

## Stand up for artists in Sudan!



We strongly condemn the sentencing of five young artists to jail for two months over public nuisance and disruption of public safety charges in Sudan. The case which was policed, prosecuted, and judged by al-Bashir era authorities points to a dangerous backsliding in Sudan as oppressive laws put in place by the former regime continue to stifle free expression and target artists and human rights defenders.

The five artists were arrested at the Civic Lab where they work to create art for community engagement. During the COVID crisis Civic Labs were responsible for creating hundreds of educational murals across the country, distributing meals and water to needy families, and making powerful films that delivered crucial public health messaging. These artists have steadfastly poured their energy into helping their country get through this difficult transition period by creating spaces for vital conversation about Sudan's future. Hajooj Mohamed Haj Omar is Sudan's most well known director, screening his films at dozens of international festivals while creating critical new narratives for Sudan to navigate its future, including the award-winning *Beats of the Antonov* and *A Kasha*. The other artists represent some of Sudan's brightest new voices and are dedicated to using art to educate the public and to demand social justice. They are Duaa Tarig Mohamed Ahmed, Abdel Rahman Mohamed Hamdan, Ayman Khalaf Allah Mohamed Ahmed and Ahmed Elsadig Ahmed Hammad. Duaa played an integral role in founding the Civic Labs which support artists across the country. Now they are jailed, and their voices stifled at a time when Sudan needs them most.

The artists were arrested in the aftermath of an attack on the Khartoum Civic Lab where a play rehearsal was taking place. The police responded to the attack by arresting the Civic Lab staff and attendees, and did not intervene when the attackers continued to beat the artists. Although they were initially charged with a variety of offenses they were all dropped and the case that resulted in the jail sentence was focused on the fact that they chanted while under arrest at the police station. Five members of the group was charged with creating a public nuisance. The men who attacked the Civic Lab were never charged, nor were they held.

Duaa, a female artist, along with 4 of her colleagues were charged separately while another 6 artists are awaiting a verdict on Sunday 20th September. During Duaa's detainment she was assaulted by an investigator. All of Duaa's attempts to bring a case against the officer were

denied despite multiple witnesses to the assault. For more information on the incident please see SIHA's in-depth press release.

The trial of the artists was handled in a biased and politicized manner. Although the charges were all related to the allegation that the artists were chanting in the jail cells where they were held, the proceedings gave platform to conservative citizens to besmirch and attack the artists for alleged discretions that were extraneous to the case. Almost no witnesses on the accused side were allowed to testify in accordance with the Al Bashir era laws. It was a clear message to the current government that the old Islamist regime still controls the judiciary and the law enforcement apparatuses. The return to arbitrary justice mechanisms in which the legal framework is used to control freedom of association and expression is a chilling reminder at what is at stake in Sudan's transition.

Across the world citizens are demanding an end to police brutality and injustice. We ask that these movements and democratic governments come together to send a clear signal to the Sudan police and judiciary that these transgressions will not be tolerated and to demand the release of the five artists and drop the charges against the other 6 artists. We are deeply concerned that this incident will establish a precedence and are demanding rapid reforms in the judiciary and police system and an immediate independent investigation into the police and judges involved in this incident.

We are particular concerned about the immediate safety of Duaa following her earlier assault and recent reports of the security forces using torture and engaging in other abuses of prisoners.

In order to restore justice in this case we ask that you send correspondence to key authorities demanding the following.

- 1) Release the 5 Civic Lab members until a just and impartial trial can be organized and the charges dropped against the other 6 artists.
- 2) Launch an investigation into all those involved in the fraudulent proceedings and terminate those responsible for the abuse. Amend the police law which grants impunity to police forces and make it nearly impossible for citizens to raise complaints against the abusive police officers.
- 3) Fast track legal reform by suspending the ability of the police and judges to use Article 69 and 77 of the criminal code, to criminalize citizens at will and amend criminal procedures act and evidence acts which give the law enforcement more power to criminalise citizens and poses a barrier to achieving justice.
- 4) Make a public statement defending the rights of Sudanese citizens to freely express themselves without fear of persecution and in particular to stand up for women to express themselves in the public sphere.

Artists are at the vanguard of positive change in Sudan, and played a critical in the revolution. When they are not protected, no one is protected.

Issued by GISA, Sudan

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[info@gisagroup.org](mailto:info@gisagroup.org)  
[www.gisa.media](http://www.gisa.media)

**Text to share with the relevant Sudan govt. authorities:**

I am writing to demand the release of the five artists recently detained and sentenced for public annoyance in Sudan. Hajooj Mohamed Haj Omar, Duaa Tarig Mohamed Ahmed, Abdel Rahman Mohamed Hamdan, Ayman Khalaf Allah Mohamed Ahmed and Ahmed Elsadig Ahmed Hammad represent the future of a free Sudan and should not be persecuted for being artists.

The trial of the artists was handled in a biased and politicized manner. Although the charges were all related to the allegation that the artists were chanting in the jail cells where they were held, the proceedings gave platform to conservative citizens to besmirch and attack the artists for alleged discretions that were extraneous to the case. It was a clear message to the current government that the old Islamist regime still controls the judiciary and the law enforcement apparatuses. The return to arbitrary justice mechanisms in which the legal framework is used to control freedom of association and expression is a chilling reminder at what is at stake in Sudan's transition.

I am concerned for the immediate well-being of the artists after they were sentenced to two months in prison, especially for Duaa Tarig who was previously assaulted in police custody and has been singled out based on her gender.

These artists have spent the last two years creating art to support Sudan's quest for freedom and democracy. They have created hundreds of murals and films in the public service, supported the Prime Minister's office and Sudan National Television, and conducted hundreds of civic engagement workshops across Sudan through their work at the Civic Lab network. Artists are at the vanguard of positive change in Sudan, and played a critical in Sudan's revolution. When they are not protected, no one is protected.

These actions by a corrupt security apparatus establish a chilling precedence that must be immediately addressed. In addition to releasing the five artists and the dropping of the six artists facing trial. I call on the civilian-led government to investigate the judges and police involved in this case, and fast track reform to the Bashir-era laws that unjustly criminalize civilians. It has also come to my attention that Hajooj Mohamed Haj Omar is currently being beaten in prison and partially shaved, I demand that this be stopped.

**Text to share with International community who can apply pressure on the Sudan Govt. and Ministry of Justice:**

I am writing because of my profound concern for the jailing of 5 young Sudanese artists in Khartoum. It is imperative that your organization makes it clear these actions by a corrupt security apparatus establish a chilling precedence that must be immediately addressed.

Hajooj Mohamed Haj Omar Duaa Tarig Mohamed Ahmed, Abdel Rahman Mohamed Hamdan, Ayman Khalaf Allah Mohamed Ahmed and Ahmed Elsadig Ahmed Hammad represent the future of a free Sudan and should not be persecuted or smeared for being artists.

The trial of the artists was handled in a biased and politicized manner. Although the charges were all related to the allegation that the artists were chanting in the jail cells where they were held, the proceedings gave platform to conservative citizens to besmirch and attack the artists for alleged discretions that were extraneous to the case. It was a clear message to the current government that the old Islamist regime still controls the judiciary and the law enforcement apparatuses. The return to arbitrary justice mechanisms in which the legal framework is used to control freedom of association and expression is a chilling reminder at what is at stake in Sudan's transition.

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In addition to releasing the five artists and the dropping of charges against the six artists facing trial, I ask that you demand the civilian led government to investigate the judges and police involved in this case, and fast track reform to the Bashir-era laws that unjustly criminalize civilians. It has also come to my attention that Hajooj Mohamed Haj Omar is currently being beaten in prison and partially shaved, I demand that this be stopped.

**Sudanese embassy contacts:**

USA: [consular@sudanembassy.org](mailto:consular@sudanembassy.org)  
FRANCE: [soudan75@orange.fr](mailto:soudan75@orange.fr)  
NETHERLANDS: [adm.sudanembassy@gmail.com](mailto:adm.sudanembassy@gmail.com)  
CANADA: [sudanembassy-canada@rogers.com](mailto:sudanembassy-canada@rogers.com)  
ITALY: [info@sudanembassy.it](mailto:info@sudanembassy.it)  
SOUTH AFRICA: [info@sudani.co.za](mailto:info@sudani.co.za)  
GERMANY: [consul@sudan-embassy.de](mailto:consul@sudan-embassy.de)  
UK: [info@sudan-embassy.co.uk](mailto:info@sudan-embassy.co.uk)  
SWITZERLAND: [consulate@sudanmission.ch](mailto:consulate@sudanmission.ch)  
BRAZIL: [sudaninbrasilia@gmail.com](mailto:sudaninbrasilia@gmail.com), [sudaninbrazil@gmail.com](mailto:sudaninbrazil@gmail.com)