

# Sudan in crisis, commission reports

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WASHINGTON (RNS)—The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, created by Congress, issued a report March 29 painting Sudan as a nation in crisis that needs U.S. intervention.

“Sustained close engagement by the United States government is necessary to ensure compliance ... with human rights provisions,” Chairman Michael Cromartie told reporters in releasing the study, based on a fact-finding visit in January.

Congress created the bipartisan commission in 1998 to promote religious freedom and make policy recommendations. Its Sudan study found displaced refugees, a prohibition on new churches and even genocide of non-Muslims—all in a country supposedly at peace.

In January 2005, Sudan officially ended two decades of civil war with a peace agreement signed by the National Congress Party in the north and the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement in the predominantly non-Arab south.

A year later, USCIRF has found that while religious freedom has improved in the south and other areas, development and security remain problems.

Meanwhile in the Arabic north, non-Muslims continue to be subjected to the Muslim law of Sharia, which carries a possible death sentence for religious conversion.

The report said permits for new churches have been denied, churches built without permission often are destroyed and the government-controlled Muslim religious institutions enforce a militant interpretation of Islam.

Humanitarian organizations continue to be harassed, and little progress is being made by groups promoting peace, the report said. There is no indication the country's oil revenues are being shared evenly by north and south as required in the peace agreement.

Refugees still are imprisoned, and stories of rape, murder and slave trade in the detention camps abound, the report said. And the situation is exacerbated by the genocide in Darfur.

In addition to other suggestions, the report urged Washington to send a high-ranking envoy to Sudan to oversee implementation of the peace accords.

Joining Cromartie were Democratic House leader Nancy Pelosi of California, and Reps. Frank Wolf (R-Va.) and Donald Payne (D-N.J.).

Genocide "is a concern of the entire world, and we all must rise to the challenge," Pelosi said. "Too often we have said 'never again,' only to have it happen again."

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