

Oral evidence on Sudan from a Sudanese human rights lawyer

I can share with you some highlights of 14 years' service as a human rights lawyer in Sudan. I defended Christians in north. After the independence of South Sudan in 2011 there was a surge in attacks on Christians. As an Islamic country Sudan (north) wants to get rid of the Christians. This is done through a variety of means.

- Churches are demolished.
- Church land is confiscated
- When rezoning to improve an area churches are demolished, but not mosques
- The Government interfere in the administration of churches. E.g. The Government replaced elected committee of Evangelical churches with rival committees appointed by the Government which sold off church land. The Supreme Court ruled in favour of the elected committees but it was too late the damage was done and they are not handed back.
- Confiscation of church lands or lands belonging to Christians by the NISS (security services) (17 cases). I worked on two cases out of 17 lands that were confiscated in 2012 by NISS, only one succeeded.
- Also 200 cars were confiscated from Christians. The NISS said they were used by missionaries. I acted on 3 cases, which are still pending.

The law is discriminatory. For example, the crime of apostasy. I worked on 6 cases (this law only applied after 2011) eg Meriam Yahya.¹ Also indecent clothing cases resulting in Christian women being whipped. 'Crimes against the state' law are used against foreign missionaries. I took 5 cases for pastors last year. Peter from the Czech Republic and 12 others. 23 years sentence for Peter and 12 years for the others. Later there was a Presidential pardon.

Education

Christian schools existing since 1924 and giving a good education to pupils from all religions. But the Government targeted them by insisting that they must close on Saturdays, Christian subjects no longer allowed to be taught and textbooks no longer supplied by the Government whereas they continue to be supplied to Muslim schools. Christian students forced to leave class during the teaching on Islam. Now they have Christian school centres elsewhere on Fridays, but many have been taken away by the Government.

An elder was killed trying to defend a one of these Christian centres from sale by the Government (Corruption Committee). Also there have been bombings of Christian villages in the Nuba Mountains by the air force. 100s from there are now in IDP camps in South Sudan. House churches are increasing in Darfur. 12 were arrested last October and the Government tortured them forcing them to renounce Christianity and convert back. One of these didn't and we managed to get him to a safe place in XXXXXX.

The British Embassy in Khartoum are doing nothing. There was a good reaction from there up until 2015, but since then nothing. (one member of staff prior to 2015 was exceptionally helpful and

¹ Meriam Ibrahim was sentenced to death in Sudan in May 2014 for apostasy. After an international campaign, her conviction was overturned and she was released. In July 2014, she finally left the country and started a new life with her family in the USA.

committed to FoRB). But the US Embassy (and to a certain extent the Dutch) is active. They regularly release statements and also meet human rights defenders and Christians. When the priest (from the Christian centre) was killed the US Ambassador came to his funeral and a lower level diplomat from the UK Embassy also. The US Embassy does the minimum, but it is better than nothing, and the Dutch meet human rights defenders too and follow the situation. I expected more from the British Embassy. Should at least release strong statements of the real situation. At the Human Rights Council they are only interested in minor issues, not FoRB. Engaging with Governments only. They appear more interested in keeping diplomacy behind closed doors (which has no effect) and continuing their good relationship with the Sudanese Government to make the Sudan road map successful. Don't want to apply pressure to avoid any issues. Now national dialogue with the opposition, but no-one trusts the Government.

Q : Have you had contact with the FCO in London and Sudan? Used to visit the Sudan desk officer in the past. Met many times with officials since 2015 in London and Khartoum, but the staff keeps changing. You need time to get to grips with a region but if the staff keep changing then this does not help that, especially somewhere like Sudan which is highly complex. I have also met with more senior people of the Africa regional team and when I was awarded a human rights award I met Lord Ahmad last December.

Q: Have you had engagement with the wider region – any involvement? I had recent contact in Nigeria, with human rights activists but not the Horn of Africa.

Q: What is the effect of speaking out about religion on the Government? The US Embassy came out immediately to the demolished church at Suba in 2017. The Brits did nothing. Speaking out won't make the situation worse. The Christians need to know that there are more alongside them. Diplomats need to leave the embassy and go and visit what is happening on the ground more.

Q: What is the Muslim political opposition to the current Government – would they support Christians? Violations have only come from the Government side; it is not a popular persecution. The Government mentality is to destroy Christianity. The Government has Wahhabi connections - connections to Saudi Arabia.

Q Is the situation approaching genocide? Yes for the Nuba Mountains, but there is an ethnicity dimension there to that too.

I am involved in a charter programme funded by the British Embassy in Sudan. It is an inter-faith forum for religion in Sudan. Also the Faith & Belief Forum and 3 Faiths Forum. It's very interesting and is important to improve the situation to bring all people together. I am a Muslim, but more needs to be done to protect Christians in my country - the situation for them is very bad, someone needs to speak out and advocate on their behalf. I was detained and tortured many times. I was told to stop representing Christians, I didn't and as a result my house was demolished, and I had to flee Sudan and am now a refugee - only with my immediate family, having to leave my extended family behind.

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