

# Hearings on Religious Persecution in Sudan: Mr. Ezekiel Gatkouth Oral Testimony

February 15, 2000

(Note: These are unedited and uncorrected transcripts)

MR. GATKUOTH: Thank you for having me here. I really thank you for inviting me here.

First I want to make a few points about what is happening right now in Khartoum and also in the bush. Of course, we signed an agreement in 1997 wishing to change the situation in Khartoum, but what we get back is the fighting in Bentiu, and we have realized that the Government of Khartoum was not committed to the peace agreement in 1997.

After we signed the agreement in 1997, on April 21, the Government of Sudan attempted to assassinate one of our signatories of the agreement, whose name is Kwa Achmokwai [ph.]. They killed 13 people. Then, Dr. Riach Machar made a complaint to President Bashir to investigate, but this failed; the President did not respond positively in regard to the investigation.

Second, in September 1998, the Government started using Paulino Matipe [ph.] to dismantle the agreement. We also made a complaint letter to the President, trying to work together to conclude this agreement we had to solve our problems together instead of leaving us in confusion.

I also met with the visiting finance ministers here in Washington to try to address the issue of having Paulino fighting us--and I also met with the Ambassador to the United Nations--and the answer I got from them was, and I will quote: "You Southerners have to solve your problems yourselves instead of us involved, because it will cost lives." And our response back was that even if it is going to cost lives, we have to work together to solve it.

Second to that, when Dr. Riach Machar realized that this agreement was not going to work, he paid a visit to Europe to try to really explain to the world--and I really do think that if the United States and the international community put extra pressure on this government that the 1997 agreement

would be honored--but because of that, we are now taking another direction instead of this violated agreement. They met in Nairobi, Dr. Riach Machar and the commanders, to try to see where they could go from there if the agreement was not really working, and now, they are forming--which I am representing--the Sudan People's Democratic Front, the political wing of the Sudan People's Democratic Front. This organization is really trying to make changes and find means of making the Khartoum Government really commit to peace.

Of course we are committed to the agreement. The only thing we are having a problem with is the agreement with the Government, because they are not really committed to the agreement, but they are trying to use us in a way that will relieve their problems internationally so this can come to a conclusion.

Of course there is religious persecution in Sudan; I will say that. We made a complaint letter when they were demolishing churches in Umdruman [ph.]. Dr. Riach Machar wrote a letter to the State Minister of Khartoum, trying to tell the Minister that the way of doing this is demolishing the churches, but the Minister did not really give us a good response to that.

Also, the Government in Sudan--I am talking about the current Government--is really trying to wipe out the population in Unity State. This has been happening since we signed the agreement, but we were thinking that maybe there would be changes. We worked hard to make changes, but it did not work out, and now, I think it is too late for the Government to tell us to honor the agreement again when they violated it. So the only option we have now is to fight the Government.

Finally, I would like the international community and also the United Nations and the U.S. Government and the other governments to really put extra pressure on this Government to make it respect the abuses they are doing in respect to the people who are living in the oil fields.

Also, there are a lot of things happening not only in the oil fields. I got a report yesterday that they attacked Mayom, near Mayom, they were fighting there, and also Mabon [ph.] and also Wat [ph.]. There is fighting right now in those areas, and it was the Government who attacked us; we did not really declare war.

Also, before Dr. Riach Machar submitted his resignation letter to the Government, when he went to Bentiu, they bombed the conference area. This really made Dr. Riach Machar realize that this is not the Government to sign an agreement with, and the only option for Dr. Riach

Machar is to find a way to unite his commanders and fight this Government.

Thank you.