



The Sudan Consortium

*African and International Civil Society Action for Sudan*

-- OPEN LETTER --

Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Uganda  
IGAD Secretariat  
IGAD Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism

### **13 African civil society organisations call for strong IGAD response to uprising in Sudan**

1 March 2019

Your Excellencies,

We, the undersigned African civil society organisations, write to express our concern about the deteriorating situation in Sudan. Nationwide peaceful protests against 30 years of oppression and the present day economic crisis have been met with government-sponsored violence and a failure to engage substantively with any of the protests and demands of the protesters. In a worrying escalation this week, President Bashir declared a year-long state of emergency, dissolved both the federal and regional governments, and appointed members of the military and security forces to regional governorships. These actions suggest that the authorities are preparing the groundwork for greater repression and impunity: as protests continued this week, new arrests of political figures and journalists who criticised the emergency declaration only underline this concern. Yet despite all this, Sudanese civilians and activists continue to call for democracy, good governance and human rights, values which IGAD has committed to promote.

The government has attempted to violently suppress the uprising. According to civil society reports, thousands of citizens have been detained, more than 50 people have been killed and hundreds injured as a result of use of excessive force. These numbers mask the real human cost of the violence. Members of professional associations have been killed; among them medical doctors, a teacher, students and elders (more detail has been provided in the background below). The African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies and the International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH) have [documented](#) female activists being arrested and subjected to verbal abuse and body searches so invasive as to constitute sexual assault. Many detainees have been held incommunicado for long periods.

The size and longevity of the current protests represent a significant shift. The Sudanese people are determined to achieve change and are unlikely to accept a return to the status quo. If international actors do not engage with the government of Sudan on these issues, the abuse of peaceful protesters and political activists is likely to simply continue. Worse yet, the situation could descend into widespread disorder, which would both negatively impact the potential for the government of Sudan to engage with regional political initiatives such as the IGAD initiative to facilitate the return of peace to South Sudan and create a raft of negative consequences for its neighbours. Further, in the light of the serious economic crisis caused by the government of Sudan's mismanagement, the country is undermining regional efforts to promote development and economic stability. At the same time, since the declaration of state of

emergency, the government has issued new restrictions on trade that will only further undermine its capacity to contribute to regional development.

Despite the negative consequences that failing to find a just and sustainable solution to the current situation could have for both IGAD's members and its mandate to safeguard peace and stability and to address prevent, manage and resolve of conflicts in the region, IGAD has said nothing. Even more worrying, there have been reports that the government of Sudan expects to take up the chair of the body following the upcoming summit in Khartoum. Allowing Sudan to chair the body in the midst of this crackdown would only degrade the prestige of the institution and slow the development of the region as the chair will be less focused on regional integration and more on managing its own internal affairs. Rather, IGAD should fulfil its stated aims of promoting human rights and good governance by refusing to give Sudan the chair until the governance issues being raised by protesters and human rights violations to which they have been subject are adequately addressed by the government.

In this context, we call upon your Excellencies to take urgent action to respond to the ongoing situation in Sudan by:

- Reject the proposal by the government of Sudan to take over as Chair of IGAD, instead appointing a chair who can better represent the stated goals of the community and contribute to regional integration.
- Denouncing violations of the human rights of peaceful protesters and calling on the government of Sudan to ensure that security forces respond to protests in line with the country's international human rights obligations.
- Supporting Sudanese authorities to foster inclusive dialogue, to ensure broad public engagement with in a program of peaceful transformation that would create a state which both respect s human rights and allows the people of Sudan to exercise their constitutional rights to peacefully express their political, economic and social views without fear.
- Ensuring that the situation in Sudan is urgently placed on the agenda of the IGAD Peace and Security Division and that the Division continuously monitors the situation and updates the IGAD secretariat.
- Calling for an immediate, independent and impartial investigation into all allegations of excessive use of force against peaceful protesters by the African Commission for Human and Peoples' Rights or another appropriate body.

Such a robust response by IGAD would contribute to peaceful, stable and prosperous Sudan and the region.

**The undersigned:**

Arab Coalition for Sudan  
African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies  
Association for Human Rights in Ethiopia (AHRE)  
Darfur Bar Association  
Foundation for Democracy and Accountable Governance (FODAG) (South Sudan)  
Institute for Social and Economic Rights (Uganda)  
International Refugee Rights Initiative (Uganda)  
Justice Centre for Advocacy and Legal Consultation  
National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders-Kenya  
National Human Rights Monitors Organisation  
Regional Centre for Training and Development of the Civil Society  
Sudan Consortium  
Sudan Democracy First Group

**Background**

Over the last eight weeks, Sudan has experienced an uprising. Touched off by the removal of subsidies, the current turmoil grows out of deeper crises looming over the country for the past fifteen years in terms of regional conflicts, human rights violations and financial mismanagement.

Massive conflicts have raged in Darfur, Blue Nile and Southern Kordofan, disproportionately affecting civilians and causing massive displacement. Despite government protestations of the success of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur, no sustainable peace has been achieved in any of these conflicts. The Sudanese regime has evidently alienated rule of law institutions and the national army to the extent that it has been forced to rely on party and security mechanisms to preserve the status quo.

Despite the fact that Sudan is a signatory to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, which guarantees a broad range of rights without discrimination, the country's human rights record has been consistently poor. Women and religious minorities are particularly vulnerable, with the government adopting an ideology that often legitimises persecution of both groups. This ideology even suffuses school books designed under this regime, seeking to inculcate extremist and exclusionary values to the next generation.

The protests began in mid-December, triggered by the removal of subsidies on bread and scarcity of basic commodities including medicine and fuel, but fed by the crises of human rights and conflict that have gripped the country. The scarcity that triggered the protests is not isolated, it is linked to a deep economic crisis. In December 2018, the inflation rate reached 72.94%. Although this crisis is driven in part by the loss of South Sudanese oil revenues, it has been exacerbated by government mismanagement. The government has continued to invest massively in military expenditure. Corruption is rampant, Sudan was ranked 175th out of 180 countries reviewed by Transparency International, which also reported that President Bashir and his cronies have likely embezzled up to US\$ 9 billion from the oil sector. The country has consistently failed to open up for trade or regional or international collaboration which has contributed to weakening the state's capacity to manage economic crisis. In this context, there is little sign of a reversal of the country's economic fortunes in the near future.

It is, therefore, unsurprising that protesters have risked the violent crackdown to take to the streets nor that demands quickly escalated from economic concerns to demanding that President Bashir step down. Two weeks into the protests, Sudanese civil society and the political opposition adopted the "Freedom and Change Declaration" calling on Bashir and his government to step down and form a transitional government that can fulfil the aspirations of Sudanese for peace, freedom and democratic transformation.

The protests quickly spread nationwide, from Atbara, an area that has traditionally been loyal to Bashir, in the northeast; to Khartoum; to Al Fashir and Buram in Darfur in the west; to Um Ruwaba in North Kordofan and Damazine in Blue Nile. The protests have reached both areas that are under emergency rule and areas that are usually considered to be loyal to the regime.

This geographical breadth is greater than in previous rounds of protest that shook the country in 2013, eventually leading to the deaths of at least 185 people according to Amnesty International, and 2018. More people appear to be participating as well, although accurate numbers are difficult to obtain. It is clear that more women, youth groups and young professionals are taking part. Activists are more unified in their demands than they have been in the past.

The government has responded with a violent crackdown. The Sudan Doctor's Association now reports that [57 have been killed](#). There has been particular concern about the reported death in custody of Mr. Mujahid Abdalla, whose family reported that his body showed signs of torture and a bullet wound to the mouth. On 17 January, a medical doctor who was treating wounded protesters was shot in the head after he identified himself as a doctor. On 2 February, a teacher reportedly died in custody.

There have been widespread arrests of protesters from the streets and presumed or actual organisers from their homes and offices. The minister of the interior reported to parliament on 7 January that 816 people had been arrested up to that point while a recently leaked memo, whose contents could not be

independently verified, indicated that the number is now above 3,000. Although intelligence chief Salah Gosh indicated on 29 January 2019 that those arrested as a result of the protests should be released, civil society partners have reported that activists that they have been following closely have not been released.

Meanwhile, although there have been some expressions of concern from the international community, there has been little forceful action. The international community would appear to prefer the status quo, and to see this as best served by the continuation of Bashir's reign. However, the intensity of the protests, the repression with which they have been met, alongside the reality of the financial mismanagement and the economic crisis and presence of militias and weapons that touched it off show substantial instability.