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Kenya/South Sudan: Arbitrary arrest and detention of human rights defender Morris Mabior Awikjok

On 4 February 2023, South Sudanese human rights defender **Morris Mabior Awikjok** was attacked and abducted from his home in Nairobi, Kenya, reportedly by Kenyan security forces. The defender's wife was also beaten and left behind at the scene. They did not disclose the location to where the defender was being taken. On 7 February, an official newspaper article stated Morris Mabior Awikjok had been sent to Juba, South Sudan.

[Morris Mabior Awikjok](#) is a human rights defender and the head of the civil society organisation Youth Alliance Network. Morris Mabior Awikjok was a teacher and former Secretary General of the Warrap Worker Union in South Sudan. The human rights defender is known for his documentation of human rights abuses committed by the National Security Service. Mabior Awikjok has been campaigning for sanctions against certain senior staff members of the National Security Service, for inciting human rights abuses across the country. The human rights defender has also documented and reported various abuses perpetrated by the government. An example of this is the incidents of Rualbet Payam in 2022, where women were raped, and many young men were tortured and killed. He has also raised awareness and reported on the alleged role of the National Security Service in fuelling inter-communitiy conflict in Jonglei State, South Sudan.

As a result of several death threats, Morris Mabior Awikjok took the decision to flee South Sudan. He has since been living in Kenya as an asylum seeker. The human rights defender continued his activities of denouncing human rights violations in South Sudan from Nairobi, where he is reported to still be under threat.

On 4 February 2023, human rights defender Morris Mabior Awikjok was arrested in his home in Nairobi. According to the information available, Kenyan police officers broke into his home, where he and his wife were brutally assaulted. The police took many of his belongings, including phones and laptops, and he was abducted. No information was provided to the wife of the human rights defender, who was also injured in the course of his arrest.

On 7 February 2023, the South Sudanese newspaper “The Dawn” reported on the human rights defender's situation. According to that information, he was extradited to Juba, South Sudan, and placed in the Blue House prison. However, family and colleagues have not received any official information regarding his whereabouts, his health condition, or whether he has had any access to legal representation.

South Sudanese human rights defenders who migrate to Kenya to escape persecution in their own state [face persistent cross-border harassment and targeting by the South Sudanese government](#), who operate in the neighbouring territory to pursue those who have fled. This is primarily carried out by the National Security Service (NSS) intelligence agency, which is directly controlled by the Office the President of South Sudan. In countries like Kenya, there is evidence of an apparent carte blanche given to South Sudanese actors by the national police and security agencies, to return the human rights defenders to South Sudan.

Front Line Defenders expresses its grave concern at the arrest and detention of Morris Mabior Awikjok, and the violence against his wife, as it believes that he is facing reprisal for his peaceful and legitimate work denouncing human rights violations in South Sudan. Front Line Defenders respectfully reminds the authorities of Kenya of its status as a signatory to the UN 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, as well as the principle of *non-refoulement* under international human rights law, to “guarantee that no one should be returned to a country where they are likely to face torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, and other irreparable harm”.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities of South Sudan to:

1. Take all necessary measures to ensure the immediate and unconditional release of Morris Mabior Awikjok and guarantee his physical and psychological security and integrity;
2. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the arbitrary arrest and detention of Morris Mabior Awikjok with a view to ensuring his protection and release, publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
3. Ensure that the treatment of Morris Mabior Awikjok, while in detention, adheres to the conditions set out in the *‘Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment’*, adopted by UN General Assembly resolution 43/173 of 9 December 1988;
4. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in South Sudan are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisal and free of all restriction.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities of Kenya to:

1. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the arbitrary arrest and detention of Morris Mabior Awikjok with a view to ensuring his protection and release, publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
2. Ensure that the human rights defenders seeking asylum in Kenya are granted protection without fear of being arrested and sent back/returned to their country of origin, as per the international principle standards;
3. Take all necessary measures to ensure the physical and psychological security and integrity of Morris Mabior Awikjok’s family members in Kenya, in consultation with them;
4. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in South Sudan are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisal and free from all restriction.