

AI: Sudan must end violent repression of student protests

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Amnesty International

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Sudan must end its violent repression of demonstrations, Amnesty International said in the wake of a week of unrest that saw many protesters arrested or injured.

Nationwide protests were sparked by the death of four Darfuri students in Jazeera state following a peaceful student sit-in at their university on 3 December. The four had been arrested by National Security Service (NSS) officers and were later found dead in a canal near the university.

Police continued to use excessive force this week in Khartoum during protests denouncing the death of the students and calling for the government to be replaced. Protesters were beaten and dispersed with tear gas, while scores were arrested.

"Sudanese security services have clearly used excessive force since the first peaceful murmurings of dissent at last week's student sit-in," said Amnesty International's Audrey Gaughran.

"The authorities must stop the repression of those participating in peaceful demonstrations, and respect the right to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression."

The four students found dead were among 53 arrested by National Security Service (NSS) officers on 3 December during a peaceful sit-in at Al Jazeera University.

The circumstances of their deaths are still unclear; however, they are believed to be linked with the students' involvement in the protests.

The four bodies reportedly bore signs of beatings, suggesting torture or ill-treatment. Witnesses told Amnesty International the bodies bore signs of bleeding on their heads, and one on the shoulder.

The Sudanese Minister of Justice has pledged to establish a commission of inquiry to investigate the death of the four students. However, in the past the Government of Sudan has failed to conduct impartial investigations into serious human rights violations.

"The authorities must ensure that any investigation into the recent student deaths is impartial and transparent," said Audrey Gaughran.

Students in Jazeera State had been protesting against the university administration's refusal to let them register without paying the full tuition. Under the Darfur Peace Agreement, students originating from Darfur are to be exempt from the payment tuition fees.

During the sit-in, security forces used force to disperse the students and arrested 53 of them, including four women. A large number were released the following day, however, it remains unclear whether some continue to be detained.

Two lawyers and two teachers affiliated with an opposition party were also arrested on 8 December for their alleged involvement in the protests. They remain in detention, without charge.

"The authorities must respect the right to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression. The response to the recent protests is deeply troubling. With reports that some protesters are planning to return to the streets to continue demonstrations, it is vital that the Sudanese authorities' repressive methods are curtailed before more people are harmed," said Audrey Gaughran.

Background

Protests began on 2 December against the administration of Al Jazeera University, where protestors were attacked by pro-government students. The fighting led to the arrest of 7 Darfuri students who were reportedly taking part in a peaceful

demonstration. On 3 December, a larger group of students partook in a sit-in that was said to be peaceful on all accounts. Government security forces responded to the protest by arresting more than 50 people.

On 6 December, the bodies of Adil Mohamed Ahmed and Mohamed Younis Nil were found in the canal near the Al Jazeera university buildings the state capital Mad Manani. The bodies of two other students, Alsadig Yagoub Abdallah and Nouman Ahmed Koreishi, were found the next day in the same canal.

Following this, protests quickly spread to Khartoum and other towns in Sudan. On 8 December, police in Khartoum arrested nine activists taking part in protests. They were detained and released the following day.

On 11 December, students gathered at Omdurman Islamic University (OIU) in Khartoum for another protest where they were met with pro-government students and the police. Students were beaten and dispersed using teargas. A fire broke out in the dorms of the OIU, leaving students homeless.

Amnesty International has previously expressed concerns about the excessive use of force by the security services against protestors, including most recently in the wave of protests which began in June this year.