

# Police Beat, Arrest Evangelist in Sudan

Police this week beat and arrested a church leader in Khartoum, sources told Compass.

Evangelist James Kat of the Evangelical Church of Sudan was arrested on Jan. 17, with officers beating him as they took him to a North Division police station, the sources said. He was released on bail the same day.

Police detained Kat, who lives at the church site, apparently because he was using the place as his home.

“They forced him to go with them to the police station,” an eyewitness said.

The arrest came amid increasing harassment of Christians by Sudanese authorities following the secession of South Sudan on July 9. In a Jan. 3 letter to Sudanese Presbyterian Evangelical Church (SPEC) leaders, Sudan’s Ministry of Guidance and Religious Endowments threatened to arrest pastors if they carry out evangelistic activities and do not comply with an order for churches to provide the leaders’ names and contact information.

Hamid Yousif Adam, undersecretary of the Ministry of Guidance and Religious Endowment, warned “We have all legal rights to take them to court” in the letter. SPEC leaders said the government is increasingly trying to limit church activities.

## Church Takeover

Another church leader was arrested on Jan. 16 in a SPEC church property dispute in which police and courts have been unjustly biased in favor of Muslims, Christian leaders said.

Officers arrested SPEC worker Gabro Haile Selassie, as he

lives on the church property that has been transferred to a Muslim businessman in a disputed agreement; he has refused to be evicted without police providing him an official document indicating the basis for the action.

Selassie, who was released on bail after a few hours, said he fears being arrested again; police are threatening him and his family, warning them to evacuate the house on the church property in downtown Khartoum, so they are staying with friends, he said.

Police have already started demolishing the church compound fence, Selassie added.

"They will definitely demolish my house" he told Compass. "I am in great terror; I'm afraid to sleep in the house, because they may come again and arrest me. This is a clear form of terrorism against Christians."

Armed police were deployed on to the site to take the property by force, as authorities are supporting Muslim businessman Osman al Tayeb's efforts to take control of the plot as part of planned confiscation of church property, church leaders said. A court has ruled in favor of al Tayeb.

"The government is still trying to get involved in the affairs of the church by supporting people like Osman al Tyab," said one church leader.

The church had signed a contract with al Tayeb stipulating the terms under which he could attain the property—including providing legal documents such as a construction permit and then obtaining final approval from SPEC—but those terms remained unmet, church officials said.

Church leader Deng Bol said that under terms of the unfulfilled contract, the SPEC would have turned the property over to al Tayeb to construct a business center on the site, with the denomination to receive a share of the returns from

the commercial enterprise and regain ownership of the property after 80 years. SPEC leaders had yet to approve the project because of the high risk of permanently losing the property, he said, and they had undertaken legal action to recover it.

SPEC leaders said Muslims have taken over many other Christian properties through similar ploys.

Christians are facing growing threats from both Muslim communities and Islamist government officials who have long wanted to rid Sudan of Christianity, Christian leaders told Compass. They said Christianity is now regarded as a foreign religion following the departure of 350,000 people, most of them Christians, to South Sudan since the secession.

Sudan's Interim National Constitution holds up shariah (**Islamic law**) as a source of legislation, and the laws and policies of the government favor **Islam**, according to the U.S. State Department's most recent International Religious Freedom Report.