



TEXTS ADOPTED

P8_TA(2017)0443

**Freedom of expression in Sudan, notably the case of Mohamed Zine al -
Abidine**

**European Parliament resolution of 16 November 2017 on freedom of expression in
Sudan, notably the case of Mohamed Zine al -Abidine (2017/2961(RSP))**

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on the situation in Sudan, in particular those of 13 June 2012¹, 10 October 2013², 18 December 2014³ and 6 October 2016⁴,
- having regard to its resolution of 16 March 2017 on EU priorities for the UN Human Rights Council sessions in 2017⁵,
- having regard to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,
- having regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,
- having regard to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights,
- having regard to the Cotonou Agreement,
- having regard to the Sudanese Press and Publications Act of 2009,
- having regard to the Sudanese Freedom of Information Law of 2015,
- having regard to the Kampala declaration of the Pan-African Conference on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information of 26 March 2017,
- having regard to the joint statement of the EU, Norway, the US and Canada on political detentions and newspapers' censorship in Sudan of 7 December 2016,
- having regard to the EU Guidelines on Freedom of Expression Online and Offline,

¹ OJ C 332 E, 15.11.2013, p. 49.

² OJ C 181, 19.5.2016, p. 87.

³ OJ C 294, 12.8.2016, p. 28.

⁴ Texts adopted, P8_TA(2016)0379.

⁵ Texts adopted, P8_TA(2017)0089.

- having regard to the statement of the United Nations Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Sudan, Aristide Nononsi, following his mission to Sudan of 11-21 May 2017,
 - having regard to the visit by Commissioner Stylianides to Sudan of 22-23 October 2017,
 - having regard to the declaration by the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (VP/HR) on behalf of the EU on the occasion of the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists (2 November 2017),
 - having regard to Reporters Without Borders' 2017 World Press Freedom Index,
 - having regard to Rules 135(5) and 123(4) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas an article by Mohamed Zine al-Abidine published on 23 February 2012 in the Al-Tayar newspaper criticised the alleged corruption in the family of Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir;
 - B. whereas the Sudanese National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) filed charges against Mohamed Zine al-Abidine and his editor-in-chief, Osman Mirgani;
 - C. whereas on 23 October 2017 a Sudanese court sentenced Mohamed Zine al-Abidine to a suspended jail term with a five-year probation period on charges of having violated the journalism code of ethics;
 - D. whereas the editor-in-chief of Al-Tayar, Osman Mirgani, was sentenced to pay a fine of 10 000 Sudanese pounds or serve a six-month prison sentence on the same charges, and was released after the fine was paid by the Sudanese Journalists Union;
 - E. whereas the lawyer representing both Mohamed Zine al-Abidine and Osman Mirgani has stated his intention to appeal the verdict against them;
 - F. whereas it has been reported that the NISS questions and detains journalists and has filed multiple lawsuits against Sudanese journalists and arbitrarily confiscated entire issues of newspapers, such as Al-Tayar, Al-Jareeda Al-Watan, Al-Youm Al-Tali, Al-Ayam and Akhir Lahza, containing articles critical of the government;
 - G. whereas in 2016 there were at least 44 cases of confiscated publications affecting 12 newspapers, including five issues of Al-Jareeda in a single week; whereas on 14 August 2016 the National Council for Press and Publications indefinitely suspended the publication of the Elaf, Al-Mustagilla, Al-Watan and Awal Al-Nahar newspapers;
 - H. whereas the existence of free, independent and impartial media constitutes one of the essential foundations of a democratic society;
 - I. whereas on 8 January 2017 Sudan signed the Declaration on Media Freedom in the Arab World, becoming its fourth signatory after Palestine, Tunisia and Jordan; whereas the state minister for media affairs noted the government's commitment to respect press freedom in Sudan;

- J. whereas Reporters Without Borders ranks Sudan among the least free countries, 174th of 180, in its 2017 World Press Freedom Index, owing to ‘harassment of the media, censorship, confiscation of newspaper issues, media closures, and Internet cuts’;
 - K. whereas the UN report of the Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Sudan noted in July 2017 that the censorship by the NISS of the Al-Jareeda newspaper contravened the Interim National Constitution of Sudan;
 - L. whereas Sudan has signed but not ratified the 2005 revised version of the Cotonou Agreement;
 - M. whereas VP/HR Federica Mogherini issued a statement on the 14 November 2017 on the visit of Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir to Uganda, in which she reminded all parties to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court to abide by and implement their obligations under international law;
 - N. whereas human, civil and political rights continue to be repressed in Sudan;
1. Expresses its deep concern at the sentencing of Mohamed Zine al-Abidine by the Press Court in Khartoum on 23 October 2017 to a suspended jail term with a five-year probation period, and calls on the Sudanese authorities to immediately review all charges against him;
 2. Is deeply worried about freedom of expression in Sudan, the ongoing censorship and seizures of newspapers, and the increased restrictions on journalists from freely expressing their opinion in Sudan; notes that holding government policies and politicians to account in the public domain should not result in repression of the free press; further notes with concern the long-term financial restrictions placed on newspapers as a result of routine seizures and suspensions of operations;
 3. Deplores the fact that numerous reports have emerged regarding repeated violations of media freedom and continued harassment of journalists by the NISS, and urges the Sudanese authorities to bring the powers and methods of the NISS into line with international standards;
 4. Believes that free, independent and impartial media constitute one of the essential foundations of a democratic society, where open debates play a crucial role; calls for the EU to intensify its efforts to promote freedom of expression through its external policies and instruments;
 5. Urges the Sudanese authorities to put an immediate end to all forms of harassment, intimidation and attacks against journalists and defenders of freedom of online and offline expression, and to undertake democratic reforms as a means to ensure the protection and promotion of human rights in the country, including freedom of expression, in accordance with its obligations under the Interim National Constitution of Sudan and its international commitments, including the Cotonou Agreement;
 6. Emphasises that the state, in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, has the primary responsibility for the promotion and protection of all human rights; calls on the Sudanese authorities to restore and respect human rights and fundamental freedoms under international law, including freedom of expression;

7. Recognises the importance of Commissioner Stylianides' recent mission and of conveying the EU's widely-known concerns to the Sudanese authorities, including as regards respect for fundamental freedoms;
8. Calls for the EU and its Member States to provide support to civil society organisations by means of technical assistance and capacity-building programmes, so as to improve their human rights advocacy and rule-of-law capabilities and enable them to contribute more effectively to the improvement of human rights in Sudan;
9. Notes with concern the proposed Press and Printing Act of 2017, which includes further controversial restrictions on online publications and provisions for lengthier suspensions of newspapers and journalists; encourages the Government of Sudan to amend the Press and Publication Act of 2009 in order to provide more protection to journalists and newspaper publishers;
10. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the Co-Presidents of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly, the African Union Commission, the Pan-African Parliament and the Sudanese Government.