

South Sudan's Independence Could Cause Difficulties for North Sudan Christians

As the world's newest country, South Sudan has held the headline spotlight since its July 9 secession from the North. Amid the excitement and concerns over what's to come for the new nation, however, Carl Moeller with Open Doors believes one group has been forgotten.

Moeller explains, "We are rejoicing that there are increased freedoms (and of course more challenges) in the South, but we have to ask the question: What about the Christians in the North?"

Christians have already been fleeing back to the South for fear of what is to come in the North. Open Doors reports that although many Christians are said to have returned to the South voluntarily, some observers have pointed out that they had departed because they could not be assured of their safety.

"The biggest challenge that they're facing right now is a decree from President Bashir that he is going to strengthen Shariah law after the secession is finalized," cautions Moeller.

Historically, the extension of Islamic law into society has never been a good thing for Christians. Shariah law varies in its strictness, depending on the interpretations of Islamic law, but in the past it has meant making Christians second-class citizens, or in some cases even issuing their expulsion.

Concern over the possibility of such allegations surround the country's history with Shariah law as well. Sudan was initially governed under Shariah rule in 1983, a decision

which helped propel the nation into a decades-long civil war.

If conditions indeed heat up for Northern believers, Moeller says they still will likely have the freedom to leave the country. But a mass exodus of Christians is not necessarily a good thing, says Moeller. The church needs to be protected so Christ's light can reign even in the midst of difficulties.

There is a small but strong church in North Sudan that continues to grow, and Moeller says, "This is not a historical or political analysis, but we know the end of the story. As believers, we know that Jesus has said He will build His church, and the gates of Hell will not prevail against it."

The road ahead will be difficult for believers in the North, but the church has a history of extreme growth under fire. Pray for Christ-followers to stand firm in the North.

"Those Christians are bracing for an onslaught of new repression, but pray that they would be able to stand strong and continue to provide the light of Jesus Christ into their communities."