

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

AI index: AFR 65/006/2013  
9 July 2013

### South Sudan: Questions and Answers

On 9 July South Sudan will celebrate two years of independence. Khairunissa Dhala takes stock of the world's newest nation.

#### **What has happened in South Sudan since its creation?**

South Sudan's independence was joyful. Many South Sudanese voted for independence, and many believed that an independent South Sudan could address the deep underdevelopment that resulted from a long civil war.

However many issues between South Sudan and Sudan remained unresolved at secession: border demarcation, the status of the disputed border district of Abyei and sharing oil revenues. These issues spilled over into conflict in April 2012.

In the run-up to the conflict, the shared oil infrastructure of the two countries was shut down and is not yet back on stream. This has hit the economies of both countries hard. South Sudan is living off dwindling reserves while long overdue and desperately needed development is once again delayed.

In September last year, South Sudan and Sudan signed nine agreements in Addis Ababa, on border security and oil among other things, which marks a step towards resolving many of these outstanding issues.

I hope that the ongoing talks and continued commitment from the two countries will result in implementation of the agreements.

The past two years have also seen civil society in South Sudan strengthen and grow, giving South Sudan's citizens a voice to represent them and make demands of their government.

#### **What are some of the human rights challenges faced by South Sudan?**

Progress towards realising human rights has been stymied by a number of issues including continued tensions with Sudan, lack of infrastructure and resources, and by outbreaks of inter-communal violence and restrictions of freedom of expression.

The country is awash with small arms but efforts by the authorities to carry out disarmament programs have been marred by violence and human rights violations. For example, during the civilian disarmament campaign in Pibor County, in Jonglei State last year, Amnesty International documented violations committed by the South Sudanese Armed Forces (SPLA) including sexual violence, torture and other forms of ill-treatment <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AFR65/005/2012/en/a60e1cf6-168b-4fa2-a7ab-bd8167e964e7/afr650052012en.pdf>. Civilian disarmament has now been put on hold.

Access to justice and accountability for victims of human rights abuses also remains a challenge. To date, only a handful of perpetrators have been held to account for the violations committed during civilian disarmament in Pibor County. In Wau, Western Bahr el Ghazal State, the security forces responsible for shooting and killing peace protestors have not been held to account.

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AFR65/001/2013/en/54a5a0ac-24d0-4dea-a535-77302e2b48be/afr650012013en.pdf>;

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AFR65/003/2013/en/e9f25b8b-a21b-4f1d-b989-660f614e1138/afr650032013en.pdf>

**When South Sudan was created, did you think the human rights situation was going to improve?**

Like many people, I was swept up by the sense of hope felt by the majority of South Sudanese who voted for independence. Many of the causes of South Sudan's current problems lie in protracted and complex human rights crises which cannot be addressed in one or two years. But I hoped that the new government would make more effort to prioritise action to safeguard the human rights of its citizens as well as taking steps towards respecting, protecting and promoting civil and political rights, as well as economic social and cultural rights.

**Has the situation improved or worsened in the past year?**

It's difficult to categorically say whether the human rights situation has worsened overall. However the government's heavy handedness towards human rights activists, journalists and critics has become more evident in the past year. Amnesty International has documented several incidents of journalists that have faced intimidation, harassment and unlawful detention by the National Security Service and SPLA, for carrying out their lawful work. <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AFR65/002/2013/en/54c9ea4d-a1d8-4d11-892d-bb09acae76ec/afr650022013en.pdf>

**When were you last there?**

I was in South Sudan in January and February of this year. I carried out research in South Sudan's capital, Juba, in addition to refugee camps in Unity State where over 70,000 people have fled since June 2011, when conflict erupted in Sudan's Southern Kordofan State.

I also travelled to Wau, in Western Bahr el Ghazal State, where the state government has recently conducted a clampdown on its critics, including MPs and youth activists.

**Is there any story you remember in particular?**

Despite all the challenges faced in South Sudan, people are still very committed to building a better life for themselves and their communities. Many outsiders visiting South Sudan benefit from that powerful sense of energy.

I have met many people who struggled during the civil war and whose stories have stuck with me. One person whom I can't name, walked across the continent looking for education— to refugee camps in the Central African Republic and then on to Uganda, via the DRC, where he was briefly detained and accused of being a rebel. Now back in South Sudan, he works as a reporter for a local radio station and takes big risks by reporting on human rights issues. He wants to go back to school and obtain a Masters in human rights, and work for justice and accountability for gender based violence in South Sudan.

**What would you like to see South Sudan achieve in the next two year's of its existence?**

There are many things that Amnesty International would like to see South Sudan achieve. The authorities must hold all perpetrators, including members of the security forces, to account for abuses committed in accordance with international standards.

Amnesty International would also like to see South Sudan abolish the death penalty in its new constitution which is currently being drafted, and join the global trend towards ending capital punishment.

A positive first step towards this took place in December 2012, when South Sudan voted in favour of a moratorium on the death penalty at the fourth UN General Assembly resolution.

The next step lies in establishing an official moratorium on executions in South Sudan, with a view to abolishing the death penalty.

There are currently around 200 people on death row, awaiting execution in South Sudan. Most recently in June 2013, 11 men were sentenced to death by hanging in Wau, Western Bahr el Ghazal State, for alleged murder.

On the occasion of South Sudan's second Independence Day celebration Amnesty International, together with a number of other organizations, is calling for President Salva Kiir to commute all existing death sentences  
<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AFR65/005/2013/en>.