

Christian Couple Facing Death Sentence After Daughter Suddenly Dies

An American Christian couple in Qatar is facing a death sentence after their adopted daughter died unexpectedly in their home on Jan. 15, 2013.

The Qatari government alleges that Matthew and Grace Huang starved their 8-year-old daughter, Gloria, to death in order to traffic her organs.

Matthew Huang, an engineer, had agreed to work on engineering projects in Doha for the Colorado-based company MWH Global. He and his family moved to the Middle East with their two sons and a daughter, each adopted from Africa.

The couple was charged with murder and on March 27 they were sentenced to three years in prison. They spent 11 months in an Islamic prison before a judge granted bail last November.

There was no physical evidence that the child suffered starvation or trauma. While it is unclear how Gloria died, the Huangs said she suffered from an eating disorder common to some children from impoverished countries.

But Qatari police immediately suspected foul play.

Adoption is rare in an Islamic nation and biracial families are scarce. The government of Qatar accused the Huangs, who are Asian, of adopting their African children for the purpose of human trafficking.

World News Service reports that the lead prosecutor on the case cited an Islamic prohibition on adoption: "Allah has banned it as it leads to assembling of foreigners with each other, which leads to extremely bad outcomes."

Authorities sent the couple's two sons to an orphanage, but later allowed them to return to the United States to live with Grace's parents.

Members of Haung's Lake Avenue Church in Pasadena, California, have been holding prayer vigils for the family.

In the next hearing in the case, scheduled for Nov. 30, they could be sentenced to death.

The Huangs, who are now under a travel ban and house arrest, have found legal help from organizations like the David House Agency and the California Innocence Project.

Justin Brooks of the Innocence Project calls the prosecution's assertions "outrageous" and says the case "completely lacks any due process."

Meanwhile, the U.S. State Department said officials are concerned that not all of the evidence has been heard in the case and that cultural misunderstandings have led to an unfair trial.