



[Sudanese Journalists Form an Independent Union in an Attempt to Defend Freedoms That Have Been Curtailed by the Country's Military Coup](#)

Over the preceding week, a revived independent journalist union in militarily-led Sudan elected an executive board, including a director. This is the first time such an independent union has existed in the country since the dissolution of all such groups back in 1989, when former despot Omar al-Bashir came into power. The group is a sizable one, consisting of 1,164 members, 659 of which participated in this past Sunday's election. The formation of the syndicate has given newfound hope to many that the democratic movement is in fact making progress. The elected chair of the board, Abdelmoniem Abu Idrees, commented on the historic nature of the vote and added that "it was a notable day for the unions, a day in which we exercised our democracy under a military rule and despite all the manacles that prevented us from doing so." He also expressed his belief that other professions would follow suit as well.

It is important to note that the optimism brought forth by the journalists' union is not founded on faith alone, but also on historical precedent. In the past, unions like this have been instrumental in the toppling of other undemocratic regimes in Sudan. For example, a syndicate called the Sudanese Professionals Association – an organization that consisted of educators, doctors, and others – was paramount in the deposition of former dictator Omar al-Bashir back in 2019. However, they were not alone, and the latest journalists' union will need additional support as well. Still, the self-liberation of the journalists specifically is significant, as they have long been a group under heavy government scrutiny and persecution for utilizing free speech. Many have been forced into silence or compelled to write only that which the government allows.

The hope is that the independence of the union will allow for a broader circulation of the truth and freedom of thought. The freedom of the Sudanese press has even gained international attention from other journalists, such as those in Egypt. Hussein al-Zanati, a prominent Egyptian journalist who is part of the Egyptian Journalist Syndicate Council, is one who has spoken in support of efforts for press freedom in neighboring Sudan. The group has voiced that it "supports and welcomes any entity that seeks to preserve the interests and rights of journalists in all Arab countries."

In addition to press freedom, the journalists' syndicate in Sudan is advocating for other benefits they feel belong in a free and democratic society, such as paid maternity leave and greater equality between men and women. The newly-formed union has already made it a requirement that the executive board be at least 40% female. It is also encouraging to note that although the emergence of the journalists' union is the most recent addition to the pro-democracy movement's arsenal, many Sudanese have been actively resisting the current military coup via coordinated efforts of separate neighborhood committees since the regime first installed itself back in October of 2021. In February of this year, they demanded that they be allowed to choose a prime minister and that Abdel Fattah al-Burhan – the head of the regime – be removed as commander of the army. However, it is incredibly important to the resistance that they remain non-violent, in keeping with their belief in promoting democracy to create peace. As one pro-democracy movement member put it, "the security agencies are trying to drag our revolution down a violent path, but our revolution always was – and will forever be – peaceful."