

## **Table of Contents**

- ***Sudanese authorities demolish two church buildings***
  - ***South Sudanese Christians trapped in hostile north***
  - ***Southern Sudanese Christians fear forced repatriation***
  - ***Sudan's aerial bombing aims at churches in Nuba Mountains***
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## **Sudanese authorities demolish two church buildings**

### ***Hostility toward southern Sudanese grows as officials also confiscate three Catholic schools***

Compass Direct News (28.06.2012) – Authorities in Khartoum demolished two church buildings last week, days after confiscating three Catholic schools, sources told Compass.

Officials from the Ministry of Planning and Housing of the local government authority on June 18 sent bulldozers that destroyed a church building belonging to the St. John Episcopal Church of Sudan, in the Haj Yousif area, an area source reported by email. A Catholic church building in the area was also demolished the same day.

“The government wants to remove all churches from Khartoum,” the source said. “Tell churches, all churches, to stand on prayer for the church in Sudan.”

Clergymen said persecution was intensifying following the secession of South Sudan in July 2011, with officials targeting churches they claim to be associated with now unwelcome, largely Christian South Sudanese in the Islamic-ruled country.

The St. John church was established in 1987, but when government officials later allocated housing plots in the area, they denied church requests for their land. Christian support organization Open Doors reported that the churches were targeted on the pretext that southern Sudanese had attended services, and that since they had presumably left, the buildings were no longer necessary.

In a press statement, Open Doors noted that the church does not belong to the South Sudanese, and that the bishop is (north) Sudanese.

“It seems also that the policy of an Islamic state is being implemented, where the president said, if South Sudanese vote for secession, there will be but one religion [Islam], one language [Arabic] and one culture [Arab],” said the Rt. Rev. Ezekiel Kondo, bishop of Khartoum, according to Open Doors.

The bishop demanded the local authority of Shereq El Nail compensate the church for the destruction and allot land for the congregation.

Church leaders had sent letters to the Ministry of Guidance and Religious Endowment requesting that the building be spared and another plot of land be granted to the parish, but authorities refused and instead sent the bulldozers, sources told Compass.

Christian sources also reported that another church building belonging to the Full Gospel Church was destroyed in the same area two months ago, on the claim that it belonged to South Sudanese.

### ***Schools Confiscated***

On June 14, the Jebel Aulia Locality Committee in south Khartoum confiscated three schools belonging to the Catholic Church, two in the Mayo area and one in nearby Omdurman, sources said.

The Jebel Aulia commissioner was acting on a letter issued by the Khartoum state minister of education calling for cancellation of official approval of the schools based on the claim that they were southern Sudanese. Both Mayo schools, however, were registered with the Ministry of Education as belonging to Khartoum dioceses.

Police officer Hassan Badawi Ahamed, executive director of the office of Jebel Aulia Locality, reportedly sent a letter dated May 30 to the Office of Secondary Education Directorate asking for termination of the two schools because they were supposedly southern Sudanese. Reports said the official letters mistakenly identified one of the schools as Comboni School of Mayo, whereas its name is Markaz El Talim El Namoziky.

School administrators raised complaints before the Jebel Aulia Locality Committee, protesting that the name of the school was not included in the government letter. The committee then went back to the Jebel Aulia Locality office and produced a new letter with the correct name of the school.

On June 13, the committee had also gone to a building belonging to the Catholic Church in Mayo to take it by force, claiming it was a school. Christians have gathered for prayer in the building since June 14 to prevent it from being confiscated, sources said.

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## **South Sudanese Christians trapped in hostile north**

### ***Islamic extremists threaten to seize Bible school in Khartoum.***

Compass Direct News (19.04.2012) – As tensions between Sudan and South Sudan turn into military combat on the border, predominantly Christian citizens of southern origin trapped in Sudan fear the Islamic government and Muslims in general will turn on them, sources told Compass.

Officially foreigners though many of the half million southern Sudanese in Sudan have never lived anywhere else, the ethnic southerners have been granted another 30 days as of April 8 to register or leave the country. But the government has forbidden hundreds of ethnic southerners from boarding planes for Juba, saying they require documents from the southern capital in order to leave.

“They closed all ways in front of us in order to prevent us from travel to our country,” said one church leader.

South Sudanese Christians were surprised to learn that all flights and land routes to South Sudan were closed to them on April 9, with no information forthcoming on when they would be allowed to leave, sources said. The Sudanese government last week declared it was in a state of war with South Sudan, adding to the fears of the trapped southern Sudanese.

Church leaders who wish to remain in the north said they have not been provided enough information on how to register for legal status. And many South Sudanese fear that registering will only help officials to monitor their movements.

Media and mosques, church leaders said, are increasingly sending derogatory messages about southern Sudanese to the general public. While the government at once orders and prohibits them from leaving, Islamic groups insist that ethnic southerners be deported.

"South Sudanese citizens must be deported immediately," supporters of the Al Intibaha newspaper, which has published stories hostile to southerners, shouted at a recent press conference in Khartoum.

Sources said many Sudanese of ethnic southern origin complain of hearing comments such as, "Why are you still here? Have you not gone back yet to your country?"

In addition, on April 9 hundreds of South Sudanese displaced by war were heading to Khartoum by bus from Renk when they were stopped in Kosti and forced to turn back, according to local media reports.

### ***Bible School Threatened***

The precarious legal status of the southern Sudanese has fostered more concrete hostilities. In Khartoum, an Islamic mob with a bulldozer threatened to demolish a Bible school on April 9, saying it was located on land that should be returned to "the land of Islam" because southern Sudanese were no longer legal citizens.

Claiming that Gerief West Bible School was located "in the land of Islam of our grandfathers," some 100 angry Muslim extremists brandishing clubs had first threatened to take over the school on March 30, a school employee said. The mob threatened to harm students and staff members, he said.

"On April 9 at 8 a.m. the mob came again, but this time with one big bulldozer in a clear attempt to raze the school building, but students and school administration protested and called the police to protect them," he said.

Police arrived and forced the assailants to withdraw from the school compound, he said, but the Islamists went away enraged and again threatened to take the land by force. The school, which sits on nine hectares of land, belongs to the Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church and trains church leaders from various denominations.

The source said that Khartoum officials seek to take church lands on the pretext that they belong to southern Sudanese who have lost their citizenship. Southern Sudanese voted to secede from Sudan on July 9, 2011. Since then, Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir has pledged to base the new Sudan more deeply on sharia (Islamic law).

A student at the school said there was a prayer meeting going on when the attackers arrived with the bulldozer.

"It was an answer to the prayers the worshipers were offering that made the Muslims go away without injuring a brother or a sister," the student said. "They wanted to raze the building; the situation is difficult, and you cannot imagine how bad it is."

Encouraged by weekly anti-Christian messages that imams preach at Friday mosque services, many Muslims take for granted that harassment of Christians and Christian institutions is tolerated, sources said.

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## **Southern Sudanese Christians fear forced repatriation**

### ***Khartoum gives them until Sunday to apply for citizenship or be deported***

Compass Direct News (06.04.2012) – Christians from South Sudan who have until Easter Sunday (April 8) to try to become citizens of Sudan or be deported fear authorities will use the occasion to rid the country of Christianity, church leaders said.

More than 500,000 citizens of southern ethnic origin who have been living in Sudan for decades – some of them born there – will be considered foreigners after Sunday. Human rights organizations have called on Khartoum to grant them more time to either leave or apply for citizenship.

Christian leaders expressed concern that local media such as the daily Al Intibaha newspaper have been stoking hatred against predominantly Christian southern Sudanese, describing them as “cancer cells in the body of Sudan, the land of the Arab and Islam,” and calling on the government to deport them.

“The local media are becoming very hostile toward us who are still in the north,” one Christian told Compass by phone on condition of anonymity.

Gov. Ahmad Abbass of Sennar state in central Sudan vowed to deport southern Sudanese from his state “without regret,” according to Al-Sahafa, an Arabic daily. Banners have appeared in Khartoum streets calling on the government and Muslims in general to harass and expel southern Sudanese, some of whom are also Muslims.

“Why are they still here? The government should expel them from the country,” one banner asserts.

South Sudan seceded from Sudan in a referendum last July 9. The government of Sudan has begun issuing national numbers to designate citizens of Sudan, denying the designation to Sudanese of southern origin. Without a national number, southern Sudanese have no citizenship rights to work or education.

Churches in Sudan have already suffered losses in numbers as many members prepare for forced repatriation, Christian leaders said.

“We are monitoring the situation and praying to God to protect us,” said a church leader who spoke on condition of anonymity.

As Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir has pledged to base the new Sudan more deeply on sharia (Islamic law), ethnic southerners are faced with a difficult choice, Elizabeth Kendal writes in the Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin.

“The message essentially is this: Submit to sharia or get out,” she writes. “Churches may well be targeted immediately and aggressively, starting 9 April. All across the Sudan, churches have been emptying as ethnic southerners – including those born and raised in the north – flee south. This could eventually become a pretext for closing them.”

At the same time, police have been mistreating some of the more than 113,000 southern Sudanese who are living in open spaces in Khartoum after having fled conflict in South Sudan. Officers have removed their make-shift housing, including temporary latrines, according to Jovana Luka, deputy chairperson of the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission in South Sudan, who recently returned from Khartoum.

Southern Sudanese may not be welcome in South Sudan, either, as increased competition for scarce resources leads to greater tribal conflict, and their fate depends on

the mercy of both the Sudan and South Sudan governments, the Rev. Karlo Aika of Khartoum's St. Peter and Paul Catholic Church told 98.6 FM radio station on Sunday (April 1).

He said he was concerned about security for southern Sudanese whether they stay or return to South Sudan.

"We fear too because we do not know why these things are happening," he said.

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## **Sudan's aerial bombing aims at churches in Nuba Mountains**

### ***Mosques also razed as civilians continue to be targeted in Khartoum's 'ethnic cleansing'***

Compass Direct News (30.03.2012) – After Khartoum denied that it had bombed civilians earlier this month, Sudanese aerial strikes last week were aimed at church buildings and schools in Kauda, South Kordofan state, a humanitarian aid worker said.

Antonov airplanes dropped bombs on Thursday and Friday (March 22 and 23), destroying some houses and cattle near the church buildings and schools but causing no casualties, he said.

Humanitarian agencies consider the Islamic government's targeting of civilians in the Nuba Mountains, which has a large Christian population, an "ethnic cleansing" against non-Arab peoples in the multi-ethnic state, with the added incentive of ridding the area of Christians, he said.

Churches in the Nuba Mountains are holding worship services very early in the morning and late in the evening in order to avoid aerial bombardments that target their churches, he said. Most of the bombings take place during daytime, when visibility is better for pilots of the Russian-made Antonov planes.

Khartoum is actively recruiting more security personnel and sending them to South Kordofan to help kill or arrest Nuba civilians, including Christians, sources said. Islamic government officials consider the various Nuba ethnicities as enemies or "infidels" in their campaign to clear the region of non-Arab races and Christianity.

"These people are doing everything possible to make sure they get rid of Christianity from the Nuba Mountains – churches and church schools are the targets of both the Sudanese Armed Forces and its militias," the aid worker said, although mosques have also been targeted.

The Sudanese government has razed 10 church buildings and 17 mosques since fighting broke out last June, according to a report released on March 16 by the Arry Organization for Human Rights and Development. The South Kordofan-based organization reported that the Sudanese Armed Forces and allied militias have destroyed 73 villages and 48 schools.

Civilians in South Kordofan have fled by the thousands since last June. The U.N. Commissioner for Refugees estimates there are 185,000 refugees from South Kordofan and Blue Nile states in South Sudan and Ethiopia. The United Nations estimates the conflict has made refugees of a total of 400,000 people, with 120,000 of them internally displaced within Sudan.

***Some 300,000 of those who have fled are in danger of starving.***

The killing of a Nuba political activist in Khartoum this month has elevated fears of the estimated 120,000 Internally Displaced People from the Nuba Mountains, most of whom are Christians. In early March, Public Order Police shot dead Awdeia Ajabana at her home in the Aldeam area south of Khartoum; she was reportedly arguing with officers who saw her brother drinking alcohol on her family's front doorsteps and who assaulted him.

A candidate for the National Labour Party in 2010 elections originally from the Nuba Mountains, the 39-year-old Ajabana was likely targeted for her political activity but also for her race as a Nubian woman. Other members of her family also were reportedly shot in the incident.

Following a vote last year for southern Sudan to secede, Christians in Khartoum, especially those from the Nuba Mountains, say that they live in a state of uncertainty as they fear hostilities against them will increase ahead of an April 8 deadline to leave Sudan or undergo the complex process of becoming citizens.

"We are living in great fear as far as our security is concerned," a church leader in Khartoum told Compass on condition of anonymity.

Fighting in South Kordofan, a major battleground during Sudan's 1983-2005 civil war, broke out again in June 2011 as Khartoum moved to assert its authority against gunmen formerly allied to the now independent South Sudan. The conflict between President Omar al-Bashir's forces and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) spread from South Kordofan to Sudan's Blue Nile state in September 2011.

When the Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed in 2005, the people of South Kordofan were to decide whether to join the North or the South, but the state governor, wanted for war crimes himself, suspended the process, and Khartoum instead decided to disarm the SPLM-N by force.

Sudan's Interim National Constitution holds up sharia (Islamic law) as a source of legislation, and the laws and policies of the government favor Islam, according to a U.S. Department of State report. On several occasions in the past year, Bashir has warned that Sudan's constitution will become more firmly entrenched in sharia.

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