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ARTICLE 19

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Sudan: Press Council Uses Restrictive Regulations to Suspend Sudanese Newspapers

On 1 September 2008 two Sudanese English-language newspapers, *The Citizen* and the *Sudan Tribune*, had their publishing licences suspended by the National Press Council (NPC). Whilst the *Sudan Tribune's* suspension was lifted today, *The Citizen's* was not.

ARTICLE 19 condemns the suspension decision which is symptomatic of politically motivated actions: the two newspapers' recent publication of articles critical of the Government of National Unity, and the NPC's reportedly controversial opposition to continuation of a Darfuri media professional to serve as Editor of *The Citizen* daily newspaper in Khartoum. We urge the NCP to also lift the ban for *The Citizen*.

The Press Council stated the decision to suspend these papers was for “administrative” reasons, it argued the two papers had not met registration requirements; the newspapers' offices are situated in Juba, South Sudan not Khartoum and they had not submitted copies of the paper to the NPC daily before going to press.

Sudan Tribune owner, William Ezekiel, and Citizen owner, Nihal Bol rejected the NPC's reasoning and on 2 September Mr Ezekiel submitted a letter of protest against the decision to the Press Council. *The Tribune* has since made an agreement to abide by the licensing conditions and can now resume operations.

The Government of National Unity (GoNU) has continued to apply pre-Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) laws which are restrictive of press freedom and human rights liberties since the signing of the CPA in 2005 ending 21 years of war in Sudan. The licensing and registration regime for media organisations established under the 2004 Press Act “*severely restricts media freedom, in violation of article 19 of the ICCPR as well as of the Sudanese Interim Constitution*¹” – the latter of which is guided by the CPA which also provides for the right to freedom of expression.

Between 2006 and 2008 other Sudanese newspapers such as *Al Sudani* and *Al Watan* have been “disciplined” in a similar fashion. Currently censorship of the national press in Sudan has also increased.

¹ <http://www.article19.org/pdfs/analysis/sudan-foe-07.pdf>

A report of the United Nations Human Rights Committee published in July 2007 stated:

27. While taking note of legislative reforms allowing greater press freedom ... the Committee nevertheless notes with concern that many reporters have been subject to pressure, intimidation or aggression, have been deprived of their liberty or have suffered ill-treatment at the hands of the State party's authorities.

The State party should guarantee the exercise of freedom of the press and ensure that reporters are protected in conformity with article 19 of the Covenant.

The report refers to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Sudan is a signatory.

Both media houses, the Sudan Tribune and The Citizen, are members of the Association for Media Development in South Sudan, a Juba based association currently advocating alongside ARTICLE 19 with a consortium of local and international organisations for democratic media legislation in Sudan including the introduction of a new National Press Law. The consortium has also been active in promoting freedom of expression and media development throughout Sudan

The Consortium includes; ARTICLE 19, who manages the project, the Association for Media Development in South Sudan, the Khartoum Centre for Human Rights and Environmental Development, Norwegian People's Aid, the Olof Palme International Centre and International Media Support.

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- Thanks are given to the EC and NMFA for their support of this consortium project
- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.