



## AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

### South Sudan: Authorities must reverse blanket ban on social media and investigate attacks on civilians

AI Index: AFR 65/8600/2025  
25 January 2025

#### **Reverse blanket ban on social media with immediate effect**

Amnesty International is calling on South Sudan's National Communication Authority (NCA) to immediately reverse its order, issued on 22 January, to Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to block social media platforms for a minimum of 30 days, extendable to a maximum of 90 days. Following outcry by human rights actors and the public, Napoleon Adok, the NCA Director addressed the media on 23 January saying that the South Sudanese government would lift the ban within 72 hours.<sup>1</sup>

The NCA's order states it was issued in response to violent attacks against Sudanese people and businesses in South Sudan that occurred last week after circulation of images online of South Sudanese people killed in the war in Sudan.<sup>2</sup>

The order cites sections 9(f)(g) of the 2012 National Communication Act that provides for the NCA to "limit practices that contravene beliefs, values, culture and heritage of the people of South Sudan" with "due regard to regional and international standards and practices."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sudanspost, "South Sudan to lift ban on Facebook and TikTok within 72 hours", 23 January 2025, <https://www.sudanspost.com/south-sudan-to-lift-ban-on-facebook-and-tiktok-within-72-hours/>; Eyeradio, "NCA to restore banned social media platforms within 3 days", 24 January 2025, <https://www.eyeradio.org/nca-to-restore-banned-social-media-platforms-within-3-days/>; Audio recording of Napoleon Adok's address, 23 January 2025, on file with Amnesty International.

<sup>2</sup> National Communication Authority, "Summary blockage of all social media sites within the territory of South Sudan", RSSJ/NCA/2500057, 22 January 2025, on file with Amnesty International.

<sup>3</sup> Sections 9(f) and 9(g) of the 2012 NCA Act read as follows: "9. Functions and Powers of the Authority. (f) protect obligations and requirements of the country in fields of security, defense and emergencies, having due regard to regional and international standards and practices and in collaboration with concerned bodies and entities providing communication services; (g) regulate Internet Domain Names in South Sudan, and electronic signatures, organize special systems for Internet use and application while taking appropriate measures to protect security of information and communication networks against intrusion, and limit practices that contravene beliefs, values, culture and heritage of the people of South Sudan." The order also cites section 34(6) which reads: "34. Obligations of the Licensee: (6) Compliance with regulation, directives and orders issued by the Authority and any applicable laws affecting the nature of Licence issued."

The order, however, is arbitrary and not in line with international human rights standards and practices. Blanket bans on social media platforms adversely affect people's ability to exercise their rights to freedom of information, expression, association and peaceful assembly protected by South Sudan's constitution and human rights treaties, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights to which the country is a state party.<sup>4</sup>

The order to restrict all access to social media platforms is disproportionate and sets a dangerous precedent, especially when South Sudanese authorities have previously blocked news websites and disrupted the internet.<sup>5</sup>

The two main mobile internet providers, MTN and Zain, announced they would comply with the ban,<sup>6</sup> but it is not clear if it has fully come into effect. Amnesty International reminds ISPs that businesses have the responsibility to respect human rights wherever they operate. Internet providers should oppose government blanket bans of social media platforms and carry out ongoing human rights due diligence to identify, prevent and mitigate the adverse human rights impacts of such a ban.

### **Ensure protection of Sudanese in South Sudan and fair trial rights**

Amnesty International is calling on South Sudanese authorities to protect Sudanese many of whom fled the horrors of the armed conflict in Sudan, and their property in South Sudan and to promptly, thoroughly, independently, impartially, transparently and effectively investigate and bring to justice those suspected to be responsible for the attacks against them. Authorities must provide victims and their families access to justice and effective remedies.

In mid-January, videos circulated on social media showing dead South Sudanese in civilian clothing, allegedly killed by the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) in Wad Madani in Sudan's Al Jazira State.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> International Convention on Civil and Political rights (ICCPR), Articles 19, 21 and 22. South Sudan ratified the ICCPR in February 2024. African Charter for Human and Peoples Rights, Articles 9, 10 and 11; South Sudan ratified the ACHPR in October 2013. 2011 Constitution of the Republic of South Sudan (as amended), Articles 24, 25 and 32.

<sup>5</sup> Amnesty International, "These Walls have ears": The chilling effect of surveillance in South Sudan (Index: AFR 65/3577/2021), 2 February 2021, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr65/3577/2021/en/>; Amnesty International, "End new wave of repression against peaceful protesters", 3 September 2021, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/09/south-sudan-end-new-wave-of-repression-against-peaceful-protesters/#:~:text=Amnesty%20international%20suspects%20that%20the,expression%2C%20association%20and%20peaceful%20assembly.>

<sup>6</sup> MTN South Sudan, public notice, 22 January 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/search/top?q=mtn%20south%20sudan> and on file with Amnesty International; Zain South Sudan, public notice, 22 January 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/zainsouthsudan211> and on file with Amnesty International.

<sup>7</sup> Eyeradio, "AUC chairperson echoes call for full probe into Al Jazira killings", 20 January 2025,

According to media reports, on 16 and 17 January, South Sudanese youth took to the streets and retaliated by attacking Sudanese nationals and their shops in South Sudan's capital Juba and Northern Bahr-el-Ghazal's state capital, Aweil. Citing the South Sudan National Police Service (SSNPS), the media report a total of 12 deaths and seven injured.<sup>8</sup>

On 22 January, the media quoted SSNPS spokesperson, John Kassara Koang Nhial, as saying that hundreds of detainees – the majority civilians – including those suspected to be responsible for the attacks against Sudanese and destruction and looting of their shops, had escaped from military detention in Giada military barracks in Juba.<sup>9</sup>

Amnesty International would like to remind South Sudanese authorities that civilians suspected to be responsible for the alleged crimes should not be held in military detention and that their fair trial rights should be protected.

### **Sudanese authorities must uphold and respect their international human rights obligations**

Amnesty International also calls upon SAF, as well as the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and all other parties to Sudan's conflict, to immediately end all attacks on civilians. All those suspected of criminal responsibility for the reported attack on South Sudanese in Wad Madani, and all other attacks against civilians in Sudan, should be brought to justice in fair trials.<sup>10</sup>

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<https://www.eyeradio.org/auc-chairperson-echoes-call-for-full-probe-into-al-jazira-killings/>

<sup>8</sup> Eyeradio, "AUC chairperson echoes call for full probe into Al Jazira killings", 20 January 2025, <https://www.eyeradio.org/auc-chairperson-echoes-call-for-full-probe-into-al-jazira-killings/>; Eyeradio, "3 die, 7 wounded in Juba's night-time protests: say police", 17 January 2025, <https://www.eyeradio.org/3-die-7-wounded-in-jubas-night-time-protests-says-police/>

<sup>9</sup> Eyeradio, "600 people accused of looting shops in Juba escape in massive prison break", 22 January 2025, <https://www.eyeradio.org/600-people-accused-of-looting-shops-in-juba-escape-in-massive-prison-break/>; Radio Tamazuj, "410 re-arrested as 600 prisoners escape from Juba prison", <https://www.radiotamazuj.org/en/news/article/410-re-arrested-as-600-prisoners-escape-from-juba-prison>

<sup>10</sup> For more of Amnesty International's work and calls on parties to the armed conflict in Sudan, please see: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/africa/east-africa-the-horn-and-great-lakes/sudan/>