

SUDAN Faisal el Bagir Mohamed, prominent journalist and human rights defender

Faisal el Bagir Mohamed, a prominent journalist and human rights defender, has been detained by Sudanese security forces and is being held incommunicado. Amnesty International believes him to be a prisoner of conscience, and fears that he is at risk of torture or ill-treatment.

On 13 June the security forces came to Faisal el Bagir's home in the capital of Khartoum. They arrested him and searched his house, confiscating his computer, fax machine, and various documents. They reportedly had no search warrant, and gave no reason for the arrest. They took Faisal el Bagir away for interrogation, but released him late that evening, telling him to report to the security headquarters the next day. When he did so, he was rearrested. He has been held in incommunicado detention since.

Faisal el Bagir is a member of the Sudan Victims of Torture Group (SVTG), an international network of Sudanese non-governmental human rights organisations, and of the Amal Centre for Rehabilitation of Victims of Physical and Mental Trauma, a centre offering free counselling and medical care for victims of human rights abuses.

Shortly before his detention, Faisal el Bagir met with the Ministry of Justice twice to seek permission for the SVTG and the Amal Centre, to celebrate the UN's International Day in Support of Victims of Torture on 26 June. Faisal el Bagir has been one of the main organisers of the proposed event, to which the Minister of Justice, the UN, national and international non-governmental organizations and foreign Embassies would have been invited.

Faisal el Bagir is the second person associated with the Amal Centre to be detained by security forces this year. Dr Nageeb Nagmeldin el Toum, the Centre's director, was detained in Kober prison without charge from 11 to 29 March. He has since been asked to report to the security forces for interrogation on several occasions. The Centre remains closed, and computers, medical equipment and medical files confiscated at the time of Dr el Toum's arrest have yet to be returned (See UA 61/01, AFR 54/007/2001, 15 March 2001 and follow-up AFR 54/008/2001, 10 April 2001).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Since President al-Bashir came to power in 1989, the work of human rights defenders has been severely curtailed in Sudan. In the past, those suspected of opposing the government, including lawyers, journalists, trade unionists and human rights defenders have frequently been detained incommunicado, tortured or harassed. Those who criticise the government remain at risk of illegal secret detention and torture or ill-treatment.

Under the *National Security Act and Law against Terrorism*, the security forces can keep people in detention for up to 63 hours before they are charged. The act was amended in December 2000, and detainees' right to challenge detentions of less than 93 days through the courts was reportedly removed. At the discretion of the authorities, this period can be renewed for a further three months. This means, in effect, that detainees can be held for an indefinite period of time without charge.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Mr Faisal el Bagir Mohamed;
- urging the authorities to guarantee that he is not tortured or ill-treated in custody;
- calling for him to be granted immediate access to his family, legal representatives and any medical attention he may need;
- calling for him to be released immediately and unconditionally;
- expressing concern that human rights defenders, including Dr Nageeb Nagmeldin el Toum, continue to be harassed by the authorities;
- expressing concern at the continuing closure of the Amal Centre;
- calling on the authorities to return all confiscated medical files, computers and equipment to their rightful owners.

APPEALS TO:

His Excellency Lieutenant General Omar Hassan al-Bashir
President of the Republic of Sudan
President' s Palace
PO Box 281, Khartoum, Sudan
Fax: + 24911 787676 / 783223
Telegrams: President al-Bashir, Khartoum, Sudan
Salutation: Your Excellency

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

COPIES 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 31 July 2001.