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Sudan to choose between peace and martial law on Sunday

As the Sudanese Parliament is set to approve President Omar Hassan al-Bashir's request to renew for another year the current state of emergency, in place since 1999, Amnesty International warns that extending the state of emergency, which covers the whole of Sudan, would give a green light to further violations of human rights.

"Emergency laws have allowed the Sudanese authorities to detain people indefinitely, without charge or trial, to break up peaceful demonstrations and to violate human rights under the pretext of counter-insurgency. Extending the state of emergency would signal that the Sudanese government is not ready for the peace deal it has promised to sign by year's end," Kolawole Olanyan, Director of the Africa Program said.

On 18 November, the Sudanese government pledged to the UN Security Council in Nairobi that it would sign a peace agreement with the Sudan People's Liberation Movement by 31 December 2004. The Protocol on Power-Sharing commits the Sudanese government to respect fundamental human rights, including the rights to personal liberty (no arbitrary arrests or detentions) and to freedom of expression and assembly.

While governments can adopt states of emergency, especially in cases of internal armed conflicts - like the one in Darfur, western Sudan - they can only do so in accordance with their human rights obligations. The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, to which Sudan is a party, allows no derogation from the rights it enshrines, even in states of emergency.

"Peace mediators in Naivasha and Abuja must now make the Sudanese government accountable to its human rights commitments. If the state of emergency is renewed, it will be another blow to the Sudanese people yearning for a just peace," Kolawole Olanyan said.

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