



## AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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23 September 2021

### **SOUTH SUDAN MUST RESPECT THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY**

Speaking at the UN Human Rights Council today, Amnesty International said that it remains concerned about the government's persistent targeting of the rights to freedom of opinion and expression, association and peaceful assembly, including a new wave of repression in response to calls for peaceful protests.

The organization said that, between 2 and 30 August, government actors arbitrarily arrested at least 14 people across the country in relation to the planned peaceful protests, closed a local think tank group and a radio station, increased surveillance of suspected protesters and organizers, and heavily deployed security forces, obstructing the planned protests and forcing civil society actors into hiding for fear of arrest.<sup>1</sup>

Amnesty International said that, at least five arbitrarily arrested individuals remain detained. In Yei, two civil society members, a bishop and a student, remain held in a Military Intelligence detention facility with limited to no access to their lawyer. The authorities continue to hold Kuel Aguer Kuel, one of the founders of a political action group calling for the peaceful protests, at Juba Central Prison.<sup>2</sup>

On the eve of the protests, Amnesty International documented internet disruptions that lasted until the end of the day, when the failed protests were to take place. Amnesty International suspects that the internet shutdown may have been a deliberate attempt by the authorities to derail the protests.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Amnesty International, "South Sudan: End new wave of repression against peaceful protests", 3 September 2021, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/09/south-sudan-end-new-wave-of-repression-against-peaceful-protests/>

<sup>2</sup> Amnesty International, "South Sudan: End new wave of repression against peaceful protests", 3 September 2021, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/09/south-sudan-end-new-wave-of-repression-against-peaceful-protests/>

<sup>3</sup> Amnesty International, "South Sudan: End new wave of repression against peaceful protests", 3 September 2021, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/09/south-sudan-end-new-wave-of-repression-against-peaceful-protests/>

In the week after the aborted protests, Amnesty International received more reports of harassment of civil society actors across the country.

Amnesty International urged the UN Human Rights Council to establish robust human rights benchmarks that the government must meet before the Council will consider any amendment to the Commission's mandate.

It concluded its statement by asking the Commissioners to list minimal steps the government can take to fulfil their obligations with respect to rights to freedom of opinion and expression and peaceful assembly in South Sudan.

## **Background**

This public statement is based on an oral statement Amnesty International delivered to the Human Rights Council on 23 September 2021, during the interactive dialogue with the UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan.

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