

**INTERNATIONAL COUNSEL FOR SOUTH SUDANESE POLITICAL PRISONER  
PETER BIAR AJAK FILES COMPLAINT WITH UN SPECIAL RAPPORTEURS**

Washington, D.C. and Juba – International human rights lawyer Jared Genser announced today that he has undertaken to defend Peter Biar Ajak, a prominent peace and human rights activist who has been detained in South Sudan for more than six months without charge. Genser, who has been described by the New York Times as “The Extractor” for his efforts to free political prisoners worldwide, is best known for his representation of clients such as former Czech Republic President Václav Havel and Nobel Peace Prize Laureates Aung San Suu Kyi, Liu Xiaobo, Desmond Tutu, and Elie Wiesel.

Genser, who serves as pro bono counsel to Ajak, also announced that he has submitted [an urgent action appeal](#) on Ajak’s behalf to the UN Special Rapporteurs on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders and on Freedom of Opinion and Expression. The complaint explains how South Sudan’s persecution of Ajak is directly connected to his human rights activism and violates his right to freedom of expression, and requests an urgent inquiry to the Government regarding his detention.

Genser issued the following statement: “It is a great privilege for me to join Peter Biar Ajak’s defense team as international counsel. As one of South Sudan’s great champions for peace, democracy, and human rights, Peter has contributed enormously to the development of his country, and I am honored to represent him. His team and I are now working to expose the injustice of his detention and advocate for his immediate release.”

*Background on Ajak’s Arrest*

On July 28, 2018, Ajak flew into Juba International Airport, planning to attend a commemoration ceremony in Aweil in honor of Martyr’s Day. Instead, he was arrested at the airport. Though Ajak was briefly shown the warrant, it did not indicate the reason for his arrest, nor was he informed of this verbally. He was transported directly to the headquarters of the National Security Service (NSS) in Juba, the infamous “Blue House,” where he remains imprisoned today.

Ajak’s rights under international law have been repeatedly violated throughout his detention. He was not informed of the reason for his arrest at the time he was arrested (or at any time since). He has been detained for six months without being brought before a judge and without being charged with a crime, and his access to family and counsel have been severely restricted. In addition, he has been denied adequate food and medical care.

Ajak’s arrest and detention are politically motivated and directly connected to his political and social advocacy. He is a prolific commentator on South Sudan’s politics and peace process, and he has written extensively and spoken publicly on these topics. He has also been an outspoken advocate for South Sudan’s youth – he co-founded the South Sudan Young Leaders Forum (SSYLF), which advocates for South Sudanese youth and calls for the country’s older politicians to retire so that the younger generations can take leadership

roles and facilitate lasting peace. The SSYLF is widely respected and has received support from the International Growth Centre (UK) and USAID, among other organizations.

The connection between Ajak's political activism and his arrest is clear from the stated focus of the government's investigation. The NSS terms of reference for the investigation into Ajak explicitly called for scrutiny of his Twitter and Facebook posts, TV appearances, involvement with the SSYLF, civil society meetings in Nairobi and Rwanda, and travel within South Sudan to meet with the country's youth.

While Ajak has not yet been charged, his lawyers have confirmed that he is being investigated for extremely serious crimes, including treason and "insurgency, banditry, sabotage, or terrorism." If charged and convicted, he could be put to death.

The UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression and the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders are independent experts appointed by the UN Human Rights Council to report and advise on human rights issues relating to their respective mandates. They are empowered to issue and convey urgent submissions on individual cases of alleged human rights violations, undertake visits to relevant countries, and issue expert opinions.

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