

KENYA: Woman jailed for six years for circumcising twin daughters

By Nita Bhalla

AllAfrica.com (23.11.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2QfR4ts>– The mother said she wanted her daughters to undergo female genital mutilation to avoid a curse from her deceased grandfather

A woman in central Kenya was jailed for six years for forcing her 13-year-old twin daughters to undergo female genital mutilation (FGM) in a rare conviction in the east African nation, a charity which helped rescue the girls said on Friday.

Florence Muthoni from Tharaka-Nithi county was arrested on Wednesday after a tip-off from the charity Plan International. She was sentenced by a magistrates court in Chuka on Thursday after admitting to taking her daughters to a circumciser.

A senior aid worker at the charity said Muthoni told the court that she wanted her daughters to undergo FGM to avoid a curse from her deceased grandfather who had instructed all girls in the family undergo the procedure.

“A community member alerted us when they had heard the mother was organising the girls to undergo the cut, so we informed

the local authorities," Mercy Chege, a director at Plan International, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

"Unfortunately, we were not able to prevent the circumcision as by the time the police conducted the raid and rescued the girls, they had already been cut."

The twin girls are receiving medical treatment and counselling while police are still investigating as the mother had refused to name the circumciser, said Chege.

According to the United Nations, one in five women and girls aged between 15 and 49 in Kenya have undergone FGM, which usually involves the partial or total removal of the genitalia.

In some cases, girls can bleed to death or die from infections. FGM can also cause lifelong conditions such as fistula as well as fatal childbirth complications.

Kenya outlawed the practice in 2011, but it continues as communities believe it is necessary for social acceptance and increasing girls' marriage prospects.

While some arrests have been made and cases brought to court, campaigners say implementation of the law remains a challenge, largely due to a lack of resources and capacity of law enforcement agencies and difficulties reaching remote areas.

U.N. data shows 75 cases of FGM were brought before Kenyan courts in 2016 but only 10 cases resulted in a conviction.

Campaigners said this week's conviction proved that public awareness campaigns run by charities were essential to curbing FGM as they could lead to community members reporting the crime.

"It is very important that FGM laws are properly implemented as this sends a message out that FGM will not be tolerated," said Ann-Marie Wilson, executive director of 28 Too Many.

The U.N. estimates 200 million girls and women worldwide have undergone FGM. It is practised in about 27 African nations, parts of Asia and the Middle East – and is usually carried out by traditional cutters, often with unsterilised knives.

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SUDAN: Sudan releases 13 Christians arrested in Darfur after torture, threats

One church member said to be in critical condition.

Morning Star News (23.10.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2zhJqn2> – After torturing them and threatening to charge them with serious crimes, authorities in Sudan have released 13 Christians arrested in the Darfur Region, sources said.

Personnel from Sudan's National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) released 12 of the Christians by Sunday (Oct. 21) and freed church leader Tajaldin Idriss Yousif on Monday, all without charges, but they threatened to charge the native Darfur evangelist and others with apostasy, public disturbance and crimes against the state, sources said.

"All of them were said to be tortured by NISS and are in bad shape," a source said. "One of them is said to be in critical condition owing to torture. He is said to have been vomiting and bleeding. He was rushed to a hospital, but he was not attended to by the physicians in that hospital."

The 13 Christians from four different house churches were worshipping together on Oct. 10 in Nyala, capital of South Darfur state in western Sudan's Darfur Region, when NISS

officers disrupted the service and arrested them, sources said.

NISS authorities did not give any reason for the arrests, but sources said they are targeting converts from Islam from Darfur and, in south-eastern Sudan, South Kordofan state. Three of the Christians were said to be from the Nuba Mountains area in the country's southeast.

The Christians were not taken to any court of law during their nearly two weeks of jail and interrogation.

Along with team leader Yousif, arrested were members of his church Alfadil Ismail Alnil, Ahmed Mohammed Hassan, Neseraldin Osman, Shemen Ahmed Shemen and Abubaker Biri.

Other Christians arrested were identified only as Kamal, Abdullah, Mutasim, Mujahid, El Sadik Afendi, Bolis Suliman and Abdel Maseh. NISS, widely known as a notorious agency staffed by hard-line Islamists, may hold people in detention for up to four and a half months without charges.

Following the secession of South Sudan in 2011, Sudan President Omar al-Bashir vowed to adopt a stricter version of sharia (Islamic law) and recognize only Islamic culture and the Arabic language. Church leaders said Sudanese authorities have demolished or confiscated churches and limited Christian literature on the pretext that most Christians have left the country following South Sudan's secession.

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. Besides raiding Christian bookstores and arresting Christians, authorities threatened to kill South Sudanese Christians who do not leave or cooperate with them in their effort to find other Christians.

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.

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.

Sudan ranked fourth on Christian support organization Open Doors' 2018 World Watch List of countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian.

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El Salvador woman freed after 15 years in jail for abortion

A 34-year-old woman in El Salvador has been freed after spending 15 years in jail for having an abortion.

BBC (14.03.2018) – <http://bbc.in/2pcD0oZ> – Maira Verónica Figueroa Marroquín was released after her 30-year sentence for aggravated murder was reduced.

Abortion is banned in El Salvador, a predominantly Roman Catholic nation, in any circumstances.

Ms Figueroa always maintained her innocence. She said she

suffered a stillbirth in a house where she was working as a maid in 2003.

She was taken to hospital, arrested and eventually sentenced for inducing an abortion.

Her parents, as well as journalists and activists, were outside the prison in Ilopango, near the capital San Salvador, to welcome her.

“I am happy to be with my family,” she said.

“I want to study law to understand what happened to me and help other women,” she added.

“I’m going to start again and make up for lost time.”

Ms Figueroa is the second woman this year to have her sentence for abortion reduced by the Supreme Court.

Teodora Vásquez, 35, had her sentenced commuted a month ago.

She spent 10 years in jail after her baby was found dead and she was sentenced for murder.

Complete ban on abortions

El Salvador is one of a handful of countries in the world where abortions are completely banned and carry heavy sentences.

The punishment is up to eight years in jail but in many cases in which the foetus or newborn has died, the charge is changed to one of aggravated homicide, which carries a minimum sentence of 30 years.

While El Salvador is not alone in Latin America in having a total ban on abortions, the country is particularly strict in the way it enforces it.

Doctors have to inform the authorities if they think a woman has tried to end her pregnancy. If they fail to report such cases, they too could face long sentences in jail.

Human rights groups say this results in a criminalisation of miscarriages and medical emergencies, with more than 100 convicted of abortion-related crimes in El Salvador since 2000.

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SAUDI ARABIA: Saudi moves youngest Shiite political prisoner to notorious jail

Saudi Arabia has moved the country's youngest political prisoner to a notorious jail in the eastern city of Dammam despite objections by human rights groups and the United Nations.

AhlulBayt News Agency (01.06.2017) – <http://bit.ly/2sz3WLD> – The European Saudi Organization for Human Rights (ESOHR) said in a Tuesday report that 16-year-old Murtaja al-Qurayris had been moved to the Dammam Mabahith prison, where prisoners are tortured and ill-treated.

This came during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan when the authorities across Muslim countries typically pardon and release prisoners.

Murtaja al-Qurayris has already spent nearly three years in a Dammam jail without a formal charge or trial since his arbitrary arrest on 20 September 2014.

On that day, the 13-year-old was crossing the King Fahd Bridge connecting Saudi Arabia to the Persian Gulf state of Bahrain with his parents when he was stopped and arbitrarily detained without a warrant.

The Saudi regime has accused al-Qurayris of participating in peaceful demonstrations and in the funeral of protesters

killed by the authorities in Eastern Province.

On January 20, 2017, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention found al-Qurayris' detention "in contravention of articles 10, 11, 19 and 20 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights."

The UN group further called on the kingdom "to release the minor immediately and to accord to him an enforceable right to compensation in accordance with article 8 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights."

The group further noted that the Riyadh regime had ignored its communications on al-Qurayris and had not responded to them since September 2016.

According to the UN, al-Qurayris was interrogated a number of times without his legal representative or lawyer. The minor was also held in solitary confinement for a month and was tortured and ill-treated during that period.

ESOHR has documented more than 80 cases of juveniles whom the Saudi authorities have arbitrarily detained and tortured since the 2011 protests in Eastern Province.

It has also called for the immediate and unconditional release of al-Qurayris and all other juvenile political prisoners, seven of whom face execution.

The organization has voiced concern that moving al-Qurayris to the Mabahith prison will lead to forcing him to sign confessions that would later be used to convict him. This concern arises from a pattern of similar cases where detainees were forced into signing confessions that were later used to convict them of terrorism crimes and to sentence them to death.

Saudi forces continue to besiege Awamiyah for 22nd day

Meanwhile, Saudi forces continue to terrorize thousands of

civilians for 22 consecutive days in the traditional Mosawarah neighborhood of Awamiyah, a Shia majority town in Eastern Province.

On Wednesday, local residents and witnesses accused Saudi troops of attacking homes, ransacking businesses, stealing precious items and burning vehicles during the large-scale offensive.

Saudi troops also attacked the residence of Mohammad al-Ammar, a prominent political activist during the heavy-handed crackdown.

United Nations experts have already denounced the regime in Riyadh for razing the town, saying the move has erased cultural heritage and violated human rights.

Security forces equipped with heavy weapons have been deployed in Awamiyah since May 10.

Eastern Province has been the scene of anti-regime protests since early 2011. Riyadh has stepped up security measures in the Shia-majority region. Protesters want freedom of speech, the release of political prisoners, and an end to economic and religious discrimination exercised by authorities.

Demonstrations intensified in the province after the January 2016 execution of prominent Shia cleric Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr. The protests have been met with a heavy-handed crackdown by the regime.

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SINGAPORE: Singapore teen blogger jailed over 'insulting words'

A Singapore court has handed a jail sentence to a teenage blogger for the second time over his critical postings about religion. The case has reignited concerns about censorship and drawn criticism from rights groups.

Dw.com (29.09.2016) – <http://bit.ly/2dUq7rr> – The Singapore judge sentenced 17-year-old Amos Yee to six weeks in jail Thursday for “wounding religious feelings” after the teen pleaded guilty to six charges of deliberately posting comments critical of both Christianity and Islam.

Judge Ong Hian Sun told the district court that Yee had “deliberately elected to do harm by using offensive and insulting words and profane gestures” to hurt the feelings of Muslims and Christians, which could lead to discord between the races.

It was the second time Yee’s written words have landed him in the docket.

An expletive-rich rant against Singapore’s founding prime

minister in March 2015 triggered a massive response in the Asian city-state. He was jailed over the video and ended up serving 50 days over added penalties and violating bail conditions.

His latest month-long trial was attended by officials of the UN Human Rights Council and the European Union, and was also closely watched by rights groups which see the case as a test on the limits of free speech in the country.

Phil Robertson, Asia deputy director of Human Rights Watch, said in a statement Thursday that the trial has only served to bring the blogger's off-color rants to a larger audience and that "by prosecuting Amos Yee for his comments, no matter how outrageous they may have been, Singapore has unfortunately doubled down on a strategy that clearly violates freedom of expression."

Singapore, which suffered inter-religious strife in the 1960s, closely guards ethnic harmony and prosecutes people seen to be inciting religious and racial strife. About 74 percent of its 3.9 million citizens and permanent residents are ethnic Chinese, with Malay Muslims and Indians forming the largest minorities.

After his sentencing, Yee told reporters that his case showed that "you can be sent to jail for criticizing Islam in Singapore even if you're a kid." He's due to surrender himself to jail authorities on October 13. He was also fined about \$1,500 (1300 euros).