SUDAN

Military Moves Against Opponents

With the situation in Sudan deteriorating, two human rights organizations have issued public appeals to the government, and international aid groups are warning of an impending famine in the country.

In new reports issued this month, Africa Watch and Amnesty International have called upon the Sudanese military authorities, headed by Lt. Gen. Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir, to bar executions and deliberate killings and to allow the exercise of normal political activity.

The appeals come in the wake of the first executions in the country since the military takeover six months ago and a government announcement this month that it plans to implement fundamentalist Islamic law. At the same time, government forces have resumed bombings of villages in the southern region and have generally intensified the war effort against rebels from the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA).

During peace talks late last month in Nairobi mediated by former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, the government indicated a willingness to resume "Operation Lifeline," a United Nations-sponsored program that permitted donor agencies to transport food and medicine into the war-ravaged south of the country. But more recently, the government has insisted that a cease-fire be in place before it will allow any further shipments.

Alarmed by the resumption of fighting, UN officials are saying that as many as six million Sudanese face possible starvation, due to erratic rainfall and a poor harvest. According to John Prendergast, from the Washington, D.C.-based Coalition for Peace in the Horn of Africa, a serious emergency may be unfolding in the little-noticed western part of Sudan, at a time when transportation and relief supplies are concentrated in the southern war zone.

Attention has been focused on the degenerating human rights situation, including the two executions which took place on December 17, when a businessman, Majdi Mahjoub Mohamed Ahamad, was hanged along with an Egyptian convicted of possessing drugs. At least one well-known doctor, Mamoun Mohamed Hussein, is believed to have died as well, probably from torture, according to Africa Watch. Mamoun, a gynecologist and former head of the doctors' union, was one of at least 11 doctors arrested in late November during a strike called to protest the dismissal of 16 doctors, the outlawing of unions and other government actions. He was given a death sentence by a military tribunal on December 10. The following day, Majdi, a member of a prominent Khartoum family, and another businessman, Ali Bashir Mariud, were sentenced to death for illegal currency trading. In another trial scheduled for December 24, Idris el Banna, a former senior government official, faces charges of sedition for an anti-government poem he wrote while in prison.

The government is believed to be holding more than 150 political detainees, including the deposed prime minister, Sadiq el-Mahdi. Another detainee is the lawyer, Amin Mekki Medani, who was a leader of the opposition to the previous military regime.

Meanwhile, protests against the current regime continue. The doctors' strike was one of several public demonstrations in recent weeks by students, workers and professionals. For Sudan, these outpourings of anti-government sentiments are particularly significant, since twice in the past – in 1964 and 1985 – military regimes have been forced from power by large-scale public manifestations of discontent. And protests earlier this year forced Sadiq's government to open negotiations with the SPLA.

However, according to Africa Watch, peaceful protesters may face a greater threat of severe reprisals than ever before. Sudanese soldiers have shown themselves reluctant in the past to fire upon demonstrators. But the regime, led by military officers sympathetic to the fundamentalist National Islamic Front, has recently legalized an Islamic militia, and this force is now handling many policing duties.

Ethnically-based Islamic militias are also being used increasingly in the largely Christian and animist south, Africa Watch says. According to Amnesty International, the militias have been responsible for tens of thousands of deaths among civilians in ethnic groups suspected of supporting the SPLA. In addition, many imprisoned civilians and SPLA combatants have been summarily executed by these same forces, Amnesty reports.

The SPLA has demanded the abolition of Islamic law as a condition for ending the war. Although the Islamic code has been formally in force in Sudan since 1983, none of the several hundred sentences of executions, amputations, or stonings handed down by the courts under Islamic law have been carried out since April 1985. But on December 9, a senior military officer announced that the judiciary will now be allowed to implement the sentences. ■

feelings among the church agency's staff. But NCCK Secretary-General Samuel Kobia and other church leaders said the signer of the letter does not exist. "There is no scandal in the NCCK," says a church official who is not directly related to the Council. "I happen to know that when one staffer appeared to have tribalistic attitudes, he was called on the carpet and had to change his ways."

One cleric who is boldly defending the Council is Anglican Bishop Alexander Muge of Eldoret, who told Kanu chief Aringo to stop castigating church leaders whenever they point to evils in society. Muge said Aringo should "read and interpret the signs of the times being demonstrated for him in East Germany, Czechoslovakia and many other Eastern bloc countries."

Even as Muge was releasing his statement to the press, the Minister for Culture and Social Services, James Njiru, launched a new attack on the Council, saying, among other things, that it "favored Professor Wangari Maathai's attitude."

Maathai, head of Kenya's Greenbelt Movement, was the object of the most scathing language in Moi's Uhuru Park speech. She has opposed, on environmental grounds, the planned construction of a 60-story building in

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SOUTH AFRICA

Conferees Endorse Unity Call

Faced with numerous restrictions on their activities, South Africa's anti-apartheid activists have never found it easy to convene a meeting to design common strategies and adopt policy guidelines.

In fact, the Conference for a Democratic Future, which took place in Johannesburg on December 9 and 10, is the first large-scale gathering of its kind since a "Congress of the People" in Kliptown outside Johannesburg in 1955. That meeting, spearheaded by the African National Congress (ANC) and its affiliates, adopted a "Freedom Charter," calling for the abolishment of racial discrimination and the extension of equal rights to all South Africans.

There were 2,884 delegates at Kliptown, compared with a reported 4,462 at this month's gathering. The 1955 Congress was raided by police and was followed, the next year, by a nationwide roundup of over 140 activists who were charged with treason. Among them were government opponents whose names are among the best known internationally, including Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu and Govan Mbeki.

This year, Pretoria came under heavy pressure from Washington and from the European Community to let the meeting go forward without harassment, and it did.

As one indication of the official attitude, Mohammed Valli Moosa, the acting general secretary of the United Democratic Front (UDF) and one of the chief conference conveners, was freed from detention in time to help with the planning, and the restrictions imposed on his activities after his release were lifted for the days of the meetings.

The huge conference turnout seems to have accomplished the primary aim of the organizers – building unity among anti-apartheid forces. The congress was twice postponed earlier this year in an effort to create the broadest possible consensus and draw the widest range of representation.

While adopting a declaration expressing its readiness to talk with de Klerk, the conference agreed that the president "has done nothing" to demonstrate his willingness to enter into serious negotiations. "We cannot and will not wait," the declaration said, and the delegates promised to "intensify our struggle. . . as never before."

The largest contingents at the meeting came from the trade union federation, Cosatu (Confederation of South African Trade Unions), and from the UDF, a coalition of over 600 groups that was barred by the government from active political work last year.

Along with these representatives of what has come to be called the "mass democratic movement," or MDM, the conference attracted delegates from a range of white liberal groups, sporting bodies, religious organizations, business groups, the Black Consciousness Movement, and several of the ethnically-based "homelands" established by the white government under the semi-abandoned plan to divide the country into separate, self-governing territories. Also in attendance as observers were the three co-leaders of the liberal white Parliamentary opposition – the Democratic Party – plus U.S. Ambassador William Swing, high-level representatives from several European governments and two Soviet academics.

Despite the moves towards unity, old strains reappeared. Two days before the conference, the National Council of Trade Unions (Nactu), the country's second largest trade union grouping, announced it would boycott the meeting to protest the participation of homeland leaders "and other sellouts."

Earlier, the newly-formed Pan Africanist Movement had said it would not attend. The movement is a successor to the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), which split from the ANC in 1959, a year before both organizations were outlawed by the government. The PAC criticized the ANC for collaborating with whites and proclaimed the slogan "Africa for the Africans," which has become known as the "Africanist" position.

Another absentee was the Inkatha

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UN Calls for 'Genuine' Talks

A resolution adopted December 14 by the United Nations General Assembly during a special session on South Africa is expected to serve as a barometer against which movement towards change in South Africa is measured internationally. The document, approved with no abstention or dissent, calls on the South African government "to engage in negotiations genuinely and seriously."

Agreement on the consensus language took many hours to negotiate, ending with an all night session lasting until 6:00 am. As a Norwegian occupied the chair, African diplomats and representatives of the African National Congress (ANC) bargained with U.S., British and other representatives over key sections.

In the end, an agreement was reached to say "legitimate" rather than "liberation" struggle and to replace "one person, one vote" with "universal, equal suffrage."

Where the draft said the people of South Africa "have been compelled to take up arms," the final document inserts "felt compelled." And where the draft, using the language of the Harare Declaration, adopted by the Organization of African Unity in August, calls for formation of an interim government to oversee the transition to democratic governance, the final UN resolution refers, more diplomatically, to "transitional arrangements and modalities" for drafting and adopting a new constitution.

The document appeals to the international community to "step up all-round support for the opponents of apartheid" and to provide assistance to southern African states "which have been adversely affected by South Africa's acts of aggression and destabilization." It also calls for the use of "concerted and effective measures, including the full observance by all countries of the mandatory arms embargo." The resolution says "existing measures" should not be relaxed "until there is clear evidence of profound and irreversible change."

However, in what is perhaps the biggest compromise on the part of the anti-apartheid forces, who advocated increased pressure on South Africa, no mention is made of additional sanctions.

The UN document lists the "fundamental principles" which will form the basis for an internationally-accepted solution, among them that South Africa become "a united, non-racial and democratic state" with universally recognized human rights and freedoms.