



نقابة أطباء السودان الشرعية
Sudan Doctors' Syndicate

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An Open Call For Urgent Action: Save Sudanese Doctors and detainees.

12 of January 2019

As you maybe following in the news, Sudan has been witnessing a significant wave of popular protests since the 19th of December 2018. The different professional associations and trade unions have joined the call for these peaceful protests to object the unprecedented collapse of the public sector and the lack of public services provision in the public facilities. Doctors in particular have borne the brunt of a collapsed health system. As a matter of fact, doctors have gone into several general strikes over the past few years demanding improvement of the health system and doctors' working conditions in Sudan. There has been a blatant policy of systematically destroying the once free national health services and transforming it into a profitable sector.

The out of pocket health expenditure exceeds 64% while the government allocated less than 2% of its annual general budget for the public health sector. Even in the private sector, doctors struggle with scarcity, expense and sometimes the total lack of life-saving medicines. The impact of the rapid devaluation of the Sudanese currency and the general economic collapse has further limited medicine importation. In addition the local drugs and medical supplies industry remains meager.

Shortages in lifesaving medicines includes drugs like; Insulin, Syntocinon (Oxytocin), a long list of first and second line antibiotics in addition to IV fluids, plasma expanders and oxygen delivery systems. The prices of the available drugs have increased by 150% to 300% on average due to inflation.

As a result, Sudanese doctors have become unable to perform their duties of saving lives and of providing adequate care to their patients, within the dwindling public fund allocated to the health sector and dilapidated hospitals. Our only option coupled by our professional duty was to escalate our protest,

declare a a strike as our demands for major healthcare changes have been repeatedly ignored over the years.

A remarkable moment during the ongoing protests was the march called for by the Sudanese Professionals Association on the 25th of December 2018. The government responded with the use of extreme force and firing live bullets at the peaceful protestors. According to the Human Rights Watch organisation, the death toll reached 37 in the first five days of protests. Majority were head and chest gunfire wounds. "Shoot to kill" intent. As doctors we expected the popular march to be faced with similar brutality from the government security forces. In the total absence of any sort of medical emergency or ambulance services willing to reach protestors in Khartoum, emergency field teams were voluntarily prepared by the Sudanese Doctors Union and Central Committee of Doctors to provide both medical and financial aid to wounded protestors. Security forces dealt with these medical teams as the enemy. Many doctors were detained whilst providing voluntary medical services to the many casualties, some of which were seriously wounded that day. Among the was Dr. Sabir Mohamed Ahmed as surgical registrar was shot with a live bullet, that entered his left thigh and exited through the left he was rushed into an emergency surgery. Another victim that day was Mr. Hassan Omer a 22 year old 4th year medical student who was shot in the neck, the bullet went through trachea, oesophagus and transecting his spinal cord rendering him quadriplegic, he remains on ventilation on the intensive care to date.

Doctors in the private sector opened the doors of their hospitals to treat the wounded in the protests since that day and up to now free of charge, withstanding continuous staff harassment by security forces and attempts to detain some of the wounded protestors who were transferred there. Tear gas was released within the hospital vicinity with total disregard of patient and staff safety.

As the doctors were the first of trade unions to go on strike, a series of arrests ensued. Among the doctors who were detained that day and still in incommunicado detention are; Dr. Ahmed Abdallah Elshiekh; the head of the Doctors Union, Dr. Nageeb Nagm Eldeen; his deputy, Dr. Ehsan Fegiri; a senior member in the syndicate's executive committee, (and a leading women's rights activist) and Dr. Amal Jabrallah a senior psychiatrist. The list of doctors detainees continued to include Dr. Said Alkhateeb, Dr. Houwida AlHassan, Dr. Adiba AlSayed who were also arrested. The last name on the list was Dr. Elfatih Omer Elsaid, the member of the executive committee of

the doctors syndicate and the general manager of the private Tuga hospital in Omdurman, who was arrested after announcing the hospital commitment to treat all the injured protestors free of charge.

As well, Dr. Mohamed Nagi Al-Asm despite his youth (28 years old) has become the first public spokesperson of the Professional Association following his video announcement of the Declaration of Change and Freedom issued by the Association. The major opposition political forces of the country swiftly joined this Declaration. On 4th of January Sudanese security forces arrested Dr. Mohamed Nagi Al-Asm who represents the Central Committee of Doctors in the secretariat of the Sudanese Professionals Association and there are grave concerns regarding his safety.

Sudanese doctors have previous terrible experiences and memories with security detentions during the early years of the current Bashir regime. In April 1990, Dr. Ali Fadul, general secretary of the Sudanese Doctors Union was arrested and brutally tortured for 3 weeks leading to his death making him the first civilian martyr. The head of the doctors syndicate at the time Dr. Mamoun Mohamed Hussien was also detained and sentenced to death, but was kept in prison for several months along with tens of Sudanese doctors who were fortunately later released.

Assaults on medical doctors at work have risen in the past few years; the majority perpetrated by police, army and security personnel, ranging from verbal abuse to grievous bodily harm. Several hospital has been stormed by security forces, to arrest both doctors and wounded patients from emergency departments. The latest event took place in Omdurman hospital on the 9th of January, when security forces raided the hospital, fired tear gas and live ammunition inside the hospital, and arrested many of the doctors and patients who were receiving treatment after being injured in the peaceful march that took place in the same day.

The current situation makes it impossible for the Sudanese doctors to conduct their ethical and professional duties. Sudanese doctors demanded nothing but to be able to conduct these duties and work in an environment that delivers up to standard healthcare. We are desperately in need now of a show solidarity as a means of international media pressure from colleagues and organisations from all around the world. The Sudanese Doctors syndicate can be contacted via email (naqabaatiba@gmail.com) and also has active branches in the UK (sdu@sdu.org.uk) and Ireland (chairman@sdui.ie), which can be contacted by email provided.

Sudanese Doctors Syndicate - Office of External relations