

SUDAN 2022 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

In October 2021, General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan led a military takeover that ousted Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok and his government. Hamdok was briefly reinstated in November 2021 but resigned in January 2022. Burhan served as de facto head of state and government since October 2021 while a cabinet of acting ministers handled day-to-day administration. Following the October military takeover, authorities continued to amend and restructure laws put in place by the civilian-led transitional government (CLTG). A constitutional declaration signed in 2019 included several provisions protecting the right to freedom of religious belief and worship “in accordance with the requirements of the law and public order.” Unlike the former constitution, it makes no reference to sharia as a source of law, although the clause restricting the death penalty permits its imposition as sharia-sanctioned (*hudud*) punishment for certain crimes. The constitutional declaration stipulates that existing laws and institutions governing religion remain in effect. Following the October 2021 military takeover, authorities maintained laws put in place by the CLTG but ceased work on amendments. The Miscellaneous Amendments (Fundamental Rights and Freedoms) Act of 2020 (MAA) repealed the law criminalizing apostasy and amended the blasphemy law to apply to insults against any religion, rather than only Islam, although some criminal laws and practices established by the previous government led by Omar al-Bashir remained in effect. Some criminal laws and practices, addressed in low-level courts, continued to be based on the Bashir government’s interpretation of a sharia system of jurisprudence which does not provide protections for some religious minorities, including minority Muslim groups.

Several cases involving persons facing criminal charges for adultery or apostasy went to court during the year. In one case, authorities in Gezira State in October 2021 charged a married couple with adultery based on the Islamic prohibition of a Muslim woman marrying a Christian man. In addition to adultery, authorities charged the couple with violating marriage provisions of the law. According to the couple’s lawyer, the pair could have been sentenced to 100 lashes, stoning, or “internal deportation or banishment” if found guilty. The couple was scheduled to attend a hearing in October at al-Baqir Criminal Court in Gezira State. As of

year's end, the couple had fled the country and was living abroad, and the hearing was not held.

On November 21, police arrested Pastor Abdulla Haroun Sulieman of the Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church in al-Hasahisa locality in Gezira State. According to a statement from the National Religious Freedoms Association, Pastor Sulieman was charged with witchcraft for leading a prayer meeting that allegedly healed his mother, who suffered from an infection. Local news reported on November 30 that "Muslim extremists" persuaded the police to arrest Pastor Sulieman for claiming to be a witch doctor. Police also arrested four men in Zalingei, Central Darfur State, who reportedly converted from Islam to Christianity. The four men were charged with apostasy, were jailed, and allegedly tortured. As of August 30, the Zalingei Prosecution Office in Central Darfur withdrew the case against the men.

Media outlets reported an individual attacked a Sudanese Church of Christ (SCOC) pastor and women at his congregation in al-Hajj Abdalla locality in Gezira State during a Palm Sunday service in April. Authorities charged both the pastor and the attacker with disturbing the peace, and they faced a one-month jail sentence. In February, media outlets reported that a court ordered the demolition of part of a church building in Omdurman belonging to the Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church (SPEC).

U.S. embassy officials encouraged respect for religious freedom and the protection of minority religious groups and for the inclusion of religious freedom in the political framework agreement signed between the military and civilians in December. The framework agreement committed the State to support and protect freedom of belief and religious practices for all Sudanese and explained that the State will not impose specific religions on individuals. Embassy officials also urged local lower-level courts to adhere to the provisions of the 2019 constitutional declaration and the MAA. In addition, they urged government officials to abstain from the former regime's abuses of religious freedom, including punishments such as flogging and stoning for apostasy and adultery, and the confiscation and demolition of religious properties. Embassy officials maintained close contact with religious leaders, faith-based groups, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Embassy representatives monitored the

state of religious freedom in the country and stressed the importance of religious tolerance among the various religious groups.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 48 million (midyear 2022). 2020 Pew Research Center data estimates that 91 percent of the population is Muslim, 5.4 percent Christian, 2.8 percent follow Indigenous religions, and the remainder follow other religions or are unaffiliated. Some religious advocacy groups estimate non-Muslims make up more than 13 percent of the population. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees reports 1,139,163 refugees and asylum seekers in the country as of year's end, including 807,411 South Sudanese refugees.

Almost all Muslims in the country identify as Sunni, although there are significant distinctions among followers of different Sunni traditions, particularly among Sufi orders. Small Shia Muslim communities are based predominantly in Khartoum. At least one Jewish family remains in the Khartoum area. There is a small Baha'i community.

The Sudan Council of Churches reports the presence of 36 Christian denominations, of which 24 are registered denominations. Christians reside throughout the country, primarily in major cities such as Khartoum, Port Sudan, Kassala, Gedaref, El Obeid, and El Fasher. Christians also are concentrated in some parts of the Nuba Mountains, South Kordofan State, and in parts of Blue Nile State.

Relatively small but long-established groups of Coptic Orthodox and Greek Orthodox Christians are in Khartoum, El Obeid in North Kordofan, River Nile State, Gezira State, and eastern parts of the country. Ethiopian and Eritrean Orthodox communities, largely made up of refugees and migrants, are in Khartoum and the eastern part of the country. Other larger Christian groups include the Roman Catholic Church, Episcopal Anglican Church, SCOC, Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church (SPEC), and the Presbyterian Church of Sudan. Smaller Christian groups include the Africa Inland Church, Armenian Apostolic Church, Sudan Interior Church, Sudan Pentecostal Church, Seventh-day Adventist Church, and Jehovah's Witnesses.

Government statistics indicate less than 1 percent of the population, primarily in Blue Nile and South Kordofan States, adhere to traditional African religious beliefs. Some Christians and Muslims incorporate aspects of these traditional beliefs into their religious practice.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The 2019 constitutional declaration included several provisions protecting the right to freedom of religious belief and worship “in accordance with the requirements of the law and public order.” As stipulated in that constitutional declaration, existing laws and institutions governing religion were to remain in effect while the government worked to amend and restructure them. In 2020, the CLTG signed the Juba Peace Agreement (JPA) which included provisions to respect and promote religious freedom, and specifically an agreement to establish a National Commission for Religious Freedoms to address the issues of religious diversity in the country; the JPA was incorporated into and amended the 2019 constitution. Following the October 25 military takeover, authorities maintained the laws put in place by the CLTG but ceased work on amendments. The United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission Sudan (UNITAMS), African Union, and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) have been supporting a Sudanese-led effort to build consensus on a path to restoring a credible, civilian-led government and a new constitutional framework. This led to the December 5 Framework Political Agreement and ongoing negotiations to form a new government.

While the previous constitution stated all national legislation should be based on sharia, the 2019 constitutional declaration made no reference to sharia, although the clause restricting the death penalty permits its imposition as sharia-sanctioned (*hudud*) punishment for certain crimes.

The 2019 constitutional declaration also had provisions for access to education regardless of religion. It required that political parties be open to citizens of all religions and ensures all “ethnic and cultural” groups have the right to “exercise

their beliefs” and “observe their religions or customs” “in accordance with the requirements of the law and public order.”

Abuses of freedom of religion are often addressed in lower courts but may, in theory, be appealed to the Constitutional Court. As of year’s end, however, the Constitutional Court had not been established.

National laws adopted during the Bashir administration concerning personal and family matters of Muslims remain largely in effect and are based on a sharia system of jurisprudence. The criminal code states that the law, including at the state and local levels, shall be based on sharia sources and include hudud, *qisas*, and *diyah* principles (regarding punishment, restitution, and compensation for specific serious crimes). The criminal code takes into consideration multiple sharia schools of jurisprudence (*madhahib*). The Islamic Panel of Scholars and Preachers (Fiqh Council), an official body of 50 Muslim religious scholars responsible for explaining and interpreting Islamic jurisprudence, determines under which conditions a particular school of thought applies. Other criminal and civil laws are determined at the state and local level.

Members of the Fiqh Council serve four-year renewable terms. In the past, the council advised the government and issued fatwas on religious matters, including the levy of customs duties on the importation of religious materials, payment of interest on loans for public infrastructure, and determination of government-allotted annual leave for Islamic holidays. The council’s opinions are not legally binding. Muslim religious scholars may present differing religious and political viewpoints in public. The scope of the Fiqh Council mandate was unclear under the CLTG and remained so following the military takeover.

In 2020, the CLTG ratified the MAA, rescinding a provision of the law that criminalized and imposed the death penalty for apostasy (conversion from Islam to another faith). The MAA replaced the apostasy provision with an article criminalizing takfir (the act of declaring someone a kafir, or nonbeliever). Those charged with takfir face imprisonment not to exceed 10 years, a fine, or both.

The criminal code’s section on “religious offenses” criminalizes various acts committed against any religion. These include insulting religion; blasphemy; questioning or criticizing the Quran, the Sahaba (the Companions of the Prophet),

or the wives of the Prophet; disturbing places of worship; and trespassing upon places of burial. In 2020, the CLTG removed flogging as a punishment for blasphemy. The criminal code states, “Whoever insults any religion, their rights or beliefs or sanctifications, or seeks to excite feelings of contempt and disrespect against the believers thereof” shall be punished with up to one year in prison and/or a fine.” The article includes provisions that prescribe penalties of up to five years’ imprisonment, a fine, or both for anyone who curses the Prophet Muhammad, his wives, or members of his respective households.

In 2020, the CLTG repealed a provision of law under which individuals could be arrested for indecent dress and other offenses deemed injurious to honor, reputation, and public morality. The MAA also removed penalties for anyone who imported or distributed alcohol to any individual, regardless of religion.

Some parts of the criminal code specify punishments for Muslims based on government interpretation of sharia punishment principles. For example, the penalty for adultery with a married person is hanging and for an unmarried person is 100 lashes. Punishment for an unmarried man may additionally include banishment for up to one year. These penalties only apply to Muslims. Adultery is defined as sexual activity outside of marriage, prior to marriage, or in a marriage that is determined to be void.

Under the law, the Minister of Justice may release any prisoner who memorizes the Quran during his or her prison term. The release requires a recommendation for parole from the prison’s director general, a religious committee composed of the Sudan Scholars Organization, and members of the Fiqh Council, which consults with the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MRA) to ensure decisions comply with Islamic jurisprudence.

The MRA is responsible for regulating Islamic religious practice, supervising churches, and guaranteeing equal treatment for all religious groups. The MRA also provides recommendations to relevant ministries regarding religious issues that government ministries encounter.

To gain official recognition by the government, religious groups are required to register at the state level with the MRA. The MRA and the state-level entities responsible for land grants and planning may authorize or permits to build new

houses of worship, taking into account zoning concerns. Allocation of land to religious entities is determined at the state level.

The Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC) oversees NGOs and nonprofit organizations. Religious groups that engage in humanitarian or development activities must register as nonprofit NGOs by filing a standard application required by the HAC. Only NGOs registered with the HAC are eligible to apply for other administrative benefits, including land ownership, tax exemptions, and work permits. The HAC worked with the Ministry of Interior to facilitate the visa process for NGO representatives seeking to obtain visas.

The MRA has federal entities in each state that coordinate travel for the Hajj and Umra.

The state-mandated education curriculum requires that all students receive religious instruction from elementary school to secondary school. The curriculum further mandates that all schools, including international schools and private schools operated by Christian groups, provide Islamic education classes to Muslim students from preschool through the second year of university. The law does not require non-Muslims to attend Islamic education classes and mandates that public schools provide Christian students with other religious instruction if there are at least 15 Christian students in a class. The government did not always provide sufficient resources to carry out this provision or to hire the requisite number of teachers overall. According to the Ministry of Education, this number was not reached in most schools. Non-Muslim students normally attend religious study classes of their own religion outside of regular school hours to fulfill the religious instruction requirement. The Ministry of Education is responsible for determining the religious education curriculum. According to the ministry, the Islamic curriculum must follow the Sunni tradition.

Under the law, a Muslim man may marry a non-Muslim woman. In practice, Muslim men follow sharia guidance, which advises that they may marry “non-Muslim women of the book,” i.e., either Christian or Jewish women. A Muslim woman, however, legally may marry only a Muslim man. A Muslim woman marrying a non-Muslim man can be charged with adultery.

There are separate family courts for Muslims and non-Muslims to address personal status issues such as marriage, divorce, and child custody, according to their religion. By law, in custody dispute cases where one parent is Muslim and the other is Christian, courts grant custody to the Muslim parent if there is any concern that the non-Muslim parent would raise the child in a religion other than Islam.

According to Islamic personal status laws, Christians (including children) may not inherit assets from a Muslim. Children of mixed (e.g., Muslim-Christian) marriages are considered Muslim and may inherit assets.

Government offices and businesses are closed on Friday for prayers and follow a Sunday to Thursday work week. A 2019 decree mandates that academic institutions shall not give examinations on Sunday and authorizes Christians to leave work at 10:00 a.m. on Sunday for religious activities. Individuals may also leave work to celebrate Orthodox Christmas, an official state holiday, along with several key Islamic holidays.

An interministerial committee, which includes the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the General Intelligence Service, and, in some cases, the military intelligence service, must approve foreign clergy and other foreigners seeking a residency permit.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

In October 2021, the military organized a takeover that ousted Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok and his government. Hamdok was briefly reinstated in November 2021 but resigned in January 2022. Under the new regime, General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan has served as de facto head of government since October 2021 while a cabinet of acting ministers handled day-to-day administration. These acting ministers were either senior civil servants or hold-over ministers who were appointed by the Hamdok Government and are representatives of JPA signatories. In December 2021, during a brief reinstatement, Prime Minister Hamdok assigned Undersecretary Abdelaati Ahmed Abbass to run the MRA; he was retained in that position after Hamdok's resignation in January 2022.

Since the takeover, UNITAMS, the AU, and IGAD, in conjunction with the international community, have worked to facilitate a Sudanese-led process with Sudanese stakeholders, including a range of religious actors, to build consensus on a path to establishing a credible civilian-led government and a new constitutional order.

On July 4, General Burhan announced his commitment to withdraw the military from politics. On December 5, the military and some civilians signed a Framework Political Agreement that includes commitments to protecting religious freedom. The framework agreement, however, is an interim agreement; the parties have committed to hold additional, inclusive dialogues on key outstanding issues and then conclude a final agreement and/or constitutional document prior to forming a new civilian government. The framework agreement would commit that government to support and protect freedom of belief and religious practices for all Sudanese. It stated that the State will not impose specific religions on individuals. It also called attention to religious freedoms by noting that individuals have the right to enjoy the protection of the law without discrimination because of their religious beliefs; have the right to freedom of religious belief and worship; have the right to declare their religion or belief, or to express them through worship, education, and practice; or to perform rituals or celebrations in accordance with what the law organizes in a democratic society; and that no one should be forced to embrace a religion in which they do not believe, or practice rituals that they do not accept voluntarily.

Some criminal laws and practices continued to be based on the Bashir government's interpretation of a sharia system of jurisprudence, which human rights groups stated did not provide protections for some religious minorities, including minority Muslim groups.

A married couple facing charges of adultery, based on the Islamic prohibition of a Christian man marrying a Muslim woman, with a possible sentence of stoning, fled the country in advance of a hearing scheduled for mid-October. In October 2021, authorities charged the couple with adultery and the case went to trial during the year, garnering international attention. While both were Muslim at the time of their marriage in 2016, the husband converted to Christianity in 2018, and the wife's family filed for divorce on her behalf and won. Following the 2019 revolution, the couple reunited without the consent of the family. After the

October 2021 military takeover, the wife's brother filed an adultery case against his sister, even though she stated in 2020 that she had also converted to Christianity. In addition to adultery, the couple was accused of violating marriage laws of the 1991 Criminal Act. According to the couple's lawyer, the sentence for these charges includes 100 lashes, stoning, or "internal deportation or banishment" if found guilty. This case was postponed, as the couple delivered a baby on August 4. The couple fled the country in October and, as a result, planned judicial hearings did not take place.

On June 26, White Nile State Court sentenced a 20-year-old woman to death by stoning for allegedly committing adultery in Kosti, White Nile State. According to her lawyers, family members forced the woman to marry her cousin; she was trying to separate from him when she entered a relationship with a male companion. Another cousin found the woman with her companion and beat the companion to death. When searching the companion's cell phone, police were able to identify the woman, who admitted to being intimate with the victim at other times. Authorities then charged the woman with adultery and considered her a witness to the murder of her alleged lover. The cousin who killed the companion told the court he was protecting the "honor of the family," and observers believed the adultery charges against her strengthened his defense. As of November 21, the White Nile Court of Appeals annulled the decision to sentence the woman to stoning and ordered the case be returned to the lower court for judicial review, noting the woman was not given a fair trial and there were numerous technical issues with the prosecution. The court indicated that police and the courts did not provide the woman with required legal protection; the judge did not fully explain the consequences of confessing to the crime; she was forced to marry her cousin without consent; and the woman and her male companion were not engaged in intimate acts when they were discovered. As of December 15, media outlets reported that Kosti Criminal Court Judge Haroun Adam overturned the decision to sentence her to stoning and ordered her case to be retried. He then sentenced the woman to six months in Kosti Women's Prison.

On June 22, authorities charged four young men from the Sudanese Baptist Church with apostasy (*ridda*) after police allegedly found the group praying in Zalingei, Central Darfur State. Authorities stated the men had converted from

Islam to Christianity. The NGO CSW (formerly Christian Solidarity Worldwide) expressed concern that the four men could be sentenced to stoning or other forms of capital punishment. Under the 1991 Criminal Act, a Muslim who publicly declares their renouncement of Islam shall be deemed to have committed apostasy. Should they refuse to recant, the punishment would be death; amendments to the law in 2020, however, reduced the punishment to 100 lashes. Following questioning, authorities released the men but detained them again shortly afterwards. Six days later, the men were released on bail. Local news outlets reported that officials tortured the four men (forced haircuts, beatings, interrogations, and deprivation of food and beverages) inside police cells. Church personnel stated that police confiscated their Bibles and other church documents. On August 30, the prosecutor asked to withdraw the case and the judge informally told the lawyers the case was likely to be dropped because it was not handled in accordance with the law. As of September 8, the court dismissed the case, and local media reported that the judge stated apostasy is “no longer a crime in Sudan.” The lawyer for the four men confirmed that the prosecution had withdrawn the case and explained that legal procedures were not implemented properly.

The Ministry of Guidance and Endowments originally authorized the Sudanese Baptist Church, established by the four men found praying, during the transitional period. The church closed in June, however, due to threats and attacks by hardline Muslim residents according to CSW. Church members clarified that individual Muslims, not an organized group, harassed and threatened church goers. According to CSW, three other churches closed in Zalingei during the year due to an increase in threats and violence, including the Christ’s Light Church in January, an Episcopal church in April, and a Sudanese Baptist church in June. CSW reported that church leaders living in camps for internally displaced people in Darfur have reported receiving threats from officials, who told them they would face apostasy charges if they continued to meet to pray.

Throughout the year, Christians reported being subjected to attacks, according to local news and CSW reports. On April 10, a police officer assaulted Reverend Stephanos Adel Kujo and four women who were praying inside a church. Authorities arrested Reverend Kujo, the four women, and the officer for fighting inside the church and charged them with disturbing public peace. According to local news media, on April 25, a judge found both men guilty and “explained the

decision was meant to prevent religious strife in the community.” The judge ordered both men to serve a one-month sentence in the same jail facility.

CSW reported that on July 13, three children died from an “extremist” arson attack in Garsilla, Central Darfur. Their father, a Catholic Church deacon, died on November 21 due to suspected poisoning, during which the attackers reportedly called it the “kafir’s house.” According to CSW, this was religiously motivated. The family filed a police report regarding the suspected poisoning. As of year’s end, the police had not conducted an investigation into the death of the children or the father. Local news media did not report further on the identity of the attackers.

According to the National Religious Freedoms Association (NRFA), on June 14, police arrested Reverend Kabashi Idris and missionary Yaqoub Ishaq inside a church while they were studying the Bible with a group of delegation members.

On November 21, police arrested Pastor Abdulla Haroun Sulieman of the Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church in al-Hasahisa locality in Gezira State. According to a statement from the National Religious Freedoms Association, Pastor Sulieman was charged with witchcraft for leading a prayer meeting that allegedly healed his mother, who suffered from an infection. Local news reported on November 30 that “Muslim extremists” persuaded the police to arrest Pastor Sulieman for claiming to be a witch doctor.

In December, a member of the Sudanese Armed Forces reportedly burned down Dawka church of the Sudanese Church of Christ congregation in El Gedaref State. The church belonged to the Roman Catholic Church but was used by evangelical Christian followers after most Catholics left the area. According to local media and CSW, Yasin Ahmed Haroun, a soldier in the military, was identified by eyewitnesses and was seen running from the church to a military base following the incident. Church leaders filed a criminal case against Haroun. The local prosecutor requested that the military authorities surrender Haroun for their investigation. Military officials stated they did not have anyone by that name in their ranks.

NRFA reported that in July, the police department of al-Thawra-al-Hara in Omdurman arrested two Christian clergymen of the Independent Baptist Church

and Africa Inland Church for public nuisance as a result of a complaint submitted by one of the church's neighbors. Local parishioners continued to state that compared with Islamic institutions, zoning laws disproportionately impacted Christian places of worship.

According to religious leaders with the American Friends Episcopal of Sudan, Christian church leaders faced difficulties receiving the necessary documentation for building churches in the country and said that processing documentation was stopped at different levels of the government. According to the Primate of the Episcopal Church of Sudan, Archbishop Ezekiel Kondo, he last tried to apply for proper documentation three years ago, but that while it was approved at the local level, it faced difficulties at the second level and was sent back with a denial.

Prisons provided prayer spaces for Muslims, but observers said authorities did not allow Shia prayers. Shia prisoners were permitted to join prayer services led by Sunni imams. Some prisons, such as the Women's Prison in Omdurman, had dedicated areas for Christian observance. Christian clergy held services in prisons, but access was irregular, according to SCOC and Roman Catholic clergy.

Members of minority religious groups continued to express concerns regarding the educational system, which lacked sufficient teachers equipped to teach courses on Christianity and textbooks that promoted religious diversity. Although the law does not require non-Muslims to attend Islamic education classes, some schools did not excuse non-Muslim students from these classes. Some private schools, including Christian schools, received government-provided teachers to teach Islamic subjects, but non-Muslim students were not required to attend those classes. Most Christian students attended religious education classes at their churches, based on the availability of volunteer teachers from their church communities. According to Archbishop Kondo, most schools were required to separate by gender, compelling schools to offer twice as many classes with already stretched resources, particularly for religious courses.

Christian churches reported that the CLTG continued to grant churches and their affiliated humanitarian institutions tax-exempt status. The Bashir government had only granted such status to Islamic relief agencies. Following the dissolution of the CLTG, leaders of religious institutions said they must formally request permission to import items such as vehicles into the country, but that these items

continued to be tax exempt. While some church officials encountered challenges requesting visas and resident permits for foreign Christian missionaries, the officials stated that they have not faced difficulties regarding tax-exempt status.

In 2020, the CLTG and the SPLM-N, Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North, armed opposition movement agreed, during preliminary negotiations, to establish an independent religious freedom commission to resolve religious freedom issues from the previous regime. Following the CLTG's dissolution, the commission has yet to be created.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Individuals from minority religious groups, including Shia and other Muslim minorities, stated they avoided expressing beliefs or discussing religious practices that differed from those of the Sunni majority. Local media stated they exercised self-censorship to avoid addressing religious issues due to concerns regarding negative reactions or reprisals from the majority Sunni community.

On April 10, media outlets reported an individual attacked an Evangelical Lutheran pastor, Stephanos Adel Kujo, and women in his congregation during a Palm Sunday service in al-Hajj Abdalla Locality of Gezira State. Local media stated Ibrahim Kodi, locally referred to as Banaga, interrupted the service, attacked the pastor and other members of the church, and destroyed several Bibles and chairs. On April 25, the al-Hajj Abdallah Criminal Court convicted Pastor Kujo and the assailant for "disturbing the peace" and sentenced them both to one month in prison.

Local news media reported local Wahhabi "extremists" had previously harassed Pastor Kujo's church in February and prevented members of the congregation from accessing it. According to CSW, the building belonged to the Catholic Church, but several Christian denominations and Muslim members had used it as a place of worship and activities. On February 21, church members found a notice posted on the building banning all activities, including praying, that was allegedly signed by the Neighborhood Youth Association. The following week, the church was padlocked, but congregation members broke the lock, entered the building, and began praying, and authorities subsequently arrested two pastors and later released them.

In March, CSW reported police arrested and interrogated two church leaders from SCOC in Gezira State, a week after local “extremists” ordered the church to close the building.

In February, a court in Khartoum Bahri ordered the demolition of part of a church building belonging to the SPEC. The CSW reported that the SPEC denomination had faced interference from the military since October 2021. The CSW also stated that church property was confiscated and that several church leaders were facing criminal charges.

In October, Archbishop Kondo reported that an unidentified gunman killed a Christian teacher in Dilinge, Nuba Mountains.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

During the year, embassy officials met regularly with government officials to encourage respect for religious freedom and the protection of minority religious groups. Embassy officials encouraged political leaders in charge of drafting political initiatives to include language that addressed religious freedom. In numerous meetings, embassy officials advocated for freedom of religious beliefs, freedom of expression, inclusion of all religious groups, and other human rights throughout the political discussions prior to and following the signing of the Framework Political agreement. They also urged officials to refrain from the former regime’s abuses of religious freedom, which included confiscating and demolishing church property, and also urged local lower-level courts to adhere to the provisions of the 2019 constitutional declaration and the MAA.

Throughout the year, embassy officials engaged with religious leaders, faith-based groups, lawyers representing religious cases, and civil society organizations, including SPEC, the Sudan Council of Churches, the Evangelical Church of Bahri, and the Catholic Archbishop of Khartoum, to discuss legislation enacted under the CTLG and to seek their views on actions needed to expand religious freedom. In meetings, embassy officials stressed the importance of identifying measures to advance religious tolerance among the various religious groups.