

Christian Protests Help Block Sudan's Bid for U.N. Security Council Seat

The October demonstrations in New York drew international attention to Sudan's infamous human-rights abuses

Christian-led protests in front of the United Nations building in New York—seen by the world—influenced the U.N. General Assembly's voting when the body considered the nation of Sudan's application for an open seat on the U.N. Security Council.

On Oct. 10, the U.N. General Assembly, after four secret ballots, voted 113-55 to give the seat to the tiny island democracy of Mauritius. A month before the vote, an estimated 2,000 Christians jammed the Dag Hammarskjold Plaza across from U.N. headquarters on Sept. 9 to support oppressed Christians in Sudan. Eyeballed by policemen, they sang, prayed, waved posters and banners, and listened to speeches denouncing atrocities perpetrated by Islamic militants against mostly black Christians.

The Sudan Memorial Service 2000 followed on the heels of the U.N. Millennium Summit and drew hundreds of Christians to highly visible protests against the world's inaction to stop the Sudanese government from committing the atrocities. National TV networks covered the event in news broadcasts.

"I'm here to help be a voice for those who can't speak," said Tim McKim, a member of Bethany Assembly of God in Wyckoff, N.J. "Two million Christians have been slaughtered for their

faith in Sudan, and nobody is doing anything about it.”

Persecuted Christian Concern, a ministry of the Highland Church of Jamaica, N.Y., organized the service. Highland pastor Subash Cherian, who leads the 3,500-member independent congregation, opened the event.

“Let us expose those who kill Christians!” he shouted. “We resolve to join forces with martyrs and say: ‘It’s enough! It’s enough! It’s going to change from today.’ We must come together—black and white.”

Father James Goode, president of the National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus, and Alan Hevesi, New York City Comptroller, joined Cherian later on the platform. “We want liberation, and we want it now!” Goode said. “Prayer and work will destroy evil.” Hevesi used his political clout recently to pressure the New York City pension fund to divest 186,000 shares of Talisman Energy, a Canadian oil company with financial ties in Sudan.

Sudan is about one-quarter of the size of the United States and borders the Red Sea in North Africa. An estimated 35 million Sudanese live in their country, sandwiched between Egypt and Uganda. Military dictatorships pushing Islamic fundamentalism have ruled ever since Sudan gained independence from England in 1956. Arab-Muslims and black Christians and animists have waged a bloody civil war for 20 years.

Lt. Gen. Omer Hassan Ahmed Al Bashir runs the country with an iron fist. Christian villages are bombed and burned. Women are raped and their husbands tortured and murdered. Children are kidnapped, and women are branded like cattle and sold as

slaves. Famine and disease take a heavy toll on the Christian minority. Crops are torched, livestock slaughtered and wells poisoned.

Muslim militia kidnapped Francis Bok Bol and 100 children in 1986. He was 7 years old and seized while selling eggs and beans for his mother in the village market. Horrified, he witnessed a soldier shoot a 12-year-old girl in the head because she wouldn't stop crying. When her sister screamed, the soldier chopped off the dead girl's foot as a warning to keep quiet.

Bol was taken to a farm owned by the brother of a militia leader in northern Sudan, where he spent 10 years in slavery herding cows, horses and camels. Beaten regularly and forced to embrace Islam, he slept outside with the animals.

Bol fled into the wilderness in 1997 when he was 17. He made his way to Egypt in 1998, where the United Nations helped him obtain a visa to America. He reaffirmed his Christian faith and now serves as a spokesperson for the American Anti-Slavery Group (AASG).

"I pray every day to Jesus," he told the memorial audience. "I am free. I cannot rest until my people are free. I came here to ask you not to be silent in the face of evil. Do not let us stand alone in this war."