

Priests Released After Psychological Torture

Two Catholic priests abducted at gunpoint in Rabak, Sudan last month have been released amid a wave of forcible conscriptions into rebel southern militias.

Their captors, South Sudanese militiamen loyal to (north) Sudan's Islamic government, accused the Rev. Joseph Makwey and the Rev. Sylvester Mogga of ties to the South Sudan military. South Sudan, which seceded from Sudan on July 9, has been in military conflict with (north) Sudan over border areas while staving off southern rebel militias.

"They knew we were just priests, yet they 'arrested' us," Mogga told Compass.

The two priests were kidnapped from the compound of St. Josephine Bakhita Catholic Church on Jan. 15 and were released two weeks later, they said. For security reasons they would not discuss conditions of their release, but the kidnappers had demanded 500,000 Sudanese pounds (US\$185,530); press reports indicated no ransom was paid and that they were released after pressure from influential groups including the government in Khartoum.

Christians in Sudan have complained of a spike in threats against them by South Sudanese militias rebelling against the new South Sudan government. The South Sudanese rebels go house-to-house in Khartoum and other towns in the north abducting mainly Christian men, Christian sources said; hundreds of young men have been forcibly conscripted, while older men are either killed or ransomed.

The kidnappers tortured the two clergymen physically and psychologically, and they are now undergoing medical treatment, sources said; they will require more time to

recover.

“The two Catholic priests were mistreated,” Auxiliary Bishop Daniel Adwok Kur told Compass by phone.

There are at least three South Sudanese militia groups fighting against the government of South Sudan with the support of the government of Sudan. With almost no support within South Sudan, they have resorted to forcibly conscripting South Sudanese who are still living in (north) Sudan, where the government supports them as part of an effort to rid the country of Christianity, sources said.

Christians in (north) Sudan said that such abductions are increasing as the **Islamic government** in Khartoum supports these militias, which are fighting the government of South Sudan and the South Sudan-based Sudanese People’s Liberation Army

“Christians in Khartoum live in fear as they become the target of these militia groups,” one church leader said.

Episcopal Leaders Kidnapped

In a separate incident, two leaders from the Episcopal Church of Sudan were abducted at gunpoint on the same day by members of the same militia in Gerif West, near a local Bible school in Khartoum, sources said.

Michael Mikol and Jacob Makeer were kidnapped on Jan. 15 at around 7 p.m. and were released one hour later, after the assailants took their mobile phones and other belongings, according to Christian sources in Khartoum.

Christians from South Sudan and South Kordofan in Khartoum are afraid to attend church services because these militias are targeting them, the sources said.

The official Islamic clerical authority in Sudan has called on the body tasked with drafting the country’s constitution to

ensure inclusion of *sharia* (Islamic law), reported the *Sudan Tribune* website.

Sudan's [Muslim] Scholars Association, a body of state-controlled imams and clerics, issued the statement last week.

Sudan's Interim National Constitution holds up sharia as a source of legislation, and the laws and policies of the government favor Islam, according to a U.S. Department of State report. On several occasions in the past year, Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir has warned that Sudan's constitution will be more firmly entrenched in sharia.