



**Written Testimony of Tony Perkins
President, Family Research Council
Former Chair, U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom**

**Before the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa
Hearing on “Stopping the Bloodshed: U.S. Response to Crimes Against Humanity in
Sudan”**

December 11, 2025

Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Jacobs, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Tony Perkins. I served on the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom from 2018 to 2022, including as chair and vice chair, and I currently serve as president of Family Research Council in Washington, D.C.

We care deeply about protecting and promoting fundamental human rights, chief among them religious freedom. Research has shown that higher levels of religious freedom are associated with greater social peace and, in many cases, stronger economic performance¹—things desperately needed in war-torn Sudan.

When I served on USCIRF, I participated in the most recent USCIRF government visit to Sudan in 2020. During that visit, I met with transitional Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok, who was taking necessary steps to improve religious freedom. Those reforms led to Sudan being removed from the U.S. list of “countries of particular concern” (CPC) after 20 years. Sadly, the progress we witnessed then has collapsed, and ethnic and religiously driven violence has once again engulfed the country.

Conditions in Sudan

Sudan is currently making headlines due to horrific violence, but the reality is that the country has experienced conflict throughout most of its history since gaining independence in 1956. The danger in moments like this is to treat the crisis as something new, instead of addressing the

¹ Brian J. Grim and Roger Finke, *The Price of Freedom Denied* (Cambridge University Press, 2011); Brian J. Grim, “Is Religious Freedom Good for Business?: A Conceptual and Empirical Analysis,” *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion*, no. 10 (2014), <https://www.religioustudies.org/pdfs/ijrr10004.pdf>.

deeply-rooted issues that have fueled decades of instability. We do not need peace in name only; we need a peace that deals honestly with those underlying causes.

While the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) are rightly condemned for their atrocities, the truth is that both major armed factions carry responsibility for violence. The Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) have engaged in their own brutal acts, including killings of civilians and beheadings.² Neither group represents a path toward long-term stability or human rights.

Many may recall Omar al-Bashir, who ruled Sudan from 1989 to 2019. He created the Janjaweed militias—the same forces that later evolved into today’s RSF—as instruments of jihadist ethnic cleansing against Christians and African tribes. At that time, the RSF and SAF worked together. It was only after the coup against al-Bashir that they started fighting each other.³ The Islamist ideology shaping both the RSF and the SAF is a major driver of Sudan’s continuing violence.

Although the RSF and SAF are in conflict with each other, they have a common enemy in Christians, whom they do not see as fitting their Islamic vision for Sudan.⁴ Churches have been targeted by both the RSF and SAF.⁵ Christians have been denied food aid and told, “Unless you leave your Christianity, no food for you.”⁶ They, along with all the other people of Sudan caught in the crossfire, are the true victims here.

Regional actors are exacerbating this conflict. While the United Arab Emirates’ support of the RSF is in the news, other nations have their hands in Sudan as well to wield influence (Egypt, for example, is the primary backer of the SAF)⁷ and extract resources. Iran, Egypt, and Turkey have supplied drones to the SAF.⁸ Russia initially backed the RSF in exchange for access to gold, but then switched sides. Just a few weeks ago, it was reported that the Sudanese government offered Russia its first naval base in Africa in Port Sudan.⁹

The ongoing refugee crisis, along with internal displacement and mass starvation, remain significant challenges. Nearly 12 million people are internally displaced, and over four million

² UN Human Rights Council, Sixtieth session, “Sudan: A War of Atrocities - Report of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission for the Sudan,” A/HRC/60/22, September 5, 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/ffm-sudan/a-hrc-60-22-auv.pdf>.

³ “Civil War in Sudan,” Center for Preventive Action, last updated November 6, 2025, <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/power-struggle-sudan>.

⁴ Paul Tilsley, “‘God have mercy on us’: Sudan’s Christians struggle to survive under siege,” *Fox News*, last updated September 14, 2025, <https://www.foxnews.com/world/god-have-mercy-us-sudans-christians-struggle-survive-under-siege>.

⁵ “Briefing: Attacks on places of worship,” CSW, November 17, 2025, <https://www.csw.org.uk/2025/11/17/report/6662/article.htm>.

⁶ Tilsley, “‘God have mercy on us’: Sudan’s Christians struggle to survive under siege.”

⁷ Youseif Basher, Weam Al Sharif, and Giorgio Cafiero, “Sudan’s Armed Conflict and Humanitarian Crisis,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, May 11, 2023, <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/2023/05/sudans-armed-conflict-and-humanitarian-crisis?lang=en>.

⁸ Benoit Faucon, “Sudan Offers Russia Its First Naval Base in Africa,” *The Wall Street Journal*, December 1, 2025, <https://www.wsj.com/world/africa/sudan-offers-russia-its-first-naval-base-in-africa-0748e810>.

⁹ Ibid.

people have left the country. According to the UN Refugee Agency, many of these refugees have gone to Chad, Egypt, and South Sudan.¹⁰ Chad and South Sudan now face food shortages themselves and do not have the infrastructure to sustain the inflow of people. The Nuba Mountains area, in particular, is in need of more aid that is free from the interference of the RSF and SAF.¹¹

With more than 150,000 people dead from the past few years of conflict, and with the death toll only continuing to rise, we must take action.¹²

Religious Freedom and CPC Status

Sudan was designated a “country of particular concern” for religious freedom from 1999 to 2019. After the 2019 transition, the government enacted meaningful reforms: repealing apostasy laws, increasing protections for minorities, and partnering with U.S. institutions. Because of this, Sudan was removed from the CPC list.

But Sudan has now fallen back into a conflict driven in part by the very same Islamist structures that persecuted Christians and other religious minorities for decades. The safeguards once put in place have eroded.

Given this massive backsliding, the U.S. should reimpose the CPC designation and make clear that it will only be removed when we see verifiable improvements in religious freedom and human rights on the ground.

Policy Recommendations

1. **Utilize the CPC designation and similar tools** to advance American values in discussions with Sudanese governing factions and regional actors.
2. **Strengthen federalism.**
A centralized government controlled by a single faction guarantees continued bloodshed. Regional governance structures are essential.
3. **Ensure direct humanitarian access** to the Nuba Mountains without interference from the SAF and RSF. Aid to other regions must be ensured as well.

¹⁰ “Sudan Situation,” UNHCR, accessed December 10, 2025, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/sudansituation>.

¹¹ Daniel P. Sullivan, “The Nuba Mountains: A Window into the Sudan Crisis,” Refugees International, August 22, 2024, <https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports-briefs/the-nuba-mountains-a-window-into-the-sudan-crisis/>.

¹² Natasha Booty, Farouk Chothia, and Wedaeli Chibelushi, “A simple guide to what is happening in Sudan,” *BBC*, November 13, 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cjel2nn22z9o>.

4. **Partner with Sudan's churches.**

Despite decades of conflict, local churches remain one of the few stabilizing forces serving communities in need.

Five years ago, I stood in Khartoum, at the very place where the Blue Nile and White Nile converge to form the great river that flows north through Africa. Each tributary is distinct—different origins, different paths—but they meet at a single point that shapes everything downstream.

Sudan is standing at just such a confluence today. Its history—marked by conflict, repression, and resilience—meets a present moment filled with both danger and opportunity. What flows from this convergence will shape not only Sudan's future but also the stability of the entire region.

My hope is that the United States will help ensure that what flows forward is justice, peace, and genuine freedom for all the people of Sudan.