

Table of Contents

- ***EU-Sudan Relations: Engagement or Sanctions?***
- ***Church building demolished, two Christians arrested in Sudan***
- ***Reverend Abduraheem and Mr Abdumawla pardoned***
- ***Mob kills Christian elder at Evangelical school of Sudan in Omdurman***
- ***Police in Sudan arrest Christians at school, prevent others from leaving***
- ***'Sudanese partners open to dialogue on religious diversity': EU envoy***
- ***EU envoy asks Sudanese lawmakers about churches demolition***
- ***Czech man ready to resume African mission after Sudanese ordeal***
- ***Czech aid worker Petr Jašek released from Sudanese prison***
- ***Update: Czech faces 23 years' prison for 'spying', two Sudanese get 12 years for 'aiding' him***
- ***Sudan court verdict postponed for another week***
- ***Czech aid worker gets 20 years for 'war against' Sudan***

EU-Sudan Relations: Engagement or Sanctions?

A human rights perspective

By Willy Fautré, *Human Rights Without Frontiers*

HRWF (10.07.2017) - By 12 July, President Trump must decide whether to lift decades-old US sanctions on Sudan or not. Washington's assessment of Khartoum's progress, or lack of it, is to be measured along five criteria: cooperation on counter-terrorism; addressing the Lord's Resistance Army threat; ending hostilities in Darfur and Kordofan; improving humanitarian access; and stopping interference in South Sudan. Human rights, including religious freedom, are not on the list of US priority yardsticks. This is a grave mistake, as we see repressive measures hitting Christians and wide-spread practices of cruel, inhumane and degrading treatments.

The death penalty is imposed in cases of apostasy and acts that 'encourage' apostasy against Islam. In January 2015 the government amended the criminal code to widen the legal definition of apostasy. In addition to those converting from Islam to another religion, any Muslim who questions the Quran, the Companions of the Prophet or his wives may also be found guilty of apostasy and sentenced to death.

Under the death penalty, stoning remains a judicial punishment. Between 2009 and 2012, several women were sentenced to death by stoning.

Other inhumane forms of judicial punishment are often used, such as flogging and whipping.

The criminal code stipulates forty lashes for a Muslim who drinks, possesses, or sells alcohol. If a Christian is arrested for these reasons, he/she may be sentenced to prison or fined.

Sudan's public order law allows police officers to publicly whip women who are accused of public indecency. In 2015, there were multiple reports of individuals being arrested for 'indecent dress,' including twelve Christian female students wearing trousers; one of which was sentenced to twenty lashes.

According to a report of the US Department of State on religious freedom in the world, many people were sentenced to 40–100 lashes between 2009 and 2014. In August 2014, several Sudanese men died in police custody after being flogged.

Blasphemy, or alleged blasphemy, is punishable with up to six months in prison, flogging of up to forty lashes, and/or a fine.

Those charged with apostasy are allowed to repent within a period decided by the court but even if they do repent and hereby avoid the death penalty, they may still face up to five years in prison.

It is therefore not surprising that since 1999, Sudan has been designated by the United States as a "Country of Particular Concern" (CPC).

When the EU Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion, Jan Figel, visited Sudan this year, he voiced his concerns about the plight of Christians. He highlighted that last year the government designated twenty-five churches for destruction. Despite Figel's efforts, the demolitions go on unabated.

Christian leaders of various denominations agree that the destruction of their churches pursues the goal to eradicate Christianity in Sudan.

They also agree that the arrests of several pastors and Christians on spurious charges are part of that objective. One of them, Petr Jasek, a Czech Christian humanitarian aid worker, was sentenced to twenty years in prison for allegedly supporting rebel movements in South Kordofan, conspiring against the state and espionage. After spending fifteen months in prison, he was pardoned by the president upon the request of the Czech government and the international community. He testified at a conference on Wednesday 28 June at the European Parliament by Czech MEP Tomas Zdechovsky and *Human Rights Without Frontiers*.

So, what should the EU do with Sudan - sanctions or engagement?

The US economic sanctions have proved to be ineffective in isolating Sudan as they have hurt the Sudanese people more than the ruling elites.

In 2017, the EU devoted €250 million to humanitarian aid, development assistance, and other projects including religious tolerance and interfaith dialogue initiatives. However, the problem does not lie in the relations between the Muslim majority and non-Muslim minorities, but within the repressive nature of the regime towards religious minorities.

Last year, HR/VP Mogherini told the Foreign Minister of Sudan that an additional €100 million was set aside to address root causes of irregular migration and displacement by improving the living conditions of vulnerable groups.

Despite the EU's investments in Sudan, no progress in the legislation concerning human rights has been registered and there is no sign that the criminal code will be brought in line with international standards.

In the recommendations of its 2016 report, the EP Intergroup on FORB advocated for a process of conditional engagement with Sudan, saying that "EU aid should only be

provided on the basis of cooperation with international human rights law, protection of FORB or non-belief minority groups.”

Unfortunately it seems that there is no other meaningful option besides EU conditional engagement with Sudan; which is easier said than done.

Church building demolished, two Christians arrested in Sudan

One of at least 25 on government list of targeted houses of worship

Morning Star News (08.05.2017) - <http://bit.ly/2r8zFCG> - Khartoum state authorities in Sudan demolished a church building yesterday (May 7) as Christians were preparing to worship, sources said.

In the Khartoum suburb of Soba al Aradi, which began as a refugee camp for south Sudanese, a bulldozer sent by Jebel Aulia locality and the Ministry of Planning and Urban Development arrived at block 7 at about 2:30 p.m. and destroyed the Sudanese Church of Christ (SCOC) building, they said.

Authorities had notified church leaders of the impending demolition just a week prior. The church building was one of at least 25 the Sudanese government designated for destruction last year. The government reportedly claimed the churches were built on land zoned for residential or other uses, or were on government land, but church leaders said it is part of wider crack-down on Christianity.

Established in 1989, the building in Soba al Aradi was used by three congregations as it was the only one left in the area following the demolition of 12 area church buildings beginning in 2011. It included two offices for women’s and youth ministries, as well as a room for Sunday school classes.

Christians in Sudan complain that the Islamist government of Omar al-Bashir is targeting their buildings while favoring Muslims and their mosques.

“There is a nearby mosque in the area where the church building was destroyed, but it was not demolished,” said a source who requested anonymity.

Christian lawyer Demas James described the move as a serious violation of constitutional and international conventions of human rights. Writing on Facebook, he said the fact that the building was destroyed on a Sunday shows the government’s lack of respect for Christian holy places.

“You can see there is no place for worship left now for the believers to worship,” he wrote.

Riot police and personnel from Sudan’s National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) arrested SCOC members Bulis Salah and Naji Abdalla for refusing to open the church gate. They were taken to NISS offices, interrogated, and then released later that day.

A June 13, 2016 letter from the Executive Corporation for the Protection of Government Lands, Environment, Roads and Demolition of Irregularities of Khartoum State reveals the names and locations of 25 church buildings marked for demolition, most of them in the Sharq al Neel (East Nile area) locality of Khartoum North. The government claimed the churches were built on land zoned for other uses.

The Rev. Yahia Abdelrahim Nalu, moderator of the Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church's (SPEC) Sudan Evangelical Synod, has told Morning Star News the subsequent order was part of a systematic attack on churches by the Islamist government.

The order targets a wide range of denominations, from Roman Catholic to Pentecostal.

The Sudan Council of Churches denounced the order at a Feb. 11 press conference, calling on the government to reconsider the decision or provide alternative sites for the churches. The Rev. Mubarak Hamad, chairman of the Sudan Council of Churches, said at the conference in Khartoum that mosques located in the same area were spared from the demolition order.

Hamad said the order was aimed at 27 church buildings, including the SCOC building in Soba al Aradi and one belonging to the Presbyterian Church of Sudan in Jebel Aulia.

The order by Mohamad el Sheikh Mohamad, general manager of Khartoum state's land department in the Ministry of Physical Planning, urged that it be implemented immediately. Among the 25 church buildings listed are three located on public playgrounds; the rest are located in residential areas, according to the order.

Sudan since 2012 has bulldozed church buildings and harassed and expelled foreign Christians, usually on the claim that the buildings belonged to South Sudanese. The Sudanese Minister of Guidance and Endowments announced in April 2013 that no new licenses would be granted for building new churches in Sudan, citing a decrease in the South Sudanese population.

The government's decision to issue no new church building licenses came after South Sudan seceded from Sudan in July 2011, when Bashir vowed to adopt a stricter version of *sharia* (Islamic law) and recognize only Islamic culture and the Arabic language.

After bulldozing a Lutheran Church of Sudan (LCS) building on Oct. 21, 2015, authorities in the Karari area of Omdurman demolished an SCOC building on Oct. 27, 2015 without prior warning, church leaders said. Local authorities said the SCOC building was on government land, a claim church leaders adamantly denied.

Karari officials in Omdurman, across the Nile River from Khartoum, reportedly authorized the demolition of the church building claiming it was built on government land allocated for a field. In the demolishing of the LCS church on Oct. 21, the local authorities said it was built on land allocated for business, though a mosque stands nearby.

Ethnic Nuba have long suffered discrimination from the Arab population and authorities of Sudan. The Nuba people have longstanding complaints against Khartoum, including neglect, persecution and forced conversions to Islam in a 1990s jihad.

Sudan fought a civil war with the south Sudanese from 1983 to 2005, and in June 2011, shortly before the secession of South Sudan the following month, the government began fighting a rebel group in the Nuba Mountains that has its roots in South Sudan.

Sudanese authorities on Feb. 17, 2014 demolished another SCOC church building in Omdurman without prior notice. Bulldozers accompanied by local police and personnel from NISS destroyed the worship building in the Ombada area of Omdurman, sources said.

On Aug. 24, 2014, NISS agents padlocked the building of the 500-member Sudan Pentecostal Church (SPC) in Khartoum, which housed the Khartoum Christian Center (KCC).

Due to its treatment of Christians and other human rights violations, Sudan has been designated a Country of Particular Concern by the U.S. State Department since 1999,

and the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom recommended the country remain on the list in its 2017 report.

Sudan ranked fifth on Christian support organization Open Doors' 2017 World Watch List of countries where Christians face most persecution.

Reverend Abduraheem and Mr Abdumawla pardoned

Sudanese clergyman Reverend Hassan Abduraheem and activist Abdulmonem Abdumawla, who were serving 12 year prison sentences for espionage, have received a presidential pardon and were released today.

[To see the details of their case, please visit our prisoners database here](#)

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (11.05.2017) - <http://bit.ly/2pBAFxl> - The men were convicted in January, along with Czech national Petr Jašek, of "inciting hatred between sects" and "propagating false news". In February, Mr Jašek, who was the main defendant in the case, received a presidential pardon and was released from prison. During his visit to Khartoum in March Jan Figel, the EU Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief outside the European Union, called for a Presidential pardon to be extended to Reverend Abduraheem and Mr Abdumawla.

Following the release of Mr Jašek, the legal grounds for the continued imprisonment of both men were seriously weakened. Lawyers representing Reverend Abduraheem and Mr Abdumawla had filed an appeal against their conviction; however, the presidential pardon suspends all further proceedings in the case and means they have been freed unconditionally.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said: "*We welcome the release of Reverend Abduraheem and Mr Abdumawla, and are pleased they are finally able to return to their families after 17 months in detention. However, their case highlights our profound concerns regarding the rule of law in Sudan and the politicisation of the criminal justice system by the National Intelligence and Security Services, which pursued the case against them. We continue to call for the government to review and reform the powers of this body and to end the targeting of religious and ethnic minorities on spurious grounds.*"

Reverend Abduraheem and Mr Abdumawla have been in detention since December 2015. At times they were held incommunicado, with no access to their families, lawyers or medical treatment.

The questionable case against them centred on the provision of \$5,000 for the medical treatment of Mr Ali Omer, a Darfuri student who was severely injured during a student demonstration in 2013. The prosecution alleged the \$5,000 donated by Mr Jašek for Mr Omer's treatment was in reality support for rebel movements in the South Kordofan, Blue Nile and Darfur regions. By framing the case in this manner, the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) attempted to exploit the fact that Reverend Abduraheem and a former co-defendant, Reverend Shamal, are from the Nuba Mountains in South Kordofan, while Mr Abdumawla is from Darfur.

The release of the men comes at a time of increased government pressure on ethnic and religious minorities in Sudan. On 7 May, the last remaining church in the Soba Arabi district in the south east of Khartoum was demolished. The church belonged to the Sudan Church of Christ (SCOC) denomination, in which Reverend Abduraheem served as a minister and vice moderator prior to his arrest in December 2015.

Thomas added: *"The demolition of the SCOC church in Soba Aradi underscores the pressures Christians are facing in Sudan. We urge the government to review the current demolition orders to ensure they comply with Sudan's domestic and international human rights obligations. We also call on the African Union, European Union, and United Kingdom to encourage the Sudanese government to protect the right to freedom of religion or belief for all of its citizens, regardless of their religious beliefs."*

Mob kills Christian elder at Evangelical school of Sudan in Omdurman

Church leader defended women after police arrested men at embattled institution.

Morning Star News (05.04.2017) - <http://bit.ly/2oXMp0y> - A church elder on Monday (April 3) died from injuries sustained in a raid on an embattled Christian school by supporters of a Muslim business interest in Omdurman, Sudan, sources said.

Younan Abdullah, an elder with Bahri Evangelical Church, died in a hospital after being stabbed while he and others were defending women at the Evangelical School of Sudan, Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church (SPEC) sources told Morning Star News.

Christians had staged a protest against the attempted seizure of the school by a Muslim businessman, they said. Police from the Omdurman Central Division along with a group supported by Sudan's Ministry of Guidance and Religious Endowment arrived at the school first and arrested all the men in an attempt to hand it over to the businessman, they said.

Advocacy group Middle East Concern (MEC) confirmed that after the arrests, about 20 men, including members of a committee the government has illegally imposed on the SPEC, arrived at the school with knives and other weapons and began to beat the women.

"Several men from the nearby Bahri Evangelical Church rushed to the church to try and protect the women," MEC leaders said in a statement. "The armed men attacked them, and two church members were stabbed."

Elder Abdullah later died of his injuries, and a second church member, Ayoub Kumama, was treated at a nearby hospital and has been released, according to MEC.

Abdullah is survived by his wife and two young children.

Since 2013, the illegally imposed committee has been selling church properties to businessmen aligned with the government, the advocacy group stated.

Police were present during the attack on the school but failed to intervene, according to MEC.

"They also failed to help Younan after he was stabbed," MEC leaders said in the statement. "Following Younan's death, the police arrested Mr. Shamsoun Hamoud, a member of the illegal committee who was identified by eyewitnesses as the person who stabbed Younan. None of the other attackers have been arrested."

Christians held a funeral service for Abdullah yesterday (April 4) at the school, which had declared three days of mourning. The U.S. Ambassador to Sudan and the Second Secretary of the British Embassy were present, according to MEC.

Police in Omdurman, across from Khartoum on the Nile River, on March 27 had arrested 12 staff members of the Christian school and the next day prevented others from leaving the campus, they said.

They were taken to Omdurman's central division police station and released at about 8 p.m., accused of obstructing the work of Education Vision, which is trying to take over the school. The institution is still functioning as a Christian school, but representatives of Education Vision are regularly disrupting classes, school personnel said.

On March 16 about 20 policemen aboard a truck forcefully entered the school compound, arrested three Christian teachers including the headmaster, Daud Musa, and took them to Omdurman's central division police station, sources said. Also arrested were Christian teachers Yahya Elias and elder Abdullah, all of the SPEC.

They were released on bail after eight hours, charged with obstructing the work of those attempting to take over the school.

The arrests came nearly a month after authorities arrested and held overnight four educators from the same school, including Musa, before releasing them on bail. They were accused of destroying a sign belonging to Education Vision. The Christians strongly denied the accusation.

The Evangelical School of Sudan is one of several SPEC schools throughout Sudan.

The leadership of the SPEC remains in the hands of government-appointed committee members even after a court ruled in November 2016 that the appointments were illegal, sources said. That case is separate from an Aug. 31, 2015 ruling by the Administrative Court of Appeal saying the Ministry of Guidance and Religious Endowments interfered with SPEC's Khartoum Bahri Evangelical Church by imposing committees on the church in order to enable Muslim investors to take it over.

Harassment, arrests and persecution of Christians have intensified since the secession of South Sudan in July 2011, when President Omar al-Bashir vowed to adopt a stricter version of *sharia* (Islamic law) and recognize only Islamic culture and the Arabic language. The Sudanese Minister of Guidance and Endowments announced in April 2013 that no new licenses would be granted for building new churches in Sudan, citing a decrease in the South Sudanese population.

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Police in Sudan arrest Christians at school, prevent others from leaving

Take-over of evangelical institution leads to obstruction accusations.

Morning Star News (30.03.2017) - <http://bit.ly/2ovfMq4> - Police accused staff members of a Christian school in Sudan of obstructing the work of a Muslim-owned business trying to take it over, sources said.

Police in Omdurman, across from Khartoum on the Nile River, on Monday (March 27) arrested 12 staff members of a Christian school and the next day prevented others from leaving the campus, they said.

In an apparent attempt to help the Muslim investor take over the Evangelical School of Sudan, police first arrested two leaders of the Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church (SPEC) – the Rev. Idris Karntina and an elder identified only as Younan – at about 10 a.m. An hour later two police vans arrived at the school complex, and officers arrested 10 other Christians, including women, all SPEC members, church leaders said.

They were taken to Omdurman’s central division police station and released at about 8 p.m., accused of obstructing the work of Education Vision, which is trying to take over the school. The institution is still functioning as a Christian school, but representatives of Education Vision are regularly disrupting classes, school personnel said.

The following morning, police along with National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) officers prevented Christian teachers, including the headmaster, to leave the school, which is owned by SPEC. Teachers at the school together with other SPEC members held a prayer meeting inside, until they were allowed to leave that evening.

The Rev. Yahia Abdelrahim Nalu, SPEC moderator, was inside the school during the staff members’ confinement.

“We expect the arrests to continue,” Nalu said.

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'Sudanese partners open to dialogue on religious diversity': EU envoy

Jan Figel, Special Envoy for the Promotion of Freedom of Religion or Belief outside the European Union, who visited Sudan from the March 14 to 17, says that the exchanges he had during his visit "demonstrated readiness of Sudanese partners to engage in continuous and constructive dialogue on religious diversity in Sudan, Horn of Africa and globally".

Dabanga Sudan (18.03.2017) - <http://bit.ly/2nLH24y> - In a statement issued today, the EU Delegation to Sudan says that the European Envoy met with members of the National Assembly and the Government including the ministers for Foreign Affairs and Endowments and Guidance. Figel also met representatives of religious, political and civil society organisations. He gave a lecture at the Ahfad University for Women. He visited the National Human Rights Commission and Council of Islamic Fiqh, Nour Mosque, a Coptic Church and the Sufi ceremony in Omdurman.

The visit is to support cooperation in intercultural and interreligious dialogue, and to promote freedom of religion or belief and peaceful coexistence of different communities.

Figel said that the exchanges demonstrated readiness of Sudanese partners to engage in continuous and constructive dialogue on religious diversity in Sudan, Horn of Africa and globally. The Envoy discussed the constitutional amendments and their compliance with international human rights law, highlighting the importance that the legislative framework also reflects these standards. "A fair state must be organised around equal citizenship for all. Diversity enriches while uniformity weakens societies," said Jan Figel.

The Envoy called for the pardoning of the two Sudanese pastors, sentenced along with the released Czech Missionary Peter Jašek. Also, Jan Figel was allowed to visit and meet with Dr Mudawi Ibrahim who is in detention.

Jan Figel announced that he will brief the EU Parliament and other EU institutions about his visit.

As reported by Radio Dabanga on Friday, the Slovakian former European Commissioner discussed issues related to religious freedom and the situation of Christians in particular.

Position of Christians

The chairman of Sudan's Legislation and Justice Committee at the National Assembly, Ahmed El Tijani, reported in a press statement that Figel asked about the demolition of several churches. El Tijani told him that the freedom of belief is sanctioned by the Sudanese constitution, and the state does not impose any religious belief or practice on its citizens. He said the churches were demolished for land-ownership reasons.

EU envoy asks Sudanese lawmakers about churches demolition

Sudan Tribune (17.03.2017) - <http://bit.ly/2namvU3> - The European Union Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion Jan Figel has asked Sudanese legislators about the situation of Christians in the country and the demolition of some churches.

Following the secession of South Sudan in 2011, seven former Sudanese dioceses moved to South Sudan leaving only two dioceses for the small Christian minority mainly in South Kordofan and Khartoum states.

The visiting European Union envoy Thursday met Sudanese Members of Parliament (MPs) at the National Assembly where he discussed issues related to religious freedom and the situation of Christians particularly.

According to the Chairman of the Legislation and Justice Committee at the National Assembly, Ahmed al-Tijani, the European envoy during his meeting posed a number of questions about the demolition of some churches.

Al-Tijani said the MPs told him that the Freedom of belief is sanctioned by the Constitution, and the state does not impose any religious belief or practice on its citizens.

He added that the lawmakers pointed out that the churches have been removed because of a dispute over land ownership, and reaffirmed that some mosques have been demolished for the same reason.

He pointed out that churches have been established across the Sudan, adding that during religious events and holidays Muslims and Christians exchange congratulations and reach each other, creating an environment of coexistence and tolerance.

Tijani said that the meeting had been requested by the EU visiting envoy who besides religious freedom discussed also a number of human rights issues.

Figel, according to the Sudanese legislator, during the meeting touched on the role of women in politics and their representation in the executive and legislative organs in the country.

Last February, there were reports that Khartoum state authorities decided to demolish 25 churches. However, the decision has been suspended.

Czech man ready to resume African mission after Sudanese ordeal

Prague Daily Monitor (06.03.2017) - Petr Jasek, who spent 14.5 months on espionage charges in prisons in Sudan and was released to the Czech Republic in February, will return to Africa even after the bitter experience, Jasek told journalists after meeting the Brethren Church members yesterday.

Jasek was sentenced to 20 years in prison in Sudan in late January. In February, Foreign Minister Lubomir Zaoralek negotiated about his release in Khartoum.

Sudanese President Omar Bashir then granted pardon to Jasek and ordered his immediate release.

The Sudanese authorities accused Jasek of activities against the state, including espionage. Prague says he was arrested in 2015, during his missionary expedition aimed to help local Christians.

Czech diplomacy considers Jasek's arrest unfounded.

EU bodies, which repeatedly criticise human rights violation and violence against minorities in Sudan, also intervened in Jasek's case in support of his release. A petition for his release has been signed by 400,000 people, according to the CitizenGO group.

Jasek, together with three African people, was charged on seven counts in Sudan. Jasek said he might travel to Nigeria where Christians were persecuted, tortured and killed every day.

"I will be certainly travelling to Africa since I am in charge of it in our organisation," Jasek said.

"It is more or less a matter of time when I will return there," he added.

"For a time, I will have a holiday for my convalescence, but I will keep contact with my fellow workers. I am looking forward to the work," Jasek said.

Jasek said he doubted his release was due to the presidential pardon. "I doubt that the president signed anything," Jasek said, adding that everything was taking place under the guidance of the secret service in Sudan.

Jasek said the worst situation in Africa was in northern Nigeria. "This will be certainly the destination of my first journey," he added. When asked whether he would return to Sudan after his ordeal, he said if necessary he certainly would.

"However, since I was officially expelled from the country, as it was at least presented to me, I doubt I would be granted the visas again," Jasek said.

Jasek was forced to stay in five Sudanese prisons.

He was beaten by his fellow prisoners some of whom were Islamists. One of them was a bodyguard of Osama bin Laden.

He was also kept in a solitary confinement dubbed "a fridge" where prison guards let out cold air on him intentionally.

One of the worst experiences was staying in a small police cell with dozens of other prisoners, he added. He complained about sanitary conditions.

"Some 100 people used one toilet without water. Such conditions are hard for a man to stand," he said.

Czech aid worker Petr Jašek released from Sudanese prison

HRWF (27.02.2017) – Czech Christian aid worker, Petr Jašek, has been released from prison in Sudan after being pardoned and freed by President Omar Bashir. Jašek, 52, had been detained in Sudan since December 2015. The release apparently comes after the Czech Foreign Minister, Lubomir Zaoralek, visited Sudan this past weekend.

Petr Jašek was originally detained in December 2015 and in January 2017, was sentenced to 23 ½ years in prison for various charges including waging war against the state, violating restrictions in military areas, spreading rumors to defame the state, and inciting strife between communities.

Petr Jasek was arrested alongside two Sudanese church leaders, Hassan Taour and Abdulmonem Abdumawla, who were both sentenced to twelve years imprisonment after being found guilty of 'aiding and abetting' Jasek in his alleged spying. Taour and Abdumawla have launched appeals against their sentences, which have yet to be ruled on.

The charges against the three men revolve around their support (both vocal and financial) for a Sudanese student who was injured during a protest in 2013. As [Christian Solidarity Worldwide](#) explains, "The case further illustrates the politicization of the criminal justice system by the National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS), which, under the pretext of investigating national security crimes, has brought charges against members of the political opposition, human rights defenders and leaders of minority religions".

To learn more about Jasek, Taour, and Abdumawla's cases, please visit our [prisoner's database](#).

Human Rights Without Frontiers would like to thank all of those who contributed to our campaign to release Petr Jašek.

Update: Czech faces 23 years' prison for 'spying', two Sudanese get 12 years for 'aiding' him

World Watch Monitor (30.01.2017) - <http://bit.ly/2jQy42Y> - Lengthy prison sentences have been handed to three men detained in Sudan since December 2015.

A Czech aid worker, Petr Jašek, 52, was sentenced to 23-and-a-half years after being found guilty of various charges, including spying. He was also fined 100,000 Sudanese pounds (around \$15,000) for undertaking NGO work without a permit.

The other two men – a Sudanese church leader, Hassan Taour, and a Darfuri graduate, Abdulmonem Abdumawla – were each sentenced to 12 years, their major "crime" being "aiding and abetting" Jašek in his alleged spying. One of the years was for "spreading rumours that undermine the authority of the state" (even though the legal maximum penalty for this is six months in prison).

Lawyers for the three men plan to lodge appeals within the next two weeks.

Sources told World Watch Monitor that yesterday's (29 Jan) verdict was pronounced in the presence of a great number of Christians, who reacted with great shock and sadness.

Taour's mother was reportedly so shocked that she fainted and needed to be escorted from the room.

The case against the three men centred around Jašek's support for a Sudanese student injured during a protest in 2013. Jašek was stopped as he attempted to leave Sudan in December 2015 and found in possession of a receipt, detailing his \$5,000 contribution to the student, Ali Omer.

Jašek said the money was for Omer's medical costs, but the prosecution alleged that it was a donation to rebel groups in the southern regions of South Kordofan, Blue Nile and Darfur. Both Taour and fellow pastor Kuwa Shamal, who was released earlier this month, are from South Kordofan, while Abdumawla is from Darfur.

Last week, the Sudan government announced a "ceasefire" for another six months in its war against rebel groups in all three regions. However, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North says Sudanese troops have already broken the ceasefire in Blue Nile.

Advocacy group Christian Solidarity Worldwide said: "The case further illustrates the politicization of the criminal justice system by the National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS), which, under the pretext of investigating national security crimes, has brought charges against members of the political opposition, human rights defenders and leaders of minority religions, as occurred in the case of Reverends Yat Michael and Peter Reith in 2015.

"The verdict comes weeks after the outgoing Obama administration confirmed the lifting of some US financial sanctions imposed on Sudan since 1997. The controversial decision was made in recognition of perceived improvements in Darfur and the two conflict areas, including in humanitarian access."

Sources in the Czech Republic told World Watch Monitor that Sudan is one of the seven countries listed on US President Trump's executive order imposing a travel ban.

They also said that the EU Special Envoy at the European Commission on the Freedom of Religion or Belief, Ján Figel, is aware of the verdict. In December, the High Representative and Vice-President of the European Commission told a Czech MP that "promoting a conducive environment for civil society and the protection of human rights defenders are key issues in EU relations with Sudan".

Federica Mogherini had said then that there was a ray of hope for Jašek in that she understood "talk of espionage" had been dropped.

Sudan court verdict postponed for another week

World Watch Monitor (23.01.2017) - <http://bit.ly/2jQvRox> - The verdict in the trial of three men detained for over a year in Khartoum – due today – has been postponed for another week – until 29 January.

Sudan Church of Christ leader Hassan Taour, Darfuri graduate Abdulmonem Abdumawla and Czech aid worker Petr Jasek were first detained in December 2015, alongside another Church of Christ pastor, Kuwa Shamal, who was released earlier this month.

Jasek faces charges of waging war against the state, violating restrictions in military areas, spreading rumours to defame the state, espionage, and inciting strife between communities, while Taour and Abdumawla face only the last two of these charges.

The court indictment specifically accused them of "fabricating videos or incidents of claimed genocide, killing of civilians and burnings of villages, besides claims of persecutions of Christians in Sudan".

Jasek was the first to be arrested, on 10 Dec., when authorities confiscated his computer, mobile phone and flash drives as he attempted to leave the country. Abdumawla, a single man employed in a mining exploration company in Khartoum, was arrested a week later. Then the next day, Taour and Shamal were arrested and held incommunicado for months, without charges or contact with their families.

All four were transferred to the Omdurman prison in early August 2016, then formally indicted before the Khartoum North Court on 21 Aug.

Court proceedings have at times been scheduled almost weekly, but postponed several times without warning when a witness, translator or the judge failed to appear.

In October, the European Parliament adopted an Urgency Resolution, calling for the "immediate and unconditional" release of the four men on trial "on charges of highlighting alleged Christian suffering in war-ravaged areas of Sudan".

The trial hearings were observed periodically by Western diplomatic observers, with local supporters gathering outside the court at times to sing hymns and shout encouragements to the defendants.

One observer at a hearing in November declared, "The prosecutor has nothing new. It was just a repetition of what has already been said... They didn't have any evidence to support their accusations."

In December, courtroom interrogations focused on allegations that a meeting Taour and Shamal had attended with other Sudanese church leaders in Ethiopia a month before their arrest was organised with political motives to "damage and tarnish" Sudan's international image.

While refusing to answer some questions posed by the defence lawyers, the NISS officer serving as the plaintiff in the case declared that "national security considerations" overrode several of Sudan's criminal procedure laws that had been violated throughout the past year.

The appearance of a witness, Ali Omer, on 12 Dec. was hailed as of "significant benefit" to the four men.

The young Darfuri man testified that he had been injured with severe burns during anti-government demonstrations at an Omdurman university in mid-2015. When he was left with serious injuries requiring regular medical care, his Darfuri friend, Abdumawla, had collected funds for his treatment from various organisations and individuals, including Taour, to cover these medical costs. Jasek was carrying electronic information and photos about Omer's situation when arrested. The defendants were accused of promoting Omer's case abroad to defame the government.

Background

Sudan is ranked fifth on Open Doors' 2017 World Watch List of the 50 countries in which it is most difficult to live as a Christian.

There has been no let-off by Sudan in its efforts to impose a unified Arab Islamic character over territories still under its government since the independence of the largely African Christian South in July 2011.

Both Taour and Shamal are from the Nuba people group, native to a border region with South Sudan, and among groups resisting ethnic and religious rule from Khartoum.

Sudan has previously used charges of "undermining national security" after prolonged detentions of Christians.

In May last year, the NISS released another Evangelical church leader after nearly half a year in detention. Despite his release, the file of Telahoon (Telal) Nogosi Rata, 36, remains with the Attorney General, who could yet decide to press charges.

A number of other Christian leaders face restrictions, including Ayub Tilyab, Yagoub Naway (both also SCC pastors), Philemon Hassan, and Yamani Abraha of Khartoum El Izba Baptist Church – all have been alternately arrested, released, and then made subject to daily NISS reporting.

In August 2015, Khartoum yielded to international pressure and released two South Sudanese pastors, whom it had accused of "spying". Yat Michael and Peter Yen were in prison for eight and seven months, respectively.

Similarly, Mariam Ibrahim, a Sudanese Christian, was released in June 2014 after she was initially sentenced to death for apostasy and flogging for "adultery".

On top of arrests, several church buildings have been confiscated or demolished, and the government has stated repeatedly that new church licenses will not be issued, leaving a number of congregations without a place of worship.

In October last year, five churches received notifications that their buildings would be demolished.

Earlier this month, a house belonging to the Bahri Evangelical Church, on the outskirts of Khartoum, was demolished by government officials.

The church has seen a number of its buildings damaged or demolished since 2013, when a committee imposed by the government (but not recognised by the church) sold part of its land to investors. In September 2015, a court ruled the committee was illegal.

Several of the church's members and leaders have been arrested and fined in recent years for protesting against the sale of their property.

Czech aid worker gets 20 years for 'war against' Sudan

World Watch Monitor (17.01.2017) - <http://bit.ly/2jMnVCC> - Czech aid worker Petr Jasek has been sentenced to 20 years in prison in Sudan after being found guilty of charges which included waging war against the state, violating restrictions in military areas, spreading rumours to defame the state, and inciting strife between communities.

He's already been in prison for more than a year.

The verdict came today (29 Jan) in a trial in Khartoum which has also included Sudan Church of Christ leader Hassan Taour and Darfuri graduate Abdulmonem Abdumawla.

They were also first detained in December 2015, alongside another Church of Christ pastor, Kuwa Shamal, who was released earlier this month.

Taour and Abdumawla have faced only the last two of the charges against Jasek (above).

WWM does not yet know the verdict in their two cases. Word of Jasek's sentence came from the Czech Foreign Ministry.

Original article (published 23 January)

The court indictment specifically accused the two Sudanese men of "fabricating videos or incidents of claimed genocide, killing of civilians and burnings of villages, besides claims of persecutions of Christians in Sudan".

Jasek was the first to be arrested, on 10 Dec., when authorities confiscated his computer, mobile phone and flash drives as he attempted to leave the country. Abdumawla, a single man employed in a mining exploration company in Khartoum, was arrested a week later. Then the next day, Taour and Shamal were arrested and held incommunicado for months, without charges or contact with their families.

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