Sudan

Many Sudanese Christian women are in jail
for violating sharia law

"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]." With these words the President of Sudan, Omar Hassan al-Bashir, declared in July 2012 his intention to make Sudan a purely Islamic state. Sharia law is already in force there, and Bashir wants also to make it the main source of the constitution.

Since the mainly Christian South Sudan gained independence in July 2011, Christians and churches in Sudan (which is 98 per cent Muslim) have faced increasing aggression. They already endured discrimination and many restrictions, but now church leaders have been threatened, arrested and abducted, and Christian buildings destroyed. For example, in April 2012 a church and Bible school in Khartoum were torched by an Islamist mob, and in June another church there was bulldozed by the authorities. Although classes at the Bible school were able to resume in October 2012, Islamist hostility continues to threaten its existence.

Hundreds of thousands of Christians from South Sudan, many of whom were driven from their homes by decades of civil war (1983-2005), are now effectively being forced out of Sudan. Hostility towards any remaining Christian presence is growing, and the government now regards Southerners who refuse to leave as foreigners. But many lack the money or resources to move their families and possessions to South Sudan.

Government forces have also been targeting the Nuba Mountains near the border with South Sudan, which has one of the largest Christian populations in the country. The purpose of their brutal air and ground campaign appears to be to "cleanse" the region of its non-Arabs and non-Muslims. Thousands have fled their homes to escape the violence and are now stuck in crowded refugee camps in the South.

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