

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

AI Index: AFR 54/009/2006 (Public)
News Service No: 064
16 March 2006

Continued harassment of Sudanese NGO and curtailment to freedom of expression and association in Sudan

Amnesty International expresses concern at the closure by the Sudanese government of two offices of the Sudan Social Development Organisation (SUDO) in West Darfur. The closure appears to be part of a pattern of intimidation and harassment of SUDO and other Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) operating in Sudan.

The Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC), the body that governs humanitarian agencies in Sudan, has ordered the closure of the offices of SUDO in al-Jeneina, capital of West Darfur State, and Zalingei, West Darfur State, as of 13 March 2005. HAC ordered SUDO to cease all operations and hand over the keys to their offices, medical centres and feeding centre, as well as their vehicles. SUDO's bank accounts for their Zalingei and al-Jeneina offices have also been frozen.

HAC justified the closure of SUDO's offices and the suspension of its operations on the ground that SUDO had violated the Humanitarian Aid Commission Act. However, it did not specify which sections of the enactment SUDO had violated. This suspension of the operations of SUDO is the latest in a series of acts of intimidation and harassment against SUDO, including the arrest of five SUDO staff on 13 February 2006 at Ed Dain University, South Darfur, as they conducted a training session on human rights monitoring. They were released later on the same day.

On 20 February 2006, Sudan enacted into law the Organisation of Humanitarian and Voluntary Work Act, 2006, which will replace the Humanitarian Aid Commission Act. Amnesty International is concerned that the 'Organization of Humanitarian and Voluntary Work Act 2006', constitutes yet another enactment that imposes undue restrictions on the work of NGOs operating in Sudan. The enactment also grants discretionary and excessive regulatory power to the government over the operations of NGOs.

Some articles of the 'Organization of Humanitarian and Voluntary Work Act 2006' violate the right to freedom of association contained in international human rights treaties to which Sudan is a party, including article 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and article 10 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, as well Sudan's Interim National Constitution. The Act is also contrary to the provisions contained in articles 5 and 6 of the UN Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

Amnesty International is calling on the government of Sudan to amend the 'Organization of Humanitarian and Voluntary Work Act 2006' to bring it into line with international and regional human rights standards. Amnesty International is particularly concerned by:

the wide degree of discretion accorded to the government in the registration and regulation of the

activities of NGOs operating in Sudan;
the lack of independence from the government of the bodies established by this enactment to regulate its application, including the grant, refusal or suspension of the registration of NGOs.

Further, Amnesty International calls on the government of Sudan to end its intimidation and harassment of human rights and humanitarian activities of SUDO and other NGOs operating in the country.

Background

SUDO is a voluntary organization created to promote sustainable development and human rights. SUDO and its staff have been subject to harassment by the Sudanese authorities due to their human rights activities. SUDO's offices in Zalingei were closed temporarily in January 2006 by HAC but were later reopened. Chairperson of SUDO, Dr Mudawi Ibrahim Adam, has been arrested several times in recent years in relation to his humanitarian and human rights work (see for example AFR 54/047/2005, 09 May 2005, and follow-ups).

Some of the activities of SUDO in Zalingei and al-Jeneina include the running of two health clinics and a feeding centre.