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@Deaths and detentions: the destruction of Juba

Reports reaching Amnesty International indicate that between June and August 1992 grave human rights violations, including hundreds of extrajudicial executions and arbitrary detentions, have taken place in the besieged city of Juba, the largest city in the southern Sudan with a population of approximately 300,000. The violations mark a significant and dramatic deterioration in an already longstanding and serious human rights situation.

The violations have taken place following an intensification in the battle between government forces and the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), which tightened its siege of Juba in May 1992. Early in the morning of 7 June 1992 SPLA troops infiltrated the city from the south and briefly captured the city's military headquarters. Government forces regained control after a few hours.

The attack heightened tension in Juba and in the days that followed government security personnel are reported to have arrested over 80 southern Sudanese soldiers, policemen, prison guards and paramilitary guards attached to the Department of Wildlife. No official reason has been given for the detentions, but it is reported that those arrested were suspected by the authorities of having collaborated with the SPLA attack.

Among those arrested was Peter Cirrilo, a former Governor of Equatoria Region (now State) during the civilian government of Sadiq al-Mahdi (1986-1989). Peter Cirrilo, a retired military general in his mid-fifties, was transferred to Khartoum shortly after his arrest. He is still imprisoned, although his place of detention remains unknown. Peter Cirrilo was previously detained by the government in December 1990 when he was reported to have been severely tortured. The others arrested were not transferred to Khartoum and apparently remain in detention in Juba. They include, from the army, Major Joseph Ladu, Major Andrew and over 60 soldiers of other ranks; from the police, Colonel David Kenyi, Lieutenant Colonel Lado Peter and Captain Arkangelo Yugu; from the prisons service, Major Pitia Kenyi, Captain Kamillo Koma, Captain Mohamed Khamis and First Lieutenant Mark Taban.

There is grave concern that many of these detainees may have been tortured or even executed secretly and extrajudicially. Prisoners arrested by the army's military intelligence and Sudan Security are reported to be held in a building near the military headquarters, known as the "White House". This building, another army barracks near the White Nile bridge, known as the Mechanised Battalion, and the headquarters of the Internal Security agency near the old commercial centre of the city, have all become notorious as torture centres. Amnesty International has received information describing psychological and

physical torture in these places. A prisoner arrested in early 1992 for possession of anti-government leaflets and taken to the White House reported:

"[I was] taken to the Main Barracks and put in a trench where I was badly beaten, punched and kicked. One of the "executioners" put his gun into my mouth, waiting for me to confess the name of the person who wrote the paper they had found with me, but I could not answer because I did not know it. The interrogation went on for several days and with it cruel physical and mental tortures. One night I was taken to the foot of a nearby mountain. They began to question me again. I could hear their voices, but I was unable to see them. It was very dark. They beat and kicked me until I fell on the ground. A soldier walked on me and put his gun in my mouth for a name. But my answer was the same: "I don't know". I was brought back to the White House, in one of its two rooms, and never called for interrogation again. In that room there were other men and women, about 25. They all carried the signs of torture. One had burn marks all over his body. A hot iron had been pressed on his flesh."

On the night of 23 June 1992 seven of the detained southern Sudanese soldiers, whose names are unknown, were reportedly extrajudicially executed. It is feared that many other prisoners may have suffered the same fate.

The human rights situation deteriorated still further following a major SPLA assault commencing on 6 July 1992. Over the next ten days there was heavy fighting in and around the densely populated suburbs of Lalogo, Kator and Rejaf West. The SPLA continued to shell targets in the city and fighting has continued around the outskirts in August and September.

Following the incursions, government troops are reported to have committed several gross violations of human rights including hundreds of extrajudicial executions and arbitrary arrests. As government forces regained control of suburbs contested with the SPLA, they moved from house to house searching for SPLA members who might have remained behind in the city. People who showed resistance and young adult men were taken out of their homes and places where they had taken refuge to escape the fighting and summarily shot. It is reported that at least 200 civilians were killed during such operations. Relatives were too frightened to remove the bodies of those killed and many were left unburied for several days. Tens of thousands of civilians fled the suburbs to escape the fighting and the army reprisals. On 11 July the army ordered the evacuation of Lalogo and Kator. The next day these and other areas were put to the torch leaving approximately 100,000 civilians squatting without shelter in and around the old commercial centre of Juba.

Further extrajudicial executions are reported to have taken place on subsequent days. On 16 July 1992 a group of 40 southern Sudanese soldiers suspected of collaborating with the SPLA were reportedly extrajudicially executed after nightfall. Again on 16 July, two women and a man discovered collecting firewood on the outskirts of the city were shot dead by government forces. On 1 August three civilians arrested when discovered out of doors after the evening curfew were extrajudicially executed. According to some reports their bodies were dismembered and thrown into the White Nile. There are other reports of soldiers stopping civilians in the street, interrogating them, stealing their possessions and then shooting them.

Amnesty International is seriously concerned about the safety of hundreds of prisoners arrested since 6 July 1992. The human rights organization has learned the names of nearly 50 prominent individuals taken into detention between July and August and received reports of hundreds of arrests of people less well known. Yet more southern Sudanese soldiers, policemen, prison guards and members of paramilitary forces attached to the Department of Wildlife were arrested after the fighting intensified in July. Among those reported to have been arrested were Colonel James Duling, Major Simon Jada and Captain Isaac Losuba from the Department of Wildlife. Captain Nathaniel Jada, also a member of the Wildlife Department, is reported to have been shot and killed by soldiers sent to his house to arrest him. Several prominent civilians are also reportedly in detention. They include Michael Lado Lobuja, a local government official, Louis Gore, a town planner, and Sarafino Pitya, an accountant. On 1 August 1992 two customs officials at Juba Airport, one of them called Kennedy Khamis, were arrested and taken to the White House. They have not been seen since. At least three other workers at the airport, which has been an important target of SPLA military action, have also been detained. They have been named as Taban Elisa, the assistant manager, Evelino Modi and Mustafa Abdel Gadir, both technicians. It has been alleged that one of these men has been beaten to death.

So far the Sudan Government has not given any indication that it is prepared to take action to end arbitrary incommunicado detention and torture or to prevent soldiers from committing extrajudicial executions. Indeed recent actions, which include the expulsion of foreigners from Juba and virtually sealing the city to the outside world appear to create conditions which would suggest to the security forces that they are able to act with impunity. Amnesty International is urging the government to take immediate action to end human rights violations. This includes issuing orders to all members of the security forces in Juba that torture and the killing of prisoners and unarmed civilians will not be tolerated in any circumstances and ensuring that soldiers and security officials alleged to be responsible for such abuses are arrested and brought to justice.