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SUDAN | Authorities Destroy Church Building, Confiscate Land

Sudanese authorities demolished and confiscated a Sudanese Church of Christ building in the Ombada area of Omdurman on Feb. 17, according to reports by Morning Star News.

Omdurman is Sudan's largest city. Morning Star News reports contrary to general practice, the church building, which housed a congregation of 300, was demolished without prior notice to church authorities. When church leaders asked the authorities to justify the demolition, they were told it was in a 'Muslim area' and a church was not wanted there. Officers said orders for the demolition came from above, indicating they came from the Ombada locality or Omdurman city council.

Since December 2012, CSW has noted an increase in the detention, harassment, monitoring and deportation of Christians. In April 2013, the Sudanese Minister for Guidance and Endowments announced no new church licenses would be issued. His justification was the July 2011 secession of South Sudan led to lack of worshipers. He guaranteed freedom of worship in the country. The Ministry of Guidance and Social Endowments oversees religious affairs in Sudan.

Following South Sudan's secession, President Bashir announced Sudan's new constitution would be founded on Shari'a law, significantly altering its current status under the interim constitution as one of the sources of law. The subsequent and seemingly systematic targeting of Christians and churches lends credence to widespread misgivings that the government is moving from a multi-ethnic and multi-religious national identity to a system where the rights of religious and ethnic minorities may not be respected.

Mervyn Thomas, Chief Executive of Christian Solidarity Worldwide, said, "The irregular demolition and confiscation of church property is in violation of Sudan's international obligations under article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which the nation is signatory. We urge the Sudanese authorities to return the land to the Sudanese Church of Christ and to resume the issuing of church licenses. In addition, CSW continues to call for the drafting of a new constitution in which the rights of Sudan's minority communities are respected, including the right to freedom of religion or belief. Only the creation of a multi-religious and multi-ethnic state in which the rights of all citizens are respected can guarantee the peace and prosperity the country so desperately needs after decades of war and upheaval."