

Sudan's next constitution will be "100% Islamic" as "template" for others

Country/Region: Sudan, Middle East and North Africa



President of Sudan,
Omar Hassan al-Bashir

Sudan's president has said the country's next constitution will be "100% Islamic" to set an example for neighbouring countries, as new political orders are formed following the Arab Spring.

President Omar Hassan al-Bashir's statement, made on Saturday (7 July), comes amid historic change in several North African countries, which have seen Islamist parties exerting greater political influence and gaining positions of power.

He said:

We want to present a constitution that serves as a template to those around us. And our template is clear, a 100 per cent Islamic constitution, without communism or secularism or Western [influences].

The content of the new constitutions of Egypt, Tunisia and Libya is being fiercely debated, and those documents will lay the foundations for the new orders that are being established following the overthrow of the former regimes; Islamists in those countries are pushing for sharia to be enshrined as the main source of legislation, while liberals want to see secular codes.

President Bashir's latest statement reinforces earlier pronouncements that Sudan would adopt an entirely Islamic constitution and strengthen sharia law after the South seceded. Sharia is already in force in Sudan, which is 98% Muslim, but the president seems intent on formalising its authority and enforcing it more strictly, making the position of the Christian minority increasingly vulnerable.

On Saturday, he said:

And we tell non-Muslims, nothing will preserve your rights except for Islamic sharia because it is just.

Both history and contemporary evidence shows that the rights of non-Muslims are not preserved under sharia, which in fact gives Christians and Jews *dhimmi* status; they are treated as second-class citizens, are required to pay the *jizya*, a humiliating tax, and suffer many forms of discrimination and injustice.

Since the secession of the mainly Christian South Sudan and strengthening of the Islamic character of Sudan, churches and other Christian property in the latter have been destroyed, and Christian converts from a Muslim background are being targeted and having their property – and even their spouses – taken from them.

President Bashir did not give a target date for the new constitution but said that it would be drafted by a committee comprising all parties and religious sects. It seems highly unlikely, however, that Christians will be included in this process.

The president's increasingly hard-line stance comes as he faces mounting pressure from opposition parties, who have called for strikes, sit-ins and demonstrations to overthrow his regime. Among other protests, they have been calling for greater freedoms in the country.