

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Prisoners of conscience/fear of torture

8 April 1994

SUDAN: Mahjoub Mohamed al-Hassan Erwa, journalist and editor
 Ahmad Ali Bagadi, journalist
 Mutwakil Abdel Daff'eh, journalist

The three journalists named above, who work for the daily newspaper *al-Sudani al-Doulia*, are reported to have been arrested on 4 April 1994 in Sudan's capital, Khartoum, and accused of spreading "false news". The government has taken action to close the paper. Amnesty International believes journalists to be prisoners of conscience, arrested because of their professional activities, and fears that the three may be at risk of torture while in detention.

The whereabouts of the journalists, among them Mahjoub Mohamed al-Hassan Erwa who is a member of the Transitional National Assembly, Sudan's government-appointed parliament, are unknown but they are likely to be detained at the security headquarters in Khartoum. According to a statement issued by 'Abd al-Aziz Shiddu, the Attorney General and Minister of Justice, the journalists are to face charges under Section 66 of the Penal Code which provides for prison sentences of up to six months.

All three are known to be sympathizers of the Islamist ideology of the government but are critical of both the content and implementation of some of its policies.

The arrests and the closure of the newspaper follow the publication of articles in *al-Sudani al-Doulia* which argued for a return to multi-party politics in Sudan and which made allegations of corruption among government officials. The government has also accused the paper, in a strongly worded presidential statement issued on 4 April, of "raising doubts about the purpose and struggle of the armed forces and People's Defence Forces" and of having the aim of "destroying the revolution".

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In June 1993 the government announced that after four years of state monopoly of the press, it would allow independent newspapers. *Al-Sudani al-Doulia*, which had previously been published in Beirut, began publication in Sudan in January 1994. The government appears to have expected a compliant press produced by people broadly supporting its political agenda and has reacted aggressively to critical articles. On 24 February 1994 Mutasim Mahmoud, another journalist working on *al-Sudani al-Doulia*, was arrested for reporting the escape underground of Mohamed Ibrahim Nugud, the leader of the banned Sudan Communist Party. Mutasim Mahmoud is reported to remain in detention (see UA 84/94 - AFR 54/04/94, 3 March 1994).

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters either in English or Arabic, or in your own language:

- expressing concern at the arrest on 4 April 1994 of Mahjoub Mohamed al-Hassan Erwa, Ahmad Ali Bagadi and Mutwakil Abdel Daff'eh who Amnesty International believes are prisoners of conscience imprisoned solely for exercising their internationally recognised rights to freedom of expression;
- expressing concern about their continuing incommunicado detention without charge or trial;
- expressing concern that they may be being subjected to torture or ill-treatment;
- urging that they be immediately and unconditionally released.

APPEALS TO:

1) His Excellency Lieutenant General
Omar Hassan al-Bashir
President of the Republic of the Sudan
People's Palace
PO Box 281, Khartoum, Sudan

Telegrams: Lt Gen Omar Hassan al-Bashir, Khartoum, Sudan

Telexes: 22385 PEPLC SD or 22411 KAID SD

Faxes: 249 11 71724

Salutation: Your Excellency

2) Brigadier-Engineer 'Abd al-Rahim Muhammad Husayn
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior
People's Palace
PO Box 281, Khartoum, Sudan

Telegrams: Brig-Engineer 'Abd al-Rahim Muhammed Husayn, Khartoum, Sudan

Telexes: 22842 WZARA SD or 22604 IPOL SD

Faxes: 249 11 71724/76554/73046/70186

Salutation: Dear Deputy Prime Minister

3) Mr 'Abd al-Aziz Shiddu
Minister of Justice and Attorney-General
Ministry of Justice, Khartoum, Sudan

Telegrams: Mr 'Abd al-Aziz Shiddu, Khartoum, Sudan

Telexes: 22459 KHRJA SD or 22461 KHRJA SD (via Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

Faxes: 249 11 74063

Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Mr Jalal Ali Lutfi
Chief Justice
Law Courts
Khartoum, Sudan

Mr Hussein Suleiman Abu Salih
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
PO Box 873
Khartoum, Sudan

Dr A. al-Mufti
Secretary of Human Rights Commission*
Khartoum, Sudan

* The Human Rights Commission is a government-backed body, nominally independent, but apparently created to counter what the government perceives as hostile human rights propaganda.

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 20 May 1994.