

Sudan (48)

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U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

Sudan**International Religious Freedom Report 2002**

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

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There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. The Government continued to enforce numerous restrictions.

There were strained and distant relations between the various religious communities.

The U.S. Government's efforts to promote religious freedom and human rights in the country were limited by the nonresident status of U.S. diplomats during most of the period covered by this report. The Embassy's American staff was evacuated to Nairobi, Kenya, in 1998; nonresident American diplomats resumed visits to Khartoum in 2000, and a few permanent staff returned in 2002. The U.S. Government has made it clear to the Government that the problem of religious freedom is one of the key impediments to an improvement in the relationship between the two countries. High-level U.S. officials and U.S. Missions to international forums have raised consistently the issue of religious freedom with both the Government and the populace. In 1999, 2000, and 2001, the Secretary of State designated Sudan a country of particular concern under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has a total area of 1,556,108 square miles, and its population is an estimated 35 million. The country is religiously mixed, although Muslims have dominated national government institutions since independence. There are no accurate figures on the sizes of the country's religious populations because of poor census data, as a result of 2 decades of war. According to most estimates, between 65 and 75 percent of the population is Muslim, and adherents include numerous Arabic and non-Arabic groups. Muslims predominate in the north, but there are sizable Christian communities in northern cities, principally in areas where there are large numbers of internally displaced persons (IDP's). There are between 1 and 2 million southerners in the north. Many of these persons—who are southerners escaping the war—are practitioners of traditional indigenous religions. Most citizens in the south adhere to either Christianity or traditional indigenous religions; however, there are some Muslim adherents as well, particularly along the historical dividing line between Arabs and Nilotic ethnic groups. There are reports that Christianity is growing rapidly in the south, particularly in areas outside of government control. There also is evidence that many new converts to Christianity continue to adhere to elements of traditional indigenous practices. There also are small but influential and long established populations of Greek Orthodox and Coptic Rite Christians centered around Khartoum and other northern cities. As many as 300,000 Coptic Christians live in the north.

The Muslim population is almost entirely Sunni but is divided into many different groups. The most significant divisions occur along the lines of the Sufi brotherhood. Two popular brotherhoods, the Ansar and the Khatimia, are associated closely with the Umma Party and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), respectively.

The country's religious conflict is aggravated by the perception of southerners that they are "second-class" citizens because Northern Muslims, most of whom are native Arabic speakers, have dominated political and economic structures since independence in 1956. Southerners (largely followers of traditional indigenous religions or Christians and largely of African origin) began fighting to protest religious, political, and economic discrimination before independence; the southern ethnic groups fighting the civil war seek independence, autonomy, or some other form of regional self-determination from the north.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom*Legal/Policy Framework*

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government severely restricted this right in practice. The Government treats Islam as the state religion and has declared that it must inspire the country's laws, institutions, and policies. The Constitution states that "Shari'a and custom are the

sources of legislation."

Religious organizations and churches are subject to the same restrictions placed on nonreligious corporations. Religious groups, like all other organizations, must be registered in order to be recognized or to gather legally. Registration reportedly is very difficult to obtain in practice, and the Government does not treat all groups equally in the approval of such registrations and licenses, particularly evangelical Christian groups. Registered religious groups are exempt from most taxes. Nonregistered religious groups find it impossible to construct a place of worship or to assemble legally without the fear of interference. Applications to build Islamic mosques generally are granted in practice; however, the process for applications for non-Muslim churches is more difficult. The Government did not authorize the construction of any churches in the Khartoum area or in the district capitals; the Government often claimed that local Islamic community objections restricted the issuance of permits. No further information was available on the status of draft legislation to replace the existing law at the end of the period covered by this report.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Authorities continued to restrict the activities of Christians, followers of traditional indigenous beliefs, and other non-Muslims. The Government restricts at least one Islamic group; however, the group conducts terrorist acts against other Muslims. While non-Muslims may convert to Islam, the law makes apostasy (which includes conversion from Islam to another religion) punishable by death.

Although the Government considers itself an Islamic government, it monitors some religious and quasi-religious Islamic groups, particularly religious groups that oppose the Government through political platforms or violence against government-affiliated mosques.

Muslims may proselytize freely in government-controlled areas, but non-Muslims are forbidden to proselytize. The Government generally is less restrictive of Christian groups that historically have had a presence in the country, such as Copts and Greek Orthodox, and is more restrictive of newer arrivals.

Missionaries continued to operate, running food relief operations, medical clinics, and churches in the south. Some also operate in government-controlled areas. However, authorities sometimes harassed missionaries and other religiously oriented organizations and delayed their requests for work permits and residence visas. For example, in 2002 Catholic priests in northern areas of the country continued to have problems attaining visas and occasionally were subject to interrogations by internal security agents.

Religious minority rights are not protected, and Islam is the state religion, which confers second class citizenship status on non-Muslim adherents. In government-controlled areas of the south, there continued to be credible evidence of favoritism towards Muslims and an unwritten policy of Islamization of public institutions, despite an official policy of local autonomy and federalism. Some non-Muslims lost their jobs in the civil service, the judiciary, and other professions; however, such occurrences were less frequent than in previous years. Few non-Muslim university graduates found government jobs. Some non-Muslim businessmen complained of petty harassment and discrimination in the awarding of government contracts and trade licenses. There also were reports that Muslims received preferential treatment for the limited services provided by the Government, including access to medical care.

There were continued reports that Christian secondary school students in Khartoum were not allowed to continue their compulsory military service because they attended church.

Students who do not complete military service are not permitted to enter the University.

The Government requires instruction in Islam in public schools in the north. In public schools in areas where Muslims are not a majority, students have a choice of studying Islam or Christianity. However, Christian courses are not offered in the majority of public schools, ostensibly due to a lack of teachers or Christian students; in practice this means that many Christian students attend Islamic courses.

Sunday is not recognized as the Sabbath for Christians. Employers sometimes prevent Christians in the north from leaving work to worship. Christian students also have been forced to take school exams on Sundays.

While the Government permits non-Muslims to participate in services in existing, authorized places of worship, the Government continued to deny permission for the construction of any Roman Catholic churches, although some other Christian groups have received permission. However, the Government permitted some makeshift structures to be used for Roman Catholic services.

During the period covered by this report, no information was available on the status of negotiations to resolve a 1999 property dispute between the Episcopal Church and the Government.

In past years, the Khartoum State government razed some religious buildings and thousands of squatter dwellings around Khartoum, which largely were populated by displaced southerners, including large numbers of practitioners of traditional indigenous religions and Christians; however, this practice has ceased. Earlier improvements in procedures to grant squatters legal title to land in other areas and to move squatters in advance of demolitions continued.

Islamic family law applies to Muslims and not to those of other faiths, for whom religious or tribal laws apply. Certain Islamic law provisions as interpreted and applied by the Government, and many traditional practices as well, discriminate against women. In accordance with Islamic law, a Muslim woman has the right to hold and dispose of her own property without interference, and women are ensured inheritance from their parents. However, a daughter inherits half the share of a son, and a widow inherits a smaller percentage than do her children. It is much easier for men to initiate legal divorce proceedings than for women. Although a Muslim man may marry a non-Muslim, a Muslim woman cannot marry a non-Muslim unless he converts to Islam; however, this prohibition is not observed or enforced in areas of the south not controlled by the Government, nor among Nubans.

Various government bodies have decreed on different occasions that women must dress modestly according to Islamic standards, including wearing a head covering. In 1999 the governor of Khartoum State announced that women in public places and government offices, and female students and teachers would be required to conform to what is considered an Islamic dress code. However, none of these decrees have been the subject of legislation. There was minimal enforcement of the dress code during the period covered by this report. Women often were seen in public wearing trousers or with their heads uncovered. Public Order Police generally only issued warnings for improper dress. In 2000 the governor of Khartoum State issued a decree forbidding women from working in businesses that serve the public, such as hotels, restaurants, and gas stations. He defended the ban as necessary under Shari'a (Islamic law) to protect the dignity of women. The issue was not brought before the courts, nor was the decree reversed. It no longer was a subject of public discussion, and the authorities did not enforce it; however, some employers removed women from their positions on this basis.

Children who have been abandoned or whose parentage is unknown, regardless of presumed religious origin, are considered by the State to be both citizens and Muslims and can be adopted only by Muslims. Non-Muslims may adopt only non-Muslim children. No equivalent restriction is placed on the adoption by Muslims of orphans or other children. In accordance with Islamic law, children adopted by Muslims do not take the name of their adopted parents and are not automatic heirs to their property.

In rebel-controlled areas, Christians, Muslims, and followers of traditional indigenous beliefs generally worship freely; however, in recent years, southern soldiers have damaged a few mosques after taking over government garrison towns. The rebel Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) would prefer a secular government but is willing to allow Shari'a law to exist in northern states. Christians dominate the movement, and local SPLM authorities often have a very close relationship with local Christian religious authorities. There is no evidence that this close relationship has resulted in a failure to respect the rights of practitioners of other religions.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

There were a few reports that security forces regularly harassed and at times used threats and violence against persons because of their religious beliefs and activities; however, such reports continued to decrease during the period covered by this report.

In June 2001, Aladin Omer Agabani Mohammed, a Khartoum resident, was arrested for converting from Islam to Christianity and detained incommunicado for 3 months; he reportedly was tortured. In September 2001, he was released on medical grounds, but was required to report daily to the security forces. In January and February 2002, security police again harassed Aladin, put him under surveillance, and refused his requests to travel because he had converted to Christianity. On January 30, 2002, airport authorities refused to allow Aladin to board a plane to Uganda to study at St. Paul Theology Seminary even though he had received his visas and military exemption; the authorities reportedly told him that he was an apostate abandoning Islam.

Unlike in the period covered by the previous report, there were no reports that authorities interfered with Easter services or that clashes broke out.

The Government officially exempts the 10 southern states, in which the population is mostly non-Muslim, from parts of the law, which permits physical punishments, including lashings, amputations, and stonings, based on Shari'a law. There were reports that six cross amputations (right hand and left foot) were carried out in 2001. The Government also reportedly carried out eight amputations as punishment for violent crimes that resulted in death. All those sentenced to amputations reportedly were Muslims. However, in 2002 the Government amputated the right hand of a southern Christian for stealing spare auto parts. In February 2002, Abok Alfa Akok, an 18-year-old southern Christian woman, was sentenced to death by stoning for having an extra-marital affair and becoming pregnant. The Vatican interceded, and her sentence was commuted to 75 lashes; she was flogged following the birth of her child. There were no reports of court-ordered Islamic law punishments, other than lashings, in government-controlled areas of the south. The law legally can be applied in the south, if the state assemblies approve it. Fear of the imposition of Islamic law is one of the factors that has fueled support for the civil war among opposition forces in the south.

Unlike in the period covered by the previous report, there were no reports that Christian students were abused physically during training at police units.

In 2002 internal security agents occasionally interrogated Catholic priests in northern areas of the country; in 2001 internal security agents detained and physically abused a Catholic priest.

Security forces detained persons because of their religious beliefs and activities; however, such detentions on religious grounds occurred less frequently than in previous years. Generally detentions based nominally on religion were of limited duration; because the practice of religion is not technically illegal, detainees could not be held formally on religious grounds indefinitely.

In past years, Human Rights Watch reported that Islamic student militias operating under the protection of security forces abducted and tortured a number of student activists. Islamic students also have harassed, beat, and otherwise abused non-Sudanese African students; part of the motivation for such acts appeared to be religious.

Since the civil war resumed in 1983, an estimated 2 million persons have been killed in the violence or have died from the effects of the drought; approximately 4 million have been displaced internally as a result of fighting between the Government and insurgents in the south. In 2002 a ceasefire was negotiated and implemented in the Nuba Mountains; however, the civil war continued elsewhere during the period covered by this report, and all sides involved in the fighting were responsible for abuses in violation of humanitarian norms. Government and government-supported forces in particular were responsible for the majority of the killings, abductions, rapes, and arbitrary arrests and detentions of civilians, and for the burning and looting of villages. There is a religious aspect to the civil war: the Government is dominated by northern Muslims, while the southern ethnic groups fighting the civil war largely are followers of traditional indigenous religions or Christians. The Government has declared a "jihad" (Muslim holy war) against the southern rebels. The Government continued to insist that Shari'a law form the basis of a unified state while southerners insist on a secular state.

As part of the civil war, the Government continued to use high altitude bombings in southern areas, although the number of attacks decreased between 2000 and 2002. Air assaults were reported in the Equatoria, Western Upper Nile, Southern Blue Nile, and Bahr al Ghazal states. The bombings hit schools, medical facilities, markets, and civilian buildings in these areas inhabited primarily by Christians and practitioners of traditional African religions. For example, in June 2002, the diocesan compound and home of the auxiliary Catholic Bishop of Torit was bombed.

The forced abduction of women and children and the taking of slaves, particularly in war zones, and their transport to parts of central and northern Sudan, continued. Most raids continued to be in northern Bahr al Ghazal. Between February and May 2002, an International Eminent Persons Group was convened to investigate slavery, abductions, and forced servitude in the country; the group was composed of representatives from the United States, United Kingdom, Norway, France, Canada, and Italy. Members of the group traveled within the country and the region in February, March, and April 2002. In their May 2002 report, they stated that indigenous militia as well as Rizegat and Bagarra tribesmen, armed and supported by the Government, raid villages in the Bahr al Ghazal region, in order to loot property and livestock. The target of these raids often included the taking of women and children as slaves. The victims in the villages largely were Christians or practitioners of traditional indigenous religions. Based on their investigation, the Group reported that both forced and voluntary conversion to Islam of those abducted commonly occurred. It was unknown how many raids occurred or how many persons were abducted during the period covered by this report.

Unlike in the period covered by the previous report, there were no reports that religious workers were abducted.

Forced Religious Conversion

Some children from Christian and other non-Muslim families, captured and sold into slavery, were converted forcibly to Islam.

Popular Defense Forces (PDF) trainees, including non-Muslims, were indoctrinated in the Islamic faith. In prisons and juvenile detention facilities, government officials and government-supported Islamic nongovernmental organizations (NGO's) pressured and offered inducements to non-Muslim inmates to convert. Some persons in the government-controlled camps for IDP's reported that they were subject to forced labor and at times pressured to convert to Islam. Children, including non-Muslim children, in camps for vagrant minors were required to study the Koran, and there was pressure on non-Muslims to convert to Islam. There were credible reports that some boys in vagrant camps and juvenile homes have undergone forced circumcision.

There were no reports of the forced religious conversion of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

There were strained and distant relations between the various religious communities.

There are reports that Islamic NGO's in war zones withhold other services, such as medical and food aid, from the needy unless they convert to Islam. There also were reports that Christian NGO's used their services to pressure persons to convert to Christianity.

Leaders of religious communities occasionally meet informally to discuss community relations. However, there continued to be limited interaction between Muslim and Christian clerics.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government and the U.S. Embassy continued to make efforts to encourage respect for religious freedom. A few permanent American diplomatic staff returned in 2002. The U.S. Government has made it clear to the Government that the problem of religious freedom is one of the key impediments to developing a more positive relationship between the country and the United States. The Embassy consistently raised the issue at all levels of government, including with the President and the Foreign Minister.

The Embassy and the Department of State forcefully raised religious freedom issues publicly in press statements and at international forums, including the U.N. Human Rights Commission. The Special Envoy for Peace in Sudan, John Danforth, an Episcopal priest, met with religious leaders during his visits to the country and pressed for religious freedom. In 2002 the U.S. Government also led an International Eminent Persons Group to investigate slavery, abductions, and forced servitude in the country (see Section II).

In 1999, 2000, and in 2001, the Secretary of State designated Sudan a country of particular concern under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom.

Released on October 7, 2002

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