

For Immediate Release

## **African Commission: Investigate Sudan Killings** *Fact-finding Mission Needed Into Deaths, Detention of Protesters*

(Kampala, November 1, 2013) -- The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) should order a fact-finding mission to investigate the deaths and detention of hundreds of demonstrators, a group of 11 international and African organizations said in a letter made public today.

The organizations called on the African Commission to send a fact-finding mission to investigate human rights abuses in Sudan since demonstrations began on September 23, 2013. At least 170 protesters have died, 15 of them children, and more than 800 others have been detained.

"The African Commission for Human and People's Rights has so far been silent about the crackdown on protesters in Sudan," said Osman Hummada, executive director of the African Center for Justice and Peace Studies. "Africa's most important human rights institution should condemn the excessive use of force and investigate all reported human rights violations."

Protests began on September 23 in Sudan's major towns, following an announcement the previous day that fuel subsidies would be ended. Many of the protests turned violent as protesters vandalized and set fire to gas stations and police stations, and threw stones at police and security forces. The Sudanese government responded by firing live ammunition and teargas into demonstrations, killing and injuring dozens of people, including children.

Most of those killed and injured were shot in the head and upper body with live ammunition, witnesses told human rights organizations. Two bodies identified in a Khartoum morgue had been shot in the back, suggesting that they had been shot while running away. Hundreds more were injured.

Over 800 people have been detained, according to Sudanese human rights organizations. Sudan released many detainees within a few hours or days, including more than 20 before and during the Eid holiday. But scores of students, activists, and political opposition party members remain in detention—many without access to lawyers or their families, putting them at risk of ill-treatment, the groups said.

"People have been shot, injured, and detained during protests in Sudan," said Daniel Bekele, Africa director at Human Rights Watch. "The premier human rights institution of the African continent shouldn't stand by and watch as the rights of the Sudanese people are violated."

Over the past month, the Sudanese authorities have shut down national and international media outlets, ordered journalists not to write about these incidents and issued strict instructions to newspaper editors about what information can be published about the protests.

On September 25, the National Intelligence and Security Services summoned the medical director of Omdurman Hospital after he spoke on BBC Arabic about the numbers of casualties admitted to his hospital. The chairman of the Sudanese Doctors' Union, Dr. Ahmed

Abdalla Al-Shiekh, was also detained for a few hours on October 5 after he reported publicly that at least 210 people had been killed according to data from his organization.

The authorities have detained people who have spoken out or sought to document human rights abuses. Under the National Security Act of 2010, detainees can be held for up to four and a half months without charge and without access to their families or lawyers, in violation of international law.

“Instead of reining in the security forces responsible for the excessive use of force, the Sudanese government has put pressure on those seeking to shine a light on its abuses,” said Dismas Nkunda, chair of the Sudan Consortium.

The African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights contains guarantees of liberty, freedom of expression, information, association, and assembly under Articles 6, 9, 10 and 11. The Sudanese government response to the protests has violated those obligations, the organizations said. It has shown no signs of responding to calls for an urgent, independent and impartial investigation into incidents surrounding the recent protests.

The organizations called on the African Commission to protect human and peoples’ rights by ordering a fact-finding mission into the killings and other abuses in the context of the protests.

Under Article 45 of the African Charter, the African Commission has the authority to conduct research into human rights practices and to give its views and recommendations to governments, as well as to co-operate with other African and international institutions concerned with the promotion and protection of human and peoples’ rights. Article 46 of the Charter gives the African Commission the right to use “any appropriate method of investigation.

In June, the African Commission carried out a fact-finding mission in the Republic of Mali, in response to the request of the African Union Executive Council to open an investigation into the human rights situation in northern Mali and to provide concrete recommendations on measures to be taken.

“Over the past 20 years, the ACHPR has issued several resolutions demonstrating commitment to peace and security, justice and accountability, and respect for fundamental human rights in Sudan and Africa as a whole,” said Hassan Sheikh Shire, executive director of the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project. “The situation in Sudan following the protests demands its attention.”

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