



General Assembly

Distr.: General
XX May 2023

English only

Human Rights Council

Fifty-third session

19 June–14 July 2023

Agenda item 2

**Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner
for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the
High Commissioner and the Secretary-General**

Written statement* submitted by Jubilee Campaign, a non- governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[30 May 2023]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.

The Critical Humanitarian Emergency in the Republic of Sudan and its Implications for Vulnerable Communities

Item 2: Interactive Dialogue on the comprehensive report of the HC on the situation of human rights in the Sudan

Jubilee Campaign and Set My People Free would like to raise to the Council's attention the situation by which the divisive conflict in the Republic of Sudan between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces has had a destructive impact upon ordinary Sudanese citizens as well as vulnerable communities such as faith minorities and displaced peoples.

Caught in the Crossfire of the Power Struggle and Increased Anti-Christian Antagonism

In addition to indiscriminate shelling and sporadic yet persistent gunfire which have caused endless civilian fatalities, Islamist actors have taken advantage of the situation with churches also bearing the brunt of destructive force of munitions and have even been targeted for ambush, looting, seizure. In Masalma, Omdurman, the Coptic Orthodox Church of Mar Gigis (St. George) was attacked by unidentified assailants who shot and wounded Reverend Arsanius Zaria, his son, a cantor, a church guard, and a parishioner, all of whom fortunately recovered while receiving treatment in hospital. Witnesses of the incursion have reported that the perpetrators, while targeting the five individuals, called them infidels and demanded their conversion to Islam.¹ In Khartoum's Bahri District, the local Evangelical Presbyterian church, Coptic Orthodox church, and All Saints Anglican Cathedral were damaged by explosions, struck by a rocket, and briefly occupied by fighters.² As a result, many of the Christians residing in the area have been forced to flee, including Anglican Cathedral Archbishop Ezekiel Kondo and the 42 sheltering children he was able to safely evacuate.³ Militants from the Rapid Support Forces had ambushed numerous buildings associated with Khartoum's Episcopal Church to use for barracks and a center of operations, and the worship hall and boarding student rooms of Gerief Bible School in Khartoum were destroyed by bombs.⁴ Our Lady Queen of Africa Roman Cathedral in El-Obeid was struck by two rockets which destroyed the cathedral's main entrance and minister's accommodations.⁵ Militants have seized Virgin Mary Coptic Cathedral as a base for accessing water, using the restroom, making telephone calls, and strategic planning, and demanded the bishop and other cathedral to evacuate the compound as it could become "a potential battleground".⁶

Implications for Efforts to Advance Human Rights

Prior to the outbreak of hostilities in April 2023, the Sudanese transitional government made substantial progress in eliminating unjust and problematic legislations which curtailed religious freedoms, and working to enshrine fundamental protections for people of faith in new constitutional provisions. Article 56 of the Interim Constitutional Declaration of August 2019, for example, afforded Sudanese citizens the right to "profess or express their religion or belief through worship, education, practice, performance of rituals, or celebrations, in accordance with the requirements of the law and public order", and Article 66 regarding ethnic groups guarantees the right to observe cultural-religious traditions and raise their children according to such customs.⁷

¹ Morning Star News, "Attacks On Churches in Sudan Sees Christians Wounded", 25 May 2023.

² Jayson Casper, "Khartoum Churches Damaged as Sudan Descends Closer to Civil War", *Christianity Today*, 2 May 2023.

³ Madeleine Davies, "Anglican cathedral compound in Khartoum raided, as rival security forces clash", *Church Times*, 19 April 2023.

⁴ Evangelical Focus, "Christians wounded, Bible school bombed in Sudan", 25 May 2023.

⁵ Fredrick Nzwilli, "Sudan's increased fighting empties Christian clerics from the capital Khartoum", *Religion News Service*, 15 March 2023.

⁶ Dabanga Sudan, "Rapid Support Forces occupy cathedrals in Sudan capital", 17 May 2023.

⁷ Constitute Project, *Sudan's Constitution of 2019: Subsequently amended*, 27 April 2022.

Nearly one year later, in July 2020, the Sudanese civilian transitional government ratified Law No. 12 which amended and repealed specific articles of the 1991 Criminal Act in an effort to reconcile penal provisions with international standards of human rights. Law No. 12 formally abolished the nation's apostasy law which criminalized the renunciation of Islam and conversion to another religion [which included the death penalty]; the provision additionally stipulated penalties for "anyone who labels others as 'infidels'" and eliminated flogging as a punishment for committing blasphemy.⁸

With regards more generally to human rights improvements made in the few years prior to the current conflict, the transitional government in April 2019 restored Sudanese women's rights to dress, work, study, and travel freely. Further progress was made in April 2020 when the nation formally criminalized the practice of female genital mutilation or cutting.

While these recent changes have been welcomed by the international community of human rights and religious freedom advocates, there still exists some concern regarding whether they will be fully implemented according to the will of the civilian population of Sudan or whether they will be overlooked or reversed in the wake of the current political instability. Even before the April 2023 outbreak of violence, Sudanese citizens expressed concerns that growing military influence could pose a threat to still-fragile and very recent legal changes to promote religious freedom and human rights.

Instability of Displaced Peoples in Sudan and the Horn of Africa

Sudan is home to millions of internally displaced people who escaped their own home countries dealing with destructive conflict and instability. 800,000 refugees fleeing from widespread famine and flooding resettled in Khartoum⁹ where the current conflict is continuing unabated. These refugees, along with the 133,000 Eritrean and Ethiopian refugees¹⁰, 95,000 Yemeni and Syrian refugees¹¹ residing in Sudan, are severely impacted by the steadily dwindling food, water, and medicine supplies, as well as the destruction of necessary civilian infrastructure such as hospitals, water provision stations, and power grids.¹² This situation is further exacerbated by the multiple failed attempts at establishing and upholding a cease-fire, which would allow a temporary suspension of hostilities in order to distribute humanitarian aid not only to vulnerable communities within Sudan, but also the numerous countries for which Sudan acts as a humanitarian corridor.¹³

Recommendations

We urge the Human Rights Council to:

1. Urgently establish an international investigation in Sudan, with sufficient resources to investigate human rights violations in all the affected areas in Sudan and hold perpetrators accountable;
2. Support the transition to the civilian government and the upholding of all fundamental freedoms, including freedom of thought, conscience and belief;
3. Support civil-society efforts to realise all the fundamental freedoms for the Sudanese people, including non-discrimination of women in civil family laws to ensure women's rights to freedom of conscience, choice of spouse, custody and divorce rights are not curtailed by religious laws;

⁸ Redress, *The Criminal Act 1991* [Sudan]. ; Mohammed Alamin, "Sudan Ends 30 Years of Islamic Law by Separating Religion, State", *Bloomberg*, 4 September 2020.

⁹ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Emergency Appeal: South Sudan emergency*, updated March 2023.

¹⁰ ACAPS, *Sudan*.

¹¹ Jonathan Fenton-Harvey, "The Forgotten Yemeni Refugees", *Inside Arabia*, 30 September 2020. ; Fatma Naib & Durra Gambo, "'At least we are treated as humans': Syrians in Sudan", *Al Jazeera*, 7 December 2015.

¹² Al Jazeera, "Fighting continues in Sudan hours after ceasefire was to begin", 18 April 2023.

¹³ Nosmot Gbadamosi, "Sudan's Failed Cease-Fire", *Foreign Policy*, 24 May 2023.

4. Ensure that the freedoms realised during the transitional civilian government, including the repeal of the anti-apostasy laws, are fully implemented and maintained throughout the country.

We urge both warring parties in Sudan to:

1. Halt hostilities and allow for humanitarian aid to reach the civilians targeted and displaced by the violence.
2. Ensure the protection of religious, ethnic and belief minorities.
3. Ensure the protection of women from sexual violence.

Set My People Free, NGO(s) without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.