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Sudan: Investigations into John Garang's death must be independent

As violent clashes continue in Sudan following the death of First Vice President Dr John Garang de Mabior in a helicopter crash, Amnesty International called for an independent, competent, and adequately resourced investigation into his death – saying that anything less will fail in the eyes of the Sudanese people.

Following yesterday's call for an international investigation into the crash by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), the Sudanese government announced the formation of a national commission to investigate the crash in conjunction with the SPLM.

"The participation of independent third parties in this investigation -- such as the United Nations -- is critical and would help ensure that the enquiry is not only independent, but is seen to be independent by the Sudanese people," said Kolawole Olaniyan, Director of Amnesty International's Africa Programme.

"Although the current violence in Khartoum was sparked by suspicions over John Garang's death, it's origins lie in decades of marginalisation and human rights abuses throughout the country," said Kolawole Olaniyan.

"The recent inclusion of a Southern leader in government symbolised for many the potential for profound change in Sudan -- including a hopeful end to the marginalization suffered by many Sudanese people. If suspicions surrounding John Garang's death are not met with an immediate independent investigation, the people of Sudan may fear that any potentially positive changes in the human rights situation are slipping through their fingers and that their immediate suspicions are not being addressed."

Three Ugandan aviation experts departed for the site of the accident on Tuesday, 2 August. The United Nations has offered to assist in any investigation.

While maintaining the importance of an independent investigation, the organization stressed that it had no indication that the crash was not accidental.

Background

On 1 August, violence erupted following the announcement of Dr. John Garang's death -- mainly in the capital Khartoum. Reports from the ground put the number of deaths near 130. Observations indicated gunshots and beatings with sticks and steel bars to be the main causes of death. A night time curfew in Khartoum (from 6pm to 6am) was announced the day of the first riots and renewed subsequently. A large contingent of police and army have been deployed in the city, and reports are emerging of large scale arrests.

Amnesty International calls on the police and other law enforcement officials to deal with the unrest in accordance with UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by law enforcement officials and the UN Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials.

Public Document

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