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## **SUDAN | Church Leader Killed During Protest**

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) has learned that an elder of the Sudan Evangelical Presbyterian Church (SEPC) was killed April 3 during a peaceful protest at the Evangelical School in Omdurman against the unauthorized sale of church land.

Younan Abdulla, a 28 year-old SEPC elder, was fatally stabbed during the peaceful sit-in organized by school teachers and church members, which took place during the school holiday.

The school is part of the Khartoum Bahri Evangelical Church's property and is the subject of a long-running dispute between the church's land and buildings committee and an illegally-convened rival church committee backed by the government. The protest was aimed at preventing the sale of the land on which the school is located by the illegally-convened church committee.

An altercation occurred when approximately 20 members of the illegally-convened committee reportedly arrived at the school armed with knives, machetes, and firearms. Abdulla and another man were stabbed and transferred to a nearby hospital, where Abdulla died from his injuries several hours later. His funeral was held April 4. He is survived by his wife and two children.

The police arrested Shamon Hamoud, the accountant of the illegally-convened church committee, who reportedly stabbed Abdallah. Some church members are calling for all 20 members of the illegal committee who were present during the attack to be arrested, claiming they acted together to commit violence.

The SEPC has faced a long battle to save its properties from sale to Muslim investors amid government interference in church affairs. In April 2016, the Ministry of Guidance and Religious Endowments, which oversees religious affairs in Sudan, authorized the illegally-convened committee to act for the denomination, after which it approved the sale of the land on which the Evangelical School is located to some Muslim businessmen.

On March 16, three teachers at the Evangelical School were arrested as they protested the sale of the property. On March 27, 10 members of staff were detained and others prevented from leaving the property. In July, several church members were arrested at the school as they peacefully protested against the sale of that property, which also belongs to the SEPC.

Churches in Sudan are coming under intense pressure from the government with regard to their buildings. Last week, the Khartoum Bahri Administrative Court rejected a case brought by 25 churches challenging a government order to demolish their places of worship. The 25 churches belong to several denominations, including the Catholic, Coptic Orthodox, Sudan Church of Christ, Jehovah Witness and Pentecostal churches.

Sources close to CSW report that the SEPC is being targeted because it is one of the largest denominations in the country and the most high profile example of the government's aim to diminish or remove the Christian presence from Sudan.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "We extend our heartfelt condolences to the family of Elder Younan Abdulla and to the Evangelical Church in Omdurman. We are calling for a thorough and speedy investigation into the circumstances surrounding his death and for all those responsible to be held to account. We urge the Ministry of Guidance and Religious Endowments to authorize the legitimate SEPC committee to administrate on behalf of the denomination. We also call for an end to the policy of targeting places of worship for demolition and erasing the Christian presence from the country. This violates Sudan's obligations under its constitution and international treaties to which it is party. We urge the African Union, the European Union, UK and U.S. governments to hold the Sudanese government to account in order to ensure justice for Sudan's Christian community in general and for the family of Elder Abdulla in particular."