

## February 4, 2000: Hearings on Religious Persecution in Sudan

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For 17 years, the Sudanese government in Khartoum has waged civil war against Christians and followers of traditional African religions in the south. More than 2 million people have died; millions more have been wounded and displaced. The government has deliberately starved civilians and tolerated the kidnapping of southern women and children by slavers. The U.S. Administration and Congress are seeking effective ways to help end the fighting and the religious persecution that helps fuel it. Debate now rages on Capitol Hill and in State Department corridors over the best approach: Should the U.S. provide food aid directly to rebel groups, bypassing United Nations efforts that depend on Khartoum's cooperation? Should the U.S. allow foreign companies to offer stocks and bonds in its capital markets when the money invested would underwrite projects in countries under U.S. sanctions for egregious violations of religious freedom? Should the U.S. drop its efforts to isolate Sudan and opt instead for a policy of engagement, reopening its Khartoum embassy? Seeking answers to these questions, the new U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom will hold its first hearings on Tuesday, Feb. 15, from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. in the Senate Commerce Committee hearing room, SR-253. The hearings are open to the press and public. Among those currently scheduled to testify: \* Baroness Cox, Deputy Speaker of the British House of Lords who has rescued slaves in more than 20 trips to Sudan; \* Bishop Macram Max Gassis, exiled Roman Catholic bishop of El-Obeid, Sudan; \* Frances Deng, former Sudanese ambassador to the U.S.; \* Gaspar Biro, former United Nations Human Rights Rapporteur for Sudan; \* Christian and Muslim victims of religious persecution in Sudan. \* The hearings are held under authority of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998. Reporters and producers wishing assistance in arranging interviews with witnesses or Commissioners may contact Communications Director Lawrence J. Goodrich, (202) 523-3240.

Rabbi David Saperstein, Chair

- Dean Michael K. Young, Vice Chair Hon. Elliott Abrams Laila Al-Marayati, M.D. Hon. John R. Bolton Firuz Kazemzadeh Archbishop Theodore E. McCarrick Nina Shea Justice Charles Z. Smith Ambassador Robert Seiple, Ex-Officio Steven T. McFarland, Executive Director