

Christian Mom Sentenced to Death and 100 Whips on Mother's Day in Sudan

A Christian mother pregnant with her second child has been formally convicted of adultery and apostasy, punishable by 100 lashes and death, respectively.

On Sunday morning, Meriam Yahia Ibrahim appeared before the El Haj Yousif Public Order Court in Khartoum, Sudan, to defend her innocence to charges of adultery and apostasy handed down by that same court on March 4.

Ibrahim, 27, was raised an Orthodox Christian in a small town located in Western Sudan. A graduate of Khartoum University, Ibrahim was a practicing M.D. when she married her husband, a South Sudanese Christian with U.S. citizenship, Daniel Wani.

Sometime after discovering Ibrahim's relationship with Wani, a relative reported her marriage to police specially tasked with enforcing Sudan's public order criminal code. Having been born in Sudan, Ibrahim is considered a Muslim by birth, making her marriage to Wani, a non-Muslim, illegal in the eyes of Sudan's public order courts.

Without charge and before receiving a fair, public trial, Ibrahim was arrested by Sudanese authorities and arbitrarily detained in the Omdurman Federal Women's Prison with her 20-month-old son on Feb. 17.

Justice Center Sudan (JCS), a local human rights organization providing Ibrahim's legal defense, has expressed its intent to submit an appeal on her behalf. According to the JCS legal team, headed by co-founder Mohand Mustafa, Ibrahim has been pressured by Sudanese officials and religious authorities to convert from Christianity to Islam, allegedly rendering

promises to reduce, if not eliminate, the charges against her for doing so. The center could neither confirm nor deny Ibrahim's intention to or to not convert.

She and her child remain imprisoned, separated from their husband and father, Wani, whose passport has reportedly been revoked by the government of Sudan. Experts anticipate the sentences against Ibrahim will be carried out following the birth of her unborn child, which is expected to take place next month.

According to JCS, Ibrahim has suffered beatings during her imprisonment, been denied medical treatment, including prenatal care for her unborn child, and been refused prenatal vitamins necessary to ensure a healthy birth.

Due to his wife being convicted of adultery, Wani is now legally ineligible to assume custody of their children. The children are expected to be turned over to the custody of the Sudanese state in the case of Ibrahim's execution or prolonged imprisonment.

Since Sudan's adoption of the public order criminal code in 1991, no convicted persons have been put to death for violation of the Shariah-inspired law.

Sudan's government, led by President Omar Hassan al-Bashir, has been found guilty of "systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of freedom of religion or belief," according to the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF).

The U.S. Department of State has designated Sudan a country of particular concern (CPC) since 1999. According to USCIRF's 2014 annual report, the government of Sudan imposes "a restrictive interpretation of Shariah law on Muslims and non-Muslims alike, using amputations and floggings for crimes and acts of 'indecent' and 'immorality' and arresting Christians for proselytizing."

William Stark, International Christian Concern's (ICC) regional manager, says, "We grieve today at the sentencing to death of a mother, pregnant with her second child, for the expression of her faith and legal marriage to a practicing Christian.

"The handing down of such an extreme punishment under a law inspired by the al-Turabi radicalism of the early al-Bashir regime brings into question the direction Sudan intends to head following South Sudanese succession. Having embraced policies of Islamization and Arabization in the past, ICC fears Meriam could be the first of many more Christians to suffer under an increasingly radicalized Sudanese government intent on enforcing Shariah law throughout the land."

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