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Sudan: Hundreds unaccounted for and 109 to face sham courts over May attacks

Amnesty International today accused the Sudanese government of holding hundreds of people – including women and a nine-year-old – without charge or access to lawyers as they prepare to try another 109 in sham courts over the armed attacks by the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) on 10 May in the outskirts of Khartoum.

The fate and whereabouts of most of those still held in Khartoum over the 10 May attacks remain unknown. Many are still unaccounted for and Amnesty International has received reports of torture and ill-treatment from people who were released and fears those still detained are at high risk of torture or that they have been disappeared.

Amnesty International's charge comes after eight alleged JEM members were sentenced to death by Sudan's Anti-Terrorism Special Courts yesterday in trials that failed to meet international standards of fairness. The verdict takes the number of individuals sentenced to death in relation to the 10 May attack to 38.

"Sudan's Anti-Terrorism Special Courts are nothing but a travesty of justice," said Tawanda Hondora, Africa Deputy Director at Amnesty International "Some of the people sentenced yesterday only met their lawyers for the first time during the trial, while several said they suffered torture when they were held incommunicado and that they were forced to confess to crimes."

"Those trials were clearly unfair and now Sudan is preparing to try yet more people with this system. How is that justice?" said Tawanda Hondora.

One of the lawyers of those convicted on 17 August told Amnesty International that his request for an investigation into the allegations of torture and ill-treatment by his client was rejected by the court – including an appeal for a medical examination despite the fact that "marks of ill-treatment were still clearly visible on their bodies" when the accused were facing the judge.

The defence lawyers have appealed all the verdicts within the limited period allowed by the Special Courts. The final decision -- expected to come in the next weeks -- has to be taken by a Special Court of Appeal. Thereafter, the President will have to sign the decision for the executions to be carried out.

"The Sudanese government has the duty to investigate crimes and bring the perpetrators to justice but they must do it in accordance to international law and their own constitution, which guarantees fair trials," said Tawanda Hondora. "We urge the Sudanese authorities not to execute these men and to review their cases

immediately, according to Sudan's laws.”

Amnesty International also urged the Sudanese authorities to reveal the whereabouts of all individuals held in the context of the 10 May investigation and urges that all are promptly charged or else released immediately. The organization also calls for all detainees to be given regular access to lawyers and family and to be provided with the appropriate medical attention.

Background Information

On 10 May 2008, the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) launched an attack in the outskirts of Khartoum.

In the weeks following the attack hundreds of individuals were arrested by Sudanese police and security forces. Amnesty International received reports that extra-judicial executions occurred during the waves of arrests.

Anti-Terrorism Special Courts were established on 29 May to try individuals accused of participating in the attack in Khartoum. The 17 August verdict is the fourth issued by the Special Courts.