



**URGENT CALL FOR THE RELEASE OF HAJOOJ KUKA AND THE FOUR ARTISTS
IMPRISONED WITH HIM
Stand up for artists in Sudan**

We, the TANO consortium of African Film Festivals in the UK: Africa in Motion (Scotland), Afrika Eye (Bristol), Cambridge African Film Festival (Cambridge), Film Africa (London) and Watch Africa (Wales), strongly condemn the sentencing of five young artists to jail for two months, charged with public nuisance and disruption of public safety in Sudan. We call for the Sudanese authorities to immediately and unconditionally release filmmaker **Hajooj Kuka** and the four artists imprisoned with him, **Duaa Tarig Mohamed Ahmed, Abdel Rahman Mohamed Hamdan, Ayman Khalaf Allah Mohamed Ahmed** and **Ahmed Elsadig Ahmed Hammad**. The case - which was policed, prosecuted, and judged by al-Bashir era authorities - points to a dangerous backsliding in Sudan, as oppressive laws put in place by the former regime continue to stifle free expression and target artists and human rights defenders.

The five artists were arrested at the Civic Lab where they work to create art for community engagement. They were arrested in the aftermath of an attack on the Khartoum Civic Lab where a play rehearsal was taking place. The police responded to the attack by arresting the Civic Lab staff and attendees, and did not intervene when the attackers continued to beat the artists. During the COVID crisis, Civic Labs were responsible for creating hundreds of educational murals across the country, distributing meals and water to families in need, and making powerful films that delivered crucial public health messages. These artists have steadfastly poured their energy into helping their country get through this difficult period of transition, by creating spaces that provide opportunities for vital conversations about Sudan's future.

Hajooj Mohamed Haj Omar is Sudan's most well-known director, screening his films at dozens of international festivals while creating critical new narratives for Sudan to navigate its future, including the award-winning **Beats of the Antonov** (2014) and **aKasha** (2018). The other artists represent some of Sudan's brightest new voices and are dedicated to using art to educate the public and to demand social justice. Duaa Tarig Mohamed Ahmed played an integral role in founding the Civic Labs, which support artists across the country. Now they are jailed, and their voices stifled at a time when Sudan needs them most.

Although the artists were initially charged with a variety of offenses, these were all dropped and the case that resulted in the jail sentence focused on the fact that they chanted while under arrest at the police station. Five members of the group were charged with creating a public nuisance. The men who attacked the Civic Lab were never charged, nor were they held. Duaa, a female artist, along with 4 of her colleagues were charged separately while another 6 artists were awaiting a verdict on Sunday 20th September. During Duaa's detainment, she was assaulted by an investigator. All of Duaa's attempts to bring a case against the officer were



denied despite multiple witnesses to the assault. For more information on the incident please see SIHA's (Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa) in-depth press release [here](#).

Across the world citizens are demanding an end to police brutality and injustice. We are deeply concerned that this incident will establish a precedence and are demanding rapid reforms in the judiciary and police system and an immediate independent investigation into the police and judges involved in this incident. We are particularly concerned about the immediate safety of **Duaa Tarig Mohamed Ahmed** following her earlier assault and recent reports of the security forces using torture and engaging in other abuses of prisoners.

Artists are at the vanguard of positive change in Sudan, and have played a critical role in the revolution. When they are not protected, no one is protected.

Justine Atkinson, Africa in Motion Film Festival and founder of Aya Films
Esther Afikuruweh, Assistant producer Afrika Eye Festival
Paula Beegan, Cambridge African Film Festival, Advisory Board Member
Dr Lizelle Bisschoff, Founder, Africa in Motion Film Festival
Simon Bright, Founder Afrika Eye Festival & filmmaker
Liz Chege, Director, Africa in Motion Film Festival
Sebastiana Etzo, Cambridge African Film Festival, Advisory Board Member
Julie MacArthur, Cambridge African Film Festival, Advisory Board Member
Annie Menter, Director Afrika Eye Festival
Myriam Mouflih, Programmer, Africa in Motion Film Festival
Christine Patterson, Producer, Watch-Africa Cymru
Sheila Ruiz, Director, Film Africa & Deputy Director, Royal African Society
Estrella Sendra, Cambridge African Film Festival, Advisory Board Member
Ingrid Sinclair, Founder Afrika Eye Festival & filmmaker
Carmen Thompson, Programme Producer, Africa in Motion Film Festival
Jenny Thornton, Cambridge African Film Festival, Advisory Board Member
Dr Stefanie Van de Peer, Trustee of Africa in Motion Film Festival
Sarah Wechselberger, Producer, Film Africa