

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Obituary: Osman Hummaida

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Osman Hummaida who died from a heart attack on 17 April was a vital, exuberant, passionate and dedicated human rights defender, and a central figure in the Sudan human rights movement over the past 20 years. From 2008 until his sudden death he was Executive Director of the African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies (ACJPS), a Sudan human rights organization.

Osman was a close contact and friend of Amnesty International. He was always ready to help, to find out information, to discuss the situation. His aim was to end impunity and bring torturers and – especially – those who gave the orders, senior officials, ministers, the President – to justice. “We are building up the evidence, we will get him in the end” – he would say about a particularly suspect minister.

A political activist in Sudan in the 1980s, he was arrested in 1990/1 after the military came to power in Khartoum. After his release and escape from Sudan it was human rights which took up all his energies. In exile in London, Osman helped to found several important Sudanese human rights movements. The Sudan Organization against Torture (SOAT) was based in London. Later, by 2000, when there was more space for local non-government organizations in Sudan, he played a part in founding the Khartoum Centre for Human Rights and Environmental Protection (KCHR) and the Amel Centres for Rehabilitation and Treatment of Victims of Torture in Nyala and El Fasher in Darfur. The Amel Centres were later to win many international prizes for their work.

These organizations Osman helped found, developed out of networks of lawyers, journalists and doctors. They recognised the need for careful and accurate documentation of torture and of other human rights violations. Osman organized workshops and training sessions in London and Sudan which initiated many young activists into human rights work. A vital cornerstone of the work of these organisations was strategic litigation to bring perpetrators to justice in Sudan, and when this failed, using regional and international channels such as the African Commission on Human and People’s rights, the UN human rights councils and the International Criminal Court to seek justice. One of the cases before the African Commission on Human and People’s Rights involves Osman. He and two colleagues were arrested and two of them tortured in Khartoum in November 2008.

Osman, and the organisations he helped found were also heavily involved in advocacy. They published cases, submitted reports to the African Union, UN Human Rights agencies in Geneva and other governments. SOAT and later the ACJPS would hold joint meetings with other NGOs to inform and campaign on human rights issues. In 2003, when the massive displacement and killings in Darfur were growing, Osman brought Darfur lawyers to Geneva to lobby and explain the situation to every African country’s delegation and other members of the UN Human Rights Commission. In 2004 SOAT and the KCHR set up the Darfur Consortium, a network of African NGOs who were fundamentally important in carrying the fight against ethnic fighting in Darfur to the African Union, leaving Sudan isolated even among fellow African states. A network of Arab human rights NGOs led a similar campaign.

When the International Criminal Court indictment was issued against President Omar al-Bashir in March 2009, the KCHR and the Amel Centre, along with other Sudanese Human Rights organizations were banned. Osman and colleagues left Sudan fearing arrest. However, from Kampala the group founded the African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies to continue the struggle for human rights in Sudan, using documentation, training of activists, strategic litigation and, as always, advocacy. In May/June 2014, the ACJPS will celebrate its fifth year, a tribute to the tireless work of Osman Hummada, its executive director, for human rights in Sudan.

Osman's passing leaves a big void in the Sudan human rights defenders landscape. Amnesty International will greatly miss him.

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