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Sudan military occupy Coptic monastery

By Raymond Powell

[Christian Today](#) (20.12.2023) - Concerns have been raised about the welfare of residents at a Coptic Christian monastery in Sudan after it was taken over by members of a special military unit with a poor human rights track record.

The members of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) have been using the monastery in Wad Madani as a military base since 16 December.

The RSF were formerly under the control of the Sudanese government but since April this year they have been fighting against the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and have been declared a rebel group.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) reports that video footage was released by the RSF showing the monastery's residents being harassed. At least five priests, five trainee priests and four labourers remain missing.

CSW's Founder President Mervyn Thomas said: "CSW is highly concerned by the attack on the Coptic monastery in Wad Madani, and particularly, for the wellbeing of those whose whereabouts remain unknown."

He expressed concern about reports of serious human rights violations in areas under RSF control, and called for a ceasefire with the SAF as well as international intervention.

"We call on all warring parties to conclude a full and comprehensive ceasefire, and to immediately end the escalation in human rights violations which may amount to atrocity crimes," he said.

"The international community must also take extensive action to ensure that those responsible for egregious violations against Sudanese citizens, both during this conflict and before it, are held to account, and to penalise any nation or entity that is effectively aiding and abetting the commission of war crimes and prolonging the suffering of civilians by funding or arming the belligerents."

Minister installed after military coup re-appoints illegitimate church committee involved in church land sale

[CSW \(10.02.2023\)](#) - In January 2023 the lands and buildings committee of the Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church (SPEC) discovered that Sudan's Minister of Guidance and Endowments, Mr Abdul Ati Ahmed Abass, had re-appointed a committee created during the al Bashir presidency which was not constituted according to the church's statutes to administrate the affairs of the church.

Minister Abbas was appointed by General al Burhan in January 2022, weeks after seizing power in the military coup of October 2021 and formally removing a civilian-led government.

In Sudan, church committees recognised by the Ministry of Guidance and Endowments, which oversees religious affairs, are legally empowered to control a church's affairs. During the al Bashir era, the government abused this provision in order to retain significant control over the internal processes of churches, and to further restrict the rights of Christians. [Interference in church affairs](#) was commonplace and was primarily undertaken by National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) officers, who pitted Christians against each other. The government would subsequently claim that disputes such as those concerning different committees were an internal church matter that did not involve the state.

The legitimate SPEC land and buildings committee discovered that the minister had reappointed the illegitimate committee when the church realised that parts of a farm that they owned had been sold. The church owns land measuring approximately 50,000 square meters in an affluent part of the capital, Khartoum. Three churches are located on the land, one is run by the SPEC, a church for Indian Christians and another used by Ethiopian Christians. There is also a Bible training school.

Following their renewed authorisation the illegitimate committee has changed the farm's usage from agricultural to residential and divided the area into over 100 parcels of land. The legitimate committee has submitted a case to the administrative court to request that the Chief Justice hold 78 parcels of land that have not been sold and return the designation of the land to agricultural, as it had been before. However, there are concerns that the request will not be granted due to the return of Islamists in the military government and interference in the judicial process.

In [April 2012](#) parts of the farm were set on fire by extremists in a violent [attack](#). The day before the extremist attack, the local authority attempted to confiscate it and had already demolished the church walls without legal justification, while local police allowed people to loot the church. Foreign embassies in Khartoum raised the case with the Federal government at the time, which prevented local authorities from seizing the land and escalating tensions in the community.

In [2015](#) the Khartoum Administrative Court ruled that the Ministry of Guidance and Religious Endowments had made an error in March 2013 when it handed power to an illegitimate committee to administrate the church's affairs and ruled that the legitimate committee, led by Mr [Rafat Obid](#), was the correct one. The illegitimate committee was subsequently involved in the contentious sale of church property to local businessmen.

During the Sudanese government's transitional period, some important steps were taken to improve the protection of freedom of religion or belief (FoRB). While slow to address the issues of church interference, the Ministry of Guidance and Endowments had reached an agreement with SPEC's legitimate administrative committee for administrative control over the church's affairs. However, in November 2021 a judge [dismissed](#) this agreement. The decision came shortly after the [military coup](#) and the steady rise in influence of the National Congress Party (NCP) of former president al Bashir.

CSW's Founder President Mervyn Thomas said: ***'It is unacceptable that the Minister of Guidance and Religious Endowments has reappointed the illegitimate SPEC committee, and is thus complicit in the illegal sale of land belonging to the denomination. Taken together with the November 2021 decision to dismiss the agreement reached between the SPEC's legitimate committee and the government, this is a clear indication that Sudan is resuming the policies of state interference that were commonplace under the Islamist al Bashir administration. The continuing state interference amounts to a gross violation of the right to freedom of religion or belief, a right which Sudan is obligated to uphold both constitutionally and as a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. We urge the government to address this issue swiftly, and to finally respect the 2015 court ruling recognising the legitimacy of the committee led by Mr Rafat Obid to act on behalf of the church. We also call for the suspension of all sales of property belonging to the SPEC until this matter is resolved.'***