

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Sudan: Releases welcome but continuing incommunicado detentions must stop**

Amnesty International welcomes the decision by the Sudanese security forces to release 32 detainees, including students, peaceful activists and members of opposition parties who have been detained incommunicado without charge for months.

However, Amnesty International strongly condemns the stepping up of arbitrary arrests by the Sudanese authorities, particularly in Darfur, western Sudan, where a new internal armed conflict is developing.

The prisoners, on whose behalf the organization had repeatedly appealed to the government, were released from Kober, the main prison in the capital Khartoum. They were held arbitrarily under the National Security Forces Act, which allows the security forces to detain people without charge for up to nine months.

"This gesture is a step in the right direction and a credit to all those who have put pressure on the Sudanese government on behalf of the forgotten prisoners," the organization said.

"The Sudanese authorities must now put an end to the practice of prolonged incommunicado detention by reforming or abolishing the National Security Forces Act which contravenes international human rights law, and by immediately charging or else releasing all the persons currently held incommunicado by the security forces, including in Darfur," the organization urged.

#### **Arbitrary arrests and incommunicado detentions**

Amnesty International continues to receive allegations of arrests of members of the Fur and Zaghawa ethnic group in the context of the fighting between the Sudanese government and a new armed opposition group called the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) in the areas of Kutum and Tina in North Darfur. Due to the absence of independent observers in these isolated regions and the practice of the security forces and the army not to account for detentions, it is impossible to know how many persons are currently held in Darfur.

In the whole of the Darfur region, where the SLA started operating in February 2003, the Sudanese authorities have resorted to arresting and detaining incommunicado many people suspected of sympathizing with the armed group.

After another attack by armed militia on Shoba village on 25 July 2003 which killed about 51

inhabitants, four villagers, Suleiman Tahir Abdalla, Mohamed Mohamed Tahir, Abu Gasim Musa El Tahir and Ahmed Dut Hamid were arrested. Several leaders of the Fur ethnic group, Suleiman Hasab Allah, Mohamed Omer Ibrahim, Dr Mohamed Issa El Haj, El Fadil Adam Mohamed Ahmed Noorein and Abdelaziz Abdalla Abdel Mahmoud were also arrested in mid-July 2003. Four of them are reportedly held at the security offices in Nyala and have been forced to do harsh physical exercises and deprived of sleep.

On 29 July 2003, Yusif Ahmed El Beshir, correspondent of the daily newspaper Al-Sahafa in Nyala, was arrested after publishing an article on Darfur. The security forces have reportedly ordered he be detained in the Nyala prison for three months. Despite being accused of "publishing false news", he has not been charged with any offence. While he is not currently ill-treated, Yusif Ahmed El Beshir was previously tortured by the security forces during his detention in May 2003. The police in Nyala opened an investigation into his complaints of torture, but was reportedly told it could not look into actions by members of the security forces superior in grade.

At least 45 persons from the Malia ethnic group are held incommunicado in the Nyala prison. They were arrested in July 2003 in Adeela in South Darfur following the killing of members of the Rizeiqat ethnic group by members of the Malia ethnic group. They have no access to lawyers or families and are at risk of being tortured in order to give the names of those responsible for the killings.

"The Sudanese authorities must as a first step acknowledge the detention of all persons arrested and allow relatives and lawyers to visit them. If people are suspected to have committed offences, they must be charged with a recognizable offence and tried promptly and fairly; otherwise they must be released," Amnesty International stressed.

"The fact that attacks by armed groups on villages of sedentary people in Darfur are continuing shows that the government's response to the crisis is failing. The prolonged incommunicado detention of supposed sympathisers of the armed groups critics of the government's policy in Darfur fails to resolve the insecurity in the region and only creates more bitterness among the population," Amnesty International concluded.

## **Background**

Among the released are:

Lenin El Tayeb, a teacher and member of the Democratic Front, who was arrested on 24 April 2003 by the security forces after his three brothers were detained in order to force him to surrender. He reported that he was not ill-treated while in detention but his brothers were all severely beaten by the security forces upon arrest.

Abbas El Tigani, aged 26, student at the El Nilein University in Khartoum and member of the Darfur Students Union who was arrested on 29 May 2003 by the security forces as the Union was preparing to elect its officials. It is not known how he was treated while in detention.

Elhadi Tangur, who was arrested in Khartoum on 16 June 2003, reportedly after participating in a meeting between the Blue Nile community and General Sumbeiyu, the chief Kenyan mediator in the Sudan peace talks on the 20 years-old internal armed conflict in the south of the country. His family was allowed to visit him only once recently.

Salah Mohamed Abdelrahman, who was detained since 9 July 2002 without charge, for unclear reasons and was allowed to see a relative only in January 2003. His lawyers had appealed for his release in May 2003, noting that his continuing detention was contravening even the nine months period of detention fixed the National Security Forces Act.

Ali Shamar and Dr Al Haj Adam Yusuf, members of the Popular National Congress (PNC) headed by

Dr Hassan Al-Turabi, himself under house detention for more than two years, were released after months spent in detention without charge. Some 20 members of the PNC are said to be still detained without charge.

***Prolonged incommunicado detention is a widespread practice in government-controlled areas of Sudan. It is one of the numerous human rights violations in Sudan described in a recent Amnesty International report Sudan: Empty promises? Human rights violations in government-controlled areas (index number: AFR 54/036/2003), published on 16 July 2003.***

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