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Two Sudan Coptic priests arrested after 'baptism'

AFP (20.12.2012) - Two priests from the Coptic Orthodox Church in Sudan have been arrested after the religious conversion of a Muslim in the Islamist-run state, church sources said.

"I understand there was someone from the Arab origin that accepted Christ and was baptized by them," leading to their arrest within the past few days, one religious leader told AFP.

Other religious sources confirmed the incident but Khartoum's Coptic Bishop Elia was not immediately able to comment.

Under the 23-year Islamist regime of President Omar al-Bashir, Sudan's minority Copts have not experienced the violence suffered by their brethren in Egypt, where sectarian attacks surged after an uprising overthrew president Hosni Mubarak in February 2011 and saw Islamists rise to power.

But a little-known group calling itself Al-Qaeda in the Nilien States sent a statement to Sudanese journalists on Tuesday threatening violence against Copts unless the woman who converted and was "kidnapped" by the Christians is returned.

Faith in Christ leads judge to annul marriage, forbid seeing kids

CDN (17.06.2012) — A year ago Mohammed Khidir Khalil was glad his family had obtained refugee status in Egypt after fleeing Islamic hostilities in Sudan.

The 38-year-old Christian was also heartened that his formerly unbelieving wife was attending church with him.

Today the convert from Islam is back in Sudan fighting to recover his family after his in-laws compelled his wife to claim she was Muslim and divorce him. A Sudanese court automatically granted her custody of their two sons and forbade him to see them, he

said. He fears that if he persists in his legal battle, he faces the threat of being accused of “apostasy,” or leaving Islam.

It was last August that his Muslim mother-in-law visited them in Egypt.

“Without my knowledge, she took my wife and children back to Sudan,” Khalil said.

The couple had fled Sudan just before the South Sudan vote for independence on Jan. 9, 2011, after threats from the couples’ Muslim families and others intensified, Khalil said. In Egypt, they reported their case to the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and won asylum.

In emails to friends back in Sudan, Khalil freely shared his Christian experience and pointed out what he termed as contradictions in Islam.

Hearing nothing from his family after his mother-in-law took his wife and two sons back to Sudan, on Christmas Day Khalil decided to return to an undisclosed town in Sudan to search for them. He was shocked to discover that his wife, Manal Hassan, had filed for divorce on grounds that she was a Muslim and he a Christian.

Khalil, who converted to Christianity in 2001, had met Hassan in 2007. At that time she said she was neither a Christian nor a Muslim, and they married in a non-religious wedding. The bride’s Muslim family learned that Khalil was a Christian but had no objection to the marriage, he said.

By 2010 the couple had joined an undisclosed church and had become visibly active in it; opposition from their families grew, leading to the couple’s flight to Egypt in early 2011. Last February, Khalil decided to appeal the divorce ruling. His wife had presented a copy of the UNHCR certificate showing Khalil’s testimony as a Christian, however, and that was proof enough for a judge to rule in March that the marriage be annulled and the children automatically handed over to the spouse professing “the popular religion” – Islam, the supposed faith of Hassan.

In spite of the court’s ruling that Khalil did not have a right to even visit the children, in April he decided to try to see them. His former wife’s family threatened to call police if he persisted.

“I am very upset with courts like this that bar one from seeing one’s children,” he said. “I have to appeal against this.”

Asked what risks he might incur by appealing, Khalil said it could lead to a case against him for apostasy – punishable by death in Sudan, where *sharia* (Islamic law) is established as a primary source of legislation.

“They might take the case to a prosecution court, which might lead to my sentencing to death according to Islamic apostasy law – but I am ready for this,” Khalil said. “I want the world to know this. What crime have I done? Is it because I became a Christian? I know if the world is watching, they will be afraid to do any harm to me.”

Conversion

Khalil was a practicing Sufi Muslim when he began studies at a university in Alexandria, Egypt, in 1998. By the time he graduated in 2000, he had left Islam; he returned to Sudan an atheist.

After his return to Sudan, Khalil came into contact with a U.S. pastor who inspired him with his Christian faith.

"He was very calm and confident," Khalil said.

He recalled that the pastor made reference to the Nubian people of southern Egypt and northern Sudan calling themselves "sons of the Nile," the river being considered the source of life, and connecting that idea with the Son of God likewise coming from God as the source of all life. References to Jesus as the Good Shepherd whose Father was the God of love also moved him. Khalil decided to visit the pastor's church, and he entrusted his life to Christ in 2001.

He stayed with the pastor for three months before he left to his home village. The pastor paid him visits, and when his family realized that Khalil had embraced the Christian faith, his father threatened to shoot him. Khalil fled home.

He was later baptized in a historically Nubian area near his home village. Khalil began winning friends to Christ, and persecution intensified; family members reported him to the police, and he fled his country.

"Life became unbearable, and I decided to flee to the United Arab Emirates, where I was received by a Sudanese family in 2001," he said.

He remained there until the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement between north and south Sudan in 2005, and then decided to return to Sudan with the hope of serving his community. He became an English teacher, at the same time developing programs to promote Nobiin, one of the Nubian languages, and its cultural heritage. Building a literacy program for children in Nobiin, he also wrote poetry in the language and translated several hymns and Bible verses into it.

Along with his other challenges, Khalil is working toward publishing his sundry manuscripts in the Nobiin language, in spite of financial constraints. A deacon at his church summed up: "Mohammed needs prayers and support at this trying moment."

South Sudanese Christians trapped in hostile North

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.

Muslim mob burns Catholic church

The Associated Press (23.04.2012) - A Muslim mob set ablaze a Catholic church frequented by Southern Sudanese in the capital Khartoum, witnesses and media reports said on Sunday.

The church in Khartoum's Al-Jiraif district was built on a disputed plot of land, but the Saturday night incident appeared to be part of the fallout from ongoing hostilities between Sudan and South Sudan over control of an oil town on their ill-defined border.

Sudan and South Sudan have been drawing closer to a full-scale war in recent months over the unresolved issues of sharing oil revenues and the disputed border.

Last week, South Sudanese troops seized Heglig, which the southerners call Panthou, sending Sudanese troops fleeing. The Khartoum government later claimed to have regained control of the town.

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 (30.03.12) – 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.

Christians targeted in Sudan's 'ethnic cleansing'

Black, largely pro-south civilians of Nuba Mountains flee aerial bombing

By Simba Tian

Compass Direct News (20.03.12) – The “ethnic cleansing” that Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir has undertaken against black Africans in the Nuba Mountains is also aimed at ridding the area of Christianity, according to humanitarian workers.

By targeting Christians among people who are also adherents of Islam and other faiths in the Nuba Mountains, military force helps the regime in Khartoum to portray the violence as “*jihad*” to Muslims abroad and thus raise support from Islamic nations, said one humanitarian worker on condition of anonymity.

In South Kordofan state – which lies on Sudan’s border with the newly created nation of South Sudan but is home to sympathizers of the southern military that fought against northern forces during Sudan’s long civil war – Bashir’s military strikes are directed at Muslims as well as Christians, but churches and Christians are especially targeted, he said.

“The ongoing war against Christians and African indigenous people is more of an ‘ethnic cleansing’ in that they kill all black people, including Muslims, but they give specific connotation to the war in targeting Christians to secure funding and support from the Arab and Islamic world by saying this war is a religious war,” he said. “And in so doing, they get huge support from those countries.”

Aerial bombardment killed the five members of the Asaja Dalami Kuku family, which belonged to the Episcopal Church of Sudan, in Umsirdipa in the Nuba Mountains on Feb. 25, the source said.

The government in Khartoum is using Antonov airplanes to drop bombs, “coupled with state-sponsored militia targeting churches and Christian families,” said the humanitarian worker.

“The brutal state-sponsored militias are moving from house to house searching for Christian and African indigenous homes as the government continues with air strikes,” he added.

The Satellite Sentinel Project has gathered evidence that Antonov aircraft have indiscriminately bombed civilian populations in South Kordofan, although after a recent crash the government has said it will no longer use the planes.

In Kadugli, the capital of South Kordofan, at least four church buildings have been razed and more than 20 Christians killed, he said.

“The Islamic north sees Nuba Christians as infidels who need to be Islamized through *Jihad*,” the source said. “But the fact of the matter is this war is ethnic cleansing – a religious as well as political war, indeed a complex situation.”

Between June 2011 and March 2012, four church buildings have been destroyed, said another humanitarian worker; they belonged to the Episcopal Church of Sudan, the Roman Catholic Church, the Sudanese Church of Christ and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church.

“On Aug. 18, 2011, the Sudanese Church of Christ building was razed to ashes,” the worker said.

On June 7, 2011, state-sponsored militia destroyed the office of the Sudan Council of Churches at Kadugli, along with its vehicle, the sources said.

On Feb. 26, three church leaders visited the devastated areas of Kaduguli, led by Bishop Daniel Deng of the Episcopal Church of Sudan, and then presented grievances to the

government. They were surprised that the government denied the attack on the church buildings.

"A government official said [southern and other] militia groups were the ones destroying the churches, and not the government," one of the aid workers said.

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 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.

The United Nations estimates the conflict has displaced 400,000 people, with 300,000 in danger of starving within a month. Additionally, the U.N. Commissioner for Refugees estimates there are 185,000 refugees from South Kordofan and Blue Nile in South Sudan and Ethiopia.

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.

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.

"The church and enfeebled women and children have become victims of this fight," one of the humanitarian workers said. "We as the church have a moral and spiritual obligation to stand with our brothers and sisters who are suffering in the Nuba Mountains."

Priests released amid wave of abductions in Sudan

Southern Sudan Christians in north targeted for forcible conscription into rebel militias

Compass Direct News (15.02.12) – Two Catholic priests abducted at gunpoint in Rabak, Sudan last month have been released amid a wave of forcible conscriptions into rebel southern militias.

Their captors – South Sudanese militiamen loyal to (north) Sudan's Islamic government – accused the Rev. Joseph Makwey and the Rev. Sylvester Mogga of ties to the South Sudan military. South Sudan, which seceded from Sudan on July 9, 2011, has been in military conflict with (north) Sudan over border areas while staving off southern rebel militias.

"They knew we were just priests, yet they 'arrested' us," Mogga told Compass.

The two priests were kidnapped from the compound of St. Josephine Bakhita Catholic Church on Jan. 15 and were released two weeks later, they said. For security reasons they would not discuss conditions of their release, but the kidnappers had demanded 500,000 Sudanese pounds (US\$185,530); press reports indicated no ransom was paid and that they were released after pressure from influential groups including the government in Khartoum.

Christians in Sudan have complained of a spike in threats against them by South Sudanese militias rebelling against the new South Sudan government. The South Sudanese rebels go house-to-house in Khartoum and other towns in the north abducting mainly Christian men, Christian sources said; hundreds of young men have been forcibly conscripted, while older men are either killed or ransomed.

The kidnapers tortured the two clergymen physically and psychologically, and they are now undergoing medical treatment, sources said; they will require more time to recover.

"The two Catholic priests were mistreated," Auxiliary Bishop Daniel Adwok Kur told Compass by phone.

There are at least three South Sudanese militia groups fighting against the government of South Sudan with the support of the government of Sudan. With almost no support within South Sudan, they have resorted to forcibly conscripting South Sudanese who are still living in (north) Sudan, where the government supports them as part of an effort to rid the country of Christianity, sources said.

Christians in (north) Sudan said that such abductions are increasing as the Islamic government in Khartoum supports these militias, which are fighting the government of South Sudan and the South Sudan-based Sudanese People's Liberation Army

"Christians in Khartoum live in fear as they become the target of these militia groups," one church leader said.

Episcopal Leaders Kidnapped

In a separate incident, two leaders from the Episcopal Church of Sudan (ECS) were abducted at gunpoint on the same day by members of the same militia in Gerif West, near a local Bible school in Khartoum, sources said.

Michael Mikol and Jacob Makeer were kidnapped on Jan. 15 at around 7 p.m. and were released one hour later, after the assailants took their mobile phones and other belongings, according to Christian sources in Khartoum.

Christians from South Sudan and South Kordofan in Khartoum are afraid to attend church services because these militias are targeting them, the sources said.

The official Islamic clerical authority in Sudan has called on the body tasked with drafting the country's constitution to ensure inclusion of *sharia* (Islamic law), reported the *Sudan Tribune* website.

Sudan's [Muslim] Scholars Association (SSA), a body of state-controlled imams and clerics, issued the statement last week.

Sudan's Interim National Constitution holds up sharia 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, Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir has warned that Sudan's constitution will be more firmly entrenched in sharia.

Two Catholic priests kidnapped in Sudan

Islamic militias loyal to government forces attack Catholic Church compound

Correction:

In Compass Direct News' Jan. 25, "Two Catholic Priests Kidnapped in Sudan," it is not Islamic militia that abducted the priests, but South Sudanese rebel militia – supported by the Islamic government in Khartoum, but made up of South Sudanese. Our apologies. – *Eds.*

Compass Direct News (25.01.12) / HRWF (30.01.12) – Islamic militias loyal to the Sudanese government have kidnapped two Catholic priests in Rabak, Christian sources said.

A large truck smashed through the gates of the St. Josephine Bakhita's Catholic Church compound in Rabak, 260 kilometers (162 miles) south of Khartoum, on Jan. 15 at 10 p.m., and the assailants broke down the rectory door, the sources said. The Rev. Joseph Makwey and the Rev. Sylvester Mogga were kidnapped at gunpoint.

Four days later, on Jan. 19, the kidnappers forced the two priests to call their bishop with a ransom demand of 500,000 Sudanese pounds (US\$185,530), 250,000 Sudanese pounds each.

Auxiliary Bishop Daniel Adwok told Compass by phone that there was no direct communication between the bishop and the kidnappers, though the priests managed to convey that they were being mistreated.

"We are worried about the two priests," he said. "They are not treating them well."

The kidnappers have attempted no communication with church leaders since then, Adwok said. Neither Makwey, in his 40s, nor Mogga, in his mid-30s, are supporters of southern Sudan military forces in territorial conflict with Sudan over border areas, added.

Eyewitnesses told Compass that they saw the assailants severely beating the priests while abducting them. The kidnappers also looted the priests' living quarters, stealing two vehicles, two laptops and a safe.

The incident caused panic and terror among Christians in Rabak, with church leaders saying they fear for their lives as they become targets of the Islamic government and its allied militias.

Sudan has seen a steep increase in persecution against Christians, according to an annual ranking by Christian support organization Open Doors. Sudan – where northern Christians experienced greater vulnerability after southern Sudan seceded in a July referendum, and where Christians were targeted amid isolated military conflicts – jumped 19 places last year from its 2010 ranking, from 35th to 16th, according to Open Doors' 2012 World Watch List.

Sudanese law prohibits missionaries from evangelizing, and converting from Islam to another religion is punishable by imprisonment or death in Sudan, though previously such laws were not strictly enforced. The government has never carried out a death sentence for apostasy, according to the U.S. State Department's latest International Religious Freedom Report.

Christians are facing growing threats from both Muslim communities and Islamist government officials who have long wanted to rid Sudan of Christianity, Christian leaders told Compass. They said Christianity is now regarded as a foreign religion following the departure of 350,000 people, most of them Christians, to South Sudan following the July 9, 2011 secession.

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 the state department report. Christian leaders said they fear the government is tightening controls on churches in Sudan and planning to force compliance with Islamic law as part of a strategy to eliminate Christianity.

As he has several times in the past year, Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir on Jan. 3 once again warned that Sudan's constitution will be more firmly entrenched in sharia.

"We are an Islamic nation with sharia as the basis of our constitution," he told crowds in Kosti, south of Khartoum. "We will base our constitution on Islamic laws."

His government subsequently issued a decree ordering church leaders to provide names and contact information of church leaders in Sudan, sources said. Christian leaders said the government is retaliating for churches' perceived pro-West position.

Muslim scholars have urged heavy-handed measures against Christians to Al-Bashir, who is wanted by the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity in Darfur.

Persecution increased most in Sudan, Nigeria, report says

Open Doors' 2012 World Watch List ranks countries where Christians suffered in 2011

By Jeff M. Sellers

Compass Direct News (04.01.12) – Sudan and northern Nigeria saw steeper increases in persecution against Christians than 48 other nations where Christians suffered abuse last year, according to an annual ranking by Christian support organization Open Doors.

Sudan – where northern Christians experienced greater vulnerability after southern Sudan seceded in a July referendum, and where Christians were targeted amid isolated military conflicts – jumped 19 places last year from its 2010 ranking, from 35th to 16th, according to Open Doors' 2012 World Watch List. In northern Nigeria, a rash of Islamist bombings, guerrilla-style attacks and increased government restrictions on Christians contributed to the region leaping by 10 on the list, from 23rd to 13th place.

"Nigeria continues to be the country where the worst atrocities in terms of loss of life occur, with over 300 Christians losing their lives this year, though the true number is thought to be far higher," according to the Open Doors report, noting that the Islamic extremist Boko Haram (literally, "Western learning is forbidden") became increasingly violent across the reporting period through most of 2011.

As it has the previous nine years, North Korea topped the list as the country where Christians are most persecuted, with a persecution index of 88. The list is based on a questionnaire filled out by Open Doors in-country field personnel and cross-checked with independent experts. Countries are then ranked according to their points total, or index.

Both Sudan and northern Nigeria saw their persecution indices rise more than other countries' – Sudan by 16.5, from 37 in 2010 to 53.5 last year, and northern Nigeria by 9, from 44 to 55. The persecution index for three other countries rose by at least 5 points – Egypt from 47.5 to 53.5, Ethiopia from 30 to 36, and Indonesia from 26.5 to 31.5.

In terms of ranking, Egypt landed at 15 in the 2012 list after being ranked 19 last January, before political chaos loosened the grip on Islamic extremists; Ethiopia went from 43rd to 38th place, and Indonesia from 48th to 43rd place. Most of the countries on the list, 38 out of 50, have an Islamic majority – including nine of the top 10.

“As the 2012 World Watch List reflects, the persecution of Christians in these Muslim countries continues to increase,” said Carl Moeller, president/CEO of Open Doors USA. “While many thought the Arab Spring would bring increased freedom, including religious freedom for minorities, that certainly has not been the case so far.”

In the case of Sudan, the secession of mainly Christian southern Sudan left Christians in (north) Sudan “much more isolated under President Omar al-Bashir,” who is wanted for crimes against humanity, according to the Open Doors report.

“In response to the loss of the south, he has vowed to make his country even more Islamic, promising constitutional changes,” the report states. “On the ground, however, Christian communities have been attacked in complex battles over resources, and estimates of thousands killed by the Sudanese military are known of, yet impossible to verify.”

Territorial violence flared on border areas with South Sudan in the provinces of Abyei, South Kordofan and Blue Nile, and “Christian communities were disproportionately affected,” according to the report.

In Egypt, a bomb attack on a Coptic church in Alexandria killed at least 21 Christians on New Year’s Day, 2011, and the Feb. 11 ouster of President Hosni Mubarak was followed by a series of Islamic extremist attacks on Christians that culminated in the Maspero massacre in Cairo on Oct. 9, “when the military turned on its own citizens,” killing 27 Coptic Christian demonstrators, the report notes.

“Some were shot by soldiers or ran over by tanks, while others were killed by Muslim extremists,” the report states. “At the closing of 2011, Islamist parties flourished in the November elections, prompting some to speak of an Arab Winter instead of an Arab Spring for Christians.”

China moved from 20th place to 21st on the list, “mainly due to other countries comparatively getting worse,” though it still has the world’s largest persecuted church of 80 million, the report notes. That it dropped out of the top 20 this year “is due in large part to the house church pastors knowing how to play ‘cat and mouse’ with the government,” the report states – that is, knowing how not to attract the attention of authorities, such as not putting up church name signs, limiting worship attendance to no more than 200, and not singing too loudly.

A new addition to the list is Kazakhstan at 45th place, and Colombia returned to the list at 47th after being absent in the 2011 and 2010 editions.

Kazakhstan moved onto the list due to the passage of “an invasive and restrictive religion law” requiring the re-registration of all religious communities, the report notes. The law will make youth work virtually illegal and put all religious acts under government scrutiny, it adds.

Colombia had been included on the World Watch List annually before 2010, with left-wing insurgencies as well as paramilitary groups targeting Christian pastors. During the reporting period these movements “have branched into narco-trafficking, and Christian leaders that will not cooperate in the drug trade are targeted for assassination,” the

report notes. "Five were killed this year, and it is thought the number could be as high as 20."

After North Korea, the top 10 on the list are Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Iran, the Maldives, Uzbekistan, Yemen, Iraq, and Pakistan. Pakistan entered the top 10 for the first time with a spike in radical Islamist violence that included the assassination of the nation's highest-ranking Christian politician, Federal Minister for Minorities Affairs Shahbaz Bhatti, for his efforts to change Pakistan's blasphemy law.

Police beat, arrest evangelist in Sudan

Harassment continues amid growing hostility toward Christians

Compass Direct News (20.01.12) – Police this week beat and arrested a church leader in Khartoum, sources told Compass.

Evangelist James Kat of the Evangelical Church of Sudan was arrested on Tuesday morning (Jan. 17), with officers beating him as they took him to a North Division police station, the sources said. He was released on bail the same day.

Police detained Kat, who lives at the church site, apparently because he was using the place as his home.

"They forced him to go with them to the police station," an eyewitness said.

The arrest came amid increasing harassment of Christians by Sudanese authorities following the secession of South Sudan on July 9, 2011. In a Jan. 3 letter to Sudanese Presbyterian Evangelical Church (SPEC) leaders, Sudan's Ministry of Guidance and Religious Endowments threatened to arrest pastors if they carry out evangelistic activities and do not comply with an order for churches to provide the leaders' names and contact information.

Hamid Yousif Adam, undersecretary of the Ministry of Guidance and Religious Endowment, warned "We have all legal rights to take them to court" in the letter. SPEC leaders said the government is increasingly trying to limit church activities.

Church Takeover

Another church leader was arrested on Monday (Jan. 16) in a SPEC church property dispute in which police and courts have been unjustly biased in favor of Muslims, Christian leaders said.

Officers arrested SPEC worker Gabro Haile Selassie, as he lives on the church property that has been transferred to a Muslim businessman in a disputed agreement; he has refused to be evicted without police providing him an official document indicating the basis for the action.

Selassie, who was released on bail after a few hours, said he fears being arrested again; police are threatening him and his family, warning them to evacuate the house on the church property in downtown Khartoum, so they are staying with friends, he said.

Police have already started demolishing the church compound fence, Selassie added.

"They will definitely demolish my house" he told Compass. "I am in great terror; I'm afraid to sleep in the house, because they may come again and arrest me. This is a clear form of terrorism against Christians."

Armed police were deployed Sunday evening (Jan.15) to the site to take the property by force, as authorities are supporting Muslim businessman Osman al Tayeb's efforts to take control of the plot as part of planned confiscation of church property, church leaders said. A court has ruled in favor of al Tayeb.

"The government is still trying to get involved in the affairs of the church by supporting people like Osman al Tyab," said one church leader.

The church had signed a contract with al Tayeb stipulating the terms under which he could attain the property – including providing legal documents such as a construction permit and then obtaining final approval from SPEC – but those terms remained unmet, church officials said.

Church leader Deng Bol said that under terms of the unfulfilled contract, the SPEC would have turned the property over to al Tayeb to construct a business center on the site, with the denomination to receive a share of the returns from the commercial enterprise and regain ownership of the property after 80 years. SPEC leaders had yet to approve the project because of the high risk of permanently losing the property, he said, and they had undertaken legal action to recover it.

SPEC leaders said Muslims have taken over many other Christian properties through similar ploys.

Christians are facing growing threats from both Muslim communities and Islamist government officials who have long wanted to rid Sudan of Christianity, Christian leaders told Compass. They said Christianity is now regarded as a foreign religion following the departure of 350,000 people, most of them Christians, to South Sudan since the secession.

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 the U.S. State Department's most recent International Religious Freedom Report.

Sudan threatens to arrest church leaders

Christians subject to stricter controls, religious freedom violations.

Compass Direct News (18.01.12) – Sudan's Ministry of Guidance and Religious Endowments has threatened to arrest church leaders if they carry out evangelistic activities and do not comply with an order for churches to provide their names and contact information, Christian sources said.

The warning in a Jan. 3 letter to church leaders of the Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church (SPEC) arrived a few days after Sudan President Omar al-Bashir told cheering crowds on Jan. 3 that, following the secession of largely non-Islamic south Sudan last July, the country's constitution will be more deeply entrenched in *sharia* (Islamic law).

"We will take legal procedures against pastors who are involved in preaching or evangelistic activities," Hamid Yousif Adam, undersecretary of the Ministry of Guidance

and Religious Endowment, wrote to the church leaders. "We have all legal rights to take them to court."

Sources said the order was aimed at oppressing Christians amid growing hostilities toward Christianity.

"This is a critical situation faced by our church in Sudan," said the Rev. Yousif Matar, secretary general of the SPEC.

Another church leader said the order was another in a series of measures by the government to control churches.

"They do not want pastors from South Sudan to carry on any church activities or mission work in Sudan," he said.

Sudanese law prohibits missionaries from evangelizing, and converting from Islam to another religion is punishable by imprisonment or death in Sudan, though previously such laws were not strictly enforced. The government has never carried out a death sentence for apostasy, according to the U.S. State Department's latest International Religious Freedom Report.

Christians are facing growing threats from both Muslim communities and Islamist government officials who have long wanted to rid Sudan of Christianity, Christian leaders told Compass. They said Christianity is now regarded as a foreign religion following the departure of 350,000 people, most of them Christians, to South Sudan following the July 9, 2011 secession.

Sudan's Interim National Constitution (INC) holds up sharia as a source of legislation, and the laws and policies of the government favor Islam, according to the state department report. Christian leaders said they fear the government is tightening controls on churches in Sudan and planning to force compliance with Islamic law as part of a strategy to eliminate Christianity.

As he has several times in the past year, Al-Bashir on Jan. 3 once again warned that Sudan's constitution will be more firmly entrenched in sharia.

"We are an Islamic nation with sharia as the basis of our constitution," he told crowds in Kosti, south of Khartoum. "We will base our constitution on Islamic laws."

His government subsequently issued the decree ordering church leaders to provide names and contact information of church leaders in Sudan, sources said. Christian leaders said the government is retaliating for churches' perceived pro-West position.

Muslim scholars have urged heavy-handed measures against Christians to Al-Bashir, who is wanted by the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity in Darfur.

Hostilities

Christians in (north) Sudan celebrated last Christmas amid several threats from officials in Khartoum, and some followers of Christ were arrested for their faith, sources said.

Yasir Musa of the Sudanese Church of Christ (SCOC) was arrested along with two other church members by national security agents in Khartoum on Dec. 23; they were detained because they were Christians and therefore suspected supporters of southern military forces. Released shortly afterward, they said authorities threatened to arrest them again if they did not comply with orders not to carry out Christian activities in the Islamic nation.

SCOC leaders said they have complained to the Ministry of Guidance and Religious Endowments and were told that the three were arrested for security reasons.

In another case, sources said that Islamic militias loyal to the government in civilian uniform abducted a church leader and two church members as they were returning from a worship service and demanded \$1,000 in ransom. They were released after two days, according to Christian sources in Khartoum.

Christians in Khartoum increasingly fear arrests by militias loyal to the Islamic government, the sources said.

Security agencies in Khartoum have also ordered local Christians not to organize Bible exhibitions, as some churches have done annually, the sources said.

The pressures on Christians come as war in Sudan's South Kordofan state has led leaders there and in North Kordofan to incite hatred against Christians, with officials in both states calling for holy war against the predominantly Christian Nuba people.
