

Journalist's murder in South Sudan must be thoroughly investigated, says UN human rights expert

GENEVA (25 August 2020) – Three years after the controversial killing of freelance journalist Christopher Allen in South Sudan, a UN human rights expert today called for full investigation into his murder.

“The fact that for three whole years there has been no independent investigation into Mr. Allen’s killing sends a very dangerous signal that journalists and media workers can be targeted with impunity,” said Agnès Callamard, the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions.

“Three years is too long to leave a bereaved family without answers,” she said. “Investigation into crimes committed against journalists – not only in South Sudan, but around the world – is a key element in preventing future attacks and ending impunity. The governments of South Sudan and the United States can and must take steps to ensure that the circumstances of Mr. Allen’s murder are fully, independently and fearlessly investigated.”

Allen, a dual British-American citizen, was killed by South Sudanese armed forces while working in South Sudan on 26 August 2017. Images of his body, stripped naked were widely shared online. Senior South Sudanese government officials reportedly justified Mr. Allen’s killing, labelling him a rebel and a criminal who entered the country illegally.

At least ten other journalists have been killed with impunity during the civil war in South Sudan. “Mr. Allen’s murder is indicative of the wider climate of hostility towards journalists in the country,” Callamard said.

Callamard calls on the South Sudanese authorities to implement recommendations in her [official communication](#) to them concerning the killing of Mr. Allen. It was sent on 30 January 2020, but South Sudanese authorities have yet to respond.

In the absence of any investigation by South Sudan, Callamard called on the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), in a [separate communication to the US Government](#), to conduct an independent inquiry into the killing. The United States government confirmed that it raised concerns over the killing of Mr. Allen with the South Sudanese government. The United Kingdom’s government publicly shared its concerns regarding the lack of investigation or accountability in this case.

“Such statements are welcome but are simply not enough,” she said.

“The FBI has a duty, both legal and moral, to investigate Mr. Allen’s killing because of well-founded suspicions that war crimes may have been committed by members of South Sudanese forces,” Callamard said. “His family is still seeking answers about the circumstances of his death and accountability.”

The United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) took possession of Mr. Allen’s remains in their morgue, performed his embalming, and preserved and bagged his clothes. The Special Rapporteur recommends that UNMISS evaluates their role and contribution, with the view of developing or strengthening protocols for an effective UN management of matters of this sensitivity and gravity.

ENDS

* **THE EXPERT:** Ms. Agnès Callamard, Special Rapporteur on [extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions](#).

Dr. Agnès Callamard (France) has a distinguished career in human rights and humanitarian work globally, in civil society organizations, the United Nations and in academia. She is the Director of Columbia University Global Freedom of Expression, an initiative seeking to advance understanding of the international and national norms and institutions that define and protect freedom of expression and information in an inter-connected global community with major common challenges to address. She also works as special Adviser to the President of Columbia University. Previously, Dr Callamard spent nine years as the Executive Director of ARTICLE 19, the international human rights organization promoting freedom of expression globally. She also founded and led *Humanitarian Accountability Partnership* (now *CHS Alliance*), the first international self-regulatory body for humanitarian agencies. She was Chef de Cabinet for the Secretary General of *Amnesty International* (AI) and AI’s Research-Policy Coordinator, leading AI’s policy work and research on women’s human rights. Prior to this, she taught and conducted research on international refugee movements for the *Center for Refugee Studies* at York University in Toronto. She has advised multilateral organizations and governments around the world on human rights, including most recently the Special Advisor to the Secretary General on the Prevention of Genocide. She has led human rights investigations in more than 30 countries and published extensively, in both English and French, on human rights, women’s rights, freedom of expression, refugee movements and the methodology of human rights investigation. In particular, she has authored or directed volumes, on monitoring political killings, excessive use of force, and torture as well as on sexual violence in armed conflict.

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