[Sudanese civil society faces crackdown ahead of elections say international NGOs](http://www.civicus.org/index.php/en/media-centre-129/press-releases/2177-sudanese-civil-society-faces-crackdown-ahead-of-elections-say-international-ngos)

February 2, 2015

Civicus

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International civil society is raising the alarm over attacks on independent civil society groups and critical voices in advance of Sudan’s general elections scheduled for April 2015.

Global civil society alliance, CIVICUS, and the Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND) say that the recent decision to deregister a number of prominent civil society groups and the continued judicial persecution of peaceful activists represents a violation of basic democratic rights in the country.

“The Sudanese government’s crackdown in the run up to the elections is typical of attempts by authoritarian regimes to snuff out any remnants of political opposition and voices that could expose its poor record on governance,” said Mandeep Tiwana, Head of Policy and Research at CIVICUS. “While the African Union and the international community’s attention are presently focused on the conflict in South Sudan, it’s also important to monitor the bullying tactics being employed by President Bashir’s administration north of the border.”

On Wednesday, 20 January, the National Civic Forum (NCF), a prominent civil society organisation and ANND member, received a letter from the Registrar of the Cultural Groups notifying them of the cancellation of their registration. While the letter failed to explicitly specify transgressions, the Registrar claimed that NCF “conducts activities in violation of the Cultural Groups Law of 1996 and Sudan’s constitution.” Despite these claims, it is widely believed that NCF has been targeted due to its recent civic education and democracy promotion activities.

The dissolution of NCF appears to be part of a systematic assault on Sudan’s remaining independent human rights groups. Two days earlier, civil society group, Mahmoud Mohamed Taha Cultural Centre, was raided by Sudan’s notorious National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) and forced to suspend its operations. The Centre was reportedly raided while holding a ceremony commemorating the third anniversary of the execution of Mahmoud Mohamed Taha, the founder of Sudan’s opposition Republican Party. Following the raid, the Centre was informed that it had also been deregistered for contravening the Cultural Groups Law.

In addition to the dissolution of NCF and other human rights groups, security forces have intensified persecution of human rights defenders under the widely criticised 2010 National Intelligence and Security Act, which empowers the NISS to arrest and detain persons for extended periods without judicial oversight.

Following weeks of incommunicado detention, Dr. Amin Mekki Medani, President of the Sudan Human Rights Monitor (SHRM), and two other activists, were charged on 10 January with “undermining the constitutional system” and “waging war against the state”. If convicted they may face the death penalty. In a similar case, Madeeha Abdella, editor-in-chief of the Sudan Communist Party newspaper, Al-Midan, was charged with similar crimes under the penal code including “conspiracy,” “undermining the constitutional order” and “publishing false information.” She also faces the death penalty if convicted.

“While we support the presence of international monitors during Sudan’s upcoming general elections, legislative and extra-legal restrictions on the activities of independent civil society fundamentally undermine the possibility of free and fair elections,” said Ziad Abdel Samad, Executive Director of ANND. “The international community must make a clarion call to the Sudanese government to cease its unrelenting campaign to stifle dissent in the country.”

CIVICUS and ANND call on the African Union and the international community to closely monitor the situation in Sudan and condemn any encroachments on the freedoms of expression, association and peaceful assembly that could taint the upcoming elections.