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## **South Sudan: Stop Harassing, Detaining Journalists**

Security force harassment and unlawful detention of journalists is undermining freedom of expression in South Sudan, the Agency for Independent Media (AIM), Amnesty International, Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), and Human Rights Watch said today, on World Press Freedom Day.

Since South Sudan became independent in July 2011, its security forces have regularly intimidated and unlawfully arrested and detained journalists and editors in connection with the content of their reporting. The organizations are calling for an end to the harassment and have documented multiple cases, many at the hands of South Sudan's National Security Service (NSS), a security organ whose mandate and functions have never been established by law and which does not have any authority to arrest and detain people.

"The South Sudanese authorities have done far too little to end unlawful detention of media workers in recent years," said Daniel Bekele, Africa director at Human Rights Watch. "The government should rein in its security forces and investigate and prosecute all attacks on journalists."

South Sudan has no state body mandated to regulate the media. Security forces engage in de facto censorship through harassment and illegal detentions.

"South Sudanese journalists are increasingly engaged in self-censorship because of the harassment they face in connection with their work," said Netsanet Belay, Africa director at Amnesty International. "This is deeply worrying and in contradiction with South Sudan's Constitution, which requires the government to guarantee freedom of press."

Many journalists say they choose not to report on contentious issues for example, corruption and the internal politics of South Sudan's ruling party, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM). Either they have been told not to cover those subjects by members of security forces and/or they or their colleagues have been recently intimidated or detained for producing similar stories.

On December 5, 2012, a well-known commentator and journalist, Isaiah Abraham, was shot and killed by unidentified gunmen outside his home in Juba. Media reports said that Abraham, whose writings often expressed views critical of the government, had received a number of threats, including anonymous telephone calls and text messages ordering him to stop writing.

Authorities were quick to condemn the killing and promptly opened an investigation. However there has been no progress in identifying the killers, and a government official connected to the investigation told Human Rights Watch he doubted they would be found.

South Sudan dropped 12 places in the Reporters Without Borders 2013 World Press Freedom Index – to 124th out of 180 countries ranked – due to the heavy handedness by the security forces in dealing with journalists, and after the murder of Abraham.

Although three bills are before parliament, South Sudan has yet to enact media laws. Editors and journalists say they are especially vulnerable to harassment, arbitrary arrest, and censorship in the absence of laws establishing a legal mechanism to protect media freedom and safeguard the media in carrying out their reporting. The organizations call on South Sudan's parliament to pass the media laws in a timely manner, in line with international standards to enhance protection of free speech, the media, and access to information.

South Sudan should also promptly ratify key human rights treaties including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. These would reinforce protection of free speech and other basic rights, the organizations said.

The organizations further call on the Government of South Sudan to carry out prompt, effective, and impartial investigations into all allegations of threats and attacks against journalists and media workers, and hold those responsible to account in accordance with international standards. The arrests and harassment of journalists violates the right to freedom of expression and opinion, enshrined in article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and article 24(2) of South Sudan's Transitional Constitution, 2011.