

Advocacy dossier

Waad Bahjat

وعد بهجت

At liberty **Sudan**

Women's rights defender, blogger, and member of the Umbda Resistance Committee who was arrested, ill-treated, and convicted on charges of public annoyance after livestreaming police harassment of women at a petrol station in Khartoum.

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The case at a glance

Women's rights defender, blogger, and member of the Umbda Resistance Committee who was arrested, ill-treated, and convicted on charges of public annoyance after livestreaming police harassment of women at a petrol station in Khartoum.

Status	Arrested	Country
At liberty	**8 Nov 2020**	**Sudan**

Sentence Six months in prison (suspended), probation and a fine of 10,000 Sudanese pounds (approximately 22 euros).

Charges Public annoyance (Article 77 of the Sudanese Criminal Act)
Use of criminal force (Article 143 of the Sudanese Criminal Act)
Defamation (dismissed)
Insulting a public servant exercising judicial proceedings (dismissed)
Publishing false news (dismissed)

What we ask

We call on the authorities to:

01 Quash the conviction and drop any charges that remain on record against Waad Bahjat in connection with peaceful human rights work.

02 Confirm publicly that Waad Bahjat faces no residual travel, financial, or professional restriction arising from this case.

03 Guarantee that Waad Bahjat can resume that work without surveillance, summons, or further reprisal.

04 Provide effective remedy for the period of deprivation of liberty already served.

02

Documented violations

Each violation and the international standard it breaks.

Arbitrary detention International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 9

Judicial harassment UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, Articles 9, 12

Physical assault International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Articles 7, 9

Press freedom violation International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 19

Threats and intimidation UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, Article 12

Unfair trial International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 14

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How the case unfolded

8 November 2020

Arrest

Arrested while livestreaming police harassment

Bahjat was arrested by a police officer and an officer of the Sudanese Armed Forces while broadcasting live on Facebook the harassment of women at a petrol station in Al-Amarat, Khartoum. She was held at Al-Imtidad police station, her phone was seized, and she was threatened and beaten, leaving bruises on her arms and shoulders.

9 November 2020

Release

Released on bail pending trial

Bahjat was released on bail the day after her arrest, pending trial on charges including defamation, insulting a public servant, publishing false news, public annoyance, and use of criminal force.

3 December 2020

Hearing

First hearing before Khartoum Criminal Court

The first hearing in Bahjat's case was held before the Khartoum Criminal Court.

10 January 2021

Hearing

Second hearing; some charges dismissed

The court dismissed charges of defamation, insulting a public servant, and publishing false news. The charges of public annoyance and use of criminal force were maintained. Bahjat pleaded not guilty.

31 March 2021

Conviction

Convicted and sentenced

The Khartoum Criminal Court convicted Bahjat on charges of public annoyance and use of criminal force, sentencing her to six months in prison (suspended), probation and a fine of 10,000 Sudanese pounds. She was detained for several hours at the police station attached to the court and released after paying the fine. She announced her intention to appeal.

4 May 2021

Context

UN experts raise her conviction with Sudan

UN special procedures sent a joint communication to the government of Sudan about her arrest, ill-treatment and conviction. It was published on 14 July 2021.

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The full story

Background and Work

Waad Bahjat is an engineer, women's rights defender, blogger, and member of the Umbda Resistance Committee, a grassroots organisation advocating for civil and economic rights in Sudan. The resistance committees emerged during the popular uprising that began in December 2018 and led to the overthrow of President Omar al-Bashir in April 2019. These neighbourhood-level networks sustained the protest movement and continued to organise for accountability, economic justice, and human rights under the transitional government established after Bashir's fall.

Bahjat uses digital platforms to document and challenge discrimination and abuses of power, particularly those affecting women. Her work centres on making visible the everyday harassment and violence that women face from state actors in public spaces. On 8 November 2020, she witnessed police officers and members of the Sudanese Armed Forces harassing a group of women at a petrol station in Al-Amarat, a neighbourhood in Khartoum. She began broadcasting the scene live on her personal Facebook account, narrating what she observed.

The Arrest

On 8 November 2020, a police officer and an officer of the Sudanese Armed Forces arrested Waad Bahjat while she was livestreaming. She was detained overnight and subjected to threats and ill-treatment. She was released the following day, 9 November 2020, pending trial. Authorities charged her with multiple offences under the Sudanese Criminal Act: defamation, insulting a public servant exercising judicial proceedings, publishing false news, public annoyance (Article 77), and use of criminal force (Article 143).

Legal Proceedings

The first hearing took place on 3 December 2020 before the Khartoum Criminal Court. On 10 January 2021, during her second hearing, the court dismissed the charges of defamation, insulting a public servant, and publishing false news. However, it maintained the charge of public annoyance and added the charge of use of criminal force. Bahjat pleaded not guilty and refuted the accusations.

On 31 March 2021, the Khartoum Criminal Court convicted Waad Bahjat and sentenced her to six months in prison, suspended, and a fine of 10,000 Sudanese pounds (approximately 22 euros). After the verdict, she was detained for several hours in the police station attached to the court and released the same day following payment of the fine. Bahjat announced her intention to appeal the conviction.

Context and Continuing Risks

The prosecution of Waad Bahjat forms part of a broader pattern of judicial harassment targeting human rights defenders in Sudan, particularly women who document abuses by security forces. Despite the transitional government's commitments to reform and accountability, legacy laws from the Bashir era continue to be used to criminalise dissent and silence critical voices. The charges brought against Bahjat, public annoyance, use of criminal force, are vague offences frequently deployed to prosecute activists and journalists.

The case illustrates the risks faced by defenders who use digital tools to expose misconduct. Bahjat's conviction sends a chilling message to others who might document police violence or harassment, particularly acts targeting women. She announced that she would appeal; no appeal ruling has been reported.

Latest updates on this case Scan the code or visit: https://humena.org/defenders/waad-bahjat/

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