

End repressive laws targeting women in Sudan: Statement by Sudanese women activists

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On 10 July 2009, thirteen women were arrested by police in a restaurant in Khartoum, Sudan, and charged with violating the public dress code face being flogged up to 40 lashes.

The arrests took place when police forces stormed the restaurant and arrested women diners dressed in trousers which the police regarded as 'indecent'. The women, some of whom come from Southern Sudan, were charged under article 152 (Indecent and Immoral Acts) of the 1991 Penal Code. Ten of the women pleaded guilty, out of fear and terror usually accompanied these procedures, and had already received 10 lashes (two of them under the age of 16) and those who pleaded not guilty face up to 40 lashes if convicted.

Over the past 20 years Sudanese women- regardless of their race, religion, age or background- have suffered degrading treatment and humiliation under the public order code of 1996, which changed in 2009 to The Society Safety Code. Women, especially the poor women, street vendors and students, have been and continue to be subjected to constant threat of being arrested, beaten and tortured just for what they are wearing and their mere presence on the street. Majority are denied legal recourse and once arrested they risk being sent to prison or flogged.

Sudanese women represent more than half of the Sudan population, their contribution to the society economy and wellbeing is substantial. Women, from street vendors, teachers and farmers, workers are preserving communities and families across the country. The role of the state is to protect them, maintain their dignity and pride and their access to a fair justice system. The degradation of women is affecting our society and self esteem and diminish the respect that we have in our diverse cultures towards women and girls- an aspect of our culture that we do need to promote and enhance.

The discriminatory laws against women embedded in Sudan legislations contradicts the declared government commitment to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) signed on 9 January 2005 and the National Interim Constitution. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) - which Sudan acceded in 1986- prohibits torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment such as flogging and protects women's rights to be free from discrimination based on sex. Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, signed by Sudan on 30 June 2008 emphasized on women right to be respected as a person and to the free development of their personalities and that existing discriminatory laws and practice shall be reformed in order to promote and protect the rights of women. And the Convention on the Rights of Children, ratified by Sudan since 1979 and clearly stating that; States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that the child is protected against all forms of discrimination or punishment on the basis of the status, activities, expressed opinions, or beliefs.

We the undersigned Sudanese women urge the Government of Sudan to:

- Cease the use of cruel, inhuman and degrading punishments
- Guarantee the procedural rights of women accessing the justice system at all times
- Guarantee respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms throughout the country in accordance with the National Interim Constitution (NIC) and regional and international human rights standards.
- Commit to the promotion of positive culture of respecting women of Sudan and enhance their contribution and protect their wellbeing through adopting laws and policies in accordance with Sudan constitutions and international and regional obligations
- Support and facilitate women access to the justice system safely and with dignity, through provision of training and education on the rights of women to law enforcement and other Sudan justice system mechanisms.

P.S.

* Posted by SIAWI:

<http://www.siawi.org/article904.html>