

In spite of the new Sudanese constitution of July 1998, which sets out human rights standards, the Government's actions have not always appeared to derive from such standards. While calling for the return from abroad of prominent leaders of the Sudanese opposition, the Government has continued to arrest and harass their supporters in the country. The country's new constitution allows for political associations (parties), but the law enabling their registration is restrictive and their registration is still at the discretion of the Registrar. The call for greater participation by women in public and social affairs in Sudan has gone out at the same time as women have been punished for expressing themselves too freely. While affirming in its Constitution the freedom of worship, the Government has undertaken islamization programmes and denied permission for churches to be built. It has established a 'Special Commission to Investigate Slavery and Disappearances', but has not provided the Commission with sufficient staffing or resources to carry out its mandate.

The ongoing trial before a military court of 26 civilian defendants (including two Catholic priests) is revealing of weaknesses and contradictions in the Sudanese justice system. The defendants, mostly southerners, are accused of having committed crimes against the government by trying to destroy government property with explosives. They were denied the right to counsel of their own choosing. The evidence used against them was apparently based upon confessions, which the defendants claim were gained by torture or the threat thereof. They have been publicly declared guilty by the President of Sudan. Despite this apparent disregard for international standards, monitors have reported that the trial seems to be procedurally correct.

CANADIAN POSITION

Canada's policy toward Sudan reflects its serious concern regarding human rights. High level contacts have been limited. Arms sales are banned since 1992. Bilateral aid has been terminated. Trade support services have been withheld.

Canada regularly speaks out at the United Nations General Assembly 3rd Committee and the Commission on Human Rights about the human rights situation in Sudan and co-sponsors resolutions in both fora which call on Sudan to respect its international human rights obligations, and urge the placement of human rights monitors. Canada is encouraged by the current visit of the new Special Rapporteur on Human Rights to Sudan, Mr. Leonardo Franco, and looks forward to his report to the UN Commission on Human Rights. Canada is also supporting the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) peace talks to bring a mediated end to the civil war based on the IGAD Declaration of Principles.

Canada has also used its diplomatic contacts to express its concern for human rights with both the government and the SPLA. For example, in meetings with the most senior government leaders our Ambassador specifically expressed Canada's concern for the rights of the 26 defendants being tried before a Military Court.