



Middle East Studies Association of North America, Inc.

The University of Arizona · 1232 North Cherry Avenue · Tucson, Arizona 85721

20 October 1995

Lt. General Omar al-Bashir
President of the Republic
People's Palace
P. O. Box 281
Khartoum, Sudan

Dear Lt. General al-Bashir:

On behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association of North America, we wish to express our concern about the arrest of approximately twenty-two persons, including as many as eight students, in a September 2 raid on a house in the al-Thawra district of Omdurman, and the subsequent violent quelling of student demonstrations protesting these arrests.

The Middle East Studies Association comprises 2400 academics worldwide who teach and conduct research on the Middle East and North Africa. The association publishes the respected *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and is committed to ensuring respect for the principles of academic freedom and human rights throughout the region.

The arrests of the students were acknowledged in an official announcement on September 12 to the effect that a number of "communists" had been arrested at an illegal meeting. We understand that since their arrest the students have not been charged or tried, but have simply been held in incommunicado detention. The students' arrest fits a pattern of repression designed to stifle political dissent in the Sudan. We know that political prisoners are being arrested and held in the Sudan based on Decree Two of June 30, 1989, which bans the "showing of any political opposition by any means to the regime of the Revolution for National Salvation." The arrested students are apparently imprisoned solely for their political opinions, which are at odds with government ideology. Punishing people for their political opinions violates basic principles of human rights, and imprisoning students for their political views violates principles of academic freedom. Our concerns for the fate of the imprisoned students have been increased by the frequent accounts of detainees being tortured by Sudanese security forces.

The violent suppression of the large protest demonstrations prompted by the students' arrest also provokes our concern, since it suggests that a harsh crackdown on all forms of student dissent is under way. We understand that armed plainclothes forces associated with the NIF participated in the forceful efforts to intimidate the student demonstrators.

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Further, we understand that these efforts involved arrests and brutal beatings that left many wounded and that also resulted in deaths -- more deaths by many reports than the three deaths admitted by the Sudanese government. Our sources indicate that one student who was killed on the Khartoum University campus by a security agent was named Rahmatullah Abdul Rahman.

We respectfully urge that all arrests and imprisonment of persons on the basis of their political opinions cease, and that measures be taken to ensure that detainees are not subjected to any form of mistreatment. We further urge that the students arrested on September 2 be immediately released unless there is credible evidence that they have engaged in criminal activity, in which case we call for them to be tried in public proceedings with all the guarantees of due process. Meanwhile, we call for them to have access to family and counsel. We also respectfully urge that measures be taken immediately to ensure that nongovernmental forces are not involved in police and security activities, and that all security and police forces be constrained from using excessive force and violence to quell protests. To that end, we call for an investigation of the violent suppression of the student demonstrations and for trials of any members of the government forces who engaged in excessive use of force, with appropriate discipline and penalties.

Sincerely,



Anne H. Betteridge
Executive Director

cc: Mr. Abdal Aziz Shiddo, Minister of Justice
Mr. Ali Osman Mohamed Taha, Minister of Foreign Affairs
Mr. Angelo Beda, Chairman of the Human Rights Commission of the Transitional
National Assembly, Omdurman
Ambassador Ahmed Suliman, Sudan Embassy
Mr. Jeff Lumstead, US Department of State
Mr. Benjamin A. Gilman, House Committee on International Relations