



## **Joint Press Statement**

**15<sup>th</sup> December 2014**

### **The First Anniversary of the Armed Conflict in South Sudan: Freedom of Expression and Human Rights Defenders Under Attack**

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Since 15 December 2013, South Sudan's descent into armed conflict has led to the loss of tens of thousands of lives and has been characterised by a total disregard for international human rights and humanitarian law. Further, throughout 2014 the country's already highly restrictive operating environment for journalists and human rights defenders has dramatically worsened, said the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project (EHAHRDP) and the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) in a joint statement released today to mark the first anniversary of the conflict.

As of December 2014, the UN estimates that almost two million people have been displaced by the armed conflict in South Sudan. An estimated four million people are at risk of food insecurity, with the UN repeatedly warning of a looming famine should fighting continue. To date, no persons have been held accountable for conflict related human rights abuses.

Throughout the conflict, press freedom conditions have deteriorated significantly, with authorities routinely intimidating and harassing the press. Authorities have effectively banned critical reporting, inducing journalists to censor themselves in order to survive. The National Security Service (NSS) routinely summons and arbitrarily detains and journalists with little pretext or recourse to law; some journalists have reported being beaten in custody. An NSS bill currently being considered by President Kiir would provide such acts with a cloak of legality—while media laws designed to protect journalists are not implemented. *“Press conditions have reached rock bottom at a crucial time when the public desperately needs independent information,”* said CPJ East Africa Representative Tom Rhodes.

Human rights defenders in South Sudan operate amidst one of the most hostile and restrictive environments in East Africa. Many are subject to routine attacks, threats, harassment and intimidation in the course of their work. *“Throughout 2014, human rights defenders from across a wide spectrum of civil society organisations have borne the brunt of a renewed clampdown by the South Sudanese government,”* said Hassan Shire, EHAHRDP's Executive Director. EHAHRDP's latest report, *“For Us, Silence is Not an Option: Human Rights Defenders and the South Sudan Civil War”*, released today, details a worsening pattern throughout 2014 of harassment, intimidation and targeted threats against human rights defenders, many of whom have been forced into exile since the conflict started.

Along with Amnesty International, CPJ and EHAHRDP will be hosting a panel discussion and press conference on the human rights situation in South Sudan on 15 December 2014 in Nairobi. The event marks the first anniversary of the start of the conflict in South Sudan, and will serve as a forum for South Sudanese journalists and human rights defenders to discuss the current situation.

EHAHRDP and CPJ call on the government of South Sudan to take immediate and concrete steps to cease all intimidation, harassment, arbitrary arrests and attacks against journalists and human rights defenders.

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