

Sudanese Authorities Demolish Two Church Buildings

Authorities in Khartoum demolished two church buildings last week, days after confiscating three Catholic schools, sources told Compass.

Officials from the Ministry of Planning and Housing of the local government authority on June 18 sent bulldozers that destroyed a church building belonging to the St. John Episcopal Church of Sudan, in the Haj Yousif area, an area source reported by e-mail. A Catholic church building in the area was also demolished the same day.

“The government wants to remove all churches from Khartoum,” the source said. “Tell churches, all churches, to stand on prayer for the church in Sudan.”

Clergymen said persecution was intensifying following the secession of South Sudan in July 2011, with officials targeting churches they claim to be associated with now unwelcome, largely Christian South Sudanese in the Islamic-ruled country.

The St. John church was established in 1987, but when government officials later allocated housing plots in the area, they denied church requests for their land. Christian support organization Open Doors reported that the churches were targeted on the pretext that southern Sudanese had attended services, and that since they had presumably left, the buildings were no longer necessary.

In a press statement, Open Doors noted that the church does not belong to the South Sudanese, and that the bishop is (north) Sudanese.

“It seems also that the policy of an Islamic state is being

implemented, where the president said, if South Sudanese vote for secession, there will be but one religion [Islam], one language [Arabic] and one culture [Arab],” said the Rt. Rev. Ezekiel Kondo, bishop of Khartoum, according to Open Doors.

The bishop demanded the local authority of Shereq El Nail compensate the church for the destruction and allot land for the congregation.

Church leaders had sent letters to the Ministry of Guidance and Religious Endowment requesting that the building be spared and another plot of land be granted to the parish, but authorities refused and instead sent the bulldozers, sources told Compass.

Christian sources also reported that another church building belonging to the Full Gospel Church was destroyed in the same area two months ago, on the claim that it belonged to South Sudanese.

Schools Confiscated

On June 14, the Jebel Aulia Locality Committee in south Khartoum confiscated three schools belonging to the Catholic Church, two in the Mayo area and one in nearby Omdurman, sources said.

The Jebel Aulia commissioner was acting on a letter issued by the Khartoum state minister of education calling for cancellation of official approval of the schools based on the claim that they were southern Sudanese. Both Mayo schools, however, were registered with the Ministry of Education as belonging to Khartoum dioceses.

Police officer Hassan Badawi Ahamed, executive director of the office of Jebel Aulia Locality, reportedly sent a letter dated May 30 to the Office of Secondary Education Directorate asking for termination of the two schools because they were supposedly southern Sudanese. Reports said the official letters mistakenly identified one of the schools as Comboni

School of Mayo, whereas its name is Markaz El Talim El Namoziky.

School administrators raised complaints before the Jebel Aulia Locality Committee, protesting that the name of the school was not included in the government letter. The committee then went back to the Jebel Aulia Locality office and produced a new letter with the correct name of the school.

On June 13, the committee had also gone to a building belonging to the Catholic Church in Mayo to take it by force, claiming it was a school. Christians have gathered for prayer in the building since June 14 to prevent it from being confiscated, sources said.