

Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention; the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances; the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression and the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association

Ref.: AL SDN 6/2025
(Please use this reference in your reply)

24 November 2025

Excellency,

We have the honour to address you in our capacities as Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; Working Group on Arbitrary Detention; Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances; Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression and Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 52/4, 60/8, 54/14, 52/9 and 59/4.

In this connection, we would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government information we have received concerning the **arbitrary detention and mistreatment in prison of human rights defender Abdelwahab Ahmed Mohamed Hashem, also known as "Bob"**.

Mr. Abdelwahab Ahmed Mohamed Hashem is a human rights defender, union organizer and leader of the Workers Coordination Committee, an independent body representing public sector employees in North Kordofan state. He is widely known in his community for his work in defence of worker rights and his independence from political influence.

Concerns regarding the arrest and alleged arbitrary detention of human rights defenders have been raised in several previous communications sent to your Excellency's Government by special procedures mandate holders, including SDN 2/2025; SDN 4/2024; SDN 1/2023; SDN 3/2022; SDN 2/2022; and SDN 4/2021. We thank your Excellency's Government for its reply to SDN 2/2022. We regret that no response has been received from your Excellency's Government to the remainder of the cited communications.

According to the information received:

Background information regarding the case of Mr. Hashem

Mr. Hashem was arrested and detained briefly in August 2022, linked to his uncovering of alleged corruption by the-then governing authority of North Kordofan regarding unpaid worker salaries. He was not charged.

On or around 19 September 2025, Mr. Hashem circulated a voice message on a private WhatsApp group that included some 500 public sector employee representatives in North Kordofan. In the message, Mr. Hashem raised concerns about the lack of payment of employee salaries for 16 months and called for workers' rights to be protected and for those demanding their rights to be free

from intimidation or political retaliation.

Arrest and detention

On 23 September 2025, Mr. Hashem, unusually, did not appear online, nor did he answer phone calls.

On 25 September 2025, after Mr. Hashem was held in incommunicado detention for two days, his family received a verbal message from him, delivered by a visitor to a detainee reportedly sharing a cell with him to inform them that he had been detained. He did not provide any more information.

On 4 October 2025, two of Mr. Hashem's close relatives obtained permission from the Sudanese Armed Forces General Intelligence Service to visit him. They met him alone in the intelligence service office where he appeared tired and thinner. He told them that on 23 September 2025, armed men from the Sudanese Armed Forces General Intelligence Service presented an official arrest warrant and took him from his office in the town of el-Obeid, the capital of North Kordofan state, and brought him to the general intelligence service office. He said that he was held in a cell at the general intelligence building together with alleged common criminals, and that he had been interrogated by general intelligence service members on the content of his voice message to the WhatsApp group. His relatives brought him clothing and medication for his health conditions, including [REDACTED]

On 7 October 2025 two other close relatives of Mr. Hashem were allowed to visit him at the intelligence service building, where they waited for one hour before he was brought in to see them. He told them he had been taken to el-Obeid Central Prison on 5 October 2025 where he is being held in a small, crowded cell with alleged common criminals. He said that he was interrogated another two times, on the same voice message to the WhatsApp group.

On 10 October 2025, his relatives provided the prison with a blanket, clothing and more medication for him. He had complained of an [REDACTED].

On 14 October 2025, Mr. Hashem's son posted about his father's arrest and arbitrary detention on his social media. The post was widely picked up due to Mr. Hashem's known position in North Kordofan.

On 15 October 2025, on 18 October 2025 and on 20 October 2025, intelligence officials rejected three family visit requests and have not accepted their delivery of medication for him. Mr. Hashem remains held in el-Obeid Central Prison, without access to his family since 7 October 2025 or to necessary medication. He has not been charged with any criminal offence since his arrest, nor has he undergone legal procedures other than the interrogations by general intelligence members.

Without prejudging the accuracy of the information received, we wish to express our deep concern at the arrest and arbitrary detention without charge, as well as enforced disappearance of Mr. Abdelwahab Ahmed Mohamed Hashem. We are

concerned that these measures may have been taken in retaliation for his human rights work on behalf of workers' rights. We are also concerned at the lack of access to his family or to the outside, in clear contradiction with article 9 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and with the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules). We wish to recall that incommunicado detention may amount to enforced disappearance and highlight that regardless of the duration of an enforced disappearance, it produces serious harm and consequences for the disappeared and their families. Enforced disappearance also presents practical challenges regarding the protection of victims and defending their rights. It is equally concerning that Mr. Hashem's lack of access to necessary medical treatment may also amount to ill-treatment or torture.

If confirmed, the facts alleged would appear to contravene, among other norms, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Sudan acceded to on 3 August 1990, in particular articles 7, 9 14, 16, 19 and 22 read alone and in conjunction with article 2(3), on the right not to be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, right to liberty and security, guaranteeing the right to promptly inform anyone arrested of the reasons and the charges against them, right to prompt access to an impartial and independent judicial authority as well as to be informed of the charges brought against the detainee, the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law, safeguarding freedom of expression and guaranteeing the right to form and join trade unions with no restrictions placed other than those prescribed by law. They would also be in contradiction with the Convention on the Freedom of Association and the Right to Organise as well as the Convention to the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining, which Sudan ratified on 17 March 2021 and 18 June 1957 respectively. We also we wish to recall the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance which Sudan acceded to on 10 August 2021, in particular articles 2 and 17.

In connection with the above alleged facts and concerns, please refer to the **Annex on Reference to international human rights law** attached to this letter which cites international human rights instruments and standards relevant to these allegations.

As it is our responsibility, under the mandates provided to us by the Human Rights Council, to seek to clarify all cases brought to our attention, we would be grateful for your observations on the following matters:

1. Please provide any additional information and/or comment(s) you may have on the above-mentioned allegations.
2. Please provide information on the legal basis for the ongoing detention of Mr. Hashem without any charge and with no access to his family or legal representative. Please explain how these actions are consistent with Sudan's obligations under international human rights law.
3. Please provide updated information on the state of health of Mr. Hashem, his treatment in prison and access to medical care. Please indicate whether and how these are in line with international law and standards.

4. Please indicate what measures have been taken to ensure that Mr. Hashem and other human rights defenders and civil society organisations in Sudan are able to carry out their peaceful and legitimate work, including practicing his rights to peaceful assembly, freedom of expression and association in a safe and enabling environment without fear of threats or acts of intimidation and harassment of any kind.

This communication and any response received from your Excellency's Government will be made public via the communications reporting [website](#) within 60 days. They will also subsequently be made available in the usual report to be presented to the Human Rights Council.

While awaiting a reply, we urge that all necessary interim measures be taken to prevent any irreparable damage to the life and personal integrity of Mr. Hashem, to halt the alleged violations and prevent their re-occurrence and in the event that the investigations support or suggest the allegations to be correct, to ensure the accountability of any person(s) responsible for the alleged violations.

Further, we would like to inform your Excellency's Government that after having transmitted the information contained in the present communication to the Government, the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention may also transmit the case through its regular procedure in order to render an opinion on whether the deprivation of liberty was arbitrary or not. The present communication in no way prejudices any opinion the Working Group may render. The Government is required to respond separately to the letter of allegation and the regular procedure.

We may publicly express our concerns in the near future as, in our view, the information upon which the press release will be based is sufficiently reliable to indicate a matter warranting immediate attention. We also believe that the wider public should be alerted to the potential implications of the above-mentioned allegations. The press release will indicate that we have been in contact with your Excellency's Government's to clarify the issue/s in question.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of our highest consideration.

Mary Lawlor

Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders

Matthew Gillett

Vice-Chair on communications of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention

Gabriella Citroni

Chair-Rapporteur of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances

Irene Khan

Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression

Gina Romero

Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association

Annex

Reference to international human rights law

We would like to draw the attention of your Excellency's Government to the applicable international standards and norms, in particular the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), ratified by Sudan on 18 March 1986.

Article 9 of the UDHR state that no one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention.

Article 7 of the ICCPR provides that no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Article 9 of the ICCPR provides that no one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention except on such grounds and in accordance with such procedure as are established by law. Furthermore, article 9(2) provides that any person arrested shall be informed, at the time of arrest, of the reasons for his arrest and shall be promptly notified of the charge against him. Furthermore, under article 9(4), any person deprived of his or her liberty must have the right to an effective remedy to enable him or her to challenge his or her arrest or detention judicially, which must be capable of securing the person's release if it is decided in his or her favour. A decision to hold someone in any form of detention is arbitrary if its justification is not regularly reassessed (Human Rights Committee general comment No. 35, paragraph 12).

We would like to draw attention to the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of prisoners, or the Nelson Mandela Rules, in particular rule 3 on incommunicado detention which states that “Imprisonment and other measures that result in cutting off persons from the outside world are afflictive by the very fact of taking from these persons the right of self-determination by depriving them of their liberty. Therefore, the prison system shall not, except as incidental to justifiable separation or the maintenance of discipline, aggravate the suffering inherent in such a situation.” Rule 1 states that no prisoner shall be subjected to torture, and other cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment, and rule 24 states that the provision of health care for prisoners is a State responsibility.

Article 14 of the ICCPR guarantees the right to a fair trial and equality before the courts. It states that everyone is entitled to a fair and public hearing by a competent, independent, and impartial tribunal established by law. Under article 14(3), in the determination of any criminal charge against him, everyone shall be entitled to the following minimum guarantees, in full equality: (a) To be informed promptly and in detail in a language which he understands of the nature and cause of the charge against him; (b) To have adequate time and facilities for the preparation of his defence and to communicate with counsel of his own choosing; (c) To be tried without undue delay.

Article 16 provides that everyone shall have the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law.

Article 19 of the ICCPR guarantees the right to freedom of opinion and the right to freedom of expression, which includes the right “to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media”. This right applies online as well as offline and includes not only the exchange of information that is favourable, but also that which may criticize, shock, or offend. In its [general comment No. 34](#), the Human Rights Committee stated that States parties to the ICCPR are required to guarantee the right to freedom of expression, including “political discourse, commentary on one's own and on public affairs, canvassing, discussion of human rights, journalism, cultural and artistic expression, teaching, and religious discourse” (CCPR/C/GC/34, para. 11).

The Committee further asserts that there is a duty of States to put in place effective measures to protect against attacks aimed at silencing those exercising their right to freedom of expression (para. 23). Recognizing how journalists and persons who engage in the gathering and analysis of information on the human rights situation and who publish human rights-related reports, including judges and lawyers, are frequently subjected to threats, intimidation and attacks because of their activities, the Committee stresses that “all such attacks should be vigorously investigated in a timely fashion, and the perpetrators prosecuted, and the victims, or, in the case of killings, their representatives, be in receipt of appropriate forms of redress” (para. 23).

Any restriction on the right to freedom of expression must be compatible with the requirements set out in article 19(3) ICCPR. Under these requirements, restrictions must (i) be provided by law; (ii) pursue one of the legitimate aims for restriction, which are the respect of the rights or reputations of others and the protection of national security or of public order (*ordre public*), or of public health or morals; and (iii) be necessary and proportionate for those objectives. The State has the burden of proof to demonstrate that any such restrictions are compatible with the Covenant, and restrictions must always be “the least intrusive instrument among those which might achieve their protective function” ([CCPR/C/GC/34, para. 34](#)).

Furthermore, we would like to refer to article 22 (1) of the ICCPR which states that everyone shall have the right to freedom of association with others, including the right to form and join trade unions for the protection of his interests. Article 22 (3) states that nothing shall authorize States Parties to the International Labour Organisation Convention of 1948 concerning Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize to take legislative measures which would prejudice, or to apply the law in such a manner as to prejudice, the guarantees provided for in that Convention. Sudan is a State party to the Convention, which it ratified on 17 March 2021.

We are further drawing your Excellency’s Government’s attention to the absolute and non-derogable prohibition of enforced disappearances which has attained the status of *jus cogens*. If the alleged enforced disappearance is confirmed, it would amount to a violation of articles 1, 2 and 17 of International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and articles 1, 7, and 10 of the United Nations Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances. We wish to reiterate the joint statement of the Committee on Enforced Disappearances and the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances on so-called “short-term” enforced disappearances, which affirms that duration is not a constitutive element of enforced disappearance under international human rights law,

therefore regardless of the duration of an enforced disappearance, it produces serious harm and consequences for the disappeared and their families, and also presents practical challenges as regards seeking protection as well as defence of their rights. We also make reference to the Working Group's study on Enforced disappearance and economic, social and cultural rights (A/HRC/30/38/Add.5), in particular paragraph 33-37 which highlights the chilling effect of the disappearance of human rights defenders.

We would also like to draw the attention of your Excellency's Government to the fundamental norms set out in the United Nations Declaration on the Right and responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognised Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (Declaration on Human Rights Defenders). In particular, we would like to refer to articles 1 and 2 which declare that everyone has the right to promote and to strive for the protection and realisation of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels and that each State has the primary responsibility and duty to protect, promote and fulfil all human rights and fundamental freedoms. Furthermore, article 12, paragraphs 2 and 3, stipulates that the State shall ensure the protection of everyone from violence, threats, retaliation, discrimination, denial in law or in fact, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the Declaration.