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Introduction

1. ADF International is a faith-based legal advocacy organisation that protects fundamental freedoms and promotes the inherent dignity of all people.
2. This report addresses the rights to freedom of religion or belief and expression in Sudan. While the 2019 transitional constitution demonstrated progress towards stronger protection of freedom of religion or belief, that progress has been halted by the ongoing civil war. In particular, it draws attention to Sudan's anti-blasphemy law and its incompatibility with international human rights, together with the continuing destruction of, and barriers to the repair of places of worship—particularly those of Christians.

1. Freedom of Religion or Belief and Freedom of Opinion and Expression

1.1 BACKGROUND

3. The Republic of Sudan has a population of approximately 53 million people with 91% estimated to be Muslim, 5% Christian, and nearly 3% adhering to indigenous folk religions.¹
4. In April 2019, Sudan entered a period of political transition following the deposition of Omar Al-Bashir, who had been president since 1993.² The Transitional Military Council (TMC) and the Forces for Freedom and Change (FFC) signed a Constitutional Declaration in August 2019, establishing the Sovereign Council of Sudan as the interim government. General Abdel Fatah al-Burhan was named as the head of the Council, and General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (AKA Hemedti) was named as his Deputy.
5. The 2019 Constitutional Declaration was to remain in force until November 2022.³ However, in October 2021, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) led by Gen. al-Burhan and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) led by Gen. Dagalo suspended those provisions of the Constitutional Declaration establishing the transitional legislative council and cabinet when they orchestrated a coup against the then-prime minister.⁴
6. During 2022, Gen. al-Burhan and Gen. Dagalo attempted to negotiate plans for the transitional government, but disagreements over power sharing and the

¹ The ARDA 'Sudan: Major World Religions' (2025) <https://www.thearda.com/world-religion/national-profiles?u=211c>.

² UN News 'Sudan: New political transition, bolstered by peacebuilding, could bring long-term stability to Darfur, Security Council told' (29 August 2019), <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/08/1044961>.

³ Interim Constitutional Declaration of Sudan (August 2019), art. 7.

⁴ Just Security 'Sudan's Constitutional Crisis: Dissecting the Coup Declaration' (3 November 2021) <https://www.justsecurity.org/78848/sudans-constitutional-crisis-dissecting-the-coup-declaration/>.

integration of the RSF into the army stalled the efforts. In April 2023, fighting began in the capital, with both SAF and RSF leadership accusing the other of firing first.⁵

7. Since 2023, Sudan has been in a civil war. Death toll estimates range from 150,000 to 400,000, millions have been displaced, and millions more face severe hunger.⁶

1.2 LEGAL FRAMEWORK

8. The transitional 2019 Constitutional Declaration sought to provide greater protection for religious freedom. Article 56 of the Declaration guaranteed freedom of belief and worship, and protected against compulsion ‘to convert to a religion they do not believe in or to practice rites or rituals they do not voluntarily accept.’⁷ Furthermore, Article 57 stated that, ‘Every citizen has the unrestricted right to freedom of expression, to receive and publish information and publications, and to access the press, without prejudice to public order, safety and morals, as defined by law.’⁸
9. In July 2020, the Sovereign Council of Sudan enacted Law No. 12 to amend the Penal Code. The law eliminated Article 126 of the Penal Code, which criminalized apostasy, and abolished the penalty of flogging for the crime of blasphemy.⁹
10. However, Article 125 of the Penal Code continues to punish ‘[w]hoever, by any means, publicly abuses or insults any of the religions, their rites, or beliefs, or sanctities or seeks to excite feelings of contempt and disrespect against the believers thereof...’¹⁰
11. In February 2025, the SAF-led Ministry of Justice published an amended Constitutional Declaration, which extended the transitional period by 39 months, eliminated any mention of the RSF, and made ‘principles of Islamic legislation, religious beliefs’ sources of legislation. While it retained the abovementioned articles, their legal status remains ambiguous.¹¹
12. A month later, the RSF and its allies signed its own transitional constitution as part of efforts to establish a parallel government in Sudan.¹² The RSF-led constitution explicitly declared the cancellation of the 2019 Constitutional Declaration and all

⁵ BBC News ‘A simple guide to what is happening in Sudan’ (13 November 2025)

<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cjel2nn22z9o>.

⁶ Center for Strategic & International Studies ‘The Sudan War in 10 Charts’ (17 April 2026)

<https://www.csis.org/analysis/sudan-war-10-charts>; UNHCR ‘Sudan Emergency’ (April 2025)

<https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/sudan/>.

⁷ Interim Constitutional Declaration of Sudan (August 2019), art.56.

⁸ Id., art. 57.

⁹ Miscellaneous Amendments Law of 2020 (Law 12), art.20–21.

¹⁰ End Blasphemy Laws ‘Sudan’ (13 October 2020) <https://end-blasphemy-laws.org/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/sudan/>.

¹¹ Sudan Tribune ‘Amended Constitutional Declaration extends Sudan’s Transition’ (23 February 2025)

<https://sudantribune.com/article/297812>; Al-Sudani ‘Text of the Constitutional Document for the Transitional Period – 2025 Amendment’ (24 February 2025) <https://alsudaninews.com/?p=191039>.

¹² Reuters ‘Sudan’s RSF and allies formalize vision for parallel government’ (5 March 2025)

<https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/sudans-rsf-allies-formalise-vision-parallel-government-2025-03-04/>.

laws, decisions and decrees issued by the transitional government. It stipulated Sudan as a secular state based on a principle of separation of religion from the state.¹³

1.3 CASES

13. Since the outbreak of Sudan's civil war, numerous places of worship have been seized for military use, and more than 100 churches are reported to have been damaged or destroyed. In April 2023, RSF fighters seized All Saints Anglican Cathedral in Khartoum for use as an operational base. In May 2023, RSF forces forcibly evacuated Virgin Mary's Coptic Orthodox Church in Khartoum and a Coptic Christian monastery in Wad Madani for the same purpose, and stormed the Church of the Martyrs in Khartoum, reportedly beating parishioners, looting valuables, and digging up graves to search for gold. In January 2024, the RSF set fire to the Evangelical Church of Wad Madani, and RSF militants attacked the Sudanese Church of Christ in Al Jazirah State, wounding 14 Christians. In December 2024, an SAF airstrike hit the Al Ezba Church in Khartoum North, killing at least 11 people.¹⁴
14. Mosques have likewise been targeted. In March 2024, an SAF-allied militia vandalized and detonated explosives in the Sheikh Qarib Allah Mosque in Omdurman. RSF militants reportedly destroyed three mosques in El Fasher in July 2024, killing at least 11 worshippers. An SAF airstrike in December 2024 killed 7 at the Sheikh Elsidiq Mosque in Khartoum North, and another 15 were killed when the Sheikh El Jeili Mosque in Wad Madani was bombed.¹⁵
15. Christians continue to face barriers in obtaining permits to build or rebuild places of worship. For instance, a Coptic Christian church damaged in a 2019 rainstorm began building a new church, but upon pressure from local Islamic extremists, authorities ordered all building and worship to cease pending a permit.¹⁶ As of February 2026, none had been granted.
16. In July 2025, Khartoum State's Ministry of Planning and Urban government notified that no reconstruction of buildings damaged by the war could begin without a prior technical assessment.¹⁷ Religious leaders report that the

¹³ Al-Rakoba 'Parties to the Sudan Founding Alliance Sign the Transitional Constitution of the Republic of Sudan of 2025' (4 March 2025) <https://www.alrakoba.net/32035495/>; Lana Mahdi 'The 2025 Transitional Constitution—The New Sudan Rises from the Ashes of War' (4 March 2025) Al-Rakoba, <https://www.alrakoba.net/32035541/>.

¹⁴ Christian Solidarity Worldwide 'Briefing: Attacks on places of worship' (17 November 2025) <https://www.csw.org.uk/2025/11/17/report/6662/article.htm>.

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ Christian Today 'Sudan authorities use bureaucracy to stop church rebuilding and worship' (19 February 2026) <https://www.christiantoday.com/news/sudan-authorities-use-bureaucracy-to-stop-church-rebuilding-and-worship>.

¹⁷ Sudan Echoes 'Regarding the Khartoum State Buildings Administration's Decision on Reconstruction in the Capital' (14 July 2025) <https://asdaasudania.com/14/52448/>.

government has refused permits to churches regardless of how many conditions they meet. A Pentecostal church was even demolished in July 2025.¹⁸

1.4 SUDAN'S OBLIGATIONS UNDER INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS LAW

17. Sudan is a State Party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Sudan's obligations with respect to human rights and the fundamental freedoms of the free exercise of religion and freedom of expression remain in force even in times of armed conflict. Notably, the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion is not derogable even 'in time of public emergency which threatens the life of the nation.'¹⁹ The International Court of Justice has confirmed this widely recognized view by stating that 'the protection of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights does not cease in times of war.'²⁰
18. Article 18 of the ICCPR guarantees the right to the 'freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.' This includes the right to own, maintain and use places of worship.²¹ This freedom 'may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.'²²
19. Article 19 protects the right to freedom of opinion and expression, including the right to seek, receive, or impart information and ideas of 'all kinds.' Restrictions on this right are only permitted where they are necessary 'for the respect of the rights and reputations of others' or 'for the protection of national security, public order or public health or morals.'²³
20. Article 26 further mandates States Parties to 'prohibit any discrimination and guarantee to all persons equal and effective protection from discrimination' including on the ground of religion.²⁴ Relatedly, Article 27 ensures that religious minorities 'shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of their group, [...] to profess and practice their own religion.'²⁵
21. As noted by the Human Rights Committee:

'The fact that a religion is recognized as a State religion or that it is established as official or traditional or that its followers comprise the

¹⁸ International Christian Concern 'Christians in Sudan Watch Helplessly as their Church Building is Demolished' (25 July 2025) <https://persecution.org/2025/07/25/christians-in-sudan-watch-helplessly-as-their-church-building-is-demolished/>.

¹⁹ *Id.*, art.4.

²⁰ International Court of Justice 'Advisory Opinion in Legality of the Threat or Use of Nuclear Weapons' (8 July 1996) <https://www.icj-cij.org/index.php/node/103787>, 25.

²¹ Human Rights Committee 'General Comment No.22 – Article 18: Freedom of Thought, Conscience or Religion' (30 July 1993) UN Docs CCPR/C/GC/22, 4.

²² International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (adopted 16 December 1966, entered into force 23 March 1976) 999 UNTS 171 (ICCPR), art. 18.

²³ *Supra* footnote 21, art. 19.

²⁴ *Id.*, art. 26.

²⁵ *Id.*, art. 27.

majority of the population, shall not result in any impairment of the enjoyment of any of the rights under the Covenant, including articles 18 and 27, nor in any discrimination against adherents to other religions or non-believers.’²⁶

22. This protection applies both to adherents of minority religions, such as Christianity, and to Muslim sects that may differ from the predominant interpretation of Islamic law.
23. Sudan’s blasphemy provision enshrined in Penal Code Article 125 is incompatible with its obligations under the ICCPR. This finding is supported by the Human Rights Committee, which has explicitly affirmed that laws which prohibit expressions deemed disrespectful toward a religion or belief system—including blasphemy laws—are not compatible with the Covenant. Such laws are inherently vague, prone to abuse, and serve to suppress dissent and minority beliefs rather than protect legitimate public interests.²⁷
24. Additionally, Sudan has an obligation to ensure that people belonging to religious minorities receive equal and effective protection from violence and discrimination, including by local officials and non-state actors.

2. Recommendations

25. In light of the aforementioned, ADF International suggests the following recommendations be made to Sudan:
 - a. Ensure full respect for the rights to freedom of religion or belief and freedom of opinion and expression, including through the effective implementation of Articles 56 and 57 of the transitional Constitutional Declaration;
 - b. Guarantee full respect for human rights in drafting any constitution following the transitional period, including explicit recognition of the rights to freedom of religion or belief and freedom of expression and protection of the rights of religious minorities;
 - c. Repeal Article 125 of the Penal Code criminalizing blasphemy;
 - d. Take steps to guarantee the right of adherents of religious minorities to build, rebuild and maintain places of worship, including the removal of discriminatory permit barriers;
 - e. Guarantee full protection of Christians and other religious minorities, as well as their places of worship, from all forms of violence and discrimination, whether by state and non-state actors.

²⁶ *Supra* footnote 20, 9.

²⁷ Human Rights Committee ‘General Comment No. 34 – Article 19: Freedom of Opinion and Expression’, Human Rights Committee (12 September 2011) UN Docs CCPR/C/GC/34, 48.

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