

PUBLIC

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Fear for safety

22 December 2003

SUDAN

Islam Salih Adam Belo, journalist

Islam Salih Adam Belo, the director of the Sudan office of the independent Arabic *al-Jazeera* television channel, was arrested in the capital, Khartoum, on 18 December 2003. He is now held incommunicado and has had no access to his family. Other journalists have been ill-treated in custody, and Amnesty International is concerned for his safety.

Islam Salih was arrested by the National Security Forces, who are allowed to detain people incommunicado without charge or trial for up to nine months, under the National Security Forces Act. This has been used to detain critics of the government, including political opponents, students and sometimes journalists.

Islam Salih has apparently been detained because the government was unhappy with some programs broadcast by Qatar-based *al-Jazeera* concerning the Sudan. Amnesty International considers him a prisoner of conscience and calls for his immediate and unconditional release.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

On 17 December National Security Forces officers went to the Khartoum office of *al-Jazeera*, confiscated some of its equipment and arrested Islam Salih Adam Belo and cameraman Hamid Tirab. Both men were detained from 7am to 10 pm and then released. The following day the office was closed and Islam Salih Adam Belo was re-arrested. A few days earlier, the National Security Forces had reportedly paid a similar visit to the *al-Jazeera* office and warned them that the government did not like some of the programmes broadcast on the Sudan.

An official statement quoted by AFP said: "The Al-Jazeera channel, through its Khartoum office and its correspondent, Islam Salih Belo, took to preparing and transmitting a number of programmes and materials stuffed with false information and poor, biased analyses and with pictures and scenes selected to serve its ends." The statement apparently cited reports about tuberculosis, landmine victims and events in Darfur in the western Sudan.

The government has imposed censorship on the media in Sudan, particularly with regard to the internal conflict in the west of Sudan where attacks on the settled population, mostly by government-aligned militias, have led some 600,000 people in Darfur to flee their villages and take refuge in nearby towns or in neighbouring Chad where they remain in dire humanitarian conditions.

The government has recently suspended two daily newspapers, the Arabic-language *al-Ayyam* and the English-language *Khartoum Monitor*, over articles which did not conform to the government line on current affairs.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English, Arabic or your own language:

- calling for Islam Salih to be released immediately and unconditionally, on the grounds that he is a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful expression of his opinions;
- expressing concern for his safety, as he is being held incommunicado by the security forces in Khartoum;
- urging the authorities to allow him immediate and unrestricted access to his family, legal counsel and any medical aid he may need;

- calling on the government to stop detaining members of Sudanese civil society solely for the peaceful expression of their opinions;
- calling on the security services to end intimidation and harassment of journalists and other media workers.

APPEALS TO:

Mr Ali Osman Mohamed Taha
First Vice-President
People's Palace
PO Box 281
Khartoum, Sudan

Telegram: First Vice-President, Khartoum, Sudan
Fax : + 249 11 771025
Salutation: Your Excellency

Mr Ali Mohamed Osman Yassin
Minister of Justice and Attorney General
Ministry of Justice
Khartoum, Sudan

Telegrams: Justice Minister, Khartoum, Sudan
Fax: + 249 11 770883
Salutation: Dear Minister

Mr Mustafa Osman Ismail
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
PO Box 873
Khartoum, Sudan

Telegrams: Foreign Minister, Khartoum, Sudan
Fax : + 249 11 779383
Salutation: Dear Minister

Mr Alzawahi Ibrahim Malik
Minister of Information
Ministry of Information and Communications
PO Box 291
Khartoum, Sudan

Telegrams: Information Minister, Khartoum, Sudan
Fax: + 249 11 780146
Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Dr Hamadtu Mukhtar
Chair of the Human Rights Committee
National Assembly
Fax: + 249 15 650 950

and to diplomatic representatives of Sudan accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 2 February 2004.