

URGENT ACTION

TWO ACTIVISTS FREED AND ONE STILL DETAINED

Elwaleed Imam Hassan Taha and Alaa Aldin al-Difana have been released from the custody of the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) without charge. A third activist, Elgassim Mohamed Seed Ahmed, remains in detention pending further investigations into his online activities. The three were deported from Saudi Arabia to Sudan on 11 July and arrested by the NISS upon arrival in Sudan.

Sudanese activists **Elwaleed Imam Hassan Taha** and **Alaa Aldin al-Difana** were released on 22 August without charge after being in NISS detention since their arrest on 11 July. However, **Elgassim Mohamed Seed Ahmed**, is still in detention. The three were deported from Saudi Arabia to Sudan on 11 July. They were arrested by the NISS upon arrival.

Elgassim Mohamed Seed Ahmed and Elwaleed Imam Hassan Taha were arrested on 21 December 2016 in Saudi Arabia. During the course of their detention, the two told their families that they were interrogated around eight times by security officers from the Saudi Arabia General Directorate of Investigations (also known as al-Mabahith). The interrogation centred around their social media activism, following their support of the civil disobedience protest in Sudan in November and December 2016 through their Facebook accounts.

Alaa Aldin Daffalla al-Difana, 44, a Sudanese national, journalist and long-standing opposition activist, was arrested and detained on 26 December 2016 by four security officers from the Ministry of Interior while at his apartment in Mecca, western Saudi Arabia. This is believed to have been related to his online support for the November and December 2016 civil disobedience protest in Sudan.

Amnesty International considers Elgassim Mohamed Seed Ahmed to be a prisoner of conscience held solely for exercising his right to freedom of expression.

Please write immediately in Arabic, English or your own language:

- Calling on the Sudanese authorities to release Elgassim Mohamed Seed Ahmed, immediately and unconditionally as he is being held solely for exercising his right to freedom of expression;
- Urging them to ensure that Elgassim Mohamed Seed Ahmed, is granted regular access to his family and a lawyer of his choice without delay;
- Urging them to ensure that pending his release, Elgassim Mohamed Seed Ahmed is protected from torture and other ill-treatment.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 5 OCTOBER 2017 TO:

President
Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir
Office of the President
People's Palace
PO Box 281
Khartoum, Sudan
Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister for Justice
Idris Ibrahim Jameel
Ministry of Justice
PO Box 302
Al Nil Avenue
Khartoum, Sudan
Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:
Minister for Interior
Hamed al-Mannan
Ministry of Interior
PO Box 873
Khartoum, Sudan

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. HIS EXCELLENCY MR MOHAMMED ABDALLA ALI ELTOM
Embassy of the Republic of the Sudan, 3 Cleveland Row St James's SW1A 1DD, 020 7839 8080, info@sudan-embassy.co.uk
Salutation: Your Excellency

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 157/17. Further information:
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr54/6768/2017/en/>

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TWO ACTIVISTS FREED AND ONE STILL HELD

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On 3 November 2016, the Government of Sudan imposed new economic austerity measures to reduce the trade deficit and to stop the deteriorating exchange rate of the Sudanese Pound. The new measures significantly increased fuel, transport, food, electricity and medicine prices. In protest against the government's new economic policy, political activists called for a three-day nationwide strike from 27 to 29 November 2016. The strike was widely supported. A call was then made for a second civil disobedience action on 19 December 2016, which was supported by activists both inside and outside Sudan. In a pre-emptive move in early November 2016, the Sudanese government began arresting dozens of political activists and continually suppressed press freedom; seven newspapers all had their issues confiscated on 23 different occasions in November and December 2016.

Elgassim Mohamed Seed Ahmed had lived in Saudi Arabia since 1998 and Elwaleed Imam Hassan Taha since 2013. Both men worked in a supply company in Riyadh. They were arrested outside their workplace at about 5pm on 21 December 2016 by security officers dressed in civilian clothing. They were driven to their respective homes, which the officers then searched. The officers told Elgassim Mohamed Seed Ahmed's family that they were from the Ministry of Interior's Security Division and that he would be released by midnight. No arrest or search warrant was shown to the families of either men. The two activists were held incommunicado at al-Ha'ir prison in the Saudi Arabian capital, Riyadh from the time of their arrest until 13 February, when their families were allowed to visit them for the first time. However, they remained in solitary confinement at the prison until 6 March when they were finally moved into a cell together. According to their families, the two were told by security officials during their interrogation that they would face imprisonment or deportation.

Alaa Aldin al-Difana is a member of the National Umma Party (Hizb al-Umma al-Qawmi), an opposition political party in Sudan. On his Facebook page, he wrote about medical negligence in Sudan's hospitals and corruption within Sudan's government ministries. Through his Facebook page he also supported the November and December 2016 civil disobedience in Sudan. He is also a well-known journalist and has written for various Sudanese websites. According to his family, he was previously arrested in 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2012 for his activism in Sudan. He left Sudan for Saudi Arabia in 2012.

The NISS maintains broad powers of arrest and detention under the National Security Act 2010 (NSA), which allows suspects to be detained for up to four-and-a-half months without judicial review. NISS officials often use these powers to arbitrarily arrest and detain individuals, and many have been subjected to torture or other forms of ill-treatment. Under the same Act, NISS agents are provided with protection from prosecution for any act committed in the course of their work, which has resulted in a pervasive culture of impunity. The constitutional amendment to Article 151 (NSA) passed on 5 January 2015 expanding the mandate of the NISS and exacerbating the situation. The amendment transformed the NISS from an intelligence agency focused on information gathering, analysis and advice, to a fully-fledged security agency with a broad mandate to exercise a mix of functions usually carried out by the armed forces or law enforcement agencies. It gave the NISS unlimited discretion to decide what constitutes a political, economic or social threat and how to respond to such threats. Neither the NSA nor the revised Article 151 explicitly or implicitly require the NISS to abide by relevant international, regional and domestic law in the operation of its duties.

Further information on UA: 157/17 Index: AFR 54/6992/2017 Issue Date: 24 August 2017