

PUBLIC

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UA 154/02 Fear for safety/ Incommunicado detention/
Possible Prisoners of Conscience (POCs)

23 May 2002

SUDAN25 students - members of the African National Front (ANF)

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of 25 students, who were arrested on 21 May by the security services in the capital Khartoum. They are being held incommunicado at an unknown location and have been charged with a variety of offences, some of which carry the death penalty.

The students were arrested on the campus of Al-Nilein University in Khartoum (formerly Cairo University). They have been charged with several offences ranging from "war against the State" to sedition, breaching public peace and causing injuries under the Sudanese Penal Code of 1991.

The students were apparently arrested for taking part in a celebration marking the anniversary of the establishment of the Southern People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A), the main political and armed opposition movement in southern Sudan. The celebration, which was reportedly peaceful, was organized by the African National Front (ANF) - a national association of students originating mainly from southern Sudan. The students may have been arrested for raising the flag of the "New Sudan", which represents territories under control of the SPLA in southern Sudan and demands by the SPLM for a new political system in the country. The SPLM/A has been at war with the central government of Sudan for 19 years.

There has been a consistent pattern of human rights abuses against those perceived to oppose the government, including students, in Sudan. Members or suspected supporters of the SPLM/A have been targeted by the government and often detained without charge, tortured or killed.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Much of southern Sudan is in the hands of the armed opposition SPLA. Conflict between the government and the SPLA is currently raging in the oil-rich province of Western Upper Nile, despite recent US-brokered agreements to test both parties' commitment to a peace process.

Political opposition and freedoms of expression, assembly and association have been severely curtailed since President Omar al-Bashir came to power in 1989. Opposition political parties, trade-unions and student associations are banned or have had their activities restricted. Sedition charges and offences defined as "against the State" have been used arbitrarily in the past against suspected political opponents who can face trial by military court. Under the state of Emergency and the National Security Act, amended in December 2000, the security services can keep people in prolonged detention without charging them.

Amnesty International is unconditionally opposed to the death penalty and other forms of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment. The organisation campaigns for these to be removed from all penal codes without exception. The organization also takes no position on the ideological or religious basis of any penal code.

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

- expressing deep concern for the safety of 25 students currently detained incommunicado by security services and seeking assurances that they are not tortured or ill-treated;
- urging the authorities to immediately and publicly reveal their whereabouts;
- urging that they be given immediate and regular access to their relatives, legal representatives and any medical attention they may need;
- expressing deep concern at the charges that the students are facing, some of which carry the death penalty;
- urging the authorities to give them a fair and impartial trial, in accordance with international standards and without recourse to the death penalty;
- calling for more information concerning the basis for the charges;
- explaining that if the students were charged solely for expressing peacefully their political beliefs, Amnesty International would consider them to be prisoners of conscience and call for their immediate and unconditional release.

APPEALS TO:

His Excellency Lieutenant General Omar Hassan al-Bashir
President of the Republic of Sudan
President' s Palace
PO Box 281, Khartoum, Sudan
Telegrams: President al-Bashir, Khartoum, Sudan
Fax: + 24911 783223
Salutation: Your Excellency

Mr Ali Mohamed Osman Yassin
Minister of Justice and Attorney General
Ministry of Justice
Khartoum, Sudan
Telegrams: Justice Minister, Khartoum, Sudan
Fax: + 24911 788941
Salutation: Dear Minister

Mr Mustafa Osman Ismail
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
PO Box 873, Khartoum, Sudan
Telegrams: Foreign Minister, Khartoum, Sudan
Fax: + 24911 779383
Salutation: Dear Minister

Dr Ahmed al-Mufti
Advisory Council for Human Rights
PO Box 302
Khartoum, Sudan
Telegrams: Dr Ahmed al-Mufti, Advisory Council for Human Rights, Khartoum, Sudan
Fax: + 24911 770883
Salutation: Dear Sir

COPIES TO:

Mr Hafez al-Sheikh al-Zaki
Chief Justice, Supreme Court
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 4 July 2002.