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SUDAN | Lawyers Appeal Eviction Notice

Lawyers representing the Anglican Church in Sudan and 12 tenants in one of the church's properties in Omdurman, Khartoum State, lodged a constitutional appeal on Dec. 8 after the Ministry of Justice issued a one-week eviction notice following a dispute over ownership of the property.

The 12 tenants were issued with an eviction notice by the Ministry of Justice on Dec. 4 and were given seven days to vacate the building. The Ministry of Justice issued the notice under the Evacuation of Public Buildings Act 1969 (EPB). According to article 4 of the EPB, the decision of the Ministry of Justice is protected from appeal, thereby preventing the tenants or the Anglican Church from challenging the validity of the decision in court.

On Dec. 8, lawyers lodged an appeal with the constitutional court to request a stay in the eviction proceedings and to challenge the eviction notice on the grounds that as religious institutions, church buildings are not public buildings and therefore cannot be administrated under the EPB. The property was initially owned by the American Missionary Society and transferred to the Anglican Church before 1956. It has been under the church's control ever since.

The eviction notice to residents of the Anglican Church building in Omdurman is one of a growing number actions being taken by Sudanese authorities to confiscate or demolish church buildings and church owned properties. Last week, Sudanese authorities demolished part of a Bhari Evangelical Church in North Khartoum and arrested 37 Christians.

On Dec. 6, the governor of Khartoum State, Abdel-Rahman al-Khidri, reportedly formed a reconciliation committee which included the Secretary General of the Council of Sudanese Churches, Corey Ramila, Bishop Ezechel Kando Arch of the Episcopal Church of Sudan and Bishop Amba Sraba Amon of Omdurman, Atbara and northern Sudan, to resolve the dispute that led to the alleged sale of the church property to the investor. The church is still awaiting their legal appeal against the investor's claims to ownership.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "We are deeply concerned that the Ministry of Justice has issued an eviction notice for a building that has historically belonged to the Anglican Church, an action that indicates the steady erosion of rights of Sudan's minority religious community. Furthermore, the fact that the eviction notice is designed to prevent the church and its tenants from challenging the decision in court is a violation of their rights to freedom of religion or belief but also their right to litigation, to be treated equally before the law and a to have a fair hearing as guaranteed in article 6, 35, 34 and 31 respectively of Sudan's Constitution. CSW calls on the international community, and in particular the African

Union, to hold Sudan to the international norms and agreements that it has signed and ratified, including the African [Bangui] Charter of People and Human Rights.”