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HUMAN  
RIGHTS**

# **SPEAK TRUTH TO POWER**

**HUMAN RIGHTS  
DEFENDERS WHO  
ARE CHANGING  
OUR WORLD**

**ANONYMOUS: GIVING VOICE TO THE VOICELESS**

# ANONYMOUS

**“WE ARE HELPING THE PEOPLE. THE PROBLEM IS THAT THE GOVERNMENT DOESN'T WANT THIS TYPE OF HELP. IT IS CERTAINLY TO THE GOVERNMENT'S BENEFIT THAT PEOPLE DON'T KNOW MUCH ABOUT LAWS BECAUSE THEN PEOPLE WILL NOT DEMAND ANY RIGHTS. THIS IS ONE REASON WHY IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT FOR ME TO REVEAL MY NAME.”**



Anonymous is a Sudanese defender of human rights. He became involved in the political situation in Sudan when he lost his job in 1989 along with 10,000 others. He wrote about his story, the consequences of civil war, and his efforts to raise awareness on or around the year 2000. At the time, Sudan was in the midst of a perilous and ongoing state of repression. In 2019, President Omar al-Bashir was overthrown by the Sudanese army in response to popular protests, and a constitutional declaration was signed. Sudan's democratic transition remains fragile with limited progress on key human rights reforms. In addition, impunity for perpetrators of past and current abuses is still the norm. For these reasons, the identity of this human rights defender will remain anonymous.

He closes with this: “Courage means a lot of things to me: It means commitment, it means hope. It means thinking first of others. It means a strong belief in human rights, a strong belief in the power of the people, and it means turning our backs on the power of the rulers. Courage will bring change to us in Sudan.”

# INTERVIEW WITH ANONYMOUS

## INTERVIEW FROM KERRY KENNEDY'S BOOK *SPEAK TRUTH TO POWER*, 2000.

When I lost my job in 1989 along with 10,000 others. I became involved in human rights because of the political situation in Sudan. The government wanted to ensure that those not affiliated with the official agenda were marginalized. I felt that we who were lucky and who had an education needed to help those with the greatest need: people who lost their basic rights and who were arrested on a nearly daily basis. We were able to extend our activities in refugee areas and around some parts of the country.

We began by raising public awareness of the negative effects of the government policy of organized mass marriages. These marriages were one of the crucial points in the political agenda. The idea was to encourage marriage to promote an image of “a good Muslim,” and to discourage promiscuity and sexual dissidence. The government organizes festivals and calls people to register their names. They gather over 500 couples at a time, by bribing them with 15,000 Sudanese pounds and sometimes a piece of land. Given the poor state of the economy, people are encouraged to get involved in these marriages, accepting the idea that their daughter will marry a person who has married three or four times in the past, as long as it relieves them of the responsibility of having a daughter.

So these young girls marry, become pregnant, and then after collecting the money and the land, their husbands run away. In the end the women are left alone with a child to raise. They go to the Sharia courts in the hope of gaining maintenance fees from their husbands, but this rarely works.

Instead, as Sudan PANA (the Pan African News Agency) reported on February 1, 2000, courts in Sudan have divorced some 25,000 husbands in absentia in the past three years. In such cases, the law gives the defendant a month's notice to appear before the court, after a divorce advertisement is published in a newspaper. If the ultimatum expires and the husband does not comply, the court will automatically divorce the wife “in his absence.”

We monitor human rights violations like these, we discuss existing laws with women's groups to raise awareness, and we network among different groups to mobilize against these laws. Furthermore, we train young people to provide legal aid for the increasing number of displaced communities.

The vast majority of families in squatter communities are headed by women. The husbands are usually soldiers or unemployed men, so the women are forced to work. The easiest way to get money is to go in the streets and become a street vendor—selling tea or brewing the local alcohol, which is a traditional women's practice in the south and west. However, the women are not aware that they are working illegally. They are subsequently arrested by the popular police force, who search their houses, confiscate their belongings, and destroy their dwellings. Worse, the women can be lashed and fined £150,000 or more. One of our tasks has been to find some income-generating activities for these women. We go to courts on the behalf of the women arrested. And through networking developed with different organizations, we started collecting money to pay the fines, a sum that was constantly increasing, as the fines were revenue sources for the government.

We are helping the people, especially women, to become more aware of their rights as human beings and as Sudanese, no matter what their ethnic group or religion is. The problem is, the government doesn't want this type of help. It is certainly to the government's benefit that people don't know much about the laws, because then people will not demand any rights. This is one reason why it would be difficult for me to reveal my name. Those whom the government suspects of working on human rights are arrested, often tortured in ghost houses (which are unknown detention centers) or, if one is lucky, put in prison for an undetermined period of time. Just recently we had a journalist arrested who was kept in jail for a short while, comparatively—only two months. But he was tortured: both knees broken and his feet burned. The police didn't want to release

him because they were afraid that his family would object. They kept him until his feet healed, just a week ago. There are so many incidents of this sort, as well as disappearances.

People frequently disappear or are arrested, and the security people come the next day and say they died of “natural” causes. A well-known physician, the late Dr. Ali Fadl, arrested early in 1992, was tortured and developed a brain abscess. He died soon after. The death certificate indicated that he had cerebral malaria. His father was not allowed to take the body or even see it, and the burial was done by security forces. This is only one of many cases.

As a consequence of the war, all the young people in our country, after taking university entrance exams, are drafted and sent to jihad. They are given less than a month’s training—not nearly enough—handed weapons, and sent to the front. A group of forcibly conscripted boys escaped from a camp north of Khartoum last year. When the guards found out, they started shooting at them. The boys ran to the river, but some did not know how to swim. More than 15 were shot dead. This incident became public knowledge when the bodies floated along the Nile. Until that time the government denied it, claiming that the kids had attempted to escape, that they had gotten on a boat which had sunk, and that they had drowned as a consequence. But that was not true. They actually shot these poor boys while they were trying to swim or hide in the river.

The best way to stop these abuses is for people to be aware of their rights. Over the past few years about 17 NGOs working in women’s rights have been formed. Women are forming cooperatives, developing income-generating projects, and the good thing is that these women are coming together independent of their ethnicity, religion, and race. This activity is even having an effect among Sudanese women outside the country. What is going on today seems to transcend political affiliation, and while it is slow, it is very encouraging.

Women have a particularly difficult situation in Sudan. First of all, the government issued a series of laws that restricted fundamental women’s rights. Any woman who is traveling must submit her visa application to the Women’s Committee at the

Ministry of the Interior. This committee makes sure that the woman in question has a male guardian to accompany her, and that she has the consent of her husband. Second, a strict dress code dictates that every woman must cover her head and her hair completely, and wear a long dress covering her ankles. Employed women cannot hope to attain senior posts. There is a very well-known incident in the police department, where two women reached the level of commander and were subsequently asked to resign. The government also changed family law to encourage polygamy and to give men more freedom, including making it easier for them to obtain a divorce. According to Islam, women are supposed to have access to divorce just as easily as men do. In practice, it is extremely difficult for a woman to ask for divorce, while a man can proceed with no explanations whatsoever.

Under the new family law, a man can declare *nashiz* (violation of marital duties) when a woman does not obey. The husband is then allowed to place his unruly wife in an obedience home. He can refuse to divorce, claiming that she, for example, goes out without his permission. This is considered sufficient justification. The government has also imposed a series of new inheritance laws that are also discriminatory to women. These new moral codes have terrible implications for society. Even if you, a woman, are just walking with a man, you have to prove that this man is your brother, or your husband, or uncle.

If a woman is walking in the street without a veil, she can be arrested and lashed by the popular defense police. The same rules apply even if the women are pregnant, which is why there are so many stories of women miscarrying while being lashed. On buses, women have to sit in the last two rows in the back. It has been really difficult for women.

My father was a doctor. He worked in different parts of Sudan. He loved his patients. In one of the regions where he worked he was called *abu fanous*, “the man with the lantern,” because he would do his rounds examining his patients in their homes, in their huts. My mother worked with different groups: Girl Guides, first aid, charity, as well as church groups. Our home was always a busy home. We always had somebody who was coming for

treatment, or giving birth in our house. My parents taught us how to love our people, however simple or poor. We felt attached to them, and my parents loved our family. My grandfather was a farmer, and we still feel very attached to our extended family. I think my love of family made me love Sudan and regard all the Sudanese as my own family. I feel very much tied to my country. And I always had the feeling that I have to do something for my people, the same way my parents did and the way my father did for his patients. This atmosphere contributed to my taking on the work that I do today.

All over the country, the level of poverty is astonishing, especially among the displaced. Young people are willing to leave the country at any cost, so there is also a terrible brain drain happening. In some of the faculties, 70 percent of the students are girls because the boys avoid the university, since they are forced to go to jihad beforehand. Even now, there aren't many young men around, only girls, and many girls marry old men and foreigners, partly because most of the young men are away and partly because girls want to leave the country at any cost, even if it means marrying a foreigner of whom they know very little.

People are forced to keep quiet. One man who works in a bank told me that every employee in his office has two others watching him. Not necessarily government agents, but paid informers. Everyone is aware that the government takes advantage of the overwhelming poverty and pays people to spy on others. Youngsters are encouraged to spy on their own families and are kept on a payroll of one of the

security forces. The international community could help this situation by exposing these human rights violations. What is happening could be reported through CNN and BBC. It is not food aid for famine that is important, but media, newspapers, and television coverage. That would make a difference. It would put pressure on the government, which is the cause of this deteriorating situation in human rights.

Because of this war we lost one and a half million lives, and we are expecting more conflict. The south is a tragedy, but equally all the west, the north, everywhere. The country is really collapsing: the health system, education, everything. Yet at the end of the day, it is not the government who decides—it's the people. Since 1993, I have noted a new mood in the civil society. All Sudanese, and especially women, are becoming more aware of the importance of forming alliances, of trying to improve their lives, and trying to change what is going on. These special groups can do a lot for change. Ultimately, I don't think that the government will greatly alter in the coming five to 10 years. But through this network that we are developing, and through the confidence and the hope of all human rights activists, change will come. I don't think I will witness this, but if you start moving things, there will be an effect.

Courage means a lot of things to me: it means commitment, it means hope. It means thinking first of others. It means a strong belief in human rights, a strong belief in the power of the people, and it means turning our backs on the power of the rulers. Courage will bring change to us in Sudan.

# GIVING VOICE TO THE VOICELESS

## LESSON GRADE LEVELS 6 TO 12

### POLITICAL FREEDOM, WOMEN'S RIGHTS, WATER, AND FOOD

#### UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

- **ARTICLE 1:** Right to equality.
- **ARTICLE 21:** Right to participate in government and free elections.

#### TIME REQUIREMENT

Minimum of 40 minutes; maximum of 120 minutes.

#### GUIDING QUESTIONS

- How can students bring awareness to others about the issue of human rights violations in Sudan?
- How can students become defenders of human rights?

#### OBJECTIVES

By the end of the lesson, students will:

- Connect the study of human rights in the past to the defender named Anonymous.
- Understand the dire condition of human rights in Sudan.
- Become aware of how ordinary citizens and students have made a difference fighting those abuses.
- Become human rights defenders.

#### COMMON CORE LEARNING STANDARDS

- CCSS.ELA- LITERACY.RH.6-8.1
- CCSS.ELA- LITERACY.RH.6-8.7
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.9
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.1
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.7
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.9-10.8
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.11-12.9
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.11-12.9

#### CONCEPTS

- Human rights
- Global citizenship
- Justice
- Government
- Power
- Individual responsibility

#### VOCABULARY

- Defender
- Anonymous
- Human rights
- Sudan
- Omar al-Bashir
- Genocide

#### TECHNOLOGY REQUIRED

- An LCD projector
- Computer lab or laptop cart with Internet access

#### MATERIALS

- Excerpt from the profile of Anonymous in *Speak Truth to Power*: [www.rfkhumanrights.org](http://www.rfkhumanrights.org) /Click on Speak Truth To Power / Click on “Defenders” tab
- History Channel’s *America the Story of Us: Harriet Tubman*: <http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/harriet-tubman/videos/harriet-tubman-and-the-underground-railroad>
- Map of Sudan: <https://www.worldatlas.com/maps/sudan>
- The Voices of South Sudan’s Women: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k4TGhLcbdig>
- The “Lost Boys” Refugees of Sudan: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JV2UoY\\_3iSY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JV2UoY_3iSY)
- Acid Attacks on Sudanese Women: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=flqyYAIR7Og>
- Sudanese Women Jailed for Wearing Pants: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ufyXJqsCxK4>
- Inside the Forgotten War in Darfur, Where the Killing Never Stopped: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_NlgaXrMTc4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_NlgaXrMTc4)
- Biographical sketch of former President al-Bashir: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/54890/Omar-Hassan-Ahmad-al-Bashir>

#### TEACHER TIP

- It is highly recommended that you use the following lesson immediately after the study of one of these historical figures: Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, Mahatma Gandhi, or Nelson Mandela. Doing so provides the vital historical context that makes the study of a current defender even more relevant.
- To protect this defender’s safety, the Speak Truth to Power profile makes it intentionally unclear whether the person is woman or man, reinforced by the black hood.

# ANTICIPATORY SET

- After the study of one or more of the historical human rights figures mentioned in the Teacher Tips, show the profile of Harriet Tubman from the History Channel's *America the Story of Us*: <http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/harriet-tubman>

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- After a class viewing of the excerpt, discuss the following:
  - What made Harriet Tubman so powerful?
  - How can she be a role model for us today?
  - Where might she be working for human freedom in our time?

# STUDENT ACTIVITIES

## ACTIVITY 1

- Suggest to the students that, if she were alive, Tubman might be working in Sudan. Show the image of the defender Anonymous, as pictured on the cover of *Speak Truth to Power*. Ask students if this defender is in some way a modern-day Harriet Tubman.
- Show a map of Sudan: <https://www.worldatlas.com/maps/sudan>. Inform the class that this is where the defender Anonymous lives and writes about the struggles in Sudan.
- Show students a photo of Omar al-Bashir, former president of Sudan: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-16010445>. Read to the students the biographical sketch of al-Bashir: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Omar-Hassan-Ahmad-al-Bashir>
- Assign students to computers, either in a computer lab or with a few computers spread throughout the classroom as learning stations.
- Have the links to the websites available on the computers.
- Instruct the students to watch several short videos on the issues that Anonymous described about human rights in Sudan.

### TEACHER TIP

You can choose to show all or some of the videos:

- Women in South Sudan
- The “Lost Boys” Refugees of Sudan
- Acid Attacks on Sudanese Women
- Sudanese Women Jailed for Wearing Pants
- Genocide in the Darfur region of Sudan

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Ask for student reactions to the video. End the discussion with the following questions:
  - What would Harriet Tubman do to address these situations?
  - How does helping Sudan help the cause of freedom around the world?
  - How does being anonymous help the defender?
  - Why do other defenders choose to be open about their identities?
  - Have you ever helped someone without taking credit? If so, how did you feel?

- Have you helped someone who didn't thank you? If so, how did you feel?
- What does humility mean?
- Can someone be anonymous and still speak truth to power?
- Are most human rights defenders anonymous, well known, or in between?
- Celebrities like Mia Farrow, George Clooney, Don Cheadle, Angelina Jolie, and others have taken up the cause of Sudan. How does celebrity involvement help the cause?

## EXPANDING OPPORTUNITIES

- For a short homework assignment, students can write a letter to Anonymous describing what they have learned about Sudan.
- For a longer project, students can write poems or create posters, brochures, or websites about Sudan or Anonymous.
- Create a Facebook page on the issue of defending human rights in Sudan and/or Darfur. Plan a Day of Silence or Walking for Pledges event that attracts awareness to this cause.
- If you are a member of a church, mosque, or synagogue, talk with other members about how they can become involved as well. Be prepared with steps for becoming actively engaged in defending human rights through the organizations you have studied in this lesson.

# INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS FRAMEWORK

Since the creation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) by the United Nations (UN) in 1948, many other international documents—also called treaties, covenants, resolutions, or conventions—have been drafted to develop these rights further. Countries commit to protect the rights recognized in these treaties by ratifying them, and sometimes a specific institution is created within the UN to monitor their compliance.

Here are examples of relevant international documents:

### CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

- **ARTICLE 5:** Obligations to modify social and cultural practices that cause prejudices against women.
- **ARTICLE 15:** Obligation to the State to ensure equality before law for women and men.

### INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS TREATIES

#### INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS

#### INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION FOR THE PROTECTION OF ALL PERSONS FROM ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCE

#### CONVENTION AGAINST TORTURE AND OTHER CRUEL, INHUMAN OR DEGRADING TREATMENT OR PUNISHMENT

*For more information, visit the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights' website:*  
[www.ohchr.org](http://www.ohchr.org).



# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

## MY SISTER'S KEEPER

[www.mskeeper.org/site/](http://www.mskeeper.org/site/)

My Sister's Keeper is a women-led humanitarian organization that works to assist, protect and advocate for the women of southern Sudan.

## WOMEN FOR WOMEN INTERNATIONAL

<http://www.womenforwomen.org>

Women for Women International works to ensure that women are healthy, sustain an income, are decision-makers, and have strong social networks and safety nets, so that they are in a strong position to advocate for their rights.

## THE ENOUGH PROJECT

[www.enoughproject.org](http://www.enoughproject.org)

The Enough Project is helping to build a permanent constituency to prevent genocide and crimes against humanity.

## UN WOMEN

[www.unwomen.org](http://www.unwomen.org)

UN Women is the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, bringing together resources and mandates for greater impact.

## CAMP DARFUR

<https://www.iact.ngo/impact/camp-darfur/>

Camp Darfur is an interactive awareness and educational event that brings attention to the ongoing genocide in Darfur, Sudan, and gives individuals the opportunity to discover their ability and power to make a difference.

## DARFUR WOMEN ACTION GROUP

[www.darfurwomenaction.org](http://www.darfurwomenaction.org)

The core priority for Darfur Women Action Group lies in advancing human rights and supporting Darfuri to meet the challenges of the 21st Century by supporting women NGOs at the grassroots and national level in the US and on the ground in Darfur, building their capacity to lead desirable change, and providing opportunities for the international community to hear directly from those most affected by the conflict.

## DARFUR IS DYING INTERACTIVE GAME

<https://www.gamesforchange.org/game/darfur-is-dying/>

Darfur is Dying is a web-based video game that provides a window into the experience of the 2.5 million refugees in the Darfur region of Sudan. It is designed to raise awareness of the genocide taking place in Darfur and empower students to help stop the crisis.

