

# Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

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## Responses to Information Requests

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19 December 2014

### SDN105025.E

Sudan: The Girifna movement, including origin, objectives, members, regions of operation, activities, methods of communication within the group, funding; treatment of group members by authorities (2010-December 2014)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

#### **1. The Girifna Movement**

##### **1.1 Origin and Objectives**

Sources indicate that the Girifna movement was established in October 2009 by university students (UN 26 July 2012; Girifna n.d.a) in Omdurman, Sudan (ibid). Sources indicate that the word Girifna means "we are fed up" in Arabic (*The Washington Post* 14 Aug. 2010; VOA 6 Sept. 2012). The website of the Girifna movement specifies that the group is "fed-up with war, corruption, dictatorship, injustice, and discrimination against minorities" (Girifna n.d.a). Both the Girifna website and the International Crisis Group note that the group began as a movement to defeat the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) in the 2010 national elections (ibid.; International Crisis Group 29 Nov. 2012). Other sources note that Girifna began as a movement conducting voter registration in the lead-up to the 2010 elections (ACJPS 15 Dec. 2014; *Sudan Tribune* 8 July 2010). The International Crisis Group notes that Girifna expanded its aim to "triggering a popular uprising" (International Crisis Group 29 Nov. 2012, 18).

According to its website, the Girifna movement's objective is to overthrow the ruling NCP through non-violent resistance (Girifna n.d.a). Freedom House similarly describes Girifna as a "non-violent youth-based resistance movement" (Freedom House 2014a). According to a one-page document entitled "Demands of a Nation" published on the Girifna website, and which is attached to this Response, the aim of the movement is to replace the NCP government with a transitional government and reinstate a "democratic nation-state" (Girifna n.d.b).

##### **1.2 Members**

According to its website, the Girifna movement is open to all Sudanese citizens (ibid. n.d.c.). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a programme officer with the African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies (ACJPS), a New York-based NGO that conducts human rights monitoring and advocates on issues of legal reform in Sudan, explained that because Girifna is an "open movement," it is difficult to determine the number of members in the group (ACJPS 15 Dec. 2014). According to a 2010 *Washington Post* article, Girifna had approximately 5,000 volunteers across Sudan (14 Aug. 2010). According to a 2010 article in the *Globe and Mail*, Girifna estimated that they had nearly 18,000 supporters throughout the country (14 Apr. 2010). Amnesty International (AI) describes it as a "prominent" group (AI 23 May 2013). According to its website, Girifna membership is growing (Girifna n.d.a). Similarly, the ACJPS programme officer said that Girifna has "grown tremendously since its inception" (ACJPS 15 Dec. 2014).

Girifna describes its membership as "diverse" and "comprised of a wide range of ages, and ethnic and religious backgrounds" (Girifna n.d.a). According to the ACJPS programme officer, "Girifna's main support base is constituted of youth activists, primarily from the centre of Sudan" (ACJPS 15 Dec. 2014). IHS Global Insight, an information website providing "comprehensive economic and financial coverage" of over 200 countries by professional analysts, researchers and economists (IHS Global Insight n.d.a), similarly noted that Girifna is comprised primarily of young people (IHS Global Insight 20 June 2012). Some media sources describe the movement as "student-led" (*Sudan Tribune* 13 Feb. 2012; *The Globe and Mail* 14 Apr. 2010).

According to Girifna's website, it has members from all the major political parties in the country (n.d.a). The ACJPS programme officer said that Girifna is open to "anyone regardless of political belief" (ACJPS 15 Dec. 2014). Similarly, the International Crisis Group said Girifna includes both politically-affiliated and independent students (International Crisis Group 29 Nov. 2012, 18).

Sources indicate that two of the movement's co-founders are Nagi Musa (*The Washington Post* 14 Aug. 2010; *The Globe and Mail* 14 April 2010) and Rudwan Dawod (AI 23 May 2013; VOA 6 Sept. 2012).

Information about a formal membership process or whether Girifna has membership cards could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

### 1.3 Regions of Operation

Girifna's headquarters is reportedly located in Khartoum (Girifna n.d.a). Without providing details, its website states that they have a strong presence in "various regions of Sudan" (ibid.). The ACJPS programme officer said that while membership to Girifna is "state-wide," the leadership is focused in Khartoum and is most active in Khartoum, Khartoum Bahri and Omdurman (ACJPS 15 Dec. 2014). According to its website, Girifna has conducted activities in the cities of Madani, Algadarif, Al Jazeera, Atbara, Al Obied, Meroe, Dongola and Nyala (Girifna n.d.a).

Girifna's website states that it has a strong presence in the diaspora community and notes that many Girifna members fled Sudan to escape from government security forces (ibid.). Similarly, the ACJPS programme officer said that there are leading members of Girifna outside Sudan, some of whom were forced to leave Sudan (ACJPS 15 Dec. 2014). She said that these leading members outside Sudan have organized campaigns abroad for the group and "contribute to Girifna's strategic vision" (ibid.).

### 1.4 Activities

According to Girifna's website, one of the group's activities is to educate Sudanese youth and the public about their rights as well as the "methodologies of non-violent resistance movements" (Girifna n.d.a). The ACJPS programme officer said that between 2010 and 2014, Girifna has been primarily involved in "civic education campaigns" and have held several public forums, including discussions on the economy, southern succession, and other political issues (ACJPS 15 Dec. 2014). She indicated that they have also held art exhibitions (ibid.). According to its website, Girifna activities "have addressed such issues as corruption, economic disparity and poverty, the limitation of political freedoms, and emphasized citizen participation through voter registration and voter education" (Girifna n.d.a). According to the ACJPS programme officer, Girifna's activities also include publicizing the work of other youth movements and monitoring human rights (ACJPS 15 Dec. 2014).

Girifna members reportedly engage in *mukhatabat* (street talks) in the marketplace and distribute leaflets challenging the NCP in marketplaces, universities, schools, and on public transportation (ibid.). *The Washington Post* similarly said that Girifna members speak and hand out leaflets in markets and bus stations (14 Aug. 2010). The ACJPS programme officer also indicated that Girifna members have given "talks at public spaces in Khartoum, such as bus stops" (ACJPS 15 Dec. 2014). In 2010, the *Globe and Mail* said that Girifna conducted "flash mobilizations" on the streets in opposition to President al-Bashir (14 Apr. 2010).

Sources indicate that Girifna has held demonstrations (ACJPS 15 Dec. 2014; Girifna n.d.a) in various regions of Sudan (ibid.). According to a joint report by REDRESS, a London-based NGO that "helps torture survivors obtain justice and reparation" (REDRESS n.d.), and ACJPS, Girifna was part of a coalition of student movements that organized demonstrations in Khartoum, El Obeid, Wad Medoni and Kosti between January and March of 2011, which were met with "excessive force by the Sudanese authorities" (REDRESS and ACJPS June 2014, 42). ACJPS indicated that human rights groups reportedly documented "the deployment of riot police and the NISS [Sudan's National Intelligence and Security Services] to disperse demonstrations, the beating of protestors, mass detentions and ill-treatment and torture of detainees" during these demonstrations (ACJPS 16 Dec. 2014).

According to IHS Global Insight, Girifna and other groups called for a general protest in June 2012 against austerity measures introduced by the government and was "at the heart of the opposition to the

government" in 2012 (IHS Global Insight 20 June 2012). Similarly, the *Sudan Tribune*, a website based in Paris that aims to promote "plural information, democratic and free debate on Sudan" (n.d.), described Girifna as being "at the forefront of protests" in June and July of 2012, in which "hundreds" of protesters in Khartoum and 10 regional towns denounced price increases and called for the downfall of the regime (2 July 2012). A joint 2014 report by AI and ACJPS also indicates that Girifna was involved in June 2012 protests (AI and ACJPS 2014, 15). For further information about students protests in 2012 in Sudan, see Response to Information Request SDN104454.

### 1.5 Communication Within the Group

Sources indicate that Girifna utilizes social media (Girifna n.d.a; ACJPS 15 Dec. 2014; *The Globe and Mail* 14 Apr. 2010), including Facebook, Twitter and YouTube (ibid.). Girifna reportedly shares information via a Facebook page where members can post updates from their regions (Girifna n.d.c.). According to the ACJPS programme officer, in the beginning, Girifna's communication was all through Facebook, but this changed following arrests [of group members] (ACJPS 15 Dec. 2014). According to its website, Girifna members also communicate through online chats, e-mails, skype (Girifna n.d.a) and cell phones (ibid. n.d.c.).

Girifna reportedly encourages volunteers to make house visits in their neighbourhoods to share information orally and through one-page brochures and pamphlets (ibid.). Girifna also encourages volunteers to conduct informal informational activities in their communities and to be sensitive towards illiterate and non-Arabic speaking groups (ibid.). Girifna has reportedly created poems, songs, music videos, advertisements, audio interviews and a newsletter in trying to reach areas of Sudan beyond Khartoum and abroad to diaspora communities (ibid. n.d.a). Media sources report that Girifna has a magazine (*Sudan Tribune* 8 July 2010; *The Washington Post* 14 Aug. 2010). According to the UN's Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), Girifna spreads its message through "street demonstrations, Radio Girifna, an online magazine, public speeches and newsletters" (UN 26 July 2012).

In 2010, the *Washington Post* reported that Girifna members carry cell phone-sized video cameras to capture images of excited crowds or actions of police during their activities (14 Aug. 2010). Similarly, the *Globe and Mail* reported that Girifna makes "homemade videos" and cited an example in which Girifna posted a video of one of their public gatherings being broken up by the police on YouTube (14 Apr. 2010).

The ACJPS programme officer notes that Girifna has been "infiltrated in the past" (15 Dec. 2014). In a 2012 report, the International Crisis Group stated that Girifna was believed to be infiltrated by security forces (International Crisis Group 29 Nov. 2012, 18). Freedom House reports that in October 2013, Girifna's website was subjected to a "hacking attempt" (2014a).

### 1.6 Support and Funding

According to Girifna's website, the group's support base consists of Sudanese in Sudan and in diaspora communities, and they also receive support from political parties (Girifna n.d.d.). The website indicates that Girifna does not accept donations from foreign governments or international agencies (ibid. n.d.d). All contributions are reportedly from individuals (ibid. n.d.a). The ACJPS programme officer said Girifna is funded through private donations and does not receive funds from states (ACJPS 15 Dec. 2014).

The ACJPS programme officer noted that Girifna has received training from and networks with various human rights organizations, including ACJPS (ibid.).

## 2. Treatment of Girifna Members by Authorities

According to the ACJPS programme officer, Girifna members "operate in an extremely restrictive and dangerous environment" (ibid.). Girifna's website indicates that its members are subject to harassment by security forces (Girifna n.d.a). In its annual report for 2011, the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint programme of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), stated that authorities "particularly targeted" Girifna members (Observatory 2011, 131). Similarly, Freedom House indicated that Girifna members are one of the groups targeted by Sudan's National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) and face "systematic" detention and "torture" (Freedom House 2014b). According to an ACJPS report from December 2014, Girifna members have been subject to "increased harassment" in recent weeks, including receiving "threatening" phone calls from the NISS (10 Dec. 2014).

Sources indicate that Girifna members have been subjected to the following by security forces:

- beatings (*The Washington Post* 14 Aug. 2010; *Sudan Tribune* 29 June 2012; UN 26 July 2012);
- stabbings (*Sudan Tribune* 20 Mar. 2010)
- sexual harassment (Girifna n.d.a);

- rape (ibid.; ACJPS 15 Dec. 2014);
- abductions (UN 26 July 2012);
- arrests (Girifna n.d.a; *Sudan Tribune* 8 July 2010; AI and ACJPS 2014, 15);
- imprisonment (UN 26 July 2012);
- arbitrary detention (ACJPS 15 Dec. 2014); and
- "torture" (ibid., Girifna n.d.a; *The Washington Post* 14 Aug. 2010.)

## 2.1 Incidents in 2010

Sources report that in March 2010, three members of Girifna were arrested following a peaceful gathering at a bus stop in Khartoum (VOA 9 Mar. 2010; Observatory 2011, 131), and charged with causing a public nuisance (ibid.; *Sudan Tribune* 5 Mar. 2010). According to the Observatory, on 15 March 2010, one of the Girifna members who was earlier arrested was abducted by armed men, taken to an unknown location, "severely beaten," and interrogated about Girifna's activities and sources of funding (Observatory 2011, 131). He reportedly received death threats by NISS after speaking out about his detention during a press conference and fled Sudan in April 2010 (ibid.).

Sources report that in July or August 2010, three Girifna activists were arrested for distributing Girifna's magazine and charged with breaching public peace (*The Washington Post* 14 Aug. 2010; Observatory 2011, 131; *Sudan Tribune* 8 July 2010) and sedition (ibid.). They were reportedly taken off site and beaten (ibid.; *The Washington Post* 14 Aug. 2010; Observatory 2011, 131) by NISS (ibid.; *Sudan Tribune* 8 July 2010).

## 2.2 Incidents in 2011

The Observatory reports that on 22 January 2011, three people were arrested for distributing the Girifna magazine; they were released a few days later without charge (2011, 131). Reuters reports that in January 2011, nine Girifna members were detained on the night before an anti-government protest in Khartoum (30 Jan. 2011).

Freedom House reports that in January 2011, a Girifna activist was arrested and detained (Freedom House 2013). After her release, she provided details about being gang-raped by three NISS agents while in detention, which Girifna posted on YouTube (ibid.). ACJPS corroborates this information, but reports that the arrest and abuse occurred in February 2011 (ACJPS Apr. 2011, 14; ibid. 16 Dec. 2014). According to the US Department of State's *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2012*, the woman was arrested for organizing protests through Facebook; by the end of 2012, no actions had been taken against the security agents (US 19 Apr. 2013, 4). She filed a complaint against the authorities but her case was closed after an initial inquiry (REDRESS and ACJPS June 2014, 20). According to the same source, criminal charges were brought against five journalists who called for an investigation into the rape allegations (ibid.). The alleged rape victim reportedly left Sudan after receiving threats by authorities (ibid.).

The UK newspaper, the *Guardian*, interviewed a Girifna member who said he was detained for 12 days in 2011, and was beaten and subjected to electric shocks (8 Dec. 2014).

## 2.3 Incidents in 2011

According to the *Sudan Tribune*, six Girifna members, including co-founder Nagi Musa, were arrested on 25 January 2012 for participating in a public forum to commemorate a 2005 massacre and address human rights in eastern Sudan (*Sudan Tribune* 13 Feb. 2012). They were reportedly detained for almost two weeks without charge or access to a lawyer or their families (ibid.). One was reportedly subject to "torture and other ill-treatment" while in detention (ibid.).

According to the *Sudan Tribune*, Girifna reported that many of their activists were injured or were arrested during a government crackdown against demonstrations in June and July of 2012 (29 June 2012). In August 2012, AI reported on "dozens" of cases in which activists and protesters were being held in administrative detention for over one month, including four Girifna members (AI 3 Aug. 2012). The Observatory also reported that the same four Girifna members had been held in detention for "several weeks" and did not have access to a lawyer, but had been released as of 20 August 2012, according to information provided by the ACJPS (Observatory 20 Aug. 2012).

In one of the cases mentioned above, AI reports that a female activist from Girifna was arrested on 24 June 2012 and held at an undisclosed location by NISS without access to relatives or a lawyer until she was released on 16 August 2012 (AI 23 Aug. 2012). According to AI, she was held in "appalling" conditions (ibid.).

In another one of the cases, Rudwan Dawod, co-founder of Girifna and a US resident, was arrested on 3 July 2012 for taking part in peaceful protests (AI 23 May 2013; VOA 6 Sept. 2012). He was detained for six weeks and charged with terrorism, which carries the death penalty (ibid.; AI 23 May 2013). Dawod reportedly

said he was tortured by NISS agents during this period (VOA 6 Sept. 2012; AI 23 May 2013), including being "severely" beaten, subjected to sleep deprivation, and threatened with rape (ibid.). AI reports that he was seized and detained by NISS agents again from 13-16 August 2012 and was held incommunicado at an undisclosed location, until he was released on 16 August 2012 (ibid. 20 Aug. 2012). AI also notes that Dawod was detained "immediately after being acquitted of terrorism charges and sentenced instead to a fine for 'attempting to disturb the public peace'" (ibid). Voice of America reports that he returned to the US in September 2012 (VOA 6 Sept. 2012)

According to the *Christian Science Monitor*, police used truncheons and tear gas against Girifna demonstrators who protested in the Jabrah neighbourhood of Khartoum on 13 July 2012 (*The Christian Science Monitor* 16 July 2012).

## 2.4 Incidents in 2013-2014

*Al-Arab*, a daily Arabic newspaper published in the UK, reports that a Sudanese youth activist affiliated with Girifna was held for 50 days between 12 May and 2 July 2014 without charge and his family alleged that he had been tortured in detention based on injuries they saw after visiting him in detention (2 July 2014). Further and corroborating information about this case could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The Pan African News Agency (PANAPRESS) reported that in September 2014, at least nine Girifna members were "brutally arrested" by NISS in Khartoum as a preventative measure to thwart a commemoration of wide-scale protests that happened a year earlier (23 Sept. 2014).

ACJPS reports that a youth activist was arrested and beaten on 2 December 2014 after attending a public talk organized by Girifna regarding reforming laws that restrict human rights (10 Dec. 2014). He was reportedly convicted on 4 December 2014, without legal representation, on charges of disturbing the public peace and disseminating false information and was sentenced to one month in prison (ibid.). ACJPS further reports that others attending the talk, which was at a Khartoum bus station, were chased by police, who confiscated Girifna's pamphlets (ibid.). Corroborating information 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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## Additional Sources Consulted

**Oral sources, including:** Attempts to contact representatives of the following organizations were unsuccessful within the time constraints of this Response: Girifna Movement; International Refugee Rights Initiative.

**Internet sites, including:** Africa Confidential; Africa Research Bulletin; ecoi.net; Factiva; Human Rights Watch; Institute for War and Peace Reporting; International Refugee Rights Initiative; United Nations – Refworld.

## Attachment

Girifna. N.d. "Demands of a Nation."

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