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## **Sudanese government gives back 19 properties to church body**

World Watch Monitor (26.09.2018) - <https://bit.ly/2OsE0PI> - The Sudanese government has returned ownership of 19 properties to the Sudanese Church of Christ (SCOC), two years after it confiscated them.

The land-ownership documents were handed back on Monday (24 September), a local source told World Watch Monitor.

In August a Sudanese court ruled against the government and ordered that administration of properties be returned to the church body and that the case against five SCOC church leaders be dropped.

The surprise verdict followed a long-standing dispute between the government and SCOC over ownership of the denomination's properties, after the Ministry of Religious Affairs set up a rival land and buildings committee and charged it with the administration of SCOC's property.

The verdict coincided with Sudan pushing for the normalisation of bilateral relations with the US and its removal from the US's list of state sponsors of terrorism. But rights groups have called on Washington to "put the brakes on" normalising relations, saying there has been little evidence of progress in the area of human rights.

Under Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir, several church leaders have been harassed, interrogated and taken to court. In May 2017 the SCOC wrote an open letter of protest to the government about what it called "the systematic violation of Christian religious freedoms".

Several other denominations, like the Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church (SPEC), are also in conflict with the government over ownership of properties, and have faced fines and the closure and destruction of church buildings.

In April World Watch Monitor reported that four members of a SPEC church in Bahri, just outside the capital Khartoum, were charged with "causing physical harm to police and supporters of a Muslim businessman" after police and an armed mob attacked the church's premises, which includes houses, offices and a school, the year before.

In the same location one church member was killed during a protest against appropriation of the school.

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## **Freed Czech charity worker recalls finding hell and heaven in Sudan's jails**

By Abigail Frymann Rouch

World Watch Monitor (13.07.2018) - <https://bit.ly/2IYT0zF> - The Czech aid worker who spent 14 ½ months behind bars in Sudan has said he counted his experience a "privilege" because it enabled him to share his Christian faith with Sudanese prisoners, and praised the country's "very courageous" Christian minority.

Petr Jašek also told World Watch Monitor that two Sudanese Christians who were arrested days after him have been resettled in the US, along with their families, since their release in May 2017. A third has been released and remains in Sudan.

Jašek added that, of those with whom he shared a cell during his incarceration, the "most cruel" was a member of Islamic State who had attended secondary school and university in London, and spoke English with a London accent.

Jašek was speaking while on a two-week tour of churches in England and Wales organised by the charity Release International, which supports persecuted Christians, during which he encouraged audiences to pray for Christians in other countries who are targeted for their faith.

Now travelling publicly as the head of Voice of the Martyrs' Africa team, Jašek was arrested at Khartoum airport in December 2015 at the end of a four-day trip during which he researched accounts of state-sponsored persecution of Christians. While there, he gave US\$5,000 to a convert to Christianity who needed medical care for burns he suffered when, according to Jašek, he was attacked for this faith. Jašek was following up on claims he had heard during a conference for Sudanese church leaders two months earlier. That conference was held in the capital of neighbouring Ethiopia, Addis Ababa.

However, Jašek was apprehended as he held his boarding pass home, and taken to the headquarters of the Sudanese secret police where he was interrogated for nearly 24 hours. His wife was only told of his whereabouts after ten days, when the Czech Embassy in Cairo was informed that he had been arrested for smuggling tiger-skins out of Sudan ("which is nonsense – there are no tigers in Sudan," Jašek pointed out).

After a lengthy period of uncertainty, in January 2017 he was finally found guilty of espionage and waging war against the state (for which he could have been handed the death penalty) and sentenced to 24 years in jail. Two Sudanese Christians, Abdulmonem Abdumawla, a convert from Islam who translated for him, and Rev. Hassan Abduraheem Taour, who facilitated his visit, were each sentenced to 12 years in prison. A second pastor, Rev. Kuwa Shamal, who attended the Addis conference, initially avoided a jail sentence but was later held in the same prison as Jašek and Rev. Taour for nine months. The two pastors belong to the Sudanese Church of Christ.

### ***'They called me a filthy pig'***

In all, Jašek was imprisoned in five separate locations, and spent two extended periods in solitary confinement. He was only allowed to receive letters from his family after two months, after going on hunger strike. He was reunited with Rev. Shamal, Rev. Taour and Abdumawla in the second and fourth jails in which he was held. He was released from the last prison on 23 February 2017 after substantial lobbying from the Czech Foreign

Minister Lubomir Zaorálek, the Czech ambassador to Egypt Veronika Kuchyňová-Šmigolová, and various US senators. For three nights before he was permitted to fly home he was kept under close surveillance in a mouse-infested apartment.

"The first prison was the worst one from the point of view that I was put into the same cell as members, sympathisers and supporters of ISIS," he said. "In a cell that was normally designed for one person, we were seven people there."

He said the men dictated where he was allowed to stand while they carried out their prayers, and became increasingly aggressive towards him, especially because he did not retaliate. "They called me a filthy pig and [said] I should face the 'toilet corner' while they were praying, so I would not spoil their prayers."

"They began to slander me; later on [they] beat and tortured me," he said. For the two months he spent in that cell, he said they treated him like a slave, even forcing him to clean out the shared toilet with his bare hands and wash their underwear in a bucket. He added that they forbade him from praying out loud.

The men, who were extremist Muslims from Sudan, Libya, Somalia, Egypt, Kenya and "other Muslim countries", were "22 to 28 [years old and] all university graduates – doctors, pharmacists, engineers, and, of course, Muslim clerics," he said.

One of them had studied in London, he added. Declining to name the man, a Sudanese national, Jašek said his parents had brought him up in Saudi Arabia, where they worked as doctors, before being granted asylum in the UK in time for his secondary and university education. "He was the most cruel one, and was orchestrating all the beatings and torture for me," he added.

One of the older prisoners, a Libyan national, was known as a "man of the sword" because he had taken part in the beheadings of 20 Copts and one Ghanaian on a beach in northern Libya in 2015. Jašek said that the Libyan was held in respect because when he was 12 he had worked as a bodyguard to Osama Bin Laden. "He said that if I were American or Russian, he'd break my neck immediately," Jašek said, adding that on one occasion the man removed a length of strong fishing wire from his pocket and showed how he could use it to kill someone in seconds.

### ***Hunger strike***

When Jašek went on hunger strike to protest at being denied contact with his family or the Czech Embassy (the Czech Republic had suspended diplomatic relations with Sudan because of Jašek's incarceration), after four days guards took him to a hospital where he was forcibly connected to a glucose drip. He asked to be weighed and have his blood tested, and discovered he had lost 15kg, was severely anaemic, and probably had internal bleeding, which was causing him memory loss. He was allowed to receive his first letter from his family in March 2016, three months after his arrest. A second hospital visit two months later revealed that his anaemia had worsened and he had lost a further 10kg.

As he continually tried to recall verses from the Bible or favourite hymns, he said: "I was praying that the Lord would keep my mind sound."

Jašek said that the IS members planned to waterboard him, and so even asked the guards, many of whom feared the Islamists ("who were virtually in every cell"), to transfer him and his six cellmates to a room with running water. The day before they planned to carry this out, his cellmates had him on his knees and were beating him with the broom that was kept in the cell. But he said he experienced peace, was able to pray

for his attackers, and could not fully feel the pain. "The Lord showed me a picture of himself [when] he was spat upon and beaten," he added.

After his release, his wife Vanda told him that at that exact time she had attended a Bible study where the leader felt prompted to ask the group to all pray for Jašek.

The waterboarding was averted when one guard – whom Jašek commended for "fulfilling his duty" – refused to allow the jihadis to move cells.

"When I was physically and emotionally doing very badly, the Lord reminded me of the heavenly beings who day and night cry 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty' ... I said to myself, 'Why couldn't I do that for one day, a month, a year?' I started in my head exalting the name of the Lord and I felt a deep peace – but that was the moment when I realised the aggression against me increased."

"When you deal with radical Islamists, you are fighting not against flesh and blood but in spiritual warfare," he reflected.

He said that hearing them muttering personal prayers, in tears, when they could not sleep at night enabled him to reach a place where he could see them as "lost souls", and he began to pray that Jesus would reveal himself to them "as Lord, saviour and God".

Although the Sudan government is hostile to its Christian population, Jašek said it jails Islamists because they reject its government as secular because it has only adopted aspects of Sharia (Islamic law). Similarly, most Sudanese Muslims do not accept the Islamists, he said.

### ***Solitary confinement***

Jašek recounted two periods he spent in solitary confinement. The first one lasted a month and a half, in a cell into which cold air was blasted sporadically. However, he said he "experienced a marvellous presence of the Lord. I was just walking around, praying and singing – that was the first time I could pray out loud and I could even start singing." His memory of hymns, such as the Czech translation of Thine Be The Glory, returned to him gradually. By the second, which lasted three months, he had been given a Bible. He read it from cover to cover in three weeks, standing by the cell window each day to read it by daylight, and began writing reflections on it.

In hindsight, he said, this prepared him for six months of preaching in his last but one jail, a vast complex that could hold up to 10,000 inmates, where he was reunited with Rev. Taour, Rev. Shamal and Abdumawla. The two pastors preached from the prison chapel, which was the size of a 75-bed cell. For Muslim inmates there was one mosque for every four cells. The guards let prisoners remove the beds that were there and replace them with chairs.

"Initially, maybe 25 to 30 people would come, but the number grew as we continued," he said. Services increased from twice to five times a week. "On Christmas Eve 2016 there were over 200 people there. On Christmas Day we had slightly over 300 people, including those on death row who had been let out to attend chapel. Many on death row became Christians – Pastor Hassan and Pastor Kuwa were allowed every Friday and Sunday to go to their part of the prison, and they would preach to them. Twenty or so death-row prisoners became genuine Christians before they were executed."

"That prison was an opportunity to bear witness," Jašek said. The three figured that they had nothing to lose, being already in prison. "I became a missionary in the prisons," he mused. "I'm still praying for those who have heard the Gospel and not responded yet." He described the experience of "seeing the lost find new peace" as restorative, and his

physical and emotional health began to recover. He regained 10kg. Jašek, Abdumawla and the two pastors were also permitted to receive gifts of food and money, and Jašek was also able to use a smuggled mobile phone to speak to his family. "The wonderful experience of sharing the Gospel and seeing people saved overshadowed any bad experiences and bad memories from prison," he said.

"I would not consider myself brave or strong," he continued. "I went almost to the bottom of my physical and emotional strength, and I have the privilege of saying, together with the Apostle Paul, exactly what he writes in 2 Corinthians 12:10: 'When I am weak, then I am strong.'

"Even when I was with the Islamists [in the first prison] I still had the opportunity of sharing the Gospel. When I was asked questions, I would always include the Gospel in my answers."

### ***'We had tears in our eyes'***

He praised Sudanese Christians as "very courageous". When he and the three Sudanese Christians with whom he was tried were waiting for their first court appearance, Christians from the Nuba Mountains, where both pastors came from, travelled for several days, by a succession of buses, to support them in person.

From the little courtyard in the court complex, he said "we could hear these wonderful Christians singing a song about David and Goliath, but we couldn't see them because we were separated by a high wall. We had tears in our eyes. Later, when we were led out of the courtroom, we caught a glimpse of them and were able to wave our handcuffed hands at them."

He added that he and Pastor Taour, who were handcuffed together, "realised that God gave us the same scripture from 2 Timothy ... in which Paul says he suffered in chains like a criminal but the Word of God is not chained."

Abdumawla told Jašek before their arrests that he had already spent 11 months in prison because of his contact with human rights agencies, and had been tortured with electric shocks.

After his release Jašek was debriefed by Czech intelligence officials and the US State Department about his experience.

There are parallels between the pressure under which Sudanese Christians have to operate today and the communist regime in Czechoslovakia before 1989, Jašek said, in that churches were infiltrated by informers and those arrested were subjected to similar methods of interrogation.

"The secret police have their secret informers among the church members, who report any suspicious activity or any courageous preaching" – which in the Sudanese context could include encouraging evangelising to Muslims, he said. He said he still does not know who gave the secret police detailed information about the church leaders' conference in Ethiopia. But he said one man he saw at the secret police headquarters he recalled seeing sitting in the lobby of his hotel in Addis Ababa. He believed there were informers in the prison chapel where he and the others preached because "they asked about our cases but were not interested in the Word of God".

"Our wives and our children probably suffered more than us," he added. "For five months Pastor Hassan's wife had no idea whether he was still alive, and the Secret Service spread rumours that he had died in prison."

The Sudanese pastors' wives attended the court appearances but Jašek advised his wife and adult children not to, in case they too came to harm.

Rev. Shamal was acquitted a month before Jašek was released, and remains in Sudan. Jašek, Abdumawla and Rev. Taour, with their wives, were reunited last autumn at a 50th anniversary dinner for Voice of the Martyrs, which was held in Washington, in one of the US Senate buildings.

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## **Sudan: Four Christians charged, 36 others to stand trial**

World Watch Monitor (19.04.2018) - <https://bit.ly/2NVoZq9> - New charges have been brought against four members of one of the country's major Protestant denominations. Thirty-six others will appear in court next week on unspecified charges; five others have been acquitted.

Azhari Tambra, Mina Mata, George Adem and Kodi Abdulraheem were charged on 11 April with "causing physical harm to police and supporters of a Muslim businessman" when police and an armed mob attacked the Church's premises, which includes houses and offices as well as the school, in April 2017. Their next hearing is due to take place on Monday, 23 April.

The charges are the latest development in a long-standing dispute between the Bahri Evangelical Church, which belongs to the Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church (SPEC), and a committee linked to the government, which wants to sell off the land on which the Church's compound is situated.

The conflict began in 2013, when the Ministry of Guidance and Endowments authorised and charged an illegally convened land and buildings committee with the administration of the SPEC's property.

Church leaders say this government-backed committee has been interfering with internal church matters and involved in selling off property to investors.

In February seven church leaders were arrested and fined when they protested the takeover of the school located on the Church's compound in Omdurman, near the capital Khartoum.

World Watch Monitor reported on 2 May 2017 how, when the attackers entered the property, they raided the home of one of the accused, Azhari Tambra, and destroyed many of his belongings. He was not at home, but police arrested his wife and their three young children and held them for 12 hours.

A few weeks earlier, two church members had been stabbed when they attended a peaceful three-day protest against the government's attempted appropriation of the Church's school. One of the injured men, Younan Abdullah, an elder of Bahri Evangelical Church, later died of his injuries. The second church member, Ayoub Kumama, survived.

### **Five acquitted, 36 others to stand trial**

On the same day the four were charged, charges against five other SPEC members – Yahaya Abdulraheem, Zakaria Ismail, Idris Harris, Paulos Tutu, and Salim Hassan – were dropped for a lack of evidence.

However, next Thursday, 26 April, another 36 Christians are due to appear in court, facing charges that have not yet been published.

Sudan is fourth on the 2018 Open Doors World Watch List of the 50 countries where it is most difficult to live as a Christian.

The pressure on Sudanese churches has increased in recent years.

"[It] started shortly after the secession of now Southern Sudan from what is now northern Sudan", Daniel Hoffman, Executive Director of Middle East Concern, told Mission Network News. "The government in northern Sudan had said if the south will secede, we will strongly Islamize the legislation and the practices of the government in the north. And since then, there indeed have been a number of pressures on the churches."

A report published in December said the government uses a 'divide and rule' policy to exploit differences within and between communities and, among other things, "supports a group that rivals the official Church of Christ representative body", resulting in attacks on leaders and destruction of property.

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## **Authorities in Sudan demolish church building in Khartoum**

### ***No notice given before bulldozers arrive two hours after service***

Morning Star News (12.02.2018) - <http://bit.ly/2FikqqV> - Authorities in Sudan yesterday demolished a church building in North Khartoum, sources said.

The 64 members of the Evangelical Church in Al Haj Yousif in the Sudanese capital will have no place to worship next Sunday after land officials sent a bulldozer accompanied by police to tear down their building without prior notice, according to one of the church's leaders. Police on three trucks arrived at the church compound accompanied by a bulldozer just a few hours after the end of Sunday worship, the leader said.

"They took everything from the church," she said.

Officials told church leaders that the church was demolished because worship created public disturbances, but Christian leaders said the church sat on land that the government is helping a Muslim business interest to seize.

Leaders of the Evangelical Church in Al Haj Yousif said the Muslim who claims ownership of the church property has forged documents showing ownership. They said the church has owned the property since 1989, and that a judge last year verbally confirmed its ownership.

With police at the ready in case of potential confrontations, the bulldozer began demolishing the structure by noon. Eyewitnesses said police confiscated chairs, tables and Bibles before the demolition.

One Christian called for rights organizations to pressure the Sudanese government to return the confiscated items.

"We urge all activists and human rights supporters around the world to denounce this move and demand for the return of the confiscated property of the church," Christian activist Samaan Mahajoub wrote on his Facebook page on Sunday (Feb. 11).

A court dispute about ownership of the church site is still pending in court.

The Rev. Yahia Abdelrahim Nalu of the Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church (SPEC) confirmed the demolition.

"These crazy actions will not stop us from praying and praising God!" he told Morning Star News. "God is Almighty."

The incident has attracted widespread outrage among Christians in Sudan, with many saying it directly shows hatred of Christians.

In its campaign to rid the country of Christianity, Sudan has designated at least 25 church buildings for destruction, claiming they were built on government lands, Christian leaders said.

On Feb. 5 a court fined seven Christians for defending church properties.

Harassment, arrests and persecution of Christians have intensified since the secession of South Sudan in July 2011. 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.

Sudan since 2012 has expelled foreign Christians and bulldozed church buildings on the pretext that they belonged to South Sudanese. Besides raiding Christian bookstores and arresting Christians, authorities threatened to kill South Sudanese Christians who do not leave or cooperate with them in their effort to find other Christians.

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.

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 fourth on Christian support organization Open Doors' 2018 World Watch List of countries where Christians face most persecution.

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## **Court in Sudan fines Christian leaders for defending church property**

### ***Government helping Muslim business interest take over school, sources say***

Morning Star News (06.02.2018) - <http://bit.ly/2Ek6ruO> - A court in Sudan has fined seven church leaders fighting a takeover of their school in Omdurman for "objection to authorities," a church leader said.

The court yesterday (Feb. 5) found Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church (SPEC) elder Yohanna Tia guilty under articles 182/183 for objection to authorities and fined him 5,000 Sudanese Pounds (US\$275), the Rev. Yahia Abdelrahim Nalu told Morning Star News.



Tia was one of 26 church leaders who have appeared in court since last week for defending a Muslim business interest's attempt to illegally seize the Evangelical School of Omdurman, Nalu said. Seven of the church leaders were ordered to pay fines of 2,500 Sudanese pounds (US\$137) each, and the other 19 were freed for lack of evidence, he said.

Two pastors – the Rev. Dawoud Fadul, SPEC moderator, and the Rev. Edris Kartina – were also fined 2,500 each. Church elders Adam George, Bolus Tutu and one identified only as Azhari, were also fined, along with school director Ustaz Dauod Musa Namnam.

Omdurman is located across the Nile River from Khartoum.

Church leaders have refused to hand over church lands and estates to Muslim businessman Hisham Hamad Al-Neel, sources said. In what Christians in Sudan believe is a campaign to take over church properties, a judge ruled on Dec. 3 that Al-Neel should take over the houses of Nalu and the Rev. Sidiq Abdalla. Al-Neel is attempting to take over SPEC properties in Khartoum and Khartoum Bahri (Khartoum North).

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## Sudanese church leaders back in court



Sudan's government has confiscated or sold off several properties belonging to the Sudanese Church of Christ and Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church (World Watch Monitor)

World Watch Monitor (07.02.2018) - <http://bit.ly/2BL9gmO> - There have been new developments in [two ongoing court cases](#) against Sudan's two main church denominations.

On 5 February, a court fined seven leaders from the Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church (SPEC) for their "objection to the authorities".

Yohanna Tia, a church elder, was fined 5,000 Sudanese Pounds (\$275). Rev. Dawoud Fadul, the SPEC's moderator, and Rev. Edris Kartina were each fined 2,500 Sudanese pounds (\$138). Three more Christians were also fined, along with school director Ustaz Dauod Musa Namnam. Nineteen others were freed due to a lack of evidence.

The problems for the SPEC began in 2012, when the Evangelical Community Council, a SPEC committee responsible for managing the denomination's properties, appointed Rafat Samir as chair to replace Hamad Muhammad Salah, who was dismissed over fraud. But Salah then complained to the government, who reinstated him, even though they did not have the legal authority to appoint someone to a church committee.

Since his reinstatement, Salah has been selling church property to businessmen aligned with the government, against the wishes of the church. On several occasions church members have been detained or physically assaulted, as they peacefully protested against these sales.

This government-appointed committee has been illegally selling SPEC properties in Khartoum, Bahri (Khartoum North), Port Sudan, Kosti, Kadugli, Atbara and other towns in Sudan, according to advocacy group [Middle East Concern](#). There are numerous ongoing court cases about these properties.

***SCOC also under pressure***



SCOC's leaders have been taken to court for having church services that are "too noisy"  
(World Watch Monitor)

In the second ongoing case, five church leaders from the Sudanese Church of Christ appeared in court again on Monday 5 February to hear the complaints against them. The five men – Ayouba Telyan, Abdelbagi Tutu, Ali El Hakim, Ambarator Hamad and Haibil Ibrahim – were first [arrested last October](#).

During their detention officers ordered them to hand over ownership of the church from the elected committee to a state-sanctioned rival committee. Despite their refusal, officers released the men without further instruction.

But a few days later they were charged with causing sound pollution because their [churches were "too noisy"](#).

Their latest court hearing was adjourned until 6 March.