

South Sudan security sets free newspaper journalist without charges

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September 8, 2012 (JUBA) - South Sudan's security services on Saturday released without charge Nasir Fazol, a journalist working for one of the country's independent daily newspaper, three days after arresting him, relatives and the newspaper editor told *Sudan Tribune* on Saturday.

Fazol confirmed that he had been released but said he was asked by the Director General for Internal Security, Akol Koor Kuc to return on Monday. No statement has been made public from the security services clarifying the reasons for or denying Fazol's arrest, despite attempts by *Sudan Tribune* to independently verify the cause.

Nhial Bol Aken, the Editor in Chief of *The Citizen* newspaper said on Saturday in an interview with *Sudan Tribune* that his office did not receive any letter of arrest on issues related to Fazol's work.

Fazol was picked up from *The Citizen's* offices in Juba by security personnel on September 5 and driven away to the headquarters of the National Intelligence and Security Service where he was held for three days without access to his lawyers. Officials did not allow him to meet friends and relatives who attempted to visit him or speak to anyone while he was in detention.

Aken said that "I think this is one of the strategies to paralyze our operation. There is a feeling with security to close the paper but they do not have a reason. So this is the starting tactic", Aken told *Sudan Tribune* on Saturday.

The veteran journalist explained that the arrest of Fazol, whom he said works with him as a printing technician, was a "political ploy" to stop the paper from working because he was the printing technician. The journalist was released after Aken visited Fazol on Friday with his wife.

"They gave us only two minutes to talk to him and we were not allowed to give food", he said confirming claims by Fazol that he did not receive a food from any of his relative while in detention.

"They did not allow me see even a sun. I was inside until I was released today but I was not beaten. They did not beat. I was only denied the opportunity to interact and talk with other members", Fazol said explaining he was asked to return at 10:00 am on Monday.

Arbitrary arrests by South Sudan's Security Services targeting vocal journalists and active members of civil society are widely becoming a public concern in the young. South Sudan gained independence last year after fighting neighbouring Sudan for over two decades., after spending several years fighting for justice and better governance.

The South Sudan Human Rights Society for Advocacy (SSHURSA), a group advocating for justice said on Tuesday its office equipments had been looted, leaving them vulnerable to starting from "scratch".

Biel Boutros Biel, an executive director said his organization was saddened by the incident he strongly condemns the breakage of its Juba head office by unknown people which took place at 2:30 am local time. Biel said security guard was unable to stop the attackers

"Much as we don't have evidence to figure-point anyone or suspects as per now, but because of the sensitive work we have been doing as human rights defenders, the attack on SSHURSA office does not surprise us much", the activist said in a statement extended to *Sudan Tribune* on September 4.

"Our computers have been taken including the desktop computer and generators as well as other valuables. This leaves SSHURSA more vulnerable in terms of its operational facilities", he said

He called upon all its staff, members and volunteers throughout the country to remain focused and strong in defense of human rights and rule of law despite threats and attempts to silence them.

"This incident must not scare us but rather emboldens our resolve to defend human rights. We must remain determined to continue defending the rights of helpless majority of our people and regardless of numerous threats and intimidations and this evil that has occurred today", he explained.

Many human rights defenders in the country have repeatedly complained receiving threats from government agents allegedly acting on the instructions of senior government officials.

Deng Athuai Mawiir Rehan, Chairperson of South Sudan's Civil Society Alliance was in June picked outside his hotel in Juba

and put into a sack and driven away into a car by a group of people he said called to give a him a lift while walking back to the hotel.

Rehan was found dumped at the outskirts of Juba town after suffering severe physical abuse. No group has been found responsible although the government had promised to conduct investigation to establish who was behind the kidnapping.

Although the country's Transitional Constitution permits free speech and expression, little has been achieved in enforcing constitutional provisions. A lot of laws associated to civil rights and press laws have been enacted despite pressure and protests demanding immediate passage of the media bills.

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