

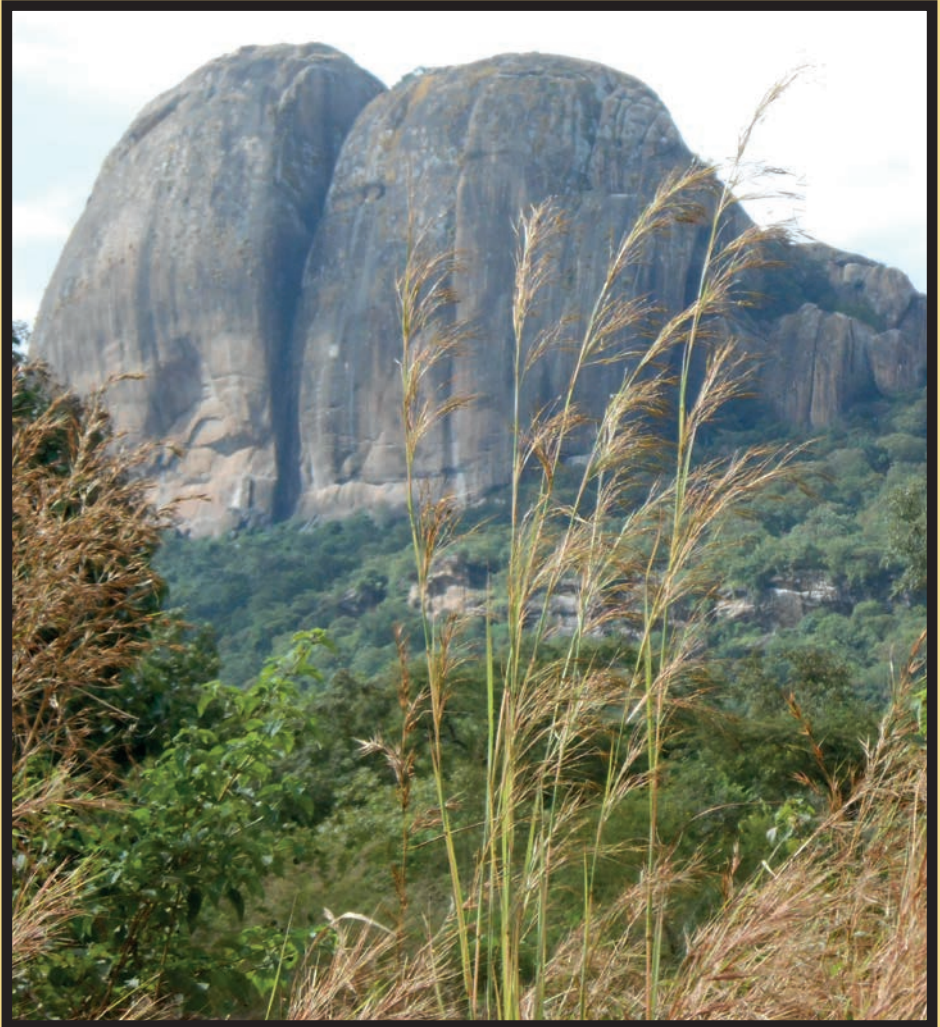


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Front cover photograph: Mountains near Mundri, South Sudan (Credit, Charlotte Martin).

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Tribute to Dr. Amin Mekki Meddani: his Imprint on Today's Rights and Civil Society Movements in Sudan¹

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One of the recurrent slogans that protesters loudly chanted during the massive popular protests that erupted throughout Sudan in mid-December 2018 and that, at time of writing, are still going on, is, “*Hurriya, Salam wa Adalla, wa al Thowra Khair al Shaab!*” Equally strong, is the determination of the demonstrators to make theirs a peaceful campaign for change, even when faced with live ammunition that is meant to quell their inalienable right to free expression, assembly and association, and to choose their own government.

The slogan, which is Arabic for, “Freedom, Peace and Justice, and Revolution is the choice of the People,” echoes the three principles to which Dr. Amin Mekki Medani dedicated his entire life, through his work as an activist and a leading official in the human rights architecture of the United Nations. His legacy as a legal scholar who trained and inspired many younger lawyers and activists in Sudan and the Arab world is widely recognised. From my perspective as an elder of the human rights movement in Sudan, I can distinctly recognise the influence of Dr. Amin in the new generation of human rights movements that today diligently monitors and reports on the daily repression of the rights of Sudanese. Since the start of the protests, these groups have kept track of the nearly 40 peaceful protesters killed by the security forces (by early January 2019), the dozens wounded by live ammunition, and the hundreds of detainees languishing in secret detention centres and routinely subjected to torture and other ill-treatment.

I see today's rights activism as a direct extension of Dr. Amin's contributions to the birthing of Sudan's human rights movement through his leadership in

¹ Dr. Amin Mekki Medani, lawyer and human rights champion, died on 31 August 2018, aged 79 after a long fight against renal failure. In August 15 years earlier, he had survived the bombing of the United Nations office in Baghdad, where he served as Legal Advisor to the UN Secretary General's Special Representative, Sérgio Vieira de Mello, who was killed. Earlier, SSSUK had been pleased to welcome Amin as a speaker on constitutional law in Sudan.

establishing the Sudan Human Rights Organisation and the Bar Association in the mid-1980s. He also led the revival in exile of SHRO in Cairo and London in 1991, shortly after the massive security crackdowns against civil society organisations and political opponents that began after the coup in 1989. During this dark assault on Sudan's once burgeoning civic movement, the regime of President Omer el Bashir turned the joint headquarters of SHRO and the Bar Association into one of the infamous 'ghost houses' in which thousands were detained and systematically tortured. In addition, Amin was the founding director of one of Sudan's leading human rights groups today, 'Sudan Human Rights Monitor'.

Dr. Amin also worked tirelessly to build a non-violent movement to press for democratic transformation, better human rights protection and a just peace, and to further the rule of law in Sudan. His vision of the greater good for his homeland and people succeeded in winning support not only from the broader political opposition but also from the armed opposition movements which were seeking to assert equal rights for their communities and equitable shares in the national wealth, as well as seeking political representation for the historically marginalised regions of Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile.

Dr. Amin played a prominent role in the mobilisation for the 1985 popular Uprising that peacefully rid the country of the autocratic rule of General Jaffar el Nimeiri (1969-1985). Making my own debut into the human rights and civic movements at the time, I followed with interest and admiration Dr. Amin's participation in unmasking the falsity of the so-called Islamic *Sharia* laws that Nimeiri had promulgated in September 1983 under the influence of the National Islamic Front. The NIF was at the time the public face of Sudan's Muslim Brotherhood Movement, just as today's ruling National Congress Party and secretive Islamist Movement assume the role of the power behind President el Bashir's throne.

In the lead-up to the 1985 Uprising, Dr. Amin represented the Sudan Bar Association in the clandestine Trade Union Alliance (that had been initiated by six professional and workers' associations), and also served as the liaison between the union movement and the political opposition, which was led at the time by the National Umma Party. The combined efforts of these two civil movements under the banner of the National Democratic Alliance managed to mobilise the population for the civil disobedience campaign responsible for ousting President Nimeiri and ushering in a peaceful transition to democracy. In recognition of his role, Dr. Amin was one of the representatives of the Trade Union Alliance in the transitional government of 1985-86.

As punishment for his prominent role in the 1985 Uprising and the transition, after the military coup led by El Bashir on 30 June 1989 against the democratically

elected government of Premier El Sadig el Mahdi, Amin was arrested on 7 September 1989 and arbitrarily detained until 1991; subsequently, he was forcibly exiled from Sudan. The loss to Sudan was the gain of the global human rights movement, as he made an illustrious career representing the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights in Gaza, Beirut and Kosovo. During his forced exile, he also helped to build the Arab human rights movement through leadership roles in the Arab Organisation for Human Rights.

Following the relative and in any event, short-lived, opening up of political space after the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, Dr. Amin returned to Sudan and helped to revitalise the civil society movement by founding and leading the Confederation of Civil Society Organisations. By 2014, there was total national political stalemate and a situation of no peace and no war in the country's many conflict areas. Amin assumed his mantle of being the interface between the civil society movement and the political and armed opposition to the regime, and proposed the drafting of the opposition's 'Sudan Call Declaration'. Following minor amendments, key political and armed opposition actors joined the charter in December 2014 and it was signed in Addis Ababa on 8 December. Dr. Amin apposed his signature on behalf of a yet to be created Civil Society Initiative as he felt at the time that he had no mandate to act on behalf of the civil society movement as a whole.

While Dr. Amin's bold and visionary step in signing the Sudan Call charter provided the launching pad for what would become the 'Civil Society Initiative' shortly thereafter, it also earned him the renewed ire of the regime: he was arrested upon his return from Addis Ababa and denied access to medical treatment abroad during months of arbitrary detention.

His deteriorating health prevented Dr. Amin from stewarding the Civil Society Initiative during its critical initial phase. While it faltered shortly after its establishment, an emerging 'Gathering of Civic Forces' was launched on 6 January 2019 by a large constituency of organisations active in civil society, human rights, women's and youth movements. They represent a broad swathe of regional revival associations and they stepped into the fray at this critical pivotal point in the push for democratic transformation in the country.

I see in the Civil Society Initiative and the Gathering signs of the reincarnation of Dr. Amin's aspirations – and those of the civil society movement – to play a decisive role in bringing Sudan back to democracy and to the wise management of its ethnic, cultural and spiritual diversity in order to encourage equal citizenship and opportunities for all Sudanese. In short, the values for which Dr. Amin lived and fought all his life, are today being reinvigorated by the movements for change and equal rights in Sudan; this will remain our lasting consolation for his loss.