

Church Reduced to Rubble as Islamic Mosque Rises Behind It

A Christian church sits in ruins today in Omdurman, Sudan, and its congregation is left scrambling to find a makeshift meeting location in time for next Sunday.

Our contact in Sudan reports to us that last week government officials appeared at the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Omdurman with bulldozers ready to demolish the building.

The Christian congregants were able to temporarily stop the church's destruction and then met with a city commissioner who promised that nothing would happen to the church building.

Days later, however, the building was reduced to rubble as Sudanese officials returned and bulldozed the church to the ground. The Sudanese government claims that the church, which was built in the 1970s, was destroyed because it was constructed in an area zoned for businesses.

The incongruence of that explanation? A brand new mosque was built directly behind the church and it remains fully intact today.

The demolition of this church is not the first time Sudanese government officials have blatantly targeted Christian churches. In fact, there is a well-documented pattern of church destruction with roots that can be traced back to the country's split from South Sudan and President Omar al-Bashir's subsequent promotion of a stricter version of Shariah law nationwide.

Morning Star News details the systematic destruction of several Christian churches since South Sudan secession:

“Sudan since 2012 has and expelled foreign Christians and bulldozed church buildings, usually on the pretext that they belonged to South Sudanese. They have also raided Christian bookstores and arrested Christians.

“Sudanese authorities on Feb. 17, 2014 demolished a church building in Omdurman without prior notice, area sources said. Bulldozers accompanied by local police and personnel from the National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) destroyed the Sudanese Church of Christ building in the Ombada area of Omdurman, they said.

“On Aug. 24, 2014, NISS agents padlocked the building of the 500-member Sudan Pentecostal Church (SPC) in Khartoum, which housed the Khartoum Christian Center (KCC).”

In a similar incident in July 2014, CNN reported that 70 government officials descended upon the Alizba slums near the capital of Khartoum and destroyed a church over the wailing of nearby residents.

And just this week our contact on the ground in Sudan reported to us that yet another church was destroyed, this time by arson in Gadaref, East Sudan. Not only was the building destroyed, but so was the furniture and even the Bibles inside.

These are just a handful of examples. There are many more.

These incidents are as sad as they are unsurprising after the Sudanese minister of religious affairs announced in April 2013 that no licenses would be granted to allow for building new churches.

The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom recently released their 2015 report. The chapter on Sudan begins, “The government of Sudan, led by President Omar Hassan al-Bashir, continues to engage in systematic, ongoing,

and egregious violations of freedom of religion or belief. These violations are the result of President Bashir's policies of Islamization and Arabization."

The report continues to discuss the destruction and confiscation of Christian churches, concluding that "at least 11 churches have been attacked either by government officials or others" in the last few years. Also troublesome, the report outlines recent legal battles in which the government of Sudan has tried to confiscate church property of both the Bahri Evangelical Church and an Anglican church. This led to the arrest of 37 congregants protesting the action.

In addition to the destruction of their churches, Christians in Sudan have faced an increase in scrutiny and arrests from the Sudanese government. From the imprisonment of Christian mom Mariam Ibraheem, who was on death row in Sudan for her faith, to the arrest and trial of Pastors Michael and Peter this past summer, Christians continue to be targeted in Sudan, facing prison and trumped-up charges that could result in death sentences.

This is why our global engagement is so important. This is why stories like these must be shared far and wide. When the world's attention was focused on Mariam, Michael, and Peter, justice prevailed.

Now, as Christian churches are reduced to rubble, we must continue our advocacy for the persecuted church around the world whose international human rights are being violated by government officials.

We will continue to monitor the situation with our contacts on the ground in Sudan.