

Sudan: 30 women detained in inhumane conditions following involvement in protests

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Kampala, Paris, 20 February 2019 - The African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies (ACJPS) and FIDH are deeply concerned about the safety of 30 women detained without access to lawyers or family members by the Sudanese National Security Intelligence Services (NISS) in Omdurman women's prison.

The detainees were targeted for their participation or suspected involvement in the ongoing protests calling for the resignation of president Omar al-Bashir. ACJPS and FIDH have gathered disturbing information about the detention conditions of these women, all of whom have been subjected to invasive strip searches, amounting to acts of sexual violence.

The detainees include members of opposition political parties, human rights defenders, journalists, teachers and doctors. Of the 30 women currently held at Omdurman, 18 were arrested during protests held between December 20, 2018 and February 2, 2019. They were forced to climb into NISS pickup trucks and to face downward so that they could not recognize where they were being taken. The other detainees were arrested over the same time period during NISS raids of their private residences and political party offices. The oldest detainee is in her late 70's whilst the youngest is 24 years old. At least one is suffering from asthma.

"Sudanese authorities must preserve the safety of the 30 women detained in Omdurman prison and ensure they have immediate and unequivocal access to their family members, medical services and to lawyers of their own choosing. Those arbitrarily detained must be released and for those charged, authorities must ensure due process of law and a fair trial including the right to promptly access courts and to review the legality of their detention", declared Mossaad Mohamed Ali, ACJPS Executive Director.

ACJPS and FIDH have received reliable information indicating that the 30 women were made to sit for hours while facing the wall as they waited for admission into the prison. After having their phones confiscated and inspected, all of the women were subjected to body searches by NISS agents including in their private parts, amounting to acts of sexual violence. While in detention, they have not had access to sanitary towels, thus exposing them to risks of infection. Many have been subjected to verbal abuse including calling them prostitutes. At least eight women are obliged to share a single cell measuring approximately 5x5 meters.

NISS authorities have used detainees' family members to pressure them to reveal information. The husband of at least one detainee was brought to the prison by NISS agents to force her reveal the identity of members of the Sudanese Professionals Association. Before the arrest of another detainee, her nephew was arrested by NISS to force her to report to their offices. Her nephew was eventually released.

"The information we have received suggests that the 30 women detainees may have been subjected

to various forms of acts of torture, inhuman and degrading treatment, including acts of sexual violence. Authorities must take immediate action to end these violations, to carry a prompt investigation into these acts and to hold those responsible to account”, declared Sheila Nabachwa, FIDH Vice President.

At least 816 people have been arrested and detained and 40 others killed since protests broke out across Sudan on 19 December 2018 [1]. While protests initially focused on denouncing increases in prices of basic commodities, they quickly developed into calling for the resignation of Sudanese president Omar al-Bashir, leading to a violent response from security agencies. On 29 January 2019, the Director of NISS ordered the release of all detainees but only a few of those detained were released. Security agencies have continued to arrest protesters and disperse rallies. Most recently, on 10 February 2019, police used teargas to disperse hundreds of protesters participating in a march organized by the Sudanese Professionals Association calling for the release of all women detained since the December 2018 protests. Police intercepted the protesters as they marched towards Omdurman women’s prison and arrested several people.

ACJPS and FIDH are deeply concerned about the detention conditions of all those who have been arrested and detained in relation to the protests, considering NISS’s well-documented record of acts of torture against detainees. Our organisations urge authorities to guarantee the safety of all detainees, in compliance with provisions of the Sudanese 2005 Interim Constitution and with regional and international treaties to which Sudan is party.

ACJPS and FIDH further reiterate their call upon Sudanese authorities to end all acts of harassment and intimidation of citizens who seek to exercise their rights to freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly.

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P.S.

- African Center for Justice and Peace (ACJPS):
<https://www.acjps.org/sudan-30-women-detained-in-inhumane-conditions-following-involvement-in-protests/>:
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Footnotes

[1] <http://www.acjps.org/sudan-hundreds-of-protesters-arrested-free-or-charge-detainees-end-abuse-of-critics/>