

PUBLIC

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Fear for safety/ Incommunicado detention/ Possible prisoner of conscience

SUDAN

Abu Obeida Abdallah (m), journalist, *Al-Ra'y Al-Amm* newspaper

Journalist Abu Obeida Abdallah was arrested on 29 September in Khartoum, the capital of Sudan, by officials from the Sudan National Security Agency (NSA, the Sudanese security services). He has now been held incommunicado for six days without charge. He may be a prisoner of conscience, held solely for exercising his rights to freedom of opinion and expression.

Abu Obeida Abdallah, a journalist on the national daily newspaper *Al-Ra'y Al-Amm* ("Public Opinion"), is reportedly held in the political section of the NSA office in Khartoum North. The reason for his detention is unknown. The NSA reportedly stated that he would be released once they have completed their investigations into him.

Abu Obeida Abdallah was a specialist on Darfur and had previously covered the peace talks on the Darfur region, which took place in the Nigerian capital, Abuja, earlier this year. He spent several months in Abuja until the talks concluded in May 2006.

On 2 October, Sudanese journalists held a protest at the detention of Abu Obeida Abdallah during an annual gathering of journalists for the month of Ramadan.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Sudanese authorities regularly restrict freedom of the press in the country, through censorship of press articles which do not conform to the government view, and through the intimidation of journalists, including arrests, ill-treatment and periods of incommunicado detention.

Despite a commitment to respect freedom of expression and information under Article 39 of the Interim National Constitution of Sudan which came into force in July 2005, the Sudanese authorities have initiated a clampdown on the press in the past few months. In particular, journalists are heavily restricted on what they are allowed to write on the crisis in Darfur, and not allowed to criticise government actions.

For instance, on 15 August four journalists were detained and sent back to Khartoum to prevent them from reporting on flood devastation suffered by those displaced by the building of the Meroe Dam north of Khartoum. On 16 August, Naser Al-Din Ahmed Al-Tayeb, journalist for *Al-Ayam* newspaper was arrested and beaten by police officers whilst reporting on the forced relocation of displaced persons at Dar Al-Salam, a squatter camp south of Khartoum. As a result of the beatings, he has partially lost his hearing.

Between 6 and 18 September, officers from the NSA visited a number of newspaper print rooms to censor material being prepared for publication. Seven newspapers had issues confiscated or were ordered to remove certain articles or editorials from their editions. Second Vice-President Ali Osman Taha declared that he regretted the censorship but did not say he would end it.

On 3 October the Deputy General Secretary of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement, the junior partner in Sudan's Government of National Unity, condemned attacks on press freedom as sabotaging the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2005.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Abu Obeida Abdallah, who has been held incommunicado without charge since 29 September;
- calling on the authorities to release him immediately and unconditionally if he is detained solely for exercising his right to freedom of opinion and expression;
- calling on the Sudanese authorities to allow Abu Obeida Abdallah immediate access to his family, lawyer and independent medical care;
- calling on the government to end restrictions on freedom of expression in Sudan.

APPEALS TO:

Mr. Ali Osman Muhammad Taha
Vice-President President's Palace
PO Box 281
Khartoum
Sudan

Fax : + 249183 771651/783223/779977

Salutation: Your Excellency

Mr. Al-Zahawi Ibrahim Malik
Minister of Information and Communications
Ministry of Information and Communications
PO Box 291
Khartoum, Sudan

Fax: + 249 183 780146

Salutation: Dear Minister

Mr Muhammad Ali al-Maradhi
Minister of Justice and Attorney General
Ministry of Justice
Khartoum, Sudan

Fax: + 249 183 780796 (Please mark, "FAO Minister of Justice")

Email: info@sudanjudiciary.org

Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Dr Abdel Moneim Osman Taha
Rapporteur, Advisory Council for Human Rights, Khartoum, Sudan

Email: human_rights_sudan@hotmail.com

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 16 November 2006.