

Middle East **Solidarity**

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War in Ukraine and the politics of **Bread, Oil & Guns**



General strike in Tunisia

Workers struggles target regime which seized power in a coup last year

Sudan's Resistance Committees

Revolutionary bodies lead the fightback against the military

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About us

Events in the Middle East often dominate the news, but war, sectarian violence and western military intervention grab the headlines. Middle East Solidarity shows a different side to the region.

We report on resistance to repression and imperialism from Morocco to Yemen, covering the strikes and protests which are missed by the mainstream media.

We carry the voices and stories of the women and men who are still fighting for bread, freedom and social justice to new audiences. Our practical guides to campaigning and resources for activists aim to build a stronger solidarity movement.

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Find out more here:

www.menasolidaritynetwork.com
www.egyptsolidarityinitiative.org
www.bahrainwatch.org

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War in Ukraine and the politics of Bread, Oil & Guns

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has had profound effects on the Middle East. **Irang Bak** and **Anne Alexander** look at how rising food costs and shortages are hurting the poor, while the rich profit from oil prices and arms deals.

This year's Ramadan, for many in the Middle East and North Africa, is different from the previous years. The region is being hard hit by the effects of the war in Ukraine with the food prices soaring to a record level.

Russia and Ukraine occupy a large share of the world grain export market.

In 2020, Russia accounted for 18 percent of global wheat exports and Ukraine accounted for 8 percent. Countries in the Middle East and Africa in particular rely heavily on wheat from Russia and Ukraine.

The dinner tables in the Middle East and Africa are being directly affected, as Western sanctions against Russia and war in Ukraine have halted exports of Russian and Ukrainian wheat. As the price of essential food such as wheat and cooking oil has soared, the amount of food that can be purchased for the same price has significantly decreased compared to the previous years.

In Lebanon, where Ukrainian wheat accounts for 80 percent of its imports, food prices rose 14 percent in February. Bread, the staple food, rose 27 percent, and cooking oil rose 83 percent.

In East Africa, hit hard by the effects

of the climate crisis, Somalia has already suffered from drought for decades, leading to a decline in crop cultivation and pastoralism. Here, too, the price of cooking oil has doubled in a week. This is because the entirety of its wheat and cooking oil imports are from Ukraine and Russia.

The situation in Egypt, the most populous country in the Middle East, is even worse. Egypt relies on Ukraine and Russia for 70 percent of its wheat imports, accounting for about half of all wheat imports to the Middle East and Africa. Egypt applied for a loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) because it could not afford the soaring food prices after the war in Ukraine.

About 70 million people, or most of Egypt's working class, depend on cheaply supplied bread from government subsidies to survive. In Egypt, bread is

“Aish” in Arabic, which literally means “life”. Under these circumstances, it is unclear whether the Egyptian regime will be able to safely overcome the storm caused by the imperialist clash between the West and Russia in Ukraine.

However, the crisis and suffering caused by the war is also resulting in resistance and protests across the region. Already in Iraq, Sudan, protests against rising prices for food and basic living prices have taken place. Controlling bread prices has often been vital for rulers of the region to maintain their power.

In 1977, Egypt witnessed “bread riots” after Sadat implemented neoliberal “infitah” policies. The revolts were only contained after the military was deployed. More recently, the rising cost of living was one of the driving forces behind the revolutions which swept the Middle East and North Africa in 2011. The revolution that toppled Omar el Bashir of Sudan in 2019 was also ignited by school students protesting against the rise of bread prices.

Meanwhile, the war in Ukraine has reconfigured global oil and gas supply chains and markets. European sanctions on Russian oil have not dented the overall volume of Russian oil exports, after dipping in February and March they had bounced back to pre-invasion levels by April, according to the International Energy Agency.

Instead of going to European destinations, Russian oil tankers are transporting their cargoes to Asia, with countries such as India and China buying up supplies at knocked-down prices. Russian supplies to Asia are up by 50 percent since the start of the year.

Russia’s loss of European markets has brought big changes for African and Middle Eastern suppliers, by contrast. North African oil exports to Europe are up by 30 percent since March and supplies shipped through Egypt’s Sidi Kerir port - most likely Saudi crude - had almost doubled between March and May.

Although the US has increased supplies to its European allies, there is no doubt that the Gulf states such as Saudi Arabia and UAE have been major winners from the Ukraine war in economic terms. This is likely feeding their confidence to assert “strategic neutrality” from the US in relation to the conflict with Russia.

The Saudi and Emirati rulers are reported to have called Vladimir Putin



Around 70 million Egyptians rely on subsidised bread while al-Sisi's arms-buying spree continues | Photos: Wikimedia Commons and EAF

in March and UAE abstained with India and China on a UN Security Council resolution condemning Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

Oil prices rose to a fourteen-year high in response to the war in Europe, and stabilised at \$110 per barrel by the end of May. Although the rising prices may strengthen the bargaining power of authoritarian oil-producing regimes, they also push up the cost of food and services for ordinary people.

Weapons deals are also playing a role in shaping the response of states such as Egypt to the crisis. Under Al-Sisi’s military regime, arms imports have soared, with Egypt becoming the third largest weapons importer in the world last year. Despite the long-term relationship between the US and the Egyptian military, al-Sisi has also bought large amounts of arms from Russia in recent years.

Between 2010 and 2014 around 47 percent of Egyptian arms purchases were from the US, but that figure dropped to 15 percent between 2015-2019, with Russian sales rising to 34 percent. By 2020, Russia was Egypt’s main arms supplier, thanks to funding from Saudi Arabia and UAE. A Russian loan of \$25bn is also financing the construction of Egypt’s first nuclear power plant.

The response of the US has been to offer more weapons to Al-Sisi’s regime, in a bid to “woo” the Egyptian military away from Russian influence. In May the Biden administration approved a potential sale of anti-tank missiles worth nearly \$700 million, despite continuing human rights abuses.

[Go to page 21 for more on solidarity campaigns with Egyptian political prisoners.](#)

TUNISIA

General strike shows potential to resist coup and IMF together

Jawhar Tounsi

The Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT), Tunisia's largest trade union defending public and private sector employees, went on strike on 16 June in protest against the austerity measures including freezing public wages and reducing subsidies on basic goods.

The general strike across the public sector paralysed traffic across Tunisia after heavily disrupting all forms of public transport. All flights scheduled for June 16 by the national carrier, Tunisair, were cancelled and rescheduled.

This is the latest escalation in a series of industrial actions. A strike hit the government sector and the public administration on 31 May. The workers were demanding that the government abide by previous agreements signed with the UGTT regarding employees' contracts and salary increases. The strike in Sfax governorate was organised under the slogan of "Day of Rage."

The Tunisian government hopes that the austerity measures will lead to an urgent \$4 billion loan agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The UGTT rightly rejects the conditions imposed by the IMF and demands wages that ensure a decent life for people.

The government has described the demands for

a decent life for people as unrealistic and unattainable. The UGTT has so far been opposed to the current government's policy but remains unwilling to take up the fight against the President who appointed the government undemocratically after a coup d'état on 21 July 2021.

Almost 11 months ago, with the protection of the army and the police, Tunisia's president Kais Saied launched a coup against the last remaining democratic gains of the Arab Spring. The new Tunisian dictator sacked the prime minister and several top officials, froze parliament, and handed himself a raft of new powers.

The coup has been successful partly because it tapped the anger of people who made the revolution in 2010. A decade later, many of them were feeling betrayed and deeply angry. Saied, elected president in 2019 as an independent, managed to portray himself as anti-establishment.

Using his reputation as a professor of constitutional law, he presented his planned reforms as a way of culling corruption and fixing the system. Up to the coup Saied benefited from relative popularity despite the fact he hasn't done anything meaningful for the people.

The UGTT is unwilling to turn the workers' struggle into a political fight. It hopes to put pressure on the President and his government

Much of the left in Tunisia—as well as the leadership of the UGTT—have supported the coup. Even though there has been growing criticism of Saied's



UGTT members rally in Sfax for a 'Day of Rage' on 16 June
Photos: UGTT Sfax via Facebook

drive towards dictatorship, the UGTT and the left are not taking a principled position against Saied's power grab. On June 19, the National Salvation Front (NSF) – a coalition of political parties including the Islamist party Ennahda – called for a new protest in downtown Tunis in defence of freedom and democracy. But the UGTT and left are refusing to work with the NSF who are currently leading the fight for democracy.

The UGTT is unwilling to turn the workers' struggle into a political fight. It hopes to put pressure on the President and his government to resist the conditions imposed by the IMF.

This is a very dangerous strategy as the purpose of the coup is ultimately to

implement the austerity measures where the previous government failed.

Unless the working class takes the fight for democracy forward, the UGTT will end up negotiating the terms of its surrender. On the other hand, the democratic movement, which does not strive to link the demands for freedom with those for bread, is unable to mobilise the people and reflects the narrow perspective of its leadership. Yet an economic struggle which does not defend democracy politically is doomed to failure. Tunisian workers are correct to fight back for economic demands but to win they must link their struggle with the fight for democracy!

Jawhar Tounsi is a Tunisian socialist



يا برهان حنجيب التار
يا حمدوك النى للنار

لا تفاوض، لا شراكة، لا مساومة، لا قحاته.

RESISTANCE CONTINUES

Sudan's Resistance Committees have been leading the popular mobilisations against the military coup. **Osman Ahmed Sir Al-Khatim** explains their role in the revolution.

To begin with, I would like to tell you a bit about the resistance committees. They are formed in neighbourhoods and then regions. Each residential area has a local committee whose members are the residents of the specific area. The members are those who believe in freedom, peace and justice; who believe in a civilian state and a civilian democratic transformation; and who believe in the goals of the glorious December

2018 revolution. Neighbouring areas form coordinating bodies of the resistance committees. Each 8 committees then form bigger regional committees that make up the main coordinating body of the Khartoum resistance committees. This is to say that the representation bodies are horizontal, and representation within them is horizontal. Each of the neighbourhood committees has a representative in the main coordinating

body. The coordination of the Khartoum State Resistance Committees includes representatives from all local committees.

The decision within the committees is taken collectively, not in a hierarchical manner, so that the base committees or the district committee contribute their opinion through the majority of votes within the committee. Opinions are merged and the majority opinion is decided based on the opinion of the Khartoum State Committees Coordination Body.

The committees were established in 2018, at the beginning of the December revolution, and the main objective of the resistance committees was to bring down the former regime through leading a peaceful mass movement within the neighbourhoods. This was done through protests, marches, barricades and all methods of peaceful resistance. After that, structural work within the committees progressed after the fall of the regime, and the coordinating bodies of the base committees were formed.

Then organisational work continued until the main coordinating body of the state of Khartoum was formed. Even within the local neighbourhood committees, they had a statute or a constitution. And then a constitution for the main coordinating body was established during the past three years. And work continued within the committees to reach a constitution that governs the coordinating body and a

statute that governs the neighbourhood committees.

The Khartoum State Coordination Charter followed by merging the Khartoum State charters with the other states' charters reaching the final draft of the Resistance Committees People's Authority Charter created by all regions and states in Sudan.

The neighbourhood committees in every region are the real stakeholders in change, those affected by the political scene, those affected by the military rule, and those pursuing their demands since 2018 on the streets.

After the final version of the People's Authority Charter is reached, it will be presented to all professional bodies and revolutionary forces present on the Sudanese political scene, including professional bodies, unionists, political parties, armed movements, etc.

The charter is open for amendments, provided that the amendments do not affect the core issues of the charter, such as

1. The civilian state
2. Overthrowing the Military Council and holding it accountable through fair trials
3. Refusal of any negotiations with those involved directly or indirectly in military coup d'état.

There will be an agreement on detailed issues and mechanisms for implementing the charter to address the national issues of the Sudanese state. Currently the resistance committees

have two main objectives. The first is to fight the October 25 coup, resisting and overthrowing the military coup d'état. The second is to establish the People's Authority Charter. The charter contains national issues and issues that address the distortions present in the Sudanese state since the independence of Sudan.

The charter aims to resolve the differences that exist between the civilian components such as in the transitional civilian justice, formation of a government, the economy, commissions, etc. There are 12 issues identified by the resistance committees as agreed upon as Sudanese, but our differences are in the mechanisms of implementation and other details.

The committees are now working on including these issues and implementation mechanisms and to reach an agreement about them as Sudanese. So that we are able to form a road map for all Sudanese to stop military coups from happening and to keep the military institution away from the political process and government. So that Sudanese are able to rule without the military institutions' interference in the rule by force of arms.

Osman Ahmed Sir Al-Khatim, the official spokesman for the Khartoum City Resistance Committees Coordinating Body. He was speaking at the NW England Sudan Solidarity conference on 26 March. Watch a video of his speech at www.menasolidaritynetwork.com

Civil disobedience, protests and strikes

Massive protests have continued across Sudan in recent months as part of the resistance by civilian revolutionary movements to the military coup which took place in October 2021.

On 14 February 15 cities across Sudan participated in a "March of the Millions." In Khartoum, tens of thousands joined marches which headed towards the national parliament. A week

later, another major mobilisation, 'Break the Chains' again saw thousands take to the streets demanding the release of political prisoners.

Khartoum's Resistance Committees, the neighbourhood-based revolutionary organisations which are leading the movement, issued a political charter on 28 February calling for the formation of a new 'People's Authority' opposed to the coup regime. The new body would unite revolutionary forces and exclude all those who took part in the October 2021 coup.

Meanwhile, members of the Resistance Committees in Northern

State have maintained the barricade of the main highway running through the state, blocking lorries coming to and from Egypt, a major ally of Burhan's regime. The blockade was initially a response to a planned increase in electricity prices.

Members of the Sudanese Teachers' Committee (STC) report that "the political situation is still congested and blocked. Protesters are taking to the streets daily. There are 8 main demonstrations planned each month plus other local ones."

The military have intensified their crackdown according to the STC



Health workers joined strikes against the killing of protesters while court workers walked out in January over pay. Some Resistance Committees have organised solidarity for strikes raising social demands
Photos: Sudanese activists via Facebook



activists. “The previous intelligence system has been reactivated; their authority was limited in the last government, and they have been given full power. They are conducting mass arrests of activists. They show up in large numbers, armed with war-like ammunition. They are practicing horrible torture, verbal aggression, and violence against the protesters and detainees. At least 200-300 were imprisoned and 2000 injured. Those arrested are kept in unknown locations and have no formal charges.”

Sudan’s military regime has arrested several leading members of the Empowerment Removal Committee, which was tasked with dismantling the structures of the former regime by the Transitional Government, including the body’s chair. ‘Empowerment’ (tamkin in Arabic), was the name given to appointments of el-Bashir’s cronies. As of 17 February 110 people had been detained in Kober prison for three days.

The director of the Sudanese Standards Organisation Sami Bella is believed to have been detained. Meanwhile, UNHCR rapporteur Adama Deng called for a swift and impartial investigation into the killing and arbitrary detention of demonstrators.

The escalating economic crisis has fed into increasing strikes by workers demanding action over the cost-of-living. Thousands of court workers took part in strikes between 2-6 January to demand a rise in their bonuses in order to meet the spiralling cost of living. Workers in the Judicial Authority organised national action coordinated by strike committees in every province, which reported up to 100 percent participation in some areas, according to the Sudanese Workers Association for the Restoration of Trade Unions (SWAFRTU). Khartoum, Omdurman, Port Sudan, Gedaref, North Darfur and West Kordofan were among the provinces where the whole workforce walked out.

“We must keep hold of the strike weapon – it is the strongest to achieve our just demands,” wrote court worker and trade unionist Mohammed Abd-al-Majid on the SWAFRTU page.

Strikes have posed challenges and sparked debates within the revolutionary movement however. After a two-month long strike led by the Sudanese Teachers’ Committee (see following pages) won concessions from the military regime over pay, some activists challenged the teachers’ union leadership for negotiating directly with the generals. Since last October they have stood by the “3 Nos – no negotiations, no partnership and no legitimacy”, and refused to talk to the regime. The STC have confirmed their continued opposition to the coup, but argue that they were negotiating as a trade union with their employer, rather than as a political body.

Find out more about the situation in Sudan and what you can do in solidarity at www.menasolidaritynetwork.com

Sudanese teachers on the frontlines of revolution



The people of Sudan by their bravery and determination, by their solidarity, protests and strikes, toppled the 30 year-old dictatorship of Omar el-Bashir in 2019.

Their demand for civilian rule brought a Transitional Government into office, where power was shared between civilian opposition politicians and el-Bashir's old generals and paramilitary leaders like Mohamed Dagalo (known as Hemedti) head of the brutal Rapid Support Forces which grew out of the Janjaweed militias responsible for genocide and ethnic cleansing in Darfur. But in October 2021 a military coup led by General el-Burhan forced civilian parties out of power.

Since the coup the Sudanese people have mobilised massive regular protests to drive forward their demand for an end to military rule. Neighbourhood-based Resistance Committees took on the leadership of the revolutionary movement, mobilising hundreds of thousands in demonstrations and days of civil disobedience rejecting the military government.

The regime uses weapons, internationally recognised as criminal, against civilians. It targets and arrests activists: thousands have been injured, hundreds imprisoned, many are beaten and tortured, over 92 have been killed.

Trade unions have faced a severe crackdown, including the Sudanese Teachers' Committee which was targeted by the military in the early days of the coup as its activists led protests.

While Western governments talked in behind-the-scenes negotiations about the importance of democracy, Sudan's generals attempted to tighten their grip on the state, carrying out mass arrests of teachers. At least 100 teachers were arrested by the military authorities in early November following



Members of the Sudanese Teachers' Committee on strike in March 2022 | Photo: STC

'Education is a right and should be free'

Gamariea Omer is Vice President of the Executive Office of the Sudanese Teacher's Committee

We expected that the Sudanese Revolution would bring about radical and fundamental change, and that development would take place through education, enabling democracy to become rooted during the transitional period.

We thought the transitional period would lead to the development of education, and the Sudanese Teachers' Committee had a plan to bring about radical change, but Al-Burhan blocked that road through

the military coup of 25 October. It is clear that education will not develop under military rule or dictatorship.

The military regime, and especially the previous dictatorship under the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood, interfered constantly in the curriculum.

Technical Education, which is vitally important to development, almost completely collapsed ... Education budgets have been cut, even during the Transitional Government, although the Education Ministry should be providing a service to all. Education is a right and should be free, according to the Constitution."

This is a reprint of a newsletter produced by NEU and MENA Solidarity for NEU Conference 2022 - go to page 20 for a full report

a violent attack on a teachers' protest outside the Education Ministry where at least 87 were detained. Coup leaders pushed ahead with appointing el-Bashir's former cadres to work in all ministries and government facilities, including in the education system, while forcing out of their posts those opposing military rule.

The regime has kidnapped people from their homes and workplaces, some are still missing, They have fabricated allegations, imprisoned and tortured minors like Tupac, a young activist.

But the scale of the protest movement paralysed the military's government, forcing its civilian figurehead, Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok to resign in January 2022. The huge network of over 5000 Resistance Committees across the country repeatedly brought hundreds of thousands into the streets, and engaged tens of thousands in democratic discussion about what an alternative to the military's dictatorship should look like.

Alongside the protests in the streets, important struggles have developed in workplaces, and activists are making links between the fight for economic dignity and the battle for democracy and political freedom.

January saw strikes by court workers for a living wage and by bank workers against dismissal. The battles in the courts and at the Bank of Khartoum sparked solidarity campaigns and efforts to bring together striking workers and activists from the Resistance Committees. When 7 activists were killed on 17 January a general strike was called for the next two days.

Health workers, rail workers, trade unions and workers committees joined the strike. A statement by trade unionists published by the Sudanese Workers Association for the Restoration of Trade Unions stated:

"We as elected union bodies call on workers in sectors connected to our members to engage in complete civil disobedience on 18 and 19 January. We must organise in the workplaces to make the battle to defeat the military coup a battle to build the unions. Democratic unions are the most effective in preparing successive strikes and guaranteeing high levels of democratic participation in the strike

Resistance Committees lead the revolution



Arkawit Resistance Committee mobilised public health volunteers during the Covid crisis



School students lead a protest organised by the Resistance Committees, March 2022

When we speak of leadership we speak of collective leadership. It's only the authority of the nation, of the movement, and is not about forcing things but rather about building upon the tracks of each and every step we've taken.

So it's a leadership not of representation but one where every participant in the street is actually part of it, and part of the decision-making. We hold three 'No's: no

negotiation, no legitimacy, and no partnership with the military. It might sound a little bit radical but we have found it's the only way to salvation from the military leaders come back after every victorious uprising and kidnap democracy. So we ask you to respect and stand in solidarity with the things that we uphold.

Resistance Committee activist, December 2021

and complete civil disobedience."

Protesters are taking to the streets daily. There are 8 main demonstrations planned each month plus other local ones. The military have intensified their crackdown. A Sudanese Teachers Committee (STC) activist reported, "The previous intelligence system has been reactivated; their authority was limited in the last government, now they have been given full power. They are conducting mass arrests of activists. They show up in large numbers, armed with war-like ammunition. They are practicing horrible torture, verbal

aggression, and violence against the protesters and detainees. At least 200-300 are imprisoned and 2000 injured. Those arrested are kept in unknown locations and have no formal charges."

The political crisis has been accompanied by rising social distress, with massive increases in the cost of living and services such as cooking gas. Since the coup, Western donor countries have cut aid and charities have warned the war in Ukraine, which provides over 80 percent of Sudan's wheat imports, will deepen the economic crisis.



STC members hold signs saying 'I am a teacher, I am on strike' during their national strike | Photo: STC

'I am a teacher, I am on strike'

The Sudanese Teachers' Committee launched a national teachers' and education workers' strike demanding a rise in the minimum wage and the abolition of an unfair pay structure on 12 March. No teacher in Sudan can live on the present salary. Families survive on remittances from abroad.

The STC's strike committee includes representatives from all parts of the country, and the union represents approximately 350,000 teachers. The strike, covering cities, villages and rural areas, has had unprecedented levels of response, in many areas 100 percent of schools were closed. The STC said "The reports received from the field committees in the localities of Khartoum State and all the cities and countryside of the states of Sudan documented an unprecedented response to the call for strike, as the strike covered cities, villages and rural areas. According to the initial reports

submitted, we affirm the overwhelming success of the first day's strike, with a rate of no less than 99 percent in the states, and even in a number of localities in Khartoum State, the response rate reached 100 percent."

As teachers and public education workers walked out for pay justice, school pupils showed solidarity with the strike. Videos circulated on social media show hundreds of pupils chanting revolutionary slogans in solidarity with striking teachers.

The authorities have responded with vicious repression in some areas. STC activists reported: "The arrest of a number of teachers of Nyala Secondary School for Boys took place on Monday, March 14, 2022, at 9.30am. Amongst them is the school headteacher, Mr Omar Muhammad Muhammad Mustafa, Mr Adel Abdul Rahman Adam and Mr Muhammad Hamdallah. They were beaten and insulted by an armed

force led by a lieutenant from inside the school, the situation is out of control!"

Security forces attacked striking teachers and sprayed primary school pupils with tear gas in Atbara, according to eyewitness video reports. A teacher said "Tear-gas grenades were thrown to Zat Alnitagin girls primary school in Atbara city. Girls were panicking and screaming. Number of girls and teachers fainted and the parents were running towards the school to check on their children."

On 24 March the Ministry of Education used a different tactic to break the strike, dismissing teachers who it claimed had "not complied with the decision of excluding politics from the education sector." Forty teachers were dismissed that day in just one area Bahri, Greater Khartoum.

The STC needs your solidarity - turn to page 12

‘We will continue to strike for our rights’

Sania Ibrahim Khojaly Al-Ashqar is a member of the Media Office of the Sudanese Teachers' Committee, and a member of the Teachers' Committee in White Nile province.

The White Nile Teachers' Committee started in difficult circumstances, at the beginning of 2012, as all teachers struggled with the authoritarian Islamic Front regime. After forming local committees we created a regional committee in the state capital, Rabak. It communicated with all the committees in the other localities and communicated with the Central Teachers Committee in Khartoum.

The committee's main objectives are to address the issues with salaries, bonuses and all the issues with the salary structure of teachers in Sudan and the White Nile State in particular. The committee announced a strike four times in the White Nile State fighting for teachers' rights.

Now we are striking to implement the salary structure change agreed by the Cabinet before the 25 October coup. The committee is holding on to the teachers' right to strike. The



STC activists march for dignity in Bahri, Greater Khartoum | Photo: STC

strike is very successful despite the confrontations encountered with the coup forces and the cadres of the coup authority within educational institutions.

One of the reasons that led to the strike's success was the stressful economic conditions.

The teachers expected the implementation of the new 2022 salary structure that the Ministry of Finance had committed to before the coup, but the ministry dropped all commitments prior to the coup.

The Sudanese Teachers' Committee had presented a study and a proposition earlier to the Ministry of Finance. That called for a minimum wage of 24,000 Sudanese pounds (£40) per month based on the cost-of-living study submitted by the STC to the

Cabinet. The Cabinet then approved a new salary structure with a minimum wage of 12,000 Sudanese pounds (£20), while maintaining allowances and bonuses according to the old salary structure.

It is not logical to have a dual salary structure, which is deceiving to government employees, with an increase that does not fulfil essential needs. Therefore, as teachers, we refuse to accept the new salary structure and stand in solidarity with the call by the Sudanese Teachers Committee for a comprehensive strike. The teachers confirm they will continue to strike until they get their full rights despite the oppression and violence inflicted by the coup authority.

Take action in solidarity: pass this resolution

This NEU District/Branch notes that:

The people of Sudan toppled the 30 year-old dictatorship of Omar el Bashir in 2019. The military coup of October 2021 put back in power many of el Bashir's former regime and has been followed by vicious repression.

On 12 March a nationwide strike organised by the Sudanese Teachers Committee began. The strike for pay rises as wages are well below a living wage, has been very well-supported, with 100 percent of schools closed in many areas.

The regime responded with

brutality, firing tear gas into one school, and beating up teachers. On 24th March as the strike continued the Ministry of Education issued an order to dismiss teachers who took part in strike action.

This NEU District/Branch resolves to:

1. Send a message of solidarity to the Sudanese Teachers Committee
2. Invite a member of the working group set up by MENA Solidarity, NEU members and Sudanese activists to build solidarity with Sudanese teachers to address our members.

3. Send a message condemning attacks on the STC and other bodies supporting the Sudanese revolution to the Sudanese authorities, copied to the Foreign Secretary and our local MP.

5. Affiliate to MENA Solidarity and circulate information about the Sudanese revolution to our members.

Go to www.menasolidaritynetwork.com to download a copy of this resolution and other resources and information about the Sudanese revolution: https://menasolidaritynetwork.com/SudanSolidarity_education/

Two decades of the 'War on Terror'



Irang Bak explores the American role in the destruction of Afghanistan and Iraq and the continuing 'War on Terror.'

The US launched a military invasion in Afghanistan with its Western allies including Britain, following the 9/11 attack in New York and Washington DC. George W. Bush and the Neo-cons were eager to portray Afghanistan as a terrorist hotbed and the West as entitled to invade the country to seek "justice" for the 9/11 attacks. Bush claimed that the US would hunt down Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda, together with the Taliban movement and other terrorist networks in Afghanistan.

By the time of the US invasion in 2001, war had already been ravaging the country for decades. When the Soviet forces invaded Afghanistan in 1979 to support the pro-Soviet government, the US sought to counteract the spread of Soviet influence in Central Asia by

funding and arming the Mujahideen. The intervention of the world's two superpowers drove one of the poorest nations in the world to extreme poverty, insecurity and near total destruction.

However, the invasion of Afghanistan was merely the beginning of a road to the invasion of Iraq, attempting to enforce US domination of the region and demonstrate its military might to its allies and potential state competitors.

In 2002 in his infamous "axis of evil" speech, Bush said, "states like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world." And added that "all nations should know: America will do what is necessary to ensure our nation's security."

This was a manifestation of what the

US elite and its right wing politicians have been eager for since the end of the Cold War. A fanatical group of right wing politicians in and around the White House launched the “Project for the New American Century” in 1997. The aim was to secure US domination of the world order by addressing the concern that its economic power was in decline relative to the rise of European and Japanese competitors.

The group included key figures in the Bush administration such as Vice-President Dick Cheney, Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and his deputy Paul Wolfowitz. They argued that removing Iraq’s Saddam Hussein and securing its oil resources was crucial for the profit of the US empire. They demanded war against Iraq as a prelude to attacking other “rogue states” to demonstrate the US military power.

A Defence Department document released in September 2000 states that “the United States faces no global rival ... There are, however, potentially powerful states dissatisfied with the current situation and eager to change it... Up to now, they have been deterred from doing so by the capability and global presence of American military power. But, as that power declines, relatively and absolutely, the happy conditions that follow from it will be inevitably undermined.”

The rhetoric of the “war on terror,” seeking justice for 9/11, weapons of mass destruction and punishing the “rogue states” were all a very convenient lie to wage wars for the global dominance of the US imperialism and its profit. What followed these lies was a total devastation of the people’s lives in Afghanistan, Iraq and many other states.

The post-9/11 wars led to the displacement of at least 59 million people in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Somalia, and the Philippines. Although the actual number of civilian deaths will be unlikely to be discovered, it ranges from hundreds of thousands to millions.

The “war on terror” rained bombs over cities and villages killing civilians, destroyed much of the social infrastructure, led to the collapse of economies and nourished a fertile ground for the rise of ISIS in Iraq and Syria.

Invasion of Afghanistan

Following the 9/11 attacks, the US launched a series of bombing campaigns against Afghanistan. US troops invaded and toppled the Taliban government in October 2001. The Taliban movement emerged in US/Pakistan-funded refugee camps in Pakistan in 1994. Despite its ultra-conservative and reactionary nature, the Taliban drew support largely from the rural population of Afghanistan, who wanted to see an end to decades of war, insecurity and corruption.

Afghanistan was already a desperately poor and war ravaged country. Ten years of Soviet invasion from 1979 resulted in at least half a million Afghan deaths and 5 to 7 million people displaced internally and internationally, before Soviet troops withdrew.

The Western invasion did not bring peace, prosperity and democracy to the Afghans

Even before the Soviet invasion, only roughly 2 percent of the land could be farmed with irrigation and most of the families made just enough to eat. 90 percent of the population lived in rural villages. Now, nearly two decades of invasion and the civil war that followed has made Afghanistan one of the poorest countries in the world.

However, the Western invasion did not bring peace, prosperity and democracy to the Afghans. While bombings continued in rural areas, poverty and insecurity haunted ordinary Afghans, especially women and children. As anthropologist Saba Mahmood rightfully questions, “why were conditions of war, (migration, militarisation) and starvation (under the mujahideen) considered to be less injurious to women than the lack of education, employment and most notably, in the media campaign, western dress styles (under the Taliban)?”

According to one estimate, the war in Afghanistan and its aftermath cost the US \$2.3tn, which is Afghanistan’s 575 years’ worth of pre-invasion GDP. However, most of this money was

never spent for ordinary Afghans. Two decades have passed since the invasion, but 90 percent of the Afghans lived on less than \$2 a day, while the Western aid consisted of 43 percent of GDP.

There were barely any schools built, especially in the rural areas where the vast majority of the population lived. Parents were reluctant to send their daughters to school in fear of the lawlessness and insecurity where the warlords ruled.

Only a tiny portion of the Afghans who lived in Kabul and large cities benefited from aid, many of whom worked for foreign NGO related jobs and embassies. Even so, non-Afghan NGO workers received 20 times more than their Afghan colleagues who worked in the same office.

Opium harvests flourished under the pro-US Afghan government, where the warlords encouraged poverty stricken farmers to grow poppies and produce heroin. The profit harvested from the drug trade went directly into the pockets of these warlords such as Abdul Rashid Dostum, who was the main ally to the Western forces and the vice president in Ashraf Ghani’s government. Dostum’s massive mansion in Kabul boasted a luxurious lifestyle equipped with a private pool, spa and indoor gardens.

While Western forces were raining bombs over villages, those who were captured under terrorism charges faced no different fate. Many ordinary Afghans who had nothing to do with Taliban or al Qaeda were captured for bounties. They were subjected to state of the art methods of torture, the likes of which were exposed through Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq and Guantanamo Bay in Cuba.

In fact, the whole premise that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction and that it trained al Qaeda members with biochemical weaponry was a direct invention from torture.

In November 2001, a Libyan national Ibn al-Shaykh al-Libi, was captured by the Pakistani agents. He had been in charge of a mujahideen training camp in Afghanistan and was interrogated by the Americans and later tortured by the Egyptian security after the US handed him over.

Al-Libi testified to the Egyptians under torture that Saddam Hussein’s regime provided training to al Qaeda members whom later carried out attacks in 9/11. Al-Libi recanted his

testimony later, but his statement provided critical justification of Bush's invasion of Iraq.

Destruction of Iraq

Saddam Hussein's government fell in April 2003 as the Western troops entered to control Bagdad after its initial advance on 21 March 2003. A new puppet government was propped up by the US along the sectarian lines which was handed over the power. However, the invasion and the destruction that followed the resistance to the occupation left Iraq in total ruins, and the ordinary Iraqis were left to suffer.

Western invading forces met resistance and insurgencies from the very start, and civil war broke out in 2006. Between the period of March 2003 and March 2005, 24,865 civilians were killed, and the US was responsible for 37 percent of them. The war displaced two million Iraqis internally and internationally, and approximately 11 million are in a dire need of humanitarian aid.

How was Iraq's social infrastructure prior to the invasion? Iraq's healthcare system during the 70s and 80s was considered to be the most advanced in the Middle East. During the 1980s, Saddam Hussein's regime was able to offer a limited level of social security to the Iraqis, largely thanks to the massive oil revenue.

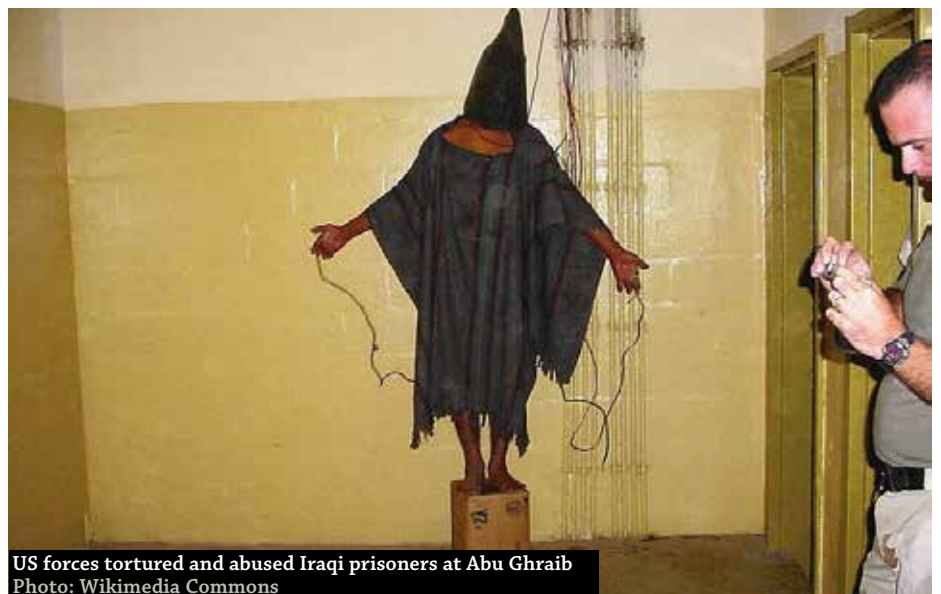
According to UNICEF, 92 percent of Iraqis prior to the invasion had access to safe water. An Iraqi infant with dysentery had only one in 600 chances of dying in 1990. This has now become one in 50.

Iraq's healthcare system had already been weakened by sanctions imposed by the West. According to the Washington Institute, some estimate that between 1993 and 2003, the funding of healthcare in Iraq decreased by as much as 90 percent. The embargo on Iraq after the invasion resulted in the lack of medicine and the subsequent deaths of thousands of Iraqis due to simple medical conditions, such as common infections and diarrhoea. The occupation resulted in massive destruction of social, economic infrastructure and fabric, and collapse in clean water distribution systems and energy supplies.

Corruption also has played a



Hijacked planes crash into the World Trade Center, New York on September 11 2001. Photo: Wikimedia Commons



US forces tortured and abused Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib Photo: Wikimedia Commons



Detainees faced horrific treatment at the US base in Guantanamo Bay Photo: Wikimedia Commons

major role in this ongoing collapse of infrastructure. Corruption in Iraq became a systematic problem during the 1990s. This was a direct result from the sanctions imposed against Iraq by the US, which led to the collapse of Iraqi Dinar, the growth of the informal “grey economy” and increased smuggling.

The portion of the informal economy in Iraq increased to an estimate of 35 percent of the country’s GDP after a decade of sanctions. This percentage almost doubled to a staggering 65 percent of GDP following the 2003 invasion and years of US occupation.

The occupation forces intentionally implemented and pursued measures that led to the rise of the informal economy and corruption in order to strengthen their control and provide profit to the American corporations and business networks.

The Neocons’ goal was to establish and re-strengthen the world order dominated by the US with its superior military power. In order to achieve this, regimes such as Saddam Hussein’s Baathist state needed to be eliminated. This necessity was due to the fact that his regime crossed the line by invading Kuwait and thus imposing a threat to one of US’s most valued allies in the region, Saudi Arabia. The Neocons promoted “regime change” that would force a free market economy under its sphere of influence in Iraq and implant an American model of pluralist democracy.

What this meant in reality was reducing the minimum wage, removing key tariffs on imported goods, enforcing a programme of privatisation of public enterprises, hosting foreign companies to enter Iraq with full rights to repatriate profits and eliminating the Baathist system of graduated income tax, cutting corporation tax from 40 percent to 15—the same rate paid by the mass of Iraqis.

When the US occupation forces invaded, the first action they took instinctively was to cancel what was left of the social welfare system. The so-called de-Baathification drove tens of thousands of Iraqis and their families into poverty.

The so-called “nation building” turned out to be a total hoax. Many Iraqis fell victim to the rise of sectarianism as the world had witnessed after the expansion of ISIS in vast regions of Iraq and Syria from 2014. The massacre committed by the US forces in Fallujah and systemic exclusion of Sunnis in Iraq along the sectarian line drove a huge portion of



Popular Mobilisation Forces, a Shi’a militia linked to Iran celebrate the defeat of ISIS. Photo: Wikimedia Commons

the population into despair.

ISIS grew out from this resentment, inciting sectarian division, violence and resistance to the Western occupation. They recruited many of Saddam Hussein’s officers and soldiers to their ranks. In contrast to the claim made by the US and its allies, the West did not eradicate terrorism. They created a fertile ground for its birth and growth.

Where now?

The invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq was a total failure for the US-led foreign intervention. The Taliban returned to power in Afghanistan after a humiliating withdrawal of the US and Western forces after the fall of the US backed government. Iraq is now closer than ever to Iran, which the US and its major watchdog of the region Israel considers to be their greatest threat to regional security.

Having spent more than 8 trillion US dollars and losing almost 10 thousand soldiers with additional tens of thousands maimed during the period of 20 years, the US lost its military bases in

Iraq and Afghanistan.

The US withdrawal from the region left a partial power vacuum, which is now being filled up by other competing global powers such as Russia and China, and regional powers like Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Israel and Iran. These powers are engaging in their own battles and wars according to their needs in places across the region such as Yemen, Syria and Libya while the humanitarian crisis continues for the ordinary people.

Unfortunately, even with all the shifts and changes that took place in the region during the last 20 years, the “War on Terror” is still continuing. It is still being waged not in a foreign territory far abroad, but rather inside your own borders against your own people. The same rhetoric of Islamophobia that was utilised to justify the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq is now being used to persecute migrants and Muslims in the US and Europe. For this reason, the war on “War on Terror” is still not over.

Saudi-US relations: *mujahideen*, missiles and multiplexes

Mutual support between the US government and the Saudi ruling family goes back a long way, Arabian activist **Ameen Nemer** told *Middle East Solidarity*.

Can you tell us about the background to the US-Saudi relationship?

Investing by the Saudi regime in schools and mosques around the world goes back to the Cold War as the US asked for support to prevent the Soviet Union from expanding its influence in the Islamic countries. It was only after the 9/11 attacks that the US started to criticise the Saudis' work in spreading their Wahhabi ideology globally. George W. Bush accused Saudi Arabia of being a "fertile ground for terrorist fundraising" on 2 September 2004. This pushed Saudi Arabia to hold its first municipal elections in 2005 in response to Bush's rhetoric about "democratisation" in the Middle East. However, this initiative did not continue, since free and fair elections would lead the US losing its influence on Saudi Arabia which it cannot afford.

How did the Saudi regime support the US against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan and what were the consequences within Saudi Arabia?

Prince Turki bin Faisal Al Saud, the former head of the Saudi intelligence agency, was one of the Saudi officials who had supported the mujahideen financially to fight the Soviets in Afghanistan. Through the CIA, the US also provided them with training and weapons. The Saudis (especially religious figures) preached for almost two decades, calling for people to fight the "infidels" (the Red Army) in Afghanistan. Later, they simply directed their sentiments towards a new enemy, the US army. This explains

why 15 out of 19 hijackers who carried out the September 11 attacks were in fact Saudis.

While there was no social media early in the new millennium, people used to share messages through Bluetooth and SMS messages to show their solidarity with Afghanistan against the US invasion in 2001. One of these messages was "Buy tameez [traditional Afghan bread] and benefit the Afghans, don't buy a pizza and benefit the Americans".

Why did the US government continue to support the Saudi regime, despite the September 11 attacks?

Both countries need each other for different reasons. Saudi Arabia relies on the US for protection from its own people. As an imperial power, the US relies on different players and Saudi Arabia is one of them. The regime was also a longstanding agent to the British Empire, starting in the 1900s against the Ottoman Empire even before the kingdom was established in 1932. It continued to serve American interests during the 20th century, including in South America, during civil war in Yemen during the 1960s and 70s, and the Nicaraguan civil war in the 1980s.

After British forces withdrew from the Gulf in the 1970s, US President Richard Nixon's administration saw Iran (pre-revolution) and Saudi Arabia as two countries that could become the major elements of stability. In other words, they would serve the American interests. Britain has not lost all its influence in the Gulf, however and in April 2018, a UK Naval Support Facility was officially opened.

Now the US is getting back into negotiations with Iran regarding the nuclear deal which Saudi Arabia opposed during Obama's presidency and celebrated when Trump withdrew from it. During Trump's presidency, Saudi Crown Prince Mohamed Bin Salman (MBS) said in an interview that he wanted to take the battle

inside Iran's territory adding that there was no chance for a dialogue with Iran because they have a radical ideology. His tone totally changed in an interview in April 2021 when he described Iran as a neighbour country. Saudi foreign policy is to a great extent a reflection of who is inside the Oval Office, with little space to manoeuvre.

Has US policy on selling arms to Saudi Arabia changed following Joe Biden's election?

After the murder of journalist Jamal Kashoggi by the Saudi regime, Trump continued selling them arms, justifying this with claims the Saudis would buy weapons from China and Russia if the US did not sell. Biden did not keep his promise to punish MBS either. The US Security National Advisor and Biden's aide, Jake Sullivan, met MBS in late September 2021. In early Nov 2021, the regime got its first major arms deal under Biden with a purchase of air-to-air missiles.

Besides missiles, are there other areas that the Saudi regime is expanding economic collaboration with the US?

In recent years the Saudi regime has invested massively in the sports and entertainment industry. Some of this is "sportswashing", such as the purchase of Newcastle United by a sovereign wealth fund chaired personally by MBS. But there is clearly a new Saudi direction of resources towards the entertainment industry through events like Riyadh Season and dancing and drinking by the beach in Jeddah.

All this has been sponsored by Saudi princes secretly and underground as Wikileaks Cables showed in 2010, but it is publicly on the ground now. The Islamic scholar Omar Al Muqbil was arrested in 2019 simply because he spoke out against the policies of the General Entertainment Authority.



Israeli clampdown brands Palestinian civil society as ‘terrorist’

Bernard Regan analyses what lies behind the Israeli government’s attack on Palestinian human rights and labour organisations.

On Friday 22 October Benny Gantz the Israeli Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence signed an order declaring six Palestinian NGOs (Non-Governmental Organisations) as terror organisations.

The six organisations are Addameer, Al-Haq, the Bisan Center, Defence for Children International Palestine (DCI-P),

the Union of Women’s Committees and the Union of Agricultural Work committees.

All of these NGOs are well established groups working within Palestinian civil society, independent from the Palestinian Authority, and respected internationally for their work.

DCI-P for example is known for its work supporting Palestinian child prisoners who have been arrested and brought before Israeli Military Courts in the West Bank especially. Two delegations of lawyers, one in 2012 from Britain led by Baroness Scotland and one in 2013 from the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), have

investigated the circumstance in which Palestinian children are arrested and detained.

Both delegations made around 40 recommendations critical of the behaviour of the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) and their treatment of minors. They established that the IDF were in the habit of arresting young Palestinians in the middle of the night, throwing them into military vehicles, physically abusing them, keeping them in solitary confinement and then trying to force them to confess to a range of crimes or face detention and imprisonment. A not infrequent allegation against them might be that they had been throwing stones at the Wall. They try to force the

youngsters to sign confessions written in Hebrew, a language they neither speak nor read. Parents often accept plea bargains to keep their children out of prison or reduce their potential sentences but the child's name is then of course in the Israeli records.

Despite the British lawyers trying to follow up their report by meeting Israeli government officials responsible for the army and the operation of the military courts they have been denied access. As a result, nothing of any significance has changed in the behaviour of the IDF towards the children.

As an NGO, DCI-P has been increasingly gaining a hearing amongst a wide range of concerned individuals and humanitarian organisations. Whilst no changes of any great significance have taken place in the practices of the Israeli occupation forces, DCI-P has continued to give support to the children arrested and their families in what is a traumatic scenario.

The other organisations listed have been similarly active in their respective welfare fields within civil society, trying to use whatever legal and humanitarian resources are open to them to give support to individuals, families, social groups and local communities faced with the daily inhuman consequences of an occupation which remains brutal and aggressive. At the same time, house demolitions, settler attacks, evictions like Sheikh Jarrah, and daily assaults take place. All of this is backed by the Israeli government.

Prime Minister Naftali Bennett has spoken in favour of the annexation of the whole of the West Bank into Israel and has been in discussions to double the Israeli Jewish population in the Jordan Valley. In the last two weeks the government has announced the building of an additional 1,300 housing units in the West Bank. Despite ousting Netanyahu from the premiership, Bennett's government is taking exactly the same path as his predecessor.

The attack on the Palestinian NGOs is clearly intended to try to discredit bodies that are gaining an international audience and political sympathy. Some years ago the IDF began to describe Palestinian civil society actions of groups like DCI-P, as "non-violent terrorism."

The reality however is somewhat different. On 3 March this year, Fatou Bensouda, announced that the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court will begin an investigation into the situation in Palestine covering the

Israeli forces shot journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, UN finds

Veteran Palestinian journalist Shireen Abu Akleh was shot dead by Israeli forces, an investigation by the United Nations' High Commissioner for Human Rights has concluded. In a statement released on 24 June, the UN body said that Abu Akleh, who was reporting from Jenin for Al Jazeera when she was killed, was shot despite being clearly visible as a journalist.

"At around half past six in the morning, as four of the journalists turned into the street leading to the camp, wearing bulletproof helmets and flak jackets with 'PRESS' markings, several single, seemingly well-aimed bullets were fired towards them from the direction of the Israeli Security Forces. One single bullet injured Ali Sammoudi in the shoulder, and another single bullet hit Abu Akleh in the head and killed her instantly."

There was no evidence of shooting by armed Palestinians, the UN investigators concluded, and no warnings were given by Israeli forces before opening fire.

"We've inspected photo, video, audio

material, we've visited the scene, we've consulted with experts, and we've looked at official communications; we've interviewed people who were also on the scene when Abu Akleh was killed ... Based on this very vigorous monitoring, we find that the shots that killed Abu Akleh came from Israeli Security Forces and not from indiscriminate firing by armed Palestinians," said UN spokesperson Ravina Shamdasani.

Shireen Abu Akleh's killing led to angry protests and outrage worldwide, which intensified after Israeli security forces were filmed assaulting Palestinian mourners carrying her coffin.

Journalists' unions have condemned the relentless attacks by the Israeli authorities on media workers. Michelle Stanistreet, General Secretary of the NUJ said: "This shocking incident must be seen in the context of Israel's systematic targeting of journalists working in Palestine and its failure to properly investigate killings of media workers." *by MENA Solidarity writers*

period from 13 June 2014 until the present day. The decision to begin the investigations followed five years of examination of the evidence. Any prosecution may well include evidence from the May 2021 IDF attack on Gaza which, according to Human Rights Watch, included an attack by 4,360 unguided rockets and mortars towards the civilian population of the strip. This attack followed previous attacks in 2008, 2012, 2014, 2018 and 2019 which Human Rights Watch has monitored. In their report on the events of 2021 they make the point that there was no evidence that the IDF attack focussed on any paramilitary target. An attack that is not directed at a specific military objective, they state, is unlawful.

The offensive against the six NGOs is a deliberate attempt to discredit organisations which have been challenging Israeli governments' anti-Palestinian policies. Increasing numbers of international NGOs such as War on Want (WOW) and Human Rights Watch (HRW) have expressed the view that the Israeli government's anti-Palestinian

policies constitute the crime against humanity of apartheid. In their report "A Threshold Crossed", HRW found that Israeli authorities have pursued an intent to privilege Jewish Israelis at the expense of Palestinians.

As they said in their press release, "Today, apartheid is not a hypothetical or future scenario. A 54-year-occupation is not temporary. The threshold has been crossed. Apartheid, and parallel persecution, is the reality for millions of Palestinians. Recognizing and correctly diagnosing a problem is the first step to solving it and ending apartheid is vital to the future of both Palestinians and Israelis and the cause of peace."

The attack on the 6 Palestinian NGOs is an attempt to deflect from the growing criticism of Israeli government actions. The evidence however cannot be hidden. It is the government of Israel which is in the dock.

Bernard Regan is the author of *The Balfour Declaration: Empire, the Mandate and resistance in Palestine* published by Verso.



Sanaa Alsabag and Rania Mohamed with Kevin Courtney, NEU General secretary at NEU Conference 2021. Top right Chi Onwurah MP & bottom right Vicky Blake address the Sudan Solidarity Emergency conference on 6 December 2021 Photos: Miriam Scharf & screenshots

NEU stands with Sudanese teachers

Miriam Scharf,
Sanaa Alsabag &
Rania Mohamed

On 10th and 11th April Rania Mohamed and Sanaa Alsabag were guests of the National Education Union at the 2022 NEU Conference in Bournemouth. Hundreds of delegates received our newsletter reporting on the teachers strike in Sudan. Over 40 delegates signed up to be contacts to build support for the Sudanese revolution. All were encouraged to take the solidarity motion to their union branches.

Over 50 delegates and visitors took selfies to share their solidarity on social media, amongst these were Joint Secretary Kevin Courtney, President Daniel Kebede and ex-president, now Baroness, Christine Blower. Rania and Sanaa worked tirelessly talking to delegates at meetings, at the Sudan Teachers' Committee stall, and all around conference, raising awareness and encouraging engagement.

By Sanaa Alsabag & Rania Mohamed

As a Sudanese Uprising Support group, we started working with the NEU in their work of solidarity with Sudan revolution. We started with the Sudanese Teachers Committee which is one of the biggest unions in Sudan. The Sudanese Teachers Committee started to attend meetings to give updates on the situation in Sudan and particularly with regards to teachers, students and education in the country.

The experience for us as advocates for Sudanese Teachers was very exciting and it was also a good learning curve. We managed to talk to a good number of delegates about the Sudanese revolution since December 2018 and how Sudanese people decided to continue with their demands for civilian rule and a dignified life despite the brutality they are facing. It was a great opportunity for us to network with different people from different organisations.

We talked about issues such as dismissals, detentions and the continuing persecution faced by the teachers all over Sudan. We also managed to raise funds through a bucket at the stall to help the STC continue their endeavour for better education and a prosperous Sudan.

[Read more on www.](http://www.menasolidaritynetwork.com)

[menasolidaritynetwork.com](http://www.menasolidaritynetwork.com) about the NEU's work with Sudanese teachers

Conferences link Sudanese activists, MPs and unions

MENA Solidarity

A series of major online conferences co-organised by MENA Solidarity with Sudanese organisations brought hundreds of trade unionists, MPs and Sudanese activists together to hear about the struggle against military rule after the coup of 25 October 2021. The Sudan Solidarity Emergency Conference took place on 6 December and was hosted by the Sudanese Diaspora, Sudanese Diaspora Roundtable UK, MENA Solidarity, UCU, NEU, Edinburgh TUC and other trade unions.

Speakers included leading Sudanese figures in the movement against the coup, such as Mohamed Nagi al-Assam of the Central Committee of Sudan's Doctors and Dr Samia al-Nagar. They were joined by MPs Chi Onwurah and John McDonnell, Vicky Blake, president of UCU and Gawaane Little of NEU. Regional conferences were organised for Scotland and NW England.

[Go to www.menasolidaritynetwork.com](http://www.menasolidaritynetwork.com) for conference reports



Protesters gather outside the British embassy in Berlin, 22 June, to mark day 82 of Alaa Abdelfattah's hunger strike Photo: Helena Zohdi

Hunger strike vigils raise alarm for Alaa Abdelfattah

Egypt Solidarity

Alaa Abdelfattah, a leading figure in the 2011 Egyptian revolution and well-known political activist has been on hunger strike since 2 April. His life is in danger, yet the Egyptian authorities continue to deny him basic dignity and rights. Dozens of supporters gathered outside the British Embassy in Berlin and the Foreign Office in London on 22 June to call for his release.

According to the FreeAlaa campaign website:

"Alaa is a writer, software developer, award-winning human rights blogger, and father to a ten-year-old son. He is an Amnesty Prisoner of Conscience and has been targeted repeatedly by the Egyptian regime for speaking up against their crimes.

For two and half years, he has been kept in a cell with no access to books, newspapers or sunlight. He is not allowed a radio. He is not allowed a watch. He is not allowed exercise time outside of his cell. His visits are limited to one family member per month, for twenty minutes, through a glass barrier, without a moment of privacy or physical contact."

Alaa is a British citizen but has so far been denied a consular visit. Nor have the British government

spoken up to demand his release – the Tory government has a shameful record of supporting Egypt's brutal regime militarily and politically. Boris Johnson called Al-Sisi in March this year, and according to Egyptian pro-government media, said he was "keen on boosting relations with Egypt at the economic and trade levels". The two men also discussed the war in Ukraine and the COP27 climate summit due to take place in Egypt in November.

Three prominent opposition activists, former MP Zyad el-Elaimy, journalist and socialist activist Hisham Fouad, and Nasserist activist Hossam Moanis were given between 3 and 5 year jail sentences on trumped up charges by an emergency court in Cairo on 17 November.

Amnesty International's Philip Luther condemned the draconian sentences on the three activists, who were jailed after spending more than two years detained in appalling conditions.

"Despite ending the state of emergency, the Egyptian authorities continue to use emergency courts to silence those who peacefully criticize Egypt's abysmal human rights record. These politicians and activists should never have been arrested in the first place and yet they have been convicted and sentenced to prison on charges related to their legitimate criticism of the Egyptian authorities.

"President Al-Sisi must quash the sentences and immediately and unconditionally release all those detained purely for exercising their right to freedom of expression. The

authorities must also cease sham trials by emergency courts which fail to respect international fair trial standards, including the right to appeal."

Hisham, Zyad and Hossam's only 'crime' was to discuss the possibility of forming an opposition electoral coalition and to share material critical of the regime's appalling human rights record online. They have been subject to what Amnesty calls "a litany of human rights violations", alongside others also arrested and sentenced in this case. This has included denial of adequate medical care, putting severe pressure on the detainees' health.

Just a day after the sentences, Prince Charles and Camilla were photographed by the world's media enjoying the sights, as part of a tour of Egypt where they were guests of the military regime.

As the New York Times puts it, Egypt's military rulers are keen to present the country as "the host of the next United Nations climate summit, a rising competitor in the natural gas industry, a business destination for European energy and defense giants, and a valued partner for the United States on the Israel-Palestine question," brushing under the carpet the continued repression.

Alaa's family and campaigners for political prisoners in Egypt are stepping up activities to highlight the tens of thousands held unjustly by Sisi's regime in the run-up to the COP27 summit.

Go to www.freealaa.net and www.egyptsolidarityinitiative.org for more information



Government takes aim at BDS and free speech for Palestine

MENA Solidarity

Government policies promoting the controversial IHRA definition of antisemitism and attempting to shut down BDS (Boycott, Divestment & Sanctions) campaigns for Palestine have intensified pressure on activists in recent months.

The National Union of Students is the latest major body in the firing line from government ministers, who 'derecognised' the national student body by refusing to meet with its officials following "antisemitism allegations".

In a statement on 13 May, Michelle Donelan, Minister for Higher Education, said:

"The NUS will be removed from all Department for Education groups and replaced with alternative student representation, such as from the Office for Students' student panel or from individual student unions, to ensure all students' views are reflected fairly in conversations about higher education."

Yet a few days later, the Chair of the Office for Students, James Wharton, was exposed in the media as having addressed the Conservative Political Action Conference in Hungary where he praised far-right politician Viktor Orbán who repeatedly used antisemitic tropes about Jewish philanthropist George Soros in his 2017 parliamentary election campaign.

Another speaker at the CPAC event was Zsolt Bayer, a far-right journalist who had previously called Jews "stinking excrement" and described Roma as "animals". Wharton claimed he "did not know" Bayer was at the event and said in a meeting with Jewish students that he had "no time for racist and antisemitic views". The OfS told journalists that Wharton was not speaking in an official capacity at the event.

By contrast, the government's



Palestinian lecturer Shahd Abusalama is an outspoken critic of Israeli apartheid Photo: via Twitter

action against NUS relates partially to tweets made by NUS president-elect Shaima Dallali over a decade ago, when she was a young teenager. Although none of these could be said to have been in an "official capacity" either, and despite her public apology for using antisemitic language in one tweet, investigations into the NUS continue.

Solidarity campaigns in support of activists targeted for their views on Palestine have had some successes, however. A campaign mobilising support from academics, trade unionists and Palestine solidarity activists pushed back against the victimisation of Palestinian academic Shahd Abusalama, a PhD student and lecturer at Sheffield Hallam University (SHU) earlier this year. Student activists, Palestine solidarity organisations, trade unionists and academics wrote letters of protest to SHU management and campaigned on social media after reports that her teaching had been cancelled in response to accusations of antisemitism. Within days, however, the campaign was able to claim an important step forward, as the University reinstated Shahd's classes, although without dropping the investigation.

Bob Jeffrey from Sheffield Hallam UCU told Middle East Solidarity that the University's actions had set immediate alarm bells ringing in the union branch, which has supported Shahd and represented her in meetings with management.

"Sheffield Hallam University (SHU) UCU has been extremely concerned by the treatment of our member, Shahd

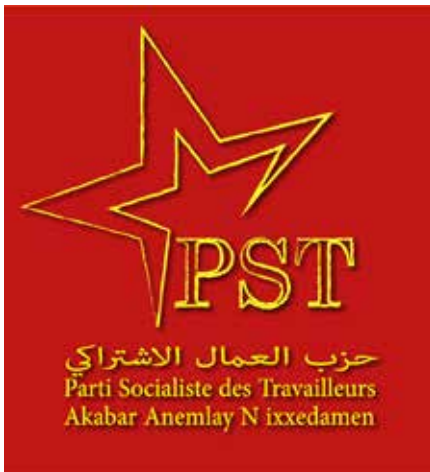
Abusalama, in relation to purported complaints to the university, and the way they have been handled (cancellation of Shahd's classes). It is important to note that neither Shahd nor her representatives have yet had sight of those allegations through official channels. Nevertheless, from information in the public domain, we believe that they pertain to accusations of antisemitism under the controversial IHRA definition."

A 2019 story in the Jewish Chronicle highlighted some of Shahd's tweets from 2012 as antisemitic. In a public Facebook post in response she retracted one of the tweets, unequivocally condemned antisemitism and pointed to her work with Jewish activists who organise in solidarity with Palestinians:

"As a Palestinian woman resisting Israel's occupation, racial supremacy and apartheid, I shall continue to reject Zionism as a racist ideology while firmly condemning anti-Jewish bigotry. Our struggle is against all forms of oppression and racism. We target complicity, not identity."

Such campaigns are likely to intensify as the government moves towards implementing legislation banning the official endorsement of BDS campaigns by public bodies. A wide range of civil society organisations and trade unions have condemned the planned laws, including Campaign Against Arms Trade, Liberty, Friends of the Earth, the Methodist Church in Britain, UCU, Unite, Unison and RMT.

Go to <https://righttoboycott.org.uk/> for the full statement



Socialist party in Algeria banned

Algerian socialist organisation, the Parti Socialiste des Travailleurs (Socialist Workers Party) has been banned by the Algerian government in the latest round of a crackdown. Three years after the eruption of the Hirak, a mass popular movement which brought down corrupt president Abdelaziz Bouteflika in March 2019, over 250 activists have been detained for their beliefs.

The latest wave of repression has also hit political parties. The PST, which was founded in 1970, was ordered by the State Council on 20 January to cease operating, exposing its activists to the threat of arrest and detention for carrying out “illegal” activities.

The party’s activists include trade unionists and students who are involved in numerous social and political struggles ranging from mobilising solidarity for the strikes by Numilog transport workers to defending political prisoners jailed by the regime for organising the Hirak.

What you can do:

- Send a message of solidarity to the PST on Facebook <https://m.facebook.com/PSTDZ>
- Write a letter of protest to the Algerian authorities via the embassy in your country. Email for London embassy (info@algerianembassy.org.uk)

Go to www.menasolidaritynetwork.com for more information



Dr Abduljalil al-Singace Photo: BIRD

UK still trains Bahrain’s police as prisoners tortured

Activists are continuing to document the litany of human rights abuses taking place in Bahrain, and the ongoing detention of the “Bahrain 13” and other political prisoners. This occurs alongside the UK government’s steadfast support for the Bahraini regime. The UK College of Policing continues to train the Bahrain police, and the UK military trains and holds regular training exercises with their Bahraini counterparts.

Forty UK MPs have signed a letter to the University of Huddersfield asking them to stop providing their MSc in Security Science to the Royal Academy of Policing in Bahrain, with thirteen Bahraini activists alleging that they had been tortured in the same building where the training was taking place.

Dr. Abduljalil al-Singace, a Bahraini human rights activist serving life in prison, has now been on hunger strike for over 300 days. Dr. al-Singace was arrested in 2010 after returning from the UK where he had been speaking at an event at the House of Lords discussing the human rights situation in Bahrain.

In 2011 al-Singace was sentenced, along with thirteen other leading political and human rights activists, “for plotting to overthrow the government.” Whilst in prison, he has been tortured brutally and sexually assaulted, all of which has been documented in the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry.

In November 2021, after a decade in prison, another of the “Bahrain 13”, Abdulhadi al-Khawaja went on hunger strike after being denied visitation rights for two years, only being allowed video calls with his family depending on the “mood” of his guards. This is not al-Khawaja’s first hunger strike in prison, his longest was for 110 days, after which he was force fed. Al-Khawaja risks blindness from the injuries he received when tortured after his arrest in 2011 and is being denied medical attention.

A Bahraini activist in the UK has also turned to this act of last resort, going on hunger strike outside the Bahraini embassy in London for 23 days at the end of 2021. Ali Mushaima is the son of Hasan Mushaima, also a member of the “Bahrain 13” that are serving life in prison. Protesting against his father’s life-sentence, and demanding access to medical and family visits, Ali Mushaima was on hunger strike outside the Bahraini embassy whilst UK MPs had dinner inside on Bahrain’s national day.

The UK’s training and support for the very institutions responsible for the human rights abuses in Bahrain, and for the detention of human rights activists, must stop. Until the political prisoners are released and human rights in Bahrain improve, going on hunger strike will remain an act of last resort for those in prison or exiled from the state.

Go to <https://birdbh.org/> for more information and campaigning resources. Ask your MP to sign Early Day Motion #578 calling for Dr al-Singace’s release.



Disabled activists join a protest in Tunisia in 2011 | Photo: Nasser Nouri

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Strike
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MENA Solidarity

menasolidaritynetwork.com

MENA Solidarity is a network of activists from different unions in the UK engaged in building solidarity for struggle to win social justice and workers' rights in the Middle East. We are supported by the UCU, PCS and NEU unions and a number of other trade union regions and branches.

BAHRAIN WATCH

Bahrain Watch

bahrainwatch.org

Bahrain Watch is an independent research and advocacy organisation formed in February 2012 that seeks to promote effective, transparent and accountable governance in Bahrain.

Egypt
مصر
SOLIDARITY

Egypt Solidarity

egyptsolidarityinitiative.org

Egypt Solidarity launched on 11 February 2014, the third anniversary of the fall of Mubarak, in order to campaign in defence of democratic rights in Egypt.