

Fatima Ghazali, Sudanese Journalist Jailed for reporting on alleged rape case

On Tuesday 5th of July 2011, a Sudanese court ordered Fatima Ghazali, a female journalist and the head of the political section of "Al-jareeda" newspaper to pay 2000 Sudanese pounds (US\$650) or spend one month in prison. Ms. Ghazali refused to pay the fine and will serve a one month in prison. In addition, Saad Eldeen Ibrahim editor- in-chief of "Al-jareeda" newspaper was fined 5000 Sudanese pounds to be paid by civil procedures.

Fatima Ghazali a Sudanese journalist, wrote an article about alleged gang- rape of an activist by security forces. National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) brought a lawsuit against Fatima and other journalists who wrote articles concerning the same rape case. The ruling against Fatima Ghazali is first in a series of several law suits brought by NISS against many journalists who wrote articles about the alleged rape, torture of Safia Is'hag a female activist being detained after participation in anti government demonstrations in January 2011. They are liable to be prosecuted under the 1991 Press Act on charges of defaming and spreading false information about security forces, which are protected by the National Security Act. Since the start of this year, any criticism of the security forces has been liable to lead to court.

This ruling reiterates the continued policy of suppression of the freedom of the press by Sudan government and its security apparatus. Press freedom has been heavily curtailed in recent months. Sudan's constitution provides for the press freedom, but newspapers are still subject to censorship and journalists have been detained without charges in many cases.

SHRN is deeply concerned by such lawsuits brought against Sudanese journalists by NISS which are motivated by desire to prevent public discussion on the general conduct of NISS.

Prosecuting of journalists' by NISS aims to silence and dissuade them from reporting crimes and human rights violations committed by security officers.

SHRN calls for the immediate release of Ms. Ghazali and the abrogation of all laws and regulations aim at curbing the freedom of the press. The detention and imprisonment of journalists are against the universal principles of the freedom of speech and against basic international human rights norms. **SHRN** urges all human rights' organizations, the international community to put the strongest pressure on the government of Sudan to stop targeting individual journalists through politicized criminal charges and contrived legal cases.