

Statement by SudanUprising Germany on normalization of relations between Sudan and Israel

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Last week, the American, Israeli and Sudanese governments announced that Sudan has moved to normalize relations with Israel. This comes as part of a deal with the United States for Sudan to pay 335 million USD compensation to (mostly American) victims of terrorist attacks and to normalize diplomatic relations with Israel in exchange for Sudan's removal from the U.S. State Sponsor of Terrorism list. Such a removal, the Sudanese government argues, would open the door for debt-relief, aid and foreign investment in the country. For U.S. president Trump, his agenda is clear: to project himself ahead of the U.S. Presidential elections next month as the strong leader capable of "bringing peace to the Middle East" and of bending other countries to his will.

We want to bring attention to a much neglected aspect of the contentious debate, both inside and outside Sudan, on whether or not the country should normalize relations with Israel: namely, its impact on Sudanese refugees. Since the deal was announced last week, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has revealed that as part of this "normalization", Sudan is considering accepting the "return" (i.e. the deportation) of Sudanese refugees. As some of us in SudanUprising Germany are refugees in Germany, this issue is of great importance to us. Refugees, especially the Sudanese, have long been referred to by Israeli authorities as "infiltrators". As reported by Noa Landau and Lee Yaron in Haaretz online on 25 October 2020, Netanyahu made a promise to the Likud party's central committee in February, on the eve of his first meeting with Sudanese officials to discuss normalization. "We stopped a million infiltrators from entering the country from Sinai", he said. "A huge difference. We have already removed one-third of those who still got in, and we're going to remove the remaining two-thirds. We're working on it; you'll hear news soon."

Human rights organizations and media bodies have for years documented the racist, violent treatment by Israeli authorities of Black, African refugees and asylum seekers, including the Sudanese in Israel. To put it simply, they are treated as sub-human. According to international law, every human being has the right to seek refuge and safety and to be treated with dignity. The treatment by Israel of Sudanese and other African migrants is part and parcel of the same oppressive machine that occupies Palestinian lands. The conflict therefore relates to us as Sudanese not just in indirect ways, but in direct ones too.

Deportations of Sudanese refugees and asylum seekers from anywhere to Sudan assumes that the conditions that forced them to flee - violence, displacement and dispossession- have been addressed. They have not. The Hotline for Refugees and Migrants in Israel, an NGO that defends the rights of refugees, migrants and victims of human trafficking, has noted: "Even if Israel were to end its non-refoulement policy in regard to Sudan, the state will still be obligated to examine all the asylum requests from Sudanese citizens – an obligation Israel has evaded for over a decade, with various excuses."

What disturbs us further is that both Hamdok's cabinet and the military establishment (through the Sovereign Council) are making decisions for the Sudanese people without any checks by legislative or judicial powers. The revolution began in part as a rejection of governance only by executive authority. Almost a year since the constitutional document mandated the establishment of a Transitional Legislative Assembly, the assembly – envisioned to represent wide segments of Sudanese society and revolutionary forces- it remains missing. We add our voices to the tens of thousands in Sudan who protested over the past year to pressure for the completion of the transitional structures - the assembly, the independent commissions and independent judicial structures, including a constitutional court.

Acting Foreign Minister Omar Gamar-Eldin has announced that normalization is subject to the agreement of the soon to be formed Legislative Assembly. We urge the Hamdok government to act transparently and to cease from both negotiations and any decision-making regarding cooperation with Israel until the transitional structures are completed and functional. We also urge civil society organizations, social movements and the media to continue to play their part in building a culture of democracy by encouraging civic dialogue, and by reflecting to the Sudanese people the varied dimensions of the decision to normalize and its potential impact not just on Palestinian struggles, but on our own.