



UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON
INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

May 30, 2017

The Honorable Rex Tillerson
Secretary of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Tillerson:

On behalf of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), I urge you to maintain existing sanctions on the Sudanese government due to its continued religious freedom violations. Since 1999, USCIRF has recommended, and the State Department has designated, Sudan as a country of particular concern (CPC) for its systematic, ongoing, and egregious religious freedom violations.

The U.S. government imposed sanctions on Sudan in 1997 and 2006, in part, due to the Sudanese government's gross human rights violations, including "the denial of religious freedom," which remain in place today. However, on January 13, 2017, then President Barack Obama signed Executive Order (EO) 13761 indicating progress by the Sudanese government in lessening military hostilities, increasing access to humanitarian assistance, and cooperating with the United States on regional conflicts and counterterrorism. EO 13761 directs lifting the existing investment and trade sanctions by July 12, 2017 if the Secretary of State determines, in consultation with other relevant agencies, that the Sudanese government "has sustained the positive actions" described above. This determination does not require an evaluation of progress, or lack thereof, on human rights or religious freedom.

Since South Sudan's secession in 2011, USCIRF has documented a deterioration of religious freedom conditions year after year. During this period, the Sudanese government has arrested nearly 200 Christians, including 14 religious leaders. Of these detentions, three pastors were prosecuted on spurious capital charges, including waging war against the state and espionage. Sudanese authorities also have demolished or partially demolished approximately 20 churches and church buildings; expropriated or threatened to expropriate at least 10 others; and have stated that they would no longer issue permits for new church construction. USCIRF also has documented the Sudanese government's strict enforcement of Shari'ah law on Muslims and non-Muslims alike. The 1991 Criminal Code permits death sentences for apostasy; death or lashing for adultery; cross-amputations for theft; prison sentences, lashings or fines for blasphemy; and lashings for undefined "offences of honor, reputation and public morality." For more information, USCIRF's recently released 2017 annual report chapter on Sudan can be found here: <http://www.uscirtf.gov/sites/default/files/Sudan.2017.pdf>.

While U.S. policy toward Sudan certainly should recognize positive developments on a range of issues, it also should take steps to address severe violations of religious freedom and other human rights.

We respectfully urge you to consider these concerns as part of your determination in lifting the current sanctions imposed on Sudan by the U.S. government.

Sincerely,



Rev. Thomas J. Reese, S.J.
Chair