



# SUDAN

## RISING RESTRICTIONS ON FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF

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### INTRODUCTION

In the lead up to South Sudan's independence, President Omar al Bashir began calling repeatedly for a 100% Islamic Sudan. On 19 December 2010, he warned, "If South Sudan secedes, we will change the constitution and at that time there will be no time to speak of diversity of culture and ethnicity. Shari'a and Islam will be the main source for the constitution, Islam the official religion and Arabic the official language."<sup>1</sup> Following southern independence on 12 October 2011, al Bashir announced in a speech to students in Khartoum that the Republic of Sudan would soon adopt an entirely Islamic constitution, enshrining Shari'a as the main source of Sudanese legislation: "Ninety eight percent of the people are Muslims and the new constitution will reflect this. The official religion will be Islam and Islamic law the main source."<sup>2</sup>

The October announcement came in the wake of mounting pressure on churches in the area following the creation of South Sudan on 9 July 2011, including an increase in threats to churches and church leaders in the north and numerous reports indicating that Christians, especially Christian leaders, were being targeted by the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) in fighting that erupted between government forces and the opposition Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) in South Kordofan in June 2011. Worryingly, with the secession of South Sudan a more restrictive and singular vision of Sudan has gained prominence in government circles, overshadowing the vision of a multicultural, multilingual and multi-religious Sudan articulated in the soon to be changed constitution.

1 *Christian Science Monitor*, 'Bashir: Sharia law will be strengthened if South Sudan votes to secede', 23 December 2010 [http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Africa/Africa-Monitor/2010/1223/Bashir-Sharia-law-will-be-strengthened-if-South-Sudan-votes-to-secede/\(page\)/2](http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Africa/Africa-Monitor/2010/1223/Bashir-Sharia-law-will-be-strengthened-if-South-Sudan-votes-to-secede/(page)/2)

2 Reuters, 'Bashir says Sudan will adopt Islamic constitution', 13 October 2011 <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/10/13/ozatp-sudan-constitution-idAFJQE79C00F20111013>

Since December 2012, CSW has noted an increase in arrests, detentions and deportations of Christians and of those suspected of having links to them, particularly in Khartoum and Omdurman, Sudan's largest cities. There has also been a systematic targeting of members of African ethnic groups, particularly the Nuba, giving credence to the notion that an agenda of Islamisation and Arabisation prevails in Sudan today.

### CAMPAIGN OF REPRESSION

The spike in repression appears to have coincided with a particular event. On Monday 10 December, two priests from the Coptic Orthodox Church were arrested in Khartoum after it was alleged a woman had converted from Islam to Christianity and had fled the country in fear for her life. As one of the few officially recognised churches, members of the Coptic Orthodox Church have previously been allowed to operate with little pressure from the Sudanese authorities. However, the female convert reportedly belonged to a high ranking Arab family, and in addition to the arrests, a group calling itself al Qaeda in the Nilien States sent a statement to Sudanese journalists threatening violence against the Coptic community unless the "kidnapped" woman was returned.<sup>3</sup> On 22 December Al Intibaha, an Arabic daily that is anti-Christian, reported that she had been returned to Khartoum after being intercepted at Addis Ababa's Bole International Airport by staff from the Sudanese Embassy

3 *Al Arabiya*, 'Two Sudan Coptic priests arrested after 'baptism'', 20 December 2012 <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/12/20/256122.html>



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in Ethiopia. While the priests have since been released, the convert's fate is currently unknown.<sup>4</sup>

On the same day (10 December 2012) Pastor Jang Bomjin and his wife Sune Kang, a Korean couple, were deported for alleged Christian activities. The couple owned a farm that was confiscated by Sudanese Intelligence services, after which they were forced to sell their animals at throw away prices. Local sources state that they were not compensated for the land before being deported.

On 17 December, security forces damaged an Africa Inland Church building in El-Haj Yousif, northern Khartoum, leaving the congregation with nowhere to worship in the run up to the Christmas season.

On 19 December, security forces arrested around four members of Sudmedia, a non-profit organisation that produces Christian songs and films, whose managing director, Nehemiah Lopai, is from South Sudan. While staff members were released the following day, it remains unclear whether or not Mr Lopai was subsequently deported.

Also on 19 December, the government refused a longstanding tradition that allowed the Lutheran Church of Sudan to record a Christmas message on national television.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, Christmas was not officially observed as a public holiday in 2012, and church leaders who had applied to the government for permission to hold a Yuletide 'March for Jesus' had their licence revoked a day after it was granted.

## CONTINUED REPRESSION IN 2013

The campaign of repression continued into 2013, with foreign Christians being arrested and deported at short notice, and those from Sudan facing arrest, detention and questioning by the security services as well as the confiscation of property such as mobile phones, identity cards and laptops. In addition to the arrests and deportations, local reports cite a media campaign warning against "Christianisation".

### JANUARY

On 3 January, security agents arrived at the state-run Aslan Education Centre for English, where staff members were interrogated about evangelising Muslims. Three of the staff were subsequently arrested, and at least two were beaten and warned not to reveal the information to western media or churches. Earlier, the school's head had been arrested and deported to the United States on suspicion of participating in Christian activities. Equipment belonging to the school was confiscated by the security services, including laptops and computers. Aslan Associates and Nile Valley Academy - a primary school run by Aslan Education Centre - will be closing at the end of the academic year in April 2013, after state

authorities declared it was not teaching the Islamic religion, and neither were male and female students being separated. The decision was taken by the National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) as well as the Ministry of Education.<sup>6</sup>

On 7 January, Jasmin Neuman, a German national who worked in Omdurman caring for orphans who have fled the war in Darfur, was deported. In January 2013, Antony and Cecilia Janu were arrested, and later released on the condition they returned to their native South Sudan within 24 hours. Mrs Janu was connected to Ms Neuman. On 7 January, Pastor Ismail Bashir was arrested. He was involved in a Christian radio station owned by Sunmedia, which government suspected was involved with Korean Pastor Jang Bomjin and his wife Sune Kang, who had been deported in December 2012.

Ronald Ssemuwemba, a Ugandan Christian who had been living on the farm owned by Pastor Bomjin was detained by security services. He was beaten, had his passport and laptop confiscated and was asked to leave Sudan. Mr Ssemuwemba went into hiding before being found and deported on 5 January.

On 24 January, teachers on duty in the Muhabba Centres for Street Children (MCC) were arrested in Sudan's two main cities. Two teachers and the headmistress at the MCC in Omdurman were detained, and in Khartoum two teachers and the headmistress were also arrested. All are Christians from the Nuba Mountains. The teachers were released on condition that they reported to the NISS daily. On 30 January, the general manager of the MCC, Mrs Istir Badur Kuku, was asked to report to the NISS where she was interrogated about the organisation's relationship with the Evangelical Church, its internal and external donors, administration, and the contracts of employees.

### FEBRUARY

On 18 February, the Presbyterian Cultural Centre of an evangelical church in Khartoum was raided by the NISS. Three people were arrested at the premises and items including books and media equipment were confiscated. The three arrested were all from South Sudan; one was released days after the initial arrest.

On 22 February, CSW received information indicating that at least 55 Christians had been detained without charge during that month by the Sudanese government.<sup>7</sup> Those arrested were mainly from the evangelical church and included church leaders. They have no political affiliations but were falsely accused of receiving money from foreign countries.

Amongst those detained is 64-year-old Salwa Fahmi Suleiman Gireis, an accountant for an evangelical Christian organisation, who suffers from high blood pressure. On 16

4 *Morning Star News*, 'Sudan Arrests Coptic Priests for Baptizing Convert', 28 December 2012 <http://morningstarnews.org/2012/12/sudan-arrests-coptic-priests-for-baptizing-convert/>

5 *ibid.*

6 *AllAfrica*, 'Sudan Shuts Down English-Language Teaching Center in Khartoum', 4 March 2013 <http://allafrica.com/stories/201303050879.html> Confirms information given in previous Morning Star report.

7 Christian Solidarity Worldwide, 'Sudanese government detains over fifty Christians', 20 February 2013 <http://dynamic.csw.org.uk/article.asp?t=press&id=1497>



February, the NISS arrested her at her home, confiscating her passport, laptops, a desktop computer, tablets and a router. She remains detained without charge and has been denied access to a lawyer. Salwa Fahmi is the daughter of a former director of the Bible Society and comes from a family that is well respected both by Christians and Muslims. Her case underlines the expansion of the scope of repression, which previously focused exclusively on Christians of African descent from southern tribes.

On 24 February, NISS officers raided the offices of Gideon Theological College (GTC) located in Banat, Omdurman (West El Milein Mosque) and arrested Steven Yagoub, Mamadan Elia, and Abdalla Saeed Ballu. NISS officers also raided the offices of the Fellowship of Christian University Students (FCUS) and arrested Yousif Ali Saeed and Barnaba Temthaose. All five men are Christians from the Nuba Mountains, and were arrested for allegedly promoting Christianity amongst university students and receiving illegal funds from abroad. By 28 February, four of the men had been released on the condition they reported to the NISS on a daily basis. The remaining detainee, Baraba Temthaose, who is a priest, was released on 17 March, also with the condition of reporting daily to the NISS.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The rising restrictions against Christians in Sudan are in violation of Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) to which Sudan is a signatory. Although freedom of religion or belief is a fundamental right that does not allow for state derogation, there are certain circumstances in which it can legitimately be restricted; specifically when prescribed by the law and necessary to protect public safety, order, health or morals. The restrictions enacted by the Government of Sudan do not conform to these standards and constitute a systematic violation of the rights of religious minorities by the state in direct contravention of Sudan's international obligations.

CSW therefore calls on the government of Sudan:

- To uphold its international undertakings by protecting and promoting the right to freedom of religion or belief in its entirety. This should include the freedom of an individual or community, in public or private, to manifest religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship, and observance, and the right to change religion or to hold no religion or belief;
- To seek popular consensus on the constitutional drafting process in order to ensure that the new constitution is an accurate reflection of popular consensus and accommodates and protects every community within the nation, including religious and racial minorities;
- Mindful of Sudan's obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, which it has signed and ratified, to adhere to international stipulations and end the arbitrary detention and harassment of citizens based on their religion or ethnicity, and release Salma Fahmi and others who are wrongfully detained.

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