

Different Tactics, Same Goal: Closure of Newspapers in Khartoum Hinders the Freedom of Expression, a joint report by the African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies and Journalists for Human Rights

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(9 September 2011) In the two months since the secession of Southern Sudan, freedom of expression has come under increasing attack in Sudan's capital city, Khartoum. The National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) has closed six newspapers and temporarily halted the distribution of three other papers since early July.

On 8 July, one day before the declaration of Southern independence, the government closed six newspapers (*The Khartoum Monitor*, *Sudan Tribune*, *The Advocate*, *The Juba Post*, *The Democrat* and *Ajras Alhurria*), in direct contravention of Article 39 of the Sudanese Interim National Constitution (INC). This trend of targeting newspapers continued throughout August and early September with the NISS preventing various newspapers from distributing copies of their papers, which caused tremendous financial loss for the papers.

- On 7 and 8 August the NISS prevented *Alahdath* from distributing copies of their newspaper;
- On 20, 21 and 22 August *Aljareeda* was prevented from distributing copies of their newspaper, which caused losses of \$10,000 in revenue;
- On 4 September the distribution of *Aljareeda* was again prohibited by the NISS
- On 4, 6 and 8 September the distribution of *Al Midan* was halted with little to no explanation. Since the paper publishes three times per week, this stoppage resulted in the loss of one week's worth of revenue for the paper.

In addition to these troubling actions, the government has apparently adopted a new policy targeting specific journalists to prevent them from publishing articles. NISS officials recently informed *Aljareeda* that NISS would continue to prevent the paper from distributing if *Aljareeda* allowed journalists that had worked at *Ajras Alhurria* until its closure in July, to publish articles in *Aljareeda*. This tactic represents a new method for the government of Sudan in its quest to severely restrict the freedom of expression inside its country.

The closure and suspension of newspapers and targeting of specific journalists undermines the freedom of expression in Sudan, guaranteed under Article 19 of the International Civil and

Political Rights, Article 9 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, instruments to which Sudan is a party, and Article 39 of the Sudanese Interim National Constitution. These actions are particularly troubling in the context of reduced international monitoring presence in Sudan and the revised Press and Publications Bill recently tabled in the National Assembly. Information received by ACJPS and JHR indicates that the revised bill is likely to be more restrictive than its already repressive predecessor, which was adopted during the interim period.

The African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies and Journalists for Human Rights call on the government of Sudan to respect the freedom of expression through its regulatory body, the Press and Publications Council. The government should immediately end its policies of pre-publication censorship and harassment of journalists and newspapers. Additionally the government should ensure that journalists, newspaper editors and other media professionals are given the opportunity to participate in debates around amendments to existing media legislation.