

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Sudan: Let Sudanese civil society and political parties talk freely about peace**

Amnesty International is calling on the Sudanese government and security forces to immediately stop harassing, detaining *incommunicado* and impeding Sudanese civil society activists from discussing issues related to the peace talks on Sudan.

"At a time when the Sudanese government and the Southern People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) are negotiating a peace agreement to end the civil war, all Sudanese must be free to participate in discussions related to their own future. The continuing repression of freedoms of assembly and expression and the harassment of civil society activists and political opponents are clear signs that the Sudanese government is intent on denying the Northern civil society the right to prepare for a sustainable peace," Amnesty International said.

Within the past month alone, the Sudanese government and security forces have forcibly interrupted meetings on the peace process by political activists and civil society groups.

On 19 June about 30 armed security officers raided the house of Ghazi Suleiman, chairman of the Sudan Human Rights Group in Khartoum Two, and arrested at least 36 political activists and civil society representatives and confiscated some documents. They had gathered there to discuss the "Cairo Declaration" of 24 May, a joint statement of northern political opposition and the SPLM on the peace process and the status of the national capital of Sudan in a future agreement. They were brought to the headquarters of the National Security in Khartoum North where they gave officers their names, addresses and phone numbers. They were released after two hours. Ghazi Suleiman was interrogated until 1am and then released, after reportedly being roughly treated and asked to stop organizing political gatherings and activities.

On 16 June Elhadi Tangur, a representative of the Blue Nile State was arrested by some plain clothed security forces in Khartoum. He is detained *incommunicado*, reportedly in the headquarters of the security forces. Amnesty International considers him to be a prisoner of conscience and is calling for his immediate and unconditional release. He was arrested after a meeting he and other members of the Blue Nile community had with General Lazarus Sumbeiyu, the Kenyan government Special Envoy for Sudan and the main mediator in the Sudan peace talks. General Sumbeiyu was in Khartoum to talk to members of the government about issues stalling the peace process.

On 2 June, the national security forces arrested 38 women from the Nuba Mountain Women's Association in Khartoum on their way to Kauda, in the Nuba Mountains for a conference on peace and development. They were detained overnight and at least one has to continue reporting to police. Belongings were confiscated and the non-governmental organizations organizing the meeting has

been shut down by the authorities ever since.

Newspapers have also been subjected to "red lines", prescribing what they can and cannot report in regard to the peace talks. Editors who have transgressed this effective censorship on articles on peace-related questions have been briefly detained and interrogated by the security forces.

"Unless the basic human rights of all Sudanese are respected in law and in practice, peace will be meaningless to them. International peace mediators must urgently put pressure on the Sudanese government to stop violating the rights of those who attempt to open discussions on peace issues," Amnesty International urged.

## **Background**

In July 2002, the Sudanese government and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/ Army (SPLM/A) signed the Machakos Protocol in Kenya. The Protocol promised a future peace agreement and an end to the decades-long civil war in the country. It was signed under the auspices of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development, a regional grouping of governments, presided by Kenyan General Sumbeiyu and international mediators from the United States, the United Kingdom and Norway. Both parties have since signed a cease-fire and held sessions to resolve contentious issues. The latest round of talks in May 2003 stalled on the status of the capital of Sudan in the final agreement as well as security and power-sharing issues.

Civil society and the political opposition are not included in the peace talks. While the SPLM claims to consult with the Southern civil society, which has had meetings and made propositions to feed into the process, the Government of Sudan now appears to block initiatives from the Northern civil society to get involved in peace discussions.

Although the Machakos Protocol mentions that human rights should be guaranteed in the future peace agreement, so far peace talks have focussed on power-sharing, borders and security issues. Amnesty International has called on both parties to the conflict and the mediators to the peace talks to comprehensively address human rights issues in their discussions and to put the human rights of all Sudanese at the heart of any future agreement.

## **Public Document**

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