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SPECIAL ISSUE: Release of Czech citizen Peter Jacek

Petr Jasek, a Czech Christian imprisoned in Sudan for 11 months, threatened next Monday with death penalty or life imprisonment

Urgent Action: Participate in our campaign for his release



Arrested in December 2015

HRWF (17.11.2016) - Petr Jasek, a Czech Christian aid worker, is currently on trial in Sudan along with two Sudanese pastors and another Sudanese man. **On Monday 21st November, there will be a court hearing about his case.**

He was arrested in December 2015 and held for eight months before charges were filed in August 2016. Mr. Jasek and the three others have been charged with at least **seven offenses**, some of which carry the **potential death penalty or life imprisonment**.

Mr. Jasek and the other men are accused of breaking several sections of Sudan's criminal code: **conspiring against the state, espionage against the country, entering and photographing military areas and works, calling for opposition to public authority by use of violence, provoking hatred against or amongst sects, and publishing false news. In addition, they also face charges of immigrating in illegal ways and conducting voluntary jobs without permission from the authorities under Sudan's immigration and passport laws.**

In November 2015, Mr. Jasek, Rev. Hassan Abduraheem and Rev. Kuwa Shamal attended a conference for Christian leaders where Rev. Abduraheem was a presenter. While speaking on his work as a church leader in Sudan, Rev. Abduraheem showed a picture of a young man from Darfur who had been badly injured during a demonstration. Mr. Jasek later met with the injured man in Khartoum and donated money toward the man's medical treatment. As Mr. Jasek left Sudan, he was searched by the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS), who discovered a receipt for the donation to the injured man. They then confiscated his personal belongings, including his mobile phone, laptop and camera.

Nine days after arresting Mr. Jasek, NISS officers arrested Rev. Abduraheem, who had signed the receipt, and Rev. Shamal. Charges were officially filed in August 2016. At least three court dates have been delayed because a translator failed to appear in court.

Mr. Jasek, who has much experience and training in hospital administration, has assisted a NGO in delivering aid to displaced and suffering Christians in Sudan and Nigeria. While his work has always been humanitarian in nature, the Sudanese government has sought to characterize him as a "filmmaker" who was conspiring against the Sudanese state. They claim that his donation toward medical care for the injured young man was actually support for South Sudanese rebels.

Mr. Jasek denies all the charges.

Campaign for his release: What you can do and what you should do!

1. **Write a letter** to the embassy of Sudan in Brussels to ask for his release:

Embassy of Sudan: sudanbx@yahoo.com
124 Avenue Franklin Roosevelt, 1050 Brussels. Belgium
Tel.: +32 2 647 9494
Fax: +32 2 648 3499
and/or to the embassy of Sudan in your country. See the list at [https://embassy-finder.com/sudan in brussels belgium](https://embassy-finder.com/sudan_in_brussels_belgium)

Model of letter

Subject: Release of Petr Jasek, a citizen of the Czech Republic, an EU member state

Excellency,

Petr Jasek, a Czech Christian aid worker, is currently on trial in Sudan. **On Monday 21 November, there will be a court hearing about his case.**

He was arrested in December 2015 and held for eight months before charges were filed in August 2016. Mr. Jasek has been charged with at least **seven offenses**, some of which carry the **potential death penalty or life imprisonment**.

Mr. Jasek met with an injured man in Khartoum and donated money toward the man's medical treatment. As Mr. Jasek left Sudan, he was searched by the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS), who discovered a receipt for the donation to the injured man. They then confiscated his personal belongings, including his mobile phone, laptop and camera.

Mr. Jasek has much experience and training in hospital administration. **He has assisted an NGO in delivering aid to displaced and suffering people in Sudan** and Nigeria. While **his work has always been humanitarian in nature**, your government has characterized him as a "filmmaker" who was conspiring against the Sudanese state. The authorities of your country also claim that his donation toward medical care for the injured young man was actually support for South Sudanese rebels. **Peter Jasek strongly denies this charge and any involvement in political matters in Sudan.**

I am hereby urging the authorities of your country to release him.

Respectfully yours.

Name:

Country:

2. Other actions

- Forward this newsletter to other Christians and other people.
- Post our call on Facebook, Twitter and any other social media.
- Raise this issue during your religious and prayer meetings.

If you want to be regularly informed about violations of religious freedom in the world, ask for a free subscription to our newsletter

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See HRWF website: <http://www.hrwf.eu>

HRWF database of news and information on over 70 countries:

<http://hrwf.eu/newsletters/forb/>

List of hundreds of documented cases of believers of various faiths in 20 countries: <http://hrwf.eu/forb/forb-and-blasphemy-prisoners-list/>

**The International Religious Freedom Roundtable
in Washington asks for the release of Peter Jacek
and Sudanese religious leaders**

***Letter to President Omar al-Bashir, Embassy of the Republic of Sudan 2210
Massachusetts Ave. Washington, D.C. 20008***

Dear President al-Bashir,

We write as an informal group of organizations and individuals who are scholars, religious and secular leaders, and human rights advocates to express our deep concern over the arrest and imprisonment of Christian aid worker and Czech national Petr Jasek, Sudanese religious leaders Hassan Abduraheem and Kuwa Shamal of the Sudan Church of Christ, and Darfuri activist Mr. Abdulmonem Abdumawla.

Mr. Jasek, Reverend Abduraheem and Mr. Abdumawla were detained in December of 2015 by officers of the National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) and held for over eight months before receiving formal charges. Their arrest centered around a receipt, carried by Mr. Jasek and signed by Reverend Abduraheem and Mr. Abdumawla, showing that Mr. Jasek had donated money towards the medical treatment of Mr. Ali Omer, a Darfuri burn victim injured during demonstrations in 2013. Reverend Shamal, who did not sign the receipt, was obliged to report to NISS for several months before being arrested in May of this year, seemingly on account of his senior role in the Sudan Church of Christ and his ethnicity.

In August, all four men were charged jointly with multiple offenses, including waging war against the state and espionage, both of which carry the death penalty as the maximum sentence. These charges come despite the fact that Mr. Jasek's work, and the assistance he received from others, was purely humanitarian in nature. Mr. Jasek's work focused on medical assistance, whereas Abduraheem and Shamal are pastors of the Sudan Church of Christ, providing aid and assistance to their congregation and the Sudanese people. The work of Mr. Abdumawla, who is a friend of Mr. Omar's, focused on advocating for human rights.

Unfortunately, the extended detainment and imprisonment of these four men appears to be only the latest development in a pattern of hostility towards religious and ethnic minorities in Sudan. On October 24th, the Sudanese government seized control of the Evangelical Basic School in Madani after briefly detaining school staff who attempted to resist the takeover. Classes were subsequently postponed for over 1,000 students while the Ministry of Education formed a new government appointed committee to run the school. In early October, officials from the State Ministry of Planning and Urban Development notified five churches in Khartoum that their buildings would be demolished to make way for "investments." In Darfur, displaced people continue to experience violence from government-allied militia, including alarming levels of sexual violence, and protests by Darfuri students are often met with violence.

As you know, Sudan is a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 18 of which protects the right to freedom of religion or belief. Article 38 of the 2005 Interim National Constitution of Sudan also provides for freedom of religion or belief throughout the country. The Constitution also states that as well as being multi religious, the country is multi-cultural, multilingual, multi-racial and multi-ethnic. We believe that the imprisonment of Petr Jasek and the other individuals in this case is not only a violation of these treaties, but that a careful review of their case will lead to their quick and unconditional release.

In October, the European Parliament adopted a resolution which noted the imprisonment of Mr. Jasek and his fellow detainees, saying that "threats against church leaders and the intimidation of Christian communities have continued at an accelerated pace [in Sudan]." The resolution called on the Sudanese government to "reaffirm that freedom of religion, conscience and belief is a universal human right..."

In the past, we have applauded the release of other prisoners of conscience by Sudanese officials, including Pastors Peter Yein Reith and Yat Michael Ruot in August of 2015 and Mrs. Meriam Ibrahim in June of 2014. In each of these cases, it was found that the original justification for their arrest proved groundless, and we believe the same will be found in this case.

President al-Bashir, the release of these men would send a strong signal to the international community that Sudan is committed to both its own constitution and its international treaty obligations. We urge you to instruct the Ministry of Justice to quickly review the evidence presented in this case and to drop all charges against these individuals. No one in Sudan, foreign or national, should be prosecuted simply for attempting to provide humanitarian relief or because of their sincerely held religious beliefs. We thank you for your attention to this urgent matter and we look forward to your response.

Respectfully,

Names of the NGOs signing the letter

Christian school in Sudan closed down after police, civilians seize property

Al Jazirah state to run institution.

Morning Star News (30.10.2016) - <http://bit.ly/2guZRp0> - The future education of more than 1,000 pupils was unclear after authorities closed down a Christian school in eastern Sudan last week, sources said.

Civilians who bused in from Khartoum and elsewhere aided armed police in taking over the Evangelical Basic School in Madani, Al Jazirah state on Oct. 24, an area church leader said. It was the third raid on the school in two months, following efforts to seize the school on Oct. 4 and Sept. 5. On Oct. 6, authorities jailed for four days Christian staff members who tried to prevent the seizure of the institution.

The National Ministry of Guidance and Endowments ordered the takeover of the Christian school so Islamist officials of Al Jazirah state can control it until courts determine final management, sources said.

"They just want to form a government body to run the school," an area Christian told Morning Star News. "Muslims were on board the bus that came from Khartoum."

School administrators and teachers are ethnic Nuba – increasingly targeted by a government that has vowed Islamic religion and Arabic culture will reign in Sudan – and from South Kordofan state, where Sudan is fighting an insurgency.

Parents of the students at the school organized a protest march last week to express their concern for their children's education, an area pastor said.

"How can the government allow such an incident to happen to one of the best schools in the state?" he said.

A legal advisor for the Christian school urged the state government to allow classes to resume on Monday, but it was unclear whether the school would re-open. Local media reported the state Ministry of Education is planning to run the school via a committee selected by the government.

Arrested on Oct. 6 along with the Rev. Samuel Suleiman, headmaster of the school, and the Rev. Ismail Zakaria, were seven other teachers who objected to the takeover of the school. The nine Christian staff members were detained until Oct. 9 before being released on bail, accused of resisting authorities.

Civilians that came from Khartoum, 166 kilometers (102 miles) west, and other parts of the country to forcibly take control of the property acted with the help of five policemen, sources said.

Zakaria is pastor of the church to which the school belongs and is also a representative of the Evangelical Communion, which oversees the property. Armed police and officials from the National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) on Sept. 5 arrested Pastor Suleiman and 12 teachers at the school, accusing them of supporting the Sudan People's Liberation Army-North (SPLA-N), a rebel group fighting government forces farther south in the Nuba Mountains state of South Kordofan.

Pastor Suleiman has strongly denied the charge.

In the Sept. 5 raid, police presented a letter from the National Ministry of Guidance and Endowments, addressed to the State Ministry of Social Welfare, ordering the handover of Evangelical Basic School to the government. The school serves more than 1,000 students, ages 3 to 18, in Madani. Established by the American Mission in 1901, it belongs to the Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church.

Harassment, arrests and persecution of Christians have intensified since the secession of South Sudan in July 2011. The Sudanese Minister of Guidance and Endowments announced in April 2013 that no new licenses would be granted for building new churches in Sudan, citing a decrease in the South Sudanese population. Sudan since 2012 has expelled foreign Christians and bulldozed church buildings on the pretext that they belonged to South Sudanese.

Sudan fought a civil war with the South Sudanese from 1983 to 2005, and in June 2011, shortly before the secession of South Sudan the following month, the government began fighting a rebel group in the Nuba Mountains that has its roots in South Sudan. The rebels in the Nuba Mountains were formerly involved with the southern Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) forces fighting Khartoum before the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA).

Fighting between Sudan and South Sudan broke out in June 2011, when Khartoum forcefully attempted to disarm the SPLA-N in South Kordofan by force rather than awaiting a process of disarmament as called for in the CPA. When the CPA was signed in 2005, the people of South Kordofan were to vote on whether to join the north or the south, but the state governor suspended the process.

Ethnic Nuba, along with Christians, face discrimination in Sudan, where President Omar al-Bashir has vowed to adopt a stricter version of sharia (Islamic law) and recognize only Islamic culture and the Arabic language.

The Nuba people have longstanding complaints against Khartoum – including neglect, oppression and forced conversions to Islam in a 1990s jihad – but as Sudanese citizens on the northern side of the border, they were never given the option of secession in the 2005 peace pact between northern and southern Sudan.

Due to its treatment of Christians and other human rights violations, Sudan has been designated a Country of Particular Concern by the U.S. State Department since 1999, and the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom recommended the country remain on the list in its 2016 report.

Sudan ranked eighth on Christian support organization Open Doors' 2016 World Watch List of countries where Christians face most persecution.

Trial resumes for four men after three week recess

CSW (18.10.2016) - The trial of Reverend Hassan Abduraheem, Reverend Kuwa Shamal, Mr Petr Jašek and Mr Abdulmonem Abdumawla resumed in Sudan on 17 October after a three-week recess.

During the hearing, the prosecution presented the case investigator as its first witness and questioned him on the evidence allegedly found against the men. The legal team representing the men have been concerned by what they see as unnecessary delays in the case, with several postponements and adjournments in the trial so far. The next hearing is scheduled for 24 October.

The men are charged jointly with at least seven crimes, including waging war against the state (Article 51 of the Sudanese Criminal Code) and espionage (Article 53), which carry the death penalty as the maximum sentence.

The case against Reverend Abduraheem, Mr Jašek and Mr Abdumawla, centres on the provision of finances for the medical treatment of Mr Ali Omer, a young man from Darfur who was injured in a demonstration in 2013. The prosecution alleges that the \$5,000 Mr Jašek donated towards Mr Omer's treatment was in reality support for rebel movements in the South Kordofan, Blue Nile and Darfur regions.

By framing the case in this manner, the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) has attempted to exploit the fact that Reverends Abduraheem and Shamal are originally from the Nuba Mountains in South Kordofan and Mr Abdumawla is from Darfur. Reverend Shamal was not involved in fundraising for Mr Omer's treatment but appears to have been included in the case due to his senior position in the Sudan Church of Christ, his relationship with Reverend Abduraheem and his ethnicity.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "We remain concerned by the unjust detention and trial of Reverends Hassan Abduraheem and Kuwa Shamal, Mr Petr Jasek and Mr Abdulmonem Abdumawla. The unwarranted delays in the trial, including the three week adjournment, have resulted in the men being held in prison for longer than is necessary. We urge the government of Sudan to drop the charges against them without condition or delay. We also call for a review of NISS's powers and for the end to the targeting of religious and ethnic minorities in Sudan."

Sudan detains six Christians, threatens to demolish five churches

World Watch Monitor (12.10.2016) - <http://bit.ly/2d9r8fA> - Sudan has detained three church leaders and three church members, meanwhile warning five churches of impending demolition.

The six, from the Evangelical Church in Wad Medani (200km southeast of the capital, Khartoum), were briefly arrested on Sunday (9 Oct.) after refusing an order to hand over to the government a church-run school.

"They were released on bail later the same day. It is not clear if further legal action is planned," sources told World Watch Monitor, on condition of anonymity.

Meanwhile, five churches have received notifications that their buildings will be demolished.

Three belong to the Sudan Church of Christ (SCOC), one to the Presbyterian Church and the other to the Episcopal Church in Sudan. They are situated in the Bahri, Soba and Jebel Aulia areas of Khartoum.

Authorities did not reveal the exact dates the demolitions would take place, but church leaders were apparently told their land had been "assigned for investment".

The latest orders trail several actions against the country's minority Christians (5% of the population) and their institutions. Since the National Islamic Front took power by military coup in 1989, Sudan has witnessed a significant clampdown on religious freedom, the Sudan Democracy First Group (SDFG) said in a report in March. The group warned that this policy is creating space for the growth of radical extremist groups, pointing to a number of incidents that it says confirms the ongoing suppression of religious freedom in the country.

Since that report, two pastors were accused of "crimes against the state" at a hearing in Khartoum on 26 September.

The charges against SCOC pastors Hassan Taour and Kuwa Shamal, as well as Czech aid worker Petr Jasek and Darfuri graduate Abdulmonem Abdumawla, could lead to the death penalty.

During an earlier hearing in August, Taour and Shamal – both originally from the beleaguered ethnic Nuba group, who live in the Nuba Mountains of South Kordofan near the border with South Sudan – were accused of highlighting Christian suffering there. (For instance, in May, Khartoum bombed St. Vincent Ferrer Catholic School in Kauda there, the latest in bombings of the Nuba area that have gone on for years.)

Held between Dec. 2015 and early August this year – most of the time without charge – the four men are due to appear in court again on 17 Oct.

A resolution was submitted last week to the European Parliament, highlighting the case of Jasek and his fellow defendants, signed by several hundred MEPs.

It noted that "the Sudanese authorities impose severe restrictions on freedom of religion; whereas threats against church leaders and the intimidation of Christian communities have continued at an accelerated pace over the past years; whereas Czech Christian aid worker Petr Jašek, Sudanese pastors Hassan Abduraheem Kodi Taour, Kuwa Shamal and Darfuri graduate student Abdulmonem Abdumawla Issa Abdumawla have been detained for nine months already by the NISS [National Intelligence Security Services] and are facing trial on charges of highlighting alleged Christian suffering in war-ravaged areas of Sudan; whereas in recent years there has been an increase in trials on charges of apostasy and subsequent death sentences".

It "calls on the African Union and the Sudanese Government to ... abolish the death penalty and reaffirm that freedom of religion, conscience or belief is a universal human right that needs to be protected everywhere and for everyone; and demands that the Sudanese Government repeal any legal provisions that penalise or discriminate against individuals for their religious beliefs, especially in the case of apostasy".

It also "expresses its concern with regard to the increased crackdown by the NISS on citizens who are civil society activists and calls on Sudan to release detainees immediately and unconditionally".

Other sources report to WWM that Taour and Shamal are both suffering from ill health.

Timeline of events

Last month, the former Bishop of Kadugli Diocese in South Kordofan was quoted as saying the government of Sudan was "not interested in the Christian religion". Rev. Andudu Adam Elnail said, "There is no freedom for us, we cannot build churches. We are treated as second-class citizens."

On 10 July, a court in Khartoum North charged five Christians over attempting to stop an illegal acquisition of church property.

In February, Sudan's Ministry of Internal Affairs ordered refugee churches in Khartoum to "register" or face closure.

In October 2015, an Evangelical church was demolished in Omdurman, just west of Khartoum, at only 72 hours' notice; it had been there for over 30 years. Another church, a Lutheran one, was burned down in Gadaref, in the eastern part of the country.

In August 2015, the Sudan government was forced to release two South Sudanese pastors, whom it had accused of "spying", after international attention on the case. Yat Michael and Peter Yen were in prison for eight and seven months respectively.

Meriam Ibrahim, a Sudanese Christian, was accused of apostasy and adultery, before being released in June 2014 after mounting global pressure.

The Sudanese minister of religious affairs had announced in April 2013 that no licenses would be granted to allow for building new churches.

Following South Sudan's independence in 2011, President Omar al-Bashir – wanted by the ICC for crimes including "genocide" – has reasserted Sudan as an Islamic state governed by Sharia. Pressure has been ratcheted up against Christians, including in South Kordofan's Nuba Mountains.

According to Open Doors' 2016 World Watch List, Sudan is ranked 8th in a list of 50 countries where Christians come under the most pressure. The country has a rating of "extreme" and for the past two years has remained among the top 10 offenders.

Charges against Czech national underpin case against clergymen and Mr. Abdumawla

CSW (16.09.2016) - Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) can confirm that Czech Christian Petr Jašek is being tried jointly with Reverend Hassan Abduraheem, Reverend Kuwa Shamal and Mr Abdulmonem Abdumawla in Sudan.

Mr Jašek is charged with the propagation of false news (Article 66 of the Sudanese Criminal Code). He is also accused, along with Reverend Hassan Abduraheem Reverend Kuwa Shamal and Mr Abdulmonem Abdumawla, of at least seven crimes, including waging war against the state (Article 51 of the Sudanese Criminal Code) and espionage (Article 53), which carry the death penalty as the maximum sentence.

As with Reverend Abduraheem and Mr Abdumawla, the case against Mr Jašek centres on the provision of finances for the medical treatment of Mr Ali Omer, a young man from Darfur who was injured in a demonstration in 2013. Mr Jašek heard of Mr Omer's plight

during an international conference for Christian leaders in November 2015. Reverend Abduraheem and Reverend Shamal were also attending the conference, where Reverend Abduraheem had been invited to speak about his work as a church leader in Sudan. During his presentation, Reverend Abduraheem showed a picture of Mr Omer and mentioned that he had donated money towards his medical treatment. Mr Jašek subsequently pledged to provide finances for Mr Omer's treatment.

In December 2015, Mr Jašek travelled to Khartoum and met Mr Omer. The meeting was facilitated by Reverend Abduraheem and Mr Abdumawla, who is a friend of Mr Omer's and had been collecting finances for his medical treatment. Mr Jašek donated \$5,000 towards Mr Omer's medical treatment, which was signed for by Reverend Abduraheem and Mr Abdumawla. As he was leaving Sudan, Mr Jašek was searched at Khartoum Airport by NISS agents who found the receipt for \$5,000, signed by Reverend Abduraheem and Mr Abdumawla, and arrested him. They also confiscated personal belongings, including his mobile phone, laptop and camera.

Nine days after Mr Jašek's arrest, Reverend Abduraheem, Reverend Shamal and Mr Abdumawla were also arrested by NISS officers. While Mr Jašek, Reverend Abduraheem and Mr Abdumawla remained in NISS detention, Reverend Shamal was conditionally released until May 2016, when he was re-arrested and held in the Attorney General's custody. Mr Jašek, Reverend Abduraheem and Mr Abdumawla were also transferred to the Attorney General's custody in May 2016. They were all charged in August 2016 and their trial is ongoing.

The prosecution alleges that the \$5,000 Mr Jašek donated to Mr Omer's treatment was in reality support for rebel movements in the South Kordofan, Blue Nile and Darfur regions. By framing the case in this manner, NISS has attempted to exploit the fact that Reverends Abduraheem and Shamal are originally from the Nuba Mountains in South Kordofan and Mr Abdumawla is from Darfur. Reverend Shamal was not involved in fundraising for Mr Omer's medical treatment but appears to have been included in the case due to his senior position in the Sudan Church of Christ, his relationship with Reverend Abduraheem and his ethnicity.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "The case against Reverend Hassan Abduraheem, Mr Abdumawla, Reverend Kuwa Shamal and Mr Petr Jašek is an example of NISS's manipulation of the criminal justice system to harass ethnic and religious minorities. The evidence clearly shows that Reverend Abduraheem, Mr Abdumawla and Mr Jašek attempted to provide medical care for Mr Omer. As a consequence of their acts of kindness, these men have been detained in terrible conditions and are now enduring an unjust trial. Reverend Kuwa Shamal, meanwhile, is being targeted simply because of his position as a senior church leader, his ethnicity and relationship to Reverend Abduraheem. We urge everyone who is as concerned as we are about this grave injustice to join us in campaigning to see these men set free. CSW urges the government of Sudan to drop the charges against these men without conditions or delay. We also call for a review of NISS's powers and for the end of targeting religious and ethnic minorities in Sudan."

Notes to Editors:

1. The charges against Petr Jašek, Reverend Hassan Abduraheem Reverend Kuwa Shamal and Mr Abdulmonem Abdumawla include:
Waging war against the state (Article 51 of the Sudanese Criminal Code);
Espionage (Article 53);
Complicity to execute a criminal agreement (Article 21);
Entry and photography of military areas and equipment (Article 57);
Calling for opposition of the public authority by violence or criminal force (Article 63);
Exciting hatred between classes (Article 64);

Working for an NGO without the proper registration (Article 23 of the Sudan Voluntary Work Act);
Illegally crossing from Southern Sudan into Northern Sudan (Article 30 of the Immigration Act).

2. [Click here](#) to take action and join in CSW's campaign on this case

Sudan pastors charged for 'claiming persecution of Christians'

World Watch Monitor (22.08.2016) - <http://bit.ly/2bBh9P3> - The trial of two Sudanese church leaders has started in Khartoum. They are among four Christians accused of trying to tarnish the image of Sudan's government.

According to the Sudan Tribune, Rev. Hassan Taour and Rev. Kuwa Shamal were charged on Sunday (21 August) with "fabricating videos of incidents of claimed genocide, killing of civilians and burning of villages, besides claims of persecution of Christians in Sudan".

The prosecutor told the Khartoum North Court the defendants also conducted "intelligence activities and provided material support for rebels in South Kordofan".

Apart from the two Sudan Church of Christ pastors (both ethnically from South Kordofan's Nuba Mountains), also charged were Abdulmonem Abdumawla Issa Abdumawla, a Darfuri graduate; and Petr Jasek, a Czech Christian advocate.

Two of the four denied the statements presented by the prosecutors as theirs, while the other two "approved their statements," said Sudan Tribune, without specifying.

'They put pressure on the country'

According to Sudan Tribune, the prosecution relied on material contained in laptop, mobile phone and flash memory, saying the defendants sought to distort the image of the government by disseminating information that could be used to put international pressure on the country.

The prosecutors said that charges have been filed against the defendants under articles of the Criminal Code, as well as Article 29 of the Passports and Immigration Law on sneaking into the country illegally, and Article 23 of the Humanitarian and Voluntary Work Act regarding running a voluntary organisation without registration.

Since Sunday's high security court session, World Watch Monitor has not learned when the defendants are next due in court.

A week earlier, an initial session was attended by four defence lawyers representing prosecution witnesses, and 21 lawyers defending the two pastors, said Radio Tamazuj.

Rev. Taour had been detained without charge since 18 December, in contravention of Sudan's own law. Rev. Shamal was detained on the same date, released, and then re-arrested again without charge on 24 May.

On 10 May, authorities released another church leader after nearly half a year in detention. Despite his release, the file of Telahoon (Telal) Nogosi Rata is believed to have remained with the Attorney General.

A number of other Christian leaders face restrictions, as Sudan's government continues to impose a unified Arab Islamic character on territories left under its rule since the independence of the largely African-Christian South in July 2011.

Following South Sudan's independence, President Omar al-Bashir – wanted by the ICC for crimes including genocide – has reasserted Sudan as an Islamic state governed by Sharia. Pressures have been ratcheted up against Christians since.

Arrests, confiscations and demolitions of churches have increased, and the government has repeatedly stated that new church licences will not be issued.

In August 2015, Khartoum yielded to international pressure and released two South Sudanese pastors, whom it had accused of "spying". Yat Michael and Peter Yen were in prison for eight and seven months, respectively.

According to Open Doors' 2016 World Watch List, Sudan is ranked 8th in a list of 50 countries where Christians come under the most pressure. The country has a rating of "extreme" and for the past two years has remained among the top 10 offenders.

Earlier this month, democracy watchdog Freedom House described as "preposterous" the charges, including espionage and terrorism, Sudan had filed against six civil society activists.

Seven charges against Sudan's pastors unlawfully detained for months

World Watch Monitor (15.08.2016) - <http://bit.ly/2gaRG0C> - After eight months of legal limbo, Sudan has finally accused two pastors of at least seven crimes, some punishable by death if proven.

Hassan Abduraheem Taour and Kuwa Shamal, both pastors of the beleaguered Sudan Church of Christ, "are accused of complicity to execute a criminal agreement and waging war against the state," [according to Christian Solidarity Worldwide \(CSW\)](#).

The pastors were moved to Al-Huda Prison (Sudan's Khartoum State) on 11 August. Originally it was believed the pastors had appeared in court on 14 Aug, but World Watch Monitor now understands that on the day of the hearing it was suddenly postponed until 21 August.

The two Christian ministers also face charges of espionage, calling for opposition of the public authority by violence or criminal force, and inciting hatred between classes, CSW added.

Rev. Taour had been detained without charge since 18 December, in contravention of Khartoum's own law. Meanwhile, Rev. Shamal was detained on the same date, released, and then re-arrested again without charge on 24 May.

Among the host of other crimes the Christians are accused of are "propagation of false news articles, and entry and photography of military areas and equipment."

The maximum sentence for waging war against the state (Article 51 of Sudan's law) and espionage (Article 53) is the death penalty.

No let-off

There has been no let-off by Sudan in its efforts to impose a unified Arab Islamic character over territories still under its government since the independence of the largely African Christian South in July 2011.

Arrests, confiscations and demolitions of churches have increased, and the government has stated repeatedly that new church licences will not be issued, leaving a number of congregations without a place of worship.

Earlier this month, Taour and Shamal, together with Darfuri graduate Abdulmonem Abdumawla Issa Abdumawla, first appeared in court for a hearing, after the country's National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) indicated they will be prosecuted.

On 10 May, the NISS released another Evangelical church leader after nearly half a year in detention. Despite his release, the file of Telahoon (Telal) Nogosi Rata, 36, remains with the Attorney General, who could yet decide to press charges.

A number of other Christian leaders face restrictions, including Ayub Tilyab, Yagoub Naway (both also SCC pastors), Philemon Hassan, and Yamani Abraha of Khartoum El Izba Baptist Church – all have been alternately arrested, released, and then made subject to daily NISS reporting.

Both Taour and Shamal had earlier asked the authorities to either send their case to court or release them.

According to Sudanese law, 45 days from arrest a detainee should either appear before court or be released, a rule ignored in at least three of the recent Christian cases – those of Taour, Shamal and Rata.

Both Taour and Shamal are from the Nuba people group, native to a border region with the now independent South Sudan, and among groups resisting ethnic and religious rule from Khartoum.

Even before Shamal's re-arrest, sources reported that Taour would face charges of "undermining national security," charges Sudan has previously used after prolonged detentions of Christians.

In August 2015, Khartoum yielded to international pressure and released two South Sudanese pastors, whom it had accused of "spying". Yat Michael and Peter Yen were in prison for eight and seven months, respectively.

Similarly, Meriam Ibrahim, a Sudanese Christian, was released in June 2014 after she was initially sentenced to death for apostasy and flogging for "adultery".

According to Open Doors' 2016 World Watch List, Sudan is ranked 8th in a list of 50 countries where Christians are under the most pressure. The country has a rating of "extreme" and for the past two years has remained among the top 10 offenders.

Unlawfully detained for months, Sudan church leaders finally in court



World Watch Monitor (05.08.2016) - <http://bit.ly/2bztYFL> - After nearly eight months of legal limbo, a Sudanese court has finally seen three detained Christian leaders, while charges against them remain officially "unknown".

Hassan Abduraheem Taour and Kuwa Shamal, both Sudan Church of Christ (SCC) pastors, and Abdulmonem Abdumawla Issa Abdumawla, appeared at the Bahri Criminal Court for a pro-forma hearing after the prosecutor sent their case on 4 August, said Middle East Concern (MEC).

The date for the next hearing is 14 August; earlier the National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) indicated they will be prosecuted for "crimes against the state".

On 10 May, the NISS released another Evangelical church leader after nearly half a year in detention. Despite his release, the file of Telahoon (Telal) Nogosi Rata, 36, remains with the Attorney General, who could yet decide to press charges.

A number of other Christian leaders face restrictions, including Ayub Tilyab, Yagoub Naway (both also SCC pastors), Philemon Hassan, and Yamani Abraha of Khartoum El Izba Baptist Church – all have been alternately arrested, released, and then made subject to daily NISS reporting.

Meanwhile, authorities on 1 August notified three churches of demolition within 72 hours

The churches, including the Baptist church and the SCC in the Hajj Yousef area of Khartoum, "are resisting the scheduled demolition through the courts", reported MEC. (Both these two denominations have been meeting in the area since the early 1990s).

Poor conditions

Both Taour and Shamal had earlier asked the authorities to either send their case to court or release them.

According to Sudanese law, 45 days from arrest a detainee should either appear before court or be released, a rule ignored in at least three of the recent Christian cases – those of Taour, Shamal and Rata.

Before their recent move to the nearby Omdurman prison, the pastors had expressed concern about their safety in police holding cells normally used to detain criminal suspects for up to 10 days.

A lawyer involved in the case told Christian Solidarity Worldwide that they were held in a small room, where sometimes up to 25 men are also detained. "Their diet was poor and their health has suffered," the lawyer added.

CSW reported that Kuwa had contracted malaria, and despite requests to the prosecutor for medical attention, he only received treatment after his church paid for it. Doctors also found he was suffering from a blood infection caused by poor diet.

Ongoing ordeal

The ordeal for the men started mid-December. On 17 December, authorities detained Abdumawla. The next day, Taour and Shamal were detained. Shamal was released after three days, but re-arrested on 24 May.

Both Taour and Shamal are from the Nuba people group, native to a border region with the now independent South Sudan, and among groups resisting ethnic and religious rule from Khartoum's Arab Islamic regime.

Back in May this year, even before Shamal's re-arrest, sources reported that Taour would face several serious charges relating to "undermining national security", charges Sudan has previously used after prolonged detentions of Christians.

Taour, Shamal and Abdumawla were detained and investigated by the NISS, but their case was only handed to the General Prosecutor's office in May.

Following the secession of the majority-Christian South Sudan in 2011, the ICC-wanted President Bashir made it clear that Sudan is an Islamic state governed by Sharia. Since then, pressures have been ratcheted up against Christians.



Confiscations and demolitions of churches have increased, and the government has stated repeatedly that new church licences will not be issued, leaving a number of congregations without a place of worship.

On 25 May 2016, the government of Sudan bombed St. Vincent Ferrer Primary School in the Nuba Mountains, in what was described as an example of a "grave violation of human rights".

In August 2015, Khartoum yielded to international pressure and released two South Sudanese pastors, whom it had accused of "spying". Yat Michael and Peter Yen were in prison for eight and seven months, respectively.

Similarly, Meriam Ibrahim, a Sudanese Christian, was released in June 2014 after she was initially sentenced to death for apostasy and flogging for "adultery".

According to Open Doors' 2016 World Watch List, Sudan is ranked 8th in a list of 50 countries where Christians are under the most pressure. The country has a rating of "extreme" and for the past two years has remained among the top 10 offenders.

Khartoum Bahri evangelical church members arrested

CSW (11.07.2016) - Members of the Khartoum Bahri Evangelical Church were arrested twice on 7 July, after protesting against the sale of the church's training school.

The first arrests took place on the morning of 7 July, when security officials arrived at the Sudan Evangelical Presbyterian Church training school with orders to seize and lock the building. The school is part of the Khartoum Bahri Evangelical Church's property and is the subject of a long-running dispute between the church's land and buildings committee and an illegally-convened rival church committee backed by the government, which authorised the seizure. The school is used by church members for classes and meetings,

however, the illegally-convened committee has prevented access to sections of the school building by issuing a long-term lease on a part of it to a third party.

On arriving at the premises on 7 July, security officials told the church members to vacate the building immediately; however, church members had received no prior notification of the order and questioned the security officials' authority to seize the building. The officials summoned the police to arrest the church members and ten men and a woman were transferred to Khartoum Bahri Police Station where they were charged with "breaching the public peace" and "nuisance" under Articles 69 and 77 of the Criminal Code. The group was released on bail several hours later.

As news of the arrests spread, leaders and members of the Khartoum Bahri Evangelical Church congregation went to the training school and found the building had been locked by the security officials. In protest, the group, which included the 11 released on bail, broke the locks and entered the building. The police returned and arrested 17 people, including six members on bail and two clergymen. The group was taken to Khartoum Bahri Police Station, where three people were immediately released upon confirming their membership of the illegally-convened committee and the remaining 14 were charged with "breaching the public peace" and "nuisance" under Articles 69 and 77 of the Criminal Code. Lawyers representing the church secured bail and were assured the 14 would be released late on 7 July; however they are still imprisoned.

The incident provides further evidence of state interference in church affairs. It is believed that the training school was seized in order to facilitate rental or sale to investors by the illegally-convened church land and buildings committee, which in May 2016 was authorised to administrate on behalf of the denomination by the Ministry of Religious Endowments and Guidance, the government body responsible for religious affairs in Sudan. This authorisation was in violation of a court order in favour the church's legitimate committee, chaired by senior church member Mr Rafat Obid.

On 8 May, Mr Rafat Obid was falsely charged with impersonation, forgery and criminal misappropriation and is currently awaiting trial while on bail. The order for his arrest came from the Ministry of Guidance and Endowments. In April, the Committee Secretary Pastor Daniel Weliam had been detained for three days without charge. Earlier, 16 church leaders and elders were questioned by police.

The recent arrests occur at a time when the Christian communities in Khartoum and Omdurman are facing a campaign of repression that appear designed to pressurise them into leaving the country. In another example of harassment, Reverends Hassan Abdulraheem and Kuwa Shamal remain in the custody of the attorney general without being formally charged while the prosecutor continues his criminal investigation.

Dr Khataza Gondwe CSW's Africa and Middle East Team Leader said "CSW calls for the immediate release from police custody of the leaders and members of Khartoum Bahri Evangelical Church and the dropping of all charges levelled against them. It is unacceptable that they are being penalised for peacefully protesting the illegal seizure of church-owned property. The continued refusal by the Ministry of Religious Endowments and Guidance to recognise the church's legitimate land and buildings committee is further indication of an ongoing campaign of harassment and an unwarranted interference in church affairs. We urge the international community, in particular the African Union, to hold Sudan to its international obligations, including its undertakings to promote, respect and protect the right to freedom of religion or belief and the rights to freedom of association and assembly, as articulated in articles 8, 10 and 11 of the African Charter on People's and Human Rights."

Sudan Church of Christ minister Kwa Shamal re-arrested

CSW (31.05.2016) - Reverend Kwa Shamal, a minister of the Sudan Church of Christ, was re-arrested by the police on 24 May.

Reverend Shamal had been reporting daily to the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) offices as a condition of his release, following his initial arrest in December 2015 during a crackdown by the authorities on Christians in the country.

His reporting conditions had been removed on 16 January 2016 but were reinstated in February 2016, when he was also required to hand over his passport, laptop computer and other personal items to NISS. On 24 May, he reported to NISS as usual, but was arrested unexpectedly by the police and his case is now with the prosecutor.

Reverend Shamal's arrest follows the transfer of his colleague Reverend Hassan Abduraheem from the detention of NISS to the Attorney General's custody on 9 May.

Lawyers representing Reverend Abduraheem have confirmed that a criminal investigation has been initiated by the prosecutor, who may charge him with national security crimes. The lawyers also confirmed that Reverend Shamal has been added to the prosecutor's investigation. The lawyers expressed concern at the conditions in which the men are being detained, noting that the clergymen are being held in small rooms with intermittent electricity supply and limited ventilation.

Both Reverends Shamal and Abduraheem are from the Nuba Mountains in South Kordofan, an area where since 2011 the Khartoum government has conducted an indiscriminate campaign of aerial bombardment in its war against the Sudan People's Liberation Movement – North (SPLMN), causing multiple civilian deaths and destroying humanitarian structures.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "We are deeply concerned by the re-arrest of Reverend Kwa Shamal. The Reverend has complied for months with NISS's requirement that he reports daily to their offices, even though he had not been charged with any crime. His treatment and that of Reverend Abduraheem are indicative of a government campaign to harass and restrict the rights of the Christian community. These developments and the ongoing detention of Reverends Abduraheem and Shamal also raise concerns regarding Sudan's compliance with fair trial principles, articulated in the 2005 interim constitution and the country's international obligations. We urge the authorities to end the judicial harassment of the Christian community and to uphold the right to freedom of religion or belief for every citizen. We also call on the Sudanese authorities to rectify any derogation from constitutional and international fair trial principles and ensure that the men are detained in a safe and habitable environment."

Christian activist released after five months, reverend still detained

CSW (11.05.2016) - Talahon Nigosi Kassa Ratta, a Christian activist and member of the Khartoum Bahri Evangelical Church, was released from prison on 10 May.

Mr Ratta was arrested in Khartoum by National Intelligence and Security Service agents (NISS) on 14 December 2015. No reason was given for his arrest and for the majority of his detention Mr Ratta was not permitted any visits from his family or legal

representatives. On 10 May, NISS agents contacted Mr Ratta's father requesting that he collect his son from their offices. Mr Ratta is reportedly in good health.

Reverend Hassan Abdulraheem of the Sudan Church of Christ, who was arrested shortly after Mr Ratta, remains in detention. On 9 May he was transferred into the custody of the Attorney General and has been informed a criminal case is being filed against him. The charges that Rev Abdulraheem is facing have yet to be confirmed, but his legal representatives have been informed that they will include security crimes, which carry the death penalty.

Meanwhile, the Sudan Evangelical Presbyterian Church continues to face government interference in its internal affairs, specifically concerning its land and buildings committee. In March 2013, an illegally-convened lands and buildings committee was recognised by the government body responsible for religious affairs in Sudan as the official group charged with administering the SEPC's affairs and was subsequently involved in the unlawful sale of church property to Muslim businessmen. A court order reinstating the legitimate committee, chaired by senior church member Mr Rafat Obid, continues to be disregarded. In April 2016, the illegally-convened committee elected new members, renewed the terms of older ones and was recognised once more by the Ministry of Religious Endowments and Guidance as the group with authority to administrate on behalf of the denomination.

On 8 May, Mr Rafat Obid was arrested and charged with impersonation, forgery and criminal misappropriation. He has been released on bail and is awaiting trial. The decision to charge him came from the Ministry of Religious Endowments and Guidance.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "We welcome the decision to release Mr Ratta; however we continue to be concerned by his prolonged detention without charge. Mr Ratta's case shows the power that NISS wields within Sudan to detain private individuals without any legal recourse, which it is currently using to harass and detain members of the Christian community and civil society. We are calling for a review of the agency's powers of arrest and detention and for the criminal proceedings against Rev. Abdulraheem and Mr Rafat Obid, which have no basis, to be dropped. Furthermore we call on the Ministry of Religious Endowments and Guidance to overturn its decision to recognise the illegally-convened committee of the Sudan Evangelical Presbyterian Church and to end its interference in the church's affairs."

Sudan religious discrimination and the quest for national integration

Adapted from the Sudan Democracy First Group (14.03.2016) - In the early morning of Friday 18th December 2015, forces from the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) arrested the two pastors Hassan Abdul Rahim Kodi and Telal Ngosi at their homes and took them to an unknown destination. The two pastors are senior clerics in the Church of Jesus Christ of Sudan. Pastor Hassan is the Secretary General of the church. Since then they have been held in incommunicado detention: their families have been prevented from visiting them and access to lawyers and legal aid denied. To date, no charges have been brought against them.

Since the 1989 National Islamic Front (NIF) coup, Sudan has witnessed a significant clampdown on religious freedoms. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) period however did protect a certain margin of freedom with Article 38 of the Interim Constitution of 2005 providing that, "Every person shall have the right to the freedom of religious creed and worship, and to declare his/her religion or creed and manifest the same, by way of worship, education, practice or performance of rites or ceremonies,

subject to requirements of law and public order; no person shall be coerced to adopt such faith, that he/she does not believe in, nor to practice rites or services to which he/she does not voluntarily consent".

Although the Interim Constitution is still in force, with the independence of South Sudan in July 2011 there has been a steady erosion of the space created by the CPA. Even before independence, statements by President Omar Al-Bashir made it clear that there was little intention to maintain the freedoms revitalised by the CPA. He declared, "If South Sudan secedes, we will change the constitution and at that time there will be no time to speak of diversity of culture and ethnicity... Sharia(Islamic law) and Islam will be the main source for legislation, Islam the official religion and Arabic the official language ". Al-Bashir's statement was a clear indication that a crackdown against religious freedom was in preparation for the post-secession period, and, in particular, against Christians. This revealed itself immediately after the outbreak of war in the Two Areas (Nuba Mountains/South Kordofan and Blue Nile) in mid-2011 when Khartoum witnessed an increasing number of attacks on churches. It seemed the authorities perceived Churches as spaces where unwanted groups of people from the Two Areas—where Christianity is practised—could congregate.

Attacks on religious leaders and places of worship

In June 2011, an extremist group burned a building belonging to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Sudan in Omdurman, and no investigation took place into the incident. At the beginning of 2012, a group of local citizens again burned a Christian compound of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in el Gerif West area in Khartoum. A Salafist Sheikh was accused of publically mobilizing his followers to carry out this act, but the police did not investigate and the authorities did not bring any official charges against the alleged perpetrators. In the same year, local authorities in Khartoum State demolished the premises of the Episcopal Church of Haj Yusif on the pretext that it had been built without planning permission from authorities, despite the Church being established there since the 1970s.

In 2014, the attacks on churches continued. In July of that year, the authorities demolished one of the churches of the Church of Jesus Christ of Sudan in Tayba Alahamda area in northern Khartoum. In December 2014, the authorities stripped the Evangelical Church in Khartoum North of a large portion of its land and destroyed some of its buildings on the pretext of allocating the land to investment. This effectively stopped the activities of the church. The authorities also closed down the Pentecostal Church, located in Said Abdelrahman Street in central Khartoum without giving any reasons. In October 2015, local authorities demolished the buildings of the Lutheran Evangelical Church in West Omdurman once again under the cover of "lack of planning permission" despite the Church having been there since 1990s.

In addition to the attack on churches, harassment against Christian clerics continued in the same period. In October 2013, the Sudanese authorities arrested Zonjal Abraham Mikhail a deacon in the Evangelical Church and withdrew his Sudanese passport. In July of that same year, the NISS arrested five pastors of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church; Raafat Said Musad, Farouq Angelo, Noah James, Daoud Fadul and George Youhana, members of the elected Management Committee for the Church. All arrested priests were accused of disturbing public order and social peace. They were later released on warranty without charges - but only after the Ministry of Guidance and Religious Affairs dissolved their Committee and appointed a new body to manage the Church. NISS also detained Anba Ilya, the bishop of the Church of Khartoum, hours before the celebration of Christmas in late 2013.

In December 2014, NISS arrested the visiting South Sudanese pastors Yat Michael and Peter Yen on the grounds simply that they had sent a letter to the Office of Religious

Affairs at the Ministry of Guidance and Religious Affairs, enquiring about the reasons for the arrests of some religious leaders. Both evangelical pastors were charged with spying and incitement of war against the state. The detention of Yat Michael and Peter Yen continued until August 2015 when a court ordered their release. In November 2015 NISS re-detained them and appealed the court ruling, claiming that new evidence had been obtained.

Denial of religious diversity in the public sphere

In addition to the individual targeting of Christian religious leaders, there has been broader state practice which has further undermined the religious rights of Sudanese Christians. Since 2011, for example, the government has stopped the celebration of Christmas as an official holiday, alongside other non-Muslim religious occasions, including refusing to broadcast these celebrations through the state-own media outlets.

The most systematic and government-driven religious discrimination and attacks against religious freedoms, however, have been suffered by the people of the Nuba Mountains/South Kordofan and Blue Nile. The security apparatus appears to consider their churches in Khartoum as centers of undesirable gatherings and their leaders as opinion leaders who are categorised as security threats given their influence in their parishes. This combination of ethnic and religious targeting and discrimination against Sudanese citizens of Nuba Mountains/South Kordofan and Blue Nile origin has become a key tool of the political conflict in the two regions. Such actions by the regime aim at generating support from extremist Islamic circles and misleading the Sudanese public so that the actual causes of the wars in the two regions are misunderstood. The result of this systematic religious discrimination is not only the exposure of citizens from Nuba Mountains/South Kordofan and Blue Nile to a double oppression (ethnic and religious targeting) but also the masking of historic failures of governance, political and social grievances and uneven development which are the foundation of the conflict.

The gravity of the religious discrimination and the systematic violations of religious freedom experienced by Sudanese Christians have already deepened the fragmentation of the Sudanese social fabric. The insistence on Sharia laws and the holy war (Jihad) pursued by the same regime during the 1990s against its citizens in southern Sudan, to a large degree, led to the separation of a significant part of the country (the Republic of South Sudan). Without understanding and addressing the root causes and consequences of religious discrimination, the continuation of such discrimination, in association with other layers of discrimination (ethnic, gender, geographic and class), is likely to lead to further fragmentation.

One major hazard of this religious targeting is the creation of space for the growth of radical extremist groups. Al Qaeda and its affiliates, and now ISIS, have been known for recruiting youth from Sudan. Sudan is increasingly seen as a place of study, contact with and staging ground for, the global jihadi movement. Formal government encouragement of targeting and discriminating against Christians and other religions is providing a safe womb for the further growth of extremism.

Significance of religious freedom in national integration

Sudanese Christians, other non-Muslims and Muslims who express their faith through diverse traditions are full citizens who must enjoy their full citizenship and constitutional rights without being subjected to discrimination.

Democratic forces in Sudan should raise their voices in support of these groups on the understanding that the only peaceful and stable future for Sudan is one based on the total acceptance of the rich cultural, religious and ethnic diversity of the Sudanese social fabric.

Civil society should also play a major role and engage in national projects which reflect on, and promote, Sudan's historical religious and cultural diversity.

Political parties and leaders should prioritise the maintenance of religious and cultural freedoms as core principles in any revision of the constitution and new constitutional arrangements. Parties to Sudan's conflicts should ensure that protection of religious and cultural freedoms and rights is a core part of any peace agreement which is negotiated in the context of the various conflicts.

Apostasy case against 25 Muslims withdrawn by Ministry of Justice

CSW (03.03.2016) - Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) has learned that the Sudanese Ministry of Justice withdrew the case against 25 Muslims, who were due to stand trial for apostasy on 9 February.

The group of 22 men and three minors was arrested by local police on 2 and 3 November 2015 in the Mayu neighbourhood of South Khartoum. They were formally charged with apostasy on 14 December 2015 and a trial date was set for 9 February 2016.

The three minors were released on bail on 30 November 2015, and the rest were released on 14 December 2015, after having been formally charged.

Their lawyers were informed on 9 February 2016 that the Ministry of Justice had withdrawn the case from the criminal court.

The group was charged with apostasy because although they had not converted from Islam, they followed an interpretation that differs from that of the ruling regime.

In a related development, on 29 February 2016 two of the 25 defendants, Abderahman Saied Enrahim and Emam Alyas Mohamed, were arrested whilst they were discussing the Qur'an. They were charged with public nuisance and released on bail on 29 February. Their trial began on 2 March and is ongoing.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "Whilst we welcome the withdrawal of this case, we remain deeply concerned by the existing apostasy legislation. We continue to call on the Sudanese government to review it and to ensure that it complies with Sudan's undertakings to uphold the right to freedom of religion or belief, as articulated in the 2005 constitution and the international covenants to which it is party. We are also concerned by the public nuisance case against Abderahman Saied Enrahim and Emam Alyas Mohamed. We call for the charge against these men to be dropped without conditions, and for the government to protect their right to freedom of expression, which is essential in facilitating the right to freedom of religion or belief."

Christian leaders kept in Sudan since December uncharged, but incommunicado

World Watch Monitor (10.02.2016) - Sudanese authorities are keeping two Christian pastors in an unknown location since mid-December, with no official charges yet filed against them, sources have told World Watch Monitor.

On Dec. 12, members of Sudan's National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) visited the family home of Telahoon Nogosi Kassa Rata, a leader of the Fellowship of University Christian Students and a leader of Khartoum North Evangelical Church, sources close to the detainees said.

Telahoon (also known as Telal) Rata was told to 'report' to the local NISS office north of the Sudanese capital Khartoum. "He went to the NISS office behind the airport at al-Mashtel the next day, and he has been detained ever since" the sources, requesting anonymity, said.

Meanwhile, two pastors from the Sudan Church of Christ, a denomination whose members originate predominantly from the Nuba Mountains in Sudan, were arrested by the NISS on December 18.

The latest cases are representative of a much larger campaign by Sudan's government to eradicate Christianity

Rev. Kuwa Shamal, (the head of a Church committee) was taken from his home in the district of Bahri, north of Khartoum, while Rev. Hassan Abduraheem Kodi Taour (the Church's vice-moderator) was detained while at home in Omdurman, a city across the Nile west of the capital.

Shamal was released three days later, but was required to continue to report daily to the NISS until this formal requirement was cancelled on January 16th.

Both Rata and Taour remain in custody in an unknown location, with no access by either family or lawyers.

Rev. Rata's parents were allowed to visit him only once, five days after his arrest, family said. They met with him in Khartoum's al-Kober prison.

Since then they tried at least four times to visit him again, but each time they were told to apply for permission to visit, only to be told a week later their request had been denied, confirmed the family.

Background

36 year old Christian worker Telal Rata was not at home the night the NISS agents came, December 12th. But some of his belongings were confiscated at his parents' home, where he lived.

A lawyer has asked to see both Rata and Taour but was informed by the prosecution that both are still being held by the NISS and no access to them will be given until the NISS hands them over to prosecution.

No details are known of the Christians' legal status or physical condition, while they are being held incommunicado.

Rev. Taour's lawyer has written to the Sudanese Human Rights Council to ask for help in bringing his client's and the other Christians' case to a court of law. In a letter to the Sudan HRC judge, he explained that the National Security was denying the basic right of citizens to be visited by their lawyers. They have received no reply, sources said.

The Sudan Council of Churches has also written a letter to the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Omdurman Government Minister and the Security Office to appeal for access to Rev. Taour and "other Christians", but there has also been no reply.

According to Sudanese law, 45 days after arrest a detained individual should either be presented before court or released. However, neither of these actions has occurred in Rata's or Taour's case.

Initially Rata's detention was suggested to be "on religious charges", but sources close to the case have hinted the Christian activist is now being investigated for espionage, a charge Sudan has eventually resorted to before, after prolonged detentions of Christians.

In August 2015, Khartoum released two South Sudanese pastors whom it accused of "spying". Pastors Yat Michael and Peter Yen were in prison for eight and seven months respectively.

"The latest cases are representative of a much larger campaign by Sudan's government to eradicate Christianity," Sudanese religious freedom activist Kamal Fahmi told World Watch Monitor.

"Since the secession of South Sudan (July 2011), Khartoum has intensified the war in Blue Nile and the Nuba Mountains (both areas of known Christian presence), and the indiscriminate harassment and arrests of church leaders and active church members" said Fahmi, who heads an advocacy website 'Set My People Free,' calling for the repeal of Islam's blasphemy and apostasy laws.

"Foreign Christian workers have been deported. Sudan has stopped the import of Christian literature and scriptures, while confiscating most of the Christian literature in the country and closing the only Christian bookshop in the capital Khartoum," Fahmi said.

"Torture and arrest of converts from Islam is also commonplace" he added.

Meriam Ibrahim, a Sudanese Christian accused of being an apostate from Islam, was released in June 2014 after a world outcry. Earlier in 2014, Ibrahim was sentenced to death for apostasy and flogging for 'adultery'(marriage to a South Sudanese Christian). During her six-month incarceration, she gave birth to her baby girl while shackled to the floor, while her 20-month-old son Martin was kept with her in prison.
