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Sudan: End crackdown on protesters and journalists

The Sudanese authorities must end its ruthless crackdown on protests and stop the harassment of journalists covering demonstrations, Amnesty International said after riot police in Khartoum used tear gas and batons to break up demonstrations over austerity cuts.

Scores of activists have been arrested since the demonstrations started on Sunday. The police also temporarily detained bloggers and journalists in an attempt to stifle reporting on the protest movement.

“The Sudanese government is showing zero tolerance for demonstrations and continues to deny the Sudanese people its right to peaceful assembly”, said Paule Rigaud, Amnesty International’s Deputy Director for Africa.

The protest movement, which is dominated by student activists, has up till now been centred around universities in Khartoum and its neighbouring cities Omdurman and Khartoum North, but demonstrations were also reported in provincial universities, notably Blue Nile University in Damazin, as well as in residential areas of the capital.

The country has faced rising food prices and a weakening currency in recent years.

Among those arrested are members of political parties and prominent youth groups, such as Girifna (“We’re fed up”), a student-led activist movement. Many were released on the day of their arrest, but some have reportedly been charged.

High-profile activist Mohammed Hassan Alim “Boshi”, was arrested from his house on 20 June. His whereabouts remain unknown. Boshi had already been detained numerous times for his political activities, notably in December 2011, when he was held incommunicado in solitary confinement for 22 days after publicly criticizing President Omar al-Bashir’s top aide Nafi Ali Nafi.

International reporters and social media activists have also been targeted. Simon Martelli, a journalist for the press agency AFP, was arrested on 19 June while covering a student demonstration in Khartoum. He was detained incommunicado for 12 hours by the National Security Service (NSS) and interrogated, before being released on 20 June.

On 21 June, Salma al Wardany, a reporter for news agency Bloomberg, was arrested alongside Maha al Sanosi, a Sudanese blogger and a member of Girifna, while covering a demonstration in Khartoum. They were detained for roughly five hours by the NSS then released.

Inspired by protests throughout the Middle East and North Africa, Sudan has experienced frequent demonstrations since January last year, calling for political change and an improvement in living conditions. The authorities in response frequently arrested and ill-treated peaceful protestors.