

Press Statement

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KAMPALA: EHAHRD-Net is concerned about increasing harassment of human rights defenders in Sudan

The Khartoum government's clampdown on human rights defenders over the last twelve months is alarming. These attacks are of particular concern, in light of the forthcoming national elections scheduled for later this year and the issuance of the arrest warrant against President Bashir by the International Criminal Court (ICC). 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.

Harassment of the independent media has since February 2008 increasingly become routine practice, notably through case-by-case pre-print censorship by the National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS), the harassment of journalists, and even the occasion arrest of journalists deemed to be overly critical.

Human rights organisations and activists have also felt the brunt of these increasing restrictions on freedom of expression and association. The freezing on 19th February 2009 of the bank account of the Khartoum Centre for Human Rights and Environmental Development, the leading national human rights organisations in the country, is the last in a series of the government's actions aimed at clampdown on activism.

The arrest of three leading human rights defenders, Mr Osman Hummida, Mr. Monim Elgak, and Mr. Amir Mohamed Suliman, last November, who were interrogated on their assumed engagement with the International Criminal Court (ICC) investigations revealed to what extent the authorities are prepared to go to silence those willing to criticise Khartoum's involvement in Darfur and to call for international justice.

These arrests also highlighted the lack of protection currently available to national human rights organisations and defenders on the ground.

"The Khartoum government, under the Interim National Constitution, is responsible to ensure that the freedom of expression, the press and association, amongst other rights, are guaranteed. We are concerned that the Khartoum government however will use the ICC indictment as an excuse to falter on these obligations and to prevent this vital work from being carried out" says Mr Hassan Shire Sheikh, Chairperson of the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project. 'The work of defenders is vital now more than ever given the forthcoming general it is essential therefore to ensure that national defenders are offered the necessary protection' ".

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