



State of New Mexico

Office of the Governor

Bill Richardson
Governor

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New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson to Meet with President of Sudan to Urge Release on Humanitarian Grounds of New Mexican and Two Colleagues Arrested for Spying

Columbus, NM resident is a journalist on freelance assignment for National Geographic

SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO – Governor Bill Richardson on Thursday will travel to Khartoum, Sudan to meet with Sudanese President Lt. General Umar Hassan Ahmad Al-Bashir and urge him to release journalist Paul Salopek and two colleagues on humanitarian grounds. Salopek was detained August 6 along with two Chadian citizens, Suleiman Abakar Moussa, Salopek’s interpreter, and his driver, Abdulraham Anu. All three have been charged with espionage, passing information illegally, and writing “false news”. Salopek, a two-time winner of the Pulitzer Prize, is on leave from his job as foreign correspondent for the Chicago Tribune on a freelance assignment for National Geographic magazine. When he is not traveling on assignment, Salopek lives in Columbus, New Mexico, with his wife, Linda Lynch.

“Paul Salopek is clearly not a spy. He’s my constituent, and he is a talented and respected journalist who was attempting to do his job telling the story of the people, culture and history of the sub-Saharan region known as the Sahel,” said Governor Richardson. “I will encourage President al-Bashir to recognize the essential role of journalists and a free press and release Paul and his colleagues on humanitarian grounds.”

It was Salopek’s wife Linda and Chicago Tribune Editor-in-Chief Ann Marie Lipinski who first appealed to Governor Richardson for help. Following that request, the Governor met last week with Sudan’s Ambassador to the United States, Khadir Haroun Ahmed, in Washington, DC, to discuss Salopek’s detainment. This week the Sudanese government formally invited Governor Richardson to travel to Sudan and meet with President Al-Bashir. Linda will accompany the Governor on the trip to Khartoum.

The invitation to Sudan came about in large part because of the Governor’s long-term relationship with President Al-Bashir and Ambassador Ahmed, which dates back to 1996. In December of that year then-Congressman Richardson successfully negotiated the release of another New Mexican, Albuquerque pilot John Early, and two Red Cross workers. The three had been held hostage for 38 days by Sudanese rebels. In that situation President Al-Bashir and Ambassador Haroun supported Congressman Richardson’s efforts.

During his career as a Congressman, Ambassador to the United Nations, and Secretary of Energy, Bill Richardson has also helped to free Americans held prisoner in Iraq, Cuba and North Korea.

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