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Christians in the Sudan face travel restrictions, cardinal says

by Fredrick Nzwili by Religion News Service

For Christians living in predominantly Muslim Sudan, travel restrictions are making life more difficult each day, a Roman Catholic cardinal said.

Sudanese Cardinal Gabriel Zubeir Wako highlighted the challenges at a Catholic Bishops Conference in Juba, the Republic of South Sudan's capital. His auxiliary bishop could not attend the Jan. 21-30 meeting because his passport was seized by security agents, along with those of eight priests.

"Christians in the two countries are facing difficulties," Wako told the gathering. "We (bishops) must focus on serious matters and come up with strong messages."

Catholics and other Christians survived serious persecution during the Sudanese civil war (1983-2005), between the Khartoum-based Islamic government and rebels in the mainly Christian south.

In 2011, the country split in two, with the south becoming the Republic of South Sudan. Since then the Christian minority in the north has faced growing violence, harassment and discrimination, including reports of priests being interrogated and having their visas denied.

The government of Sudan recognizes only six priests out of about 40 as citizens of the country. The rest it considers citizens of the Republic of South Sudan, and there are fears continued harassment may force most of them to quit working in the north.

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