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## **SUDAN | Authorities Demolish Church, Arrest 37 Christians**

Sudanese authorities demolished part of the main church building belonging to Khartoum Bahri Evangelical Church on Dec. 2 and arrested 37 people who were praying inside.

Police and security officers arrived at 6 a.m. in nine police vans and began demolishing part of the church building before arresting the people who were in the church.

The group of 15 women and 22 men were detained before being charged under sections 69, 77 and 99 of the criminal code with “breach of the peace, public nuisance and obstruction of a public servant during the course of his duty.”

Eleven of the detainees were transferred to Khartoum Bahri Criminal Court, which acquitted two of the group and found the rest guilty of the charges, imposing a fine of 250 Sudanese Pounds (SDP) (\$43). Eleven others were sent to Omar El Mukhtar court in Kober, Khartoum North. They were found guilty of the charges and received the same fine. The final 15 were tried at the El Jireif West Criminal court and were all acquitted.

The raid was one of a series of actions taken against the Bahri Evangelical Church in recent weeks. On Nov. 17, security personnel arrived at the church and demolished a wall of the main building and neighboring houses. Security personnel presented the church leaders with a court order demanding the property be given to a Muslim businessman who was the alleged owner. On Nov. 18, the church leaders filed a formal challenge over the legal ownership and are awaiting a court decision. On the same day, security personnel arrived with a second court order requiring all property be removed from one of the houses and padlocks belonging to the Muslim businessman fitted on all doors. Church members formed a human shield preventing the security personnel from interfering with the property.

Finally, on Nov. 25, eight people were arrested for refusing to comply with the court orders to hand over the church to the Muslim businessman. The group, including five church leaders named as the Rev. Daud Fadul, Elder Fathi Hakim, Elder Nouh Manzoul, Deacon Iman Hamid and Tilal Mafishi.

Local sources report police officers are still surrounding the church, indicating their intention to take further action. The raid on Khartoum Bahri Evangelical Church is the third incident of the government destroying church buildings during 2014, and indicates an escalation of intimidation against Christians. In July, the Sudanese government reiterated its policy of not allowing new church buildings to be built, two weeks after another church was demolished with only 24 hours notice given to the church leaders. The attacks on churches have extended to the Nuba

Mountains where the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) have been at war with the Sudan People's Liberation Movement – North since 2011. In October 2014, the SAF dropped four bombs on the Episcopal Church of Sudan (ECS) compound in Al Atmor, South Kordofan, destroying the church, a house and adjoining properties.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said “We are deeply concerned by the continuing action of the Sudanese authorities against the Khartoum Bahri Evangelical Church. The destruction of a religious building is a violation of congregant's rights to freedom of religion or belief as guaranteed in article 6 of the Sudanese constitution. Furthermore the arrest of 37 congregants whilst they were praying is not only a violation of their rights to freedom of religion or belief, but also their rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly which are all guaranteed under Sudan's constitution. We call on the Sudanese authorities to use utmost restraint and allow for the legal challenge of the ownership of the Church to be concluded in the courts whilst ensuring that the rights of Khartoum Bahri Evangelical church are no longer interfered with. CSW calls on the international community, in particular the African Union to hold Sudan to its international obligations as prescribed in article 18 of the ICCPR as well as articles 8, 10 and 11 of the African [Bangui] Charter of People and Human Rights which Sudan is a signatory.”