

## IV

### ATTACK ON CHRISTIANITY; ATTACK ON ISLAM

*This government has made our lives miserable in the name of Jihad. I don't believe that theirs is a holy war. They avoid the SPLA and come to attack us. They are just thieves and criminals.*

About Hamad Bako, Imam of the Ansar el Sunna mosque in Kalkada, which was destroyed by the Government of Sudan on 25 February 1994. Interviewed in Kauda, 12 May 1995.

#### A TRADITION OF TOLERANCE

The Nuba include Moslems, Christians and followers of traditional religions. The numbers who profess each faith are a matter of dispute. What is not in dispute is that the Nuba have a strong tradition of religious tolerance. It is not uncommon to have followers of three different religions within the same family. A leading anthropologist of the Miri Nuba has written:

All Miri people, villagers and migrants alike, are free in their religious practice... they are obliged, however, to respect their fellows' emphasis on other religious practices.

Thus a villager is free to build his own mosque, as has happened in Umduiu village, and is free to go on the pilgrimage, as has been done by a farmer in Miri Bara. He is not free, however, to demand of others to follow his example, or to deprecate their reluctance. Nor is he free to opt out of the priestly rituals and natural observances that within each village maintain the order of

nature. Conversely, a farmer may be more than usually conscientious in the performance of non-Islamic ritual and may even on occasion revive one that has been neglected by the community at large. Yet, he is firmly expected to keep the current Muslim practices, and not denigrate the zeal of others.<sup>1</sup>

This tradition of respect and tolerance has been eroded by the Sudan Government in the last decade, but it remains strong in areas not under government control.

Islam has been present in the Nuba Mountains since at least the fourteenth century. The Kingdom of Tegali was founded by a Moslem and always had Moslem rulers. But it was not until the nineteenth century that Islam began to spread beyond the small circle of elites in the northern jebels who were most exposed to contact with neighbouring Moslem peoples. Then, Islam was spread by two main means: the presence of Moslem Arab communities in places such as Dilling, Talodi and the western jebels, and probably more importantly, the return to the Nuba Mountains of Nuba who had served under the Turco-Egyptian and Mahdist states as soldiers. Despite colonial policies intended to isolate the Nuba from Arab-Moslem influence, the most rapid spread of Islam occurred this century, starting under British rule. Nuba Moslems are mostly followers of Sufi sects such as the Gadiriya, but there are also strong communities of the Ansar el Sunna and other Moslem sects. Sudanese Islam has two contrasting traditions: of messianic zeal, and Sufist tolerance. Nuba Moslems in general fall squarely into the second, tolerant tradition.

Christian missionary activity began in the Nuba Mountains with the visit of Daniel Comboni in 1874. These first efforts were interrupted by the Mahdiya, and it was not until the 1920s and '30s that the missions began to establish themselves fully, with schools, clinics and churches. While some groups, such as the Kawalib and Otoro, embraced Christianity, others such as the Katcha proved very resistant to its appeals, despite the presence of nearby mission stations. The missions were vital in introducing education to the Nuba, and they did so in a way designed to minimise the influence of

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<sup>1</sup> Gerd Baumann, *National Integration and Local Integrity: The Miri of the Nuba Mountains in the Sudan*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1987, p. 172.

Islam—notably they refused to use the Arabic script for as long as possible. Some missionaries saw their role as competing for adherents with the Moslem preachers.

By Independence, the Nuba tradition of tolerance was thus overlain with religious politics. It has continued this way. Successive Sudanese governments have sought to restrict the activities of Christian missions, while the most prominent Nuba politician, Philip Abbas Ghabboush, is an ordained Christian priest, and Christianity has been attractive to some Nuba youth precisely because it is not favoured by the government. While many Nuba have turned to Islam in the last forty years, Christianity has also been on the increase, notably through individual conversions among the youth.

A former catechist from Tira el Akhdar, Yagoub Osman Kaloka, explained some of the tensions that arose when he and others from his village converted to Christianity in the 1970s:<sup>2</sup>

In the past, the Tira people had many conflicts with the Arabs. But at the same time we adopted parts of the Arab culture and about two thirds of the Tira became Moslems. Christianity was not strong, it only started in our area in the 1970s with the coming of the Roman Catholic Church. (Kauda mission was concerned with the Otoro people only, not us.) So I converted and became a Roman Catholic. But when Christianity came it caused problems, because many of the youth became Christians, while the elders were mostly Moslems. My own father is a Moslem.

I was in school in Kalkada from 1965 onwards. Then I went to Khartoum, and then my elder brother took me to the Comboni school in el Obeid. Most of the pupils there were Christians, and read Christian books. So I also read the Christian books. So I compared the religions, and found that I preferred Christianity.

In our village, the Moslem leaders told people that their children should be Moslem, and that if they disagreed, they should declare a *jihad* against them. Our elders quarrelled with us, telling us we should be Moslems. On my return, I met with the elders and said that religion is a matter between the individual and God. These problems continued up to about 1975 or '76. But by the late 1970s, the great majority of elders accepted us. Only a few were still aggressively Islamic.

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<sup>2</sup> Interviewed in Tira Limon, 23 May 1995.

By the 1980s, the locus of aggressive or extremist Islam had shifted from a few village Imams and teachers to the state itself. This process culminated in the declaration of *Jihad* in 1992. One of its consequences was to open the eyes of Nuba Moslems to the manipulation of religion for political ends. In non-government controlled areas, there is now greater religious tolerance than for many years (see below).

## THE ATTACK ON CHRISTIANITY

A selective crackdown on Nuba Christians began before the war even reached the Nuba Mountains. It was the work of the security forces operating in a polarised political context, with Islamic extremism in the ascendant. Local politics also played its part. For instance, the repression of Tira Christians was instigated in part by an ambitious Tira politician, Mohamed Rahma, who has since become Amir under the *Nafir el Sha'abi*.

Agostino al Nur Ibrahim Shamila is now a judge in the civil administration under the SPLM. He was one of the first victims of the crackdown, in 1983. The pretext for the crackdown was that churchpeople were supporting the SPLA. It was a self-fulfilling prediction.<sup>3</sup>

I am a Christian, but my father was a Moslem. At first, I was a Moslem (my name was al Nur) but I became a Christian in Khartoum after I began to study the Bible at evening classes. That was in 1968. For me it is a matter of personal conviction, for the Moslem Brothers it is a matter of *ridda* [apostasy, a crime under Islamic law punishable by death]. My family—at the beginning they were not so happy. They called me and I talked to them; they saw my behaviour and how I had changed. They were impressed.

I saw segregation and discrimination in our society. I have felt this since 1963 when I was in primary school in Kauda. At the time when I entered school, the treatment of the Nuba children and the Arab children was not fair. We were living together in a dormitory, but we were not treated equally. I can remember many incidents.

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<sup>3</sup> Interviewed in Achiron, 7 May 1995.

For example, when there was a noise in the dormitory, the head teacher would call the prefect, and if the prefect said the person who is beaten and is crying is a Nuba, the head teacher would ignore the matter. He would not come and see what was happening. But if the one crying is an Arab boy, he would come and lash all the Nubas.

These incidents continued all the time. We felt we were not needed, that we were not part of the school.

I was in Lubi, in the region of Tira [el Akhdar], which was my place. I was a [Roman Catholic] catechist at Lubi church. Since the start of the SPLA, persecution against the church intensified. We were being accused either as SPLA or as supporters of SPLA. I myself was detained three times by the State Security.

The first time was in December 1983, in Heiban. I was kept three weeks. There was no charge. The second time was in early 1985. There were two charges; first that I was co-operating with the SPLA, then second that I was myself an SPLA [member]. The third time was also in 1985, with the same accusations. I was kept for three months in detention in Kadugli by the security; I was never shown in court. I was released on 15 September 1985, with the condition that I cannot go back to the church. All the churches were closed to me; I had no chance to exercise any church activities in South Kordofan, and especially in Lubi. So I decided to go to Khartoum.

In Khartoum I discovered I was being followed by State Security. Many people from my tribe were facing the same situation. I continued evading the security forces, waiting for the rainy season. When the rains of 1986 came, I went to el Obeid, then to Lubi village.

Security was informed after one week that I had violated the conditions of my release and gone back to Lubi. So a force was sent from Talodi to arrest me in our village. The army came to Um Bera, between Talodi and our village. People ran to inform me that there was a force sent to arrest me. I left, leaving my wife and three children in the house. I went to the mountains. That was 12 July 1986. At 3 p.m. the army came, surrounded the house and entered it. All the houses of my relatives were surrounded. When they did not get me they started torturing people. My wife was beaten with a cane and the daughter of my brother was also beaten up. They were asked to say where I had gone. When they said they didn't know, they were beaten more. I had left a message that they should say I was with the cattle. They were beaten all night.

In the morning, all the chiefs were called. The head chief said I had gone with the cattle. So the army told the chiefs that I must be arrested and brought to the government. They took all my possessions, such as clothes, with them. The chiefs were given three days to arrest me.

The army went to Kalkada. When three days passed, my elder brother, Ahmad and our chief, Sheikh Hamoda Murjan, went to Kalkada to tell the government. My brother Ahmad was arrested at once. The order was passed that all our cattle and goats should be confiscated at once. An army [unit] came and took everything. They also arrested my father. The order was passed: if I am found, I must be shot.

I had nowhere to go. I decided to go to the SPLA, to defend myself and defend my property. I went to the SPLA on 16 August 1986. First, I reported to the SPLA base on Um Jabralla mountain [near Um Dorein]. From there I went south, to Bilfam for training. I joined Volcano Battalion.

A catechist from the nearby village of Um Derdu, Joseph Aloga Jargi, confirmed that the assault on the church preceded any other problems in the Tira area.<sup>4</sup> While many Nuba tribes suffered militia raids from 1985 onwards, Joseph said that "there was no fighting in our area. In fact our relations with the Arabs did not deteriorate until very late." He continued:

The government began by burning churches. In August 1985, the army came and burned the church at Um Derdu. Jimmu Teima was killed on the spot. A church elder, al Nur Hamoda, was taken to Heiban and killed there. Daud and Abbas were taken and slaughtered with knives.

Lubi was the most dominant Christian village. The Mek, Mohamed Rahma, was very hostile to the natives of Lubi. So the Lubi youths accused him of many mistakes, and of making an alliance with the Arabs. The Lubi youth had an early crisis with the Arabs, and began to go to the SPLA.

When Mohamed Rahma saw this, he decided to rob the Lubi people by using the Arab militia. The first village to be burned was Lubi, which was burned by the army of Mendi in 1988.<sup>5</sup> The

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<sup>4</sup> Interviewed in Tira Limon, 21 May 1995.

<sup>5</sup> See pages 68-9.

raiders took the cattle, furniture, clothes, everything. Then the youth of Um Derdu saw what was happening and followed those of Lubi to the SPLA.

Similar assaults on Christian churches were common throughout the Mountains. In the western jebels, six Christians were imprisoned in Tullishi in April 1988, for opening a church without government permission.<sup>6</sup> When the SPLA entered the area a year later, the churches were the first target of reprisals, by the government and by NIF cadres. The Christian centre at Salara was attacked and destroyed, along with all the books and furniture. In Tullishi, the people managed to protect the churches for long enough so that they were still intact when the SPLA forces reached the mountain at the end of the year.

The destruction of churches has become so commonplace in the war that most people interviewed by African Rights did not even bother to mention it. When asked if the church was burned when such-and-such a village was destroyed, the answer was always, "Of course!" The descriptions of peace camps in the previous chapter have also detailed discrimination against Christians, including forcible conversion.

The burning of churches continues. Churches were burned by troops from Um Sirdiba and Aggab in their February 1995 "combing" operation. Yousif Haroun, a catechist in Karkaraya, inspected the ruins of his church, the afternoon after it had been burned, accompanied by African Rights:<sup>7</sup>

The army burned the church down and broke the office; they took all the church's documents, such as the notebooks, money and all the other properties such as chairs and books. They burnt everything, and there is nothing inside the church now.

Several churches were destroyed in the assaults in Tira el Akhdar and Otoro between January and March 1995. One of them was in

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<sup>6</sup> *Sudan Times*, 24 May 1988.

<sup>7</sup> Interviewed in Karkaraya, 22 February 1995.

Kuchama East, as described by Butrus el Amin Tibra, a 28-year-old Roman Catholic catechist.<sup>8</sup>

The army came from Heiban and attacked our village of Kuchama East on 17 March. The attack took place at 2:00 p.m. The enemy burned the whole village including the Catholic church. They also burned the Catholic church guest house, the school, store and three residential houses. The soldiers looted ten sacks of sorghum, five sacks of beans, six sacks of groundnuts, ten chairs, six wooden beds and two choir drums.

It is the first time the church was burned in our area. Previously they use to burn the village but not the church or the mosque. This time they burned both the church and the mosque. I think they want us either to move away completely to other areas or report to their peace camps. We will try to build the church again though it will be very expensive. Our priority now is rebuilding the school. I appeal to the world to help us with school materials. Our children need education and they are the future of the Mountains.

In the burning of Dabker on 28 April 1995, the churches of the Roman Catholics and the Sudan Church of Christ were completely destroyed.

The Sudan Government is eager to enlist Islam as a legitimation for its war effort. But in reality the war is about power and wealth, and the government's target is wider than Christianity. As Butrus mentioned, the mosque in Kuchama East was also destroyed—a testimony from the Imam is reproduced below. Barnaba Angelo, head of the New Sudan Council of Churches in the Nuba Mountains, explained:<sup>9</sup>

When the government started the war it was against the church as it believed that the church was behind the rebellion in the Nuba Mountains. The government burned the churches and launched a *jihad* against them, telling the Moslems that church people [i.e. Christians] do not believe in God and are the people who are going to destroy the country... But when the government saw Moslems were not keen to support its actions, and when Moslems did not

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<sup>8</sup> Interviewed in Kujur el Sha'abiya, 13 May 1995.

<sup>9</sup> Interviewed by the BBC in Debi, 10 May 1995.

join the government's campaign against the church, government troops started burning mosques too.

This is perhaps the Sudan Government's darkest secret in the Nuba Mountains: it is systematically desecrating mosques.

## THE ATTACK ON ISLAM

Ali Tutu Atrun is the Imam of the mosque in Kodi B in the Otoro hills. He described how his mosque was desecrated and his Holy Books, his prayer mats and other possessions of the mosque were deliberately destroyed by the Sudan Government.<sup>10</sup>

One morning in January [1995], the enemy attacked Kodi B. They were shelling the village by using heavy artillery while they were advancing. I was in Kodi A when I heard the shelling. It was 9:30 a.m. by then, exactly, [I knew] as I had a watch. Immediately I ran to a mountain between Kodi A and Kodi B. On that mountain I could see everything in Kodi B very clearly. I took a good position and saw the Sudan Government forces going towards the mosque in Kodi B market. They were running and spreading out across the whole village.

After they burned the area adjacent to the mosque I saw them moving towards the mosque. They entered the mosque with their shoes on. They took some time and they came out carrying books, chairs, a table and a carpet from the mosque. I saw six of them taking positions around the mosque's *rakuba* and the library. The six soldiers pulled out matches from their bags and in minutes the mosque's *rakuba* and the library were on fire. Then I heard a gunshot and saw the fire at the top of the mosque. The mosque started burning from top to bottom. I couldn't believe my eyes. I counted the soldiers burning the mosque and its surroundings. They were twenty five in number.

I saw the enemy leaving Kodi B at about 10:30 a.m. It was a big force of over three hundred men all in military uniform. At 12:00 noon I came down to check the destruction. We were fourteen persons including Sheikh Yousif Omer. I was the first to enter the mosque. Inside the mosque I found writings on the wall.

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<sup>10</sup> Interviewed in Kauda, 12 May 1995.

The writing reads 'If you want to be Moslems, join *Dar el Islam* in Mendi.'<sup>11</sup> I found some books including two copies of the Holy Koran burned. I checked the mosque's contents and found out that some items were taken by the soldiers. They took 52 books of the Holy Koran, 62 other [articles of] Islamic literature, one office table, three chairs and one carpet of six by three metres. One sack of *zakat*<sup>12</sup> sorghum was scattered inside and outside the mosque. To rebuild this mosque needs a large sum of money between LS 50,000 and 60,000.

This incident of burning the mosque made me completely unhappy. My feeling is that the Government of Sudan forces are racist and not Moslems because I can't imagine a Moslem burning a mosque. Moreover burning the Holy Koran—the Book of God! Allah is anywhere—we need not go to Mendi to be good Moslems. I know the government think we do not know enough Islam but they are wrong. I will not go to Mendi and will continue stay here as there is no Islam in Mendi. I refuse their version of Islam, their Islam of looting, burning and killing. I believe we are the true Moslems and al Hamdu li Allah.

The graffiti left by the soldiers is instructive: the Sudan Government has told them that Islam exists only in the areas controlled by the government. Imam Ali of course found this a tragic absurdity.

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<sup>11</sup> The Prophet Mohamed divided the world into *Dar el Islam*, the land of Islam, and *Dar el Harb*, the land of war.

<sup>12</sup> The *zakat* is the Islamic tithes collected for distribution to the poor and needy.

## Islamic Law and the 1992 *Fatwa*

Islamic law was first decreed in Sudan in September 1983, though the previous five years had witnessed a steady Islamisation of many areas of political life. The "September Laws" contained a provision prohibiting *ridda* (apostasy, renouncing Islam) and imposing the death penalty on those convicted of this alleged crime who refused to return to Islam. The prominent philosopher and politician Ustaz Mahmoud Mohamed Taha was executed for apostasy in January 1985, for preaching a version of Islam (tolerant and reformist) that was antithetical to the extremism of President Jaafar Nimeiri and his allies among the Moslem Brothers. Under this extreme definition, very many Nuba are guilty of apostasy. A significant number have converted from Islam to Christianity (and some to traditional religions), and most Nuba Moslems practise or tolerate practices that the ruling extremists consider un-Islamic.

Many leading Nuba Moslems are opposed to the imposition of Islamic Law on the Nuba Mountains. One is Imam Adam Tutu Atrun, a leading Nuba Islamic scholar. Imam Adam studied in the prestigious Hay Abdel Moniem school in Khartoum, and then went abroad to Saudi Arabia for seven years, where he studied the Islamic religion in Mecca. In December 1994, he headed the Islamic delegation to the conference on religious dialogue held in the SPLA-held areas of the Nuba Mountains (see below). Imam Adam argues that it would be wrong to impose the *Sharia* in a land where there are followers of different religions.

The rebellion in the Nuba Mountains intensified the problem of Islamic law and the question of *ridda*. Despite the fact that the SPLA forces in the Nuba Mountains have been very largely led by Moslems, successive governments have portrayed the guerrillas as fighting against Islam. In order to do so they have withdrawn the legitimacy of Islam in the SPLA-held areas, in effect declaring all Moslems who are not with them to be infidels, and thus the legitimate target for a *Jihad*.

This became explicit with the *Jihad* declared in January 1992 and confirmed by *Fatwa* shortly afterwards. Though the Mujahidiin are not currently significant as military forces in the Nuba Mountains,

the *Jihad* and *Fatwa* remain in force. The full text of the *Fatwa* reads:

*In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful, a Fatwa to fight the rebels.*

May the peace and blessings of Allah be upon His Prophet. In their conference which was held in the Popular Committee Hall in el Obeid on 27 April 1992 (Shawaal 24, 1413 AH), the religious leaders, Imams of mosques and sufists of Kordofan State issued the adduced *fatwa* to legalize the *jihad* in South Kordofan State and Southern Sudan.

The rebels in South Kordofan and Southern Sudan started their rebellion against the state and declared war against the Moslems. Their main aims are: killing the Moslems, desecrating mosques, burning and defiling the Koran, and raping Moslem women. In so doing, they are encouraged by the enemies of Islam and Moslems: these foes are the Zionists, the Christians and the arrogant people who provide them with provisions and arms. Therefore, *an insurgent who was previously a Moslem is now an apostate; and a non-Moslem is a non-believer standing as a bulwark against the spread of Islam, and Islam has granted the freedom of killing both of them*<sup>13</sup> according to the following words of Allah:

(1) Allah says:

O ye who believe! Whoso of you becometh a renegade from his religion, (know that in his stead) Allah will bring a people whom He loveth and who love Him, humble towards believers, stern towards disbelievers, striving in the way of Allah, and fearing not the blame of any blamer. Such is the grace of Allah which He giveth unto whom He will. Allah is All-Embracing, All-Knowing. (5:54)

(2) Also, Allah says:

And they will not cease from fighting against you until they have made you renegades from your religion, if they can. And

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<sup>13</sup> Emphasis added.

whoso becometh a renegade and dieth in his disbelief such are they whose works have fallen both in the world and the Hereafter. Such are rightful owners of the flames of Hell: they will abide therein. (2:217)

(3) On the legality of fighting the disbelievers, Allah says:

O Prophet! Strive against the disbelievers and the hypocrites, and be stern with them. Hell will be their home, a hapless journey's end. (66.9)

(4) For the affidavit of combating the rebels, Prophet Mohamed (may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said:

'Whoever comes to you (united in opinion) and tried to divide you (to incite *fitna*), kill him.' Retold by Moslem on behalf of the venerable Companion Arfaja ibn Shurayh.

(5) Our paragon in fighting the apostates is the first Caliph Abu Bakr al Sideiq (may Allah be pleased with him). When Prophet Mohamed had died and some Arab tribes abjured Islam, and stopped the payment of *zakat* [tithe], Abu Bakr said:

'By the name of Allah I will fight everybody who will differentiate between prayer and *zakat*. He also said, 'By the name of Allah if they refuse to hand over a camel-string they used to give to the messenger of Allah, I will fight them until they submit.' Moreover, Caliph Ali ibn Abi Talib fought the outlaws after the battle of Safein.

But those who mingle with the outlaws and the Moslem mutineers, and those who feel suspicious of the legitimacy of *Jihad* are the hypocrites and disbelievers of Islamic religion: they are renegades and they deserve chastisement by Hell therein they will abide. In His words to prove this, Allah said, 'Lo! The hypocrites (will be) in the lowest deep of the fire.' (4:145) He also said:

Bear unto the hypocrites the tidings that for them there is a painful doom. Those who choose disbelievers for their friends instead of believers: Do they look for power at their hands? Lo, all power appertaineth to Allah. (4:138, 139)

Allah (*Subahna wa Ta'ala*) has told the truth.

The signatories are:

Sheikh Musa Abdel Majid  
Sheikh Mushawar Juma Sahal  
Sheikh Mohamed Saleh Abdel Bagi  
Sheikh Qurashi Mohamed al Nur  
Sheikh al Nayer Ahmed al Habib  
Sheikh Ismail al Sayed Abdalla

The emphasised passage in the first paragraph represents the essence of absolutist, totalitarian government: the total and unequivocal condemnation of those who profess the same beliefs but infer from them a different, and more tolerant, political agenda. This passage, which exhorts the Sudanese people not only to kill Christians and traditional believers, but fellow Moslems as well, is central to an appreciation of the crime that is being perpetrated in the Nuba Mountains today.

Imams and Moslem scholars in the Nuba Mountains dispute the legitimacy of the *Fatwa* and the right of the Sudan Government to destroy or desecrate their places of worship. Ismail Suleiman al Nur studied in the Islamic school in Um Dowaban, Khartoum, for nine years, under Khalifa Yousif wad Badur, a famous teacher in Sudan. Now he is the Imam of Eri mosque, the teacher in Eri Koranic school, and hopes to build an Islamic Institute and Teaching Centre in the village. He told African Rights:<sup>14</sup>

The enemy has no religion. They are burning our mosques and Korans, and even killing our Imams.

We have heard the version of the Sudan Government—we are helping the *kufaar* [infidels] and therefore we too are *kufaar*. But for us we are fighting for our rights. They leave nothing for us—they burn our villages, take our animals, destroy our crops.

I have a message for Turabi. I would like to remind him of the *Sura* of the cow, where Allah says, he who kills another Moslem intentionally, will have everlasting Hell. We are not *kufaar*, we are

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<sup>14</sup> Interviewed in Eri, 10 May 1995.

Moslems. We want to defend our rights. This *Jihad* is for stealing and looting and killing innocents.

Imam Ismail was concerned that, despite his best efforts, villagers were getting confused about the message of Islam.

I am worried that people are becoming reluctant to go to Islam. Recently there was a call from the Sudan Government, that those Moslems in our area who want to pray faithfully must come to Mendi. Why? Is Allah in Mendi? Allah is everywhere. If you tell people that Allah is in one place, then you are making people doubt that their religion is correct. Islam is the religion of Allah, not just the religion of the Arabs.

We have a *khalwa* [Koranic school]. I teach the Koran to fifty children. We have a problem of mats. They are expensive, and the enemy often burns and loots them. So we have decided not to make or buy prayer mats, so we use the soil for prayers.

Imam Adam Tutu Atrun was equally angry. He disputed the Sudan Government's right to say that the mosques in the non-government areas were not "real mosques" and that the only "real mosques" where genuine prayers could be said existed in the army garrisons. The forty four mosques in his area all existed before the war, when the Sudan Government controlled the area, he pointed out. He wondered when and how they could have forfeited their status as mosques. The Moslems were all Moslems before the war, Imam Adam pointed out, "So how can the government say that there are no Moslems here?"<sup>15</sup>

### **Desecrating Mosques**

Mosques and Islamic leaders in non-government held areas have been targets of the Government of Sudan, equally with churches, priests and church leaders. African Rights was unable to compile a comprehensive list of places of worship that have been destroyed, but some Nuba leaders believe that the Sudan Government has now destroyed more mosques than it has churches.

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<sup>15</sup> Interviewed in Kauda, 11 May 1995.

Imam Adam Tutu Atrun, leader of the Moslem delegation to the 1994 religious dialogue conference, has compiled a list of the mosques destroyed by the Government of Sudan in the Otoro and Tira el Akhdar area. He mentioned the following:

- \* Tombari: burned in 1987.
- \* Kalkada: desecrated in July 1989. The main mosque is a permanent building so it was not burned, but looted. Imam Omer Ali Juma was killed. The two mosques in Kalkada were also destroyed again in February 1994 (see page 178).
- \* Kumu: burned and looted in July 1994 (see page 209) and again in February 1995.
- \* Toror: a permanent building that could not be burned, but which was looted in February 1995. The Koran was torn up.
- \* Um Derdu: burned in February and again in March 1995.
- \* Tajura: burned in March 1995
- \* Kuchama: burned and looted on 17 March 1995.
- \* Kodi B: desecrated and burned on 20 March 1995. The army looted Korans, mats and prayer jugs
- \* Kauda: a well-built mosque so it could not be burned, but it was looted on 20 March 1995.

Imam Adam commented simply, "Islam does not allow Moslems to do this."<sup>16</sup>

The destruction of mosques is not confined to this area. The mosque in Karkaraya al Byeara was burned on 21 February 1995. Najib Musa Berdo, judge of the central court of Lagowa County, reported a similar widespread desecration of mosques in the western jebels.<sup>17</sup>

The Julud people are all Moslems. But they burned all the mosques in our area on the basis that they are the mosques of rebels.

Atrocities against Islamic places of worship by the Government of Sudan may have confused some Nuba people about the nature of Islam. But most Nuba Moslems are determined to remain true to their

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<sup>16</sup> Interviewed in Kauda, 11 May 1995.

<sup>17</sup> Interviewed in Achiron, 7 May 1995.

faith, despite the government onslaught. Ibrahim Katin Abdel Karim is the Imam of the mosque in Kuchama East in the Otoro hills.<sup>18</sup>

We had just finished our prayers when the enemy attacked Kuchama East. It was on Friday 17 March 1995 at about 3:00 p.m. The enemy soldiers burned the village including the mosque. Twenty-five books of the Holy Koran, twenty books of el Hadith, two blackboards, five chairs and 33 prayers mat were burned. They looted three sacks of sorghum, two sacks of groundnuts, three tins of sesame, one mattress and one iron bed. All these items were *zakat* and the mosque's property. Other homes in the village were also looted and they took away all items they could carry with them to Heiban.

I was not surprised that they looted and burned our mosque. For sometime I used to hear that the Government of Sudan thinks that we are pagans. They consider our stay in the rebel areas as betrayal to Islam and therefore we are apostates and deserve to be killed. The government thinks that we should have run away from South Kordofan to their so-called 'peace camps' and leave the areas controlled by the SPLA. What they cannot understand is that our problem is with the 'Islamic' government of al Bashir.

Though he did not profess surprise, Imam Ibrahim was deeply shocked by the outrage of the destruction of his mosque. But he was undaunted.

It is the first time the Government has burned a mosque in Kuchama, both East and West. This will not discourage us to continue preaching Islam. Many of us had enough Islamic education. The government consider us rebel Imams and say we don't know Islam. They pretend to know Islam better than us because they are Arabs and Islam came to them first. However, I'm convinced that many of us know Islam better than most of their Imams in the North. I will continue preaching Islam here without the government assistance or help. Even if they ask me for an Imam training in government-controlled areas I will not accept it. I'm sure there is nothing new I can learn from their training except hypocrisy and lies. I studied Islam in the kind hands of *Mawlana*

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<sup>18</sup> Interviewed in Kujur el Sha'abiya, 13 May 1995.

Abbas Baballa in Heiban for four years. I'm from the Gadiriya Sufi sect.

I call upon friends and the world to stop the Government of Sudan from looting our crops, killing innocent people, burning our villages. This policy of destruction and looting has gone on now for too many years. They should be stopped from burning churches and mosques. Any time they burn our mosques we will build them and our Islamic convictions are not affected whatsoever by their atrocities.

## **RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE UNDER THE SPLM AND THE SUDAN GOVERNMENT**

Islamic extremism is all-pervasive in government-controlled areas of Sudan. But in the non-government controlled areas, the religious atmosphere is very different. In many respects, the Nuba tradition of religious tolerance lives on. But both Islam and Christianity are profoundly influenced by the extremist project of the government and the war. There has been a growth of Christianity, particularly the evangelical Sudan Church of Christ.<sup>19</sup>

There have been some religious tensions in the SPLA-controlled areas. These include some Christians and Moslems interfering in traditional believers' celebrations, in particular objecting to the consumption of alcohol. Some Imams and Church leaders have objected to intermarriage between Moslems and Christians, or to conversion from one religion to the other. The SPLA has also had friction with some religious leaders. For instance, the Sudan Church of Christ teaches a strictly pacifist doctrine, and thus its more devoted followers, such as the church youth, refuse to join the SPLA for their "national service." While the SPLA has not closed any churches or banned any preachers, it has sought to restrict the numbers of church youth (suspecting that boys who want to avoid serving in the SPLA are using church work as a cover), and has tried to legislate against

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<sup>19</sup> For a discussion of similar issues in Southern Sudan, see African Rights, "Great Expectations: The Civil Roles of the Church in Southern Sudan," Discussion Paper No. 6, April 1995.

preaching pacifism (see below). As the civil administration has developed, administrators and judicial officers have also had to adjudicate in disputes between religious groups—forcing them to improvise.

Najib Musa Berdo, the judge of the central court in Lagowa, said that one shortcoming of the SPLM legal code is that it does not give adequate guidelines concerning religious disputes. The case he describes also illustrates the nature of many religious disputes and how they are resolved.<sup>20</sup>

One of the difficulties is that the [SPLM] code seems not to be complete. There are some crimes with no relevant section in the Code.... Also lacking are some of the provisions for complete religious toleration. Some of the religious people, Christians and Moslems, try to disrupt the celebrations of the Kujurs [traditional priests], to attack them and disrupt what they are doing. When the Kujur complains, he finds nothing in the Code. What we normally do is arrest the aggressors, if they have destroyed something or poured out the *merissa* of these fellows, make them pay compensation and sign a compact to allow the celebrations to be completed.

For example at Katla in 1993, someone died. Being a traditional believer, Kujurs and relatives were carrying him, following their tradition of dancing and singing around the dead person while he is being carried, and drinking *merissa* [sorghum beer]. Some Moslems went and poured out all their *merissa*, took the body of the dead person by force and buried him in the Islamic manner. This created a big fight where many people were wounded. If there had been no quick intervention [by the SPLA] many people might have been killed.

I came and presented this case before the inter-religious conference. It was resolved that any sect that interferes with another religious sect has to be brought to court and sentenced. This includes up to the death sentence. From that time there have been no problems.

The conference was officially called the Religious Tolerance Conference and was convened in Tongole, Delami County, on 10

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<sup>20</sup> Interviewed in Achiron, 7 May 1995.

December 1994. Imam Adam Tutu Atrun led the Islamic delegation.<sup>21</sup>

I am a member of the Advisory Council and participated in the Tongole Religious Dialogue Conference as leader of the Moslem delegation. The idea of the conference came from our experience in the past. Most of the religions were coming to compete and divide the people, so we thought it was important to have dialogue. We have a resolution to establish an Islamic Institute. But we agreed that everyone should have freedom of religion, including Kujurs. We resolved that Christians should preach the right Christianity, and Moslems should preach the right Islam. When I say the 'right Islam' I mean what has come from the Koran and Sunna. Many try to make their own interpretations with the view of dividing and confusing people.

More than fifty Imams were invited to the conference. About forty came. Some could not come because of insecurity or distance or the work on the harvest.

The Kujurs did not participate as such. They were there in attendance and we talked to them. Some famous Kujurs from Delami were there, though the ones from this side [Heiban County] did not go. But the formal dialogue was between Christianity and Islam.

Ismail Suleiman al Nur, the Imam of Eri mosque, also attended the conference. He explained:<sup>22</sup>

We have an Islamic Council, set up in 1992. The head is Mohamed Juma Bahri, but he went to the South for the SPLM Convention and has not yet returned. In his place we made permanent the committee headed by Adam Tutu Atrun. This was in Debi.

The Ansar el Sunna have a problem because the situation here does not allow them to have the women covered, as there are no clothes. And the culture of the people does not welcome these things [i.e completely covering women]. This was stressed in the religious conference.

The religious conference was convened by the Deputy Governor, Ismail Khamis Jellab, because there was some

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<sup>21</sup> Interviewed in Kauda, 11 May 1995.

<sup>22</sup> Interviewed in Eri, 10 May 1995.

disharmony between the different religious groups. The Brothers of the Ansar el Sunna and Sufists had, for example, some differences of interpretations. Also there were disputes within the Christian sects. The Deputy Governor thought that people should come together, although the problems were not grave, and agree that Christians and Moslems should live together without problems.

The conference went smoothly beyond their expectations—many people thought beforehand that there would be religious disputes. We were about 47 Moslem Imams, from Delami, Heiban, Nagorban and Regifi. Those from Tullishi and Lagowa were not able to attend. A committee was set up within the conference, led by the Amir of the Moslems, Adam Tutu Atrun.

We have resolved to build an Islamic College and to teach culture while teaching religion. It will be here in Eri. But because of enemy attacks, we haven't yet been able to assemble the grass and bamboo for the construction.

The Conference was concerned not just with relations between the religious communities, but between them and the SPLM. The chairman was Alternate Commander Yousif Karra Haroun, and the interests of the SPLM were also well-represented: religious freedom was guaranteed but challenges to the SPLM on religious grounds were not endorsed. (Any Moslem who opposed the SPLM on such grounds would of course have left the SPLM-administered areas long ago. The position of the pacifistic Sudan Church of Christ is more ambiguous.) The Nuba journal *NAFIR* summarised the nineteen major resolutions of the Conference.<sup>23</sup>

1. Harmony and co-operation and religions and the various sects of each religion are necessary. All should aim at planting the seeds of love and co-operation, and resolve issues that create hatred and disharmony.

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<sup>23</sup> "A Report on the Religious Conference Held in Delami County on 10-15 December 1994 under the Auspices of the Advisory Council, South Kordofan." *NAFIR*, issue 2, July 1995. *NAFIR* is published by the Nuba Mountains Solidarity Abroad in London and the Nuba Relief, Rehabilitation and Development Society in the Nuba Mountains and Nairobi.

2. Moslem and Christian preachers should be trained and supervised by their respective organisations. Their names should be recorded and registered.
3. The New Sudan Council of Churches should prepare a plan for establishing a Theological College.<sup>24</sup>
4. The Islamic Council should begin the establishment of an Islamic Institute and Teaching Centre (*Mahad*).
5. Any person who preaches contrary to the teachings of the Holy Books with the intention of creating religious disharmony or sectarianism shall be disciplined.
6. Any person who uses religion to direct people against the public interest or the will of the people, as represented by the governing authorities [i.e. SPLM], shall be disciplined.
7. Inter-marriage between Moslems and Christians is permitted, and anyone who preaches or agitates to prohibit it shall be disciplined.
8. The observation, preservation and revival of good Nuba values, traditions and customs is emphasised to be necessary.
9. All people have the freedom to practise games and leisure, including dancing and the consumption of alcohol, without undermining community values.
10. Polygamy is acceptable to all whose beliefs permit it, and no religious leaders should exert ideological or psychological pressure against polygamists.
11. A broad-based committee should be formed to allocate and distribute any assistance or donations that are received, whether from religious or secular sources.

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<sup>24</sup> *NAFIR* noted that the Sudan Church of Christ already has a Theological College in Um Dulu, but it does not serve the other denominations.

12. The numbers of Church Youth should be limited to those necessary for effective spiritual work. Service in the Church should not be abused as a pretext for avoiding National Service.

The conference resolutions have been well-received, though lack of paper and difficulties of travel have meant that they had still not been widely disseminated five months after the conference ended. The Moslem delegation in particular was happy, even with resolutions that appear to go contrary to some of the most widely-held Moslem conventions. Ibrahim Katin Abdel Karim, Imam of Kuchama East, explained:<sup>25</sup>

I was very happy with the intermarriage resolution between Moslems and Christians. I'm happy because there are many Moslem girls unmarried and no Moslems men to marry them. So it is advisable for these girls to marry their Christian brothers than to remain unmarried or even go to the government towns for prostitution or forced marriages by the enemy soldiers. Though our area of Kuchama didn't experience girls going to government towns for marriage it happened in other areas and may happen to us in the future so as elders we have to be careful.

One of the best resolutions of the conference was the establishment of the Islamic Institute and Teaching Centre, *Mahad*. I'm sure this Institute will graduate many Imams who will spread the true Islam in the Nuba Mountains. By true Islam I mean the Islam of tolerance and cooperation with other religious groups.

The Christian delegation was headed by the representative of the New Sudan Council of Churches, Barnaba Angelo. The Catholic and Anglican churches in the Nuba Mountains were also happy with the discussions and resolutions.

As important as the resolutions, however, was the conduct of the conference itself. It lasted for six whole days, and was marked by vigorous debate, with all delegates able to speak and present their views. Though they did not officially participate (due to lack of an institutional structure to represent them) a number of senior traditional priests (kujurs) were in attendance, and their positions were presented to the conference.

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<sup>25</sup> Interviewed in Kujur el Sha'abiya, 13 May 1995.

The Tongole Conference is a remarkable contrast to the Religious Dialogue Conference held in Khartoum by the Government of Sudan on 8-10 October 1994, amid much publicity. More than one hundred delegates participated, including guests from 27 countries. A reader of the conference proceedings could be forgiven for believing that the Government of Sudan was a model of tolerance.

In the closing session, President Omer al Bashir said: "The Sudan embraces within the arms of its boundaries peoples of all races, cultures and religions. It is imperative that religious values be given their proper place and role in contemporary life..."<sup>26</sup> Dr Hassan al Turabi also presented a paper:

We, in Sudan, are reviving an old rule, by establishing an experiment of dialogue and religious co-existence. Within it every person is free to believe, to worship and refer to his religion in political and civil issues whenever he is in a state where the majority of the people believe in one religion. On the federal government level, religion does not deny the rights of the citizens or deprive them of their rights, we will not close the doors of free competition [for] public posts or political posts regardless of religious belief, because we know that this is the way that leads to social security in the country. We do know that peace between the religions is not a far-fetched thing, but that the challenge facing us is how to surpass religious fanaticism, and to do that, we should intensify dialogue and establish joint forums not to discuss theological issues, but to discuss what we could do altogether to spread religious values in the world, the world which is sliding into nasty paganism day after day.<sup>27</sup>

Like the whole conference, Turabi's address needs to be carefully decoded. The second sentence quoted clearly makes freedom of religion dependent upon living in a state with a majority of co-religionists. The final sentence alludes to Turabi's strong opposition

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<sup>26</sup> Quoted in: "The Second International Conference on Interreligious Dialogue in Sudan," *Understanding*, 12, (Khartoum, 16 November 1994), p. 5.

<sup>27</sup> "Inter-Religious Dialogue, Challenges and Horizons," paper presented by Dr Hassan al Turabi, reproduced in "The Second International Conference...", p. 25. His speech to the conference was rather different.

to secularism, which he believes to be destroying all that is valuable in the world. The assault on the Nuba peoples who live under SPLM administration falls within Turabi's concept of a "common front", whose aim is "to reject any positivistic ideology which contradicts the divine message and to reject any anti-religious call that aims at destroying religious values."<sup>28</sup> "Reject" means "destroy by all means available."

Despite its name, the Khartoum conference was more in the way of an exchange of speeches on historical, theological and related issues than a true dialogue. There was little opportunity for any speakers other than those proposed by the government to speak. Many members of State Security were in the audience, and the atmosphere intimidated those on the floor who would have liked to present their experiences and opinions. When one Catholic teacher boldly spoke out and made proposals, the chairman of the conference refused to allow them to be debated. In fact, the final communiqué, which is in effect an enthusiastic endorsement of the Sudan Government's position, was not debated at all. The papers were simply handed to President Omer al Bashir at the close.

The "resolutions" of the conference were widely publicised in the government-controlled Sudanese media. But, despite the promises, nothing changed. The weeks following the conference were marked by continuing discrimination and harassment of non-Moslems and Moslems who are not government supporters in Khartoum—not to mention the abuses in the Nuba Mountains and elsewhere.

By contrast, the Tongole Conference received no publicity outside the SPLM-administered areas. Due to lack of pens and paper, the full proceedings could not even be recorded. It was solely designed as a genuine measure to address the local problems of religious dialogue, rather than a piece of propaganda. It indicates that the Nuba tradition of religious tolerance is alive.

## CONCLUSION

The Sudan Government's assault on Islam in the Nuba Mountains is its most closely-guarded secret. It is not simply a matter of

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<sup>28</sup> *Op cit*, p. 24.

victimising Moslems. Islam itself, in the form of mosques, Holy Books, the *zakat*, and Imams themselves are among the targets of the Sudan Government, which has declared that true Islam cannot exist in the areas outside its control.

The assaults on the Christian church and traditional Nuba religion are equally crimes. But these attacks are well-known. In addressing its own citizens, the Sudan Government speaks of religious war. Any claim to religious sanction is revealed to be hollow by the widespread desecration of mosques and Korans, and the destruction or looting of the *zakat*. It is an assault on Islam itself.