

AI Index: PRE 01/503/2013
26 September 2013

Sudan: Security forces fatally shoot dozens of protesters as demonstrations grow

The Sudanese security forces must immediately stop using arbitrary and unlawful force against protesters, the African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies and Amnesty International urged today, after confirming that at least 50 demonstrators were killed on Tuesday and Wednesday after being shot in the chest or head.

Local sources and activists have put the figure much higher, in excess of 100, and at the time of writing the two organizations were still receiving reports of shootings and excessive use of force.

The organizations also expressed deep concern for the hundreds of people reportedly detained by Sudan's National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) and urged the Sudanese authorities to ensure that they are protected from torture and other ill-treatment.

"Shooting to kill – including by aiming at protesters' chests and heads – is a blatant violation of the right to life, and Sudan must immediately end this violent repression by its security forces," said Lucy Freeman, Africa Deputy Director at Amnesty International.

Protests broke out in cities around Sudan after President Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir announced cuts to fuel subsidies on 22 September. The following day, thousand of protesters took to the streets in Wad Madani, soon followed by the capital Khartoum, Omdurman, Port Sudan, Atbara, Gedarif, Nyala, Kosti, and Sinnar.

According to information received by the organizations, Sudanese police and NISS officers used disproportionate force – including firing tear gas and live ammunition – to disperse the demonstrations.

At least 50 people have been killed and 100 injured since the protests began, according to sources interviewed by the organizations, including eyewitnesses, relatives of those who were killed, journalists, and doctors. A 14-year-old boy from North Khartoum was among those killed, and it appears that the majority of the victims were aged 19-26.

A source from Omdurman hospital, told Amnesty International that in one day alone, 36 people were reportedly sent to the morgue and 38 surgeries were carried out on individuals injured by live bullets, of which two died. Another source told the African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies that he saw two bodies with gun shot wounds to the back, suggesting that the deceased had been shot whilst running away.

"The Sudanese government must immediately establish an investigation into the use of disproportionate force and allegations of the intentional killing of protestors and use of live ammunition by security forces," said Osman Hummada, Executive Director of the African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies.

“Even when responding to violent acts by some protesters, the security forces have a duty to protect all individuals from violence and to avoid unnecessary loss of life. Anyone responsible for the arbitrary or abusive use of force against protesters must be brought to justice, and the Sudanese authorities must send a clear message that the excessive use of force will not be tolerated.”

Some of the protesters have reportedly set fire to government buildings, including police stations, petrol stations and buses in Omdurman and Wad Madani.

The United Nation’s Basic Principles of the Use of Force, which elaborate the conditions in which force may lawfully be used without violating human rights, including the right to life, state that even in the context of unlawful or violent assemblies, use of force must be necessary and proportionate and intentional lethal force may not be used except where strictly unavoidable in order to protect life.

Arrests and restrictions on media

Sudan’s NISS have reportedly detained hundreds of activists and demonstrators, including known members of political opposition parties, students and other activists.

The African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies and Amnesty International documented the widespread use of prolonged incommunicado detention, torture and ill-treatment by the NISS against protesters, activists and perceived political opponents during anti-government demonstrations last year.

Schools and government offices have been closed in Khartoum, and national access to the internet was reportedly cut off for several hours on 25 September.

Information received by both organizations demonstrates that independent reporting on the demonstrations may have been blocked. Chief Editors from a number of Khartoum’s newspapers were reportedly summoned by the security services on 26 September and instructed to only publish on the demonstrations if the information came from the police or security. Another newspaper, Al Sudani, was suspended today for allegedly publishing information contrary to the instructions of security services.

The Sudanese authorities have routinely used excessive force against mostly peaceful demonstrations over the last two years. Amnesty International and the African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies reported on police forces using batons, tear gas and rubber bullets at close range against demonstrators.