

Widespread violations against journalists during the first month of the war

The Sudanese Journalists Syndicate – 14 May 2023

A general report on the situation of journalists in the first month of the conflict in Sudan.

Introduction:

The outbreak of the armed conflict in Sudan between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces on April 15 deepened the suffering of journalists in Sudan. Since the outbreak of the fighting in mid-April, the vast majority of the media in Sudan has stopped, which has displaced a large part of male and female journalists, and the truth has been hidden from the citizens, while many workers in the field of media live in difficult conditions and face daily risks in search of the truth in the midst of the fighting.

The Sudanese Journalists Syndicate has monitored a number of violations against journalists, which pose a threat to their lives and safety and a restriction on media freedom.

A number of newsroom offices in central Khartoum were bombed. Dozens of journalists are stuck in their workplaces, which were located in the lines of fire between the warring parties, and some journalists were subjected to violations and repression while covering the clashes.

The most prominent observation is that the two warring parties are not satisfied with the news and information reported and published by independent journalists, and a number of journalists have been subjected to threats of liquidation in light of a climate of hate speech and media misinformation.

According to a survey conducted by the Journalists Syndicate at the beginning of the year, 250 journalists, women and men, left the profession, while there are about 250 others who are unemployed recently.

In this space, the Sudanese Journalists Syndicate presents a report on the conditions of Sudanese journalists since the beginning of the fighting, which represents a summary of four weeks of monitoring¹:

Violent Incidents:

- The syndicate noted with concern that many journalists were *forcibly detained* at their offices in the first weeks of the conflict. This includes 13 journalists who were detained in Al-Neelain Towers, (9) of whom work for Al-Araby TV and (4) work for Al-Arabiya and Al-Hadath channels. They were evacuated by the Red Cross on April 23, after spending nine days and nights in their offices in Khartoum, in a dangerous area of hot combat, without food supplies. (15) journalists of the Sudan News Agency were detained for 72 hours in their workplace, along with two of the agency's workers. Journalists working for Al-Hurra and Russia Today channels were detained in a building in the middle of the clashes for 72 hours; All Radio Hala journalists were detained for 72 hours; in central Khartoum a Photographer was detained in his apartment from April 18, before he was released in the second week of May;

¹ Names of the victims of the harassment are known to the SJS but remain anonymous here for protection reasons

- Prohibition of reporting was widespread in Khartoum as documented by the Syndicate: The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) correspondent in Khartoum was beaten by soldiers of the armed forces while he was trying to cross the Al-Fatihab Bridge and reach his workplace on Saturday, April 15th; The correspondent of Al-Sharq News Channel, and the cameraman were detained on Saturday, April 15, for eight hours by an armed force near Marawi Airport, and they were later released; an Al-Jazeera journalist crew was expelled in the Kalakla area while they were covering events there; A number of journalists were arrested at checkpoints spread across the capital, and at least two cases of cellphone looting were recorded in Omdurman and Sharq Al-Nil by gunmen in Rapid Support uniforms; a photographer, while covering the clashes in the east of the capital, was shot with a pistol, before being beaten and threatened with death by members of the Rapid Support Forces. He was released without providing any first aid or medical assistance.
- Media houses were also subjected to gunfire and looting: Al-Jarida newspaper's headquarters was subjected to gunfire twice, on Sunday and Monday 16/17 April; Al-Sharq TV office was exposed to gunfire on Sunday, April 16th; in the second week, a number of workers in the official radio and television remained detained in the midst of the fighting, before they were released in batches; the headquarters of Al-Hirak Al-Siyasi newspaper in Khartoum was subjected to looting and vandalism after the fighting ended; A number of media workers were exposed after their homes were bombed or looted in light of the violent clashes that spread in the capital, especially in the regions of Kafouri, North and South Bahri, and Khartoum East; in southern Khartoum, one journalist suffered physical injuries due to shrapnel that fell into his house.

Defamation and death threats:

- The Syndicate recently monitored a campaign led by some Facebook accounts² against journalists and satellite channels. The campaign encourages citizens to expel journalists from events sites and calls on the authorities to expel the channels, which is considered hate speech against journalists and may have serious repercussions;
- The syndicate follows with great concern the emergence of defamation campaigns of journalists; the emergence of anonymous lists that classify journalists as working for one of the parties to the bloody conflict in an approach that could expose the lives of those names, men and women, to potential danger;
- Those named in these lists were subjected to communications threatening them with liquidation; a number of journalists, men and women, including members of the Executive Office of the Syndicate of Journalists, received death threats through phone calls and messages through social media; One journalist was shot at his car while he was trying to evacuate his family to a safe place.

Threats to journalists in the regions:

- Problems in the regions are underreported: Journalists in El Geneina, West Darfur state, are living in tragic conditions with their families, due to displacement and killing. They face great challenges and difficulty to obtain information and find a safe place to practice journalism and writing. A number of them lost their homes and were subjected to looting; a correspondent for Khartoum TV in the White Nile state, died while working in a traffic accident on Wednesday, April 26, while he was moving from one place to another to transmit and follow up the events;

² Facebook pages are documented by the Syndicate

In conclusion:

The Journalists Syndicate expresses concern that the "Jeddah Declaration for the Protection of Civilians" did not refer to guaranteeing the rights of journalists to move freely to perform their professional duties as guaranteed by local, regional and international laws, and the Syndicate calls on all parties to give this issue utmost care, respect journalists, men and women, and secure appropriate conditions to perform their work professionally.

The Syndicate urges all international and multilateral actors following the tragic events in Sudan to do everything they can to strengthen the protection and safety of journalists.

Sudanese Journalists Syndicate, Sunday, May 14, 2023