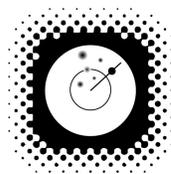


# Sudan



## Overview

Sudan openly acknowledges filtering content that transgresses public morality and ethics or threatens order. The state's regulatory authority has established a special unit to monitor and implement filtration; this primarily targets pornography and, to a lesser extent, gay and lesbian content, dating sites, and provocative attire.

## Background

Though a two-decade civil war between the north and the south ended in January 2005 when the Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement signed a comprehensive peace deal with the Sudanese government, extended fighting began in 2003 in the western region of Darfur. According to the UN, more than two million people have fled their homes and more than 200,000 have been killed in the Darfur conflict, in which pro-government Arab militias are accused of carrying out a campaign of ethnic cleansing against non-Arab groups.<sup>1</sup>

The government secretly decided in February 2008 to restore censorship, which was officially lifted in July 2005

after the signing of the peace accord.<sup>2</sup>

Since the decision, privately-owned media in Khartoum have been threatened by security agents, raids, confiscation of issues, closures, and coercive measures by state agencies, and security agencies have censored news, interrogated editors, and made nightly visits to printing presses to remove articles.<sup>3</sup> In September 2008, the National Press and Publications Council (NPPC) closed two southern dailies for nearly a month for allegedly violating their publishing licenses, which require their headquarters to be based in Khartoum, and for "obstructing the 2005 peace agreement." Both papers were allowed to reopen several weeks later after complying with all administrative requirements.<sup>4</sup>

## Internet in Sudan

The number of Sudanese Internet users has increased from approximately 9000 in 2000<sup>5</sup> to approximately 3.8 million in 2008<sup>6</sup> (from 0.03 to 9.4 percent of the population). In January 2009 the mobile phone penetration rate was estimated to be 23 percent, with a 3.7 percent fixed-line penetration rate.<sup>7</sup>

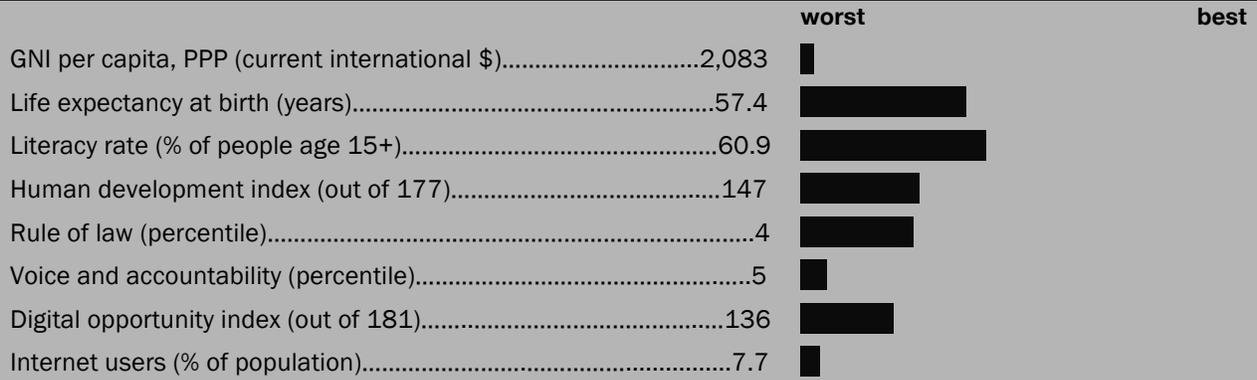
### RESULTS AT A GLANCE

Filtering	No evidence of filtering	Suspected filtering	Selective filtering	Substantial filtering	Pervasive filtering
Political			●		
Social				●	
Conflict/security	●				
Internet tools				●	

Other factors	Low	Medium	High	Not applicable
Transparency			●	
Consistency		●		

## KEY INDICATORS



Sudan's existing telecommunications infrastructure covers approximately 80 percent of the country. The telecoms market is served mainly by Zain Sudan, government-backed Sudatel/Sudani, MTN, and Canar, a fixed-line operator with a focus on next generation networks and wireless loop that accounts for 43 percent of the industry. Publicly accessible Internet is available in only 46 percent of the country's cities and towns, something operators attribute to low demand. Only two ISPs, Sudatel and Canar, have direct connectivity to the global Internet, though this is expected to change by the end of 2009. Sudan is connected to Saudi Arabia through an underwater fiber optic cable; the domestic fiber optic cable network extends over 11,000 kilometers throughout the country.<sup>8</sup>

The number of home Internet subscriptions increased by a factor of ten between 2001 and 2005, rising from 50,000 to 500,000. During the same period, the number of Internet cafés more than doubled. However, Internet usage remains concentrated in Khartoum, accounting for 95 percent of Internet users. The majority of Internet users in Sudan rely on dialup connections (59 percent), and very few have high-speed Internet (19 percent). While 81 percent of universities in Sudan are Internet-

equipped, most (65 percent) still use dialup connections.<sup>9</sup>

The information and telecommunications sector in Sudan is regulated by the National Telecommunication Corporation (NTC), which was established in 1996.<sup>10</sup> In 1993, the state-owned Public Telecommunication Corporation was transformed into the Sudan Telecommunication Company (Sudatel), allowing private investors to purchase a share in the enterprise. As of 2008, the government retained approximately 20 percent of Sudatel's shares.<sup>11</sup>

In 2001, the Sudanese government adopted the National Strategy for Building the Information Industry, with the goal of enabling "all sectors of society to access information media in a way leading to the widest dissemination and utilization of information, all of which shall contribute to achieve an appreciated economic growth, wealth development, job opportunities, enhancement of all-sector production rates and eradication of poverty."<sup>12</sup> As a result of the Strategy, Sudatel's monopoly over mobile telephony ended in 2002, and competitive operators—including several ISPs—in telecommunications were licensed.<sup>13</sup>

Sudatel was blacklisted by Washington and barred from doing business with American firms in May 2007, as part of US

pressure on Khartoum to halt violence in the troubled Western Darfur region. Sudatel, however, has pursued to expand in a number of African countries.<sup>14</sup>

Due to the growth of the Internet services in Sudan, Sudan Internet Society, a non-governmental, technical and professional organization, has been established to serve the Sudanese community and to provide leadership in addressing key issues about the roles and uses of the Internet.<sup>15</sup> SIS also manages the domain name registration under Sudan Top Level Domain ".sd"<sup>16</sup>

### **Legal and regulatory frameworks**

Article 39 of the 2005 interim national constitution of the Republic of Sudan states that "[e]very citizen shall have an unrestricted right to the freedom of expression, reception and dissemination of information, publication, and access to the press without prejudice to order, safety or public morals as determined by law."<sup>17</sup> The same article also states that the "state shall guarantee the freedom of the press and other media as shall be regulated by law in a democratic society."<sup>18</sup>

In July 2008, international human rights organization Article 19 welcomed the draft Media Bills proposed for Southern Sudan, which "largely conform to the international standards," but recommended further changes, including the amendment of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Organization Bill to remove its right to exercise regulatory powers over broadcasting.<sup>19</sup>

Censorship, which was officially lifted in July 2005 and secretly reinstated in February 2008, returned to the country publicly in April 2008 because "a number of newspapers had referred to the support Khartoum had provided to a failed coup attempt against the president of neighboring Chad." The crackdown

focused on privately-owned newspapers and those affiliated with parties other than the ruling National Congress Party. As a result, many newspapers were subject to pre-publication censorship and one opposition newspaper was banned from publishing entirely on February 14.<sup>20</sup> The regime uses a number of methods to intimidate the press, "going from direct censorship over lawsuits under the Press and Publication Law to withdrawing much-needed government advertisements from critical newspapers."<sup>21</sup> This new wave of censorship did not affect Web sites as much, but low penetration rates mean the impact of the Internet in Sudan is low compared to more traditional media.<sup>22</sup>

The 2001 National Strategy for Building the Information Industry called for filtering Internet content that is "morally offensive and in violation of public ethics and order, [and] that may promote corruption and deface traditional identity."<sup>23</sup> The NTC declares that, although it targets several categories, "most important are the pornographic sites which constitute more than 95% of the blocked sites. Other sites include those related to narcotics, bombs, alcoholics, gambling and blasphemous sites normally offensive to Islam."<sup>24</sup> Interestingly, the NTC uses Western peer-reviewed research to support its decision to block these materials in defense of the public good. The NTC admits that "some translation sites are blocked as they are exploited to transcend the filtering process."<sup>25</sup>

The NTC has set up a special filtering unit to screen Internet media before it reaches users in Sudan. The NTC asserts that sites are filtered based on their contents rather than their names, and that filtering is needed "to conserve the ethics and moral values and forestall evil in the society."<sup>26</sup> According to the NTC, the Internet Service Control Unit receives daily

requests to add Web sites to, or remove them from, the blacklist. The NTC makes available on its Web site an e-mail address for such requests.

In August 2008, Reporters Without Borders protested the blocking of the video sharing Web site youtube.com and expressed concern over free expression online in Sudan.<sup>27</sup> Sudan's National Telecommunication Corporation also reportedly blocked e-mail access for United Nations staff of the UN Mission in Sudan in February 2008.<sup>28</sup>

In April 2007, Google confirmed that it does not permit the download of Google Earth in Sudan because of restrictions imposed by the United States in accordance with US export controls and economic sanctions regulations.<sup>29</sup> Users who attempt to download Google Earth get the message, "This product is not available in your country."<sup>30</sup>

### **Surveillance**

According to a 2008 US State Department human rights report, the government of Sudan monitors Internet communications, and the National Intelligence and Security Service reads e-mail messages between private citizens.<sup>31</sup> Media reports reveal that Sudan's police have a special unit that monitors Internet cafés to stop them from providing access to sexual content. The unit has reportedly filed claims against Internet cafés for hosting "obscene and immoral practices."<sup>32</sup> Because of security concerns, Sudan's regulatory requirements order telecom networks to disconnect mobile prepaid subscribers if they have no personal information about the customer on record. Because of this, telecom operator MTN alone lost 1.1 million subscribers during the beginning of the second quarter of 2008.<sup>33</sup>

### **ONI testing results**

Testing was conducted on two ISPs in Sudan, Sudanet and Zina Net. Their blocking behavior was identical. Results from 2008-2009 testing indicate changes in the filtering policy since 2006-2007 testing. The filtering regime still targets mainly pornography, but it has now been extended to include previously accessible online discussion groups that facilitate the exchange of Arabic sex materials. Interestingly, filtering of gay and lesbian, dating, and provocative-attire Web sites is now more limited compared to earlier results, as previously inaccessible content in these categories was found to be accessible ([www.lesbians-against-violence.com](http://www.lesbians-against-violence.com) and the search portal [www.bglad.com](http://www.bglad.com) are two examples of accessible sites that were previously blocked). The dating Web sites that were blocked were those likely to host sexually explicit (for example, [adultfriendfinder.com](http://adultfriendfinder.com)) or gay and lesbian ([gayromeo.com](http://gayromeo.com)) content.

Another change in recent years is the unblocking of health-related sites pertaining to the alteration of body parts, such as [www.circumcision.org](http://www.circumcision.org) and [www.breastenlargementmagazine.com](http://www.breastenlargementmagazine.com). Similarly, most of the miscellaneous sites that were found blocked earlier, such as [www.collegehumor.com](http://www.collegehumor.com) and [www.metacafe.com](http://www.metacafe.com), were found unblocked in recent testing.

Several of the tested sites that facilitate anonymous Web surfing or circumvention of Internet filters remain blocked. Additionally, some Web sites with hacking, cracking, or warez content were blocked, though these sites could have been blocked because they also contain sexually explicit content.

A small number of translation Web sites—which the NTC argues are used to circumvent filtering—were blocked.<sup>34</sup>

Though none of the tested blogs were found to be blocked, blogging is subject to scrutiny and can incur serious consequences. In October 2006, Sudan expelled Jan Pronk, a top U.N. official, from the country after he posted on his blog ([www.janpronk.nl](http://www.janpronk.nl)) sensitive statements relating to the conflict in Darfur.<sup>35</sup> ONI has monitored and verified the blog's accessibility from Sudan.

The Arab Network for Human Rights Information (HRinfo.org) reported that the NTC blocked access to the Web site [www.sudaneseonline.com](http://www.sudaneseonline.com) in 2004.<sup>36</sup> This site was not found to be blocked during ONI testing.

### Conclusion

Online pornography is the main target of the censors in Sudan, as the government openly acknowledges. Many anonymizer and proxy Web sites are blocked, as are some sites related to provocative attire, dating, and gay and lesbian interests. Sudan is relatively transparent in its filtering of the Internet compared with other Arab states, and even provides an appellate process for challenging the blocking of a site. Even though 2008-2009 test results found the country's technical filtering to be less aggressive compared to earlier results, the return of media censorship in 2008 could result in stricter regulations of Internet activities.

### NOTES

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