

Concern for safety of five political opposition leaders detained in Sudan

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African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies

(11 January 2013) Five political opposition leaders have been arrested by Sudan's National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) on their return from a meeting in Kampala, Uganda attended by Sudanese political opposition parties and armed opposition groups. The five are detained incommunicado in an unknown location and are at risk of torture and ill-treatment. Attempts by families of the detainees to obtain further information have been rejected by the NISS.

On 7 January, the NISS arrested two members of the Socialist Unionist Nasserist Party (SUNP) from their homes in Khartoum:

- Dr. Jamal Idris, (m), Chairperson of the SUNP.
- Enstar Alagali, (f), a leading member of the SUNP. Ms. Alagali is also head of the women's unit within the Sudanese civil society coalition called 'Cooperation for Defending Rights and Freedoms'.

On 8 January, the NISS arrested three members of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) from Khartoum airport, upon their return from the Kampala meeting:

- Professor Mohamed Zain Alabidein, (m), Political Affairs Assistant to the DUP Chairperson.
- Dr. Abdulrahim Abdalla, (m), Dr. Abdalla is the Regulatory Affairs Assistant to the DUP Chairperson.
- Hisham Al Mufti, (m), a leader of the DUP.

The arrests are thought to be directly connected to the political negotiations which took place in early January in Kampala between a coalition of Sudanese political opposition parties called the National Consensus Forces (NCF) and a coalition of armed opposition groups called the Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF). The negotiations were also attended by representatives from Sudanese youth movements, political parties outside of the NCF coalition, and a number of individuals.

Sudan's track record of using the NISS to intimidate political opponents of the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) and the lack of information on the whereabouts and welfare of the detainees give rise to serious concerns for their safety.

The African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies (ACJPS) calls on the Government of Sudan to:

Immediately make known the whereabouts of the detainees and grant them access to their families and lawyers.

Guarantee the physical and psychological integrity of the detainees and order their immediate release in the absence of valid legal charges that are consistent with international law and standards or, if such charges exist, to bring them before an impartial, independent and competent tribunal and guarantee their procedural rights at all times.

Cease the harassment and intimidation of political opponents and guarantee the right to freedom of assembly, association and expression as recognised by the Interim National Constitution (2005) and Sudan's commitments under international law.

Background

The political meeting held in Kampala, Uganda culminated in the adoption on 8 January of a political document entitled the "New Dawn". The "New Dawn" document affirms the validity of both peaceful and violent means for regime change, and pledges the creation of a transitional government with independent bodies that respects diversity. The leadership of a number of political parties whose representatives signed the document have since distanced themselves from it.

These arrests of political opposition leaders form part of a broader campaign targeting the right to freedom of expression, association and assembly in Sudan. They came just days after the forced closure of three civil society organisations and one literary forum in Sudan by the authorities.

Popular protests which took place throughout the country in 2012 were met by the Sudanese authorities with excessive use of force, mass arbitrary arrests and detention, torture and ill-treatment.

ACJPS has serious concerns that the little space left for political debate and expression of dissenting views in Sudan is rapidly contracting.

Sudanese media outlets have quoted a statement made by Presidential Assistant and Chairperson of the ruling National

Congress Party (NCP), Mr. Nafei Ali Nafie, to recent graduates of the paramilitary Popular Defence Forces, where he warned that the signatories to the “New Dawn” document had “dug their graves with their own hands by adopting the agreement, as it is based on the rejection of the principles of Islamic Sharia law”. He was also reported to state that “2013 will be the year of cleaning of the opposition by both peaceful and military means” and that “we will not leave the traitors a chance to breathe”.

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