

SUDAN 2017 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The Interim National Constitution (INC) provides for freedom of religious creed and the rights to worship, assemble, and maintain places of worship. Some laws and government practices are based on the government's interpretation of a sharia system of jurisprudence, which human rights groups state does not provide protections for some religious minorities, including minority Muslim groups. The law criminalizes apostasy, blasphemy, conversion from Islam to another religion, and questioning or criticizing the Quran, the Sahaba (the Companions of the Prophet), or the wives of the Prophet. While the law does not specifically address proselytizing, the government has criminally defined and prosecuted proselytizing as a form of apostasy. On April 3, a member of the government-appointed Presbyterian Evangelical Community Committee (ECC) of the Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church (SPECS) killed church elder Yonan Abdullah during an altercation between ECC supporters and those opposing the ECC's efforts to sell a school property to a private investor. Between February and April, the authorities arrested – and released on bail – more than 60 members of the SPECS who protested the sale. On January 29, authorities convicted Czech religious worker Peter Jasek and two Sudanese associates of eight crimes, including espionage and “warring against the state,” and sentenced them to life imprisonment. The court dropped all charges against another colleague and released him. Both Jasek, who had been documenting abuses of Christian converts, and his two Sudanese associates received presidential pardons and authorities released them in February and May, respectively. Human rights groups continued to accuse the government of interfering in internal community disputes over the sale of church lands to investors, such as those belonging to evangelical Protestant groups, including the SPECS and the Sudan Church of Christ (SCOC), and the inability of these Christian groups to seek legal recourse. Authorities continued to influence the internal affairs of churches through intimidation, harassment, and arrests of those opposed to government interference within evangelical churches. While the law does not prohibit the practice of Shia Islam, authorities took actions against adherents. Some Shia reported authorities continued to prevent them from publishing articles about Shia beliefs. In August government officials accused a Shia Muslim man of espousing “nonmainstream beliefs.” The man subsequently signed a written statement of repentance. In May authorities demolished two SCOC churches in Soba County of Khartoum State, stating the churches were constructed on publicly-owned land. In July Khartoum State officials reportedly rescinded a 2016 order to demolish 25 churches; no further demolitions took place

through the end of the year. According to multiple sources, authorities regularly charged and convicted Christian and Muslim women with “indecent dress” for wearing pants and fined and lashed them. The Khartoum State Ministry of Education ordered Christian schools to operate on Sundays in order to meet minimum required instruction hours.

Muslims and non-Muslims said a small and sometimes vocal minority of Salafist groups continued to be a concern because some advocated violence. Some Christian leaders of the Sudan Inter-Religious Council said they felt the council was dominated by Muslim leaders, although others felt the council was a good forum to discuss challenges faced by evangelical Christian churches. The imam of Khartoum’s Al-Noor Mosque delivered a sermon in response to the investment minister’s statement in favor of normalizing ties with Israel, saying Jews were to blame for “all things evil.” In November fans of the al-Hilal soccer team displayed a portrait of Adolf Hitler and a sign that spelled out the word “Holocaust” during a match; the Sudanese Football Association fined the team and took action against the fans responsible.

In high-level discussions with the government, U.S. officials encouraged respect for religious freedom and the protection of minority religious groups. The Deputy Secretary of State, USAID Administrator, U.S. Special Envoy for Sudan and South Sudan, an official from the U.S. Department of State Office of International Religious Freedom, and U.S. embassy officials raised specific cases with government officials and emphasized the government’s need to take concrete steps to improve religious freedom and bring the country’s legal framework into compliance with its international human rights obligations. In meetings with the foreign minister, the Charge d’Affaires raised the issue of the detained pastors, urging the government to grant a fair and speedy trial. Embassy officials stressed that respect for religious freedom was crucial to improved relations with the United States. The embassy maintained close contact with religious leaders, faith-based groups, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and monitored and attended many of the legal proceedings for those prosecuted in connection with their religious beliefs. The embassy used social media to highlight its concerns about the April killing of the Presbyterian Church leader, as well as the demolition of Soba Al-Aradi Church.

Since 1999, Sudan has been designated as a “Country of Particular Concern” (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 for having engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom. On December 22, the Secretary of State redesignated Sudan as a CPC and identified the

following sanction that accompanied the designation: the restriction on making certain appropriated funds available for assistance to the Government of Sudan in the annual Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, currently set forth in section 7042(j) of the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2014 (Div. K, Pub. L. 113-76), and any provision of law that is the same or substantially the same as this provision, pursuant to section 402(c)(5) of the Act.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 37.3 million (July 2017 estimate). According to the Sudanese government, approximately 97 percent of the population is Muslim. It is unclear whether government estimates include South Sudanese (predominantly Christian or animist) who did not leave after the 2011 separation of South Sudan or returned after conflict erupted in South Sudan in 2013, or other non-South Sudanese, non-Muslim groups. During the year 195,000 South Sudanese refugees arrived in the country, bringing the total estimated number of South Sudanese refugees in Sudan to more than 772,000. Some religious advocacy groups estimate non-Muslims make up more than 20 percent of the population.

Almost all Muslims are Sunni, although there are significant distinctions among followers of different Sunni traditions, particularly among Sufi orders. There are also small Shia Muslim communities based predominantly in Khartoum. At least one Jewish family remains in the Khartoum area.

The government reports the presence of 36 Christian denominations in the country. Christians reside throughout the country, primarily in major cities such as Khartoum, Port Sudan, Kassala, Gedaref, El Obeid, and El Fasher. Christians also are concentrated in some parts of the Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile State.

There are relatively small but long-established groups of Coptic Orthodox and Greek Orthodox Christians in Khartoum, El Obeid in North Kordofan, River Nile and Gezira States, and eastern parts of the country. There are also Ethiopian and Eritrean Orthodox communities, largely made up of refugees and migrants, in Khartoum and the eastern part of the country. Other larger Christian groups include the Roman Catholic Church, Episcopal Anglican Church, Sudan Church of Christ, Sudan Evangelical Presbyterian Church, and Presbyterian Church of the Sudan. Smaller Christian groups include the Africa Inland Church, Armenian

Apostolic Church, Sudan Interior Church, Sudan Pentecostal Church, Seventh-day Adventist Church, and Jehovah's Witnesses.

Government statistics indicate less than 1 percent of the population, primarily in Blue Nile and South Kordofan States, adheres to traditional African religious beliefs. Some Christians and Muslims also incorporate aspects of these traditional beliefs into their religious practice. There is also a small Bahai community, which operates primarily underground.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The INC provides for freedom of religious creed and worship, and grants individuals the right to declare their religious beliefs and manifest them through worship, education, practice, or performance, subject to requirements of laws and public order. It prohibits the coercion of individuals to adopt a faith they do not believe in or to engage in rites or services without consent. Authorities may suspend these rights during a state of emergency. The INC states that nationally-enacted legislation shall be based on sharia. The government has not amended the INC to reflect the 2011 independence of South Sudan.

The INC allows religious groups to establish and maintain humanitarian and charitable institutions, acquire property and materials related to their religious rites and customs, write and disseminate religious publications, teach religion, solicit public and private contributions, select their own leaders, observe days of rest, celebrate religious holidays, and communicate with constituents on matters of religion.

The INC states that where the majority of residents do not practice the religion or customs on which the national legislation is based, citizens may introduce new legislation consistent with their religion and customs or refer the existing legislation to the Council of States, the lower house of parliament.

The INC denies recognition to any political party that discriminates based on religion and specifically prohibits religious discrimination against candidates for the national civil service. Constitutional violations of freedom of religion may be pursued in the Constitutional Court; however, cases of discrimination often originate and are addressed in lower courts dealing with civil or criminal charges.

National laws are based on a sharia system of jurisprudence. The criminal code states the law, including state and local, shall be based on sharia sources and include *hudood*, *qisas*, and *diyah* principles (specific serious crimes and related restitution and punishment). The criminal code takes into consideration multiple sharia schools of jurisprudence (*madhahib*). The Islamic Panel of Scholars and Preachers (Fiqh Council) determines under which conditions a particular school of thought will apply. Other criminal and civil laws, including public order laws, are determined at the state and local level.

The law does not prohibit individuals from converting to Islam from another religion. The criminal code does not explicitly mention proselytizing, but criminalizes both conversion from Islam to any other faith (apostasy) and acts that encourage conversion from Islam. Those who convert from Islam to another religion as well as any Muslim who questions or criticizes the teachings of the Quran, the Sahaba (the Companions of the Prophet), or the wives of the Prophet may also be considered guilty of apostasy and sentenced to death. Those charged with apostasy are allowed to repent within a period decided by the court, but may still face up to five years in prison.

The criminal code's section on "religious offenses" criminalizes various acts committed against any religion. These include insulting religion, blasphemy, disturbing places of worship, and trespassing upon places of burial. The criminal code states, "whoever insults any religion, their rights or beliefs or sanctifications or seeks to excite feelings of contempt and disrespect against the believers thereof" shall be punished with up to six months in prison, flogging of up to 40 lashes, and/or a fine. The article includes provisions that prescribe penalties of up to five years' imprisonment and 40 lashes for any non-Muslim who curses the Prophet Muhammad, his wives, or members of his respective households.

The Ministry of Guidance and Endowments (MGE) regulates Islamic religious practice, including activities such as reviewing Friday sermons at mosques, supervises churches, and is responsible for guaranteeing equal treatment for all religious groups. The MGE also provides recommendations to relevant ministries regarding religious issues government ministries encounter. The president appoints the Fiqh Council, an official body of 40 Muslim religious scholars responsible for explaining and interpreting Islamic jurisprudence, to four-year renewable terms. The council advises the government and issues fatwas on religious matters, including levying customs duties on the importation of religious materials, payment of interest on loans for public infrastructure, and determination of government-allotted annual leave for Islamic holidays. The council's opinions

are not legally binding. Muslim religious scholars are free to present differing religious and political viewpoints in public.

To gain official recognition by the government, religious groups must register at the state level with the MGE, or a related ministry such as the Ministry of Culture, or the Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC), depending on the nature of the group and its activities. The HAC oversees NGOs and nonprofit organizations.

Religious groups that also engage in humanitarian or development activities must register with those bodies as nonprofit NGOs by filing a standard application required by the HAC for both local and international NGOs. The application must include the names and addresses of founding members, a copy of the organization's constitution, and an organization chart, and be accompanied by a fee. Such organizations must have at least 30 members, although the relevant minister may register an organization with fewer members if it provides proof of its financial stability. In addition, the law states an international NGO may not be from a country in a state of war with Sudan, must be registered in its country of origin, have an approved registration certificate from a Sudanese embassy or diplomatic mission, present evidence of its financial and technical capabilities, and meet other conditions the minister may apply. Groups registered with the HAC must then submit their activities and financial statements to the government for review and approval. Only religious groups that register are eligible to apply for other administrative benefits, including land ownership, tax exemptions, and work permits.

The law does not permit Shia Muslims to hold worship services; however, they are allowed to enter Sunni mosques to pray.

The state-mandated education curriculum requires that all students receive religious instruction. It further mandates that all schools, including international schools and private schools operated by Christian groups, provide Islamic education classes to Muslim students, from preschool through the second year of university. The law does not require non-Muslims to attend Islamic education classes, and mandates that public schools provide Christian students with other religious instruction if there are at least 15 Christian students in a class. According to the Ministry of Education, following the separation of South Sudan, this ratio has not been met in most schools. Non-Muslim students therefore normally attend religious study classes of their own religion outside of regular school hours in order to fulfill the religious instruction requirement.

The Ministry of Education is responsible for determining the religious education curriculum. According to the ministry, the Islamic curriculum must follow the Sunni tradition.

The MGE determines, along with the state-level entities responsible for land grants and planning, whether to provide authorization or permits to build new houses of worship, taking into account zoning concerns such as the distance between religious institutions and population density (the allocation of land to religious entities is determined at the state level). The MGE is mandated to assist both mosques and churches in obtaining tax exemptions and duty-free permits to import items such as furniture and religious items for houses of worship; it also assists visitors attending meetings sponsored by religious groups and activities to obtain tourist visas through the Ministry of Interior. The MGE also coordinates travel for the Hajj and Umra for government representatives.

Public order laws, based largely on the government's interpretation of sharia, vary by state. These laws prohibit "indecent" dress and other "offenses of honor, reputation, and public morality." Authorities primarily enforce such laws in large cities and enforce laws governing indecent dress against both Muslims and non-Muslims. The criminal code states that acts are contrary to public morality if they are deemed so by the religion of the person performing the act or the custom of the country where the act occurs. In practice, the special Public Order Police and courts, which derive their authority from the Ministry of Interior, have wide latitude in interpreting what dress or behaviors are indecent and in arresting and passing sentence on accused offenders.

Some aspects of the criminal code specify punishments for Muslims based on government interpretation of sharia punishment principles. For example, the criminal code stipulates 40 lashes for a Muslim who drinks, possesses, or sells alcohol; no punishment is prescribed for a non-Muslim who drinks or possesses alcohol in private. The criminal code stipulates if a non-Muslim is arrested for public drinking, or possessing or selling alcohol, he or she is subject to trial, but the punishment will not be based on *hudood* principles. The INC was amended in August to change the penalty for adultery with a married person from stoning to hanging (a punishment more commonly executed than stoning, according to legal experts). The penalty for adultery by an unmarried person is 100 lashes. An unmarried man could additionally be punished with expatriation for up to one year. These penalties apply to both Muslims and non-Muslims. Adultery is defined as sexual activity outside of marriage, prior to marriage, or in a marriage that is determined to be void. The code was not changed after the secession of South

Sudan, and most articles of the code specify punishments according to region, the North (majority Muslim) and the then-South (majority Christian), rather than the religion of the accused.

Under the law, the justice minister may release any prisoner who memorizes the Quran during his or her prison term. The release requires a recommendation for parole from the prison's director-general and a religious committee composed of the Sudan Scholars Organization and members of the Fiqh Council, which consults with the MGE to ensure decisions comply with Islamic legal regulations.

Under the law, a Muslim man may marry a non-Muslim woman (although most Sudanese sharia schools of thought advise that the non-Muslim women must be "people of the book," i.e. either Christian or Jewish). A Muslim woman, however, legally may only marry a Muslim man. A Muslim woman marrying a non-Muslim man may be charged with adultery.

Separate family courts exist for Muslims and non-Muslims to address personal status issues such as marriage, divorce, and child custody, according to their religion. By law, in custody dispute cases where one parent is Muslim and the other is Christian, courts grant custody to the Muslim parent if there is any concern that the non-Muslim parent would raise the child in a religion other than Islam.

According to Islamic personal status laws, Christians (including children) may not inherit assets from a Muslim.

Government offices and businesses are closed on Friday for prayers and follow an Islamic work week of Sunday to Thursday. The law requires employers to give Christian employees two hours off on Sundays for religious activity. Leave from work is also granted to celebrate Orthodox Christmas, an official state holiday, along with several key Islamic holidays.

An interministerial committee, which includes the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), the National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS), and in some cases Military Intelligence, must approve foreign clergy and other foreigners seeking a residency permit.

The INC's bill of rights says all rights and freedoms enshrined in international human rights treaties, covenants, and instruments ratified by the country are integral parts of the INC's bill of rights.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

Summary paragraph: A member of the government-appointed ECC of the SPECS killed a SPECS elder during an altercation. Plainclothes police reportedly witnessed but did not intervene in the attack, and then arrested the alleged attacker, whose trial was pending at year's end. A Khartoum court in January convicted a Czech Christian aid worker, a Sudanese Church of Christ pastor, and a Sudanese student from Dafur of crimes including espionage and "warring against the state." The three were pardoned separately in February and May. While authorities permitted the Czech aid worker to immediately leave the country, the two Sudanese were eventually allowed to leave the country after intense international pressure prompted the government to lift the travel ban imposed on them at their release. Evangelical Protestant groups, including the SPECS and the SCOC, continued to oppose the government's involvement in internal disputes about continued sale of church lands to investors, the detention of clergy and other religious leaders, and the inability of Christian groups to seek legal recourse. On August 23, the NISS arrested seven SCOC church leaders and interrogated them for six hours, reportedly for refusing to comply with an August 14 government order to hand over church leadership to a government committee. The leaders reportedly were released on bail after authorities told them to comply with the government order, which they rejected. On October 22, police briefly detained and later released five SCOC church leaders after they refused to cancel prayer services at the Harat Church in Omdurman. The government reportedly charged them with disturbing the peace. There were reports of authorities arresting, intimidating, and detaining Christian clergy and church members on religious grounds, denying permits for the construction of churches, closing or demolishing existing churches and church schools, censoring religious materials and leaders, and restricting non-Muslim religious groups and missionaries from operating in or entering the country.

On April 3, a member of the ECC stabbed and killed SPECS elder Yonan Abdullah during an altercation between ECC supporters and opponents within SPECS over control of the SPECS-operated Omdurman Evangelical Church School. According to SPECS members, the ECC supported government efforts to sell off church properties to private investors; the SPECS members accused the government of interfering in the internal affairs of the church. Yonan was among a group of SPECS members protesting against ECC efforts to take control of the school. Eyewitnesses reported that plainclothes police officers at the school did not

intervene in the attack but arrested the alleged attacker whose trial was pending at year's end. From February to April police arrested more than 60 SPECS members opposed to the ECC's efforts to sell the school. The government denied the accusation that it was behind the April 3 attack and attributed the incident to "internal feuding between two Christian administrative boards." At year's end, the government had not implemented a 2015 court decision stipulating that only a SPECS-appointed entity could govern the property decisions of the SPECS Church in Khartoum, and not the government-recognized ECC, which continued to sell the church's land to private investors throughout the year. As of year's end, the government had implemented neither a February Constitutional Court ruling that the government-recognized ECC was illegal, nor the court's order for the ECC's dissolution.

On January 29, a Khartoum court convicted Czech Christian aid worker Petr Jasek, Sudanese Church of Christ pastor Hassan Abdelrahim, and Sudanese student Abdelmoneim Abdumaula, from Darfur, of eight crimes, including espionage and "warring against the state." On January 29, a court sentenced Jasek to life imprisonment, and Abdelrahim and Abdumaula to 12 years' imprisonment. The men had been in detention since their initial arrest in December 2015. They had reportedly donated money to fund medical treatments for Ali Omer, a Darfuri student injured during antigovernment demonstrations in 2013, and documented alleged abuses against Christians who said they were persecuted in the Nuba Mountains and Darfur. Authorities arrested Jasek at Khartoum Airport when he attempted to leave the country with photos and documentation of abuses against Sudanese Muslims who converted to Christianity. Authorities said Jasek had illegally entered Sudan via South Sudan and provided money to rebel movements, and that Jasek, Abdelrahim, and Abdumaula conducted interviews and took pictures without obtaining prior governmental permission.

Following pressure from the international community and the arrival in Khartoum of Czech Foreign Minister Lubomir Zaoralek, Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir pardoned Jasek, who returned to the Czech Republic on February 26 after 14 months in NISS custody. On May 11, President Bashir pardoned and released Abdelrahim and Abdumaula following sustained international advocacy on their behalf, but the government banned them from obtaining passports and leaving Sudan. Following further international pressure, the NISS and Ministry of Interior lifted the travel ban on the two men in October. While in detention the three men were transferred multiple times with no reason given to various NISS detention facilities and were finally held in Al Huda Prison during their trial. All three men reported prison officials physically abused them and kept them in poor conditions.

Jasek additionally said he suffered from several medical problems caused by his poor treatment in prison.

On January 19, the MGE reportedly appointed Angel Alzaki to head a government-backed Executive Committee of the SCOC, effectively removing Yacoub Tilian from SCOC's leadership position. On August 23, the NISS arrested seven SCOC church leaders and interrogated them for six hours, reportedly for refusing to comply with an August 14 government order to cede church leadership to a government committee. The leaders reportedly were released on bail after authorities told them to comply with the government order, which they rejected. SCOC Head of Missions Pastor Kowa Shamaal and SCOC Moderator Ayoub Mattan were among the seven church leaders arrested for challenging the order. Shamaal was previously arrested in December 2015 with Petr Jasek, Hassan Abdelrahim, and Abdelmoneim Abdumaula but was acquitted of all charges and released in January.

According to Morning Star News, on September 22, the NISS arrested SCOC Elder Mahjoub Abotrin at his home in Omdurman. They interrogated him and released him the same day without charges. According to SCOC sources, Abotrin was arrested for his refusal to turn over the leadership of the SCOC to government appointees. The mandate of the current leadership expires in March 2018. The SCOC constitution calls for a general assembly every three years to appoint church leaders. Some observers stated a factor in the government's intervention was that most SCOC members are ethnically Nuba, from the Nuba Mountains of South Kordofan state, where the government was fighting a continuing insurgency. The observers said the government has accused ethnic Nuba of supporting the 2011 secession and continuing conflict in the areas adjacent to the border with South Sudan and has thus targeted them for their religious and ethnic affiliations. On October 22, police briefly detained and later released SCOC Moderator Reverend Ayoub Tiliyan, Reverend Ali Haakim Al Aam, Pastor Ambrator Hammad, evangelist Habil Ibrahim, and Elder Abdul Bagi Tutu for refusing to cancel prayer services at the Harat Church in Omdurman. The government reportedly charged them with disturbing the peace.

According to reports the Public Order Police frequently charged women with "indecent dress," and there were numerous court convictions. Religious leaders and government officials confirmed that Muslim and Christian women were fined and lashed on a daily basis in Khartoum for wearing pants and other dress considered indecent by the Public Order Police.

International and domestic human rights observers continued to express concern that 2015 legal amendments widening the definition of apostasy targeted and discriminated against minority Muslim groups, especially Shia, whose practice of Islam differs from that of the Sunni majority. Many individuals from Muslim minorities, such as Shia or Quranist groups, reported that their places of worship have remained closed since 2014. They also stated that they needed to keep a low profile regarding their places of worship, as well as religious events and gatherings. Some Shia reported they remain prohibited from writing articles about their beliefs. In August government officials accused a Shia man of espousing “non-Sunni” religious beliefs. Reportedly, the man signed a written statement of repentance under pressure from the government. Persons continued to reference the case against 25 Muslims who faced the death penalty in 2015 on charges of apostasy for following the “wrong” version of Islam and who were acquitted in early 2016.

The Public Order Police arrested journalist Marwa Altijani on September 24, after she published two satirical articles on a popular website discussing religious concepts, including the divinity of God. She also reportedly wrote that it was not wrong to be a lesbian. Authorities charged her with apostasy under the relevant articles of the Criminal Code and released her two days later. They later dismissed the charges against her based on their assessment that she was psychologically unfit to stand trial.

In May the Omdurman sector prosecutor filed apostasy and public disturbance charges against Mohamed Salih Aldisogi after he attempted to change his religion on his state identification documents from Muslim to “nonreligious.” The prosecutor dropped all charges against Aldisogi after a state-appointed psychiatrist examined him without his consent and concluded he was not mentally competent to stand trial.

On October 1, police arrested Salafist preacher Muzamil Fageeri in front of his house in Khartoum State and charged him with apostasy after lawyers accused him of insulting the Prophet Muhammad, his companions, and wives while lecturing at the Musaab bin Omair dormitory in Khartoum. Police released Fageeri several days later. Independent observers stated they believed police arrested him because of a personal dispute between Fageeri and another imam.

On August 15, police evicted Reverend Yahia Nalu, pastor of the SPECS Omdurman church, and another minister who was living with Nalu and his family from their home where Nalu and his family had lived for one year and a half.

Police later arrested Nalu and held him for one day for “criminal trespass” after he refused to leave his home. The Administrative Court denied Nalu’s appeal of his eviction on August 20, and his legal counsel decided to take his case to the Supreme Court. Nalu’s trial began in November, but the judge repeatedly postponed hearings for administrative reasons.

There were reports government security services continued to monitor mosques closely for Friday sermon content. Observers stated authorities provided talking points and required imams to use them in their sermons.

Prisons provided prayer spaces for Muslims, but authorities did not allow Shia prayers independent of Sunni prayers. Shia prisoners were permitted to join prayer services led by Sunni imams. Some prisons, such as the Women’s Prison in Omdurman, had dedicated areas for Christian observance. Christian clergy held services in prisons, but access was irregular.

The government continued to state it did not have non-Muslim teachers available to teach Christian courses in public schools. Some public schools excused non-Muslims from Islamic education classes. Some private schools, including Christian schools, received government-provided Muslim teachers to teach Islamic subjects, but non-Muslim students were not required to attend those classes.

According to various church representatives, the government skewed its decisions on permit issuances for houses of worship towards mosques. Some churches reported they were less willing to apply for land permits or to construct churches given the government’s previous repeated denials. The government attributed its denial of permits to the churches not meeting government population density parameters and zoning plans.

Local parishioners reported that, compared to Islamic institutions, Christian places of worship were disproportionately affected by zoning changes, closures, and demolitions. The government said places of worship that were demolished or closed lacked proper land permits or institutional registration. The government stated mosques, churches, schools, hospitals, and residences were all affected equally by the urban planning projects. Sources estimated at least 24 churches, Christian schools, libraries, and cultural centers were “systematically closed,” demolished or confiscated by the government between 2011 and 2017.

In May government authorities demolished the SCOC in Khartoum (also known as Soba Al-Aradi church). In December 2016 the government issued a written notice

to the Church, stating it had no legal right to the land on which the church was built in 1986. The Sudanese Council of Churches (SCC) and lawyers appealed on behalf of the church. While the church's case was still pending in May, authorities appeared during a Sunday morning service to demolish the church. Parishioners and neighbors prevented the complete razing of the church by standing in front of the demolition vehicle until authorities left the site. Some of the church walls remained standing, but the church was rendered unusable. News of the demolition circulated widely on social media. As of year's end, the church neither received compensation nor relocated elsewhere in Khartoum.

Two weeks after the demolition of Soba Al-Aradi church, authorities carried out the demolition of a large brick wall surrounding the Dihinat SCOC in the Kalakla sector of Khartoum State. A man dressed in a military uniform reportedly told church leaders that he had bought the land on which the church stood, as well as an adjacent plot. As of year's end, the church building remained partially demolished.

During the July visit of Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, government officials told Welby they had formally cancelled a July 2016 order from the Khartoum State Government to demolish 25 churches the government had repeatedly denied existed. The government did not demolish any of the 25 churches by year's end.

In August the state government made a request to five pastors that they demolish their churches – two SCOC churches, two Episcopal churches, and one Baptist church – located in Jaboronna Camp outside of Khartoum. The reason provided was that the Khartoum State Ministry of Physical Planning had begun rezoning the surrounding area three weeks earlier than announced and had already demolished several nearby homes. The pastors demolished their church buildings accordingly on August 3, based on verbal guarantees from government officials that the churches would be compensated and granted land elsewhere in Khartoum. Church leaders confirmed that the government provided temporary places of worship to each of the five pastors until they were fully compensated for the demolished churches. These were the first such reports of government provision of temporary places of worship to Christians pending compensation. There were no reports of compensation to two demolished churches (one Catholic and one Presbyterian) in Soba County of Khartoum State in December 2016, which authorities stated were on publicly owned land.

Unknown intruders on broke into the home of a human rights lawyer who defended multiple pastors in religious freedom trials on August 19, while his family was out

of town. The individuals broke the metal locks on his steel door, took all of his English-language files and academic papers, and two removable flash drives. They also took his family's television, his two children's guitars and laptops, and his wife's jewelry. In October 2016 unknown assailants also broke into his home and smashed all of the windows and mirrors; no belongings were taken. The lawyer was forced to relocate his family as a result of the intrusions. Observers alleged that authorities may have been responsible for both incidents.

The Church of Jesus Christ in Aliza, Khartoum North, continued to seek restitution for the government's demolition of its church building in 2014 due to what the MGE said was lack of proper land permits and registration. According to the SCC, the church had not received compensation, and authorities continued to prevent it from constructing a new building.

The government continued to state that church demolitions were purely a land administrative issue that impacted not only churches, but also mosques, hospitals, schools, and private homes, but did not provide examples of mosques being destroyed during the year. The NISS noted the locations of other churches and mosques it was tracking which were located on what the government referred to as "unplanned areas" in Khartoum State. Christian leaders and lawyers said that gaining outright land titles remained very difficult given that the government legally continued to own all land, and thus the legal status of churches remained unclear.

In July the Khartoum State Ministry of Education ordered Christian schools (except for Coptic schools) to operate on Sundays in order to adhere to the national general schedule of operations mandating that schools operate from Sunday to Thursday. Foreign Minister Ibrahim Ghandour publicly expressed concern that the order would damage the country's international reputation. Members of the Khartoum State parliament also voiced opposition to parliamentary Deputy Speaker Mohamed Hashim, and told the Khartoum State minister of education the decision to cancel the Sunday holiday was not well studied. The order remained in place at year's end; Coptic schools continued to be exempted. Local authorities reportedly threatened schools planning to oppose the order and resume Saturday instruction, although no schools reported they had been sanctioned for noncompliance. Schools temporarily increased instruction hours during the week in order to remain closed on Sundays and still meet the required hours of annual instruction. Schools and parents voiced concern that this was unsustainable for schools and students, and feared that schools would need to open on Sundays to alleviate the burden on teachers and families. Religious rights groups, including

the SCC, stated the order could prevent Christian students from attending worship services and prevent parents from raising their children as Christians. In September approximately 60 parents of Christian and Muslim students who studied at Christian schools gathered outside of the Council of Ministers in Khartoum to protest the order requiring the schools to operate on Sundays.

The government continued to restrict some religiously-based political parties, including the Republican Brothers Party, which opposes the government's use of sharia as a source of law. The Political Parties Affairs Council, which oversees the registration of political parties, refused to register the party, and the party's leader filed a case in the Constitutional Court, which remained pending at year's end.

Government officials continued to state Islamic principles should inform official policies and often pointed to sharia as the basis for the country's legal framework. President Bashir and other senior figures frequently emphasized the Islamic majority of the country.

The government continued to restrict non-Muslim religious groups from operating or entering the country and continued to monitor activities and censor material published by religious institutions. The MGE said it granted a limited number of Christian missionary groups permission to engage in humanitarian activities and promote Muslim-Christian cooperation.

The government denied Christian churches or their humanitarian institutions tax-exempt status. Christian churches reported authorities required them to pay or negotiate taxes on items such as vehicles.

Leading officials from various churches reported the government refused to grant, or delayed renewing, work and residency visas to church employees of foreign origin, including missionaries and clergy, or to individuals it thought would proselytize in public places. This reportedly had a particularly negative impact on the Catholic Church whose clergy are mostly of foreign origin, while most clergy of other Christian denominations are ethnically Sudanese. The government only granted residence permits with less than a year's validity. According to Catholic Church officials, the government continued to maintain restrictions on the entry of foreign clergy. In October the government issued 30 visas and residence permit renewals to Church personnel (clergy and nuns) after a six-month delay, representing only a portion of the international staff requested by the Church. Approximately 25 foreign missionaries left the country during the year due to protracted delays in obtaining visas and/or renewing residence permits. The

government required clergy to pay a 70 Sudanese pounds (SDG) (\$8) fine for every day they were not in residency status, approximately 12,600 SDG (\$1,400) over six months.

The government closely scrutinized those suspected of proselytizing and used administrative rationales, or other aspects of the law such as immigration status, to either deport or exert financial pressure on such individuals. As a result, most non-Muslim groups refrained from public proselytizing.

Some religious groups reported the government barred the import of unapproved religious texts, and said most Christian denominations were unable to import teaching materials and religious texts as guaranteed by the constitution. According to a Morning Star News Service report in October, authorities in Port Sudan continued to detain a shipping container with Arabic language Bibles destined for Khartoum for two years without explanation.

A small number of Christian politicians, the majority of whom were members of the Coptic Church, continued to hold seats in the government.

Christian groups continued to call for a Christian director in the MGE Office of Church Affairs. The MGE-appointed director as of year's end was a Muslim.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Government officials reported continued tensions between members of some Muslim groups. Muslims and non-Muslims said a small, growing, and sometimes vocal minority of Salafist groups continued to be a concern because some advocated violence. Some groups said that, by allowing the largest of these Salafist groups, the Ansari al-Sunna, to operate with little surveillance or intervention, the government gave tacit approval to the organization's views.

Individual Muslims and Christians reported generally good relationships at the societal level and stated that instances of intolerance or discrimination by individuals or nongovernmental entities were generally considered to be isolated incidents.

The Sudan Inter-Religious Council, a registered nonprofit, nonpolitical organization consisting of scholars, half Muslim and half Christian, was mandated by its constitution to advise the MGE and to encourage interfaith dialogue. During the year members stated they continued to search for ways in which their

involvement could promote the coexistence of religious groups in the country. The council, which was very active during the secession of South Sudan, became less active in resolving domestic religion-related disputes thereafter. Some Christian leaders stated they felt the council was dominated by Muslim leaders, while others, particularly those who participated, felt the council was a good forum to discuss challenges faced by evangelical Christian churches.

On August 25, Muhammad Hassan Tanoun, imam of Khartoum's Islamist Al-Noor Mosque, delivered a sermon in which he stated, "ever since [the Jews] appeared on the face of the Earth, they have been the head of the serpent" and that "all things evil and all the tragedies on Earth are caused by their schemes, their deception, and their wickedness." He also said, "How can the movement for normalization [of ties with Israel] be spreading in Muslim countries, even though those Jews are your worst enemies, oh Muslims?" His sermon followed statements made by Investment Minister Mubarak Al-Fadil Al-Mahdi on August 21 in favor of normalizing ties with Israel.

In another reaction to the investment minister's remarks on normalizing ties with Israel, Major General Younis Mahmoud stated during an August 23 interview on Khartoum TV, reported on the Memri TV website, that the Quran provided evidence that "these Jews, these Zionists, never adhere to treaties" adding that "the fingerprints of the Jews and Zionists are on today's problems."

On November 25, fans of the al-Hilal soccer team displayed a portrait of Adolf Hitler and a sign that spelled out the word "Holocaust" during a match against a rival team. While the team condemned the fans responsible for the incident, its Facebook page posted pictures of the fans holding up the signs and portrait. The Sudanese Football Association (SFA) fined the team 40,000 SDG (\$4,400) and banned the fans responsible from attending al-Hilal's first 2018 game. As of December the International Football Association (FIFA) was investigating the incident, as was the team and the SFA. The UK-based organization Football Against Racism in Europe described the team's fans celebrating the Holocaust and Adolf Hitler as "a gruesome first for Sub-Saharan Africa."

Rival factions within SPECS led by Nalu and the MGE-supported Reverend Hamad Mohamed Saleh, who replaced Rafat Samir Musaad as leader of the SPECS in 2013, contested ownership of land where a house was located adjacent to a SPEC church and two evangelical Christian schools. Saleh, who possessed government-recognized ownership documentation for the property, signed a 50-100 year rental agreement with a business investor. The property is located next to

the Omdurman Evangelical School, where SPECS church elder Yonan Abdullah was killed in April during an attack on Nalu's supporters who protested the investor's purchase of the school. Saleh previously signed legal agreements that allowed the same investor to rent properties where the SPECS-operated Bahri Presbyterian Evangelical Church, Omdurman Evangelical School, and Wad Medani Evangelical School were located. Although government officials denied playing any role in the dispute between Nalu's and Saleh's rival SPECS church factions, observers considered Nalu's eviction to be another government attempt to support Saleh's faction and to interfere in the internal affairs of religious groups.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

In high-level meetings, Department of State officials, including the Deputy Secretary of State and the Special Envoy for Sudan and South Sudan, encouraged the government to respect religious freedom and protect the rights of minority religious groups. In a speech on religious freedom at the Al-Noor Mosque in November, the Deputy Secretary urged the government to take concrete steps to protect the rights of religious minorities, and called for an immediate suspension of the demolition of houses of worship. The Special Envoy raised, in high-level government meetings, the prolonged detention of Hassan Abdelrahim and other clergy by the NISS without charge and urged the government to grant a fair and speedy trial.

In meetings between the Charge d'Affaires and the minister of guidance and endowments, the Charge promoted religious freedom as a means of achieving peace and stability. He said persons of different religions need to be able to practice their religious beliefs freely and that creating an environment without fear of harassment based on religion was crucial to bringing peace and stability to the country's conflict areas. This included the Nuba Mountains, where there is a large Christian population. He also noted that as fighting has returned to South Sudan, the daily number of South Sudanese arrivals, many of whom are Christian, was increasing and the government should accommodate these refugees.

In May an official from the Department of State Office of International Religious Freedom met in Khartoum with government representatives, including Foreign Minister Ibrahim Ghandour. They discussed ways Sudan could take concrete steps toward substantially improving the state of religious freedom in the country by addressing the concerns that had led to its designation as a Country of Particular Concern. The official stressed the need to address religious freedom concerns and urged a formal response to the proposed religious freedom action plan provided by

the embassy in 2016. During the trip, the official also visited Bahri and Omdurman churches, and met with both SPECS factions, the Sudan Interreligious Council, and several other religious groups. Embassy officials proposed a roundtable on the registration and construction of religious properties as an important first step in such a process.

Throughout the year, the Charge d’Affaires emphasized religious freedom formed a key basis for broader normalization of bilateral relations and conveyed strong concerns to Minister of Guidance and Endowments Amar Mirghani Hussein Mohammed and other relevant officials regarding imprisoned evangelical Christian religious workers convicted of espionage; harassment of Muslim minorities; apostasy and blasphemy laws; threats by the Governor of Khartoum State to demolish more than 25 churches and religious establishments; arrests at the Omdurman Evangelical School of more than 60 clergy and lay members of Omdurman Presbyterian Church; the illegal sale of church properties; the denial of licenses for new churches; and enforcement of “indecent dress” laws.

Embassy officials met regularly with imams and Sufi clerics, and clergy and parishioners of Catholic and Protestant churches to hear their views on the religious freedom situation. Embassy officials attended religious ceremonies of different groups and underscored in regular meetings with leaders of Muslim and Christian groups the importance of religious tolerance. U.S. government representatives closely monitored and attended many of the legal proceedings concerning religious organizations and religious leaders. Embassy officials regularly attended weekly hearings from August to November for Peter Jasek, Pastors Kowa Shamal and Hassan Abdelrahim, and human rights activist Abdelmoneim Abdumaula. The Charge d’Affaires also attended the funeral of slain SPECS elder Yonan Abdullah.

The embassy regularly utilized its social media outlets to share articles and messaging related to religious tolerance and freedom. The embassy used social media to draw attention to the demolition of Soba Al-Aradi church and the killing of the Presbyterian elder by other church members aligned with the government. Messaging also often highlighted religious diversity in the United States and efforts by local communities to remain inclusive and maintain an open dialogue. The embassy issued statements in observance of both Christian and Islamic holidays.

Since 1999, Sudan has been designated as a “Country of Particular Concern” (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998. On December 22,

2017, the Secretary of State redesignated Sudan as a CPC and identified the following sanction that accompanied the designation: the restriction on making certain appropriated funds available for assistance to the Government of Sudan in the annual Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, currently set forth in section 7042(j) of the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2014 (Div. K, Pub. L. 113-76), and any provision of law that is the same or substantially the same as this provision, pursuant to section 402(c)(5) of the Act.