

EAST AND HORN OF AFRICA HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS NETWORK

Public Statement

23rd February, 2011

KAMPALA: EHAHRD is concerned over the increasing harassment of human rights defenders and general human rights situation in Sudan

The East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Network [EHAHRD-Net] is deeply concerned by the unending reports of mistreatment of human rights defenders in Sudan. EHAHRD-Net strongly condemns this repression and calls on the Khartoum government to abide by its international and national responsibilities to protect the rights of human rights defenders

The government of Sudan should release the protesters including journalists who continue to be detained by the National Intelligence and Security Services. While demonstrating against the government imposed price increase, the Youth for 30 January Change Alliance called on President Omar al-Bashir to revoke measures imposed to combat the economic effects of South Sudan's secession. The uprising that was sparked by the protests that have recently taken place in Egypt and Tunisia comprised thousands of Sudanese students and their supporters gathered in Khartoum and other northern cities on January 30 and 31. The use of water pipes, sticks and teargas by the dispatched armed riot police in response to the demonstrations was uncalled for. With the demonstrations going into the second week, National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) treatment of the detained protesters worsened through deprivation of sleep and use of electric shocks.

Following the demonstrations, nine journalists who reported on the demonstration were arrested but four have since been released, while four newspapers have also been censored since the protests: Ajras Alhurria, Al Sahafa, Al Alyoum, and now Al-Midan, with the first two papers not allowed to be distributed after they covered the demonstrations. On the evening of 2 February, National Intelligence and Security Services surrounded the offices of Al-Midan, a Communist Party-affiliated newspaper in Khartoum and confiscated the newspaper's 1 February issue covering the mass demonstrations.

“We are deeply saddened by the continued harassment of human rights defenders in Sudan, and urge the authorities to desist from such unlawful acts. Such unprecedented threats and harassment as reported by our Sudanese Network members are a clear manifestation of the government's continued crackdown on HRDs which is absolutely uncalled for. We also call on the government to lift restrictions on the media immediately and respect the right to freedom of assembly and peaceful association of its people without further delay,” said Hassan Shire Sheikh, Executive Director EHAHRDP.

The East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Network insists that HRDs must enjoy the protection provided for by the 1998 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders which stresses in its very first Article that the right individually and in association with others, to promote and strive for the realisation of human and fundamental rights must be observed. The

Network is committed to ensure the observance of this and other provisions of the Declaration by all countries in the region.

Back ground

Attacks on freedom of expression have become systematic in Sudan notably through case-by-case pre-print censorship, public information bans as well as intimidation, poor treatment and arrests of journalists. The Press and Printed Press Material Act, was passed by the Sudanese Parliament on the 8th June 2009 despite significant opposition to the draft from national, regional and international media and civil society but also within the Parliament itself. This formalised staunch restrictions on freedom of expression and the media.

The Act imposes heavy fines for infractions by the media, establishes a Press Council which lacks independence, with eight of its twenty-one members including the Chairperson being appointed by the Presidency itself, and is granted extensive regulatory powers, notably the power to suspend newspapers without judiciary approval for up to three days. The Press Council is also granted the power to assess the eligibility of journalists to exert their profession. Furthermore, the law allows the State to impose restrictions on the press for national security and public discipline considerations and requires that journalists do not publish material at odds with religious values and traditions. Although the pre-election period saw a slight decline in instances of pre-print censorship, there has been a further clampdown on freedom of expression in Sudan since the April 2010 elections.

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