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Sudan: Fabricated charges against Sudanese teacher must be dropped

The remaining charges against Sudanese teacher and activist Jalila Khamis Koko must be dropped and she must be immediately and unconditionally released, Amnesty International said ahead of her court appearance tomorrow.

Khamis Koko, a member of the Nuba ethnic group from Southern Kordofan, has been in detention for nine months during which time her health has deteriorated. She is currently suffering from high blood pressure due to stress.

“The charges that the Sudanese National Security Service (NSS) has brought against Jalila are completely unfounded. They are typical of the systematic harassment and intimidation of human rights activists that characterise security service operations,” said Audrey Gaughran, Amnesty International’s Africa program director.

“Jalila, a teacher and the mother of six children, has already endured months of detention and must now be freed to return to her work and family.”

Prior to her arrest in March 2012 Khamis Koko had been volunteering to provide humanitarian support to people who had fled their homes in Southern Kordofan - a region affected by internal conflict between the government and opposition fighters of the Sudan People's Liberation Army - North, the armed wing of the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement – North (SPLM-N).

In June 2011, Khamis Koko appeared in a youtube video in which she denounced the conditions in conflict-affected areas of Southern Kordofan and called for a cease fire.

She was arrested in March 2012 and charged with a number of counts, some of which were classed as crimes against the state, including undermining the constitutional system and waging war against the state. The only evidence brought against her by the NSS consisted of the youtube video.

“Amnesty International believes that Jalila Khamis Koko is being detained because of her humanitarian work and the peaceful expression of her views,” said Gaughran.

On Monday the Khartoum North Criminal Court dropped some of the charges against Khamis Koko – including two that carried the death penalty - because it found that the NSS failed to provide adequate evidence.

“The fact that some of the charges against Jalila have already been dropped due to lack of evidence is a positive step,” said Gaughran. “We must hope that justice prevails at her court appearance tomorrow and all the remaining charges are dropped and she is released.”

Khamis Koko, a member of the banned opposition party the SPLM-N, will appear in court tomorrow facing two charges: 'calling for opposition to public authority by use of violence or criminal force' and 'provoking hatred against or between sects'.

The charges carry a maximum sentence of three years imprisonment and a fine.

In a recent public statement Amnesty International documented how Sudanese security forces and military intelligence have carried out a campaign of arrests, targeting individuals suspected of being members of the SPLM-N or their relatives, seemingly on the basis of their ethnicity. Many of them were from the Nuba ethnic group in Southern Kordofan. The organization recorded that over 90 people, including 32 women, were arrested in Kadugli and Dilling in November 2012.

Arbitrary arrest of peaceful activists or of individuals on the basis of their ethnicity violates international law, as does prolonged administrative detention.