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the religious
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Christians*



WEA
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Joint Stakeholders' Report

Sudan: Freedom of Religion or Belief, Gender-Based Violence and Human Security

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Submitting organizations:

Christian Solidarity International (CSI) was founded in 1977 and is an interconfessional human rights organization dedicated to promoting religious liberty and human dignity worldwide.

Middle East Concern (MEC) was founded in 1991 and seeks to promote freedom of religion or belief in the Middle East and North Africa, with a focus on the Christian communities.

Open Doors International (ODI) is an international NGO that supports communities of Christians from all denominations in more than 70 countries where their fundamental rights are violated because of their faith.

The World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) was founded in 1846 and is a network of churches in over 160 nations that have each formed an evangelical alliance, and over 100 international organizations joining together to give a world-wide identity, voice, and platform to more than 650 million evangelical Christians worldwide.

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Introduction

1. This joint submission highlights key human rights concerns in Sudan, including: (1) attacks on Christians in the context of armed conflict; (2) gender-based and sexual violence; (3) attacks on places of worship and violations of the right to religious education; (4) the humanitarian crisis and discrimination in aid access; and (5) exclusion of religious leaders and local peace actors from peace processes.
2. During the previous UPR cycle (2021), Sudan accepted relevant recommendations including:
 - a) Adopt a comprehensive anti-discrimination and equalities law, banning discrimination on such grounds as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, age or disability (137.106);
 - b) Continue to enhance the promotion of interfaith dialogue and religious tolerance (137.149);
 - c) Adopt measures for the protection and prevention of sexual and gender-based violence, in addition to mechanisms for accountability, in conflict-affected and displacement settings (137.246);
 - d) Ensure fully the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and expression, including for protestors, as well as strict compliance by security forces with their obligations under international human rights law (137.52)
3. Despite these commitments, implementation has been limited and the context in Sudan has since changed dramatically.
4. Since the October 2021 military coup, Sudan has experienced a severe deterioration in human rights protections, reversing progress made during the 2019–2021 transitional period. The outbreak of armed conflict in April 2023 between the Sudanese Armed Forces (hereafter SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (hereafter RSF) has further exacerbated violations, resulting in widespread civilian harm, displacement, and collapse of essential services.¹

Constitutional and Legal Framework

5. The 2019 Constitutional Declaration provided for freedom of religion or belief, equality before the law, and non-discrimination. However, this Declaration has been effectively defunct since the outbreak of civil war in April 2023.²
6. Provisions in the 1991 Penal Code³ allow for discretionary enforcement and are used to restrict religious expression and conversion. These include Article 125 (blasphemy), Article 126 (apostasy) and Article 12 (public decency).
7. Although documented prosecutions under Article 125 (blasphemy) are limited to a few cases, its broad and discretionary language creates a risk of misuse against religious minorities, particularly Christians and converts from Islam. Its existence

may contribute to a climate of legal uncertainty and may have a chilling effect on the exercise of freedom of religion or belief.

8. Although Article 126, which criminalized apostasy and prescribed the death penalty for Muslims who renounced Islam, was repealed in 2020 as part of broader legal reforms, concerns remain regarding its continued influence. Reports indicate that, in some areas of Darfur, criminal complaints have been filed against Christian converts from Islam under the repealed apostasy provision. While these cases did not proceed to trial, the individuals concerned were reportedly detained, raising concerns about the implementation of legal reforms at the local level.
9. Sudan is a State Party to key international human rights treaties, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).
10. Sudan is failing to uphold these obligations, particularly regarding the rights to life (ICCPR Article 6), freedom from torture (ICCPR Article 7), freedom of religion or belief (ICCPR Article 18), freedom of expression (ICCPR Article 19), and protection from discrimination (ICCPR Articles 2 and 26).

Context

11. Sudan is experiencing one of the world's largest humanitarian crises, with more than 33 million people in need of assistance and more than 9 million internally displaced.⁴
12. Christians constitute approximately 4.3% of the population and face heightened vulnerability as a religious minority.⁵
13. Sudan ranks 4th on Open Doors' World Watch List 2026 (a ranking of the countries where Christians experience the most violations), with a score of 92 out of 100, reflecting extreme levels of violence and pressure against Christians. 23 Christians were killed for their faith in the most recent reporting period (1 October 2024 – 30 September 2025).
14. Since April 2023, persecution has expanded from traditional conflict zones such as Darfur, the Nuba Mountains, and the Blue Nile into urban centres including Khartoum and Gezira State.⁶

Issue 1: Attacks on Christians in the context of armed conflict

15. Both SAF and RSF have been implicated in attacks on civilians, including religious communities. Both sides have pressured Christians into supporting them, whilst marginalizing them. Religious leaders have been harassed, abducted, or detained.⁷

16. Other religious communities, including Shia Muslims and followers of traditional beliefs, also face heightened risks.

17. The breakdown of law enforcement and judicial systems has severely limited accountability, enabling ongoing violations and creating a culture of impunity.

18. Examples of violations of the rights of Christians include:

Date	Place	Incident
January 2025	Shandi City, Northern State	The local SAF arrested six displaced youth members of the Sudanese Church of Christ. The SAF alleged that they had colluded with the RSF in Bahri, Khartoum State, the area they were displaced from. On 14 January 2025 the court in Shandi sentenced them to 5-7 years in prison each. Christian lawyers intervened and they were all released except one, who still faces sentencing as a criminal.
April 2025	Omdurman-Bear Hamad	On the evening of Tuesday 29 April 2025, Christian missionary Justin Hamid, who served with the Sudanese Reform Church, died as a result of torture allegedly inflicted by the SAF. Hamid had spent over two years in a conflict zone south of Omdurman, an area controlled by the RSF. Seeking safety, he relocated to the Bear Hamad area, which is under the control of the SAF. Upon arrival, he was detained at a military checkpoint and questioned about his prolonged stay in RSF territory. Once the authorities discovered that Hamid had been proselytizing in the RSF-controlled region, they reportedly began beating him severely. The assault left him unable to move. He was later released into the care of his family, who rushed him to hospital but he died later that evening from his injuries.
June 2025	El Fasher	On Wednesday 12 June 2025, the city of El Fasher was attacked by the RSF in the Nasr area with heavy artillery, targeting three churches. Several shells fell on the Episcopal Church, killing three people who were inside and injuring the pastor. The African Internal Church and the Catholic Church buildings were also damaged.
December 2025	Tulushi, South Kordofan State	In December 2025, the SAF launched a drone strike on a Christmas procession in Tulushi village in Julud county of South Kordofan State. The procession was heading towards a local church at the time. Twelve civilians were killed and 18 others injured. ⁸ Since the incident, church leaders have had to change all Christian events, including Sunday services, to very early in the morning or late at night to avoid violence.

19. These violations contravene ICCPR Articles 6, 7 and 18.

Issue 2: Gender-Based and Sexual Violence

20. Christian women and girls, particularly ethnic Africans and converts, face heightened risks of sexual violence, domestic violence, abduction, and forced marriage.
21. Since 2023, sexual violence has been used systematically by armed actors, including rape and sexual slavery. There have been attacks on health facilities supporting survivors of sexual violence.
22. Survivors face stigma, lack of access to justice, and weak institutional protection. Examples include:

Date	Place	Incident
Ongoing since 2024		H is a 19-year-old girl who became a Christian in 2024. Her parents died and she lives with her Muslim uncle. He warned her never to go to church but she persisted in attending Sunday services. Her uncle got angry and would beat her and tie her up whenever she attended. She now attends Bible classes secretly for fear of further torture.
Ongoing		22-year-old R, a Christian female, is married to a Muslim man who promised her that she would be able to attend church. Once they were married, he changed his mind and ordered her to become a Muslim. R did not accept. Her husband beats her every time she attends church or a Christian gathering.
7 April 2025	West Omdurman	On 7 April 2025, a 34-year-old woman, A, who lives with her elderly mother and 5-year-old child, was raped at approximately 1am. The house was attacked by four unidentified persons. Two of them stood at the door whilst the other two threatened the lady and her family to keep quiet while they raped her. She struggled to move for 24 hours after the attack, after which she managed to get to her pastor to tell him what had happened.

23. These violations contravene ICCPR Article 7, CEDAW and UN Security Council Resolution 1325.

Issue 3: Attacks on places of worship and violations of the right to religious education

24. Authorities monitor religious activities, interfere in church leadership, and restrict construction and maintenance of places of worship.
25. Since April 2023, 150 churches have been damaged, destroyed, or occupied by armed groups. Examples include:

Date	Place	Incident
8 July 2025	Haj Yousef, Shugla area, Khartoum State	On the morning of 8 July 2025, the authorities in Khartoum State, specifically in the Haj Yousef locality in the Shugla area, demolished the Sudanese Pentecostal church without allowing its members any time to retrieve their possessions inside the church. The buildings within the entire church precinct were destroyed in the presence of police and security personnel. Several church officials inquired about the reasons for the demolition from the local authorities, who stated it was due to the removal of unregulated buildings throughout Khartoum State.
29 September 2025	Jebel Aulia locality, Khartoum State	On 29 September 2025, the Director of Education in Jebel Aulia locality, Khartoum State, issued a decision to take over a school affiliated with the Catholic Church, on the pretext that it is a school for South Sudanese ‘foreigners’ and it should rather adhere to the rules of the Republic of Sudan. Consequently, a large number of people arrived at the school, broke down the gate and seized the school. The area has a large number of Christian students who face difficulties in finding schools where Christian education is taught.
Ongoing	Kadugli and El Obeid	Reports from Kadugli and El Obeid indicate that military forces have taken over some church premises for military purposes such as positioning vehicles and equipment. This potentially exposes places of worship and civilian congregants to increased security risks and undermines the protection afforded to religious sites under international humanitarian law.

26. These practices violate ICCPR Articles 18, 22 and 27.

Issue 4: Humanitarian Crisis and Discrimination in Aid Access

27. The conflict has caused mass displacement, hunger, and collapse of basic services.

28. Humanitarian access is restricted by insecurity, bureaucratic barriers, and attacks on aid workers. Christian NGOs can be denied access from Sudan altogether. Christians face discrimination in aid distribution, exclusion from assistance, and harassment in IDP camps. These challenges are particularly acute in the Nuba Mountains region, the region with the largest Christian population in Sudan. Since the outbreak of the conflict in April 2023, both the SAF and RSF have blocked the delivery of humanitarian aid and food to the region.⁹ Few international aid organizations remain operational there, most having suspended or drastically

reduced their operations. The UN has no presence in Kadugli, the regional capital, which is under SAF control.

29. According to local authorities, the SAF regularly diverts aid intended for the Nuba Mountains region. As a result, most of the international aid and other goods that do arrive come through an illegal border crossing with South Sudan.¹⁰ The SAF also blocks all air traffic into the Nuba Mountains. A single road connects the Nuba Mountains with a border crossing with South Sudan, which becomes nearly impassable in the rainy season. Accordingly, rates of hunger spike in the Nuba Mountains during the rainy season. This *de facto* blockade, combined with the influx of IDPs, has exacerbated already severe food shortages in the Nuba Mountains. Al-Buram locality in the Nuba Mountains has been classified as a food security emergency (IPC Phase 4) since 2016.¹¹ In October 2024, local authorities claimed that 646 people had starved to death in the Nuba Mountains.¹² Local sources say the hunger situation in 2025 was the worst in living memory.¹³
30. Christians also report discrimination in the distribution of humanitarian assistance. A church leader from Darfur testified that some Muslim aid workers and UN personnel discriminating against Christians during relief distribution by recording only Muslim families on beneficiary lists, thereby preventing Christian families from receiving support.

Issue 5: Exclusion of Religious Leaders and Local Peace Actors from Peace Processes

31. Diplomatic efforts, including the Jeddah process and UN-led initiatives, have failed to achieve a sustainable ceasefire.
32. Religious leaders and local peace actors play key roles in mediation and community-level conflict resolution, especially in contexts of weak state presence such as Darfur and South Kordofan.
33. In Darfur, locally conflict management mechanisms have historically drawn on the authority of community elders and religious leaders to support intercommunal dialogue and tension reduction.¹⁴ Similarly, in South Kordofan, church leaders and faith-based networks have at times acted as locally trusted intermediaries, supporting community-level dialogue, civilian protection efforts, and informal mediation.¹⁵
34. However, the participation of religious leaders and local peace actors in national-level mediation and peace processes remains limited. Local peace actors and mediation initiatives often lack stable platforms and reliable support within formal diplomatic processes. As a result, the potential contributions of trusted religious leaders, community elders, and grassroots networks to broader stabilization and peace efforts remain largely underutilized.¹⁶

Recommendations

We respectfully recommend that Sudan:

- 1) Immediately cease attacks against civilians and civilian objects and ensure unhindered humanitarian access throughout the country in accordance with international humanitarian law and without discrimination on the basis of religion or belief.
- 2) Ensure the effective protection of the right to freedom of religion or belief and take measures to prevent violence, discrimination, and attacks against Christians and other religious minorities, including attacks on places of worship.
- 3) Amend or repeal provisions of the 1991 Penal Code and related legislation that are inconsistent with Sudan's international human rights obligations, including provisions that enable discrimination against Christians and other religious minorities.
- 4) Cooperate fully with the United Nations Independent International Fact-Finding Mission for the Sudan and implement its recommendations.
- 5) Strengthen measures to prevent and address gender-based violence and conflict-related sexual violence and ensure accountability for perpetrators and support for survivors.
- 6) Ensure the full, meaningful and inclusive participation of women, youth, civil society and religious minorities in peacebuilding, humanitarian and recovery efforts.

¹ Open Doors International, *Sudan Policy Brief: Civil War, Displacement, and Escalating Violations against Christians*, 2026. Online: <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/advocacy-resources/Sudan-PolicyBrief-ODI-March2026.pdf>; Council on Foreign Relations, "Sudan's Humanitarian Crisis, Explained," 2026. Online: <https://www.cfr.org/articles/what-extent-sudans-humanitarian-crisis>; OHCHR, "Sudan: Entrenched impunity fuelling gross human rights violations and abuses," 2025. Online: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/02/sudan-entrenched-impunity-fuelling-gross-human-rights-violations-and-abuses>.

² Transitional Constitutional Declaration, Sudan, 2019. Online:

<https://constitutionnet.org/sites/default/files/2019-08/Sudan%20Constitutional%20Declaration%20%28English%29.pdf>

³ Sudanese Penal Code, 1991. Online: <https://features.hrw.org/features/african-union/files/Sudan%20-%201991%20Criminal%20Act%20as%20amended%20in%202009.pdf>.

⁴ UN OCHA, *Sudan: Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan*, 2026. Online:

<https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/sudan/sudan-humanitarian-needs-and-response-plan-2026-april-2026-enar>.

⁵ Open Doors International, *World Watch List 2026, Sudan Country Dossier*. Online:

https://www.opendoors.org/persecution/reports/Sudan-Country_Dossier-ODI-2026.pdf.

⁶ Open Doors International, *Sudan Policy Brief*; Vibhu Mishra, "Sudan war: 'Darkest chapters' ahead as Darfur massacre claims over 100 lives," UN News, 14 April 2025. Online:

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/04/1162211>.

⁷ Open Doors International, *Sudan Policy Brief*.

⁸ Christian Solidarity International, “Sudanese Christians killed in Christmas procession,” 26 January 2026. Online: <https://www.csi-int.org/news/sudanese-christians-killed-in-christmas-procession/>.

⁹ Human Rights Watch, “Sudan: War Crimes in South Kordofan,” 10 December 2024. Online: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/12/10/sudan-war-crimes-south-kordofan>.

¹⁰ Andrei Popoviciu, “Aid blocked as “unimaginable suffering” grips Sudan’s Nuba Mountains,” *The New Humanitarian*, 25 June 2025. Online: <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2025/06/25/aid-blocked-unimaginable-suffering-grips-sudans-nuba-mountains>.

¹¹ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, “Sudan: Emergency and Resilience Plan: 2026-2028,” 2026, p.7. Online: <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/84905af9-41e9-456a-b834-9956e9601703/content>

¹² European Union Agency for Asylum, “Security situation in Sudan: recent events - EUAA,” February 2025. Online: <https://www.euaa.europa.eu/coi/sudan/2025/security-situation/23-kordofans/234-civilian-casualties>.

¹³ Andrei Popoviciu, “Aid blocked as “unimaginable suffering” grips Sudan’s Nuba Mountains,” *The New Humanitarian*, 25 June 2025. Online: <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2025/06/25/aid-blocked-unimaginable-suffering-grips-sudans-nuba-mountains>.

¹⁴ UNDP Sudan, *Bridging Divides: Local Peace Initiatives in Sudan*, October 2025. Online: undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2025-10/undp_sudan_bridging_divides_report.pdf.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ PAX, “Sudan Peace Talks collapsed: a reminder for inclusive peacebuilding,” 31 July 2025. Online: paxforpeace.nl/news/sudan-peace-talks-collapsed-a-reminder-for-inclusive-peacebuilding.