

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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Sudan: Amnesty International welcomes the release of political prisoners and calls for amendments to security legislation

Amnesty International today welcomed the release of political prisoners, including Popular National Congress leader Dr Hassan al-Turabi, by the Sudanese government. However, the organization remains concerned at legislation in place which allows prolonged incommunicado detention without charge and has been repeatedly used in the past few months in Darfur, western Sudan.

"By releasing political prisoners, the Sudanese government signals a greater respect for the fundamental civil and political rights of individuals," Amnesty International said.

"It must now show a real commitment to human rights by abolishing Article 31 of the National Security Forces Act. This article allows the security forces to detain people incommunicado for up to nine months without charge or judicial review and is inconsistent with Sudan's obligations under national and international law."

"In addition establishing a registry of all persons detained by the security forces, allowing visits to detainees and ensuring fair judicial process for anyone detained are concrete measures that will improve human rights and peace prospects in Sudan."

Amnesty International is also calling on the Sudanese government to account for incommunicado detentions in Darfur. In the past months, many community leaders of Fur, Zaghawa or Masalit ethnicity have been detained on suspicion of supporting the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA), a new armed opposition group in the region. Despite a September cease-fire agreement between the Sudanese government and the SLA allowing for the release of people detained in connection with the conflict, individuals are still reported to be held without charge in detention centres in Darfur. They include Abaker Ismail Adam and three others from Mukjar, reportedly detained in the prison of Nyala, South Darfur and Hayder Tamboor and seven others in the security forces office in Zalingei, West Darfur.

The release of political prisoners come in the context of progress on security and military arrangements in peace talks between the Sudanese government and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) to end a 20 years-old internal armed conflict in the south of the country. Both parties to the conflict are said to have signed a human rights "text" which would guarantee fundamental human rights. Amnesty International is calling on both parties and on international mediators to the peace talks to put in place guarantees to end arbitrary detentions of suspected political opponents in Sudan.

"According to international human rights law, anyone detained must have access to

relatives, lawyers and medical care if needed, and must be promptly charged with a recognizable criminal offence or else released," Amnesty International said.

Background

On 13 October, Dr Hassan al-Turabi, leader of the Popular National Congress (PNC) and other party members, including Yusuf Mohamed Saleh Libis, were released by a presidential decree. The decree reportedly allows the opposition party to reopen its headquarters and to publish its newspaper. Hassan al-Turabi stated that his release was due to a combination of national and international pressure for greater political freedoms and peace in Sudan.

Hassan al-Turabi was arrested in February 2001 after signing a memorandum of understanding with the SPLM and charged with offences related to "crimes against the state". Despite two rulings by the Constitutional Court that he should have been released after a certain period, his detention was renewed, first under the National Security Forces Act, then by presidential decree. He was transferred from Kober prison to house detention in May 2001. He was never brought to trial.

Yusuf Mohamed Saleh Libis was arrested by the security forces in February 2002 and was detained in solitary confinement for several weeks before being transferred to Kober, the main prison in the capital Khartoum. He was never charged with a recognizable criminal offence.

Four days ago, Mohamed Fergeraj, member of the Beja Congress, a political party in Eastern Sudan was released. He was arrested on 28 September 2003, reportedly after criticising government policies in Eastern Sudan at a symposium in the Al-Nilein University in Khartoum. He was reportedly held in Kober prison without charge until his release.

Public Document

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