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PRESS RELEASE

**Sudan: ARTICLE 19 Pledges Solidarity with Journalist Over
“Trouser Trial”**

ARTICLE 19 castigates the Government of the Republic of Sudan for its continued suppression of fundamental human rights, as demonstrated most recently by the arrest and prosecution of Lubna Ahmed Hussein for “indecent dressing”.

ARTICLE 19 believes that the charges against Hussein and others are frivolous and illegitimate under international law. ARTICLE 19 lends its support to Hussein, whose right to freedom of expression has been violated, and calls for the charges against her to be dropped.

Lubna Hussein, a journalist, a human rights defender and an employee of the United Nations Mission in Sudan was arrested along with several other women and young girls on 10 July 2009, by the Public Order Police (POP) for allegedly being “indecently” dressed. At the time of her arrest, Hussein was wearing trousers, but with her head covered by a scarf.

In the Sudan, both common and sharia law apply. In this case, the POP were acting under Article 152 of the Penal Code which gives them the authority to administer lashes to women deemed to be indecently dressed. Whilst most of the women arrested alongside Hussein pleaded guilty and received 10 lashes, Hussein pleaded not guilty. She now risks a sentence of 40 lashes and a fine of 250 Sudanese Pounds (approximately USD100).

Hussein resigned from her UN employment, through which she would have received immunity from prosecution and has stated her readiness to receive 40,000 lashes, if that was what it took to abolish the medieval legislation on Indecent and Immoral Acts.

ARTICLE 19 Executive Director, Dr Agnès Callamard called the case against Lubna Hussein “*an infringement on her right to freely express herself through her dress and an illegitimate attempt to gag her.*”

Freedom of expression may be restricted under international law, for instance on grounds of threats to national security, or public health or morals. But these restrictions should be narrowly defined and implemented. To argue that a woman wearing pants constitutes a threat to national security or public morals is simply ludicrous and constitute an illegitimate restriction on the legitimate expression of

political or personal opinion regarding women's dress and equality. Furthermore, the charges against Lubna Hussein are poorly defined and laws against "immodestly" dressed women are inconsistently applied in the Sudan.

Whilst this case has gained much international publicity, the Sudanese media has also been subject to stringent censorship and crackdown. A columnist for the Arabic publication *Freedom Bells*, Amal Habbani, has been charged with defamation under the Sudanese Criminal Law for her comments on the case against Lubna Hussein, whilst several other journalists were detained when covering the court case. The Arabic- language newspapers are subject to daily censorship in the Sudan and the so-called "trousers" case has been no exception.

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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.