HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

"Good Girls Don't Protest"

Repression and Abuse of Women Human Rights Defenders, Activists, and Protesters in Sudan

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Printed in the United States of America
ISBN: 978-1-6231-33344
Cover design by Rafael Jimenez

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MARCH 2016

ISBN: 978-1-6231-33344

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Summary

Sudan has a long record of stifling dissent by targeting activists for specific abuses, such as beatings, arbitrary arrests, unlawful detentions, ill-treatment in detention, interrogation for long hours, and intrusive government surveillance. The government also restricts freedom of expression, assembly and association by censoring or confiscating newspapers, harassing civil society organizations, and using lethal force to break up protests and demonstrations.

While these patterns of repression are well-documented, scant attention has been paid to the toll of this repression on women activists and human rights defenders. Yet, as popular protests and civil society activism by women has increased, so too have reports of abuses and repression against them. As this report shows, women involved in protests, rights campaigns, social services, legal aid, and journalism, and other public action have been targeted for a range of abuses, and operate in a wider context of gender inequality that makes their activism all the more challenging.

Based on interviews with more than 85 female activists and human rights defenders in Sudan's urban centers, this report documents the patterns of abuse women experience at the hands of government security forces and the restrictive environment in which they work. It describes how women activists and human rights defenders face an array of abusive practices their male colleagues are less likely to have to contend with – from sexual violence to the deliberate efforts of security personnel to tar their reputations in ways that can cause lasting social and professional harm.

These abuses reflect, or are made worse by, the wider context of gender inequality in Sudanese society and the laws that institutionalize it. Vaguely defined public morality crimes discriminate against women in Sudan, proscribing their manner of dress, limiting their movement and role in public life, and imposing humiliating corporal punishments of lashing and stoning, in violation of international norms. The cases described in this report also highlight the broader problem of entrenched impunity for human rights abuses women face, including sexual violence.

Sudanese activists lack protection as well avenues to remedy or assistance, especially victims of sexual violence who may be reluctant to report their experiences to others for fear of damaging consequences. While some of the women we interviewed were able to access medical assistance or other support, none obtained legal redress either because they were too afraid to report or because law authorities did not investigate or prosecute the crimes. Many women, traumatized and frightened of future abuse, fled the country, leaving behind close family members. Others remain in Sudan, but were forced – by pressure from government officials or from their own families and friends – to tone down or stop their activism.

Sudan is due to adopt a new constitution following a contentious and long-awaited national dialog process, which officially started in October 2015 despite the absence of key opposition parties. Any new constitution should include full protections for human rights and women's rights, and reform of repressive laws and institutions, including the national security service, public order codes, and provisions in the criminal law that discriminate against women.

Sudan should lift restrictions on expression and association, and allow civil society, including female human rights activists, to demonstrate peacefully and engage in public action and discourse. Authorities should instruct security forces to stop targeting activists and end all abuses, including sexual and gender-based violence, and hold accountable those responsible. They should cease using the criminal code and public order regime to silence or restrict activists. And they should also address the longstanding obstacles to justice for victims of rape and other sexual violence.

Sudanese civil society organizations should coordinate support for human rights defenders and activists at risk, and help them to obtain legal, medical and psycho-social services when needed. International donors and partners should assist these efforts, and help build capacity of Sudanese human rights defenders to protect themselves, especially those living in rural areas or in Sudan's conflict zones where they have little access to protection or legal or medical services.

Finally, United Nations (UN) and African Union (AU) rapporteurs on human rights defenders should increase their engagement on Sudan, and conduct visits to investigate and report

on patterns of abuse against female activists, including sexual violence against them and the adverse impacts on their work of gender inequality in Sudan.

Recommendations

To the Government of Sudan

To Police, Armed Forces, and National Intelligence and Security Services

- Instruct police, armed forces and National Intelligence and Security Service personnel to end all abuses against human rights activists including protesters, journalists and members of civil society, with specific emphasis on ending sexual violence against female activists.
- Ensure victims of sexual violence have access to justice; investigate all alleged abuses including obstruction of access to justice and medical care, and hold those responsible to account.
- Ensure victims of sexual violence and physical assault have access to medical care including psycho-social support.
- More generally, end arbitrary detentions of all activists and human rights defenders; release those held unlawfully or charge them lawfully according them full due process.
- End censorship on the media and undue restrictions on civil society organizations and on peaceful assembly; allow journalists, activists and protesters to speak about the full range of issues of public interest, including sexual violence.

To the Presidency, Parliament, Ministries and Political Parties

- Ensure Sudan's new constitution includes equal rights protections for women and girls, and prohibitions on discrimination on the basis of sex and gender, as well as full protection of political and civil rights to expression, assembly and association.
- Reform or repeal other laws that unfairly punish women and girls and impose corporal punishment. These include the public morality and adultery provisions in the criminal code and local ordinances codifying public morality laws.
- Abolish the penalty of flogging and the penalty of death by stoning for adultery or any other crime, as it violates international human rights standards, including prohibitions on torture and cruel and unusual treatment.
- Reform or repeal the National Security Act 2010, the Press and Printing Act 2009, Voluntary and Humanitarian Work Act 2006, and Criminal Act 1991 which

carry provisions used to restrict the rights to freedoms of expression, assembly and association.

- Ratify the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading and Treatment or Punishment and its Optional Protocol, which allows independent, international experts to conduct regular visits to places of detention.
- Ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women without reservation, thereby accepting the internationally accepted minimum standards pertaining to women's human rights.
- Ratify the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa.
- Cooperate fully with experts from the United Nations (UN) and the African Union (AU), including their respective Special Rapporteurs on Human Rights Defenders, the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict, the UN Special Rapporteur Violence Against Women, and the AU Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in particular with respect to any investigation into sexual violence or other attacks against women human rights defenders.

To the United Nations and the African Union

- Condemn the abusive tactics, including sexual violence, harassment, and threats, used against female human rights defenders in Sudan, and call on the government to investigate all alleged abuses by security forces, and hold those responsible for abuses to account.
- Call on Sudan to reform repressive laws, including those governing national security, media, and civil society, and bring them in line with international and regional human rights standards.
- Call on Sudan to reform or repeal other laws that unfairly punish women and girls and impose corporal punishment. These include the public morality and adultery provisions in the criminal code and local ordinances codifying public morality laws.
- Call on Sudan to abolish the penalty of flogging and the penalty of death by stoning for adultery or any other crime, as it violates international human rights standards, including prohibitions on torture and cruel and unusual treatment.
- The UN Special Rapporteur for Violence Against Women, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict should request to visit

Sudan with a view to investigating patterns of attacks including sexual violence against women human rights defenders.

- The AU's Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders and the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women should request to visit Sudan with a view to investigating patterns of attacks including sexual violence against women human rights defenders.

To Sudan's donors and partner governments

- Condemn Sudan's abusive tactics, including sexual violence, harassment, and threats, used against female human rights defenders in Sudan, and call on the government to investigate all alleged abuses by security forces, and hold those responsible for abuses to account.
- Call on Sudan to reform repressive and discriminatory laws as part of its constitution-making process and ensure gender equality and respect for women's rights are included in the forthcoming constitution.
- Assess ways to support or provide direct protection to women human rights defenders who are facing or recovering from abuse by state authorities. Steps to improve protection could include making more resources available to support individual women, both inside and outside of Sudan, and supporting the creation of a protection network within Sudan including its conflict zones, and funding emergency post-rape care.
- Donor funding to support civil society generally should include programs to build the capacity of human rights defenders and specifically female human rights defenders.

Methodology

For the purposes of this report, the term "activist" is used to describe a range of individuals – members of civil society, students, teachers, journalists, lawyers, protesters, and others working for social justice in Sudan. The term "human rights defender" refers to an individual who works to promote and defend internationally-recognized human rights. "Civil society" refers to all non-governmental institutions, organizations and individuals engaged in public affairs.

This report is based on interviews with more than 85 female activists and human rights defenders between November 2014 and January 2016. Researchers sought women who identified themselves as activists or human rights defenders, and could speak to the obstacles to their work and abuses they faced because of their activism. Of those interviewed for this report, many also identified themselves as feminists or women's rights activists.

The interviews were conducted confidentially in person or by telephone, most in Arabic without an interpreter, some in English. The interviewees gave full consent to be interviewed and no payments or other consideration were sought or paid for interviews. However, in many cases, because of the sensitive nature of the abuse or substantial risk of further abuse, names and identifying details have been withheld or replaced with pseudonyms to protect the security of the interviewee.

Most of the women were interviewed in Khartoum or its neighboring city, Omdurman. Human Rights Watch also interviewed women in Red Sea state, Northern state, White Nile, and Darfur, as well as with women in exile in Egypt, Uganda, the United Kingdom, and the United States. They include teachers, students, journalists, lawyers, staff members of non-governmental organizations, and members of various political parties. Some are well-known personalities. Researchers did not canvas the full spectrum of grassroots activism.

As the objective of the research was to document the particular experiences of these female activists and human rights defenders, this report is based on qualitative, illustrative, evidence. It does not attempt to document all patterns of gender-based violence in Sudan. The women interviewed for this report were asked to describe their

experience in as much detail as possible. To the extent possible, researchers corroborated specific allegations with other sources. Researchers also drew from Human Rights Watch's previous work on Sudan, media reports, and other international and Sudanese organizations reporting over the last five years.

On February 5, 2016, Human Rights Watch wrote a letter to the Sudanese government describing preliminary findings of the research and requesting information about the wide range of human rights concerns raised in this report (see attached annex 1). At time of writing, Sudanese authorities had not responded.

I. Background

On January 9, 2011, South Sudan seceded from Sudan.[1] Around the same time, a new civil war between government forces and armed opposition ignited in Southern Kordofan's Nuba Mountains and spread to Blue Nile state.[2] Meanwhile the government continues to fight rebels in Darfur, where conflict is now in its 12th year.[3]

Amid economic, political and military pressures caused by the South's secession and new wars, as well as falling oil prices and frustration over policies of the ruling National Congress Party (NCP), Sudan has seen a surge in popular protests over the last few years. The uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt in January 2011 also catalyzed Sudanese to take to the streets calling for democratic change.4 Although the largely youth-led protests in 2011 failed to achieve their aim of regime change, they triggered a period of frequent protest actions, often youth-driven with youth groups like Girifna, Sharara, and Sudan Change Now using creative strategies and social media to campaign and organize events.[5]

Sudanese women and girls from a cross-section of society – including elderly women – have participated in these protests.[6] In some cases, women appeared to lead protests; female students at Khartoum University played a key role catalyzing the wider "Sudan Revolts" protests in June and July 2012 when they marched from the dormitory to the streets of Khartoum. The "Kandake Friday" protest on July 13, 2012, named after Sudan's revolutionary women, attracted many women.[7] In addition to these popular protests,

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[1] This date marked the end of the six year transition period in the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement that ended Sudan's long civil war and paved the way for a southern referendum on independence.

[2] The armed group, made up of soldiers who fought alongside the former southern rebels, are known as the Sudan People's Liberation Army - North (SPLM-N).

[3] Human Rights Watch report, "Men with No Mercy: Rapid Support Forces Attacks against Civilians in Darfur, Sudan," September 10, 2015, https://www.hrw.org/node/280756/.

[4] Human Rights Watch news release, "Sudan: Violent Response to Peaceful Protests," February 3, 2011, https://www.hrw.org/news/2011/02/03/sudan-violent-response-peaceful-protests.

[5] See, e.g. actions by Girifna ("we are fed up") http://girifna.com/.

[6] Sudanese women have long protested government policies, such as the public order laws in 2009 and the national security law in 2010, but a larger number joined protests in 2012 and 2013.

[7] Nobel Women's Initiative, "Survivors Speak Out: Sexual Violence in Sudan," at 11, November 2013, http://nobelwomensinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Survivors-Speak-Out-Sudan-web.pdf.

women's groups have led smaller protests on a range of issues, including against the public order laws and for justice for victims of protester killings in September 2013.

The government's response to the mass protests and other forms of activism has been violent and repressive, as described below. Along with their male counterparts, many women activists have been arrested and detained during these crackdowns or targeted for detentions and abuses in other contexts. As documented in this report, they have been harassed, taunted, and humiliated, including sexually, for their work promoting or defending human rights and women's rights.

Patterns of Repression Since 2011

A major trend in the past five years – since January 2011, when Sudanese youth, inspired by the Arab Spring protests, took to the streets in large numbers demonstrating for regime change – has been violent crackdowns on, and abuses against, peaceful protesters in Sudan's main towns, such as Khartoum, Wad Medani, in Darfur, and other locations. These crackdowns violate basic freedoms of assembly and expression.

Government security forces including National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) and police officers cracked down harshly on protesters in the January 2011 protests and again during a wave of protests in June and July 2012, dubbed "Sudan Revolts," in which large numbers of youth and opposition supporters protested against government policies in Khartoum and other provincial towns across Sudan. In both cases, the security forces used batons, tear gas and rubber bullets, injuring many, arrested and detained a large number of people, including women, sometimes for several weeks or months. Former detainees reported ill-treatment and torture at the hands of security agents.[8] In Darfur, security forces used lethal force against protesters.[9]

But the most violent crackdown was on the September 2013 protests. After President al-Bashir announced austerity measures on September 22, large-scale, spontaneous protests

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[8] Human Rights Watch news release, "Sudan: Protesters Describe Torture by Security Officers," March 4, 2011, https://www.hrw.org/news/2011/03/04/sudan-protesters-describe-torture-security-officers; "Sudan: Torture, Abuse, of Demonstrators," July 11, 2012, https://www.hrw.org/news/2012/07/11/sudan-torture-abuse-demonstrators.

[9] See, e.g. Human Rights Watch news release, "Sudan: Police Fatally Shoot Darfur Protesters," August 3, 2012, https://www.hrw.org/news/2012/08/03/sudan-police-fatally-shoot-darfur-protesters.

swept the country, centering in the major towns. Dozens of witnesses told Human Rights Watch researchers that security forces and armed men in plain clothes aligned with them used live ammunition as well as tear gas and batons to break up protests.[10]

More than 170 were killed in the 2013 protests, mostly on the streets of Khartoum and its sister cities, Bahri and Omdurman. Thousands were detained, many for short periods but some for several weeks. One of the victims, a young pharmacist named Sarah Abdelbagi who was shot dead outside her home in Khartoum, became a symbol of the violence and impunity for the killings – her family's efforts to prosecute the shooter, who was identified, resulted in a murder conviction that was overturned on appeal.[11]

In November 2015, more than two years after the violence, a government justice official announced that a ministry of justice investigation had found that just 86 protesters were killed, and that four security men were arrested.[12] To date, however, the report has not been made public and apart from Abdelbagi's case, no prosecutions for killings have concluded.[13]

The government has also repeatedly used violence against protesters inside universities, a longstanding pattern that appears to have intensified in recent years and often involves violence between pro-government students and other groups.[14] In one example, security forces reportedly shot dead Darfuri student Ali Abaker in Khartoum University in March

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[10] Human Rights Watch report, "We Stood, They Opened Fire: Killings and Arrests by Sudan's Security Forces during the September Protests," April 21, 2014, https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/04/21/we-stood-they-opened-fire/killings-and-arrests-sudans-security-forces-during .

[11] Human Rights Watch interview with member of the victims' solidarity committee in Khartoum, November 2015.

[12] "Sudanese gov't acknowledges death of 86 protesters," *AllAfrica*, November 9, 2015, http://allafrica.com/stories/201511092192.html.

[13] African Center for Justice and Peace Studies, "Protesters Calling for Justice for Victims of 2013 Protester Killings Beaten, Detained," February 11, 2016, http://www.acjps.org/protestors-calling-for-justice-for-victims-of-2013-protest-killings-beaten-and-detained-by-sudans-security-agency-in-khartoum/.

[14] Sudan's university students have a long standing history of political engagement, many joining student chapters of political parties, and holding frequent discussion forums on campus. See Human Rights Watch, "Behind the Red Line: Political Repression in Sudan," May, 1996 https://www.hrw.org/report/1996/05/01/behind-red-line/political-repression-sudan for examples from early in the current regime.

2014,[15] and in another example they sexually harassed, beat and detained female students protesting eviction from the university's dormitories in October 2014.[16]

NISS officers have also continued to target specific individuals and groups of activists for harassment, interrogation, and detention at various times. While student political activists from Darfur have been especially vulnerable to arrest, others were targeted because of their work on sensitive topics or in the wake of key events, such as the outbreak of armed conflict in Southern Kordofan in 2011, and at Heglig oil fields in 2012, or various political meetings.[17] In the lead up to, and following, the 2015 elections – which were marred by low turn-out and did not, according to credible observers, meet international standards – dozens of activists were detained.[18]

Meanwhile, authorities have tightened restrictions on the media and civil society, limiting freedoms of expression and association.[19] NISS has regularly suspended newspapers, confiscated print runs, and instructed editors not to publish articles that cross "red lines." These topics have included stories about conflict in Darfur, Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile; and on the economy, protests, corruption, and sexual violence broadly – an extremely sensitive topic, as evidenced by government denials of specific cases and

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[15] See, e.g., "One dies as troops fire on Darfuri students in Khartoum, Radio Dabanga, March 11, 2014, https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/one-dies-as-troops-fire-on-darfuri-students-in-khartoum. In addition, NISS officials also detained student activists for more than two months for protesting the student killing. Human Rights Watch World Report 2015: Sudan, https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2015/country-chapters/sudan.

[16] Human Rights Watch news release," Sudan: Police Beat, Arrest, Female Students," October 15, 2014, https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/10/15/sudan-police-beat-arrest-female-students. In mid-2015, as violence between pro-government and Darfuri student groups escalated after a student NCP leader was killed at Sharg el-Nil University in Khartoum in April, government forces reportedly broke up student demonstrations with tear gas, beatings, and detained many Darfuri students. See, e.g., "Darfuri students targeted in Sudan as violent rhetoric intensifies," Guardian, June 5, 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/05/darfur-students-targeted-sudan-violent-rhetoric-intensifies.

[17] See, e.g. Human Rights Watch new releases "Sudan: Political Repression Intensifies, September 21, 2011, https://www.hrw.org/news/2011/09/21/sudan-political-repression-intensifies and "Sudan: Repression Intensifies after Border Violence," May 17, 2012, https://www.hrw.org/news/2012/05/17/sudan-repression-intensifies-after-border-violence and "Another Declaration, Another Sudan Crackdown," December 10, 2014, https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/12/10/dispatches-another-declaration-another-sudan-crackdown.

[18] Troika statement, "Joint Statement on Elections in Sudan," April 21, 2015, http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2015/04/240887.htm; Human Rights Watch news release, "Sudan: Surge in Detentions, Beatings, Around Elections," April 28, 2015, https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/04/28/sudan-surge-detention-beatings-around-elections.

[19] See, e.g., Amnesty International report, "Entrenched Repression – Freedom of Expression and Association Under Attack," April 2, 2015, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr54/1364/2015/en/.

patterns of sexual violence by government forces in Darfur.[20] A Sudanese media watchdog, Journalists Association for Human Rights, reported 66 incidents of newspaper confiscations in 2014-2015.[21]

Authorities also stifled reporting by arresting and harassing journalists, including while they were trying to cover protests; and by bringing criminal charges such as publishing false news, against journalists. Several journalists, including Amal Habbani and Fatima Ghazali, were charged with crimes for writing about the rape of Safiya Ishaq, an artist and graduate student, by national security officials in Khartoum following the wave of protests in January 2011.[22] Both were sentenced to fines and prison following convictions that were denounced by the UN special representative of the secretary-general on sexual violence in conflict.[23] Another journalist, Rashan Tawfiq Oshi, was charged with defamation for writing about NISS abuses during the Khartoum University female student dorms protest in October 2014.[24] In December 2014, the state security prosecutor charged Madiha Abdallah, the editor-in-chief of the communist newspaper *al-Maidan*, with undermining the constitution (a crime that is punishable by death) after the paper carried an interview with a rebel leader.[25] In addition political figures and individual activists – many of whom are profiled in this report – have been arrested for speaking out or writing on politically sensitive issues.[26]

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[20] Government officials have frequently been confronted with—and have categorically denied and refused to investigate — well-documented reports of sexual violence, including in Darfur where government forces have carried out mass rapes. See, e.g., Human Rights Watch, Mass Rapes in North Darfur: Sudanese Army Attacks against Civilians in Tabit, February 11, 2015, https://www.hrw.org/report/2015/02/11/mass-rape-north-darfur/sudanese-army-attacks-against-civilians-tabit and "Men With No Mercy": Rapid support Forces Attacks against Civilians in Darfur, Sudan, September 9, 2015, https://www.hrw.org/report/2015/09/09/men-no-mercy/rapid-support-forces-attacks-against-civilians-darfur-sudan.

[21] See, e.g., "NISS confiscates print-runs of two newspapers," Radio Dabanga, September 20, 2015, https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/security-gags-el-sudani-newspaper-over-pollution-report (referencing the statistic).

[22] Sudan Tribune, "Another Sudanese journalist jailed on rape case charges," July 26, 2011, http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article39642.

[23] "Rapists, not reporters must face criminal charges in Sudan," *UN News*, August 3, 2011, http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=39221#.VkUKsE2FOUk.

[24] Human Rights Watch interview with Rashan Tawfiq Oshi, November 3, 2014.

[25] Reporters without Borders, "A journalist from al-midan newspaper in government sights again," January 22, 2015, http://en.rsf.org/sudan-a-jouranlist-from-al-midan-21-01-2015,47523.html.

[26] For example Sadiq al-Mahdi, head of the National Umma Party and former president of Sudan, was detained on May 17, 2014 after publicly criticizing the Rapid Support Forces' abuses in Darfur. Ibrahim al-Sheikh, head of the Sudan Congress Party, was detained for similar reasons in June. Human Rights Watch World Report 2015: Sudan. https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2015/country-chapters/sudan In May 2015, two activists were detained by NISS for speaking out about sexual

Both the NISS and the government's regulatory agency for nongovernmental organizations, the Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC), restrict civil society. They have raided many organizations' offices, including those working on broad human rights and other issues not directly related to women. They have harassed and detained staff members, seized valuable equipment and funds, and interfered in their work, denied registration and closed organizations without stating reasons.[27] Since 2009 – when Sudan expelled 13 international groups and shut down three national human rights groups following the announcement of the International Criminal Court (ICC) case against Omar al-Bashir – many other groups, local and international, have been expelled or closed.[28]

These patterns have had a stifling effect on Sudanese civil society, including women's groups. As one woman, a longtime trainer who has worked with many of the organizations, put it: "Women's rights groups work in extremely hostile environment and we are always at risk of being closed at any moment."[29] Asha al-Karib, director of Sudan Organization for Research and Development, a women's rights group, observed, the government has made "a serious attempt to close down, freeze, and restrict civil society organizations," and this has a profound impact not just on the work, but on groups' ability to secure funding.

Hostile Environment for Female Activists and Women's Rights Groups

Sudan's current Islamic government, dominated by the National Islamist Front (NIF) later renamed the National Congress Party (NCP), came to power by military coup in 1989. The regime espoused a strict Islamic ideology with little tolerance for secular politics. It stifled all protests, banned unions and political parties, purged the civil service, beefed up the national security service, and quickly became known for its highly repressive tactics,

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violence in schools, and corruption. See Amnesty International, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr54/1759/2015/en/.

[27] Amnesty International, "Entrenched Repression – Freedom of Expression and Association Under Attack," April 2, 2015, at https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr54/1364/2015/en/.

[28] For example, Sudan has expelled Doctors without Borders from several parts of the country and suspended the work of the International Committee for the Red Cross for much of 2014. In June 2012 the government ordered closure of seven international groups working in eastern Sudan and in December 2012, it closed four civil society organizations on the heels of a propaganda campaign against groups receiving foreign funding, accusing them of spying. ACJPS http://www.acjps.org/the-government-of-sudan-closes-the-offices-of-seven-international-organizations-2/ and "End Crackdown on Civil Society," Human Rights Watch news release, January 13, 2013. https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/01/13/sudan-end-crackdown-civil-society.

[29] Human Rights Watch interview with Majda Salih, November 2014.

including arbitrary detentions in secret, illegal, security-run prisons, known as "ghost houses," and for torture.[30]

The impact on women was harsh: thousands of women were arbitrarily dismissed from their jobs, and various laws on guardianship, personal status, and public morality, imposed new restrictions on women's inheritance, movement, travel, what they wear and how they behave in public.[31] Negative cultural and social perceptions of women, promoted in official ideology, further reinforce discrimination, harassment, and various forms of ill-treatment of women activists.[32] As documented in this report, authorities may use social conventions, rather than political or administrative reasons, to harass or threaten women, or to deny permission to organizations to conduct certain activities.

Government officials have expressed open hostility to women's rights and women activists. In March 2012, Nafie Ali Nafie, a presidential adviser, warned female members of the ruling NCP against "those women activists working with international organizations to implement destructive plans against the community," a clear reference to women's rights groups.[33] Pro-government media have referred to activists against the public order law as "prostitutes."[34] As one female activist who was arrested and interrogated by security officials for 20 hours for protesting in 2012 told Human Rights Watch, there is a "clear stigma on the girls and women who are working in the field of women's rights and engaging in the rights arena."[35]

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[30] Robert O. Collins, "A History of Modern Sudan," pp 185-188; For a comprehensive account of repression see Human Rights Watch, "Behind the Red Line: Political Repression in Sudan," May, 1996 https://www.hrw.org/report/1996/05/01/behind-red-line/political-repression-sudan.

[31] Robert O. Collins, p. 191-192. Several laws, including certain provisions in the 1991 criminal law, public order laws and personal status laws adopted during this period eroded women's civil and political rights. See SIHA Network, "Third-class Citizens: Women and Citizenship in Sudan – A paper on women's struggle for equal citizenship in Sudan," September 2015, http://www.sihanet.org/content/third-class-citizens-women-and-citizenship-sudan.

[32] Equal Rights Trust, in partnership with Sudanese Organisation for Research and Development, "In Search of Confluence: Addressing Discrimination and Inequality in Sudan," October 2014, http://www.equalrightstrust.org/search-confluence-addressing-discrimination-and-inequality-sudan (Chapter 2.4 on gender discrimination)

[33] See report on Nafie's speech in Al-Ahram (Arabic) March 18, 2012, http://www.alahramsd.com/ah_news/29347.html

[34] Human Rights Watch interview with Layla Ali Alhaj, a lawyer and women's rights activist, Khartoum, May 2015 (referencing Alwifaq newspaper, August 19, 2009).

[35] Interview with Suzana el-Wakeel in Khartoum, November 13, 2015.

The apparent presumption of many government, law enforcement and security officials that many women's rights activists are affiliated with the opposition – whether true or not – makes the activists' work even harder. "This is one of the big problems facing women's rights groups and women human rights defenders. Their work is always labelled by the government to be political," explained one long-time activist and professor, who is not a member of any political party."[We are] branded as opposition."[36]

Activists who speak out on topics the government deems sensitive – such as sexual violence – are especially susceptible to government restriction, interference or outright censure. After the international women's rights organization, Nobel Women's Initiative, published a report on sexual violence in Sudan in 2013, for example, members of parliament discussed the report and reportedly threatened women quoted in it.[37] As noted above, authorities brought criminal charges against journalists for reporting on alleged rapes by security agents (notably the alleged rape of Safiya Ishaq). They have also arrested those who speak on sexual violence: for instance, in May 2015, activist Nasreen Ali Mustafa and another were detained by national security after attending a symposium at which she spoke about sexual harassment and abuse in school buses.[38]

Many of the women interviewed for this report said that with the end of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, in 2011, the space for their work has narrowed, and they simply cannot work openly or do advocacy on sensitive issues for fear of being arrested or their organizations being shut down. These issues include "human rights," "democracy," "women's rights," "protection," "sexual violence," "women's participation," and even promoting Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).[39] As a result, many said they keep a low profile and work in more subtle ways than previously.

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[36] Human Rights Watch interview with professor (name withheld), Khartoum, April 2015.

[37] Human Rights Watch interview with Fahima Hashim, director of Salmmah Women's Resource Center in Khartoum, November 11, 2014.

[38] See Amnesty International, "Sudan: Activists Whereabouts Unknown," May 29, 2015, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr54/1759/2015/en/.

[39] Human Rights Watch interview with Safaa Adam, Khartoum, September 5, 2015; Human Rights Watch interview with Zeinab Badreldin, Kampala, November 16, 2014; Human Rights Watch interview with Majda Salih, Khartoum, November 2014; Human Rights Watch interviews with (names withheld), Khartoum, December 23 and December 29, 2014.

Nevertheless, female activists individually and as women's rights organizations do continue to publicly advocate for their rights in various ways, even in the face of abuses documented throughout this report. Many continue to participate in protests, and the group *No to Women's Oppression*, formed in 2009, continues to protest the public order laws and other issues. As Asma Ismail, a youth activist who has worked with several different organizations in Sudan, observed: "The restrictions on civil space and the targeting of women activists did not stop women from continuing their activism but it made it harder for them. We had to keep a low profile and develop coping mechanisms."[40]

Discriminatory Laws Used Against Female Activists

Many Sudanese laws discriminate against women in various ways, reflecting Sudan's interpretation of Shari'ah law and contributing to a hostile environment that has a chilling effect on women's activism, including the crime of adultery. While it is applied disproportionately against women, and carries humiliating flogging and stoning penalties that violate international standards, it does not have a specific impact on the work of female activists. Yet it is emblematic of the environment in which female activists work.[41] Although no executions by stoning have been carried out, courts frequently impose flogging and fines for adultery and other morality crimes.[42]

Sudan's so-called "public order regime" is more directly relevant to stifling activism. Spelled out in Article 152 of the criminal code, it criminalizes dress or public actions "contrary to public morals."[43] These laws are vague and proscribe private matters that should not be the subject of criminal law, such as clothing choice or keeping company

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[40] Human Rights Watch interview with Asmaa Ismail, Khartoum, December 2014.

[41] In early 2015, amendments to the adultery law separated the crime of rape from the crimes of zina (sex outside marriage) reduced the risk of women being accused of zina when they report rape – a welcome reform if implemented. See Women Living Under Muslim Law, "Sudan's Revised Penal Code: A Mixed Picture for Women," June 3, 2015, http://www.wluml.org/resource/sudans-revised-penal-code-mixed-picture-women.

[42] WELDD blog, "Women and Morality Laws in Sudan: Flogging and Death by Stoning Sentences Continue," by Hikma Ahmed, July 8, 2015, http://www.weldd.org/blogs/weldd/women-and-morality-laws-sudan-flogging-and-death-stoning-sentences-continue; REDRESS, "No More Cracking of the Whip," March 2012, "http://www.pclrs.com/downloads/Corporal%20Punishment%20-%20English.pdf.

[43] Sudan's criminal code art. 152(1): Whoever commits, in a public place, an act, or conducts himself in an indecent manner, or a manner contrary to public morality, or wears an indecent, or immoral dress, which causes annoyance to public feelings, shall be punished, with whipping, not exceeding forty lashes, or with fine, or with both. (2) The act shall be deemed contrary to public morality, if it is so considered in the religion of the doer, or the custom of the country where the act occurs.

with someone from the opposite sex, and carry flogging penalties.[44] Charges are often brought against marginalized communities, such as women alcohol-brewers, or non-Muslim women and girls, in summary proceedings without fair trial protections, and usually result in fines and flogging, which violates international prohibitions on cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment.[45]

Women, including high-profile activists, have repeatedly been arrested and prosecuted under these laws. For example, in November 2013 in Red Sea state, public order police arrested lawyer and activist Najlaa Mohammed Ali and her male travel companion, also an activist, alleging the man had placed his hand on Ali's shoulder contrary to the law. Both were charged with "indecent behavior," punishable by 40 lashes, and jailed. Following international outcry, charges were dropped.[46] In August 2013, Amira Osman, an engineer and activist in Khartoum, was arrested for refusing to wear a headscarf, charged with an "indecent act" under art. 152, and jailed for five hours. The trial was delayed indefinitely after Amira's lawyers challenged the constitutionality of the public order laws.[47]

Some, like Amira, have turned their arrest on public order charges into a platform to protest against the laws. In 2009, a UN staff member, Lubna Hussein, was arrested for wearing trousers. She invited journalists to attend her trial. Hussein was convicted and given the option to pay a fine or go to jail; she chose jail but a journalists' association paid the fine for her. Hussein's case inspired fellow activists to form the women's rights coalition *No to Women's Oppression*, whose members, some wearing trousers, protested against the public order laws at Hussein's hearing. More than 40 were reportedly arrested, and at least one beaten by police.[48]

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[44] For a full analysis of the regime, see SIHA report "Beyond Trousers" http://www.sihanet.org/content/beyound-trousers; REDRESS, "No More Cracking of the Whip," ibid.

[45] Human Rights Watch news release, "Sudan: End Lashing, Reform Public Order Rules," December 15, 2015, http://www.hrw.org/news/2010/12/15/sudan-end-lashing-reform-public-order-rules.

[46] Najlaa had previously been arrested by NISS officials while protesting for accountability for 2005 massacre in Port Sudan and in April 2012 during a wave of arrests after clashes at Heglig. Telephone interview with Najlaa Mohammed Ali on November 13, 2014; Amnesty press statement "Sudan: Two Activists at Risk of Flogging for 'Indecent Behavior," 12 November 2013, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2013/11/sudan-two-activists-risk-flogging-indecent-behaviour/.

[47] Human Rights Watch interview with Amira Osman, Khartoum, November 21, 2014; see "Calls for Sudan to End Flogging of Women," Sudan Tribune, November 10, 2013. http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article48751.

[48] New York Times, "Sudan fines woman for wearing trousers," September 7, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/08/world/africa/08sudan.html?_r=0.

Other cases have also galvanized activists to protest the penalty of flogging. In 2010, a video of a woman being flogged by public order police circulated widely, sparking protests inside Sudan against the public order system, at which dozens of women were arrested.[49] A 2015 case, in which public order police arrested 12 ethnic Nuba Christian girls charging 10 with "indecent dress," sparked criticism not just of the public order laws and flogging penalties, but official intolerance of religious freedom.[50]

Although most victims of the public order regime are not self-identified activists, the threat of arrest restricts movement and public conduct, and broadly undermines women's ability to participate in public life – including certain forms of activism. "In addition to the oppression that all activists face such as arrest and detention [...] you have to watch the way you dress to avoid the harassment by public order police and you have to defend your existence as a woman," explained one young women's rights activist.[51]

In one example of such harassment, a student member of a street theater group that promotes the rights of women and girls told Human Rights Watch: "police come to us where we work and say 'you are not from good families, why are you performing on the street with men' and threatened to arrest us because we are women walking in the street at night with strange men."[52]

In January 2016, a high ranking NCP member, Badria Suliman, proposed to repeal the public order laws in the context of the ongoing national dialog and constitution-making process.[53] A time of writing, Human Rights Watch was not aware of any actions taken to implement the proposal.

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[49] Human Rights Watch news release, "Sudan: End Lashing, Reform Public Order Rules," December 15, 2010, https://www.hrw.org/news/2010/12/15/sudan-end-lashing-reform-public-order-rules; Opheera McDoom, Reuters, "Sudan police arrest women protesting at flogging video," December 14, 2010, http://www.reuters.com/article/ozatp-sudan-women-flogging-idAFJOE6BD07U20101214.

[50] On June 25, 2015 the public order police arrested 12 Christian girls and women between 17 and 23, all ethnic Nuba, in front of the evangelical Baptist church in Khartoum where they had attended a ceremony. Police released two of them after several hours, but the others were released on bail on June 27, and charged with "indecent dress." Two were sentenced to high fines, one to flogging, which was overturned on appeal in November 2015 See, e.g., "UN experts urge Sudan to overturn 'outrageous conviction,'" August 28, 2015, UN News Centre, http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=51750#.VpHWZBGPHDk.

[51] Human Rights Watch interview with Walaa Salah Mohammed Abdelrahman, Kampala, November 16, 2014.

[52] Human Rights Watch interview with (name withheld), Khartoum, November 2014.

[53] See Al Jareeda (in Arabic), excerpt at Al Tahyeer, January 13, 2016, http://www.altaghyeer.info/ar/2013/news/9071/.

II. Patterns of Abuse against Women Human Rights Defenders, Activists, and Protesters

Sexual and Gender-based Violence

Almost all the female activists Human Rights Watch interviewed reported that they had experienced some form of gender-based violence in reprisal for their activism, ranging from rape and assault to threats of rape, attacks on their reputation and verbal harassment. In most cases, the perpetrators of the abuses were identified as national security agents or police.

While our research does not purport to quantify the scale or prevalence of these abuses, the incidents described below illustrate how women activists are at risk of abuses their male colleagues are far less likely to experience, from brutal acts of sexual violence to damaging attacks on women activists' reputation. Some of the incidents also illustrate how security personnel can use the threat of social stigma to intimidate women they subject to sexual violence into remaining silent about the abuse, abandoning their activism or even fleeing the country altogether.

To Human Rights Watch's knowledge, the Sudanese authorities have not investigated or prosecuted any perpetrators of the crimes described in this section. Most of the women did not receive sufficient medical or psychosocial support following the violence. None of them successfully brought charges against the perpetrators. In some cases, women were instead charged with public disorder and other crimes.

Rape and Sexual Violence

Government security forces, especially NISS, have raped and sexually abused female activists with impunity. The cases described below arose in various contexts and represent some of the most serious examples of sexual violence against female activists over the past five years.

On January 30, 2011, Safiya Ishaq, an artist and an active member of Girifna, a youth movement, participated in the large-scale anti-government protests that had gripped Khartoum. Two weeks later, on February 13, after purchasing art supplies in downtown Khartoum, Safiya was abducted off the street by two male security agents in plainclothes who took her to the NISS office and, together with other men, beat her and interrogated her about her activism. During the interrogation, the men removed her clothing and raped her over the course of several hours. They released her without charging her with any crime, telling her to get dressed and leave.

"Two men in plain clothes shouted me "ya bit ya bit!" [hey girl!] and I turned to run but they caught me and forced me into a small white car. I tried to scream but one of them put his hand over my mouth… they were hitting me all over my upper body," she recalled. The men took her to an office and forced her out of the car. "They threw me on the ground and were beating me and kicking me with their boots. They accused me of distributing fliers for Girifna … they insulted me saying I am a communist and an indecent girl." She fainted during the beating. "When I woke up I found two men holding my legs and the other one raping me. Three of them took turns and raped me. I was in a lot of pain. My hands were tied with my headscarf."

After the rape, the men told her to leave and threatened her they would rape her again if she continued her activities. Safiya walked home in pain, and sought medical care for her wounds. With help from friends she reported the crime to the police and prosecutors, but was told by police not to proceed with the case. "[The policeman] said security wouldn't do such a thing and told me not to proceed with my complaint because it would ruin my family name."

In the face of mounting publicity about her case and social pressure, Safiya fled the country in March 2011, and now lives in exile in France. Speaking to Human Rights Watch in December 2014, she said, "I became a victim again. It wasn't enough the government subject me to all this but society and my colleagues also labelled me an indecent girl."

During the lead up to the 2015 elections, security officers allegedly abducted, beat, and raped Samia (pseudonym), an opposition party member, while she was distributing pamphlets promoting an elections boycott in a town in southeastern Sudan. She told Human Rights Watch that on the morning of April 2, 2015, while she was leaving home to distribute the pamphlets, three men in plainclothes, who told her they were security agents when she asked, arrested her. She said that the men shoved her into their land cruiser, tied her hands and covered her eyes, and drove her to a location far from a main road where they tied her to a tree, beat her, and took turns raping her.

"They made me sit down and tied my hands around the tree," she recalled. Then the men allegedly kicked and beat her, and interrogated her about her political affiliations. "They said, 'you women activists and party members, you are all *sharmuta* [whores].' I said I work in what I believe. Then they started kicking me and one of them took his trousers off and started raping me." Samia told Human Rights Watch that all three men raped her and threatened that they would rape her again if she told anyone.

After the rape, they dropped her some distance away in the desert and she walked to the nearest town, where she sought medical care for injuries. She then travelled to Khartoum where she said that security personnel again arrested her on April 25, 2015, detaining her for several hours, and threatened her not to tell anyone about the ordeal. At the time of being interviewed by Human Rights Watch, in May 2015, she had trouble speaking coherently and appeared severely traumatized; she has since left Sudan for treatment.[54]

Nuba women activists working with displaced communities in Khartoum and Omdurman have also been targeted for rape and sexual violence, often by security personnel who accused them of supporting the rebel Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North.[55] In many of these cases the women activists were themselves displaced, from marginalized communities, and did not have resources or contacts with relevant organizations to protect themselves from possible abuses.

Kaka (pseudonym), a teacher and Nuba community leader, told Human Rights Watch she was raped by security agents in April 2012, at a time when government authorities were cracking down on Nuba activists. She had already been arrested eight times in 2011-2012 for her work on behalf of displaced Nuba. She said she had been beaten and repeatedly warned not to hold meetings in her home or do any work with displaced communities. "Every time they arrested me they called me names and touched my body and said 'we can do what we want to you, we can rape you or kill you,'" she recalled.

On April 15, 2012, security officers arrested her at her home at around 9 p.m. and took her to their office in Alkalakla neighborhood. "They said I am stubborn and I did not obey their

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[54] Human Rights Watch interview with opposition member (name withheld), Khartoum, May 2015.

[55] The SPLM-North spun off of the southern Sudan People's Liberation Movement, now the ruling party in independent South Sudan. Its armed wing, SPLA-North, and the Sudanese government have been fighting in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile states since 2011.

orders [...] and they would teach me a lesson." She said that two of the men held her while two others raped her. "I was screaming but after the second one I could not do anything, I was in so much pain."

She said that her captors accused her of working with the armed opposition and used racist slurs against her, such as '*khadim'* [slave]. She said that after about 12 hours they released her, threatening to harm her children if she told anyone about the rape. Four days later security agents allegedly raided her house and arrested her and threatened her again not to tell anyone about the rapes. After this last incident, she fled the country and now lives in exile. [56]

Nagwa (pseudonym), a trainer in women's and children's rights working with Nuba communities displaced by the conflict, told Human Rights Watch that on March 1, 2015, while holding a workshop in Omdurman, three plainclothes men forced her into a car with two other men who identified themselves as security officers. "The men said 'we know you and we know all your work in Ombada and Nuba Mountains and you must tell us about your organization,'" she recalled, and accused her of working with foreigners and rebels and leaking information. "The interrogation lasted about 15 minutes. Then I do not recall what happened," she said.

She said that she was dropped off in an area called al-Kasarat, on the outskirts of Omdurman— beaten, bruised and bleeding from her genitals. She believes she was raped by the men at some point after her interrogation, but could not remember details. She was still traumatized when Human Rights Watch researchers spoke with her in late May 2015. She said that a few days after the abduction, security officers closed the organization she was working with, and placed her home under surveillance.

Nagwa said that security officers arrested her again on May 16 while she was on the way to a meeting with the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women. Two men in plain clothes stopped her and ordered her to come with them "or they will do to me what they did before," she recalled. They blindfolded her, drove her to their office, and threatened

[56] Human Rights Watch interview with teacher (name withheld), in Egypt, November 20, 2014.

her not to tell any activists about the rape. They released her after eight hours. "I wanted to tell my story to the rapporteur but I was followed and threatened by security."[57]

Outspoken activists from Darfur have also been in targeted. In one example from 2011, Hawa Abdallah "Jango," a well-known community activist from North Darfur, was detained for more than two months and subjected to torture and sexual violence. On May 6 2011, national security agents raided her family's home in Abu Shouk displaced persons camp, and using violent force, took her to the security office for two days, then transferred her another facility in Khartoum. On May 8, a photo was released of Hawa holding a Bible, her face bruised, on a government news outlet accusing her of attempting to convert children to Christianity. She was held incommunicado, with the exception of one visit by UN officials which, she said, was supervised. She was never formally charged.[58] During interrogations, security officers whipped and beat her with iron rods, electrocuted her, pulled out her fingernails, and sexually abused her, she said. They accused her of supporting the ICC and being a spy, among other things. They released her on July 12, 2011, threatening her and her family if she continued her activism. Shortly thereafter, Hawa fled the country. In 2012, she received the International Woman of Courage award.[59]

More recently, security forces used sexual violence against Darfuri students protesting their eviction from a university dormitory in Khartoum. In October 2014, national security officials allegedly raped at least one female student following the eviction of about 70 mostly Darfuri women from the Zahra women's dorm of Khartoum University. According to multiple eye-witness accounts collected at the time, police and security officers entered rooms, beat women, groped and taunted them and threatened to assault them sexually. One women's group reported that security officers forced some students to undress, photographed them and threatened to use photos against them.[60]

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[57] Human Rights Watch interview with trainer (name withheld), Khartoum, in May and December 2015.

[58] Human Rights Watch news release, "Sudan: Free Female Activist," May 11, 2011, https://www.hrw.org/news/2011/05/11/sudan-free-female-activist.

[59] Human Rights Watch interview with Hawa Abdallah, January 9, 2016. See also http://www.state.gov/s/gwi/programs/iwoc/2012/bio/.

[60] Human Rights Watch news release, "Sudan: Police Beat, Arrest Female Students," October 15, 2014, http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/10/15/sudan-police-beat-arrest-female-students.

Many were detained for questioning at NISS offices. Rihab (pseudonym), a student leader detained for more than a month, told Human Rights Watch that the security officers beat and raped her. She said security officers accused her of being a prostitute and taking drugs and of running a brothel in the dorms, and questioned her about her political affiliations and activism. In one of the interrogation sessions, she said she lost consciousness and woke up "naked with all four security officers there looking at me." She said that she was then shown a video of the four men raping her. Rihab said security officers raped her three more times during her month of detention. Upon her release, she appeared bruised and could not walk properly. She left Sudan fearing for her safety and now lives in exile. [61]

Sexual Assault, Rape Threats, and Other Threats

> "The police and national security are using very abusive, sexist language against women during arrests… They threaten women activists with rape or rape of their daughters." [62]

Many of the women human rights defenders, activists and protesters who were arrested and detained in various contexts, even for very short periods, said national security officers or police sexually assaulted or threatened to rape them during arrest and interrogations.

Shadia Abdelmonim, a long-time human rights defender and women's rights activist, arrested many times since 2002, said that during one of her detentions in Khartoum in 2011 security forces threatened her with death, rape, and humiliation: "They threatened me with rape. They told me they could take off my clothes and picture me in a sexual position. They also said, 'we can kill you and no one would know anything about what happened.'" Because of her profile as a women's rights activist, she faced repeated threats and surveillance by the national security officers, especially after the September 2013 protests. After receiving a warning that she would be arrested, Shadia decided to leave Sudan with her family in 2014.[63]

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[61] Human Rights Watch with student leader (name withheld), in Sudan and Egypt, November 2014 and August 2015.

[62] Human Rights Watch interview with with longtime women's rights activist (name withheld), Khartoum, December 23, 2014.

[63] Human Rights Watch interview with Shadia Abdelmonim, Khartoum, November 17, 2014.

Amira Osman Hamid, an engineer and well-known activist in her mid-30s who was arrested in 2013 for refusing to wear a head scarf, was among a group of 14 women detained for several weeks during the 2012 protests. Most were arrested in June or early July and held until mid-August when released by presidential pardon.

Amira told Human Rights Watch that on June 24, 2012, national security officers arrested her with her sisters in Khartoum, beat them and took them to the NISS offices for questioning for several hours. A few days later, officers came to her home and rearrested her "on the ground of being active in my area," apparently because she was helping the community to protest high water and electricity bills.

She said around 20 armed men in plain clothes surrounded her house, arrested everyone present, and drove them to the security offices in Khartoum for questioning. "They threatened me with rape. They said 'we will take off your clothes and rape you in front of your brother.' This was one of the most painful and terrifying things I have ever experienced," she recalled.

Amira said she was then transferred to another security office and detained in the parking lot for two nights before being transferred to Omdurman prison, where she was detained for another 52 days.

Najlaa Sid Ahmed, a videographer and member of the youth group *Girifna* who was detained several times between 2010 and 2012 while documenting elections and various protests, was also threatened with rape. In June 2012, NISS officers arrested Najlaa while she was documenting the impact of war in Southern Kordofan by recording video testimonies. She told Human Rights Watch they blindfolded her and took her to a NISS office and accused her of spying on the country. "They asked me to cooperate with them by stopping filming and posting [to the internet] these testimonies," and accused her of providing evidence to the ICC. "When I refused to collaborate with [the officer], he threatened me with rape," she recalled.[64] On the last day of the detention, she fainted from low blood pressure and had to be hospitalized; shortly thereafter she decided to relocate to Uganda with her family.

[64] Human Rights Watch interview with Najlaa Sid Ahmed, Kampala, November 22, 2014, and her recorded account, http://girifna.com/blog-girifna/7422.

In March 2013, in Khartoum, two plainclothes security officers arrested Hala (pseudonym), a young activist from Kadugli, Southern Kordofan, working with displaced Nuba communities in Khartoum. She told Human Rights Watch that the security officers blindfolded her and detained her in their office for three days: "They said 'you are just a Nuba woman, you are worthless and we will rape you' and they touched me all over my body," she recalled. During interrogations they allegedly accused her of spying for rebels and leaking information to international organizations. Hala said that after three days she was released – but only after signing an oath that she would not continue her activist work.[65]

Several women arrested during protests in 2013 also reported rape threats. Samar Marghani, a pharmacist who was arrested in Khartoum while recording the shooting of a protester at close range, was badly beaten and threatened with rape. She told Human Rights Watch that a group of men in plainclothes, apparently working with police, forced her into a truck, beat her, and took her to a police station, where they accused her of posing as a journalist. At the station they continued to beat her, "all over my body with sticks, guns and insulted me with very bad insults," including threats to rape her. Her mother found her in the station on the floor, bleeding from her head.

Samar was released after four hours and charged with public nuisance, rioting, possession of obscene pictures, among other crimes. She was eventually convicted of breach of peace and tranquility and sentenced to a fine or prison. Because authorities have not waived legal immunities, her attempts to prosecute the perpetrators have been unsuccessful.[66]

Novelist Rania Mamoun told Human Rights Watch that when she was arrested during September 2013 protests in Wad Medani, police officers beat her, groped her private parts, and threatened to rape her on two different occasions. "They dragged me on the ground and called me all sorts of names then threatened me with gang rape," she wrote in a public account.[67]

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[65] Human Rights Watch interview with activist from Kadugli (name withheld) in Egypt, November 22, 2014.

[66] Human Rights Watch interview with lawyer, Nabil Adeeb, on November 7, 2015, and telephone interview with Samar Merghani, December 2015. She was convicted of violating article 69 of Sudan's criminal code of 1991.

[67] Human Rights Watch interview with Rania Mamoun, Khartoum, November 2015; Rania Mamoun, "A day in hell," September 30, 2013, http://girifna.com/8797; recorded account, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SAJIxgjRkuE.

More recent examples include the arrest, during a protest against violence in Darfur in front of the national parliament in Khartoum in July 2014 of a Darfuri student. The student told Human Rights Watch that security officers assaulted, harassed and threatened her. She said they dragged her out of a public mini-bus, beat her causing bleeding, and took her to the Omdurman south police station for interrogation. "They beat me and verbally assaulted me. They said awful things and called me prostitute." After the arrest, she began receiving calls and texts from the security officers threatening to rape and kill her.[68]

In an example from North Darfur, two female legal aid lawyers were allegedly assaulted and harassed by police in a police station in El Fasher while defending a group of 20 university students arrested for protesting the elections in April 2015. "They put me in one of the offices and closed the door and started slapping me and grabbing me and abusing me verbally. They said: 'you are nothing, we will hang you up and we will rape you, you will be under our boots, you are just a prostitute,'" recalled one of the lawyers.[69]

Student Protests

Female student activists involved in various protests on university campuses also reported how police and national security officers engaged in clear patterns of sexual harassment and taunting during crackdowns.

"Every time there was protest in the dorm or in the campus the security and police stand in front of our dorms for hours and harass every female student entering or exiting the dorm. I cannot even say the words they use," said one Khartoum University student who protested many times.[70] Another student, actively promoting women's rights on campus, recalled how police beat her and other female protesters and insulted them during protests in 2012: "[They] said 'you are girls, protesting is not your thing. Why should girls take to the streets? Good girls do not protest.' They called us many bad names and made sexual remarks."[71]

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[68] Human Rights Watch interview with Darfuri activist (name withheld), Khartoum, November 10, 2014.

[69] Human Rights Watch interview (name withheld), El Fasher, North Darfur, May 2015.

[70] Human Rights Watch interview (name withheld), Khartoum, November 12, 2014.

[71] Human Rights Watch interview (name withheld), Khartoum, October 2014.

A student leader from Kosti, White Nile, said that during the 2012 Sudan Revolts, protests at the university there, police and national security beat and insulted them, "calling us names like 'you are sluts' and arrested many of us including me," she said.[72]

Several students who were arrested during public protests said security officials sent them threatening messages on social media. "They said they will arrest and harm me because they can, unless I choose to join them," recalled Sahar (pseudonym), a Khartoum University activist on women's rights of her experience in 2012. Lemia (pseudonym), a digital activist with Youth for Change, a pro-democracy group, received threatening messages from people she suspects are national security officers on her Facebook account, saying "we will rape you and your mother in front of your eyes."[73]

Attacks on Women's Reputations

Many of the women activists who were detained told Human Rights Watch that their detention served to reinforce wider patterns of gender inequality, and they subsequently faced family or social pressures and other lasting repercussions that male activists subjected to similar abuses simply did not have to contend with. As Asha al-Karib, director of a women's rights organization in Khartoum, explained, "Women activists can be harassed and prevented from continuing their activism by their families. When talking about women's rights, we have to go inside the family, because the family has a huge impact on women."

In some cases, women described how security officers slandered or threatened to slander their reputations to family and friends. For example, in February 2012 when a community worker and youth activist was released after three days of detention following her arrest during a protest, the security agents who detained her allegedly told her father "that I am following males who use drugs and drink and I will lose my reputation and will destroy his also," she recalled. As a result of the allegations, her family forced her to stop her work and participate in protests or meet colleagues.

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[72] Human Rights Watch interview (name withheld), Khartoum, November 13, 2014.

[73] Human Rights Watch interview with Lubna Al Junaid, Khartoum, October 2014.

"I think security tactics now is more targeting the families more than the women [...] They know we are in a community where women are not yet independent and we still have to obey our families and protect their reputation," she said.[74]

A Nuba student at Nilein University told Human Rights Watch that she received many threats on her Facebook and mobile phone, telling her to stop her activities against the war in Southern Kordofan. She said national security officials contacted her family in early 2013 and "told them that I am lesbian and accused me of apostasy" and as a result her brother beat her and detained her in the house for months. "The security is reaching us inside our houses. They do not need to detain us anymore, the family members can do their jobs for them."[75]

Youth activist Rashida Shemseldin, was detained for more than two months in 2012,\. During her arrest from a café in Khartoum in 2012, NISS officers "pulled me by my blouse and scarf and started beating me in the street with sticks. One of them slapped me in the face," she recalled. She said that the men took her to the NISS office, where she found other female detainees also waiting, then questioned her for several hours about her role in the protests. They then transferred her to the women's prison in Omdurman where she said she was detained in isolation for 10 days before joining other women in a crowded cell.

Rashida said following the arrest, she experienced the effects of social stigma. "My house was under surveillance for days after my release and family put so much pressure on me to cut all my relations with my colleagues and stop participating in events. They were so afraid from the social stigma attached to my stay in prison."[76] Faced with the pressure of ongoing harassment and threats from national security personnel and warnings from her relatives, Rashida left Sudan for several months.

Rania Saeed, a community activist from Mahas, Northern state, was arrested in Khartoum several times in October 2014 because of her activism against the construction of dams (see more details below). She said following her arrest, national security personnel began

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[74] Human Rights Watch interview (name withheld), Khartoum, November, 2014

[75] Human Rights Watch interview (name withheld), Khartoum, December 2014

[76] Human Rights Watch interview with Rashida Shemseldin, Egypt, December 2014.

to contact her family directly, telling them she had "bad ethics" and spent time with "bad people." "My family started putting so much pressure on me, they asked me to leave the country because they were afraid of a bad reputation," she recalled.[77]

Journalist Rashan Tawfiq Oshi, who was arrested on July 17, 2012, while protesting for the release of detained journalists, also said that during her detention NISS officers threatened to photograph her in "embarrassing positions" and, when her family came to pick her up, told them "bad stories" about her personal life. "I believe the security is using everything they can to intimidate [us]. They are using the social norms to limit [our] ability to work and move. That is why they tried to tell wrong stories to my family about me."[78]

Beatings and Arbitrary Detentions

Most of the female activists and human rights defenders interviewed by Human Rights Watch reported experiencing a range of other abuses, in addition to the SGBV described above. These included beatings, arrests and arbitrary detentions, both during protests but also in a more targeted fashion. The examples below show that women, as well as their male counterparts, experience these types of abuses.

During Protests

While most of the worst beatings occurred during the mass protests of 2011, 2012 and 2013, authorities have also broken up dozens of smaller protests, sit-ins, and demonstrations over a range of issues, arrested women and used excessive force. Many women, of all ages, sustained injuries during these crackdowns, and women and girls were amongst those killed by government forces and aligned gunmen during the September 2013 protests.[79]

In one example from June 2012, a women's rights activist in her 50s and director of a peace-building organization, told Human Rights Watch that she was badly beaten as she searched for her son, a university student, during a protest: "A police officer attacked me

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77 Human Rights Watch interview with Rania Saeed, Egypt, December 2014.

78 Human Rights Watch interview with Rashan Tawfiq Oshi, Khartoum, November 3, 2014.

79 Human Rights Watch report, "We Stood, They Opened Fire," April 21, 2014, https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/04/21/we-stood-they-opened-fire/killings-and-arrests-sudans-security-forces-during.

with another student's mother. [...] The police beat me on my head. I was bleeding all over my face," she recalled. She was taken to the hospital for treatment and was then bed-ridden for weeks, she told Human Rights Watch.[80]

Rania Mamoun, the novelist who was arrested with her brother and sister on September 23, 2013, in Wad Medani, in al-Gazira state, described how security forces, "circled me like flies" and beat her so many times she "lost count" leaving bruises and other injuries to her face and body.[81] Police in Khartoum beat Samar Merghani (see above) so badly that her mother found her on the floor, bleeding from the head.

Many women protesters were detained arbitrarily, for long periods. In June and July 2012, more than a dozen women were detained for several weeks without charge in Omdurman women's prison. Most were released in mid-August by presidential pardon.[82] Rashida Shemseldin, a youth and women's rights activist (see above), was detained for one of the longest periods, 65 days. During the September 2013 crackdown, hundreds of people, including many women, were detained, some for up to a week.[83]

Female journalists were among those detained while covering protests. Maha Elsanosi, a freelance journalist and youth activist, was arrested in her car with another journalist while trying to cover the Sudan Revolts protests in June 2012. She told Human Rights Watch that NISS officials interrogated her for several hours about her activism and youth groups, threatened that she would "never see the sun again," and verbally abused her. She said that later the same evening a group of armed security men raided her family's home, intimidated family members, searched her room and seized phones and computers. They again detained her for several hours of interrogation and ordered her to return every day for three days.[84] Following the detentions, she left the country in 2012.

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[80] Human Rights Watch interview with activist (name withheld) Khartoum, December 23, 2014.

[81] Rania Mamoun, "A day in hell," September 30, 2013, http://girifna.com/8797; recorded account https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SAJIxgjRkuE.

[82] FIDH, Urgent Appeal, "Sudan: releases of defenders but judicial harassment has to stop," August 20, 2012, https://www.fidh.org/en/region/Africa/sudan/Sudan-releases-of-defenders-but.

[83] Human Rights Watch report, "We Stood, They Opened Fire: Killings and Arrests by Sudan's Security Forces during the September Protests," April 21, 2014, https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/04/21/we-stood-they-opened-fire/killings-and-arrests-sudans-security-forces-during .

[84] Telephone interview with Maha al Sanousi, Dubai, October 2014.

During the September 2013 protests, NISS officers arrested Amal Khalifa Habani, a prominent human rights activist and journalist, while she was covering the funeral of a slain protester.[85] She told Human Rights Watch that she was blindfolded and taken to an NISS office for interrogation. "There were many young detainees and they looked like they were badly beaten," she recalled. She was then transferred to Omdurman women's prison where she was detained until October 6, when she was released together with other female detainees, without charge. She had previously been arrested many times during protests, and is a founder of the group, *No to Women's Oppression*. [86]

In September 2014, during the one-year anniversary of the 2013 protester killings, dozens of women were detained for hours or days by national security agents.87 One woman who was among a group of youth activists arrested while making fliers in downtown Khartoum to commemorate the 2013 protester killings said security officers interrogated her for hours. They made her stand and sit repeatedly and sprayed air freshener in her eyes to force her to speak, and that she required medical attention upon her release ten days later:

> "They opened up my WhatsApp and Facebook accounts. When they realized that my tribe is *Jaalin* similar to the president's they accused me of associating myself with '*gharaba'* [people of the west, such as Darfur]. They accused me of being a leader in *Girifna* [youth movement] and threatened that I would never get out of there."[88]

In January 2016, Sudanese parliament amended the criminal code to increase penalties for damage by rioters, from six months to five years.[89] Some officials threatened to use it against a group of women arrested for staging a small demonstration in Khartoum against violence in Darfur and justice for victims of the September 2013 protester killings. At least

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[85] In December 2014, Amnesty International USA awarded Habani for her work defending women's rights, http://www.amnestyusa.org/news/press-releases/amnesty-international-usa-honors-sudanese-journalist-amal-habani-with-annual-award-for-women-s-human

[86] Human Rights Watch interview with Amal Habani, Khartoum, December 2014.

[87] Human Rights Watch interview with Negat Bushra, Omdurman, November 27, 2014.

[88] Human Rights Watch interview with (name withheld), Khartoum, November 5, 2014.

[89] "Sudan MPs Approve Harsher Penalties for Rioting," AFP, January 20, 2016 http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/afp/article-3409097/Sudan-MPs-approve-harsher-penalties-rioting.html.

two of the women were beaten by security officials, who also insulted the women and called them prostitutes.[90]

Activists Working with Conflict-Affected Communities

Government abuses against activists in conflict zones was beyond the scope of this research, but researchers found many examples of arrest of women activists and human rights defenders working with conflict-affected communities. In many cases, security officials presume or claim to believe that activists support the opposition or rebel groups.

One emblematic case was the arrest on March 15, 2012, of a prominent Nuba activist and teacher providing humanitarian assistance to displaced communities, Jalila Khamis Koko. Security officers arrested her from her home and reportedly detained her in solitary confinement for more than four and a half months.[91] At around 2 a.m. on March 15, 2012, a group of national security officers arrested her at her home. "I only had my pajamas on and they refused to allow me to wear my *toub* [traditional woman's garment]. They blindfolded and chained my hands and put me in a room for four hours," she recalled.

She told Human Rights Watch that after the initial interrogation, authorities transferred her to Omdurman women's prison and detained her in isolation, without access to lawyers or family. She received her first family visit after 56 days. NISS told her husband she was being held because of her activism and her supposed membership in SPLM-North. "I was in solitary confinement for four months and 18 days. The security interrogated me 8 times, each time for about six hours, in a very cold room or very hot temperature, repeating the same questions," she told Human Rights Watch.

Authorities charged her with crimes against the state, punishable by death. She said most charges were eventually dropped but fears they could be re-activated. Upon her release in January 2013, she said that she was not allowed to resume her post as a teacher or claim other work benefits, and felt pressured to stop her activities. "They told my husband to stop me from going out because I participate in public events such as political

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[90] Human Rights Watch correspondence with participant (name withheld). Khartoum, February 16, 2016; see also African Center for Justice and Peace Studies news statement, February 10, 2016, at http://www.acjps.org/protestors-calling-for-justice-for-victims-of-2013-protest-killings-beaten-and-detained-by-sudans-security-agency-in-khartoum/

[91] For more personal details see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jalila_Khamis_Koko.

symposiums or rallies. The security also called my sister and asked her to stop me going out."[92]

Those working with conflict-affected communities have also been targeted for abuses. In late February 2012 a group of security officers, some armed and in uniforms, raided the home of a young woman, Amel (pseudonym), from northern Sudan who had been working to document the situation of displaced Nuba. She told Human Rights Watch that the officers searched the house, took her laptop, phone, books and documents and ordered her to report at the NISS offices the next day. Amel said she was interrogated by security officers for 12 hours, harassed, threatened, accused of spying, then released with orders to return the following day. The threat of further abuses forced her to leave the country.[93]

Activists Working on Other Issues

Many other female activists have been targeted for arrest and detained because of their work on a broad range of other social, political and human rights issues. For example, security officers have targeted activists who oppose dam construction projects in northern Sudan. The projects are contentious because they would result in the flooding of villages and displace thousands, as other dams have in Sudan.[94]

On October 7, 2014, NISS officials arrested community activist Rania Saeed while she was printing statements in opposition to a controversial dam construction project in northern Sudan. Rania told Human Rights Watch security officials arrested her in downtown Khartoum and detained her for several hours at an office, beat her on the back and interrogated about her links to another known northern Sudanese activist opposing dam construction, Rashid Abbas, who was at the time also being held in detention.[95]

"I was released after hours of investigation which included beating on my back and standing for hours," she recalled to researchers. She said that she was arrested and

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[92] Human Rights Watch interview with Jalila Khamis Koko, Khartoum, December 2014.

[93] Human Rights Watch interview with activist (name withheld), May 2015, and e-mail correspondence, November 2015.

[94] Al-Monitor, "Sudan Nile Dam Threatens Nubian Villages," http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/05/sudan-kajbar-dam-nubians.html; "Sudan's anti-dam movement fights the flooding of Nubian culture," December 12, 2014, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/dec/12/sudans-anti-dam-movement-fights-the-flooding-of-nubian-culture.

[95] International Rivers, "Take Action for Illegally Detained Dam Fighter in Sudan," November 20, 2014, https://www.internationalrivers.org/resources/take-action-for-illegally-detained-dam-fighter-in-sudan-8446.

interrogated several more times before finally fleeing to Cairo in December 2014, where she sought medical attention for her back injuries. She has since returned to Sudan.[96]

In River Nile, authorities twice arrested Amna Mohammed, a teacher and activist involved in efforts to get compensation to the al-Manaseer community, displaced by the Merowe dam in 2010. She was arrested briefly in November 2011 during a sit-in, but then again in 2013 after she went on a local radio station demanding accountability for the government's response to the forced displacement of communities from the flooding in Atbara, River Nile. She said she was questioned for about six hours before being released.[97]

Activists have been targeted for specific speech or writing on sensitive topics, including sexual violence – as in the case of NISS detention of an activist who spoke about sexual harassment and abuse in school buses.[98]

In one example, an activist was targeted for her speech complaining of racism. On May 10, 2015, Solafa Seif Eldin Mohammed Saad, a university student in Khartoum who has worked with "*Shawaria al-hawadith*," a grass-roots initiative to help people access healthcare,[99] was arrested after she posted a description of an incident of racism she experienced. The post, from April 30, 2015, went viral and turned into an online debate about racism in Sudan, which coincided with Darfuri student protests in several universities.

Solafa told Human Rights Watch that several security agents arrested her near her home, blindfolded her, and took her to their office where they questioned her for several hours about her humanitarian work and comments on Facebook. She said that one officer was particularly aggressive, insulting her, slapping and hitting her, and using a razor to cut off her ponytail. "At that point I started shaking and crying and I nearly passed out," she recalled.[100]

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[96] Human Rights Watch interview with Rania Saeed, Egypt, December 2014.

[97] Human Rights Watch interview with Amna Mohamed, October 2014.

[98] See Amnesty International, "Sudan: Activists Whereabouts Unknown," May 29, 2015, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr54/1759/2015/en/.

[99] See, Patinkin, Jason, "For Sudan's uninsured, a dose of Facebook is the cure," May 28, 2015, Christian Science Monitor, http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Africa/2015/0528/For-Sudan-s-uninsured-a-dose-of-Facebook-is-the-cure

[100] Human Rights Watch interview with with Solafa Seif Eldin Mohammed Saad, May 2015.

She was released, but then re-arrested May 17 when agents raided her home and detained her briefly. She fled Sudan shortly thereafter. She and other members of the grass-roots group have received threats on social media and by phone, and she has been accused of spreading false information for reporting her detention.

Security agents have also harassed and arrested known activists at politically sensitive times, apparently because of their reputations as activists.

In April 2012, security agents summoned and questioned human rights lawyer Najlaa Ahmed for three days. The summons came during a wave of repression after Sudan and South Sudan clashed at Heglig oil fields. [101] The interrogation was apparently triggered by her receipt via DHL of a criminal law reform book, published by the London-based human rights group REDRESS, and her links to international human rights organizations. She said that security agents threatened to have her disbarred, to detain her, and to spread damaging rumors about her reputation. Security personnel also raided her office and seized laptops and work documents. Because of the repeated harassment and threats, Najlaa fled Sudan shortly thereafter.[102]

In Sennar state, for example, national security officers summoned a well-known human rights lawyer active in many areas including consultations for Sudan's new constitution. She told Human Rights Watch that they arrested her from court on the morning of September 25, 2013, against the backdrop of wider context of protests that week, and interrogated her about the type of cases she works on and her political affiliations, then searched her office and confiscated her laptop.[103]

In the April 2015 elections period, NISS officers arrested many activists who advocated a boycott of the elections.[104] One of the high-profile cases at that time was the alleged abduction by NISS officials of Dr. Sandra Kadouda, who is a well-known human rights

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[101] Human Rights Watch news release, "Sudan: Repression Intensifies after Border Violence," May 17, 2012, http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/05/17/sudan-repression-intensifies-after-border-violence.

[102] Human Rights Watch interview and e-mail correspondence with Najlaa Ahmed, 2015. Previously, in April 2011 security agents had arrested her while distributing food items to southern Sudanese communities.

[103] Human Rights Watch interview (name withheld), November 8, 2014.

[104] Human Rights Watch news release, "Sudan: Surge in Detention, Beatings, Around Elections," April 28, 2015, http://www.hrw.org/news/2015/04/28/sudan-surge-detention-beatings-around-elections.

activist and daughter of the late communist leader, Farouk Kadouda. Media reported that on April 12, 2015, while Sandra was driving to an event at the National Umma Party headquarters in Omdurman, men who later turned out to be security officers arrested her and held her for three days at an unknown location, and then released her in a public place on April 15, visibly bruised and with injuries to her shoulder.[105]

NISS denied responsibility for the arrest, but required Sandra to report to their office for questioning every day. She was then charged with defamation of the NISS and spreading false information; her friends and family members were questioned and detained, and newspaper coverage of the case was censored.[106]

Restrictions on Women's Civil Society

As noted above (see background), Sudanese authorities – primarily the NISS and HAC – routinely restrict independent civil society organizations using various tactics including closures, denying or delaying registration, harassing staff, and interfering in the work. These actions restrict civil society groups, including, but not limited to, those dedicated to women's rights.

Closures, Denial of Registration

On June 24, 2014, authorities closed the Salmmah Women's Resource Center, a women's rights and education organization based in Khartoum. The ministry of justice cancelled the registration and ordered the office closed. Authorities then seized assets and sold them in a public auction, without consulting the staff. Reasons for the closure were never stated, but the organization's director, Fahima Hashim, told Human Rights Watch the move was likely triggered by several factors: her contributions to a report on sexual violence by the

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[105] "Missing female Sudanese rights activist found beaten in the street," Sudan Tribune, April 15, 2015, http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article54626; African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies, "Urgent Safety Concern for Activist Sandra Kadouda Kidnapped in Sudan," April 13, 2015, http://www.acjps.org/urgent-safety-concern-for-activist-sandra-kodouda-kidnapped-in-sudan/.

[106] Human Rights Watch news release, "Sudan: Surge in Detention, Beatings, Around Elections," April 28, 2015, http://www.hrw.org/news/2015/04/28/sudan-surge-detention-beatings-around-elections; Freedom House news release, "Sudan Arrests Pro-Democracy Figures," April 23, 2015, https://freedomhouse.org/article/sudan-arrests-pro-democracy-figures.

Nobel Women's Initiative, her participation in "One Billion Rising" promoting women's rights, and her attendance at international conferences.[107]

Some organizations said rather than receiving orders to close, their applications for registration or renewal went unanswered, presumably because of the nature of their work. In Khartoum, the *Development and Coexistence Organization*, a small community-based organization working with women displaced from conflict zones, was forced to shut down in August 2013 – nearly a year after national security officials arrested the director and three staff and refused to renew the group's registration. "They said we broke the NGO laws that say we can only work on development not rights," the director recalled.[108]

In North Darfur, authorities reportedly told the founder of a women's psychosocial organization to focus "only on development issues like providing small projects for women to start little businesses," and required she add members of the ruling National Congress Party on the board as a condition to register. "I refused to add people to my organization, and after that they refused to register the organization," she said.[109] A doctor in El Fasher said that she had a similar experience when she tried to register her medical organization: "The authorities refused to register our group because we are not members of the NCP. We wasted the whole year 2013 trying to register. In the end we just stopped out of despair and fatigue."[110]

Community-based organizations assisting displaced people from the conflict zones of Darfur, Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile appear especially vulnerable to being shut down. In one example from late 2013, security officials closed a legal aid group working mostly with Nuba women on the outskirts of Khartoum, citing security concerns. "They said our members were threatening the country's security," recalled one of the managers.[111] In another example from 2013, a group working with Nuba displaced women was forced to

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[107] Human Rights Watch interview with Fahima Hashim, Khartoum, Nov. 26, 2014. See Nobel Women's Initiative, "Survivors Speak Out: Sexual Violence in Sudan," ibid.

[108] Human Rights Watch interview with Awad Elkareim Fadil Almawla,Khartoum, November 20, 2014.

[109] Human Rights Watch interview Amani Hamed, Khartoum, October 30, 2014.

[110] Human Rights Watch interview Hala Osman, North Darfur, November 2014.

[111] Human Rights Watch interview with legal aid manager (name withheld), Khartoum, December 2014.

stop work when security officers summoned and interrogated the director about her work and accused her supporting the SPLM-North.[112]

Harassment, Interference

Female staff at organizations working both on women's rights and other issues told Human Rights Watch how authorities interfered in their work, canceling events, harassing them and interrogating staff. "[NISS officers] would just come to my office and sit there [...] I also used to receive calls from them at the evening, saying we want to invite you for tea. In my opinion this was harassment," recalled one female staff member a pro-democracy organization that has faced multiple raids.[113]

In 2014, security officers summoned a prominent activist in Khartoum, Zeinab Badreldin Mohammed, head of a teachers' organization, requesting a monthly report and a list of donors. She told Human Rights Watch that they also visited the office periodically and arrested staff for protesting government education policy and cancelled a workshop on violence against female students.[114]

HAC and NISS officials have also denied permission for specific events and raided or cancelled civil society events – including an international women's day event in March 2014, and dozens of others.[115] The head of a legal aid organization in River Nile state said authorities there denied permission for a January 2014 workshop on the African Protocol on women's rights, and closely monitored events, "taking notes in our meetings before the workshops, recording discussions and even demanding final reports after every workshop. Our space is shrinking every day in the grassroots level."[116]

In some cases, activists said authorities used social conventions, rather than political or administrative reasons, as a rationale for denying permission for activities. In Kassala, eastern Sudan, authorities prevented a youth organization from providing assistance to flood victims in 2013, in part on grounds that females cannot sleep outside of their homes.

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[112] Human Rights Watch interview with community leader (name withheld), Khartoum, December 27, 2014.

[113] Human Rights Watch interview with Arwa Ahmed el Arabia, formerly of the Khatem Adlan Center, in Khartoum, December 2014.

[114] Interview with Zeinab Badreldin Mohammed, Kampala, Uganda, November 16, 2014.

[115] Civil Society Confederation bulletins, on file with Human Rights Watch.

[116] Human Rights Watch interview with Amna Mohammed Ahmed Hamouri, River Nile state, November 8, 2014.

On an another occasion, a security officer prevented female students from joining a university protest in support of communities displaced by dam construction project saying, "it's not right for a female to protest in the street or raise her voice in public," recalled a witness to the event.[117]

[117] Human Rights Watch interview with activist (name withheld) in Kassala, October 29, 2014.

III. Lack of Accountability, Protection

As far as Human Rights Watch has been able to ascertain, no NISS or police officials have been prosecuted or otherwise held accountable for the patterns of abuse described in this report. In some cases, activists instead faced criminal charges linked to their participation in protests and activism – in some cases those charges, or threats of charges, carried a potential death sentence.

Almost everyone we interviewed emphasized the lack of protection available in Sudan for human rights activists, especially for women. "The human rights defenders have no national umbrella for protection. There are no laws that provide protection for them or mechanisms that defenders can use for their protection, especially women rights defenders," observed Azza (pseudonym), a journalist and longtime human rights activist. "Women in particular go through challenging circumstances due to their place in the society especially when they have children."[118]

Little exists to support women activists who have been sexually assaulted or otherwise abused by security personnel, and who may face "damaged reputations" and other social problems if the abuses they suffered become known to others.

Women also face enormous obstacles to justice. "If you tried to file a case the police will not consider the seriousness of your claim or try to provide any protection," said Azza. Safiya Ishaq, when she tried to report her case, said a high-ranking police officer warned her not to file a case against NISS because it would ruin her family's name.[119] Similarly, other victims of abuse have not succeeded in lodging formal complaints, in part because of legal immunities protecting members of the security services from prosecution.[120] These immunities have contributed to an environment of impunity for sexual violence particularly

[118] Human Rights Watch interview with activist (name withheld), Khartoum, November 10, 2014.

[119] Human Rights Watch interview with Safiya Ishaq, December 23, 2014.

[120] Immunities were obstacles in complaints brought by at least two of the victims of abuse by NISS described in this report.

in conflict zones – Darfur, Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile – where many armed forces are deployed. [121]

Some women, rather than face the risk of further arrest or harassment or attack on themselves or their family members, or social stigma, felt their best option was to leave the country. Azza said the community of women activists and human rights defenders has diminished in size because of the numbers driven to flee the country. "We are now exhausted working on many issues at the same time."

In some cases, female activists who faced abuses found assistance through family or from international organizations that provide temporary financial support. But this support is available only if the victims of abuses know where to find it, and in some cases only if they fit an organization's definition of "human rights defender." Moreover, women from less privileged backgrounds, conflict zones or marginalized communities are less connected with civil society groups that have links to international organizations and are far less likely to be able to discover and access these resources.

Even when women are able to access assistance, it may not be adequate to relocate to safety for longer periods, or to access needed medical, psychosocial, or legal assistance. Donors and international organizations should ensure that existing support to civil society includes a focus on female human rights defenders, capacity building for civil society on protection matters, and helping victims of abuse to access needed medical and legal services.

[121] Human Rights Watch, "Five Years On: No Justice for Sexual Violence in Darfur," April 6, 2008, https://www.hrw.org/report/2008/04/06/five-years/no-justice-sexual-violence-darfur (describing the patchwork of legal immunities that apply to NISS, police and Sudanese army personnel).

IV. Consequences of Abuses and Forced Exile

Many women – especially those who suffered rapes and long-term detentions – described being physically and psychologically traumatized from the abuses they suffered. In some cases, evidence of the abuse appears in public photographs.

Some of the women activists interviewed for this report said they avoided public gatherings after they were released or declined to participate in events they normally would have taken part in, because of fear of further abuse. "Now I have become hesitant and terrified. I am always expecting the security will come arrest me," said Zahra (pseudonym), a Darfuri journalist in Darfur who relocated to Khartoum for two years to evade constant interrogations by NISS about her work in Darfur. [122]

Some women said the fallout from their activism, and the government's abuses in response, has undermined or destroyed their careers. One doctor who galvanized colleagues to improve conditions for the medical profession said she believes harassment she faced as a result of her activism damaged her professional reputation. "Our work as women doctors active in our unions or any human rights activism is very risky and forced many colleagues to leave the country to protect their careers from being destroyed like mine."[123]

Khartoum-based journalist Amal Habani was unemployed a full year because newspapers refused to hire her, and because of her activities she has effectively forfeited the chance to be promoted to editor-in-chief. Amira Osman, an engineer who was arrested many times including in 2012 when she was detained for nearly two months, said: "The experience affected me socially and economically. I have been isolated from my social network and I lost my clients."[124]

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[122] Human Rights Watch interview with Darfuri journalist (name withheld), Khartoum, November 26, 2014.

[123] Human Rights Watch interview with female doctor (name withheld), December 2014.

[124] Human Rights Watch interview with Amira Osman Hamed, November 12, 2014.

Those who fled Sudan faced difficult challenges in exile. Najlaa Sid Ahmed, who fled to Uganda in 2012 with her husband and four children after being detained by NISS officials, said:

> "I am upset that I can't help or document the violations. In addition, my family suffered with me. My husband left his job. My four children left their friends and schools and life in Sudan. I put great burden on my family and punished them with me. Now we are not working and don't have a stable source of income."[125]

Rashida Shamseldin, who was detained for 65 days and left the country in October 2012 said:

> "The detention forced me to change my life, affected me psychologically and physically and forced my family to face harsh social sigma. I had to leave my family and my life and start again in a new place. There have been challenges of finding a job and finding a way to resume normal life in new and unplanned conditions."[126]

A Darfuri human rights activist forced to flee the country in 2010, described how she feels vilified by her community:

> "Being a single woman fleeing the country affected me socially. I faced many challenges socially because I come from a conservative community. I didn't have social support and very close people abandoned me [...] They consider it extremely wrong for a girl or woman to travel abroad and live alone." [127]

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[125] Human Rights Watch interview with Najlaa Sid Ahmed, Kampala, November 22, 2014.

[126] Human Rights Watch interview with Rashida Shemseldin, Egypt, November 2014.

[127] Human Rights Watch interview with Maymona Abdullah Fadl, Kampala, December 2014.

As Amel, the activist who fled in 2012 after NISS raided her home and interrogated her for 12 hours about her work with Nuba communities, put it, "to be a woman activist in exile is considered proof of every bad thing they said about you inside."[128]

Najlaa Ahmed, human rights lawyer, said in addition to the personal challenge of being forced to leave her family and find new ground, described feeling bereft without "the momentum of working on issues that became part of my life," and worries she has disappointed her clients. Like many of the women who fled, she would have remained in Sudan had she found the protection and support needed to live free of fear.[129]

To improve the protection for female human rights defenders inside Sudan, donors and organizations should assess how to support human rights defenders better, possibly by supporting Sudanese civil society groups to form a national civil society-led protection network. Where necessary they should endeavor to help activists and their families to relocate to safer areas in Sudan, and to become economically independent.

Donors and Sudanese civil society should also support better provision of urgent post rape care and longer-term psycho-social support for women who survive rape and sexual assault, either in the country or by helping women to seek treatment outside Sudan. They should also support training for activists, on ways to mitigate threats to their security, including digital security.

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[128] Human Rights Watch interview with activist (name withheld), Egypt, May 2015, and e-mail correspondence, November 2015.

[129] Human Rights Watch interview and e-mail correspondence with Najlaa Ahmed, 2015.

V. Sudanese Law and State Repression of Women Activists and Human Rights Defenders

Sudan's government is obliged not only to prevent and ensure accountability for the abuses described in this report, but to respect the right of Sudanese civil society to work, assemble and speak free from reprisal or unreasonable constraint. These rights are guaranteed by Sudan's own Interim National Constitution as well as by international law.[130] Instead, the Sudanese government has adopted laws that directly contravene these obligations while either directly encouraging or failing to rein in patterns of repression and violent abuse by state authorities. Indeed, the human rights abuses as appear to be part of a policy to dissuade and punish independent activism and political dissent.[131]

Previous Human Rights Watch research has documented Sudan's onerous restraints on the rights of civil society groups – notably through the National Security Act, Press and Printing Act, the Criminal Act of 1991 and the Voluntary Humanitarian Work Act – and the profound impact this has had on the ability of such groups to operate effectively and free of fear.[132]

The NISS is the primary instrument Sudan's government uses to repress civil and political rights. The NISS has a hand in every aspect of the government's repression and surveillance of civil society. It censors media, monitors organizations, and targets activists

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[130] Article 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) as well as Article 10 of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR) guarantee the freedom of association. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), adopted December 16, 1966, G.A. Res. 2200A (XXI), 21 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 16) at 52, U.N. Doc. A/6316 (1966), 999 U.N.T.S. 171, entered into force March 23, 1976, Art. 22; African [Banjul] charter on Human and People's Rights, adopted June 27, 1981, OAU Doc. CAB/LEG/67/3 rev. 5, 21 I.L.M. 58 (1982), entered into force October 21, 1986. Sudan is a party to both instruments. The right to free association is guaranteed by Article 19 of the ICCPR and Article 9 of the ACHPR. The right to free expression is also guaranteed by Article 39 of Sudan's 2005 Interim National Constitution (INC), while Article 40 of the INC guarantees the rights to free association and assembly. Interim National Constitution of the Republic of Sudan, 2005 [Sudan], July 6 2005, available at: http://www.refworld.org/docid/4ba749762.html (accessed 14 December 2015), Art. 39 and 40.

[131] For additional discussion of patterns of government harassment, censorship and human rights abuse targeting Sudanese activists, journalists and human rights defenders, see Human Rights Watch, "It's an Everyday Battle:" Censorship and Harassment of Journalists and Human Rights Defenders in Sudan, February 18, 2009, https://www.hrw.org/report/2009/02/18/its-everyday-battle/censorship-and-harassment-journalists-and-human-rights; Human Rights Watch, Universal Periodic Review Submission: Sudan, September 21, 2015, https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/09/21/universal-periodic-review-submission-sudan pp. 1-4.

[132] Human Rights Watch report, "It's an Everyday Battle", February 19, 2009, ; Human Rights Watch, Universal Periodic Review Submission: Sudan September 21, 2015.

and real or perceived political opponents for harassment, interrogations, arrests and detentions, often without charge. Its abusive tactics, such as physical mistreatment and torture, are well-documented by many human rights organizations.[133]

The National Security Act (2010) grants the NISS a broad mandate and the power to search and seize property, and to arrest and detain individuals for up to four and a half months - without judicial review. Although the law allows detainees the right to communicate with family and receive visits, in practice the NISS detainees are often held *incommunicado* for weeks.[134] Amendments to the constitution in January 2015 further empowered the NISS, designating it as a "regular force," with a broad mandate to combat a wide range of political and social threats and take precautionary measures against them.[135]

Sudan's Voluntary and Humanitarian Work Act (2006) gives the Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC) broad control over civil society. It imposes a range of burdensome requirements on organizations, requires them to register with HAC and renew registration on an annual basis, and requires advance permission for seeking foreign funds. Groups with fewer than 30 members cannot register without specific ministerial approval, which is entirely discretionary.[136] In practice, authorities often deny registration or renewal; around 40 organizations were denied renewal in the first half of 2015 alone.[137] Authorities also delay responding to requests, effectively denying them. The law provides no remedy for government delays and groups cannot operate until their registration is formally granted.

Sudan's media law, the Press and Printed Materials Act (2009), is also repressive and restrictive in various ways. It empowers a national council on press and publications to

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[133] See, e.g., Amnesty International report, "Agents of Fear: the National Security Service in Sudan," July 19, 2010 https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/AFR54/010/2010/en/.

[134] National Security Act 2010, Articles 50 and 51. Translation available at http://www.pclrs.com/english/bills-and-laws

[135] Unofficial translation and commentary on the constitutional amendments on file with Human Rights Watch. The amendment is understood to give NISS the same status as police and army. See, "Sudan's NUP rejects constitutional amendments," Sudan Tribune, January 8, http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article53590.

[136] Voluntary and Humanitarian Work Act, 2006, translation available at http://www.ifrc.org/docs/idrl/858EN.pdf See also, East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project, "Caught Up in Bitter Contests: Human Rights Defenders working in the context of Elections in Sudan, Ethiopia, Burundi and Uganda," https://www.defenddefenders.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Caught-Up-in-Bitter-Contests.pdf State level legislation can be more restrictive; for example, rules adopted by Khartoum state allows HAC to revoke registration on the grounds of national security, and to monitor, re-direct activities, and requires approval for all funding.

[137] The Confederation of Sudanese Civil Society Organizations, "Sudan Civil Society Watch," April-June 2015, on file with Human Rights Watch.

oversee the media, suspend newspapers for up the three days without cause, and imposes criminal liability on editors in chief for the content of their publications. It also restricts reporting on national security and operations, actions and plans of the armed forces except when specifically authorized by "relevant authorities." [138] In addition, criminal code provisions, such as "publication of false news," and crimes against the state are used against journalists and have a chilling effect on what they write.[139]

Moreover, as discussed in this report, Sudan's tactics of repression and restrictions on independent civil society combine with the public order regime to create an even more tightly restricted space particularly for female activists. Sudan's public order regime is so overly broad that it gives government and security officials a tool they can use to punish women for behavior that is linked to activism and human rights work, such as traveling or protesting with male colleagues.[140] That is, public authorities can easily target women activists for manufactured "violations" of the public order regime simply because it is the easiest way to restrict or silence them. These charges are particularly serious because public morality offenses can trigger cruel, inhuman and degrading punishments such as flogging.

The rights to free expression and association are not entirely unfettered, but governments may only restrict them as provided by law and even then only to the extent necessary to protect a narrowly defined range of compelling government and public interests.[141]

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[138] Press and Printed Publications Act, 2009; see also, East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project, "Caught up in Bitter Contests," ibid.

[139] Sudan Criminal Act of 1991, Article 66 and Part V (offenses against the state). Translation available at http://www.pclrs.com/downloads/bills/Criminal%20Law/Criminal%20Act%201991%20English.pdf See also, Human Rights Watch, "It's an Everyday Battle: Censorship and Harassment of Journalists and Human Rights Defenders," February 2009, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/sudanfrexp0209web.pdf .

[140] The public order regime is rooted primarily in article 152 of the Criminal Act of 1991, which broadly prohibits "indecent and immoral acts." This has been interpreted as prohibiting women and girls from wearing trousers or leaving their hair uncovered. See above, Discriminatory Laws. See also Human Rights Watch, Universal Periodic Review Submission: Sudan September 21, 2015; Human Rights Watch, "Sudan: End Lashing, Reform Public Order Rules: Arrest of Women's Rights Activists, Flogging of Woman Violate Basic Rights," December 15, 2010, available at https://www.hrw.org/news/2010/12/15/sudan-end-lashing-reform-public-order-rules; "Sudan: Ban Death by Stoning: Sentence Shows Urgent Need for Legal Reforms," May 31, 2012, available at https://www.hrw.org/news/2012/05/31/sudan-ban-death-stoning.

[141] The ICCPR permits governments to impose certain restrictions or limitations on freedom of expression, if such restriction is provided by law and is necessary: (a) for respect of the rights or reputations of others; (b) for the protection of national security or public order, or of public health or morals. ICCPR, Art. 19. For a detailed interpretation of what constitutes a legitimate restriction in the name of national security interests, see the "Johannesburg Principles." The Johannesburg

Human Rights Watch has long argued for reforms to Sudan's legal framework that would allow the space independent civil society needs to operate free of arbitrary interference or reprisal. The NISS, with its wide-ranging powers continues to play the leading role in repression of civil society – from targeting activists and real or perceived opponents for arbitrary arrest and detention, to censoring the media and shutting down organizations. The laws that enable NISS and the other authorities regulating civil society and media to engage in these patterns should be reformed or repealed in line with international standards.

Finally, because of the particular impact on women described in this report, reforms to the public order regime and other laws that place unreasonable restrictions on women's freedom should be regarded not "only" as a women's rights issue, but also as central to any broader effort to protect the rights of activists and human rights defenders in Sudan and secure their ability to work freely and effectively.

Principles set out standards for the protection of freedom of expression in the context of national security laws. They were adopted on October 1, 1995 by a group of experts in international law, national security, and human rights convened by ARTICLE 19, the International Centre Against Censorship, in collaboration with the Centre for Applied Legal Studies of the University of the Witwatersrand, in Johannesburg. They have been endorsed by the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression and referred to by the Commission in their annual resolutions on freedom of expression every year since 1996. Johannesburg Principles on National Security, Freedom of Expression, and Access to Information (Johannesburg Principles) adopted on October 1, 1995. Available at www.1umn.edu/humanrts/instree/johannesburg.html (accessed December 14, 2015).

VI. Acknowledgments

This report was researched and written by Jehanne Henry, senior researcher in the Africa division at Human Rights Watch. Leslie Lefkow, deputy director in the Africa division, edited and reviewed the report. Liesl Gerntholtz, director of the Women's Rights division, and Sarah Taylor, women, peace and security advocate, provided specialist review. Chris Albin-Lackey, senior legal advisor, and Babatunde Olugboji, deputy program director, provided legal and program reviews. Joyce Bukuru, senior associate in the Africa division, provided additional editorial assistance. The report was prepared for publication by Grace Choi, publications director, Olivia Hunter, publications associate, and Fitzroy Hepkins, administrative manager.

Human Rights Watch wishes to thank the many Sudanese women's rights and human rights activists within and outside Sudan who shared their experiences, analyses, and views with researchers, sometimes at great personal risk.

Annex 1: Human Rights Watch Letter to Sudanese Authorities

3 February 2016

Minister of Justice
Awad Al Hassan Alnour
PO Box 302
Al Nil Avenue
Khartoum, Sudan
Email: moj@moj.gov.sd

Your Excellency,

Human Rights Watch is a privately funded international nongovernmental organization, dedicated to researching and documenting human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law throughout the world in an impartial and professional manner.

We are writing to request your response to a number of questions and findings on the human rights concerns of women activists and human rights defenders in Sudan. We will publish the results of our research in a report that describes the environment in which women activists operate and provides details of cases of human rights violations against women activists, including rape, sexual violence and harassment. The report offers recommendations to the Sudanese government for ending these abuses and improving respect for freedom of speech, assembly and association.

In order to present a comprehensive picture, we would welcome your perspective on the human rights problems we have documented as well as any details you can provide about efforts made by the government of Sudan to address these concerns. We will include your response in our report if we receive it by March 1, 2016. We would also appreciate your response to the following questions:

We believe, and our research illustrates, that Sudan's public morality laws, such as Article 152 of the criminal code, are vague, subjective, and discriminate against women. Law enforcement officers, for instance, may arrest women based on their own interpretation of decent dress and public behavior. Moreover, the public morality laws allow for penalties of flogging which are contrary to international norms. How do you respond to these critiques? What steps, if any, have the Ministry of Justice and other relevant authorities taken—or plan to take in future— to amend the public order codes and abolish flogging?

We were pleased to learn that amendments passed in January 2015 to Article 149 of the criminal code will help protect victims of rape from being prosecuted for adultery. However, the crime of adultery remains in the criminal code. Data shows that it is applied more often to women than to men, and carries corporal punishments of flogging and stoning, contrary to international norms. How do you respond to these critiques? Have there been any efforts to abolish adultery as a crime and to abolish flogging and stoning, in line with Sudan's human rights obligations?

Sudan is in the midst of an important constitution-making process. Sudan has indicated to the Human Rights Council in its mid-term report in 2013 that it will ensure the new constitution will include a bill of rights. Will this bill of rights reflect the full range of Sudan's international human rights treaty obligations, such as freedom of assembly, expression and association, the right to due process and equal rights protections for women, to the same extent that Sudan's Interim National Constitution does? If not, can you please explain the nature and extent of any likely divergence and the reasons for this?

Has Sudan taken steps since its report to the Human Rights Council on to accede to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment? Please also describe any such steps that are planned but have not yet been taken.

We understand that Sudan recently established a law review committee. What is the mandate of this committee and who will its members be? Will part of the committee's mandate include an effort to ensure that domestic laws are in line with Sudan's international human rights obligations?

The National Security Act 2010 grants far-reaching powers to the National Intelligence and Security Service to detain people for up to four and a half months without judicial review. We maintain that this provision clearly violates international human rights standards and should be amended or removed. In addition, the law grants immunity to individual officers from prosecution for any crimes, which has impeded accountability. We maintain that the Humanitarian and Voluntary Work Act of 2006 and the Press and Publications Act of 2009 also allow authorities to unduly restrict the rights of civil society organizations and the media. How do you respond to these concerns? Does the government plan to take any steps to amend any or all of above-mentioned laws to ensure that they are in conformity with international human rights obligations?

According to our research, some NISS officials have targeted activists, human rights defenders and perceived opponents for detention and subjected them to ill-treatment and torture. Has the Sudanese government received reports of such incidents and if so, what was the response? Have the authorities investigated any cases where this is alleged to have happened? If so, could you please share any relevant findings? Have any NISS officials been prosecuted for any alleged human rights violations over the past five years? If so, could you please share details of these cases?

Our research also concludes that some NISS officers have arbitrarily arrested and detained female human rights defenders and that some NISS officers have allegedly abducted, beaten, sexually assaulted and raped female activists. Has the Sudanese government received reports of such incidents and if so, what was the response? Has the government investigated any NISS officers for any alleged abuses of any female human rights defenders over the last five years? If so, could you kindly provide details about the cases and whether they resulted in prosecution?

We have also documented cases where police allegedly beat women human rights defenders in detention, especially in the context of the crackdown on protests in September 2013. Two high profile cases include novelist Rania Mamoun, in Wad Medani in September 2013, and Samar Mirghani, in Khartoum in September 2013. Have authorities investigated the allegations at issue in either of these cases? If so, have these investigations resulted in prosecutions or any other disciplinary measures?

We look forward to hearing from you on these and any other points you wish to share. We

would welcome a chance for an in-person meeting should you be available. Please do not hesitate to contact me, Daniel Bekele, or my colleague in New York, Akshaya Kumar, at XXXX@hrw.org.

Sincerely,

Daniel Bekele
Africa Director
africa@hrw.org

CC: Permanent Representative of Sudan to the United Nations
Ambassador Omer Dahab F. Mohammed
305 East 47th Street
3 Dag Hammarskjold Plaza, 4th Floor
New York, NY
Via email: sudan@sudanmission.org

CC: Director, National Intelligence and Security Services
Mohammed Atta al-Moula

CC: Minister of Interior
Ismat Abdul-Rahman Zain Al-Abdin
Ministry of Interior
PO Box 873 Khartoum, Sudan

“Good Girls Don’t Protest”

Repression and Abuse of Women Human Rights Defenders, Activists and Protesters in Sudan

Sudan’s government has a long record of targeting outspoken activists, censoring independent media, restricting civil society, and using violence to break up protests. Although these patterns are well-documented, scant attention has been paid to the particularized impact of this repression on female activists and human rights defenders.

Good Girls Don’t Protest describes how Sudanese women involved in protests, rights campaigns, the provision of social services, legal aid, journalism and various forms of public action have been targeted for a range of abuses their male counterparts are less likely to face – from sexual violence to the deliberate efforts of security officials to tar their reputations.

Sudanese women activists operate in a context of gender inequality that often makes their activism more challenging. Vaguely defined public morality crimes discriminate against women, proscribing their manner of dress, limiting their movement and role in public life, and imposing humiliating corporal punishments of lashing and stoning, in violation of international norms.

The consequences of these abuses can be far-reaching. Many women activists, traumatized and frightened of future abuse, have fled the country, leaving behind close family members. Others remain in Sudan, but are pressured by government officials or even by their own families and friends, to tone down or stop their activism.

A key way to protect Sudanese human rights defenders is the reform of repressive laws and institutions, including the national security service, public order codes, and provisions in the criminal law that discriminate against women. Sudanese civil society, donors and international partners should support these reforms, and ramp up their support to defenders in need, especially women and people from rural areas or Sudan’s conflict zones who have little access to services.

Women at a “No to Women’s Oppression” rally protesting Sudan's public order laws, in solidarity with journalist Lubna Hussein, who was prosecuted for wearing trousers.

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