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Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2015

Sudan

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sudan is a republic with power concentrated in the hands of authoritarian President Omar Hassan al-Bashir and his inner circle. The National Congress Party (NCP) maintained control of the government, continuing 26 years of near-absolute political authority. The country last held national elections on April 13-16. Key opposition parties boycotted the elections when the government failed to meet their preconditions, including a cessation of hostilities, holding of an inclusive national dialogue, and fostering of an environment conducive to discussions between the government and opposition on needed reforms and the peace process. According to the African Union (AU), voter turnout was low. The National Electoral Commission reported that 46 percent of eligible voters participated in the elections and declared incumbent President Bashir as the winner of the elections, having won 94 percent of the votes. Civilian authorities generally maintained effective control over the security forces, but there were instances in which elements of the security forces acted independently of civilian control.

Some armed elements did not openly identify with a particular security entity, making it difficult to determine under whose control they operated. In January the NCP-majority parliament passed amendments to the 2005 Interim National Constitution that broadened the mandate of the National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) to include authorities previously reserved for the armed forces.

In September the government enacted a unilateral two-month cessation of hostilities and offered general amnesty to opposition party members and rebel leaders in exile who returned to the country to participate in the national dialogue. The Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF) followed with its own announcement of a six-month cessation of hostilities beginning on October 21. There were isolated reports that both government and rebel forces violated their declared cessation of hostilities, but by year's end, violence between rebel and government forces were at a historical low. In late November negotiations for a monitored cessation of hostilities and humanitarian access, leading to a comprehensive political process and permanent ceasefire, were adjourned without agreement. More informal discussions on ending the conflicts in the Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile states (also referred to as the "Two Areas") and Darfur, along with a preparatory meeting to discuss procedures and requirements for the armed movements (represented by the SRF) and opposition parties to join the national dialogue, were expected to convene under the auspices of the AU in early 2016. The "7+7," a negotiation mechanism created to include seven ruling-party representatives and seven opposition representatives, participated in the launching of the national dialogue in October. Participants in the dialogue included representatives from the government, opposition political parties, rebel movements, and civil society. Some members of the political and armed opposition refused to participate due to continuing concerns about the government's commitment to genuine political dialogue and peacebuilding. By year's end the dialogue had progressed through the work of six committees, but it was announced that the national dialogue would be extended until at least February 10, 2016, to allow time for the armed movements and holdout opposition parties to negotiate their participation.

Government forces, government-aligned groups, rebels, and armed groups committed human rights abuses and violations throughout the year. The most serious human rights abuses and violations included: indiscriminate and deliberate bombings of civilian areas; ground attacks that included the killing and beating of civilians, sexual and gender-based violence, forced displacement, looting and burning entire villages, and destroying the means necessary for sustaining life; and attacks on humanitarian targets, including humanitarian facilities and peacekeepers.

Other major abuses included: extrajudicial and other unlawful killings; torture, beatings, rape and other cruel or inhuman treatment or punishment; arbitrary arrest and detention by security forces; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; incommunicado detention; prolonged pretrial detention; obstruction of humanitarian assistance; restrictions on freedom of speech, press, assembly, association, religion, and movement; and intimidation and closure of human rights and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Societal abuses included discrimination against women; sexual violence; female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C); use of child soldiers; child abuse; sexual exploitation of children; trafficking in persons; discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities, persons with disabilities, and persons with HIV/AIDS; denial of workers' rights; and child labor.

The government took steps to investigate violations committed by the national police, but prosecution was rare. Authorities, however, did not investigate violations by other branches of the security forces. Impunity remained a common problem in all branches of the security forces. The government agreed to compensate some families relating to the September 2013 protests, but it did not make investigative reports into this or other incidents available to the public.

Conflict between government forces and rebels in Darfur, Blue Nile, and Southern Kordofan states continued. Government forces and rebels committed violations and abuses in these areas. The government routinely impeded independent efforts to investigate violations and abuses in conflict zones. Localized violence between ethnic communities in the disputed area of Abyei continued in the form of cattle raids, although to a lesser extent than in previous years. In Darfur clashes between government forces and rebel groups decreased, and intercommunal violence was slightly less prevalent.

Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom from:

a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

There were numerous reports that government forces, rebel groups, and ethnic militia groups committed arbitrary and unlawful killings of civilians in connection with the conflicts in Darfur and the Two Areas; in addition there were reports of 13 such killings in Abyei (see section 1.g.).

Security forces used excessive force against demonstrators and detainees.

There were numerous reported abuses similar to the following example: On June 12, security forces used excessive force to respond to protests over land issues in Gireaf East (Khartoum North), resulting in the death of Ahmed Alaabeid.

Excessive force against civilians and detainees was also common in the conflict zones (see section 1.g.).

In March 2014 security forces used force and live ammunition to disperse students at the University of Khartoum protesting escalating violence in Darfur. One student, Ali Abakar Musa Idris, died of injuries. As of year's end, the government had not released any report on this incident.

In August the government announced that it would compensate families of the victims of the September 2013 protests. The Sudan Advisory Council for Human Rights reported that the government contacted families of the 85 victims it had identified and offered financial compensation or the possibility of opening court cases. Eighty-one families agreed to accept financial compensation, while four requested to open court cases. Human rights observers estimated 200 deaths resulted from the protests. According to the government, families who were not initially identified for compensation were eligible for compensation if a court so decided. It was not clear that this was publicly known. On November 8, local media reported that the Ministry of Justice had allocated three million Sudanese pounds (SDG) (\$450,000) to compensate the families of the 85

identified victims of the protests--40,000 SDG (\$6,000) each. In addition 35 million SDG (\$5.3 million) would go towards compensating victims who suffered property damage. Some members of parliament recommended postponing compensation until perpetrators of the crime were brought to justice. Other members suggested that neither compensation nor criminal prosecutions were needed because the security forces were acting in official capacities. As of year's end the government had not released its full investigation into the protests.

b. Disappearance

There were reports of politically motivated disappearances. Unlike in the previous year, this included disappearances in nonconflict (as well as conflict) areas.

According to the government, the NISS maintained public information offices to receive inquiries about missing or detained family members. Families of the missing or detained often reported that such inquiries went unanswered.

There were several reported disappearances similar to that which took place on April 12, when unknown assailants reportedly abducted political activist Sandra Kadouda while she was en route to a political rally to urge a boycott of the impending elections. Kadouda was released in Khartoum on April 15 and displayed signs of physical and emotional mistreatment. The government alleged that Kadouda contrived her "kidnapping" to bring negative attention to the government during national elections and denied any involvement.

Government authorities opened a defamation case against Kadouda and harassed and intimidated persons who claimed that national security forces were responsible for her disappearance and mistreatment. Kadouda subsequently issued a written apology denying NISS involvement in her disappearance. Social media, local press, and human rights observers speculated the apology was issued under government pressure.

Government forces, rebel groups, and armed criminal elements were responsible for the disappearance of civilians, humanitarian workers, and UN and other international personnel in conflict areas (see section 1.g.).

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The 2005 Interim National Constitution prohibits torture and cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment, but security forces, government-aligned groups, rebel groups, and ethnic factions continued to torture, beat, and harass suspected political opponents, rebel supporters, and others.

In accordance with sharia (Islamic law), the penal code provides for physical punishments, including flogging, amputation, stoning, and the public display of a body after execution, and was commonly applied to convicted defendants despite the constitution's prohibitions. With the exception of flogging, such physical punishment was not common. Courts routinely imposed flogging, especially as punishment for the production or consumption of alcohol.

On October 26, a court in Jebel Awlia ordered the amputation of a man's right hand for stealing furniture estimated to be worth 10,000 SDG (\$1,500). The defendant was initially sentenced to one year's imprisonment. The case was appealed before the sentence was determined and continued under appeal at year's end.

On April 6, an Omdurman court sentenced three prominent members of the Sudanese Congress Party, Political Secretary Mastor Ahmed Mohammed, Assim Omer, and Mohamed Zain, for disturbing public order when they publicly criticized the ruling party earlier that month. They each received 20 lashes in accordance with the sentence.

The law requires the police and the attorney general to investigate deaths on police premises, regardless of suspected cause. Suspicious causes of death while in police custody were often investigated but not prosecuted.

The president called on the chief prosecutor and chief justice to ensure full legal protection of police carrying out their duties and stated the police force should investigate police officers only when they have been observed exceeding their authority.

On August 31, authorities arrested three men in South Darfur suspected of stealing. One confessed to the crime while the other two claimed innocence. According to witnesses, the latter two, Mohamed Hussein and Zakaria Mohamed, were beaten and tied in stress positions. They were found dead the next day (see section 1.a.).

There were five reported deaths in Port Sudan prisons between July and August 2014, including those of Hussein Hadab and Khamis Kuku, who died while in police custody after undergoing court-ordered police floggings for public intoxication. There were no deaths in Port Sudan prisons reported in 2015. Reportedly, the families of four victims from 2014 agreed to financial compensation from the government in lieu of legal proceedings. By year's end they had received no compensation. In the case of the fifth victim, the family had not agreed to receive compensation.

Government security forces beat and tortured persons in detention, including members of the political opposition, civil society and religious activists, and journalists, according to civil society activists in Khartoum, former detainees, and NGOs. Subsequently, the government released many of these persons without charge. It did not investigate cases of torture or excessive use of force by security agents.

On July 17, security authorities detained three men accused of providing information to the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) in West Darfur. One man allegedly died of torture, and the other two remained in custody (see section 1.g.).

Former detainees reported physical and psychological torture by police, NISS, and military intelligence personnel of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF). Some of those arrested were subjected to torture and other forms of mistreatment, including prolonged isolation, exposure to extreme temperature variations, electric shock, and use of stress positions. Some female detainees alleged NISS harassed and sexually assaulted them while in detention. Some former detainees reported being injected with unknown substances without their consent.

In May security officials detained a female activist attempting to raise money for street children and questioned her about her work. Before releasing her, assailants cut her hair as a form of humiliation. A few days after her release, unidentified assailants trapped the woman in her vehicle, choked her with a cord, beat her, and tied her to a car seat. The home of the activist's family was ransacked following the family's attempts to file a case against authorities for the abuses.

Journalists were beaten, threatened, and intimidated (see section 2.a.).

The law prohibits indecent dress and punishes it with a maximum of 40 lashes, a fine, or both. Officials acknowledged authorities applied these laws more frequently against women than men and applied them to both Muslims and non-Muslims. Courts denied some women bail, although by law they may have been eligible.

There were numerous reported abuses similar to the following example: On June 25, public order police charged 12 Christian girls and women between the ages of 15 and 22 with "indecent dress." Authorities stopped the girls as they exited church to go to a bus station. Authorities dropped charges immediately against two of the detainees and, following significant international pressure, acquitted five of the detainees. Three women were fined 50 SDG (\$7.50). Another woman was initially fined 50 SDG (\$7.50), which the court subsequently increased by 500 SDG (\$75) fine for her being "indecently dressed" at court and sentenced her to 20 lashes. Another woman was also fined 500 SDG (\$75). Of the 10 cases, three were overseen by public order courts while the remaining seven were referred to criminal courts. As of October both cases that included 500 SDG fines (\$75) and flogging were under appeal.

On December 21, the public order court of Jebel Awlia tried five athletes accused of indecent dress and sentenced them each to pay a fine of SDG 500 (\$75). Authorities arrested them while they were training in Jebel Awlia, charged them with indecent dress, and released them on bail. The chair of Sudanese Athletics Union defended them before the court, emphasizing they were training in standard swimming uniforms as members of the Sudan Olympic Swim Team. The athletes were to be sentenced to two months in prison if they refused to pay the fines.

Security forces, rebel groups, and armed individuals perpetrated sexual violence against women throughout the country; the abuse was especially prevalent in the conflict areas (see section 1.g.).

The UN special rapporteur on violence against women visited the country May 13 to 24. At the conclusion of her visit, she issued a statement noting that violence against women and silence around the issue was of concern in both conflict and nonconflict areas. She noted additional government attention regarding women's access to justice was needed. She urged the government "to set up a commission of inquiry, consisting of both national and international persons, to look into the reports of allegations of mass rapes in different regions, including recent allegations regarding the village of Thabit."

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison conditions throughout the country remained harsh, overcrowded, and life threatening. The Prisons and Reform Directorate, a branch of the national police that reports to the Ministry of Interior, oversees prisons, but according to human rights activists and released detainees, military intelligence officials detained and held civilians on military installations, especially in conflict areas.

Rebel groups in Darfur and the Two Areas periodically detained persons in isolated locations and held them in prison-like detention centers.

Physical Conditions: As a general rule, the Ministry of Interior does not release any information on the physical conditions of prisons. Specific information about the number of juvenile and female prisoners was unavailable.

Reportedly, overall conditions, including food, sanitary and living conditions, were better in women's detention facilities and prisons, such as the Federal Prison for Women in Omdurman, than at equivalent facilities for men, such as Kober or Omdurman prisons. In Khartoum juveniles were not held in adult prisons or jails, but there were reports they are held with adults elsewhere in the country.

Health care was often inadequate. Some prisoners did not have access to medications or physical examinations. Prisoners sometimes relied on family or friends for food. Most prisoners did not have access to beds. Ventilation and lighting conditions differed among prisons, and overcrowding was a major problem.

There were reports of deaths due to negligence in prisons and pretrial detention centers, but comprehensive figures were not available. Local press reported deaths resulting from suspected torture by police. Human rights advocates reported suspicious circumstances surrounding the death of prisoners in Port Sudan and that additional deaths resulted from harsh conditions at military intelligence detention facilities such as extreme heat and lack of water.

Prisoners held in NISS custody or detained under national security statutes were held in separate, sometimes unknown facilities. Such prisoners included 19 Sudanese Liberation Movement-Minni Minawi faction rebels captured in February 2014, tried in the Darfur Special Crimes Court, and charged with crimes warranting the death penalty. One prisoner died while in detention due to negligence, health complications with anemia, and poor nutrition.

Authorities regularly denied prisoners held in NISS facilities visits from family and lawyers, and, in the case of foreign prisoners, from foreign government representatives. Some former detainees reported security forces held them incommunicado; beat them; deprived them of food, water, and toilets; and forced them to sleep on cold floors.

Political prisoners were held in special sections of prisons. The main prison in Khartoum, Kober Prison, contained separate sections for political prisoners, those convicted of financial crimes, and others.

Administration: Because prisons were professionally administered, records were believed to be complete and accurate, although, it was difficult to confirm, as the government considered such information confidential and did not release it.

Authorities generally did not use alternatives to sentencing for nonviolent offenders.

Police reportedly allowed some visitors, including lawyers and family members, while prisoners were in custody and during judicial hearings. Visitors generally were not allowed access to prisoners held in custody of NISS, however. The government usually did not notify foreign missions of the detention of their citizens in a timely manner.

Christian clergy held services in prisons, but access was irregular.

There was no ombudsman or inspector general specifically designated for prisons. The police inspector general, the minister of justice, and the judiciary are authorized to inspect prisons.

Independent Monitoring: The government allowed a few restricted visits to prisons by international observers but continued to deny unrestricted access to diplomatic missions for consular visits. There was no access to NISS or military intelligence detention facilities.

The Ministry of Justice occasionally granted the UN Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) access to government prisons in Darfur. In 2014 the government granted the UN independent expert for the human rights situation in Sudan access to Alhuda Prison, Omdurman Women's Prison, and Zalingei Prison in Western Darfur.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The Interim National Constitution prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention and requires that individuals be notified of the charges against them when they are arrested. Arbitrary arrests and detentions, however, remained common under the law, which allows for arrest without warrants and detention up to four and one-half months. Authorities often released detainees when their initial detention periods expired but took them into custody the next day for an additional period. The authorities, especially NISS, arbitrarily detained political opponents and those believed to sympathize with the opposition (see section 1.e.).

Role of the Police and Security Apparatus

Several government entities have responsibility for internal security, including Ministries of Interior and Defense and the NISS. Civilian authorities generally maintained control of police and other security forces but failed to prevent societal violence. The government attempted to respond to some interethnic fighting but was not effective in mediating peaceful solutions.

NISS is responsible for internal security and all intelligence matters. It functions independent of any ministry. Constitutional amendments passed in January expanded NISS's mandate to include immunities and authorities traditionally reserved for the military and judiciary. Under the new amendments, NISS may establish courts and is allowed greater jurisdiction for making arrests. The Ministry of Interior oversees the national police, including the security police, Special Forces police, traffic police, and the combat-trained Central Reserve Police. There was a police presence throughout the country. The Ministry of Defense oversees all elements of the SAF, including the Border Guards and military intelligence units.

In 2013 the government created the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) as a new element of the security apparatus. A former SAF general commanded the RSF, but NISS oversaw its operations. The RSF continued to play a significant role in the government's campaigns against rebel movements and was often implicated in reports of human rights violations against civilians. The government tightly controlled information about the RSF, and public comment critical of the RSF often resulted in arrest or detention (see section 2.a.).

Impunity remained a serious problem for security forces, although crimes involving child victims were prosecuted more regularly. The law provides NISS officials with legal protection for acts committed in their official capacity. The government infrequently lifted police immunity or pressed charges against officers. The government generally failed to investigate violations committed by other branches of the security forces.

The government reported NISS maintained an internal court system to address internal discipline matters and investigate and prosecute violations of the National Security Act, including abuse of power under article 59 of the act. Penalties included up to 10 years in prison, a fine, or both for NISS officers found in violation of the act. The government claimed to have closed approximately 25 cases during the year.

In 2012 Public Order Police shot and killed Awadia Ajbna in front of her house. In November 2014 a court convicted a police lieutenant of her premeditated murder and sentenced him to death, marking a rare case in which authorities lifted police immunity for prosecution. Six other police present during the shooting were convicted of not providing assistance to the victim and sentenced to two months in prison, already served, or a fine of 2,000 SDG (\$300). In January the Court of Appeals changed the conviction of the primary defendant from “premeditated murder” to “semi-premeditated murder” and reduced his sentence from death to five years in prison and payment of a compensatory fine. The court also cancelled the convictions of the remaining defendants and ordered their immediate release.

NGOs reported that clashes between protesters and government forces in September 2013 caused more than 185 deaths. The government announced the Ministry of Justice would investigate the government’s use of force. The government provided its conclusions to the UN independent expert on the situation of human rights in Sudan in June 2014; however, contrary to the Independent Expert’s recommendations, the government did not make its full report public. The government’s findings confirmed 85 deaths and a “big number” of arrests. According to the government, perpetrators could not be identified because eyewitnesses were not present during the protests or did not wait to be questioned by police. The independent expert concluded the government’s report “does not provide evidence of a thorough and independent investigation of the human rights violations that occurred during the September demonstrations.” In August the president directed the Ministry of Justice to compensate the families of victims of the protests. According to the ministry, compensation or legal recourse was offered only to families of individuals who were officially recognized by the government as being victims, including families of government security forces killed in the clashes. Human rights observers noted the compensation plan did not offer compensation to approximately half of the victims’ families. In November local media reported that the Ministry of Justice agreed to pay compensatory “diya” (blood money) totaling 35 million SDG (\$5.3 million) in compensation to families of the identified victims and would lift the immunity of four security officers (see section 1.a.).

Although the government in 2011 named a special prosecutor from the Ministry of Justice to monitor NISS detentions, the UN independent expert remained concerned about weak judicial oversight of NISS arrests and detention. In numerous press statements, she expressed concern over NISS’ failure to adhere to human rights principles, including respect for the rule of law in Khartoum, Darfur, and the Two Areas.

Corruption among police and other security forces continued to be a problem. Security forces and police harassed suspected government opponents.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

Under the National Security Act, warrants are not required for an arrest. The law permits authorities to detain individuals for three days for the purpose of inquiry. The magistrate can renew detention without charge for up to two weeks. The superior magistrate may weekly renew detentions during investigation up to six months for a person who is charged.

The law allows detainment for up to 45 days before individuals are charged. The NISS director may refer certain cases to the Security Council and request an extension of up to three months, allowing for detentions of up to four and one-half months without charge. Authorities often released detainees when their terms expired and rearrested them shortly thereafter for a new detention period, such that detainees were held for several months without criminal charges.

The constitution and the law provide for an individual to be informed of charges at the time of arrest in detail and with interpretation as needed, and for judicial determination without undue delay, but these provisions were rarely followed. Individuals accused of threatening national security were routinely charged under the national security law, rather than the Criminal Act, and frequently detained without charge.

The law allows for bail, except for those accused of crimes punishable by death or life imprisonment. There was a functioning bail system; however, there were some reports women were not allowed bail.

The law provides for access to legal representation, but government security forces often held persons incommunicado for long periods in unknown locations. By law any person may request legal assistance and must be informed of the right to counsel in cases potentially involving the death penalty, imprisonment lasting longer than 10 years, or amputation. The

government was not always able to provide legal assistance, and legal aid organizations and lawyers partially filled the gap.

Arbitrary Arrest: NISS, police, and military intelligence arbitrarily arrested and detained persons. Authorities often detained persons for a few days before releasing them without charge, but many persons were held much longer. The government often targeted political opponents and suspected rebel supporters (see section 1.e.).

Unlike in the previous year, the government did not conduct sweeping arrests in the period preceding the anniversary of the September 2013 protests or prevent individuals from holding commemorative events. The anniversary of the protests coincided this year with a religious holiday during which many citizens travel.

In June Amnesty International called for the release of 171 detainees including college students, political activists, and civil society activists who were being held by national authorities at the time. The human rights group expressed concern about 221 Darfuri students detained around the country following weeks of increased tensions and violence between Darfuri students and NCP groups on college campuses. At the time of the Amnesty International press statement, 157 Darfuri students had been released on bail after being charged with various crimes. Few, if any, NCP students were charged during the same incidents.

NISS officials frequently denied holding individuals in their custody or refused to confirm their place of detention. In lieu of formal detention, NISS increasingly called individuals to report to NISS offices for long hours on a daily basis without a stated purpose. Many human rights observers considered this a tactic to harass, intimidate, and disrupt the lives of opposition members and activists, prevent the carrying out of "opposition" activities, and prevent the recording of formal detentions.

Authorities also arbitrarily arrested and detained foreign nationals without charge. In some cases authorities used intimidation and financial pressure to force foreigners to leave the country.

There were at least two reports of Sudanese citizens residing abroad being deported from their country of residence at the request of the Sudanese government. In December the Jordanian government forcibly deported 800 Sudanese asylum seekers to Khartoum. The majority of deportees were from Darfur. By year's end there had been no reports of torture or further violence against deportees.

In July Waleed al-Hussein, the creator of the critical online news outlet *al-Rakoba*, was arrested by authorities in Saudi Arabia, where he had been residing with his family. Hussein was subjected to interrogations about his work with *al-Rakoba*, held in solitary confinement without charge for more than two months, *and threatened with deportation to Sudan. In November he was transferred to a general holding cell and allowed sporadic contact with his family; he remained imprisoned at year's end.* Family members believed he was arrested at the request of the Sudanese government, which had targeted Hussein for his work in the past and was seeking to have him extradited to Sudan.

There were reports of individuals detained due to their actual or assumed support of antigovernment forces, such as the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) and Darfur rebel movements. Local NGOs reported that some women were detained because of their association with men suspected of being SPLM-N supporters (see section 1.g.).

Pretrial Detention: Lengthy pretrial detention was common. The large number of detainees and judicial inefficiency resulted in trial delays. In cases involving political defendants accused of subverting national security, the accused may be held for as long as four and one-half months, with the possibility of extended detention periods, before being formally charged. In his report to the Human Rights Council, the independent expert expressed concern about several reports received of prolonged detentions and persons held without access to legal aid. He called on the government to release all detained persons or charge them with a recognizable offense in accordance with the law.

In December 2014 NISS officers arrested Reverend Yat Michael Ruot Puk, a South Sudanese pastor who addressed a congregation at the Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church in Khartoum days earlier. On January 11, authorities arrested Reverend Peter Yein Reith, a South Sudanese pastor residing in Khartoum and associate of Reverend Michael. Authorities arrested both clergymen without an arrest warrant and held them incommunicado at an unknown location for three months. On March 1, the government charged the pastors with eight offenses, including treason, espionage, and undermining the

constitution--capital offenses--and on March 2, transferred them to a high-security prison. The pastors went on a hunger strike on March 28-29 to protest their continued detention without trial and lack of access to lawyers. The case eventually came before a court on May 19. In June, however, authorities again denied the pastors any visitation rights--preventing any access to family or legal aid. Following significant international pressure, in August authorities dropped most charges against the pastors and sentenced them to time served. Authorities released the pastors the same day; however, they imposed a travel ban, forbidding their departure from the country. Both pastors were believed to have left the country due to fears of continued detention and persecution. On November 19, the Criminal Court of Appeal announced its decision to retry the pastors in absentia.

Amnesty: On September 22, the government issued Presidential Decree 39, granting general amnesty for leaders and members of the armed movements taking part in the national dialogue. The amnesty covered "all words and deeds that constitute crimes during the period of the participation in the national dialogue." Many observers considered the amnesty a government incentive to encourage opposition members living abroad to return to the country for participation in the dialogue without fear of arrest or reprisal. By year's end there were no known reports of arrests of opposition members who participated in the dialogue, although NISS detained and seized the travel documents of opposition members who met abroad (see section 2.d.). Leading opposition members living in exile who had called for more freedoms as a condition to their participation in a dialogue had not taken advantage of the general amnesty. The decree also called for the release of political prisoners whose parties participated in the dialogue. There were no known reports of such releases, however.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

Although the constitution and relevant laws provide for an independent judiciary, courts were largely subordinate to government officials and the security forces, particularly in cases of alleged crimes against the state. On occasion courts displayed a degree of independence. Political interference with the courts, however, was commonplace, and some high-ranking members of the judiciary held positions in the Ministry of Interior or other ministries in the executive branch.

The judiciary was inefficient and subject to corruption. In Darfur judges were often absent from their posts, thus delaying trials. Access to functioning courts was also a problem for residents in other remote areas.

A state of emergency in Darfur, Blue Nile, and Southern Kordofan allowed for arrest and detention without trial.

Trial Procedures

The constitution and law provide for a fair and public trial as well as a presumption of innocence; however, this often was not respected. Trials are open to the public at the discretion of the judge. In cases of national security and offenses against the state, trials are usually closed. Juries are not used. The law stipulates the government be obligated to provide a lawyer for indigents in cases in which punishment might exceed 10 years' imprisonment or include execution. The accused may also request assistance through the legal aid department at the Ministry of Justice or the Sudanese Bar Association.

By law criminal defendants must be informed promptly of the charges against them at the time of their arrest and charged in detail and with interpretation as needed. Individuals arrested by NISS often were not informed of the reasons for their arrest.

Defendants generally have the right to present evidence and witnesses, be present in court, confront accusers, and have access to government-held evidence relevant to their cases. Some defendants reportedly did not receive legal counsel, and counsel in some cases could only advise the defendant and not address the court. Persons in remote areas and in areas of conflict generally did not have access to legal counsel. The government sometimes did not allow defense witnesses to testify.

Defendants have the right to appeal, except in military trials, where there is no appeal. Defendants were sometimes permitted time and facilities to prepare their defense, although in more political cases the charges may be disclosed with little warning and can change as the trial proceeds. Defendants in common criminal cases such as theft as well as in more politicized cases were often compelled to confess guilt while in police custody through physical abuse and police intimidation of family members.

Lawyers wishing to practice are required to maintain membership in the government-controlled Sudanese Bar Association. The government continued to arrest and harass members of the legal profession whom it considered political opponents.

Military trials, which sometimes were secret and brief, did not include procedural safeguards. For example, a defendant's attorney could advise the defendant but could not address the court.

A 2013 amendment of the 2007 Sudanese Armed Forces Act subjects any civilians within SAF-controlled areas believed to be rebels or members of paramilitary groups to military trials. NISS and military intelligence officers applied this article to detainees in the conflict areas.

For example, between April and October 2014, military intelligence officers arrested six civilians in Rashad and Dallami in South Kordofan during a period of heightened government offensives against the localities. Two arrestees were minors found carrying rifles as they grazed their cattle. Authorities released one minor, Idris Abdalla Kuku, immediately, but continued to hold the other (who has since reached adulthood). Military officials detained four other civilians in Rashad. The five defendants were eventually transferred to El Obeid, capital of North Kordofan, and brought before a military court at the headquarters of the Sudan Armed Forces Fifth Division on August 18. The defendants were being tried as a group under Article 50 of the Court Martial Act. As of year's end the trial continued.

Three-person security courts deal with violations of constitutional decrees, emergency regulations, and some sections of the penal code, including drug and currency offenses. Special courts composed primarily of civilian judges handled most security-related cases. Defendants had limited opportunities to meet with counsel and not always were allowed to present witnesses during trial.

Due to long distances between court facilities and police stations, local mediation was often the first resort to try to resolve disputes. In some instances tribal courts operating outside the official legal system decided cases. Such courts did not provide the same protections as regular courts.

While Islamic jurisprudence (sharia) strongly influenced the law, sharia was generally not applied to Christians in domestic cases such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, and other family matters.

See the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/ (<http://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>).

Political Prisoners and Detainees

The government continued to hold political prisoners and detainees, including protesters. Due to lack of access, the actual numbers of political prisoners and detainees could not be confirmed. Human rights monitors reported political prisoners as being in the hundreds; the government claimed it did not have political prisoners.

The government severely restricted international humanitarian organizations' and human rights monitors' access to political detainees. The government allowed UNAMID extremely limited access to Darfuri political detainees in Khartoum and Darfur.

The government also arbitrarily detained and otherwise targeted numerous Darfuri students on university campuses. On September 3, members of the Darfur Students Association at Omdurman University sustained serious injuries when clashes erupted with progovernment students over the trial of Mohamed El Baggari. Baggari was accused of killing a senior member of the Islamic Student Wing of NCP at Sharq Alneel College in Khartoum on April 29. On November 8, Baggari was sentenced to five years in prison and required to pay "diya," or "blood money" compensation of 40,000 SDG (\$6,000). He was prosecuted under article 131 of the criminal code. Government authorities also temporarily held more than eight members of the Darfur Students Association. Upon release, some students showed visible signs of torture. Government forces reportedly used live bullets to disperse crowds of Darfuri students while they protested. There were numerous reports of violence against student activists and their family members.

Security forces detained political opponents incommunicado, without charge, and tortured them. Some political detainees were held in isolation cells in regular prisons, and many were held without access to family or medical treatment. Human rights organizations asserted NISS ran “ghost houses,” where it detained opposition and human rights figures without acknowledging they were being held. Such detentions were prolonged at times.

The government continued to arrest or temporarily detain opposition members, especially those belonging to or affiliated with of the Sudan Congress Party, Sudanese Communist Party, and affiliates of the SPLM-N or other opposition groups. Detentions were especially frequent in the period before national elections in April. There were some temporary detentions after elections as well despite the government’s assurances that it would create an environment conducive to national dialogue.

In August government authorities detained 15 members of the Sudanese Congress Party. According to official statements by the Congress Party, many of those arrested were beaten and required to report to NISS on a daily basis following their release (see section 3).

Authorities detained four leaders of the opposition Reform Now Party on September 3 while they conducted a public rally at a bus station in Khartoum. Authorities charged them with disturbing public peace and public nuisance under the criminal code. As of November the cases remained open (see section 3).

In December 2014 security officers arrested Farouq Abu Eissa, 78, head of the National Consensus Forces; Amin Mekki Medani, 75, former president of the Confederation of Civil Society Organizations; and SPLM-N advisor Farah Ibrahim Mohamed Agar, 60, for their support of the “Sudan’s Call,” a political declaration by a number of both armed and political opposition groups that called for political reforms and a transitional government. Authorities held Abu Eissa and Medani incommunicado for two weeks before transferring them to a high-security prison. On February 23, authorities brought Abu Eissa and Medani before a special terrorism court and charged them with undermining the constitution and waging war against the state--capital offenses. During several sessions the state attempted to prove Abu Eissa’s and Medani’s intention to undermine the ruling regime by highlighting their work on human rights and relationships with Western organizations. Authorities held Farah Agar in an undisclosed location and denied him visits. No formal charges were brought against Agar, nor was he brought to trial. Under significant international and domestic pressure, the minister of justice exercised discretionary powers to release the individuals on the eve of national elections on April 9.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

Those seeking damages for human rights violations had access to domestic and international courts. The judiciary, however, was not independent. There were problems enforcing domestic and international court orders (see section 5).

f. Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The Interim National Constitution and law prohibit such actions, but the government routinely violated these rights. Emergency laws in Darfur, Southern Kordofan, and Blue Nile states legalize interference in privacy, family, home, and correspondence.

Security forces frequently conducted searches without warrants and targeted persons suspected of political crimes. NISS often confiscated private property, especially electronic equipment.

The government monitored private communication and movement of individuals and organizations without due legal process. A wide network of government informants conducted surveillance in schools, universities, markets, workplaces, and neighborhoods.

Under sharia a Muslim man may marry a Jewish or Christian woman. A Muslim woman may not marry a non-Muslim unless he converts to Islam, but this prohibition was not universally enforced. Non-Muslims may adopt only non-Muslim children; a comparable restriction does not apply to Muslim parents.

On November 3, authorities detained 27 individuals and charged them with public nuisance, refusal to deliver a document or submit a statement, and apostasy. The group was detained at a seminar during which two of the individuals were leading a discussion on whether or not to acknowledge hadiths (the Prophet's teachings). The charges fall under new amendments to the article, which allow for an expanded definition of apostasy. After six weeks of detention, a court granted the defendants bail on December 14. Hearings had not resumed by year's end.

In May 2014 a local court sentenced Meriam Yahia Ibrahim Ishag to 100 lashes and death by hanging for committing apostasy and adultery by marrying a Christian man. Ishag identified herself as a Christian. The government released Ishag from custody in June 2014 after the Court of Appeals overturned her conviction. Following significant international pressure, authorities allowed her to leave the country the following month but did not officially rescind the charges against her. There were no new developments in the case.

g. Use of Excessive Force and Other Abuses in Internal Conflicts

Conflicts in Darfur and the Two Areas continued. Initiatives to negotiate peaceful resolutions and humanitarian access between the government, ethnic tribes, and rebel groups were attempted throughout the year.

Killings: In Darfur and the Two Areas, government forces and government-aligned militias killed civilians, including by repeated targeting and indiscriminate aerial and artillery bombardment of civilian areas. Ground attacks often followed aerial bombardments. Rebel forces also killed civilians during attacks.

Physical Abuse, Punishment, and Torture: All parties to the conflicts in Darfur and the Two Areas were accused of perpetrating torture and other human rights violations and abuses. Government forces abused persons detained in connection with armed conflict as well as internally displaced persons (IDPs) suspected of having links to rebel groups. There were continuing reports that government security forces, progovernment and antigovernment militias, and other armed persons raped women and children.

Child Soldiers: The law prohibits the recruitment of children and provides criminal penalties for perpetrators. In July 2014 the government enacted a law raising the age of conscription into the Popular Defense Forces (PDF) from 16 to 18 years and establishing 18 as the minimum age for joining the national reserve service and the national service.

Many of the armed movements issued commands or statements prohibiting the use or recruitment of child soldiers, including the SLA/MM in 2014, the JEM in 2012 and again during the year, the SPLM-N during the year. Allegations persisted, however, that the armed movements, government forces, and government-aligned militias had child soldiers within their ranks.

According to several reports, the government provided material and logistical support in the country to South Sudanese opposition group Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition, which was widely reported to recruit and use child soldiers. In late 2014 the United Nations observed children under the age of 15 in SAF uniforms carrying weapons in Darfur; however, there were no similar reported observations during the year involving children with government forces.

In January the National Council for Child Welfare reported an estimated 2,100 children had been recruited by armed movements. The UN Panel of Experts on Sudan reported visiting former JEM child soldiers in their places of detention during the year.

In November a representative of Sudan's Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) Commission claimed the SAF and PDF did not recruit or use child soldiers.

In May 2014 the United Nations reported 405 children formerly associated with armed groups received reintegration support.

Many children lacked documents verifying their age. Children's rights organizations believed armed groups, including the SAF, exploited this lack of documentation to recruit or retain children. The SAF continued to deny recruiting children and having children in its ranks.

Also see the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/ (<http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/>).

Other Conflict-related Abuses: All parties to the conflict in Darfur obstructed the work of humanitarian organizations, UNAMID, and other UN agencies, increasing the displacement of civilians and abuse of IDPs. The government also continued to deny access to humanitarian organizations and UN agencies in all SPLM-N-controlled areas of Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile, isolating an estimated 800,000 IDPs and severely limiting access to lifesaving humanitarian assistance. The SPLM-N failed to respond to calls to negotiate access for the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO) to conduct vaccination campaigns in the Two Areas as a standalone issue but insisted on including the campaign in broader political negotiations for increased humanitarian access. Violence, insecurity, the denial of visas and travel permits, and refusal of access to international organizations reduced the ability of humanitarian organizations to provide needed services.

Despite a joint communique released by the government and the United Nations, government forces frequently harassed NGOs that received international assistance. The government restricted or denied permission for humanitarian assessments, refused to approve technical agreements, changed operational procedures, copied NGO files, confiscated NGO property, questioned humanitarian workers at length and monitored their personal correspondence, delayed issuance of visas and travel permits, restricted travel, and publicly accused humanitarian workers of aiding rebel groups. Unidentified armed groups also targeted humanitarian workers for kidnapping and ransom.

Darfur

In Darfur fighting involving government forces, rebels, and ethnic militias continued. Fighting was often along communal lines. These armed groups, including the RSF, which NISS controlled, killed and injured civilians, raped women and children, looted properties, targeted IDP camps, and burned villages in all of Darfur's five states. These acts resulted in approximately 243,000 newly displaced persons by December. An increase in criminality and banditry also contributed to a deterioration of overall security in Darfur.

In its January 19 report, the UN Panel of Experts on Sudan characterized the government strategy under Operation Decisive Summer as one of "collective punishment of villages and communities from which armed opposition groups are believed to come or operate." The report described a pattern of air attacks followed by RSF ground attacks on civilian areas, including looting of villages and an "especially high number" of killings. The panel concluded that the use of airstrikes against civilian targets violates Security Council resolution 1591 (2005).

In its June 19 report, the International Criminal Court (ICC) prosecutor for Darfur cited an example of 10 villages burned in East Jebel Marra by the RSF on January 26 following a SAF aerial bombardment.

Progovernment militiamen carried out dozens of attacks on civilians in Darfur, including 115 killings, 21 incidents of sexual abuse, 56 injuries, eight kidnappings, and 19 arrests in which individuals were detained inhumanely. The RSF destroyed and plundered water wells, food stores, and community resources, including livestock.

All states in Darfur were under varying states of emergency.

Between December 2014 and October, 915 cases of criminality and banditry included 256 killings. The attacks included rape, armed robbery, abduction, ambush, livestock theft, assault/harassment, and burglary and were allegedly carried out primarily by Arab militias, but also by government forces, unknown assailants, and rebel elements.

The government provided support, including training, weapons, and ammunition, to the RSF. The government seldom took action against government forces that attacked civilians. Rebel forces received financial support from foreign sources.

Reports claimed ethnic militias affiliated with government security forces, including the Border Guards and Central Reserve Police, supported their ethnic kin in intercommunal conflicts, further increasing the number of deaths. Sources documented attacks by progovernment militia on civilians in areas controlled by both rebels and the government, including east Jebel Marra

and Gairida, South Darfur.

Intercommunal violence became the most deadly consequence of the conflict in Darfur. The continued utilization and arming of local militias as proxies and the continued influence of these groups in part due to their heavy armament, coupled with widespread impunity, allowed the conflict to spread systemically as clashes over land, cattle, and other resources intensified. Clashes between heavily armed communal groups, particularly in East, South, and North Darfur, resulted in significant casualties (dead and injured) on all sides.

In May, one incident in East Darfur resulted in 107 deaths, including women and children, when heavily armed Rizeigat attacked the capital of the Ma'alia tribe, Abu Karinka. There was no progress toward a peace agreement between the Ma'alia and Rizeigat.

In September 2014 the Rizeigat signed a peace agreement with the Beni Hussein tribe. There were a few minor skirmishes, but the reconciliation efforts appeared to be holding; members of both groups formed a joint committee earlier in the year to oversee the reconciliation.

Despite the Berti and Zevadivah tribes signing cessation of hostilities agreements in March and July, fighting reignited between the groups in Mellit, North Darfur. While the government sent troops to stabilize the situation, both in North Darfur and in other instances of intercommunal violence, fighting persisted in the absence of viable reconciliation processes.

In addition to deaths attributed to intercommunal clashes, many deaths continued to be attributed to the SAF and militia groups. Security deteriorated in North Darfur. In the Jebel Marra area of East Darfur violence, including indiscriminate SAF aerial and artillery bombardments, continued.

The government took few actions to implement provisions of the chapter on justice and reconciliation of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur. Inadequate funding for the Darfur Regional Authority's (DRA's) Commission on Justice, Truth, and Reconciliation hindered the commission's work. In May 2014 the DRA created the Justice Committee and the Truth and Reconciliation Committee. The committees were charged with determining compensation for Darfuri victims and formulating recommendations for resolving Darfur's conflict; they remained ineffective during the year, however.

The general prosecutor for crimes in Darfur continued to receive cases throughout the year. According to UNAMID the majority of cases brought forward largely involved minor crimes, such as theft, rather than substantive war crimes or crimes against humanity. At year's end there was no update on the six cases referred in 2014 to the Special Court for Serious Crimes in Darfur.

As of year's end, the AU and the United Nations had not named observers for the Special Court for Serious Crimes in Darfur.

As of year's end, 76 JEM rebels remained imprisoned, including 25 detainees from the JEM/Dabajo faction. In April the government pardoned and released five JEM detainees from Shala Prison in El Fasher. In August authorities notified families of the remaining seven detainees in Shala Prison they would be executed within days. At that time a JEM representative stated the group was attempting to stop the proceedings by referring the case to the Darfur Peace Office. In late December the government announced it had stayed the executions.

According to UNAMID, victims of human rights violations and abuses continued to face difficulties in accessing judicial redress due to reluctance of law enforcement authorities to pursue perpetrators. Government authorities cited a lack of capacity of law enforcement authorities and lack of information in identifying the perpetrators as reasons for the lack of progress.

Low levels of investigations and prosecutions encouraged perpetrators to act with impunity and contributed to diminishing trust in the justice system. Of 314 incidents of human rights violations recorded by UNAMID, only 126 were acknowledged by the government, which initiated investigations into only 32 of them, resulting in 22 arrests; no prosecutions were reported.

Killings: Security in Darfur deteriorated due to the rise in criminal activity and intercommunal conflict, as well as continued clashes between the government and rebel factions and attacks by the government's RSF forces on unarmed civilians in South, North, and East Darfur. SAF raids resulted in civilian casualties.

Clashes between government forces, government-armed militias, and Darfur rebel movements, notably the SLA/MM, Sudan Liberation Army/Abdul Wahid faction (SLA/AW), and Justice and Equality Movement/Gibril (JEM-Gibril), resulted in casualties on all sides.

Aerial bombardments by the SAF continued to kill and injure civilians throughout the year. UNAMID verification teams confirmed the killing of 14 civilians, including five children, during an April 1 bombing of Rowata village in Central Darfur, and another bombing, which killed one civilian and damaged a UNAMID vehicle on April 6. UNAMID received numerous other reports of SAF bombings of villages.

Ground attacks targeting civilians were also a serious problem. During a six-month period during the year, 346 crimes against civilians were reported, resulting in the loss of 216 lives.

There were many reported abuses similar to the following example: On March 4, a SAF soldier indiscriminately opened fire on civilians in a market in El Fasher, North Darfur, killing one and injuring four.

There were also numerous reported abuses against detainees, such as the following: In September an individual arrested in Jebel Mun, Darfur, was found dead one day later. Witnesses reported the individual had been tied to a tree in a stress position. The local police commissioner called for an investigation, but as of year's end, there had been no action on the case (see section 1.c.).

Attacks on peacekeepers and humanitarian workers were also commonplace. The following examples are illustrative of a wider pattern: On September 27, one South African peacekeeper was killed and four others injured when their convoy was attacked by unidentified armed groups near Mellit, North Darfur.

On September 8, unidentified armed groups attacked a West Darfur State Ministry of Health vehicle carrying Sudanese and WHO officials, killing two.

Between January and September, 34 incidents of intercommunal conflict were reported that resulted in the deaths of 631.

Abductions: Attacks by armed militia on UNAMID increased. Militia groups carjacked UNAMID vehicles and abducted UNAMID staff for ransom (see section 1.b.). On January 29, two international UNAMID contractors on board a UNAMID bus were abducted by unknown armed men in Zalingei, Central Darfur. The captors released the contractors on June 6. Abductions of UNAMID and WHO staff took place during the year.

The United Nations continued to report cases of kidnapping of humanitarian aid workers. For example, on June 3, armed men abducted an international NGO national staff member; his body was found on August 2 near Kutum, West Darfur.

Local media reported four persons were killed and three children missing following a raid by a group of border guards on villages north of Kutum, North Darfur, on September 17 and 18.

On September 2, SLA/AW released 13 SAF soldiers who had been held prisoner in Jebel Marra since 2012.

Physical Abuse, Punishment, and Torture: Sexual and gender-based violence continued throughout Darfur. In 2014 the ICC prosecutor noted an increasing pattern of gang rapes of women and girls. Authorities often obstructed access to justice for rape victims. IDPs reported perpetrators of such violence were often government armed force or militia members. Assaultants assaulted, raped, threatened, shot, beat, and robbed women. In its 2015 report, *Men Without Mercy*, Human Rights Watch reported that rape and other abuses by the RSF were "systematic."

In January human rights organizations reported that the RSF launched a wide-scale campaign of rape of civilians, including minors, in the villages of Golo and Bardani. The United Nations was not allowed access to the area following the reports.

On June 9, NGOs reported claims that dozens of women and girls had been gang-raped by government forces in Golo, Central Darfur, without specifying the date of the incident.

UNAMID continued to document hundreds of cases of human rights violations, including unlawful killings, violations of the right to physical integrity, and cases of arbitrary arrest and detention.

On July 29, human rights observers reported one man had died while in the custody of military intelligence and expressed concern two other individuals risked torture. The body of 32-year-old Abakar Adam Ishag, showing signs of torture, including wounds sustained from a sharp object, reportedly died en route to the Teaching Hospital in El Geneina, West Darfur, on July 19. According to the report, military intelligence arrested the three individuals in West Darfur on July 17 on suspicion of providing information to the rebel JEM. The three men were believed to have been severely tortured at the Jebel Mun Military base in the Silea area of West Darfur.

According to UNAMID, between December 2014 and October, 314 incidents of human rights violations and abuses were recorded in Darfur, involving 856 victims. Of the incidents, 108 were allegedly perpetrated by government forces and 206 by unidentified armed men, the majority of whom victims described as “unidentified armed Arab men.”

Between December 2014 and October, UNAMID identified 54 cases of sexual and gender-based violence involving 93 victims, including 16 cases involving minors. Most victims were IDPs.

UN Special Representative for the Secretary-General (SRSG) for Children and Armed Conflict Leila Zerrougui reported in May at least 60 girls were raped in 48 incidents in Darfur in 2014. The SRSG stated 15 were verified and attributed to the armed forces, 10 to the RSF, and 35 to unidentified armed men. In Darfur it was believed most rape victims did not report incidents, and the actual number of rapes was likely much higher.

Extortion of civilians by progovernment militias was common in Darfur. In July more than 40 tollgates were erected illegally by progovernment militias on the road between El Fasher in North Darfur and Nyala in South Darfur. Persons travelling on buses and trucks were required to pay exactions before being allowed to proceed. At the end of the journey, each bus was forced to pay 1,000 SDG (\$150). If not paid, passengers were beaten and assaulted by armed militiamen.

In an August report on Impunity in Sudan, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) reported that between 2012 and 2014, the Special Court for Crimes in Darfur had only ruled on seven cases. At the time of the report's release, 33 cases were under trial and 25 remained under investigation. None of the concluded cases had relevance to alleged violations of international human rights or humanitarian law, as stipulated by the court's mandate.

According to the OHCHR, 52 regular courts, 94 rural courts, and 17 prosecutor's offices existed throughout Darfur's five states in 2014.

The government prosecuted some crimes involving government officials. Although rare, prosecutions were most common in cases involving violations against minors.

During the year an appeals court in Zalingei, Central Darfur, upheld the guilty verdict of six men, including SAF members, who gang-raped a 16-year-old girl. Authorities sentenced the perpetrators to 10 years' imprisonment, a fine of 5,000 SDG (\$760) each, and (for SAF members) dismissal from the SAF without benefits.

In two incidents in December 2014, a SAF sergeant and a police corporal raped 11-year-old girls. Authorities in Zalingei convicted the perpetrators and sentenced them to 20 years' imprisonment. In another instance a SAF soldier raped a 27-year-old woman in Azom, Central Darfur, and was sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment. As of November, two of these cases remained open for retrial following appeals.

In May local media reported the executive director of Kass locality in South Darfur admitted to raping a 14-year-old girl. As of November a criminal case had not been opened on the alleged incident.

In October 2014 Radio Dabanga, a media outlet with on-the-ground sources and local journalists (but which broadcasts from outside Sudan and which the government accuses of being a propaganda outlet for the armed groups of Darfur) reported SAF soldiers belonging to the military garrison near El Fasher, North Darfur, raped approximately 200 women and girls from Thabit village. The government rejected the allegations and delayed for several days UNAMID's travel to Thabit to investigate the allegations. In February, Human Rights Watch issued a report detailing the mass rape. As of November the government had not made its full investigative report available to the public. Humanitarian and human rights groups reported other cases of sexual abuse; however, they were unable to determine the scale or nature of the attacks.

Child Soldiers: The UN SRSG for children and armed conflict reported isolated cases of recruitment by the SAF, Border Guards, and the PDF in 2014.

In November a representative from the country's DDR Commission reported that a program to demobilize 225 Liberation and Justice Movement child soldiers in West Darfur was in progress. The program provides four alternatives for former child soldiers: being sent back to their families, identifying a foster family, enrolling them in school, or receiving vocational training.

In 2014 SLA/MM issued a command prohibiting child recruitment within its ranks. JEM claimed to continue abiding by a similar command issued in 2012. In May, following a meeting with UN SRSG for Children and Armed Conflict Leila Zerrougui, JEM, SLA/MM, and SLA/AW issued a joint statement in which they committed to continue to take all necessary steps to protect children. On September 30, JEM reissued a directive prohibiting the recruitment and use of children in its ranks, but lack of access made compliance difficult to verify.

In October 2014 former Janjaweed leader Sheikh Musa Hilal initiated a community-based strategic plan to end the use of child soldiers in interethnic and intraethnic fighting. Leaders from the Abbala, Beni Hussein, Fur, Tamma, Gimir, Awalad Janoub, and various other tribes in Kabkabiya, El Sereif, Saraf Umra, al-Waha, and Jebel Si in North Darfur endorsed the plan.

Eyewitness reports indicated both the government and rebel groups employed child soldiers in conflict. Armed groups reported they did not actively recruit child soldiers. They did not prevent children who volunteered from joining their movements, however. The armed groups stated the children were stationed primarily in training camps and were not used in combat.

During an interview with progovernment daily newspaper *Sudan Vision*, a defector from JEM-Gibril Ibrahim accused Ibrahim of kidnapping children from IDP and refugee camps in Darfur and Blue Nile States to be used as child soldiers in Jebel Marra and the Two Areas. According to the defector, some of the children were under 13 years of age. In July, *Sudan Vision* reported a JEM official admitted Jem-Dabajo faction members recruited child soldiers from North Darfur.

Other Conflict-related Abuses: Fighting, insecurity, bureaucratic obstacles, and government and rebel restrictions reduced the ability of peacekeepers and humanitarian workers to access conflict-affected areas. Armed persons attacked, killed, injured, and kidnapped peacekeepers and aid workers. Humanitarian organizations often were not able to deliver humanitarian assistance in conflict areas, particularly in Jebel Marra, South Darfur.

During the year the UN Panel of Experts reported the use of Antonov An-26 aircraft in the government's offensive overflights in Darfur. Human rights groups alleged such aerial bombardments disproportionately affected civilians.

In his June report on children and armed conflict, the UN secretary-general reported 65 children were killed and 132 maimed due to government-rebel crossfire in Darfur. Additionally, 15 children were killed and 29 injured by explosive remnants of war.

The United Nations verified numerous cases of rape of and sexual violence against girls that occurred in 2014: 15 of these cases were attributed to the armed forces, 10 to the RSF, and 35 to unidentified armed men. A UN report stated limited progress occurred in holding perpetrators for crimes against children accountable. In 2014, 12 cases of abuse of minors were reported, of which only four resulted in prosecution and one led to a 20-year prison sentence for rape.

The United Nations verified one school in South Darfur was used for military purposes in 2014 and noted 10 other schools were severely damaged, destroyed, or looted during fighting between the government and armed forces.

According to UNAMID the government forbade numerous land movements and planned flights for UNAMID and humanitarian organizations to access sites in Darfur, mostly in North Darfur. Humanitarian access to critical areas remained very limited. Access limitations and fear of government retribution continued to inhibit reporting on human rights violations, especially sexual and gender-based abuses, and on humanitarian situations.

Between December 2014 and March, UNAMID encountered 63 restrictions on land movement, 59 of which were imposed by the government, three by SLA/AW, and one by the Liberation and Justice Movement. Between March and October, UNAMID encountered 37 restrictions on movement. During the period between March and June, the government refused clearance for 68 of 2,189 planned UNAMID flights.

On April 28-29, following an attack on peacekeepers in Kass, South Darfur, 49 of 949 flights were cancelled.

On April 26, a UNAMID peacekeeper who was injured on duty died in Mukjar, Central Darfur, when NISS forces, citing security concerns, refused to allow an emergency medical evacuation by air from Mukjar to Nyala,.

According to Human Rights Watch, in January the RSF trapped an estimated 130,000 unarmed civilians in some areas in Jebel Marra without access to humanitarian aid.

Humanitarian organizations and NGOs continued to face challenges in accessing populations in Darfur. The Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC) continued to require NGOs to refrain from interviewing or selecting staff unless they used a five-person government selection panel with HAC officials present. This requirement significantly delayed the hiring of new staff in Darfur. The HAC also continued to impose additional requirements on humanitarian organizations on an ad hoc basis, often at the state level.

UN agencies experienced constraints regarding access, although the government granted some travel permits to Central, South, and West Darfur. UNAMID was sometimes denied access to provide security to UN and other humanitarian actors. In these cases the latter had to rely on government-provided security escorts. The latter, however, frequently declined to provide them escorts to areas affected by fighting and restricted movement of UN-sponsored fuel, food, and nonfood supplies to areas outside of major population centers.

During the year both UNAMID and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) were forced to temporarily suspend humanitarian activities in South Darfur for security reasons.

Attacks on humanitarian and UNAMID convoys continued. Bandits obstructed humanitarian assistance, regularly attacked the compounds of humanitarian organizations, and seized humanitarian aid and other assets, including vehicles. Instability forced many international aid organizations to reduce their operations in Darfur.

There were several reports of government forces, and armed militias and individuals, raiding IDP camps.

Some groups claimed Darfur-based rebel groups, such as JEM-Gibril and the SLA/MM, committed attacks in other regions of the country, especially the Two Areas.

Largely unregulated artisanal gold-mining activities continued to expand in all of the Darfur states and to be a source of tension between communities. Claims to land rights continued to be mostly tribal in nature. Clashes sometimes resulted from conflicts over land rights, mineral ownership, and use of gold-mining areas, particularly in the Jebel Amr area in North Darfur. Observers believed those clashes resulted in significant numbers of deaths and displacement.

Officials acknowledged the illicit transport of arms across the country's western border. Reports of cross-border transport of conflict minerals, in particular into Chad, Libya, and Egypt, could not be confirmed but were believed possible. Reports noted the possibility that proceeds from artisanal and small-scale mining in Darfur were being used by armed groups to finance their operations.

Two Areas

Heavy fighting between the SAF and the SPLM-N continued in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile (known as the Two Areas). Both the government and rebel fighters were accused of using excessive force and targeting civilians. The government continued its Decisive Summer campaign throughout the dry season, with a surge in aerial bombardments in May and June. Humanitarian actors and fleeing IDPs also alleged that government forces, primarily led by the RSF and PDF, conducted a systemic forced displacement campaign in Blue Nile beginning in March, burning villages and executing those who refused to leave.

In August, President Bashir announced a two-month cessation of hostilities and amnesty for members of the armed movements to participate in the national dialogue in Khartoum, which went into effect by presidential decree on September 22. Despite this announcement, the SPLM-N, humanitarian actors, and local residents reported continued aerial bombardments inside the Two Areas during late September, allegedly resulting in the death of one child. There were also unverified reports of SAF attacks on SPLM-N forces in Blue Nile on October 29.

The SRF responded to the government's declaration with its own announcement of a unilateral six-month cessation of hostilities to take effect on October 21 and called on the AU High-level Implementation Panel (AUHIP) to hold talks between the armed movements and the government in an effort to reach agreement on modalities for monitoring the cessation of hostilities and allowing for humanitarian access. The SPLM-N admitted to ambushing a government convoy in Blue Nile in early November but claimed it was not a violation as they were only seeking to block resupply of forces that were attacking them.

The AUHIP convened talks on the cessation of hostilities for the Two Areas in mid-November, although the formal talks were adjourned after they became deadlocked over the issue of humanitarian assistance and sequencing of the broader political process. The SPLM-N and government delegations met for a second time in informal discussions in mid-December. As of late December, the government had renewed isolated aerial bombardments in Blue Nile, and there were also multiple incidents of SPLM-N attacks on government forces in both Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile.

According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the four-year conflict has resulted in 1.74 million IDPs and severely affected people in the Two Areas and resulted in 281,100 refugees in neighboring states. During the year through October, 92,000 individuals were newly displaced in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile. Many of the IDPs faced chronic food shortages and inadequate medical care. Significant numbers of farmers were prevented from planting their fields due to the conflict, leading to near-famine conditions in parts of Southern Kordofan. The government and the SPLM-N continued to deny access to humanitarian actors and UN agencies into areas controlled by the SPLM-N; these areas accounted for approximately 800,000 of the IDPs and severely affected persons. The government also continued to restrict access for humanitarian actors and UN agencies in some government-held areas of Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile.

The SAF and the SPLM-N conducted indiscriminate and targeted attacks on civilians in the Two Areas.

Killings: SAF air raids resulted in civilian deaths and the destruction of fields and impeded the planting of crops throughout Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile. Women and children accounted for most of the victims.

In his August report, the UN independent expert on the situation of human rights in Sudan reported that he had received information regarding the dropping of an estimated 374 Antonov, MiG, and Sukhoi bombs in 60 locations across South Kordofan between January and April. These aerial bombardments, as well as ground shellings, were allegedly responsible for killing 35 civilians and injuring 70. In its response to the independent expert's report, the government claimed that it attacked in self-defense and alleged there were civilian casualties because the opposition used civilians as human shields.

There were numerous reported aerial bombardments similar to the following example: The humanitarian wing of the SPLM-N, the Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Agency, alleged the SAF conducted 135 air raids between January and June, killing at least 75 persons and injuring 98.

Between May and June, humanitarian actors reported numerous skirmishes between government forces and the RSF outside of Kadugli and in Dalami and Thobo counties, Southern Kordofan, which resulted in at least five civilian casualties.

Between April and May, the government burned at least three Ingessana villages of Mankaza, Khor Mungra, and Mediam in Blue Nile, with as many as 50,000 persons displaced. Fleeing IDPs and refugees reported numerous unverified civilian executions during these forced displacements and village razings. According to human rights observers, these populations were targeted as "rebel supporters."

Ground attacks by SAF forces and government-backed militias often followed aerial bombardments. Rebel forces also killed civilians during attacks. Attacks resulted in civilian displacement.

The SPLM-N is alleged to have killed 33 gold miners in attacks near Talodi, Southern Kordofan, on June 25 and at least 10 artisanal gold miners in attacks in Manjam al-Akhadaar, South Kordofan, on August 12. A spokesperson for the SPLM-N denied any involvement by the armed group, stating that their forces only attacked SAF and RSF troops.

The SPLM-N also conducted attacks on civilian areas in Southern Kordofan.

Shelling by the SPLM-N killed at least five civilians and injured a dozen others in Kadugli and Delling in April during the period preceding the national elections.

In the June report on children and armed conflict, the UN secretary-general reported that in 2014, at least 62 children between the ages of five and 17 had been killed or maimed in the Two Areas and Abyei, 28 of whom were reportedly killed in the shelling by Sudanese Armed forces of SPLM-N controlled-areas. An additional 42 children were believed to have been killed or maimed as a result of tribal clashes.

Abductions: International organizations were unable independently to verify reports of disappearances due to lack of access to the region. Humanitarian actors reported unverified cases of civilians, including women, being abducted or detained by government-aligned forces due to their suspected affiliation with the SPLM-N.

Local human rights actors reported one case of abduction and one case of illegal detention of civilians by government forces in Dilling County, Southern Kordofan, during July.

In May government forces allegedly abducted 48 civilians during forced displacements in Blue Nile.

On May 25, there were reports that military intelligence captured and imprisoned Mohamed al-Bur Ali from the Ingessana ethnic group in Damazin Maket, Blue Nile. Military intelligence accused him of communicating with the SPLM-N through internet application WhatsApp. As of year's end, he remained in solitary confinement in SAF headquarters in Damazin.

In September 2014 military intelligence arrested five individuals accused of being SPLM-N supporters or affiliates in Allaggori village, Southern Kordofan: Eisa Abbas, Gibriel Abbas, Abdalla Khamis, Abboud Obeid, and Abboud al-Tijani. As of year's end, their whereabouts remained unknown.

In June the UN secretary-general's report on children and armed conflict reported that in August 2014 four South Sudanese refugee boys had been held captive for six months. Arab men had abducted the boys in West Kordofan and released them following negotiations with the police.

Physical Abuse, Punishment, and Torture: The SAF and government-aligned forces reportedly burned and looted villages in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile. There were reports of physical abuse and violent interrogations of SPLM-N-affiliated individuals in Kadugli prison and military installations.

Government forces killed and maimed civilians during repeated aerial or artillery bombardment. There were also numerous reports of the SAF using cluster bombs in the Two Areas.

Throughout the year the SAF also repeatedly bombed cultivated land, disrupting planting cycles, which, coupled with forced displacements and the denial of humanitarian assistance, resulted in near famine-like conditions. NGOs accused the government of using the denial of food as a weapon of war. During July and August, humanitarian actors reported the SAF targeted civilian areas with 53 bombs, including 11 cluster bombs, and 122 artillery shells.

Human rights groups continued to report that government forces and allied militias raped, detained, tortured, and arbitrarily killed civilians in government-controlled areas of Blue Nile.

In July human rights actors reported that a woman was raped by the government militia in Habila County, Southern Kordofan.

During forced displacements in Blue Nile in May and June, IDPs reported cases of rape and sexual assault to local humanitarian actors.

Child Soldiers: Due to problems of access, particularly in conflict zones, reports of child soldiers were limited and often difficult to verify.

In the June report, the UN secretary-general reported that in 2014 the United Nations verified the recruitment by armed groups of 60 boys between ages 14 and 17, of whom 55 were forcibly recruited by JEM from a refugee settlement in Unity State, South Sudan. There were unverified reports that JEM recruited an additional nine boys in 2014. According to the United Nations, new cases of children recruited as child soldiers could not be verified. Some sources reported the government PDF continued to recruit children. The government denied allegations it did so.

Other Conflict-related Abuses: The government continued to obstruct the work of humanitarian organizations, increasing the displacement of civilians and abuse of IDPs. Violence, insecurity, and the denial of visas and refusal of access to international organizations reduced the ability of humanitarian organizations to provide needed services.

Government forces frequently harassed local NGOs that received international assistance, despite a joint communique between the government and the United Nations that allowed for the NGOs' operation. The government restricted or denied permission for humanitarian assessments, refused to approve technical agreements, changed procedures, copied NGO files, confiscated NGO property, questioned humanitarian workers at length and monitored their personal correspondence, delayed issuance of visas and travel permits, restricted travel, and publicly accused humanitarian workers of aiding rebel groups (see section 5).

The SPLM-N failed to work with OCHA and WHO officials to implement a vaccination campaign from October through year's end.

There continued to be reports humanitarian aid workers and centers, including hospitals, were targeted in the Two Areas. In the June report on children and armed conflict, the UN secretary-general noted the United Nations had received credible reports in 2014 regarding the military use of three schools by armed forces in South Kordofan.

On January 20, the air force bombed the NGO Doctors without Borders in Frandala, Southern Kordofan, killing at least one person and injuring two. The NGO subsequently left the country.

SAF air raids also destroyed homes, schools, churches, mosques, and other civilian structures.

There were reports the government provided support to antigovernment rebels in South Sudan, especially following the December 2013 violence.

There were unconfirmed reports that conflict minerals, including gold, were illicitly traded across borders in the Two Areas.

On January 7, a landmine detonated, killing at least five civilians and injuring five others travelling in a truck in Jebel Gilda Mol in Kurmuk County, Blue Nile.

Abyei

Abyei is a disputed region between Sudan and South Sudan that, according to agreements between the two governments, is to be jointly administered until a referendum on the final status of the area is held. After conflict in 2011 between Sudanese and South Sudanese forces, the United Nations established the UN Interim Security Force in Abyei (UNISFA). The security situation in Abyei was tenuous throughout the year due to rising tensions between the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya communities compounded by deteriorating economic conditions and the unresolved 2013 murder of Ngok Dinka paramount chief Kuol Deng Koul. The AU and the Abyei Area Joint Investigation and Inquiry Committee had still not released their reports following its investigation into the 2013 killings of Koul, an Ethiopian UNISFA peacekeeper, and 16 Misseriya tribesmen. The Abyei Area Joint Investigation and Inquiry Committee completed an investigation into the incident but had yet to release its conclusions.

Several humanitarian aid NGOs continued to provide mobile outreach services in Abyei from their bases in South Sudan.

During the year there were some incidents of violence between the two communities.

Killings: On February 28, UNISFA reported 100 armed Misseriya tribal militia attacked Marialachak village in Abyei (south sector), burned 24 houses, killed at least three Ngok Dinka, and abducted eight children. UNISFA apprehended some of the assailants, some of whom claimed to be from the militant group Tora Bora and one of whom self-identified as a SAF intelligence officer. The abducted children were returned to their families by Misseriya tribal leaders in a ceremony under UNISFA supervision.

On May 20, UNISFA reported unknown armed Misseriya militia killed two Ngok Dinka men in Dar, Abyei. According to Misseriya representatives, on November 12, armed members of the Ngok Dinka killed at least 13 Sudanese traders and burned the trucks they travelled in near Shagaga, Abyei. The traders were transporting goods to Mayom, south of Abyei. As of November 15, it was not clear what action, if any, local authorities took in response to the incident.

Other Conflict-related Abuses: UNISFA also reported occasional Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) incursions into southern Abyei, including an attempted robbery at a market in Agok on July 20 by SPLA soldiers based in Unity State. On September 13, SPLA deserters set up illegal roadblocks in the south of Abyei and attempted to extort taxes from passing traffic. The SAF also maintained an illegal armed presence in the form of the so-called oil police north of Abyei.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The Interim National Constitution provides for freedom of thought, expression, and of the press "as regulated by law," but the government restricted these rights.

Freedom of Speech and Expression: Individuals who criticized the government publicly or privately were subject to reprisal, including arrest. The government attempted to impede such criticism and monitored political meetings and the press. The government arrested opposition political leaders, especially before the April elections. Members of the Sudanese Congress Party and "Irhal" ("Leave") Campaign, which advocated for an election boycott, were prevented from holding public discussions.

President Bashir on December 14 criticized his government's inability to "control the media" in an address to the ruling NCP parliamentary caucus. He warned that he himself would take "decisive measures."

On December 17, Osman Mirghani, editor of the daily newspaper *al-Tayar*, and Ahmed Yousef al-Tay, editor of the newspaper *al-Saiha*, were charged with abusing their positions as journalists, publishing false news, and undermining the constitutional system, a crime punishable by death. The two had published articles critical of the government, including a December 12 piece on electricity cuts. Two days prior to the arrest, *al-Tayar* announced on its Facebook page that NISS had indefinitely suspended the newspaper's license. On the same day, Mirghani held a press conference challenging the legality of the ban. As of year's end, the two journalists had been released on bail and were pending trial. *Al-Tayar* remained closed. Ahmed Yousef al-Tay later resigned from his position with *al-Saiha*.

On May 25, authorities arrested Yasir Mirghani, secretary general of the Sudan Consumer Protection Society (SCPS), and activist Nisreen Ali following a protest against reported child molestation by school bus drivers. Their whereabouts were not immediately known. Human rights observers believed the May 25 confiscations of the full daily runs of 10 different newspapers that reported the protest were linked to the same reports of child molestation by bus drivers. Authorities confiscated property belonging to the SCPS on May 28. In July the SCPS called on the Presidency to return the organization's confiscated property and allow it to resume its activities.

Throughout August, NISS detained more than 17 opposition party members, the majority belonging to the Sudanese Congress Party. In many cases authorities detained individuals following meetings or symposiums during which political discussions were held.

The government also curtailed public discussion of a religious nature if proselytization was suspected and monitored religious sermons and teachings (see the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/ (<http://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>)).

Press and Media Freedoms: The Interim National Constitution provides for freedom of the press, but authorities prevented newspapers from reporting on problems deemed sensitive. Those measures included direct prepublication censorship, confiscation of publications, legal proceedings, and denial of state advertising. Confiscation in particular inflicted financial damage on newspapers that were already under financial strain due to low circulation. The government announced "red line" topics that could not be reported on in the press, such as corruption, security services, and government action in conflict areas. Authorities ordered the confiscation of newspapers that reported on these topics.

In January the government passed the Freedom of Information Law to promote greater transparency and allow citizens greater access to information. Local and international human rights observers and journalists remained skeptical that the law would improve access to information, since little was publicly known about this law. Additionally, the law excepts 12 categories of information, including personal, national security, foreign policy, and criminal procedures, all of which can be classified.

The government influenced radio and television reporting through the granting or denial of permits.

During the year NISS indefinitely suspended a radio program, *Sabah El Buyout*, which discussed corruption and nepotism in the country. In June journalist Hassan Ishag was detained for more than three months, continuing a series of arbitrary detentions and mistreatment of journalists.

The government controlled the media through the National Council for Press and Publications (NCPP), which administered mandatory professional examinations for journalists and oversaw the selection of editors. The National Council for Press and Publications had authority to ban journalists temporarily or indefinitely. In November the NCPP estimated there were 7,000 registered journalists in the country, of whom an estimated 1,000 were actively employed.

During the year authorities lifted restrictions on one journalist who had been temporarily banned from writing. As of December, seven other journalists remained banned from writing, including four journalists for *al-Jarida* newspaper.

Violence and Harassment: The government, including NISS, continued to arrest, harass, intimidate, and torture journalists and vocal critics of the government. NISS required journalists to provide it personal information, such as details on their tribe, political affiliation, and family.

Following the April elections, journalists reported that authorities increasingly required them to report daily to NISS, where they would be held several hours a day, sometimes without questioning. Human rights observers considered this type of alternative detention a form of harassment and intimidation.

On September 6, NISS summoned Eiman Mustafa of *al-Jarida* newspaper in relation to a September 4 article she authored covering political interests in an agricultural bill in parliament since 2010. Mustafa was required to report to NISS headquarters for 12-hour periods for three consecutive days.

In July authorities arrested three journalists covering a doctors' strike in Gadaref.

In late December lawyers referred to the Constitutional Court the case of Osman Mirghani, editor and chief of *al-Tayar*, who was attacked by unknown assailants in July 2014. Some human rights advocates suspected the government instructed the court to delay its ruling.

In January the Ministry of Culture informed the Sudanese Writers Union that it had revoked the group's registration because its activities were contrary to provisions in its mandate and those regulating national cultural organizations. The union had been registered with the government since 2006 to hold intellectual forums, cultural nights, and movie screenings in addition to other activities. The union filed a case against the Ministry of Culture. On October 27, a judge ruled in favor of the union, disallowing justifications used by the ministry to close the group. Before year's end, however, the court had reversed its judgment, and the organization had restarted legal procedures to regain its status.

Censorship or Content Restrictions: The government continued to practice direct prepublication and prebroadcast censorship of all forms of media. The second half of the year witnessed fewer confiscations of newspapers.

In September 2014 the government announced it would suspend exceptional measures, including prepublication censorship, imposed by NISS on print media; however, it failed to do so. According to the National Council for Press and Publications, by November a court specializing in media issues and "newspaper irregularities" was established under the existing Press and Publications Act, although it was not functional by year's end.

The government confiscated print runs of 24 newspapers on at least 47 occasions between January and June (mostly between February and May). For example, on May 25, NISS confiscated print runs of 10 newspapers. Authorities gave no justification, but observers believed the newspapers were targeted because of their intention to publish a press statement by the UN special rapporteur on violence against women who visited the country May 13 to 24.

National Security: The Press and Publications Act allows for restrictions on the press in the interest of national security and public order. It contains loosely defined provisions for bans because of encouragement of ethnic and religious disturbances and incitement of violence. The act holds editors in chief criminally liable for all content published in their newspapers. The criminal code, National Security Act, and emergency laws were regularly used to bring charges against the press.

NISS initiated and continued legal action against journalists for stories critical of the government and security services.

On February 16, NISS confiscated 14 newspapers due to national security concerns. On February 17, *Sudan Vision*, a progovernment paper, reported that the National Council for Press and Publications expressed "regret" for the confiscations and reminded members of the press of their "national responsibility to avoid all forms of excitement that can be harmful to society or the national security of the country, especially the armed forces." The minister of interior reaffirmed the right of NISS to intervene and suspend any newspaper believed to threaten national security. Observers speculated that articles on military gains by rebel groups the previous day may have been one reason for the confiscations.

In January authorities brought charges against Madeeha Abdalla, editor in chief of the independent *al-Midan* newspaper; Ibrahim Merghani, head of *al-Midan*'s political desk; and journalist Suliman Hamed, including crimes against the state, which carry the death penalty if convicted. Human rights observers believed the charges were related to articles published including comments by an SPLM-N leader on the economic situation facing populations in West Kordofan and Northern Sudan. The three were released on bail the same day, although they were required to attend trial hearings. As of December the cases remained pending.

Internet Freedom

The government regulated licensing of telecommunications companies through the National Telecommunications Corporation. The agency blocked some websites and most proxy servers judged offensive to public morality, such as those purveying pornography. There were few restrictions on access to information websites, but authorities sporadically blocked access to YouTube and "negative" media sites.

Reporters Without Borders reported NISS established a "Cyber-Jihadist Unit" with a mandate to crack down on "internet dissidents" in 2011. According to outside reports, the unit monitored social media accounts and electronic communications, especially of those believed to be regime critics.

According to the International Telecommunication Union, approximately 25 percent of individuals used the internet in 2014, an increase from 23 percent in 2013.

Freedom House continued to rank the country as "not free" in its annual internet freedom report. According to the report, there were 300 bloggers registered with the Sudanese Bloggers Union, the majority of whom wrote anonymously due to fear of reprisal.

On August 15, al-Tareeq, an independent website, reported it suffered a cyberattack that caused great damage. According to staff, the attack was traced to actors in the country and Ukraine.

On the eve of elections, April 12, two online newspapers, *Hurriyat* and *Sudanile*, reported being hacked and receiving calls from NISS warning them that publishing on elections was a "red-line" issue.

In November at an international three-day cybercrime workshop in Khartoum with participants from 40 African countries, the chief of NISS said the threat of cybercrime deserved "high level attention" and urged countries to develop new legislation "to protect the continent."

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

The government restricted academic freedom at cultural and academic institutions. It determined the curriculums and appointed the vice chancellors responsible for administration. It continued to arrest student activists and cancel or deny permits for some student events. Youth activists reported some universities discouraged students from participating in antigovernment rallies and showed favorable treatment towards NCP students. Some professors exercised self-censorship. Security forces used tear gas and other heavy-handed tactics against largely peaceful protests at universities or involving university students. The Public Order Police continued to monitor public gatherings and cultural events, often intimidating women and girls, who feared police would arrest them for "indecent" dress or actions.

Due to increased clashes between pro- and antigovernment students, many universities suspended student activities (political, cultural, and social) on university premises and required approval before events could be held.

On January 21, authorities raided and closed the Mahmoud Mohammed Taha Cultural Center during an event marking the 30th anniversary of the execution of Taha, a renowned secular Islamic scholar.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

Freedom of Assembly

Although the Interim National Constitution and law provide for freedom of assembly, the government severely restricted this right. The criminal code considers gatherings of more than five persons without a permit to be illegal. Organizers must notify the government 36 hours prior to assemblies and rallies.

On September 3, authorities detained four leaders of the opposition Reform Now Party (RNP) who were conducting a rally at a bus station in Khartoum. Authorities held them for two days, released them on bail, and charged them with disturbing public peace and public nuisance, punishable by imprisonment, a fine, or flogging.

On October 3, the RNP released a statement emphasizing that freedoms of expression, association, and assembly are guaranteed by the constitution's Bill of Rights and that the president had issued Executive Order 158 supposedly to enhance political freedoms in the period preceding the National Dialogue. The first two court sessions took place October 4 and 20. By December the cases were closed, with the court imposing fines, which the RNP leaders refused to pay. The alternative was a month in prison. The four were imprisoned for several days and then released after the fine was paid anonymously. Some suspected the government paid the fine to end the case quietly.

The government continued to deny permission to Islamic orders associated with opposition political parties, particularly the Ansar (Umma Party) and Khatmiya (Democratic Unionist Party), to hold large gatherings in public spaces, but parties regularly held opposition rallies on private property. Government security agents occasionally attended opposition meetings, disrupted opposition rallies, or summoned participants to security headquarters for questioning after meetings.

In the period before April elections, authorities temporarily detained without charge more activists around the country who supported the Irhal (Leave) campaign to boycott elections. Many detainees were members of the opposition Sudanese Congress Party, Sudanese Communist Party, or Umma Party. Many detainees reported being beaten by government authorities (see section 3).

On April 12, unknown assailants abducted Sandra Kadouda while she was en route to an Irhal campaign at Umma Party Headquarters. A member of the Communist Party and Solidarity Committee for Families of the Detained, Kadouda had served as moderator of the antielection rally the previous night. Kadouda was abandoned days later by her assailants in Khartoum displaying signs of physical and mental abuse. Kadouda's family initially blamed government authorities for the abduction. Kadouda later issued a statement absolving the government of wrongdoing. Human rights observers believed the statement was issued under pressure from the government (see section 1.b.).

The African Center for Justice and Peace Studies recorded 22 arrests on April 12, the day before elections started. On the first day of elections, April 13, joint police/SAF forces fired live ammunition and tear gas to disperse an antielection rally at Mornei IDP camp in Central Darfur. Antielection protests also took place in Hasshahis and Hamidiya IDP camps (Central Darfur), Kalma IDP camp (South Darfur), and Rongatass camp (Western Darfur). UNAMID reported six IDPs and three police officers were injured.

On April 14, police fired tear gas to disperse a public forum at El Fasher University in North Darfur calling for a boycott of the elections. Local groups of an estimated 30 students were arrested. The whereabouts of 12 students was not immediately known, and 18 were taken into custody and charged with criminal offenses including undermining the constitutional system, which carries the death penalty.

Authorities reportedly took limited if any action against security force members who used excessive force. In November local media reported the Ministry of Justice agreed to pay "diya" (blood money) totaling 35 million SDG (\$5.3 million) in compensation to families of identified victims of the September 2013 protests and lift the immunity of four security officers. As of November cases against the security officers remained pending.

Freedom of Association

The Interim National Constitution and law provide for freedom of association, but the government severely restricted this right. The law prohibits political parties linked to armed opposition groups. The government closed civil society organizations or refused to register them on several occasions. Government and security forces continued arbitrarily to enforce provisions of

the NGO law, including measures that strictly regulate an organization's ability to receive foreign financing and register public activities. In his August report, the UN independent expert on the situation of human rights in Sudan noted several instances in which the government clamped down on the activities of civil society and noted these actions contravened the country's obligations under the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights and Article 40 of the Interim National Constitution.

In June the Sudanese Confederation of Society reported that, in the first half of the year, authorities rejected the applications to reregister more than 40 registered organizations or began investigations into their activities.

Under the government's "Sudanization" policy, many organizations reported they faced administrative difficulties if they refused to have progovernment groups implement their programs at the state level. In Blue Nile, for example, HAC state authorities prevented one humanitarian organization from implementing a food security program for several months until it agreed to collaborate with CORD, a local organization selected by the state government.

Organizations reported delays in obtaining permits to hold general assembly meetings. In the absence of general assemblies, the government prevented some organizations from holding elections or filling vacant positions. Some civil society activists believed the government delayed these approvals to disrupt the organizations' work or force them out of compliance with government regulations.

On January 18, NISS raided the Mohmoud Mohamed Taha Cultural Center. Later the same month, the National Civic Forum and Sudanese Writers Union were informed in writing that the Ministry of Culture was revoking their licenses. In its response to the independent expert's reporting of these closures, the government stated the cancellation of the Writers Union and Taha Center registrations was undertaken because of their violations of the Cultural Groups Regulation Act of 1996. The government did not specify what terms of the act had been violated by the groups in question. In November a Khartoum court overturned the ministry's decision to reject the Writers Union's license.

On March 4, authorities notified Zarqa's Organization that its registration had been rejected for one year. On March 8, NISS and HAC officials summoned the director of Zarqa's Organization to question him about foreign financing of the organization's projects.

On December 14, NISS closed seven offices of Tearfund, an international NGO that was providing health and nutrition services in Central Darfur. By year's end all seven offices remain closed, with activities suspended. No reason was given for the closure or anticipated duration at the time.

c. Freedom of Religion

See the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/. (<http://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>)

d. Freedom of Movement, Internally Displaced Persons, Protection of Refugees, and Stateless Persons

The Interim National Constitution and law provide for freedom of movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, but the government restricted these rights for foreigners, including humanitarian workers.

The government impeded the work of UN agencies and delayed full approval of their activities throughout the country, particularly in the Two Areas. NGOs also alleged the government impeded humanitarian assistance in the Two Areas.

In-country Movement: The government and rebels restricted the movement of citizens as well as UN and humanitarian organization personnel in conflict areas (see section 1.g.). While the government claimed refugees had freedom of movement within the country, it required they formally register and be granted travel permits before leaving refugee camps. According to authorities, registration of refugees helped ensure their personal security.

Internal movement was generally unhindered for citizens outside conflict areas. Foreigners needed travel permits for domestic travel outside Khartoum, which were often difficult to obtain. Foreigners were required to register with the Ministry of Interior's Alien Control Division within three days of arrival and were limited to a 15.5-mile radius from Khartoum. Once registered, foreigners were allowed to move beyond this radius, but travel outside of Khartoum State required official approval.

The government delayed issuing humanitarian visas to UN and NGO staff and generally denied access to conflict areas, with some exceptions made for Darfur IDP camps. The government also delayed issuing travel permits to nonconflict areas.

The country maintained a reservation on Article 26 of the UN Convention on Refugees of 1951 regarding refugees' right to freely move and choose their place of residence within a country. The government's encampment policy requires asylum seekers and refugees to stay in designated camps. The government did not allow the establishment of formal IDP or refugee camps in White Nile, Southern Kordofan, and Blue Nile, but it assisted new arrivals from South Sudan in holding sites in White Nile State.

Foreign Travel: The government requires citizens to obtain an exit visa if they wish to depart the country. Issuance was usually pro forma, but the government continued to use the visa requirement to restrict some citizens' travel, especially persons of political or security interest. To obtain an exit visa, children must receive the permission of both parents.

In October and November, authorities prevented leading opposition party members from travelling abroad to participate in a meeting of opposition parties and rebel groups. Authorities confiscated several passports. In one case authorities confiscated the foreign passport of a dual national living abroad when he attempted to depart the country in October and, as of November, had not returned the passport or explained the reason for its confiscation. The individual believed he may have been targeted because of his former affiliation with opposition groups.

On November 16, local media reported authorities temporarily detained and confiscated the passports of Sudanese National Alliance Party Chair Kamal Ismail and Deputy Chair of the National Umma Party Mariam al-Sadiq al-Mahadi upon their return from talks in Paris with members of the opposition who belonged to the "Sudan Call," a grouping of political and armed opposition forces and civil society organizations. Human rights observers and opposition members considered the temporary detentions and confiscations of passports contrary to the government's stated policy of creating a conducive environment for the national dialogue. Several opposition leaders invited to the AU and other international peace talks to end the country's internal conflicts were denied exit visas and/or had their passports confiscated. Some leaders were able to travel but reported having their passports confiscated upon return.

Exile: The government observed the law prohibiting forced exile. It warned political opponents of their potential arrest if they returned, however. Opposition leaders and NGO activists remained in self-imposed exile in northern Africa and Europe; other activists fled the country during the year. In September a presidential decree granted general amnesty for opposition members and rebel leaders living abroad who agreed to return to Sudan to participate in the national dialogue. As of December prominent opposition members had not returned to the country under the amnesty, some expressing concern about their civic and political rights even with the amnesty (see section 1.d.).

Internally Displaced Persons

Large-scale displacement continued to be a severe problem. By year's end OCHA reported a total of 247,000 persons had been displaced in Darfur since January. Of these, approximately 110,000 received humanitarian assistance, 100,000 were in areas with limited or no access to humanitarian assistance, and 67,000 had returned to their places of origin. IOM registered approximately 103,000 who were referred for humanitarian assistance--85,000 in North and South Darfur, and 18,000 in West and South Kordofan. As of December 31, the United Nations reported 52,000 displaced in government-controlled areas of South Kordofan and 60,000 in government-controlled areas of Blue Nile state. More than 20,000 remained displaced in Abyei.

In Darfur government restrictions and security constraints continued to limit access to affected populations and impeded the delivery of humanitarian services.

Government restrictions, harassment, and the threat of expulsion resulted in continued interruption of gender-based violence programming. Reporting and outreach were limited (see section 1.g.). Some UN agencies were able to work with the Darfur governor's advisers on women and children to raise awareness of gender-based violence and response efforts.

There were numerous reports of abuse committed by government security forces, rebels, and armed groups against IDPs in Darfur, including rapes and beatings (see section 1.g.).

Outside IDP camps and towns, insecurity restricted IDP freedom of movement, and women and girls who left the towns and camps risked sexual violence. Insecurity within IDP camps also was a problem. The government provided little assistance or protection to IDPs in Darfur. Most IDP camps had no functioning police force. International observers noted criminal gangs aligned with rebel groups operated openly in several IDP camps.

As in previous years, the government refused to establish formal IDP or refugee camps in Khartoum or the Two Areas.

The United Nations did not have a presence in SPLM-N-controlled areas and was unable to assess the scope of civilian displacement in the area.

Protection of Refugees

As of December 31, UNHCR reported approximately 374,000 refugees and asylum seekers in the country, including 112,000 Eritreans, 15,000 Ethiopians, and 42,000 Chadians. As of December 195,000 South Sudanese had arrived in the country since fighting erupted in December 2013, of whom more than half arrived in 2015. New refugees entering eastern Sudan often stayed in camps for two to three months before moving to Khartoum, other parts of the country, or on to Libya in an effort to reach Europe. According to UNHCR, the government hosted approximately 75,000 refugees in Khartoum as of December. The government continued to restrict access in eastern Sudan for international humanitarian NGOs.

As of October UNHCR estimated 350,000 persons of South Sudanese origin remained in the country following South Sudan's independence in 2011. Approximately 200,000 of them lived in Khartoum. Many integrated into the urban population. An estimated 40,000 lived in shantytowns, informal settlements known as "open areas." The government did not officially recognize this population as refugees or IDPs and restricted access to these areas by humanitarian organizations. Many "open areas" lacked basic services such as water, electricity, and sewage systems. The government worked with UNHCR throughout the year to develop a relocation site in Khartoum for South Sudanese living in Khartoum's "open areas" as well as new arrivals fleeing the conflict in the south. As of December approximately 1,745 families had been relocated to the site. Access to basic services, however, remained limited, and the government controlled the access of humanitarian actors to the area.

Few individuals of South Sudanese origin who remained in the country after 2011 re-acquired their Sudanese citizenship or obtained South Sudanese nationality documentation following South Sudan's independence. The governments of Sudan and South Sudan signed a framework agreement in 2012, known as the "four freedoms" agreement, which allows citizens of both states to enjoy freedom of residence, movement, economic activity, and property ownership, but it was yet to be fully implemented.

The government did not recognize individuals fleeing from South Sudan as refugees following December 2013 fighting in South Sudan, but it allowed some national and international organizations to assist them. In December 2014 UNHCR and the Ministry of Interior's Commission for Refugees and Directorate General of Passports and Immigration signed a memorandum of understanding on the registration and documentation of approximately 500,000 South Sudanese in Sudan, including those that fled the conflict in South Sudan in December 2013.

According to UNHCR, as of October nearly 170,000 South Sudanese had been registered by the Directorate of Passport and Immigration as part of the registration of all South Sudanese in Sudan, including those who remained in Sudan following the secession of South Sudan. Although some South Sudanese reported delays in receiving their identification cards, UNHCR welcomed the registration process as it helped to facilitate work, travel, and access to basic services for South Sudanese residing in Sudan. The government, however, did not provide services within the "open areas" and controlled access to and activities by humanitarian workers in these areas.

Access to Asylum: The government generally provided first asylum/temporary protection to individuals who might not qualify as refugees. In 2014 the government adopted new asylum legislation that provides for the granting of asylum or refugee status and requires asylum applications to be submitted within 30 days of arrival in the country. The government granted asylum to many asylum seekers, particularly from Eritrea, Syria, Somalia, and Ethiopia, but it sometimes considered individuals registered as asylum seekers in another country as migrants. Government officials routinely took up to three months to approve individual refugee and asylum status, but it worked with UN agencies to implement status determination procedures in eastern Sudan and Darfur and attempted to reduce the case backlog. The law requires asylum seekers to register both as refugees with the Commission for Refugees and as foreigners with the Civil Registry (to obtain a “foreign” number).

On May 1, authorities arrested 32 Eritrean asylum seekers in Port Sudan and charged them with illegal entry under Article 30 of the Immigration and Passport Act, which allows for up to two years’ imprisonment, fines, deportation, or both. The individuals, who included 14 women and a six-year-old child, were detained and not allowed immediate access to UNHCR to request international protection as asylum seekers. On May 7, a court found the group guilty of illegal entry and sentenced the group to two months’ detention in lieu of a 4,000 SDG (\$600) fine followed by deportation. In June, UNHCR’s legal-aid implementing partner appealed the decision of the court. The Court of Appeal reversed the sentences of seven individuals while affirming the sentences of the other 25. The Supreme Court upheld the appeals court decision; however, the decision to deport the 25 individuals was not executed, and they were released on bail. As of year’s end, all 32 individuals were at large and not under detention.

Since the beginning of the Syrian conflict in 2011, 25,000 Syrians have registered with UNHCR in Sudan. The government estimated 80,000 Syrians had arrived in Khartoum since the start of the conflict. The government did not require visas or residency permits for Syrians as it considered them “brothers and sisters.” Following a marked increase in Syrian arrivals throughout the year, however, the Sudanese Commission for Refugees restarted registration of Syrian nationals (as “others of concern”) in November to better account for their number and needs.

Beginning in April the government waived regular entry requirements for Yemenis and third-country nationals fleeing the conflict in Yemen, and the country became an initial staging ground for humanitarian actors attempting to assist victims of the conflict in Yemen. As of December UNHCR estimated that 6,000 Yemenis had arrived in the country.

Refoulement: Sudan is a signatory to the 1951 Geneva Convention and generally respected the international principle of nonrefoulement with a few notable exceptions. According to UNHCR incidents of refoulement decreased significantly over the year. As of October, two incidents of Eritrean refugees being deported back to Eritrea had been reported. Both incidents occurred in the eastern region of the country in January and were reported to involve 79 individuals, including 17 unaccompanied minors. In February authorities in the east disclosed they followed a practice of returning “recyclers”—Eritrean asylum seekers presumed to be previously registered as refugees in Ethiopia. With UNHCR’s intervention, authorities were trained on referral procedures to prevent refoulement, including of refugees who previously registered in other countries.

Refugee Abuse: Asylum seekers and refugees were vulnerable to arbitrary arrest, harassment, and beatings outside of camps because they did not receive identification cards while awaiting government determination of refugee or asylee status. Refugees and asylum seekers also were subject to arrest outside the camps, including in urban areas, because the government’s encampment policy makes it illegal to move from assigned camps without authorization. On average 150-200 refugees and asylum seekers were detained in Khartoum every month and assisted with legal aid by the joint UNHCR/Commissioner for Refugees (COR) legal team. Although the new asylum act makes naturalization possible for refugees for the first time, it was not fully implemented.

There were abuses, including gender-based violence, in the camps. The government attempted to work with UNHCR to provide greater protection to refugees.

Human rights advocates stated the delay in granting legal status was one reason why some new refugees left camps before registering with UNHCR. Refugees often relied on human smuggling networks to leave camps. Traffickers routinely abused and tortured refugees if ransoms were not paid. UNHCR reported an increase in violent kidnappings around refugee camps in the eastern region in the last quarter of the year. Reported trafficking cases also increased in Khartoum.

On June 11, an armed group attacked a group of 19 Eritrean asylum seekers seeking to reach Khartoum with smugglers. To evade the attackers, the smugglers accelerated, prompting the truck to overturn and killing the smugglers and four asylum seekers. The government opened an investigation and agreed to provide armored escorts for future convoys moving refugees and asylum seekers between government reception centers and refugee camps. As of November the armed attackers had not been apprehended.

On June 4, an armed group opened fire on a convoy organized by the UNCHR's COR carrying 49 Eritrean asylum seekers from Wad Sharifey reception center to Shagarab refugee camp. The armed group abducted 14 persons, including seven unaccompanied minors and five women. The government initiated an investigation and search for the perpetrators and abductees. On June 27, Kassala state police freed 47 asylum seekers of Eritrean origin held by human traffickers and arrested six traffickers. COR reported to UNHCR that the 14 asylum seekers kidnapped on June 4 were among those rescued. As of November, seven of the victims were housed in the Kassala safe shelter and serving as witnesses for the prosecution.

See the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/ (<http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/>).

Employment: The government in principle allows refugees to work but rarely granted work permits (even to refugees who have obtained higher degrees in Sudan). In 2013 the government announced it would issue approximately 30,000 work permits to Eritrean refugees in Kassala in the eastern region as part of a joint UNHCR/UN Development Program (UNDP) "Transitional Solutions Initiative." The program was cancelled in 2014 and not renewed as of December. Some refugees in eastern states were able to find informal work as agricultural workers or laborers in towns. Many women in camps resorted to producing alcohol and were subject to arrest and harassment by police. In urban centers the majority of refugees worked in the informal sector (for example, as tea sellers, maids, and drivers), leaving them at heightened risk of arrest, exploitation, and abuse.

Temporary Protection: The government maintained an open border with South Sudan and stated South Sudanese refugees fleeing conflict in their country would enjoy the same status as Sudanese citizens. As of November UNHCR, estimated 195,000 individuals had crossed into the country from South Sudan since December 2013. The majority sought refuge in White Nile State, while approximately 30 percent travelled to Khartoum.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

The country continued to operate under the Interim National Constitution of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). The constitution provides citizens the ability to choose their government in free and fair periodic elections based on universal and equal suffrage. Citizens were unable to exercise this right in practice, however. Post-CPA provisions provide for a referendum on the status of Abyei and popular consultations in Blue Nile and Southern Kordofan. In Abyei the Ngok Dinka held a unilateral referendum in October 2013, which the international community did not recognize. No popular consultations took place during the year in either Southern Kordofan or Blue Nile.

Several parts of the CPA designed to clarify the status of southern-aligned groups remaining in the north following South Sudan's secession continued to be the subject of negotiations between the governments of Sudan, South Sudan, and rebel groups. Peace negotiations for the Two Areas and Darfur continued to stall while fighting between government and antigovernment forces continued. Neither Sudan nor South Sudan progressed toward a resolution on the final status of Abyei.

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: The national- and state-level executive and legislative elections, held April 13-16, did not meet international standards.

The government failed to create a free, fair, and conducive elections environment. Restrictions on political rights and freedoms, lack of a credible national dialogue, and the continuation of armed conflict on the country's peripheries contributed to a very low voter turnout. Observers noted numerous problems with the pre-election environment. The legal framework did not protect

basic freedoms of assembly, speech, and press. Security forces restricted the actions of opposition parties and arrested opposition members and supporters. In addition there were reported acts of violence during the election period (see section 1.c.).

The main opposition parties, Umma National Party, National Consensus Forces, Sudanese Congress Party, and the Popular Congress Party, boycotted the election itself; only the ruling NCP party and National Unity parties participated.

According to the chair of the National Election Commission, 5,584,863 votes were counted in the election, representing approximately a 46 percent participation rate. According to the AU and other observers, however, turnout was considerably lower than this. Following the elections the National Assembly consisted of 426 seats (Upper House). The NCP held 323 seats, Democratic Unionist Party 25, and independents 19 seats; the remaining seats were won by other minor political parties. The independents, many of whom were previously ejected from the ruling NCP, were prevented by the government from forming a parliamentary group. The States Council (Lower House) consisted of 54 members with each state represented by three members. The NCP had 36 members in the Lower House. Under a new amendment, the president appointed 18 state governors.

Political Parties and Political Participation: The NCP dominated the political landscape, controlling all of the regional governorships and holding a two-thirds majority in the National Assembly. Various other parties held the remainder, with the SPLM-Peace Wing holding eight seats and the Popular Congress Party and Democratic Unionist Party each holding four.

The Political Parties Affairs Council listed 79 registered political parties, but organizers of the National Dialogue claimed that it involved more than 90 political parties. The Umma Party and the Democratic Unionist Party were never registered with the government. The Reform Now Party registered as a political party during the year. The government continued to harass some opposition leaders who spoke with representatives of foreign organizations or embassies or travelled abroad (see section 2.d.).

The Political Parties Affairs Council oversees the registration of political parties. The ruling party controls the council; it is not an independent body. The council continued to refuse to register the Republican (Jamhuri) Party, which opposes Islamic fundamentalism and promotes secularism. The party leader condemned the decision and filed a complaint in the Constitutional Court.

Authorities monitored and impeded political party meetings and activities, restricted political party demonstrations, used excessive force to break them up, and arrested opposition party members.

In January 2014 the president announced the national dialogue, an initiative designed to engage all political parties, including the opposition, civil society, and others, in a planning framework intended to recommend, initiate, and implement democratic reforms. The government also described the dialogue as a mechanism for resolving conflicts throughout the country and determining a constitutional framework. While some opposition groups agreed to participate, most major opposition parties withdrew from the dialogue early in 2014, and some independent civil society representatives claimed that the national dialogue was incomplete because it failed to bring in opposition parties, which have major influence on the ground.

Early in the year the government announced it would postpone the holding of a national dialogue until after national elections in April, and it made amendments to the Interim National Constitution. In March the government failed to attend an AU-facilitated meeting aimed at securing inclusion of opposition and armed groups in the national dialogue. Nonetheless, in August President Bashir chaired a meeting of the High Coordinating Committee of the National Dialogue. The committee selected five national figures to settle issues that did not receive consensus in the national dialogue discussion committees. The committee also selected 50 (later increased to 70) national figures to participate in the national dialogue conference, in addition to approving 12 persons to chair six discussion committees and 26 persons to form the general secretariat of the national dialogue. The government launched the dialogue on October 10, although major opposition parties and rebel groups continued to boycott the process until year's end. In October the government stated its intention to complete the dialogue within three months. The government, however, extended the dialogue to allow for more participation by political and armed opposition groups.

Participation of Women and Minorities: Women have the right to vote. In July 2014 the National Assembly increased from 25 to 30 percent the proportion of seats in the national and state assemblies drawn from state-level women's lists. Women held 120 of the 426 seats (28 percent) in the National Assembly, 19 of 54 seats (35 percent) on the Council of States, and eight of 88 (9 percent) positions in the cabinet.

A few religious minorities participated in government. There were prominent Coptic Christian politicians within the national assembly, Khartoum city government, and Khartoum state assembly. A member of the national election commission was Coptic. A female Anglican served as the state minister of water resources and electricity.

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

The law provides criminal penalties for corruption by officials; nevertheless, government corruption at all levels was widespread. The government made few efforts to enforce legislation aimed at preventing and prosecuting corruption.

Corruption: According to the World Bank's most recent Worldwide Governance Indicators, corruption was a severe problem. The law provides the legislative framework for addressing official corruption, but implementation was weak, and many punishments were lenient. Officials found guilty of corrupt acts could often avoid jail time if they returned ill-gotten funds. Journalists who reported on government corruption were sometimes intimidated, detained, and interrogated by services.

A special anticorruption attorney investigates and tries corruption cases involving officials, their spouses, and their children. Punishments for embezzlement include imprisonment or execution for public service workers, although these sanctions were almost never carried out. All bank employees are considered public service workers.

On August 26, the Council of Ministers chaired by the minister at the Presidency endorsed the Anti-Corruption Commission Bill for 2015, presented by the minister of justice. The bill aimed to establish an anticorruption commission for all levels of government to boost transparency in financial and administrative transactions. By year's end the president had not approved the bill.

In April 2014 two employees of the Khartoum State governor's office were charged with running a massive embezzlement scheme. The two men remained free, however, and were not brought to trial during the year. Reporting on corruption was considered a "red line" set by NISS and a topic authorities prohibited newspapers from covering for the most part.

Financial Disclosure: The law requires high officials to disclose publicly income and assets. There are no clear sanctions for noncompliance, although the commission possesses discretionary powers to punish violators. The Financial Disclosure and Inspection Committee and the Unlawful and Suspicious Enrichment Administration at the Justice Ministry both monitored compliance. Despite two different bodies ostensibly charged with combating official corruption, there was no effective enforcement or prosecution of offenders. In October the country was deemed in compliance with anti-money-laundering and antiterrorism financing regulations and removed from the international Financial Action Task Force blacklist.

Public Access to Information: In January the government passed a freedom of information law to promote greater transparency and allow citizens greater access to information. Local and international human rights observers and journalists remained skeptical throughout the year the law would improve access to information given that little was publicly known about the law. The law excepts 12 categories of information that can be maintained as classified, including personal information and information on national security, foreign policy, and criminal procedures.

Section 5. Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

The government was uncooperative with, and unresponsive to, domestic human rights groups. It restricted and harassed workers of both domestic and international human rights organizations.

According to international NGOs, government agents consistently monitored, threatened, prosecuted, and occasionally physically assaulted civil society activists. The government arrested NGO-affiliated international human rights and humanitarian workers, including in Darfur (see section 1.g.).

On March 26, armed NISS agents raided offices of the Khartoum-based TRACKS for Training and Human Development while the organization hosted a session on social responsibility. Participants were accused of boycotting the impending elections. Private property, including four laptops and a computer server, were confiscated.

On April 16, authorities arrested prominent human rights advocate Adil Bakheit, whose laptop had been confiscated during the TRACKS raid in March. Authorities charged Bakheit with undermining the constitutional system and waging war against the state--crimes punishable by death. On May 3, authorities released Bakheit on bail. As of year's end, charges against him remained pending.

NGOs must register with the HAC, the government entity for regulating humanitarian efforts. The HAC obstructed the work of NGOs including in Darfur, the Two Areas, White Nile State, and Abyei. The HAC often changed its rules and regulations without prior notification.

On December 14, NISS closed seven offices of Tearfund, an international NGO that was providing health and nutrition services in Central Darfur. At year's end all seven offices remain closed, with activities suspended. No reason was given for the closure or anticipated duration.

The government continued to use bureaucratic impediments to restrict the actions of humanitarian organizations, contrary to provisions in the 2007 joint communique between the government and the United Nations. These included delaying the issuance of visas and travel permits to humanitarian workers and limiting their validity to less than six months. In some instances authorities only renewed visas for 10-day periods, greatly affecting UNAMID's ability to carry out its operations. Authorities also delayed the release of food and necessary equipment to UNAMID for prolonged periods. In October members of the UN Security Council expressed grave concern about the bureaucratic and operational restrictions faced by UNAMID, including the government's holding of 190 UNAMID containers containing food rations for peacekeepers and its continued delay of visa approvals for UNAMID personnel.

Humanitarian organizations reported the government continued to deny travel to East Darfur and severely limited travel to South Darfur. Some travel to Central, North, and West Darfur, as well as eastern Sudan and White Nile state, was approved.

The United Nations or Other International Bodies: The government remained uncooperative with UN Security Council Resolution 1593 and failed to comply with the ICC arrest warrants for President Bashir; Ahmad Muhammad Haroun, former minister for humanitarian affairs and current governor of Northern Kordofan; former defense minister Abd al-Rahim Hussein; and Ali Muhammad Abd al-Rahman Hussein, a former senior Jingawit commander who supported the government against Darfur rebel groups.

In 2005 the United Nations established a sanctions regime on Sudan pursuant to resolution 1591. These sanctions impose an arms embargo on Darfur and travel bans and asset freezes of certain individuals. A Panel of Experts, appointed by the UN Sanctions Committee, prepares quarterly reports regarding compliance with Resolution 1591, which informs an annual Sanctions Committee report. In its January and October reports, the Panel of Experts indicated the country was not compliant with all aspects of the Darfur sanctions regime.

The government is a party to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, overseen by the AU. The government last submitted a report to the African Commission in 2011. In June 2014 the commission released its decision regarding a 2009 case filed against the government by three IDPs regarding torture and other allegations. The court ordered the country to pay

compensation, initiate an investigation, amend legislation, and train security officers on the prohibition of torture. The government did not implement the court's decision.

The UN special rapporteur on violence against women visited the country May 13-24. At the conclusion of her visit, the special rapporteur issued a press statement in which she noted that violence against women, and silence around the issue, is of concern in both conflict and nonconflict areas. She noted that the inability to have unfettered access and frank and open discussions with all stakeholders without fear of reprisal was a concern as was the gap between the government's "stated intent and actual practice" when it came to cooperation with the United Nations and promotion of human rights.

Government Human Rights Bodies: The government's Advisory Council for Human Rights is responsible for advising the government on necessary reforms and preparing the government's official human rights reports, as required by the United Nations. The Advisory Council did not respond to requests by international organizations to investigate human rights violations and did not provide lists of detained individuals to the international community.

In 2013 the Advisory Council released the National Action Plan for the Protection of Human Rights 2013-23 in Sudan. The plan discussed human rights education, civil and political rights, legal reform, and capacity building for international human rights and humanitarian law. The Federal Ministry of Education was charged with incorporating the plan into national curriculums; it was unclear if any steps were taken during the year.

The National Human Rights Commission is a 15-member independent body to monitor respect for human rights in the country, receive grievances from citizens regarding human rights violations, and assess the government's compliance with international human rights treaties. The commission received training from the UNDP throughout the year and established internal operating procedures. In June the commission announced it had received more than 150 complaints from residents related to human rights violations and reported that 75 cases had been settled since the commission's establishment in 2012. The commission refrained from publicly stating its position on some high-profile human rights cases. Some commission members made public statements in their capacity as commissioners on political matters not within the scope of the commission's mandate. In its October 9 report, UNESCO called upon the government to bring the commission into compliance with the Paris principles and ensure its independence and financial autonomy.

In September 2014 the chair of the National Human Rights Commission resigned. As of year's end, a new chair had not been named.

Security forces prevented NGOs, human rights advocates, and opposition members from submitting grievances to the commission on several occasions.

Section 6. Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons

The Interim National Constitution states, "All persons are equal before the law and are entitled without discrimination as to race, color, sex, language, religious creed, political opinion, or ethnic origin to the equal protection under the law." Other articles of the constitution encourage tolerance between different tribes and provides for protection of women and persons with disabilities. The law provides for safeguards for children. The government worked to promote the rights of women, children, and persons with disabilities. It did not always provide protections to persons of different religious groups.

In its October 9 report, UNESCO expressed concern about discriminatory provisions in several pieces of legislation affecting women, religious minorities, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) persons. It also noted the lack of legislation to implement and enforce constitutional principles of nondiscrimination.

Women

The Ministry of Social Welfare, Women, and Child Affairs is responsible for matters pertaining to women. The Violence against Women Unit oversees branch units in 14 of the 18 states and the National Action Plan for Combating Violence against Women. It monitors and reports on women's problems and works with civil society and other stakeholders.

Rape and Domestic Violence: The law treats any sexual contact outside a legally recognized marriage as a crime. The penalty for violating this law is 100 lashes if the offender is not married (fornication) and stoning to death if the offender is married (adultery). Both men and women can be prosecuted, but women constituted the vast majority of the accused offenders and of those found guilty. On February 22, the president signed a bill amending section 149 of the criminal code to differentiate between rape, sodomy, and adultery as crimes. The amended article also expanded the definition of rape to include any form of penetration of the body. Human rights observers welcomed the amendment, which meant women who were raped would no longer face adultery charges.

The law does not address spousal rape. In most rape cases, courts made convictions a matter of public record. Observers believed sentences often were less than the legal maximum. Because there was no official tracking of rape cases, no information was available on the number of persons prosecuted, convicted, or punished for rape. Rape of women and girls continued to be a serious problem throughout the country, especially in conflict areas. International and government agencies assisting rape victims stated rape cases were underreported due to victims' fear of reprisal and stigmatization. Investigative and prosecuting authorities often obstructed access to justice for rape victims. By law a woman who accuses a man of rape and fails to prove her case may be tried for adultery. Victims sometimes refused to report their cases to family or authorities due to fear they would be punished or arrested for "illegal pregnancy" or adultery.

While the law prohibits violence in general, it does not specifically prohibit domestic violence. Violence, including spousal abuse, against women was common. Women who filed claims of domestic violence were subjected to accusations of lying or spreading false information, harassment, and detention. Consequently, many women were reluctant to file formal complaints, although such abuse constituted grounds for divorce. Police normally did not intervene in domestic disputes. Statistics on the number of abusers prosecuted, convicted, or punished were not available.

In Darfur UNAMID documented 27 incidents of sexual and gender-based violence involving 39 victims between January and April. Prevalence rates, however, were believed to be much higher. There were no reliable statistics on the prevalence of such violence in other areas. The government rejected UNAMID figures on the basis that the cases had not been reported to state authorities, but observers concurred the government needed capacity building in how to track cases.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: FGM/C was traditionally practiced in the country. The government launched a national campaign in 2008 to eradicate FGM/C by 2018. The government, with the support of the first lady, continued to prioritize the "Saleema" campaign, which raised public awareness about FGM/C throughout the year. Despite these efforts FGM/C remained a problem for women and girls throughout the country. No national law prohibits FGM/C. Since 2008, however, five states have passed laws prohibiting FGM/C: South Kordofan, Gedaref, Red Sea, South Darfur, and West Darfur. In its October report, UNESCO expressed concern that the provisions criminalizing FGM/C were removed from the Child Health Act.

According to UNICEF and the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), the national prevalence rate of FGM/C among girls and women 15-49 years old was 88 percent. Prevalence varied geographically and depended on the local ethnic group. The 2010 Sudan Household Health Survey indicated prevalence rates of FGM/C varied from 99.4 per cent in Northern State to 68.4 per cent in Western Darfur.

Girls were generally cut when five to 11 years old. Comprehensive figures were not available. The government and UNICEF reported a shift in attitudes towards FGM/C and observed downward trends in its prevalence between the household health surveys in 2006 and 2010. The 2010 survey concluded 34.5 percent of girls ages five to nine were cut, compared with 41 percent in 2006.

Of girls and women ages 15-19, 37 percent favored FGM/C in 2010, compared with 73 percent in 2006.

The government attempted to curb the prevalence of FGM/C and made public-awareness campaigns a top priority. In 2008 the National Council on Child Welfare, with support from UNICEF, launched the National Strategy to Abolish FGM/C in Sudan (2008-18).

The government agreed to a three-year program with UNICEF, UNFPA, and the WHO to seek to end FGM/C in the country. In October the government hosted a conference in Khartoum to promote the "Saleema" campaign and anti-FGM/C initiatives.

Other Harmful Traditional Practices: The Interim National Constitution obligates states to combat harmful customs and traditions that undermine the dignity and status of women. Nonetheless, harmful traditional practices, such as early and forced marriages, continued (see section 6, Children).

Sexual Harassment: No law specifically prohibits sexual harassment, although the law prohibits gross indecency, which is defined as any act contrary to another person's modesty. Authorities generally enforced the statute. The penalty for gross indecency is imprisonment for up to one year and 40 lashes. There were frequent reports of sexual harassment by police.

Reproductive Rights: Although awareness of reproductive rights was lacking in some communities, couples were generally able to decide the number, spacing, and timing of their children; manage their reproductive health; and have access to the means and information to do so, free from discrimination, coercion, or violence. Contraception, skilled medical attendance during childbirth, and obstetric and postpartum care were not always accessible in rural areas. The UNPD estimated that 12 percent of girls and women ages 15-49 used a modern method of contraception in 2012. The WHO estimated in 2013 that the maternal mortality rate was 216 deaths per 100,000 live births and that skilled health-care personnel attended 31 percent of births. The high maternal mortality rate stemmed in large part from lack of access to reproductive health and emergency obstetric care, particularly in rural areas, lack of access to family planning services, poor sanitation, and chronic undernourishment in poorer areas, as well as infection, malaria, anemia, and hemorrhage.

Discrimination: The law, including many traditional legal practices and certain provisions of Islamic jurisprudence as interpreted and applied by the government, discriminates against women. In accordance with Islamic judicial interpretation, a Muslim widow inherits one-eighth of her husband's estate; of the remaining seven-eighths, two-thirds goes to the sons and one-third to the daughters. Depending on the wording of the marriage contract, it was often much easier for men than women to initiate legal divorce proceedings. In certain probate trials, the testimony of women is not considered equivalent to that of men; the testimony of two women is required. In other civil trials, the testimony of a woman equals that of a man.

A Muslim woman cannot legally marry a non-Muslim unless he converts to Islam. This prohibition usually was neither observed nor enforced among certain populations.

Various government institutions required women to dress according to Islamic or cultural standards, including wearing a head covering. In Khartoum Public Order Police occasionally brought women before judges for allegedly violating Islamic standards. Islamic standards for dress generally were not enforced for non-Muslims.

One women's advocacy group estimated that in Khartoum, Public Order Police arrested an average of 40 women per day.

On September 10, seven Cristian girls from South Sudan were arrested at a popular restaurant and convicted of indecent dress. The girls each were fined 100 SDG (\$15).

In addition to housing and education discrimination, women experienced economic discrimination in access to employment, equal pay for substantially similar work, credit, and owning or managing businesses.

Children

Birth Registration: The law grants citizenship to children born to a father who is a Sudanese national by descent. The Interim National Constitution states persons born to a Sudanese mother or father have the right to citizenship. Although the constitution eliminated gender discrimination in conferring nationality on children, the law does not grant gender equality in the passing of citizenship to children.

Most newborns had access to birth certificates, but some in remote areas did not. Registered midwives, dispensaries, clinics, and hospitals could issue certificates. A birth certificate does not automatically qualify a child for citizenship. Failure to present a valid birth certificate precludes enrollment in school. Access to health care was similarly dependent on possession of a valid birth certificate, but many doctors accepted a patient's verbal assurance that he or she had one.

Education: The law provides for tuition-free basic education up to grade eight, but students often had to pay school, uniform, and examination fees to attend. Primary education is neither compulsory nor universal. In Darfur few children outside of cities had access to primary education due to its high cost. In public schools, boys and girls are educated separately in urban areas but often together in rural areas, where resources are more limited.

In 2013 the government reported that overall female enrollment increased to 69 percent, as the result of a national education strategy focused on girls.

A September Ministry of Education/UNICEF report estimated that 15 percent of primary school children were at risk of dropping out before the final grade of primary school and identified girls, IDPs, children in rural areas, and members of certain ethnic and religious groups as being at particular risk of being excluded from school. In addition to gender discrimination and poverty, early marriage was also indicated as a factor that negatively affected education levels.

Child Abuse: Child abuse and abduction for ransom were widespread in conflict areas and less prevalent in nonconflict areas. The government tried to enforce laws criminalizing child abuse and was more likely to prosecute cases involving child abuse and sexual exploitation of children than cases involving adults. Some police stations included family and child protection units that were "child friendly" and provided legal, medical, and psychosocial support for children. NGOs reported social stigma and lack of cooperation from some families prevented cases from being referred to police authorities.

Local NGOs reported an increase in street children and expressed concern that children working in public transportation and public markets were particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse and subsequent extortion. Due to shame and social stigma associated with sexual abuse, abused children often remained with their patrons out of fear of blackmail and were often too afraid to seek help. Early in the year, several newspapers were confiscated after they published a report highlighting the sexual abuse of minors on public buses.

Early and Forced Marriage: The law establishes the legal age of marriage at 10 for girls and 15 or puberty for boys. There were no reliable statistics on the extent of child marriage, but child advocates reported it remained a problem, especially in rural areas. According to UNICEF estimates, 12 percent of women ages 20 to 24 were first married or in a union before they were 15, and 34 percent were married before reaching 18. In October the first lady issued a statement during International Day of the Girl expressing concern about early and forced marriages and announcing a government initiative that would be launched to tackle the issue.

Female Genital Mutilation and Cutting: See information for girls under 18 in Women above.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: Penalties for offenses related to the sexual exploitation of children vary and can include imprisonment, fines, or both. Sexual exploitation of children was less prevalent in nonconflict areas. The government tried to enforce laws criminalizing sexual exploitation of children; NGOs reported, however, that social stigma prevented many families from pursuing legal cases against perpetrators. Some police stations included protection units that were "child friendly" and provided legal, medical, and psychosocial support for children.

There is no minimum age for consensual sex or statutory rape law. There were occurrences of nonconsensual sex with children who were forced into early marriage. Pornography, including child pornography, is illegal. Statutes prescribe a fine and period of imprisonment not to exceed 15 years for offenses involving child pornography.

Child prostitution also remained a problem, although the government denied the phenomenon existed in the country.

Child Soldiers: Armed groups continued to recruit and deploy child soldiers in internal conflicts (see section 1.g.).

Displaced Children: Internally displaced children often lacked access to government services such as health and education due to their inability to pay related fees. In June 2014 UNICEF reported approximately 70 percent of IDPs were children. In North Darfur more than 265,000 of the 379,000 IDPs were under age 18 and more than 66,000 were children under five. Of the 161 children recorded as unaccompanied IDPs, 11 were reunited with their families. More than 50 percent of arrivals from South Sudan who arrived after December 2014 were children (see section 2.d.).

Institutionalized Children: Police typically sent homeless children who had committed crimes to government camps for indefinite periods. Health care, schooling, and living conditions were generally very basic. All children in the camps, including non-Muslims, had to study the Quran. The government granted international and domestic humanitarian NGOs access to the camps. NGOs sometimes assisted the government with certain aspects of camp operations.

International Child Abductions: The country is not a party to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. For information see the Department of State's report on compliance at

travel.state.gov/content/childabduction/en/legal/compliance.html

(<http://travel.state.gov/content/childabduction/en/legal/compliance.html>), as well as country-specific information at

travel.state.gov/content/childabduction/en/country/Sudan.html

(<http://travel.state.gov/content/childabduction/en/country/Sudan.html>).

Anti-Semitism

A very small Jewish community remains in the country, predominantly in the Khartoum area. While there were no reports of anti-Semitic acts, societal attitudes were not tolerant of Jewish persons.

Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/

(<http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/>).

Persons with Disabilities

Although the law, including the Interim National Constitution, provides protection for persons with disabilities, social stigma and a lack of resources hindered the government's enforcement of disability laws. The law does not specifically prohibit discrimination against persons with disabilities, but it stipulates, "The State shall guarantee to persons with special needs the enjoyment of all the rights and freedoms set out in the Constitution, access to suitable education [and] employment, and participation in society."

In 2013 the Ministry of Social Welfare, Women, and Child Affairs and the National Council for Persons with Disabilities launched an initiative to improve access to public sector jobs and encourage respect for the constitutional rights of persons with disabilities. The Ministry of Education also established a special education department. Children with disabilities attended public schools, and there were some other educational institutions for persons with disabilities, including two schools for the blind. In 2013 the Ministry of Education initiated a national education strategy for 2013-16, which included special provisions for children with disabilities.

Social stigma and lack of resources often prevented government and private entities from accommodating persons with disabilities in education and employment. Appropriate supports were especially rare in rural areas.

In July 2014 the governor of Khartoum announced the city would allocate 5 percent of the city's more than four million jobs to persons with disabilities (approximately 211,000 jobs) with special needs and issue persons with special needs health insurance cards. The Ministry of Social Development stated it would provide financial assistance to 3,000 persons with disabilities and supply hearing aids to 50 persons monthly. Social stigma and apathy of officials toward the needs of disabled persons, however, often limited the resources allocated to those facilities, and accommodations for persons with disabilities were rare in most rural areas.

The government has not enacted laws or implemented effective programs to provide for access to buildings for persons with disabilities. Persons with disabilities reported it was difficult to access or afford necessary equipment, such as wheelchairs.

Several NGOs continued to advocate on behalf of persons with disabilities.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

The population is a multiethnic mix of more than 500 ethnic groups, speaking numerous languages and dialects. Many of these ethnic groups self-identify as Arab, referring to their language and other cultural attributes. Other tribes self-identify, or are identified by the broader society, as African. Northern Muslims traditionally dominated the government. Interethnic fighting in Darfur was between Muslims who considered themselves either Arab or non-Arab and between different Arab tribes.

“National Identity” is one of the six discussion committees of the national dialogue.

Some ethnic groups, such as the Beja in the eastern region, promoted a hierarchical social structure within their own ethnic groups that discriminated against persons of certain tribes. The Zaghawa ethnic group in Darfur maintained a caste system that discriminated against persons of lower castes.

The Muslim majority and the government continued to discriminate against ethnic minorities in almost every aspect of society. Citizens in Arabic-speaking areas who did not speak Arabic experienced discrimination in education, employment, and other areas (see section 7.d.).

The government announced that persons fleeing the conflicts in South Sudan should be considered “brothers and sisters” and thus not subjected to discrimination. Many South Sudanese returning to Sudan were able to reintegrate into their old Sudanese communities. In conflict areas there were reports persons of South Sudanese origin experienced societal discrimination. Security forces often suspected persons of South Sudanese origin of supporting antigovernment forces in Abyei and the Two Areas.

Acts of Violence, Discrimination, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

LGBTI persons are not considered a protected class under antidiscrimination laws. The law does not specifically prohibit homosexuality but criminalizes sodomy, which is punishable by death. Antigay sentiment was pervasive in society. LGBTI individuals expressed concern for their safety and did not identify themselves publicly. There was at least one confirmed case of an individual detained, beaten, and harassed by authorities because of his suspected affiliation with LGBTI-friendly groups. LGBTI organizations increasingly felt pressured to suspend or alter their activities due to threat of harm. Several LGBTI persons felt compelled to leave the country due to fear of persecution, intimidation, or harassment.

There were no reports of official action to investigate or punish those complicit in LGBTI-related discrimination or abuses.

HIV and AIDS Social Stigma

In August the Sudanese Society for HIV Victims disclosed there were 3,443 persons with HIV/AIDS in the country, including 1,693 men, 1,514 women, and 236 children. The organization reported it facilitated income-generating projects to support children of HIV-positive parents who could not afford school fees.

There was societal discrimination against persons with HIV/AIDS. The conservative nature of society made discussion of sex out of wedlock and related issues difficult, particularly for activists and members of the international community addressing these topics.

Promotion of Acts of Discrimination

The government, government-supported militias, and rebel groups reportedly promoted hatred and discrimination, using standard propaganda techniques. The government often used religiously charged language to refer to suspected antigovernment supporters.

The government did not take measures to counter hate speech.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The law provides that employees of companies of more than 100 workers can form and join independent unions. Other employees can join nearby, pre-existing unions. The law establishes a single national trade union federation and excludes police, military personnel, prison employees, legal advisers in the Justice Ministry, and judges from membership. In some cases membership in international unions was not officially recognized. The Sudan Workers' Trade Union Federation, a government-controlled federation of unions that consisted of 17 state unions and 22 industry unions, is the only official umbrella organization for unions.

The law denies trade unions autonomy to exercise the right to organize or to bargain collectively. It defines the objectives, terms of office, scope of activities, and organizational structures and alliances for labor unions. The government's auditor general supervised union funds because they are considered public money. The law provides unions the right to conduct legal strikes. Some unions have by-laws that self-restrict their right to strike. Labor observers believed some of these self-restrictions were imposed to maintain favor with the government. The law does not specifically prohibit strikes in nonessential sectors, but it requires all strikes to receive prior approval from the government after satisfying a set of legal requirements. Specialized labor courts adjudicate standard labor disputes, but the Ministry of Labor has the authority to refer a dispute to compulsory arbitration. Disputes also may be referred to arbitration if indicated in the work contract. The law does not prohibit antiunion discrimination by employers.

The government restricted the right to strike. Police could break up any strike conducted without prior government approval. In July authorities dispersed a sit-in organized outside the Gedaref Public Hospital to protest the suspension of 80 junior doctors in the state. In September 2014 secondary school teachers in El Fasher held a 10-day strike over nonpayment of federally mandated wage increases. The government deployed riot police and arrested several strikers. The teachers' committee, the organizing body behind the strike, eventually reached agreement with the West Darfur governor on implementing the pay increases.

Bureaucratic steps mandated by law to resolve disputes within companies may be lengthy. In addition court sessions may involve significant delays and costs when labor grievances are appealed.

The government did not effectively enforce applicable laws. Freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining were not respected. There were credible reports the government routinely intervened to manipulate professional, trade, and student union elections.

According to the International Trade Union Confederation, in oil-producing regions police and secret service agents, in collusion with oil companies, closely monitored workers' activities.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits all forms of forced or compulsory labor. The government, however, did not effectively enforce the law. Resources, inspections, and remediation were inadequate, and penalties for violations were insufficient to deter violations. Most of the violations existed in agricultural and pastoral sectors. Enforcement proved difficult in rural areas and areas undergoing conflict.

The government stated it investigated and prosecuted cases of forced labor, but it did not compile comprehensive statistics on the subject. Some government officials claimed that forced labor had been eradicated and denied reports that citizens were engaged in this practice.

The forcible recruitment of persons into armed groups continued (see section 1.g.).

There were reports some children were engaged in forced labor, especially in the informal mining sector. Some domestic workers were believed to work under forced conditions or without pay. Women refugees were especially prone to labor violations. Also see the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/ (<http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/>).

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The Interim National Constitution mandates that the state protect the rights of children as provided in international and regional conventions ratified by the country. The law defines children as persons younger than 18 but does not explicitly prohibit child labor. According to the Child Act, 12 is the minimum age children can be engaged in "light work." The Ministry of Social Welfare, Women, and Child Affairs is responsible for enforcing child labor laws.

The law prohibits the employment of young persons in hazardous industries and jobs, in jobs requiring significant physical effort, or in activities harmful to their morals. The law also prohibits the employment of young persons between 8 p.m. and 6 a.m., although authorities may exempt persons ages 15 and 16 from this restriction. It is illegal to employ children under age 12, except in state vocational training schools and training workshops and jobs performed under apprenticeship contracts. Work supervised by family members that does not include nonfamily members, such as on family farms, is also excluded from these provisions.

The law allows minors to work for seven hours a day broken by a period of one paid hour of rest. It is illegal to compel minors to work more than four consecutive hours, work overtime, or work during weekly periods of rest or on official holidays. The law prohibits employers from waiving, postponing, or reducing annual leave entitlements. The government did not always enforce such laws due to inadequate resources to monitor work areas or overcome societal complicity.

Child labor was a serious problem, particularly in the agricultural and pastoral sectors where the practice was common. Most child labor occurred in the informal sector, including in menial jobs for which the government lacked the resources to monitor comprehensively. Children were engaged in shining shoes, washing and repairing cars, collecting medical and other resalable waste, street vending, begging, agricultural work, construction, and other menial labor. In January the National Council for Child Welfare reported that 22 percent of the country's children were engaged in child labor.

The International Labor Organization monitored the use of forced child labor in gold mining. UNICEF received unverified reports revealing the dangerous conditions children were working in gold mining, including the requirement to carry heavy loads, work at night and within confined spaces, and be exposed to high temperatures.

The use of child soldiers and child trafficking were problems (see section 1.g. and the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/ (<http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/>)).

d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation

Law and regulations prohibit discrimination regarding race, sex, gender, disability, tribe, and language, but they do not protect classes according to sexual orientation and/or gender identity, HIV-positive status or other communicable diseases, political opinion, social or national origin, age, or social status. Labor laws apply to migrant workers with legal contracts, but foreign workers who are not considered to have legal status also are not provided legal protections from abuse and exploitation.

The government did not effectively enforce labor laws and regulations, and penalties were not sufficient to deter violations. Discrimination in employment and occupation occurred based on gender, religion, and ethnic, tribal, or party affiliation. Ethnic minorities often complained that government hiring practices discriminated against them in favor of "riverine" Arabs from northern Sudan. Ethiopians, Eritreans, and other refugees or migrants were often exposed to exploitative work conditions. There were reports that some female refugees and migrants working as domestic workers or tea sellers were not compensated for their work, required to pay "kettle taxes" to the police, sexually exploited, or trafficked. Due to their uncertain legal status, many refugees and migrants did not report cases of discrimination or abuse due to fear of imprisonment or repatriation.

Migrant workers and some ethnic minorities were unaware of their legal rights, suffered from discrimination, and lacked ready access to judicial remedies. The IOM established a migrants' reception center in Khartoum that included workshops on workers' rights and the hazards of migration.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The minimum monthly wage for public sector workers was 425 SDG (\$64). Normally the High Council of Salary in the Ministry of Cabinet Affairs sets the minimum wage for the public sector. The minimum monthly salary in the private sector is set by agreements made between individual industries and the High Council of Salary, and it varied among industries. Citizens whose monthly wages are below 700 SDG (\$105) pay no personal income tax. An estimated 46 percent of citizens lived below the poverty line of 12 SDG (\$1.80) per day.

The law limits the workweek to 40 hours (five eight-hour days, which does not include a 30-minute to one-hour daily break), with days of rest on Friday and Saturday. Overtime should not exceed 12 hours per week or four hours per day, although some persons worked more than this on occasion. The law provides for paid annual leave after one year of continuous employment and paid holidays after three months.

The laws prescribe occupational safety and health standards. Any industrial company with between 30 and 150 employees must have an industrial safety officer. A larger company is required to have an industrial safety committee that includes management and employees. Committees and officers are required to report safety incidents to the Ministry of Labor. The law requires the owner of an industrial company to inform workers of occupational hazards and provide means for protection against such hazards. Management is also required to take necessary precautions to protect workers against industrial accidents and occupational diseases but the law does not recognize the right of workers to remove themselves from dangerous work situations without loss of employment. Some heavy industry and artisanal mining operations, notably gold extraction, reportedly lacked sufficient safety regulations.

Safety laws do not apply to domestic servants; casual workers; agricultural workers other than those employed in the operation, repair, and maintenance of agricultural machinery; enterprises that process or market agricultural products such as cotton gins or dairy-product factories; jobs related to the administration of agricultural projects, including office work, accountancy, storage, gardening, and livestock husbandry; and family members of an employee who live with the employee and who are completely or partially dependent on him for their living.

Representatives of the Eritrean and Ethiopian communities in Khartoum stated undocumented migrants in the capital were subject to abusive work conditions. They also reported many undocumented workers did not report abuse due to fear authorities might deport them to Eritrea because of their illegal status.

The Ministry of Labor, which maintained field offices in most major cities, is responsible for enforcing these standards. Various types of labor inspectors included specialists on labor relations, labor conflicts, and vocational, health, and recruitment practices. They operated on both federal and state levels.

Standards were not effectively enforced. Although employers generally respected the minimum wage law in the formal sector, in the informal sector wages could be significantly below the official rate. Since enforcement by the Ministry of Labor was minimal, working conditions generally were poor. Inspection efforts and enforcement were generally minimal in both the formal and informal sectors.

Wage, overtime, and occupational safety and health standards violations were common in the industrial and informal labor sectors, especially in the areas of agriculture and pastoral work. Foreign migrant workers, youth, and female workers typically faced the most exploitative working conditions. An estimated 60 percent of the workforce worked in the informal sector, according to the *2012 Africa Economic Outlook*. There was no credible data on workplace fatalities and accidents.

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