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## **SUDAN | UN Independent Expert Calls For Inquiry**

The UN Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in the Sudan, Mashood Baderin, called for an independent judicial enquiry into the government crackdown of September 2013, which left at least 200 protesters dead, and a review of Sudan's apostasy laws.

The protests began on Sept. 23, 2013 in Wad Medani, Gezira State, after the government decided to lift fuel subsidies, leading to a sharp rise in commodities. The protests soon spread across Sudan's northern states, including to the capital city Khartoum, and turned violent when the government instructed the security services to quash them, resulting in the deaths of protestors.

Government officials claim 85 people died; however, civil society organizations estimate that over 200 protestors were killed. Speaking to Sudanese Media during the protests, Dr. Ahmed Al Sheikh, the head of the Sudanese Doctors' Syndicate, said at least 210 people had died, mostly from gunshot wounds to the head and chest, with families forced to accept death certificates stating their relatives had died of natural causes.

Political activists have been harassed in the run up to the first anniversary of the protests and the Sudan Tribune newspaper reports that several key activists have also been arrested in what appears to be an attempt to prevent new demonstrations. The general coordinator of the Sudanese Human Rights Network (SHRN), Azhari al-Hag, was reportedly detained by National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) agents on Sept. 21 and released later on the same day, while Khaled Saad, a member of the opposition Sudanese Congress Party (SCP) executive committee, was arrested Sept. 20 and detained overnight. The ruling National Congress Party (NCP)'s deputy parliamentary speaker Samia Ahmed Mohamed issued a statement Sept. 23, warning against any attempt to call for demonstrations on the anniversary of last year's protests. Families of those who died in last year's protests had planned to hold remembrance services on the anniversary of the protests, but have been warned by the NISS not to hold them.

In his report to the Human Rights Council (HRC), Baderin highlighted the fact that the victims' families had "expressed hopelessness in their quest for justice." So far only one case has been taken to court and was dismissed due to an alleged lack of evidence. The Sudanese authorities claim the low prosecution rate is due to difficulties in identifying those who shot and killed protestors. Baderin dismissed this claim as both morally and legally unacceptable.

Baderin also highlighted the case of Meriam Ibrahim, whose convictions for apostasy and adultery were overturned by the Appeal Court in June 2014, and called for a review of article 126 in the 1991 criminal code, which criminalizes apostasy. Lawyers for Ibrahim are taking her case to the constitutional court for a final ruling on the legality of apostasy in view of Sudan's

constitutional and international obligations to guarantee freedom of religion or belief.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "We echo the calls of the Independent Expert and members of the HRC for the creation of an independent judicial enquiry into the September 2013 protests; an end to impunity and a review of Sudan's apostasy laws. We stand in solidarity with the grieving families who have yet to see justice and call for Sudan to respect their rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly. We also urge the international community, especially the African Union and Arab League, to stand in solidarity with victims of human rights violations by holding Sudan to its international and regional obligations, and in particular to articles 18, 19, 21 and 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and articles 8, 9, 10 and 11 of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (ACPHR), which guarantee the freedoms of religion or belief, expression, association and assembly."