

Sudan: Justice Needed for Student Deaths, Halt Violent Crackdown on Protesters - HRW

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(Nairobi, December 10, 2012) – Sudanese authorities should immediately investigate the deaths of four student protesters and the disappearance of two others at the beginning of December 2012, in Madani, Jazeera state, and hold those responsible to account, Human Rights Watch said today.

“The murky circumstances of these deaths are fueling more protests and violence,” said Daniel Bekele, Africa director at Human Rights Watch. “Sudanese authorities should immediately investigate, bring those responsible for these deaths and disappearances to justice, and stop its security forces from using violence and excessive force against protesters.”

The student deaths have caused violent protests in Khartoum and other towns, with protesters calling for justice and for the government to be replaced. Sudanese security forces used teargas, beat protesters with sticks and batons, and arrested dozens, including lawyers and high profile opposition party members, on December 9 and 10.

News emerged on December 7 that the bodies of three students, Mohamed Younis al-Nil, Adel Mohamed Ahmed, and Alsadiq Abdullah Yagoub, had been found in a sewage canal near Al Jazeera University. The body of a fourth student, Nu'man Ahmed Koreishi, was also found later in the canal. The students were reported missing earlier in the week during protests over the university's refusal to register Darfuri students unless they paid full tuition. Under the Darfur peace agreements of 2006 and 2010, Darfuri students qualify for a tuition exemption. Sudanese universities have interpreted the provision inconsistently, however, prompting protests by Darfuri students at several campuses in recent years.

On December 2, national security officials entered the university and arrested 11 Darfuri students who had appealed to the administration for a fee waiver. In the following days, students protested at the university. Police, national security officers, and pro-government students clashed with the protesters.

Approximately 60 were arrested on December 5, according to Sudanese groups following the case. Witnesses interviewed by Human Rights Watch said the government security forces pushed the protesters toward the canal, causing several students to fall in. Six protesters were reported missing, including the four whose bodies were later recovered from the canal. Two other students are still missing.

The circumstances of the deaths are unclear. One witness told Human Rights Watch the bodies of three of the deceased bore signs of beatings, suggesting at a minimum that they had been beaten, most likely by security forces, before they died. The university administration said the students drowned. Authorities have refused to provide the medical examiner's report. National security officials arrested Mohammed Zain Osman, a lawyer for one of the deceased students' families, when he requested the report on December 7.

Sudan's Justice Ministry announced on December 10 the formation of a commission of inquiry into the deaths. The investigation should be independent, transparent, and capable of identifying those responsible for the deaths, Human Rights Watch said.

“Withholding the autopsy report only gives the impression the authorities have something to hide,” Bekele said. “Sudan needs to find out what happened to these students and make the findings public. The government should impartially investigate the deaths and prosecute those responsible for these deaths and disappearances.”

Sudan has consistently failed to follow through on promises to investigate abuses in which officials and government forces are implicated. Its failure to investigate crimes in Darfur led the United Nations Security Council to refer the situation to the International Criminal Court, which hears cases when a government is unable or unwilling to investigate on its own. In 2010, the government said it would investigate the death of Mohammed Musa following a demonstration in Khartoum, but investigation results were never made public and no one was identified as responsible or prosecuted for the crime.

Crackdown on student protests

From June through August of 2012, Sudanese security forces cracked down on a wave of student protests, sparked initially by austerity measures, in towns across Sudan. National security officials detained protesters for weeks or months, subjecting many to beatings, insults, and other mistreatment and torture while in detention.

Darfuri students were treated particularly harshly during the protests, former detainees told Human Rights Watch, describing beatings, sleep deprivation, and racist insults. Security forces also responded particularly harshly to protests in Darfur,

shooting live ammunition to disperse protests and killing 13 in South Darfur in August.

For more information, please contact:

In New York, Jehanne Henry (English, French): +1-212-216-1291; or +1-917-443-2724 (mobile); or henryj@hrw.org

In Amsterdam, Leslie Lefkow (English): +31-6-21-59-7356 (mobile); or lefkowl@hrw.org

In Johannesburg, Tiseke Kasambala (English): +27-11-484-2640 (mobile); or kasambt@hrw.org

In London, David Mepham, (English): +44-20-7713-2766; or +44-7572-603995 (mobile); or mephamd@hrw.org