

Sudan

Sudan's human rights record continued to be defined by government repression and violations of basic civil and political rights, restriction of religious freedoms, and disregard for obligations on civilian protection under international humanitarian law.

In Darfur, Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile, Sudan's Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and other government-aligned forces attacked civilians. Sudan failed to provide accountability for serious crimes committed during the conflicts, or other serious human rights violations.

The national security agency detained student activists, human rights defenders, members of opposition parties and journalists. Authorities prosecuted activists and journalists for their reports and confiscated newspapers.

In January, then-United States President Barack Obama issued an executive order promising to lift broad economic sanctions if Sudan met certain conditions; these did not require measurable improvements in human rights.

Conflict and Abuses in Darfur, Southern Kordofan, and Blue Nile

Despite the government's unilateral ceasefire and reduced fighting in all three war zones, government forces and allied militia attacked civilians including in displaced persons camps throughout the year.

In May and June, the RSF attacked villages in North and Central Darfur, forcing tens of thousands to flee. RSF fighters were responsible for large-scale attacks on villages during counterinsurgency campaigns from 2014 to 2016.

In Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile, the six-year conflict continued, with sporadic government attacks on civilians. In Blue Nile and in refugee camps in neighboring South

Sudan, displaced communities fought along ethnic lines following a split within the leadership of the armed opposition, Sudan People's Liberation Army-North.

In the rebel held areas of both states, hundreds of thousands lacked sufficient food and basic supplies because the government and rebels failed to agree on modalities for the delivery of essential items.

Attacks on Human Rights Defenders

In December 2016 and January 2017, national security agents detained Dr. Mudawi Ibrahim Adam, a prominent rights defender, along with several other activists and held them for up to eight months. Mudawi and two others were charged with undermining the constitutional system and crimes against the state, which carry the death penalty. At least two detainees were badly beaten and one was forced to confess under torture. They were released by presidential pardon in August.

In March, authorities released three human rights defenders associated with the civil society organization Tracks for Training and Human Development, after nine months in detention. The men were convicted of trumped-up charges of espionage and dissemination of false information.

National security agents arrested the men along with other Tracks staff in May 2016. In August 2016, the United Nations Working Group of Arbitrary Detention found the detentions violated fair trial standards.

Arbitrary Detentions, Ill-Treatment, and Torture

Security officials detained opposition members, journalists, and labor leaders throughout the year, often for long periods without charge or access to lawyers. They routinely beat detainees during interrogations.

Following the "civil disobedience" campaign to protest economic austerity measures in November and December 2016, agents detained dozens of opposition members. One Sudan Congress Party (SCP) member was held for 50 days without charge, and beaten so badly that he required surgery upon his release.

In December 2016, a British journalist and his Sudanese-American colleague were detained first in Darfur then transferred to Khartoum for almost two months without charge and said they were subjected to beatings, electric shocks, and mock execution. The two entered Darfur to investigate Amnesty International's allegations of chemical weapons use by the government.

In April, security officials detained for several days three doctors involved in a doctor's strike that began in late 2016 over work conditions. Several SCP members were detained in June from a sit-in about a cholera outbreak. In September, security officials detained a diaspora SCP member for seven weeks. In August, security officials detained Nasreddin Mukhtar, former head of a Darfur Student Union, and held him without charge in solitary confinement.

Freedoms of Association, Assembly, and Expression

Government security forces used excessive force to break up protests across the country. In September, government forces opened fire on protesters in the Kalma displaced persons camp in South Darfur, killing more than five and wounding two dozen. The residents were protesting President al-Bashir's visit to the camp.

Authorities also used excessive force on several occasions to disperse protests on university campuses. In May, following clashes over disputed elections at Bakht al-Rida university in White Nile state, police and security forces raided a dormitory, beat and shot students, wounding several, and arrested dozens. In response to the arrests, more than 1,000 Darfuri students withdrew from the university, alleging discrimination against Darfuri students. Nine students remained in detention by year's end.

In August and September, security officials detained dozens of members of the United Popular Front, a student branch of a Darfur rebel group, while protesting on the streets of Khartoum and Omdurman. Officials arrested many other student activists throughout the year.

By the end of 2017, there had been no justice for the killings of more than 170 people during violent government crackdowns on popular anti-austerity protests in September and October 2013.

Freedom of Media

Security officials continued to restrict media by harassing and detaining journalists, charging them with crimes, and confiscating editions of newspapers that published articles deemed too sensitive.

In October, a court ordered the editor of *al-Tayyar* to pay a fine or spend six months in prison for publishing an article about alleged abuse of power in the president's family. Other journalists, including Hanadi el-Siddig, editor-in-chief of *Akhbar El Watan*, were interrogated or detained for content deemed too critical, such as allegations of abuse by security forces and an interview with an opposition leader. Marwa Tijani was detained for three days after publishing a piece of creative writing critiquing religion.

Three online activists were deported from Saudi Arabia to Sudan and detained there in July, allegedly for their writings in support of the 2016 "civil disobedience" campaign to protest austerity measures. Authorities confiscated both independent and pro-government newspapers, including *El Tayar*, *El Jareeda*, *Akhar Lahza*, *El Wifag*, and *El Sayha*, often without giving reason.

Freedom of Religion

In early 2017, officials in Khartoum announced they would demolish at least 27 churches within Khartoum; the decision was being challenged by a church organization. In May, police and other security demolished a church in Soba area of Khartoum following a dispute over land ownership.

Officials have prohibited construction of new churches. In 2013, the minister of guidance and endowments claimed there was no need for new churches as South Sudanese Christians would have returned to South Sudan following its independence in 2011.

In October, police arrested five members of the Sudan Church of Christ, charging them with public nuisance for praying at a church that authorities closed, in a case that illustrates disputes over the administration of churches.

In February and May, al-Bashir pardoned two clerics—a Czech missionary and Sudanese pastor—and a Darfuri activist who had been detained since December 2015. The men were among five arrested in December 2015 and accused of links to armed opposition, and charged with espionage and other crimes.

Refugees and Migrants

Sudan continued to receive large numbers of South Sudanese refugees. Approximately 183,500 arrived in 2017, bringing the total to more than 461,000 since war in South Sudan began in December 2013. Sudan agreed to open humanitarian aid corridors to South Sudan.

In August, Sudanese authorities deported 104 Eritrean refugees, including 30 minors. In September, the government reportedly deported another 36. None of the deportees appear to have had an opportunity to apply for asylum. The UN Refugee Agency, UNHCR, called on Sudan to refrain from further removals of potential refugees.

The head of the notoriously abusive Rapid Support Forces, Mohamed Hamdan “Hemeti,” publicly claimed that his forces were assisting the European Union, raising concerns that the EU is funding the abusive forces as part of its migration assistance package.

Law Reform

Following the conclusion of the national dialogue, a government initiative to address political grievances, President al-Bashir appointed a prime minister to implement recommendations and form a new government. Many opposition parties rejected the dialogue process.

In January, Sudan’s parliament passed the Rapid Support Forces Act to regulate the force, but forces continued to operate under the same commander independently of the army.

Sudan has not reformed laws governing its security agency. The National Security Act of 2010 gave broad powers of arrest, detention, search, and seizure and violates accepted international standards, to which Sudan is bound. Sudan also retains the death penalty, despite international consensus to ban it.

Sudanese law discriminates against women and girls in various ways, including through application of Sharia (Islamic) law penalties for “morality crimes,” such as adultery or dress code violations. Sudan also criminalizes same-sex sexual activity with harsh penalties such as life in prison or death.

Key International Actors

In January, former US President Obama issued an executive order promising to lift broad economic sanctions on Sudan if Sudan made progress in five areas, which did not explicitly include human rights reforms. This step was welcomed by the EU. In October, the US permanently lifted the sanctions.

The EU has pledged hundreds of millions of euros to Sudan in support of the regional Khartoum Process, to manage migration. The aid programs have been widely criticized on grounds that they encourage or assist the RSF to carry out abusive operations.

In March, President al-Bashir attended a League of Arab States’ summit in Amman, Jordan. Jordan did not comply with its obligation, as a party to the Rome Statute, to arrest and surrender him to the International Criminal Court (ICC).

EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs Federica Mogherini also attended the summit but did not publicly call on Jordanian authorities to comply with their obligation.

In July, the UN Security Council renewed the peacekeeping mission in Darfur through June 2018, agreeing to dramatic reductions as part of an exit plan lobbied for by Sudan, and extended the UN Interim Security Force for Abyei.

In September, the UN Human Rights Council renewed the mandate of the Independent Expert to monitor and advise on human rights for another year, but used language

foreshadowing the end of the mandate if there is “continued and sustained improvement” to the situation in the country, risking prematurely ending the mandate in coming years.

The Security Council did not press Sudan to cooperate with the ICC in its investigation into crimes committed in Darfur, despite having referred the situation to the ICC in 2005. The ICC first announced charges in 2007. It currently has outstanding arrest warrants against five individuals, including President al-Bashir, for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide allegedly committed in Darfur between 2003 and 2008.