Sudan court sentences three men to hand amputation for stealing

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Three Sudanese men have been sentenced to hand amputation for stealing, the first time in almost a decade that such a punishment has been handed down in the country’s courts.

The three men in their 20s were convicted of stealing gas cylinders in Omdurman, Sudan’s most populous city, which sits across the Nile River from the capital, Khartoum.

The verdict was handed down two weeks ago but has just come to light, in a case that will further worry many who fear Sudan is sliding back into state extremism, 15 months after the [military coup](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/24/sudan-security-forces-clash-with-protesters-against-military-coup) which destabilised the country and halted its transition to democracy.

The men were also sentenced to three years in prison for mischief and fined 2,000,000 Sudanese pounds (£3,000) as compensation for the theft.

The men have been taken to Koper prison in north Khartoum, where the sentence is to be carried out at an unspecified date. The prison currently holds former president Omar al-Bashir, who was ousted in 2019 after a public uprising, and his aides.

Samir Makeen, the men’s lawyer, said: “Unfortunately, despite the political change in the country, nothing has changed in terms of the rights of the people, it was a change on the surface.”

In a statement, the African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies, a rights organisation operating from Uganda, accused the Sudanese authorities of not giving the three men a fair trial. It said the trial had taken place “without legal representation, [with the] failure of the court to explain to the accused the gravity and penalty of the offences and the reliance of court on the confessions as the only evidence to convict the accused”.

In August 2021, Sudan signed the UN convention to stop torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment, which should have led to many laws in the criminal code being redrafted to align with international human rights laws, “but that never happened because there’s no real will to do that by the people who hold the power. That’s why we keep seeing such cases every now and then”, Makeen said.

Sudan has been ruled by Islamic laws since September 1983. The laws were frozen for three years under the democratically elected government of Sadiq al-Mahdi, and reintroduced by Bashir when he came to power in an Islamist-backed coup in 1989.

After Bashir was ousted in 2019, some progressive laws were introduced, such as the criminalisation of female genital mutilation and the abolition of flogging. However, the October 2021 military coup ended a two-year transition to democracy, and several unpopular and regressive public order laws have been reintroduced.