

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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Amnesty International Urges South Sudan to Rein in the National Security Service and Respect the Rights to Freedom of Expression and Peaceful Assembly

Speaking at the UN Human Rights Council today, Amnesty International said it remained concerned about the continued shrinking civic space for South Sudanese in South Sudan and Kenya and the illegal conduct of the National Security Service (NSS).

It said since the last interactive dialogue on South Sudan before the Council in March 2019, dissidents had continued to be harassed, arbitrarily arrested and detained without charge, citing the cases of [Michael Wetnhialic](#), a youth activist and [Ding Ding Mou](#), a security agent, who remain in NSS detention without regular access to their lawyers and family since they were arrested in May 2019. They also cited the case of [Michael Rial Christopher](#), a newspaper editor who was arbitrarily detained on 17 July 2019 for 37 days, largely without access to his family and lawyer.

The organization pointed out that even leaving South Sudan does not guarantee safety for critics of the government. Between May and July, Amnesty International [documented](#) multiple cases of harassment and intimidation of government critics by South Sudanese state agents in South Sudan and across the border in Ethiopia and Kenya, including through written and verbal threats, arbitrary arrests and detention of protesters, and physical attacks.

Background

This statement is based on an oral statement delivered at the Human Rights Council on 16 September 2019, during the interactive dialogue with the UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan.

Continued arbitrary arrests and prolonged detention by the NSS

The NSS continues to arbitrarily arrest individuals and detain them for prolonged

periods of time. For example, [Michael Wetnhialic](#), was arbitrarily arrested by the National Security Service (NSS) in Juba on 18 May. He is currently illegally detained at the NSS headquarters, known as 'Blue House', without regular access to his family and lawyer. According to a relative, Michael has not been informed of any charges against him. This is the third time the youth activist has been arrested. According to his relative, Michael Wetnhialic was first arbitrarily arrested by the NSS in August 2017 and detained in 'Blue House' for approximately six months on suspicion of using Facebook to criticise the NSS and senior NSS officials. Michael was arrested again in 2018 when, according to his relative, the NSS suspected him of using a fake name on Facebook to continue criticising the NSS and its senior officials.

Security agent [Ding Ding Mou](#) is illegally detained at the Riverside detention centre – notorious for its extremely poor conditions and incidents of torture and other forms of ill-treatment. He was arbitrarily arrested by the NSS in Juba on 31 May. He was first detained at 'Blue House' for eight days.

On 15 July 2019, [Michael Rial Christopher](#), a 40-year-old South Sudanese newspaper editor was taken off a flight to Kenya by NSS agents. He was summoned to 'Blue House' and illegally detained on 17 July. He did not have regular access to his family and a lawyer. Michael was released on 22 August 2019.

In January 2019, after Michael published an opinion article in support of the protests in Sudan, the Media Authority and the NSS warned Al-Watan, a South Sudanese newspaper, not to report about the anti-government protests. Michael temporarily fled South Sudan in January 2019 due to death threats from persons he believes were NSS agents and returned to the country in February. In March 2019, the authorities suspended Al-Watan for operating without a license, an allegation that Michael denies.

Cross-border and domestic campaign of harassment and intimidation of real and perceived critics of the South Sudanese government

On 16 May 2019, South Sudanese took to the streets in Australia, the United States, Ethiopia and Sudan to express their concerns about, and dissatisfaction with, the policies and action of the Government of South Sudan. These peaceful protests were organized by the Red Card Movement (RCM), a nascent South Sudanese diaspora-led youth movement, which is open to any individual who embraces its non-violent approach, and consists mainly of human rights defenders, civil society activists, students, academics and politicians. Inspired by the protests in Sudan and Algeria that led to the fall of former presidents Omar al-Bashir and Abdelaziz Bouteflika, RCM identifies itself as a “civil rights movement establish[ed] to rebuild and safeguard a fair, free and open society,” which seeks “to balance the fundamental

values of liberty, equality and fraternity”¹ and operates under the mottos, “Kiir must go”² and “Don’t be silent, don’t be violent.”³

Soon after its emergence and announcements of planned peaceful demonstrations, real or perceived RCM members were targeted with arbitrary restrictions and arrest, harassment and intimidation. Amnesty International [documented](#) written and verbal threats against, as well as detention of RCM members and assaults on journalists by the South Sudanese government to silence criticism of the government and its leaders.

In May 2019 in Juba, South Sudan’s capital, people were deterred from peacefully protesting after the government heavily deployed the military in the lead-up to planned protests, conducted house-to-house searches and intimidated, harassed and threatened members of the group. The harassment extended beyond borders. In Nairobi, protesters were denied their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly by the Kenyan authorities in May 2019. On 9 July, despite having complied with Kenyan legal requirements to notify the police of their planned protest, three peaceful protesters were arrested in Nairobi and beaten in police custody. In Ethiopia, two cameramen covering the protest in the capital, Addis Ababa, were physically attacked by South Sudanese embassy personnel. According to Amnesty International’s information, protesters in Kenya and Ethiopia have been targeted by South Sudan National Security Service (NSS) agents and threatened with abduction. In Kenya, where the enforced disappearance of three, and subsequent execution of two, prominent South Sudanese government critics and the deportation of another since 2016 still looms large, these threats and attacks have instilled fear in South Sudanese human rights defenders, activists and civil society.⁴

Recommendations

Amnesty International calls on the South Sudanese government to immediately end harassment, intimidation and targeting of individuals simply for expressing critical views of the government within and beyond South Sudan’s borders. Instead, the government must respect, protect, promote and fulfil the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly, association and expression. The government should independently, thoroughly and effectively investigate all allegations of harassment, intimidation and threats against RCM members. In addition, the government should

¹ RCM Facebook page, https://www.facebook.com/pg/RED-CARD-Movement-2262745200437966/about/?ref=page_internal Accessed 5 July 2019

² RCM mission and vision document. On file

³ RCM Kenya Chapter, Press Release on Public Protests and Public Conduct, no date.

⁴ Amnesty International, South Sudan: ‘We Are at Risk and On the Run’ Security Agents Track Down Protesters (AFR 65/0692/2019)

amend the 2014 NSS Act to curb the agency's unchecked powers that contravene the 2011 Transitional Constitution and reform it in line with international human rights standards.

Public Document

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