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ARTICLE 19

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Sudan: Respect for Human Rights Plummets Further

In a renewed attack on human rights and freedom of expression in the last week, Sudanese human rights defenders have again been subjected to intimidation, detention and censorship by the Sudanese Government of National Unity (GNU) and the country's National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS). ARTICLE 19, together with its consortium partners, condemns this latest crackdown.

On 19 February 2009, the Humanitarian Aid Commission for Khartoum State froze the bank account of the Khartoum Centre for Human Rights and Environmental Development (KHCRED). The NISS repeatedly interrogated and threatened KHCRED staff, and raided their offices throughout the past year.

KCHRED, a partner of ARTICLE 19, has been vocal in its criticism of the GNU and its supporting offices' lack of respect for fundamental human rights, including the right to freedom of expression. The 2004 Press Law, which is contrary to the National Sudanese Interim Constitution, inhibits freedom of expression and since early 2008 Khartoum-based newspapers have been subject to daily pre-print censorship and harassment by NISS operatives.

ARTICLE 19 is deeply concerned that the actions of the NISS against KCHRED could be the start of a systematic campaign of repression in the country. This comes at a particularly important time for Sudan. Presidential and legislative elections are due before July 2009, as stipulated in the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement. There is also increasing international pressure and criticism over the conflict in Darfur, which has culminated in the case for the International Criminal Court (ICC) arrest and trial of President Omar Hassan Al-Bashir over charges of war crimes and genocide in Darfur. Human rights groups and the broader population must be able to express their views on these issues and events without fear of reprisal.

Salah Gosh, Head of the NISS, was quoted in the *Sudan Tribune* as saying: “*Anyone who attempts to put his hands to execute [ICC] plans we will cut his hands, head and parts because it is a non negotiable issue.*”

The ICC decision over Al-Bashir's arrest warrant will be made public on 4 March 2009.

ARTICLE 19 calls on the Sudanese Government to fulfil its domestic and international human rights obligations, as laid out in the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as well as the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement and the National Interim Constitution of Sudan. Death

threats and blatant disregard for human rights, including the right to freedom of expression, must cease.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

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- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.