

**Seminar on Persecution of Christians, European Parliament  
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**PERSECUTIONS OF CHRISTIANS IN THE SUDAN MAY ENCOURAGE THEM  
TO CHOOSE SECESSION IN THE FORTHCOMING REFERENDUM JANUARY  
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**Introduction – The Sudan**

Honorable members, I bring you greetings on behalf of my people, in Sudan.

Good morning ... thank you for the kind introduction.

I would especially like to thank COMECE for the invitation to come and give my TESTIMONY in such an important conference, under the theme: Persecution of Christians which is an issue at the heart of my country's source of prolonged conflicts.

And I think this may actually be the first time that COMECE has addressed this important issue in the European Parliament. This meeting affords us a great opportunity to get to the bottom of these important issues.

This Conference is being held here just less than 90 days before the people of my country, make a historical choice, between unity and partition. It will be the first time, since the split between Eritrea and Ethiopia that a nation state in Africa will be given the right of self determination and major departure from the African continent's cardinal principle of recognizing and enforcing borders as inherited at independence. .

Honorable members, there is, however, a real and imminent threat to the security of the people of Sudan and indeed the whole region. If the referendum goes well, it will bring peace to a country which has suffered almost five decades of brutal civil war and make my country a beacon of hope to the world. If however the promises of the CPA are not honoured and the referendum does not deliver a credible result reflecting the aspirations of the people, then Sudan will descend into violence and instability which will affect the whole region.

Opportunities to encourage the principal parties and to prepare adequately for the referendum process, with all its complex logistics and technical requirements are rapidly dwindling. Meanwhile the parties are deadlocked on key issues including the referendum in the region of Abyei, which will also have its plebiscite to decide between unity with the North, or joining the South. They are also negotiating post referendum arrangements in a climate

of mistrust. Clearly there is no time to waste. The CPA guarantors (especially UK, EU, the USA), the UN and the international community need to demonstrate a renewed political will and commitment to enhance their engagement, not just until the referendum but throughout the coming months and years of transition.

The Sudanese Church in her prophetic role has accompanied the Sudanese people in times of peace and war. The Church has been building peace, providing basic services and serving millions of Sudanese people across the generations, as international aid actors have come and gone. It is an indigenous Church, sharing the hopes and suffering of the people, giving voice to those who often are not heard. It represents the vast majority of the population of southern Sudan and a significant number of people in the north.

Honorable members, We the church have witnessed acts of unimaginable violence and contempt for mankind. Helpless and stricken with grief, we are attempting to come to grips with the inconceivable. How can we talk about a peaceful referendum without recalling with concern the persistent persecution of Christians which the Sudan has experienced? Have the brutal facts not crushed any commitment to voting for united Sudan"?

Honorable members, I am not here to criticize my fellow brothers and sisters who follow the Islamic Faith, but only those, who in the name of Islam have taken it as their obligation to wipe the Christian faith from Sudan and declaring Sudan as an Arab Islamic country in which the other diversities of the Sudan are not given due recognition and equal rights. A unity based on a national framework which is not inclusive and which does not draw on the totality of Sudan's ethnic, racial, cultural, linguistic and regional diversities is not likely to be supported.

I am very aware that a negative image of Islam might be reinforced by what we are saying as the Church and we are fully conscious of potential misunderstandings. However, we are at the same time confident they can be avoided. We are confident because our country, Sudan is a product of more than 2000 years of history and it is a multi ethnic, multi racial, and multi religious country, therefore although Islam is part and parcel of Sudan, there are other faiths that make up the mosaic of our country and therefore it is problematic to say that Sudan is an exclusively Islamic country in the same way that it would be wrong to say that Sudan is an exclusively Christian country. ALL faiths must be respected, and our cry is therefore very legitimate and it is backed by history.

Indeed, I think that this Conference can make a positive contribution to the dialogue between civilizations and religions of which Sudan could also potential play a role given its diversities which I have just mentioned. I take lead in this respect from the Second Vatican Council, which subjected Christian traditions to a critical review while providing a positive assessment of other great traditions, thereby offering a sound point of departure for new co-operation and a constructive dialogue. The influence of God's spirit is appreciated in non-Christian civilizations and religions and it forms the theological basis for inter-religious dialogue, the aim of which is to understand the essence of other faiths and to learn from one another.

Condemnation, segregation or annihilation even are no longer the issues. On the contrary, what really matters is constructive co-operation. Unfortunately, my country Sudan has missed this golden opportunity.

Honorable members, the organizers of this conference want us to investigate the reality or otherwise of Christian persecution in particular countries, and what dimensions such a persecution takes. I find the formulation useful because religious persecution today hardly occurs in the same manner as it did in the early history of the Church or at the time of the crusades and the Jihads.

Where it occurs today, religious persecution is often not blatant but subtle, and what sometimes camouflages as religious violence in some parts of the modern world is the cumulative result of a complexity of interlocking factors, including failure in the socioeconomic and political structures of many societies, involving real and

perceived injustices, widespread poverty, large scale youth unemployment, and the resultant resentment, anger, crime, violence and war. It is also embedded, as is the case in Sudan, in the way the national framework is structured.

Put simply, in my country, the national framework, since independence in 1956 imposes only one vision of race, culture and religion, namely Arab Islam, over the rest of the country, which as we have seen, is heterogeneous. This, honorable members, is the fundamental problem facing the Sudan, and which is responsible for religious persecution and discrimination.

I believe that any sincere reflection on Christian persecution today must get to core of what persecution is. Meanwhile, the English dictionary defines a persecuted person as someone who is a subject of harassment, torture, humiliation, intimidation, and oppression. The reason for persecution may be due to one's religious beliefs, one's racial descent or one's cultural practices or may be typically political. Here we shall restrict ourselves to the persecution of Christians based on their religious beliefs in the Sudan.

I believe that a discussion on this theme is most apt for two reasons. First of all, the missionary mandate enjoins us to preach the Gospel to all the ends of the earth, welcome or unwelcome. In His life, the experiences of Jesus Christ and His early disciples testify to the fact that persecution was going to be a hallmark of the faith. When we look at the experiences of Prophet Muhammad and his early followers, it is possible for us to argue that every religion has always experienced persecution and that the ability to withstand persecution has by and large been the mark of all true believers, radical Islamic groups and immigrant prophets of salvation, i.e. sectarian preachers.

The Christian side should continue and intensify its general information and educational work in respect of Islam and inter-religious encounters. Only those who are familiar with the fundamental tenets of Islam and the whole range of its possible interpretations can adopt a positive attitude towards it. The greatest threat to Christian minorities in the Sudan would be the formation of a Christian ghetto. This would fit in nicely with the concepts of certain Islamic circles. In other words, Christianity would be tolerated as a written religion, but Christians would be turned into second-class citizens. To understand the essence of this, we need to go back to the history of the Sudan.

Honourable members

The fundamental problem of the Sudan which many characterize as the problem between Northern and Southern Sudan is as old as the Sudan itself. This problem was acknowledged as far back as the Second World War. The uprising in 1955 of Southern soldiers in the two Southern towns of Nzara and Torit was the first visible outburst of a deep-seated crisis that had been brewing for a long time. What came to be known as the so called 'Southern Problem' was a web of complex issues ranging from inequalities in development between North and South to inequalities in opportunities afforded to the peoples of the two portions of the country by the central government. These were compounded by racial and religious differences between the two peoples.

There is exist historical animosity generated by slave trade – which still propels the Northern elite to treat the African peoples as their slaves. This view is shared with emphasis by Tim Niblock: Southerners in modern times were to say that the memory of the Northern slavers had been kept alive to this day because the Northerners continued to treat the Southerners as though they were slaves and had ruled the south since independence like colonialists. Many Northerners find this version untrue and distasteful, blamed the Christian missionaries for keeping hostility alive by exploiting the theme of Northerner slavers.

Honorable members, it would also be appropriate here for me to dispel the notion of a "Southern problem" so that it is never misunderstood and misused again.

The problem in Sudan is really a "Sudanese problem". It, is as we have said earlier, the problem of a national framework which is defined in only two parameters, Arabism and Islamism, and yet the Sudan is such a diverse country! Therefore those who do not fit into these two parameters are automatically excluded, marginalized and discriminated. This, honorable members, is what Southern Sudanese by and large, have refused to accept. It is also worth mentioning that it is not only the South that has rejected this narrow framework, but also the people of Darfur, as well as those of Eastern Sudan, not to mention the transitional areas of Abyei, Nuba Mountains and Southern Blue Nile. Therefore, it becomes clear, and reinforces our point that we are facing a "Sudanese problem" for which viable solutions must be found. Even in the far north, there are groups that are resisting this national framework that has been imposed on the country.

To look deeper into this problem, the elite in the North irrespective of whether the regimes were civilian or military have held the political, military and economic reins of the country and portrayed the Sudan as an Arab and Islamic orientated country. The elite claim historical bonds with the Arab world. This pro-Arab outlook was well demonstrated during the Israel-Egyptian conflict and the Gulf war, in which the Khartoum government sent manpower and resources to help fight in defence of their Arab brothers, while these resources could have solved the desperate situation in Southern Sudan and other marginalised areas.

Honourable members, the Southern part of the country as some of you may know is socially, geographically, culturally, and economically oriented toward Africa south of the Sahara. Its ethnic communities, split by colonial borders, still maintain their expanded family interaction. Arrogance and disdain towards the South was to be a hallmark of the various governments in Khartoum Simply because the African culture is demeaned in the wake of a national framework that is built around Arab Islam.

Honourable members, this is indeed indicative of a much deeper problem in Sudan!

Let us again go back into history for a moment.

From the 6<sup>th</sup> century onwards the whole of Northern Sudan was evangelized as far as the border with Egypt. But these flourishing Churches were completely wiped out by the advent of Islam as from 640 A.D. until 1317 A.D. when Christianity at Dongolla was brought to an end. The second evangelization which was introduced much later, in 1881, is the one which got rooted among the African Sudanese, and has been battling for survival up to today.

Dr. Hassan el Tourabi, the ideologue of the Islamic movement's real influence in the Arab world, put himself forward as the leader of the National Islamic Front (NIF) movement which defined and directed the policies and programs of the Government of Hassan el Bashir nursed a vision of a nation whose state religion would be fundamentalist Islam, and whose culture would be distinctly Arab. From 1983 onwards, he was responsible for what can only be described as a brutal application of Islamic Sharia, which meant to all intents and purposes that non-Muslims and non Arabs were reduced to becoming second-rate citizens. This should not have come as a surprise to anyone because as we have seen, any system which imposes one particular racial, cultural and religious vision over the rest of the country, to the exclusion of other diversities is bound to create discrimination, which in turn breeds resentment and even rebellion. This is the sad story of my country Sudan.

The restrictive national framework which has characterized all regimes in Sudan has entrenched the persistent persecution and discrimination against Christians and non Arabs in the Sudan has become more pronounced as political contests for dominance have ensued. From the early days after independence, non-Muslims and those who do not identify themselves as Arab were told in no unclear terms that there were advantages in being Muslim and in identifying with the Arab culture. To this effect, the dominant elite, adopted as a guiding philosophy the dictum of One religion, One People, One Race. Thus, the first premier Minister of Sudan, Ismail Al Azhari, began a massive campaign to convert Sudanese to Islam across the Country. He went on to register the Sudan as member of the Arab league the second day after independence. Being a Muslim and identifying with the Arab culture and race for example, became the basis for ascending to any meaningful economic or political office in the Country.

A special feature of life in the Sudan today is the existence of radical Islamic groups, who are prepared to assert their ideas at gunpoint and are not prevented by the state authorities from providing military training for their militias and deploying them in areas of conflict, they are known as the "holy warriors" or *Mujahidin* literally meaning: soldiers of holy wars or Jihad, whose violations of human rights during ethno- religious purges, which included the destruction of Christian churches, is never punished by any state court.

Honourable members

The Sudanese Catholic Bishops in their pastoral letter *The Family of God the Father on Journey towards Justice and Peace*, issued in 1998, offers a concise description of the impact of the Sudanese conflict:

We the Catholic Bishops of the Sudan, being critically aware of the devastating civil war in our country and mindful of our responsibilities as bishops, have discussed among many other things the issue of peace in the Sudan.

We also reflected on the situation of human rights in general as on the famine currently affecting the country. We noted with the greatest concern the devastating consequences of the on-going civil war on the civil population and property as represented by the continuing loss of innocent lives (this amount to ethnic cleansing and destruction of property; rampant sense of frustration and hopelessness; broken families, spread of crimes and immorality including rape; dislocation and displacement of whole populations resulting in unprecedented suffering, impoverishment and dehumanization.

The influx of refugees to the neighbouring countries no doubt relates to the agonizing effects of this war. We also note with regret certain practices which undermine the dignity and worth of the human person. In particular, we deplore extrajudicial punishment, disappearances, slavery and slavery-related practices, torture, restrictions of freedom of expression, discriminative Islamic laws on non-Muslims, manipulation of the media, bombardment of the innocent civilian by military war planes, lack of genuine dialogue between Muslims and the Christian, forced Arabization and Islamization. We disapprove of the use of food for faith or as weapon...We cite the situation of war to express our total rejection of it.

## SINCE 2005 INTERIM PERIOD WHAT HAS IMPROVED AND HAS NOT IMPROVED?

- 1) The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) endorsed that despite all the evils which took place in the past, the government of Northern Sudan must make unity attractive to all Sudanese and in particular, to Southerners and those living in the marginalised areas. The call to make unity attractive was a radical message given the parties to revisit the restrictive national framework and make it more inclusive of all races, cultures, religions and regions, which could have created a space for Southerners and others in the marginalized areas to participate on an equal basis as Sudanese. Some positive outcomes of the CPA are as follows:
  - a. Despite minor violations, the ceasefire still holds
  - b. The first Vice President of the Sudan is a Christian and s Southerner
  - c. Despite setbacks, some major protocols in the CPA have been implemented
  - d. Some developmental projects have been implemented in the Southern Sudan and other marginalized areas.
  - e. Southerners have government of their own, which though young and faced with several challenges is close to the people
- 2) There are however a number of issues that still need to be addressed:
  - a) As yet, there is no agreement on the boundary between North and South
  - b) The application of Islamic law has not changed and minorities who constitute 25% of the population are not exempted from its applications in the North.
  - c) In reality, the former NIF elite (now NCP) control the Government of National Unity, even though the SPLM participates in it. All Government of Unity programs and projects are purely Islamic.
  - d) Non movement in a number of crucial areas to prepare for a credible referendum process in Southern Sudan and Abyei
  - e) Popular consultations in Southern Kordofan and Southern Blue Nile states will not meet the aspirations of a large number of the populations in those areas, even if these were to be free and fair.
  - f) There is therefore a real danger that violence could break out again, given that these areas will remain in the North. Such violence could easily drawn in the South and potentially spread to the whole country.
  - g) Christians in the north remain at risk. Already there is inflammatory rhetoric including reports of threats and a climate of fear. Just last week on 29<sup>th</sup> September 2010, the Minister of Information, Mr. Kamal Mohamed Obeid declared in a press conference in Khartoum that: " If the referendum resulted in separation, the Christians will not enjoy citizenship rights in the north as they would be considered citizens of another state. " There are now growing and valid fears about what an independence vote would mean for an estimated 1.5 million southerners living around Khartoum and other northern towns, many of them long-term residents of internally displaced peoples camps and other settlements.
  - h) Activities of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) continue to devastate people in southern Sudan, mainly in my diocese. The LRA is no longer a Ugandan issue, it is regional, covering four countries. Indeed it represents a new dimension of warfare, an indigenous way of recruiting mercenaries. Official forces, whether SPLA, UPDF or UN, have failed to protect civilians. This group of Rebels, the LRA on 14<sup>th</sup> August 2009, broke into one of my parishes of Ezo and abducted 27 Christians who were at prayers, in the forest these rebels literally crucified 17 of them to the ground with pieces of wood. Four days later in Nzara attacked our Chapel of Nzara parish, caught 12 people and nailed them to the ground in form of a cross. The Church emphasizes that there can be no military solution to this issue and a negotiated settlement must be pursued.

Honorable members

Making unity attractive for the Christians or Southerners to vote for unity is made all the more difficult by the reluctance of the Khartoum elite to constitutionally separate religion from state and drastically change the national framework to make it more inclusive of all diversities that make up the Sudan. Without this, the international community should expect the result of the referendum to be secession, if the state of affairs remains this.

#### WAY FORWARD FOR PEACE IN THE SUDAN AND ELSEWHERE:

Campaign for dialogue in many ways is the noble cause for which all of us must labour!

Honorable members:

1. The struggle for religious freedom requires two attitudes that are not easily reconciled with one another. On the one hand, there is a need for SPIRITUALITY OF PEACE FOR BOTH BELIEVERS. At the end of the study on Christian and Muslims and the Challenge of Human Rights' the authors state that: "Many developments in the Islamic world may give us cause for skepticism at present. On the other hand, there are repeated examples of successful encounters. However, it is not optimistic or pessimistic forecasts which count, but a fundamental open-mindedness towards the potential of the other side - and that potential may, indeed, be surprising.
2. On the other hand, it is important not to link one's own tolerance to the tolerance practiced by others. This is explained very well by Ernst Nagel, who died recently after many years as the head of the Institute for Theology and Peace in Hamburg. He said: "Another outcome of this theological self-contemplation is that one's own attitude to dialogue does not depend on the good behaviour of one's partner.
3. We, the minorities of in the Sudan, particularly the Christians, urge the support of the international community for a peaceful referendum which must sponsor permanent peace in the Sudan either one or two separate countries, where no one can be discriminated on the basis of religion, gender or ethnic affiliation. We are people of hope and we hope that our efforts will bear fruit and we will live in a peaceful environment in our beloved country. Our faith is in a peaceful struggle. We will continue it until we achieve our goal of a just society, where we are considered equally human and Sudanese.
4. Can this conference recommend to the EU in order to put pressure on the United Nations to empower its legislation to protect the rights of minorities of especially the Christians? Can the UN come up with a Commission on International Religious Freedom in its consortium with a strong power to bring justice to any country which persecutes its citizens of particular faith or belief? Which types of atrocities does ICC persecute, can the killings and persecutions of Christians not qualify?

Honorable members, I would like to conclude my deliberation with the saying of great peace lover, Mahatma Gandhi, who believed in non-violent protest. He said "What is faith worth if it is not translated into action?" And this is what we are doing. Thank you very much for your kind attention.