

PUBLIC

AI Index: AFR 54/146/2004

11 November 2004

UA 304/04 Fear of Torture / Forced Relocation / Excessive use of force

SUDAN 13 women (names unknown), residents of al-Geer camp

In the early morning of 10 November, Sudanese police carried out the latest in a series of increasingly violent attacks against displaced people held in camps in South Darfur. The attacks appear to be an attempt to forcibly evict people from these camps, a further violation of the rights of those who have already been forced to flee their homes by the conflict in the Darfur region.

During two separate attacks on al-Geer camp, shortly after midnight and at 5am on 10 November, four carloads of Sudanese police shot bullets into the air, threw teargas into tents, and beat scores of residents, telling them that they had to leave the camp. At least 34 people were taken into police custody, where they were severely beaten. Twenty-one of these were released on bail on 11 November, following UN intervention, but 13 women remain in detention and are at risk of torture. One of those released, Shaikh Taher Hasaballah, a leader of al-Geer camp, has been transferred to hospital as a result of injuries sustained under torture.

The attacks in al-Geer took place in front of members of the United Nations, African Union ceasefire monitors and the press. A plastic bullet was reportedly fired at a BBC cameraman standing near a UN vehicle, and an American journalist was reportedly among those arrested.

A previous attack on al-Geer camp occurred at 3am on 2 November, when 100 police officers beat hundreds of displaced people, reportedly tying them up and bundling them into 15 trucks to be taken to another camp, al-Sherif, several kilometres away. Others staying in al-Geer camp fled to the town of Nyala.

Sudanese police are also carrying out attacks on other camps. Police arrived at Otash camp, also near Nyala, at 9pm on 1 November telling the sheikhs (camp leaders) that they wanted to move the camp's residents. They left, but returned at midnight, beating some of the camp's residents, and arresting nine people. Those arrested were taken to Central Nyala police station, again beaten, and were forced to have their heads shaved. They were transferred to prison before being released on bail on 4 November. They have since been treated at the Amal Centre for Rehabilitation of Torture Victims in Nyala.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Two armed groups, the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) have been fighting against the Sudanese government in the west of Sudan since early 2003. They are protesting at the marginalization of Darfur and the failure of the government to protect the farming population from nomad attacks. In response the Sudanese government gave free rein to nomad militias, known as the *Janjawid*, to devastate villages and kill people. Sudanese armed forces also participated in the attacks. More than one and a half million people have fled rural areas and taken refuge in camps for displaced people as well as settlements in and around towns in Darfur.

People forced to flee their homes should benefit from the full protection of domestic law, as well as the rights enshrined in international human rights and humanitarian law: these include the right not to be forced to return or to resettle to an area where their life, safety, liberty or health would be at risk, the right to freedom of movement, including the right to move freely out of camps and other settlements, and the right to an adequate standard of living.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or Arabic or your own language:

- expressing concern for the safety of the 13 women who were detained by Sudanese police at al-Geer camp for displaced people on 10 November;
- asking for assurances that they will not be tortured or ill-treated in custody, and that they are allowed immediate and unrestricted access to relatives, legal counsel and any medical attention they may need;
- asking that they are released unless they are to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence;
- urging the authorities to ensure that people living in camps in Darfur are not forcibly returned to any place where their life, safety or health is at risk.

APPEALS TO:

Mr Ali Osman Mohamed Taha
First Vice-President
People's Palace
PO Box 281
Khartoum, Sudan

Salutation: Your Excellency

Mr Mustafa Osman Ismail
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
PO Box 873
Khartoum, Sudan

Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Dr Abdel Moneim Taha
Advisory Council for Human Rights
PO Box 302
Khartoum, Sudan

and to diplomatic representatives of Sudan accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 23 December 2004.