

# **SUDAN**

## **THE GHOSTS REMAIN**

### **One Year after an Amnesty is Declared, Detention and Torture Continue Unabated**

On April 27, 1991, meeting in Khartoum, the delegates to the first meeting of the Popular Arab Islamic Conference elected, by acclaim, Dr Hassan al Turabi as their secretary general. Three days later, President Omer al Bashir announced a general amnesty for all political prisoners, many of whom were held in the regime's "ghost houses" -- detention centers and torture chambers, whose existence is not officially recognized. One year later, Dr Turabi remains in his prestigious and powerful position, and many of his countrymen remain in the selfsame ghost houses. The rhetoric of the government remains in flagrant contradiction to the realities of gross abuse of human rights.

In the days following the announcement of the amnesty, 299 political prisoners were released. This welcome development was marred by the fact that at least 60 other political detainees remained in prison. Others have been detained since. At the time of writing there are at least 150 political detainees in Sudan.

Some of those who remained in detention after the "amnesty" had been subjected to trials that failed to observe due process of law, and others had not been charged at all. Among those who remained in detention were:

- \* Abraham Ngor Luong, an accountant;
- \* Abu Bakr Mohamed el Amin, a journalist for the newspaper *al-Medan*;
- \* Ahmed Osman Siraj, a psychiatrist, who according to some reports was convicted after an unfair trial in December 1990;
- \* Albino Akol Akol, a retired military officer;
- \* Emmanuel Doku Joseph, an electrical engineer;
- \* Osman Khidir Abu Shama, a journalist subjected to an unfair trial in August 1990;
- \* Siddig Yusuf, an engineer;
- \* Stanislaus Kau Aping, a fire brigade officer;
- \* Yusuf Hussein, a geologist.

## Continuing Arrests

Equally serious, however, was the fact that the detention of alleged opponents of the government continued apace without any respite. Some of those who were released in the amnesty were rearrested quickly afterwards. For example, Yaqoub el Fil, an employee of the Ministry of Finance, was released on a Wednesday. He had a celebratory meal in his house on the Friday, and was rearrested on the Saturday. Omer Adlan al Mek, a member of the textile workers' trade union, suffered a similar experience. A number of other former detainees, including Hashim Mohamed Ahmed and Ali al Mahi al Sakhi, also found themselves rearrested, sometimes on several occasions.

Before the 1991 "amnesty", detainees were arrested and held for long periods in either the non-regular detention centers known as "ghost houses" or in the main prisons, including Kober, Port Sudan and Shalla. Torture was common in the ghost houses and conditions were poor in the regular prisons, especially those outside Khartoum.<sup>1</sup>

During 1991-92, the security services have followed a somewhat changed set of practices for arrest, detention and torture. People are arrested and taken to one of several buildings used by the security forces. One of these buildings is the headquarters of the security service, near the Citibank building, where several rooms are used for prisoners, in addition to a larger number who are kept on the roof. At least three other ghost houses are currently in use, one near to the headquarters, one in Shambat (Khartoum North) and one in the south of the city. The detainees are held for shorter periods of time, ranging from ten days to about two months, and occasionally longer, and then released. After release they are kept under surveillance, and may be rearrested at any time. They are restricted to Khartoum, and may not travel without special permission. The short period of detention means that when reliable information reaches their friends and relatives, they may already have been released, and their place taken by others.

Some of those arrested and released during the last twelve months include:

- \* Abdala Mohamed Abdala, trainee advocate;
- \* Abdel Rahman Abdalla Nugudalla, former minister and member of the Umma Party;
- \* Adil Abul Gassim, Arabic Company employee;
- \* Adil Hassan, a librarian at Khartoum University;
- \* Ali al Amin, a graphic designer;
- \* Alla' el Din Hassan Hemoura, businessman;

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<sup>1</sup> See: "Lest they be Forgotten ... Letters from Shalla Prison," News from Africa Watch, May 8, 1990, and "Inside al Bashir's Prisons," News from Africa Watch, February 11, 1991.

- \* Gassim Mohamed Saleh Hassan, a lawyer;
- \* Ismam Abul Gassim, Cairo University student;
- \* Mahmoud Jadallah, a student of fine art;
- \* Sid Ahmed al Hussein, former foreign minister and member of the Democratic Unionist Party;
- \* Sharaf al Din Yassin, a journalist with the Sudan News Agency and Khartoum University Press;
- \* Yasir Mohamed Abdala, Cairo University student.

In early April 1992, the government arrested a number of women who were attempting to stage a demonstration to mark the second anniversary of the summary execution of 28 army officers following an alleged attempted coup two years earlier. At least twelve were detained, including the mother and three sisters of the executed officer Captain Mustafa Awad Khogali and the mother and three sisters of Abdel Moniem Hassan Ali Karrar.

A particularly disturbing practice is the detention or harassment of children. Africa Watch has obtained the details of one case in which a 14-year-old boy was arrested when the security forces were unable to locate his father, whom they wanted, and has received reports of younger boys and girls being harassed or detained.

Many of those arrested during the year remain in detention at the time of writing. They include:

- \* Abdul Aziz Mohamed Dafalla, a trade unionist;
- \* Awad al Sharif, an engineer;
- \* Makoi Wuol Manuer, an official of the Sudan Council of Churches;
- \* Brig. Nasr Hassan Bashir Nasr, a former diplomat;
- \* Zaki Hassan Bashir Nasr, brother of Nasr (above).

Following the report of an attempted coup in early February, 41 officers from the airforce were detained, including Col. Seif al Din Mohamed Ahmad and Col. Mustafa al Tai. In mid April, following another foiled coup attempt, several officers were detained. Recent reports indicate that several leading members of the Democratic Unionist Party have also been detained, on suspicion of plotting against the government. These detainees include:

- \* al Haj Mudawi;
- \* Mirghani Abdel Rahman Suleiman (who was also detained in 1991);
- \* Musa al Hussein (brother of Sid Ahmed al Hussein);
- \* Sayed Haroun.

The whereabouts of most of these detainees are not known precisely, implying that they are held in ghost houses rather than in regular prisons.

## Torture

Perhaps the most sinister aspect of developments over the last year has been the systematic use of physical and psychological torture. The use of torture by members of the Sudanese security forces appears to be becoming more sophisticated.

Africa Watch has obtained the testimonies of several detainees who have been subjected to torture during the last twelve months. The following is one example, given by Gassim Mohamed Saleh Hassan. Gassim, aged 29, is a lawyer. He was dismissed from the Attorney-General's chamber in March 1990 with 16 colleagues, on suspicion of anti-government sympathies. He told Africa Watch about his detention, which began two months after the Sudan government's "amnesty":

In the morning of July 4, 1991, at 1 a.m. four men armed with machine guns, in civilian clothes, came to my house. My father met them first, and I came when my father was trying to ask them who they were and what they wanted me for. They told me to get my things and go with them, and then told my father "It's just a simple matter and he will come back." They took me to a search area, where they detain people arrested for violating the curfew. They left me there with the guards. I realized later that this was a gathering point because I remained for 45 minutes during which other detainees were brought. I asked, "are we going to stay for long?" and I got no answer. After our number became six, they took us with the landcruiser to the security offices near to the Arab Bank for African Development.

They kept us in the yard of the building. We formed a line and one of the four men asked, "where is the one who was in a hurry? What is your name?" I told him my name. He said, "say it loudly, go face the wall and repeat your name in a loud voice." When I did as I was told, two men started hitting me with their hands, feet, and rifle butts until I fell to the ground. They returned me to the line, and the four who brought us left and they told the other officers to take good care of us. It was clear what they meant by "take good care". They ordered us to sweep the yard. We did. It was cold. They ordered the others to go inside and me to remain. They ordered me to do the ~~arnab nout~~ exercise [*the "rabbit jump", which involves jumping while squatting with extended arms*] over ten meters, to and fro. I continued doing that until I fell. Then they forced me to stand and they struck me and ordered me to do the number nine jump. [*To do this, you must*

*raise your hands and jump very high and land on one foot; on the next jump you land on the other foot; this is repeated.] Then they took us to a very small room, like a closet under the stairs. It was 1.5 by 1.5 meters. They ordered us to stand to attention. We stood like this until 7 o'clock. At 7 they took us to the corridor and the officer came and started to strike us one by one. He said, "These are the communists of Sahafa [a neighborhood in Khartoum]." He said, "Take them to al-qiyama [the 'apocalypse' or 'place of judgement']."*

*Al-qiyama* was a room outside the main building, 3 x 3 meters. A group of soldiers were inside the room with us. They started beating us. The room was full of cement dust. The soldiers' noses were covered with handkerchiefs. They were six and we were six. They had sticks and rubber hoses. They started the beating and making loud shouts, and ordered us to make exercises like push-ups in front of the wall. Dust was everywhere. This treatment continued for two hours. I fainted.

Then they took us to another yard and they ordered us to stand without shoes, until 7 o'clock in the evening. This treatment [i.e. the standing] continued for the three days we stayed there. During the daily line up there was a group of soldiers who carried out the beatings and ordered us to stand in difficult positions such as on tiptoes, or ordered us to face the sun with eyes open, and if you failed or protested they punished you by making you carry stones. One day they forced us to put snuff inside our noses. One soldier told us on the first day, "you haven't seen anything, in the night there will be *dhabit shadid*" [*a term that can imply sexual abuse or other more regular forms of torture*].

They returned us to the rooms at 7 in the evening where they forced us to stand up. After 2 o'clock they allowed us to sit down, but not continuously. During this time we had two meals a day. It was not enough, with all the effort we were expending. On the second day they took our pictures, and they didn't allow this procedure to go quietly.

At first one of them said, "take them to the electricity room." This seemed to imply torture. When you actually go to the photography room, with the equipment, you will actually believe that this is a torture room. Anyway they took our pictures. In the evening of the second day, and while we were standing in line, they took us to the investigating officer, one by one. He asked each one, "Are you a communist? Are you the leader of a Communist cell?" -- but he wrote nothing down. At the end of the third day there was a thorough investigation, and answers were written down.

During the regular line up in the sun we noticed a certain person who was not participating in the torture. He would take each detainee away from the line and sit with him in the shadow of a tree, which is a great relief, and he would start explaining, "These are brutal people and you better tell them everything, and in any case they know everything already, they just want you to say it." And when the detainee replied "I know nothing, I have nothing to say," he would say, "Think about it and whenever you are ready just tell anybody, and I will come." This same man would appear on different occasions at the edge of the suffering, and he would either smile and go, or he would say, "Hey, haven't you changed your mind." We gave this man the name of "Angel." *[Another officer, who was particularly vicious in the manner of inflicting torture, called himself Shetan, "the Devil"]*.

At 12 midday, on the fourth day, they took us in a pickup truck to the revolution security office inside the military headquarters. Here, they took us to an office, and the officer there struck us, saying "These are the communists, which one has al-Medan?" [the communist newspaper]. They made us form a parade facing the wall and they continued to talk with us the same way, "You are the communists!" At sunset, a pickup came and three guards got out. They held a man and threw him inside the car; they made three of us lie on the floor of the pickup, and three more on top of them, and they covered us with a blanket and we felt them riding with us in the same pickup, some directly above us and the others sitting on the side with their feet on us. The car drove very fast. It turned many corners, and we were about to suffocate, when it stopped in front of a house. We could hear the sound of the door opening, and then the car started to move inside.

When we were inside the building they took off the blanket and the beating started when we were still inside the car and they threw us to the ground. On the ground the beating continued, they concentrated the beatings on me and Alla' [al Din Hassan Hemoura]. They took Alla' and left me. I fainted many times and they returned me to consciousness by pouring water over me or with a strong kick in my kidney. I don't know how much time passed. But after they threw water on me they ordered me to stand with my head bowed so as not to see the walls [and therefore not to know the location of the building].

I entered the house, and was taken to a room called the refrigerator, because it is one meter by one meter or even smaller. I found 7 or 8 people there, three of them from my original group of six. The people inside gave me a sip of water -- only a sip because they had the experience that for

someone in my condition, too much water would have a bad effect on me. Inside this refrigerator these people cannot sit at the same time so they have an arrangement to sit in rotation.

After ten minutes the guards took me from the refrigerator. They took me to another cell a bit bigger; 2.5 x 2.5 meters. Here I found two more of my first group, and we found Yaqoub el Fil [see above] and a Tanzanian ex-officer called Ramadan. I stayed in this room for one month. I was very weak for the first two days. Inside the room they ordered us to do very difficult exercises like standing for very long periods and the *qiyamat* exercises.

The exercises were:

- \* *qiyam sitt al aragi*: [the lady who sells *aragi* (Sudanese gin): the detainee is required to sit on the ground, with the left hand on the right shoulder and the right arm threaded through the loop thereby created, with one finger on the ground. He is ordered to spin around the finger on the floor, and sometimes the security man holds his head and speeds him up. Suddenly the torturer will suddenly shout, "Attention, up!" and the detainee will have to stand up, but will often fall down again immediately];
- \* *qiyam al na'ama* [the ostrich: a push up with the head on the ground and the arms behind the back];
- \* *qiyam al sagur* [the eagle: the detainee squats on the ground on tiptoes, with his hands around knees, and jumps, landing on his toes];
- \* *qiyam hindi* [the Indian];
- \* *qiyam al tayara gaamat* [the aeroplane taking off: the prisoner stands on one leg, on tiptoe, with his arms raised. He must stand for a long period; if he falls he is beaten];
- \* *qiyam arnab nout* [the rabbit, see above];
- \* *qiyam number nine* [see above];
- \* push up.

During this month the officers made us line up from the morning to the evening, and during this time we were required to do the *qiyamat*, or simply stand to attention. After 7 o'clock they didn't tell the detainees to do exercises and we were allowed to sit down, but any time any soldier could come and order us to stand up. So it was not possible to guarantee a whole night's sleep. If they heard us talking to each other, they would punish us for that. They used also to give us orders to do some work like sweeping the yard, and they always ordered us to bow our heads when we were outside the rooms.

We discovered that all of the officers' names were fake names. The man in charge was calling himself Adil. Whenever he entered the room he ordered us to bow our heads. Anyone who failed to do this would be beaten severely and sometimes he would say, "Do you want to recognize my face?" and then start beating.

During this month the only break we had was the five daily prayers. *[Earlier testimonies from former inmates of ghost houses indicated that many had been prevented from praying. More recent information indicates that praying is regarded by the officers as the one legitimate way of temporarily avoiding the punishing routines of the detention center.]* After coming to the house, we used to have three meals, two *ful* [Egyptian beans] and one white beans. Our day started at 4 o'clock with the dawn prayer. There was a short break between the end of the prayer and 6 o'clock when the other shift would take charge.

After this room I was transferred to a big room. We called it the salon [lounge]. Most of the people went to this new room, except Ramadan and Yaqoub. I found two of my group there. We were about 15 in this lounge. The routine continued until 15 days before my release, when things really relaxed, there was no more beating and the exercises were less frequent and they were more tolerant about movement between the three rooms that formed the lounge. They allowed us to form a food committee and buy and prepare our own food. They changed the man in charge, the new commander was more tolerant and never got personally involved in any harsh treatment, and whenever he saw somebody holding the Koran he would take it and read it loudly and make it an occasion to give us a religious speech, which we felt ourselves obliged to listen to. He used to do this and one day he opened a discussion, but I think he was embarrassed by a certain question because he never did it again. It was very clear that this man was trying to give us an Islamic model. I discovered that he was the commander of the camp because when I was released I signed the papers in front of him.

While we were in detention they brought four southerners. Their first names were: Bob, Simon, Fanom and William. They were students. When they first arrived they were beaten very severely in the yard. We heard the noises of the soldiers shouting "You are SPLA!" and the boys crying, "We are not SPLA! We have nothing to do with it!" The whole matter created a very gloomy and sad atmosphere among us inside the room. We later knew their stories. They were evacuated from Nasir [in southern Sudan] due to the fighting. People fled in different directions. The



four went to Ethiopia where they succeeded in continuing their education. They said that during their stay in Ethiopia they were very anxious to know the fate of their families but they didn't approach the Sudanese embassy for papers because they feared SPLA retribution if they did so. [The SPLA was close to the then-government of President Mengistu Haile Mariam.] They believed at that time the Ethiopian security would facilitate retribution, but after Mengistu was driven out they went to the Sudanese Embassy and they discussed the whole case. They were well-received in the embassy and they were provided with papers.

They were very surprised to be detained when they arrived at Khartoum airport. Simon was suffering from weakness in his left side, so he was handicapped. He was the most surprised and angry, he was always stating that "We must do something we cannot just sit and receive this punishment." One day when he was in the bathroom he tried to commit suicide with electricity, by pulling the wires from the socket, but the guard discovered him before he completed his task. We noticed that all the security people were annoyed, although some of them tried to pretend otherwise, saying, "Why are you in a hurry for death, this we will do eventually." They were very anxious and told Simon's group to take care of him and not to leave him alone. *[Simon also suffered from heart problems, and twice had malaria. A group of other detainees asked the officers to allow him to have medical treatment. This treatment was promised but never given. Other detainees bought chloroquine for treating his malaria.]*

I was released on August 30 or 31. They announced our names. They took us to the yard. They ordered us to do some exercises, and they were telling jokes like "This one is still weak, we must keep him for a while." One of us had taken a bath and dressed in good clothes. The guards asked him, "Why are you dressed like this?" He said, "Well, it seems that we are to be released." They were furious and they started questioning him, "How do you know?" They took him to the store room with the window closed and he remained for two hours in the heat. When he eventually joined us he was covered in sweat and the clothes were no longer nice.

This testimony indicates the methods of systematic humiliation that political detainees are currently subjected to. Two aspects of this are worthy of particular attention.

One element, remarked upon by a number of former detainees, is the extremely degrading nature of the verbal abuse to which they are subjected. This causes considerable embarrassment, especially to devout Moslems. As well as the regular use of

dhabit ("fucking") in many contexts, a common example of abusive language is the use of the word *lowaita*, or sodomite. According to one former detainee, during parades, when the prisoners were ordered to raise their hands and keep them raised for a long period of time, anyone who failed to comply was verbally abused: "You sodomite, if you can't stand it, why did you it? [I.e., oppose the government]." Another humiliating aspect of the detention regime is the use of military terms; when orders are given, they are shouted and prefixed with the shouted word "Army!"

A second element in the detention regime is the manipulation of religious imagery. Many aspects of the detention are clearly intended to create the likeness of purgatory or hell, from which the only respite is prayer. In some cases this has had the effect, presumably intended, of causing detainees who previously did not pray regularly to start following the daily routine of prayer and continue it even after their release. It is an ironic comment on the government's claim to follow the highest principles of Islam.

## Official Responses

The Sudan government has consistently denied the existence of political detainees, ghost houses and torture. Following the publication by Amnesty International of a detailed and meticulously-documented report earlier this month,<sup>2</sup> the Sudanese Minister of Finance, Abdel Rahim Hamdi, gave a wholly unconvincing attempted rebuttal in an interview on the BBC.<sup>3</sup> He and other government spokesmen, including Ali Mohamed Osman Yassin, First Undersecretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, denied that the government was holding any political prisoners whatsoever. The bulletin of the Sudan Embassy in London also attempted to pour scorn on the details presented:

One monstrous story peddled by opposition groups and swallowed hook and line by AI was the so-called "Ghost houses" allegations. The most famous ghost house in the world turned out to be an unmarked security building in the very heart of the town and next to a main road and many other official and business buildings. It is probably the only ghostly residence with an address.<sup>4</sup>

The existence of the building is not a point of controversy. The point of dispute is whether the government will admit the existence of the political detainees confined within its walls.

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<sup>2</sup> Amnesty International, *Sudan: A Continuing Human Rights Crisis*, April 1992.

<sup>3</sup> April 17.

<sup>4</sup> *Sudan News* (Sudan Embassy Information Bulletin, London), April 14, 1992, p. 5.

Sudan's Chief Justice, Jalal Ali Lutfi, has recently claimed:

Although the torture of prisoners may occur in other countries, it will not happen in Sudan. It is not that it is prevented by law, but because we are prevented by something which is stronger than the codes of law, and that is our Islamic principles and our humanitarian relations and family and kin ties.<sup>5</sup>

These denials follow a well-established tradition among spokesmen of the current Sudanese government of replying to carefully-substantiated research into human rights abuses with simple gainsaying.

### **Recommendations**

The Sudan Government must immediately release all prisoners who have been detained without charge or following unfair trials; it must cease at once the practice of arresting suspected political opponents and subjecting them to torture; it must allow full and unrestricted access to the known ghost houses for members of the international human rights community and the diplomatic community; and it must bring to justice all those against whom there is evidence that they have participated in or ordered such gross abuses of human rights.

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<sup>5</sup> Statement to the 48th Session of the Human Rights Committee of the United Nations, February 17, 1992.

## **Recent Africa Watch Publications on Sudan**

Inside al Bashir's Prisons: Torture, Denial of Medical Attention and Poor Conditions (February 11, 1991).

New Islamic Penal Code Violates Basic Human Rights (April 9, 1991).

Sudanese Human Rights Organizations (November 4, 1991).

Destroying Ethnic Identity: The Secret War Against the Nuba (December 10, 1991).

*Africa Watch is a non-governmental organization created in May 1988 to monitor human rights practices in Africa and to promote respect for internationally recognized standards. Its Chairman is William Carmichael and the Vice-Chair is Alice Brown. Its Executive Director is Rakiya Omaar; its Associate Director is Alex de Waal; Janet Fleischman and Karen Sorensen are Research Associates; Barbara Baker, Ben Penglase and Urmi Shah are Associates.*

*Africa Watch is part of Human Rights Watch, an organization that also encompasses Americas Watch, Asia Watch, Helsinki Watch and Middle East Watch. The Chairman of Human Rights Watch is Robert L. Bernstein. Aryeh Neier is Executive Director of Human Rights Watch, the Deputy Director is Kenneth Roth; Holly Burkhalter is Washington Director and Susan Osnos is Press Director.*