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Sudan: Those responsible for indiscriminate Port Sudan killings must be brought to justice

Amnesty International today condemned the excessive use of force by security forces, which left more than 20 people dead and scores wounded, after demonstrations turned violent in Port Sudan over the weekend.

The organization called on the Sudanese government to immediately set up an independent and impartial commission of inquiry into the killings in Port Sudan. Those that used or ordered the use of excessive lethal force should be brought to justice.

"Many of those killed or wounded, including children, were uninvolved in any demonstration and appear to have been wantonly attacked in their homes", said Kolawole Olaniyan, Director of Amnesty International's Africa Programme. "Vandalism by demonstrators can never excuse the use of lethal force".

Armed security forces reportedly used live ammunition against a demonstration which had reportedly turned violent on Saturday 29 January. They then attacked houses outside the area of the demonstrations, reportedly throwing grenades inside the houses and wounding residents, including children.

According to internationally adopted principles, law-enforcement agencies should develop a range of means as broad as possible and apply non-violent means before resorting to the use of force and firearms. Officials shall only use firearms if other means remain ineffective or without any promise of achieving the intended result. Firearms may be used against people, after appropriate warnings are given, only to prevent death or serious injury where less extreme means are insufficient. In doing so, law-enforcement officials must respect and preserve life and minimize injury and damage.

"The excessive and indiscriminate use of force in Port Sudan is in contravention of international human rights standards which state that police and security forces may only resort to intentional lethal use of firearms when strictly necessary to protect life. There has been no suggestion that the lives of the police were in danger from demonstrators armed only with sticks and stones." said Kolawole Olaniyan.

The organization expressed concerns at reports of demonstrations and large scale arrests in Kassala, also in the east of the country.

Background

Before the violent events of last Saturday, a peaceful demonstration had taken place on 26 January in Port Sudan and a list of demands was presented to the Governor of Red Sea State, including a demand for a

share in power and equal opportunities for the people of the region. Many of those demonstrating were said to be from the Beja ethnic group of the eastern Sudan. They gave the governor of Red Sea State 72 hours to respond to the memorandum with the demands.

The demonstrations in Port Sudan protesting against perceived marginalization of eastern Sudan followed the crisis in Darfur where more than 1.65 million people were forcibly displaced and more than 50,000 killed after armed groups protested at the marginalization of sedentary people in western Sudan.

In Port Sudan the protests appear to have been triggered by the Beja group, who live in the arid hills west of the Red Sea.

A Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed on 9 January 2005, ending the 21-year conflict between the southern Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and the Khartoum Government in southern Sudan. Marginalized groups from western, northern and eastern Sudan felt themselves left out of this peace agreement.

Public Document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566
Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

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