

North Sudan Church Still in Ruins After Muslim Torching

More than seven months after Muslim extremists burned its church building, a Presbyterian Church of the Sudan (PCOS) congregation is still afraid to meet for worship, according to Christian sources.

The Rev. Maubark Hamad said his church in Wad Madani, 138 kilometers (85 miles) southeast of Khartoum, has not been able to rebuild since the Jan. 15 devastation due to the congregation's meager resources.

"Nothing has been done for the burned church building; so far it has not been rebuilt," he told Compass by phone.

Christian sources said they are increasingly fearful as Muslim extremists pose more threats against Christians in an attempt to rid what they call *Dar al Islam*, the "Land of Islam," of Christianity.

"The increased challenges now faced by many Christians in North Sudan are something for which we need to pray very hard for the Lord to intervene," said another church leader on condition of anonymity.

The PCOS building in Wad Madani was burned after a series of threats against its members by Muslims extremists, sources said.

"These anti-Christian activities continue to be growing these days, aiming to cause fear among the believers in North Sudan," said the church leader.

When PCOS leaders reported the case to police in Wad Madani, they were surprised to find officers reluctant to investigate. At press time the assailants had not been arrested.

Property damages to the church building were estimated at 2,000 Sudanese pounds (\$740); destroyed items included Christian literature, Bibles in local languages, chairs, tables and a pulpit.

"Muslims target our church because they don't want anything that is related to the church," one church member said.

Christians in North Sudan are living beneath a blanket of fear since South Sudan seceded on July 9. Just one month after the South voted for independence from the predominantly Islamic North, pressures on churches and Christians have increased, with Muslim groups threatening to destroy churches, kill Christians and purge the country of Christianity.

One anti-Christian newspaper with strong ties to the North's ruling party continuously advocates that North Sudan become a purely Islamic state and a purely Arab country. The *Al Intibaha* Arabic daily is well-known for provoking Muslims against Christians in Sudan.

North Sudan's predominantly Arab population has intermingled with several indigenous peoples, leading some other Arab nations to regard it as not "pure Arab," according to *Operation World*. Besides striving for an Arab-based ethnic-religious purging in North Sudan, Islamists may also be trying to counter estimated losses among adherents to Islam, with some estimating the Muslim population of the formerly unified Sudan recently dropping to about 55 percent from 61 percent.

Hostilities toward Christians by the Islamic government in Khartoum began to increase last year following a statement by President Omar al-Bashir, when he asserted that his second republic would be based on *Shariah* (Islamic law) and Islamic culture, with Arabic as the official language.