SOUTH SUDAN: UNFREEZE CIVIL SOCIETY AND POLITICAL ACTIVIST’S BANK ACCOUNTS

Joint statement on South Sudan’s Central Bank freezing of bank accounts of civil society organizations, activists, and a politician.

The Bank of South Sudan must immediately unfreeze the accounts of three civil society organizations, a think tank, four civil society activists and a political activist. The 46 organizations signed on to this statement believe that the freezing of these bank accounts is an attempt by the South Sudanese authorities to suppress calls for peaceful protests against the government and unduly restrict the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, including by forcing them to stop the activities of real and perceived members of a newly formed civic action group called the People’s Coalition for Civic Action (PCCA).

On 6 October, Director General Moses Makur Deng of the Bank of South Sudan’s Directorate of Supervision, Research and Statistics directed all commercial banks operating in South Sudan to block, with immediate effect and until further notice, all the bank accounts of organizations connected to the PCCA, naming the local think tank Sudd Institute and civil society organizations, the Organization for Responsive Governance (ORG), Okay Africa Foundation, and the Foundation for Democracy and Accountable Governance (FODAG).1

That same day, a second directive was given to all commercial banks operating in South Sudan by the same authority to freeze and block, with immediate effect, all the personal bank accounts of Abraham Awolic, former Executive Director of the Sudd Institute; Rajab Mohandas, Executive Director of ORG; Wani Michael Saki Lotio, former Executive Director of civil society organization Okay Africa Foundation; Jame David Kolok, Executive Director of FODAG and Kuel Aguer Kuel, former governor of Aweil. The directive gives no justification for the punitive measure.2

According to four of the five individuals affected by this measure,3 they had not received any prior official notice from their banks or proof of any required legal proceedings. According to two of the individuals affected, bank staff had informally told them they were acting on the orders of the Central Bank. At least four of the five individuals affected have been unable to access their personal and the organizations’ bank accounts.4

Article 79 of the 2012 South Sudan Banking Act allows the Bank of South Sudan to issue a written instruction to banks to freeze accounts “if it has reason to believe that any account held in any bank has funds on the account that are the proceeds of crime […]”.5 Article 7 of the 2011 Bank of South Sudan Act prohibits the Bank or any member of the Board or other Bank officials to “seek or take instructions from any ministry, public institution, office, agency, or other entity or their members or officials.” The same article prohibits South Sudanese government authorities to “improperly seek to influence the Bank or any member of the Board or other Bank officials in the performance of their tasks or interfere with the proper execution of such tasks.”

The undersigned organizations are concerned that the decision to freeze the bank accounts of these civil society organizations and activists is a form of reprisal for their real or perceived membership of the PCCA, which is calling for peaceful protests and a change in the country’s leadership, is an abuse of power and an attack on the right to freedom of expression protected by article 24(1) of South Sudan’s 2011 Constitution and the rights to peaceful assembly and association guaranteed by article 25(1) of South Sudan’s 2011 Constitution. The rights to freedom of expression and of

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1 Bank of South Sudan, Letter regarding the directive to block the bank accounts of organization [sic] connected to PCCA, 6 October 2021. On file.
2 Bank of South Sudan, Letter regarding the directive to freeze and block all bank accounts of PCCA members, 6 October 2021. On file.
3 The fifth individual affected could not be reached because South Sudanese authorities have detained him in Juba Central Prison.
4 The fifth individual affected could not be reached because South Sudanese authorities have detained him in Juba Central Prison.
5 Article 79 of the 2012 South Sudan Banking Act.
We furthermore call on all South Sudanese authorities to:

- Ensure that civil society organizations, human rights defenders, academic and political activists involved in promoting human rights can freely exercise their rights protected by South Sudan’s 2011 Constitution and the country’s international human rights obligations including the ACHPR.

- Ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

6 Articles 9 and 10 of the African Charter of Human and Peoples’ Rights to which South Sudan is a state party.  


11 Eyeradio, Kuel Aguer’s health reportedly deteriorating, 19 September, https://eyeradio.org/kuel-aguer-reportedly-deteriorating/
• Repeal any law or practice that unduly restricts the ability of civil society organizations and human rights defenders to seek, receive and use funding and other resources.
• Investigate and hold to account officials responsible for any abuse of authority that restricts the ability of individuals and organizations to promote and defend human rights.
• Refrain from taking any punitive measure against people organizing or participating in peaceful protests.

Signed by the following civil society organizations:
1. Africa Light Organization for Relief and Development
3. Alliance for Development
4. Amnesty International
5. Center for Citizens Communication and Justice
6. Centre for Development and Research South Sudan
7. Center for International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights - Yemen
8. Civic and Legal Aid Organization, Tanzania
9. CIVICUS
10. Community Empowerment for Progress Organisation - South Sudan
11. Community Empowerment Initiative Network
12. Community Protection Centre - Somalia
13. Community Transformation Foundation Network - Uganda
14. Consortium of Ethiopian Human Rights Organisations
15. Corruption Brakes Crusade, Uganda
16. Crisis Resolving Centre (Tanzania)
17. DefendDefenders (East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project)
18. Defenders Coalition Kenya
19. Good Health Community Programs - Kenya
20. Human Rights Concern – Eritrea
21. Human Rights Defenders Coalition of Malawi
22. Human Rights Defenders Solidarity Network Uganda
23. Human Rights Sanrakshan Sansthaa
24. Iniskoy for Peace and Development Organisation – South Sudan
25. International Association of People’s Lawyers
26. ISDO Rwanda
27. Islamic Development and Relief Agency – South Sudan
28. Jamaa Resource Initiatives Kenya
29. Kijiji Yeetu - Kenya
30. Ligue Burundaise des droits de L'homme Iteka - Burundi
31. Malaba Wikileaks
32. Mandera County Human Rights Network - Kenya
33. Masvingo Residents Forum
34. National Coalition for Human Rights Defenders - Uganda
35. Organization for Progressive African Movement
36. Partenariat pour la Protection Intégrée - DRC
37. Raise the Young Foundation
38. Scarlet Initiative Uganda
39. Sexual Minorities Uganda
40. Solidarity 2020 and Beyond - USA
41. Somali Human Rights Association
42. Tanzania Human Rights Defenders Coalition
43. Young Positives South Sudan
44. Youth Advocacy Foundation Uganda
45. Youth Forum for Social Justice
46. Zaina Foundation - Tanzania