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Responses to Information Requests

Responses to Information Requests (RIR) respond to focused Requests for Information that are submitted to the Research Directorate in the course of the refugee protection determination process. The database contains a seven-year archive of English and French RIRs. Earlier RIRs may be found on the UNHCR's Refworld website. Please note that some RIRs have attachments which are not electronically accessible. To obtain a PDF copy of an RIR attachment, please email the Knowledge and Information Management Unit.

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7 June 2013

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Sudan: Student protests in 2012, particularly at the University of Sudan and Gezira University; treatment of protesters by security forces; role of the Darfur Students Organization and the Darfur Graduate Students Association
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Student Protests June-August 2012
1.1 Overview

Several sources report on student-led protests that began in mid-June 2012 (AI 3 Aug. 2012; International Crisis Group 29 Nov. 2012, 19; UN 20 June 2012). The protests reportedly began on 16 June (*The Christian Science Monitor* 16 July 2012; AI 3 Aug. 2012) or 17 June (International Crisis Group 29 Nov. 2012, 19; IWPR 12 July 2012). They were started by female students at the University of Khartoum in response to government austerity measures and high prices (*The Christian Science Monitor* 16 July 2012; AI 3 Aug. 2012; Human Rights Watch 11 July 2012). In the next few days and weeks, protests spread to other areas of Khartoum and to other cities (UN 20 June 2012; International Crisis Group 29 Nov. 2012, 19), including:

- Omdurman (Human Rights Watch 11 July 2012; IWPR 12 July 2012);
- Khartoum North (Human Rights Watch 11 July 2012);
- Port Sudan (AI 3 Aug. 2012; Radio Dabanga 27 June 2012; Human Rights Watch 11 July 2012);
- al-Obeid (AI 3 Aug. 2012; Human Rights Watch 11 July 2012);
- Dongola (AI 3 Aug. 2012; Human Rights Watch 11 July 2012);
- Atbarah (AI 3 Aug. 2012; Human Rights Watch 11 July 2012);
- Kassal [Kassala] (AI 3 Aug. 2012; Human Rights Watch 11 July 2012);
- Gedaref [Gedarif] (AI 3 Aug. 2012; Human Rights Watch 11 July 2012; Radio Dabanga 25 June 2012);
- Kosti (ibid.);
- Sennar (ibid.);
- Umdawan Dan (ibid. 27 June 2012);
- Hagar al Asal (ibid.);
- Nyala (AI 3 Aug. 2012; International Crisis Group 29 Nov. 2012, 19).

According to Human Rights Watch, protests occurred nearly daily from mid-June to July 11 (Human Rights Watch 11 July 2012), and continued until August 2012 (ibid. 10 Dec. 2012). *The Christian Science Monitor* noted that the protests were situated primarily on university campuses, where the movement began (16 July 2012). The International Crisis Group described these protests as "limited and relatively isolated" (29 Nov. 2012, 19). According to Agence France-Presse (AFP), the demonstrations dissipated after July 2012 because of a "security clampdown" (AFP 16 Dec. 2012).

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1.2 Treatment of Protesters by Security Forces

Sources indicate that security forces used "excessive force" against protesters (International Crisis Group 29 Nov. 2012, 19; AI 3 Aug. 2012; UN 20 June 2012), including the use of:

- batons (ibid.; AI 3 Aug. 2012; Radio Dabanga 25 June 2012);
- tear gas (UN 20 June 2012; AI 3 Aug. 2012; *The Christian Science Monitor* 16 July 2012; Radio Dabanga 25 June 2012);
- rubber bullets (AI 3 Aug. 2012; Radio Dabanga 25 June 2012; Human Rights Watch 11 July 2012);
- axes and swords by *rabata* [plain-clothed security elements] (International Crisis Group 29 Nov. 2012, 19).

Radio Dabanga, a radio station created in 2008 and run by a coalition of Sudanese journalists and international development organizations (Radio Dabanga 27 Feb. 2013), reports that dozens of people were injured during the June protests (25 June 2012). Amnesty International (AI) noted that the National Security Service (NSS) obstructed injured protesters from receiving medical care by deploying agents to hospitals in the Khartoum area (AI 3 Aug. 2012).

International Crisis Group reports that security forces "violently dispersed" protests throughout Khartoum and other states on 29 June 2012 (29 Nov. 2012, 19).

Human rights organizations report that security forces fired bullets at protesters in South Darfur (AI 3 Aug. 2012; Human Rights Watch 10 Dec. 2012). Sources varied on the number of people killed, ranging from 7 (International Crisis Group 29 Nov. 2012, 19) to 13 (Human Rights Watch 10 Dec. 2012). According to AI, most of the victims were high school students (3 Aug. 2012). AI (ibid.) and International Crisis Group (29 Nov. 2012, 19) report that the incident occurred in Nyala on 31 July 2012.

1.3 Detention

Some sources estimated that around 2,000 people were detained between mid-June and mid-July in response to the protests (*The Christian Science Monitor* 16 July 2012; Human Rights Watch 11 July 2012; IWPR 12 July 2012). Human Rights Watch could not confirm that number, but noted that as of 11 July 2012, at least 100 people remained in detention in Khartoum alone (11 July 2012). Two sources indicate that some people were detained for more than four weeks (VOA 17 July 2012; AI 3 Aug. 2012). According to AI, most of these detainees had been held without charge or denied access to a lawyer (ibid.).

Sources indicate that not all of those arrested were protesters (ibid.; *The Christian Science Monitor* 16 July 2012). According to AI, "hundreds" of known activists were arrested, even if they did not participate in the protests (3 Aug. 2012).

According to Human Rights Watch, the majority of detainees were held in NSS detention centres, which it claims are "well known for the use of ill-treatment and torture" (Human Rights Watch 11 July 2012). More than thirteen released detainees interviewed by AI and Human Rights Watch indicate that they were subjected to "beatings, verbal insults, food, water and sleep-deprivation, and other ill-treatment[s] while in detention in Khartoum and its suburbs" (ibid.). According to a later report by AI, many of the detainees said "they had been tortured with sticks, water hoses and fists, and made to stand under the scorching sun all day" (3 Aug. 2012). The *Christian Science Monitor* also indicates that protesters who were detained were subjected to "torture" (16 July 2012).

Sources indicate that detainees included students (AI 3 Aug. 2012; *The Christian Science Monitor* 16 July 2012; Radio Dabanga 27 June 2012). According to the Darfur Students Association, at least 17 Darfuri students had been detained as of 27 June 2012 (ibid.).

1.4 Protests at Sudan University

Two sources indicate that protests occurred at Sudan University (UN 20 June 2012; VOA 17 July 2012). According to the UN Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), on 19 June 2012, police used "excessive violence" against a student demonstration at Sudan University after students gathered at the university's gates to protest against price hikes and against the regime (UN 20 June 2012). Voice of America (VOA), a news broadcaster funded by the US government (n.d.), reports that on 17 July 2012, a protest at Sudan University turned violent and students clashed with police (VOA 17 July 2012). Sources also indicate that at least one student from Sudan University was detained by security forces (Human Rights Watch 11 July 2012; Radio Dabanga 27 June 2012). According to Human Rights Watch, a 24-year-old student from Sudan University reported being subject to physical abuse while in NSS detention (Human Rights Watch 11 July 2012).

2. Student Protests in December 2012
2.1 Overview

In December 2012, Darfuri students at Gezira [Al-Gazira, Al Jazeera, Jazeera] University staged a sit-in at their university to protest that their tuition fees were not waived (Reuters 8 Dec. 2012; *Sudan Tribune* 11 Dec. 2012; Human Rights Watch 10 Dec. 2012). Gezira University is located in Madani (*Sudan Tribune* 11 Dec. 2012; Human Rights Watch 10 Dec. 2012) in Jazeera state (ibid.; AI 12 Dec. 2012). Under peace agreements, Darfuri students are entitled to a tuition exemption (Human Rights Watch 10 Dec. 2012; AI 12 Dec. 2012).

According to Human Rights Watch, on 2 December, national security officials arrested some Darfuri students who appealed to the administration for a tuition waiver (10 Dec. 2012). Protests at the university followed, in which police, security officials and pro-government students fought with the protesters (Human Rights Watch 10 Dec. 2012). Several sources report that government supporters dispersed the sit-in, after which a number of students went missing, and four students were found dead (Reuters 8 Dec. 2012; *Sudan Tribune* 11 Dec. 2012; Human Rights Watch 10 Dec. 2012).

The dead students were found in a canal (*Sudan Tribune* 11 Dec. 2012; Human Rights Watch 10 Dec. 2012). According to a witness interviewed by Human Rights Watch, three of the bodies had signs of physical abuse, suggesting that they had been beaten by security forces before they died (ibid.). AI similarly indicates that the four bodies reportedly showed signs of beating, suggesting torture or ill-treatment (AI 12 Dec. 2012). AI reports that the four students had been arrested by the NSS prior to being discovered dead in the canal (ibid.), while the *Sudan Tribune* states that police forces and loyalists of the ruling National Congress Party attacked the student protesters and chased them to the site of the canal (11 Dec. 2012).

The Darfur Students Association of Gezira University, as reported by AFP, blamed the university administration, the Student Union, and the National Congress Party militia for the death of the students (AFP 9 Dec. 2012). The police (*Sudan Tribune* 11 Dec. 2012) and university officials (AFP 12 Dec. 2012; Human Rights Watch 10 Dec. 2012) claimed the students drowned.

The death of the four students at Gezira Univesity sparked further student protests (AFP 9 Dec. 2012; *Sudan Tribune* 11 Dec. 2012; AI 12 Dec. 2012). According to AFP, protesters called for "'revolution'" and an end to President Omar al-Bashir's regime (AFP 13 Dec. 2012). Protests occurred outside Khartoum universities and in other towns (ibid. 12 Dec. 2012; AI 12 Dec. 2012; Human Rights Watch 10 Dec. 2012), including:

- nearly 500 student protesters marched at Al-Nilain University (in center Khartoum) (*Sudan Tribune* 11 Dec. 2012). Police force used tear gas against the protesters (ibid.).
- 200 students at Khartoum University's agricultural faculty (*Sudan Tribune* 11 Dec. 2012). Security forces dispersed the protest (ibid.).
- Student protest of dozens of students at the central bus station "Jackson Square" in Khartoum (ibid.). Police arrested "many" of them (ibid.).
- On 11 December, students protesting at Omdurman Islamic University in Khartoum were dispersed by pro-government students and police, who used tear gas and subjected protesters to beatings (AI 12 Dec. 2012). A dormitory was set on fire, leaving students homeless (ibid.).

Some sources report that the police used "excessive force" against the student protesters (AFP 12 Dec. 2012; AI 12 Dec. 2012). According to the Secretary-General of the Student Association of 'Greater Darfur' of Gezira University, during the protests, seven students were "severely injured," and one student was found in front of a dormitory in critical condition with "clear signs of torture," including ripped off fingernails (Radio Dabanga 12 Dec. 2012). In addition, four students from Gezira University reportedly went missing (ibid.). This information could not be corroborated among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

2.2 Detention

Several sources report that student protesters were arrested and detained by security forces (Human Rights Watch 10 Dec. 2012; AI 12 Dec. 2012). Human Rights Watch reports that 11 Darfuri students were arrested at the start of the protest at Gezira University on 2 December (10 Dec. 2012), while AI reports that 7 students were arrested on that day (AI 12 Dec. 2012). AI reports that 53 students from Gezira University were arrested by the NSS on 3 December, and that a "large number" were released the following day (ibid.). According to Girifna, a non-violent resistance movement whose objective is to overthrow the ruling National Congress Party (Girifna 17 Nov. 2009), approximately 60 students were arrested on 5 December at Gezira University (7 Dec. 2012). According to the Darfur Students Association of Gezira University, as reported by AFP, 80 students were arrested when the pro-government Student Union broke up the sit-in (9 Dec. 2012). AI states that on 8 December, the police arrested 9 activists taking part in demonstrations and released them the next day (AI 12 Dec. 2012). The *Sudan Tribune* reports that on 9 December 2012, 47 protesters were arrested during protests on charges of "illegal assembly and causing riots" (11 Dec. 2012). According to the Secretary-General of the Student Association of 'Greater Darfur' of Gezira University, quoted in a Radio Dabanga's

article, on 10 and 11 December 2012 the NISS arrested 30 Darfuri students (12 Dec. 2012). The article lists the names of several of the students arrested (ibid.). Those arrested included the head of the Darfur Student Union at Sudan University (ibid.).

3. Role of Darfur Students Association and Darfur Graduate Students Association

Information about the role of the Darfur Students Association in planning or participating in the protests was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response. The Darfur Students Association provided information to media sources about students detained or injured in both the June 2012 protests (Radio Dabanga 27 June 2012) and the December 2012 protests (AFP 16 Dec. 2012; Radio Dabanga 12 Dec. 2012). A spokesperson for the Darfur Students Association reportedly spoke at a forum on 13 December 2012 in reaction to the death of the four students at Gezira University, stating that "thousands of students are ready to take to the streets and remove the regime" (*Sudan Tribune* 14 Dec. 2012). As previously noted, during the December protests, the Darfur Students Association spoke out against the death of the four students, claimed that they were killed, and blamed the ruling party, university administration and Student Union for their death (AFP 9 Dec. 2012).

AI also reports on student activists affiliated with the Darfur Students Association who were arrested and detained by security forces, and denied access to family or lawyers (AI 5 Apr. 2012; ibid. 8 Feb. 2013). In one example, an activist with the Darfur Students Association was arrested on 28 March 2012 in a market in Khartoum North after recently giving speeches at a number of campuses about the situation in Darfur, Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile (ibid. 5 Apr. 2012); he was reportedly released as of 23 April 2012 (ibid. 24 May 2012). In another example, a media officer for the Darfur Students Association of Eastern Nile University disappeared on 11 December 2012 shortly after informing family members that he was being followed by the NSS (ibid. 8 Feb. 2013). AI reports that this activist had been detained and "ill-treated" for three months previously in 2012 (ibid.).

Information about the role of the Darfur Graduate Students Association in planning or participating in the protests could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Internet sites, including: African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies; ecoi.net; Factiva; Freedom House; International Federation for Human Rights; Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty; United Nations – Refworld, ReliefWeb.

Tips on how to use this search engine.

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