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Sudan: Urgent need for continued human rights monitoring Joint press release

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH and AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL Joint press release

(Geneva) Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch today called on the UN Commission on Human Rights to continue to strengthen its human rights monitoring presence in Sudan, as the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva debates the human rights situation in "any part of the world".

"The positive changes in Sudan have taken place largely as a result of international pressure to make meaningful moves to end human rights abuses," the two international human rights organizations said.

"The UN must not end human rights monitoring now in the midst of the transition period, especially when the peace protocol signed at Machakos over eight months ago has not yet materialized in a peace agreement."

There have been many positive changes since the Commission on Human Rights first appointed a Special Rapporteur to report on the human rights situation in Sudan 10 years ago, in March 1993. But yet again most of the recommendations in last year's resolution have not been implemented.

The Special Rapporteur on Sudan's 2003 report states: "in spite of the commitments made, the overall human rights situation has not improved". The Special Rapporteur describes how in the area under the control of the Government of Sudan "the role of the security apparatus as the main entity responsible for the human rights abuses as well as the impunity enjoyed by security remains an issue of serious concern".

In the areas controlled by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) the Special Rapporteur said that "virtually no guarantees are set for the respect of basic rights and fundamental freedoms".

In the government-controlled area arbitrary and prolonged detention of opponents; torture; unfair summary trials followed by cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment; and lack of freedom of expression, association and assembly continue. In the areas under the SPLM/A, the report says, there are "severe restrictions on freedom of opinion and expression, speech, assembly and association".

"Over the past 10 years the Special Rapporteur has been an important agent for change; his regular monitoring visits and public reporting have been a lifeline for Sudanese human rights activists and victims. We are calling for his mandate to be renewed," the organizations said.

The human rights violations related to the armed conflict have continued despite a cease-fire signed in October 2002. One of the positive acts, as a result of outside pressure, over the past year has been the agreement, in March 2002, between the Government of Sudan and the SPLM/A not to target civilians or attack civilian facilities. This has been monitored by the Civilian Protection Monitoring Team (CPMT), at first composed of US military, later strengthened by some civilian country experts and others, based in Khartoum and Rumbek and with the right to unrestricted access to all parts of the country to investigate reports of killings. The recent report by the CPMT, found that the government and allied militia had committed a number of attacks targeting and killing civilians in the oil rich areas south of Bentiu in January and February 2003.

"Monitoring and public reporting is the one way to end abuses and impunity," the organizations said. "Now is the time to increase UN human rights monitoring, not to end it".

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch called on the UN Commission on Human Rights to pass a resolution on the Sudan which should make clear recommendations and lay down benchmarks for the respect of human rights and international humanitarian law. In particular they urged the Commission on Human Rights to ensure that:

the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Sudan is renewed; the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in the Sudan receives adequate funding so that it can effectively monitor human rights in the Sudan and extend these activities to areas controlled by the SPLM/A, including by ensuring adequate representation in the south of the country

A resolution should, among other things, call on the Government of Sudan to:

issue a standing invitation to the thematic mechanisms of the Commission on Human Rights to visit the Sudan, in particular the Special Rapporteurs on torture, violence against women, and freedom of expression; the Representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons; and the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention;

guarantee freedom of expression, association and assembly, in particular the right of civil society to comment on questions relating to the peace process;

set up an independent commission of inquiry into the human rights situation in Darfur, whose findings and recommendations should be made public and implemented;

address the urgent humanitarian situation of the estimated 4.5 million internally displaced persons and begin a program of voluntary return with guarantees for their security;

end the practice of incommunicado detention of government critics.

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To see Amnesty International's media materials for the 59th Session of the UN Commission of Human Rights please visit: <http://www.web.amnesty.org/mavp/av.nsf/pages/UNCHR>.

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