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SUDAN | Case Dismissed Against Church Leaders

CSW learned the criminal case against the elected president and senior leaders of the Sudanese Church of Christ (SCOC) was dismissed on Aug. 9.

Eight leaders of the SCOC were arrested Aug. 23, 2017 and charged with trespassing on the church headquarters. They were also accused of refusing to hand over administrative control to an unelected church committee led by Angelo Alzaki and appointed by the government.

The SCOC is a predominantly Nuban denomination and has experienced both religious and ethnic discrimination. The experiences of the SCOC mirror those of the Sudan Evangelical Presbyterian Church (SEPC), where a government-backed church committee, that was not constituted in accordance with church procedures, has sold church land to developers.

In 2017, the Ministry of Guidance and Religious Endowments, which oversees religious affairs in Sudan, appointed an alternative Executive Committee for the SCOC, led by Alzaki, to manage church affairs. The decision violated the internal procedures of the church and is illustrative of government interference in the affairs of religious institutions.

The criminal proceedings against the elected SCOC leadership started in late 2017 and lasted for over 10 months, with delays caused by the prosecution prolonging the proceedings. On Aug. 9, after hearing the prosecution's case and questioning the witnesses presented by the complainant, which included an official from the Ministry of Guidance and Religious Endowments, the judge ruled that the SCOC President and senior leaders had no criminal case to answer and dismissed the charges. In his ruling, he commented that the case centered entirely on an administrative dispute which was not criminal in nature.

Rev. Kuwa Shamal, who was released in January 2017 after standing trial for national security crimes in 2016, was among the eight SCOC leaders accused in this case.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "We welcome the dismissal of charges against the elected leadership of the Sudan Church of Christ. This case demonstrates

the politicization of the criminal justice system, resulting in religious leaders, who are upstanding members of the community, being forced to defend themselves against unwarranted criminal charges. Rev. Kuwa Shamal exemplifies these challenges. He has on two occasions been accused of criminal charges and been found innocent by the court in both instances. Reverend Shamal not only had to defend himself against unjust charges, but was also held in detention for nine months between 2015 and 2016, a powerful illustration of the harassment religious minorities are facing in Sudan.”