

Targeting of Opposition-affiliated Journalists and Censorship of 30 January Demonstrations Continues

Contact: Osman Hummaida, Executive Director

Phone: +44 7956 095738

E-mail: osman@acips.org

(5 February 2011) Following the mass mobilisation of activists in the 30 January demonstrations organised in Khartoum, Omdurman, Wad Medani, and Kosti by the “Youth for 30 January Change Alliance”, the capacity of opposition-affiliated newspapers to report on the protests has been largely incapacitated through arrests of journalists covering protests and in their offices.¹ To date, four newspapers have 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 30 January demonstrations. Neither newspaper has been allowed to resume publication, as will likely be the case with *Al-Midan* and *Al-Alwan*. Staff of *Al-Midan* was arrested on the evening of the 2 February and are currently being held incommunicado. The stringent censorship measures imposed also reveal a campaign against opposition-affiliated newspapers; staffs of newspapers who are not journalists have been arrested, as well as members of the Communist and Umma Party since 30 January.

The arrests of journalists appear to be an attempt to curtail organizing by limiting information about ongoing actions. Security targeted journalists during the protests, and has continued to circumscribe access to information through stringent censorship of newspapers affiliated with opposition parties. Early in the protests, joint NISS/police forces attacked a demonstration in Midan Jackson, Sharia Algasr, and Al Meridan. Journalists were specifically targeted, and nine were arrested, mainly from *Alathdath*, *Ajras Alhurria*, *Al Sahafa*, *Akhbar Alyoum*, and *Al Gerida*. Photos of the demonstration were deleted from digital cameras. On 2 February, authorities in Khartoum investigated *Al Alwan* newspaper for an article written and published in issue no. 447623 by Chief Editor Hussein Khojaliyi criticising NCP member Alfath Abdan, who publicly called Popular Congress Party leader Hassan al-Turabi unintelligent and delinked him from the student movement. Turabi was arrested only one day after an interview with AFP where he called for a popular uprising.

Targetting of demonstrators also appears to have racial, ethnic, professional, and political undertones. One demonstrator arrested, a Southerner named Lewis Awil Weriak, was transferred away from the other detainees and has been severely tortured. He is currently being held incommunicado and there are fears that he will be used to send a message to other Southerners to not involve themselves in political affairs.

On the evening of 2 February, National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) in Khartoum surrounded the offices of *Al-Midan*, a Communist Party-affiliated newspaper in Khartoum. The newspaper's 1 February issue covering the mass demonstrations by the “Youth for 30 January Change Alliance” was confiscated. At 7 PM, NISS agents cordoned off the area surrounding *Al-Midan's* offices and blocked the doorway.

NISS agents waited for the staff to emerge from their offices, and arrested journalists, staff, a visitor, and the newspapers' driver while they were on their way home. Apart from those already released, the

¹ For more information, see the African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies, “Youth Mass Protests Spark 113 Arrests and One Death”.

group is being held incommunicado and some members have been tortured with electric shocks, and forced to open their e-mails and facebook accounts to track information. Those arrested are:

- Samir Salaheldin, journalist trainee
- Mohamed Rahman, employee
- Mawia Hassim, employee
- Kamal Karrar, deputy chief editor
- Ibrahim Merghani, journalist, political section
- Khalid Tofiq, graphic designer
- Fatima Bashir, printer (released at 2 AM, but summoned back to NISS for questioning on the 3rd)
- Fadia Ibrahim, printer (released at 2 AM, but summoned back to NISS for questioning on the 3rd)
- Mohamed Al Didiri, journalist trainee
- Mali Hajid, employee
- Ahmed Ali, guest
- Abdul Azim El Badawi, intern
- Shadia Abdulmonim: visitor
- Hind El Tigani, visitor
- Nagatt Ahmed, visitor
- Minibus driver (name unknown)
- Suliman Wedaah

At 1:30 AM, NISS agents arrested Hatim Gatan, a member of the Communist Party and the Party's Central Committee, from his home in Khartoum Bahri, Aldoshrap neighbourhood. Over the past few days, there have also been arrests of other Communist Party leaders. On 31 January, Khamal Osman was arrested in Wad Medani, El Gezira state. On 2 February, Amin Hassan of the Communist Party was also arrested in Wad Medani.

Further protests planned for 3 February have already resulted in the arrest of ten individuals in Khartoum Bahri. Riot police and the NISS surrounded the demonstration in Midan Agreb and opened tear gas. Two demonstrators were injured and are in serious condition. They are:

- Omar Hassan
- Onur Hashim

Two members of the Sudan Peoples' Liberation Movement –Northern Sector were arrested. They are:

- Sadiia Eisa
- E Hassan Abdelazaz

More arrests are expected as demonstrators reach checkpoints established by security.

The arrests impede freedom of expression and association, guaranteed by Article 39(1) of the Interim National Constitution, as well as highlighting the reemergence of censorship to stifle press freedom. This pattern is all the more disturbing considering that it is happening within a time frame between preliminary announcements of referendum results on the 30 January and official results on the 7 February by the Southern Sudan Referendum Commission. With further protests planned, the African Centre fears that the pattern of repression may continue.

The responses undertaken by the NISS illuminate the direction that the ruling National Congress Party has chosen to take; faced with reconstruction of a new North and internal divisions over liberalisation or Islamisation, initial signs show that they have opted to attempt to consolidate power by any means necessary.