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Sudan Rights Defenders: 'UN Rights Body Must Not Abandon Sudan'

(Geneva, 10 June) Our organisations regret that the Human Rights Council has decided to defer its discussion of the human rights situation in Sudan to its fifteenth session in September 2010.

Human rights organizations are alarmed that the postponement will prevent the Human Rights Council from addressing the growing number of human rights violations in Sudan.

In his report to the Human Rights Council, the Independent Expert on Sudan concluded that there are “unresolved and serious human rights concerns” in Sudan, and recommended “the Human Rights Council remain engaged... until significant progress is made.” As the Independent Expert was unable to attend the session for medical reasons, the Human Rights Council deferred his presentation of his report and its inter-active dialogue with him.

“It is very dangerous for the UN Human Rights Council to neglect Sudan now,” said Faisal Elbagir, journalist, human rights defender and former Secretary General of the Khartoum Centre for Human Rights and Environmental Development, which was closed down in March 2009 by Sudanese authorities, “The government of Sudan wants us all to believe that the recent elections have resulted in human rights progress. In fact, the opposite is true- the rights situation since April has only gotten worse.”

The Sudanese Presidential and Parliamentary elections of April 11-15 were marked by serious human rights violations, including intimidation of voters. Since the elections the government of Sudan increased its efforts to repress civil and political rights, including by reinstating the pre-print censorship by National Intelligence and Security Services on newspapers in Sudan. NISS agents have arrested four journalists and reportedly tortured two of them. On 9 June, the journalists appeared in court for criminal charges leading to death sentence, on the sole basis of their peaceful exercise of their work. Six members of a Doctors' Strike Committee were arrested, some reportedly tortured.

According to Ali Agab, former legal officer for the Khartoum Centre for Human Rights and legal adviser for the African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies, “Without basic freedoms and rule of law, the Referendum on secession of southern Sudan, due to take place in January 2011, could result in mass voter disenfranchisement and lead to another civil war. The international community and the Human Rights Council must remain focused on the human rights situation in Sudan.”

The Independent Expert is currently the only UN mechanism monitoring the human rights situation throughout all of Sudan, providing a regular update to all UN member states and reporting to the Human Rights Council.

“This failure to renew the mandate of the Independent Expert for a full year now is very unfortunate in light of the urgency of addressing current human rights violations in Sudan,” a prominent human rights defender from Sudan anonymously said. “We urge the Independent Expert to carry out another country visit and update his report for the September 2010 session of the Human Rights Council.”

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