

Ex-Captive Reveals Exactly How ISIS Converts Tortured Him Once They Discovered His Faith

A Czech Christian aid worker, freed from prison in Sudan on Feb. 26, has spoken of how the prison authorities treated him.

“The first two months were probably the most severe for me because I was placed in a cell together with members of the Islamic State, who humiliated me as a Christian. It then escalated into humiliation and physical beatings, and psychological torture and humiliation,” Petr Jašek told reporters once safely back on Czech soil late on Sunday night.

He was moved from prison to prison—five in total—“with each getting worse and worse”, he said.

One of the prisons had been known as “the refrigerator” because prisoners were subjected to constant blasts of cold air; he said it was “terrible.”

For someone who had been in Sudanese prisons for 14 months, he looked remarkably well as he and the Czech Foreign Minister, who had personally flown to Khartoum to ensure his release, posed for a “selfie video” on the Czech Airlines plane bringing him home.

Nicknamed “Karl Marx” by fellow prisoners due to his bushy beard, Jašek had had a day in “house arrest” (still in prison) in which that was shaved off, and he had a chance to get completely clean. Friends said he looked remarkably well, though he has lost 25 kg in weight.

His foreign minister paid him tribute, saying: “The conditions

were very heavy. I am convinced that he is really an extraordinarily brave guy. Most people could not stand it.”

Jašek said one of the hardest blows during the year of his imprisonment awaiting trial was finding out his father had died a month after it happened.

In early February, the Czech and Sudanese governments had agreed that the Czech Foreign Minister would visit Sudan on Feb. 26, and that Jašek would then be released into his care.

Former U.S. Congressman Mark Siljander, who has good connections in Sudan, also visited Khartoum in recent days and petitioned the authorities for the release of Jašek and his two co-defendants, Rev. Hassan Abduraheem Kodi Taour and Darfuri graduate Abdulmonem Abdumawla.

However, Jašek said he didn't know for sure that he would finally be free to leave the prison and Sudan until about 4 p.m. (local time) on the Sunday afternoon.

His co-defendants were each sentenced to 10 years for abetting Jašek in the crime of espionage, and one year each for inciting strife between communities and spreading rumors undermining the authority of the state (even though the legal maximum penalty for this last crime is six months in prison). All of these sentences are to be served consecutively. Their lawyers appealed against the sentences on Feb. 9.

In a press briefing at Prague's Kbely military airport shortly after landing at about 11 p.m. Czech time, Jašek spoke briefly to thank all those involved in diplomatic efforts to secure his release.

The Czech Republic broke off diplomatic relations with Sudan in protest at his arrest, so it was its ambassador to Egypt who represented the Czechs as they pursued diplomatic efforts.

Jašek also thanked the Swiss Ambassador to Sudan, who had

attended every hearing.

The 52-year-old aid worker also spoke of the psychological distress caused by the endless delays and postponements of hearings in his 14-month-long case, some of them even blamed on the judge being on holiday on the dates set.

Minister Lubomir Zaorálek said that he'd felt an obligation to help Jašek, who had only been helping others.

Comparing cases when his foreign ministry has to intervene on behalf of Czech citizens who are in trouble abroad (whether by design or accident), he said it had been doubly important to help Jašek, of whom it had said a month ago that there was no evidence to support his conviction or sentence.

Zaorálek said that Khartoum was finally convinced that Jašek "had no intention to undermine" Sudan.

"We've tried from the first moment to intervene and help," he said. "It is interesting for me to then check to what extent our attempts have been really effective, the extent to which the tide went against what we wanted. I am glad that Mr. Jašek clearly appreciated our efforts even during his imprisonment."

Jašek also thanked Christians around the world for their prayers, which he said had helped both to sustain him and to bring about his eventual pardon by President Omar al-Bashir.

After the short press briefing at the airport, he was taken to an undisclosed hospital where he had an emotional reunion with his wife, Wanda.

"It's absolutely incredible to have him back again", she tearfully told friends later.

A close relative of Jašek's described how she was sitting on a crowded train when she got the news, and how tears were streaming down her face, to first the surprise, then delight

of other passengers.

Jašek, who spoke confidently at the press briefing, described how the sight of the Czech Airlines plane sent to bring him home made him feel very proud of his homeland.

And he urged supporters not to forget the two men still in Sudan's Kober prison, convicted to 12 years each for aiding him.

As Christian Solidarity Worldwide's CEO Mervyn Thomas put it: "It is deeply regrettable that the amnesty granted to Mr. Jašek was not extended to his co-defendants, particularly in view of the fact that the case against them was predicated on his alleged actions and conviction. These men remain in a maximum security prison despite the evidence against them being so weak that the case should not have proceeded to trial, let alone resulted in such lengthy convictions.

"CSW calls on the Sudanese Government to review and overturn the verdict and sentences given to Rev. Abduraheem and Mr. Abdumawla. We also call on the EU to urge Sudan to expedite the release of the men so that they too can return to their families."

Ján Figel', EU Special Envoy for freedom of religion or belief outside the EU, has also worked behind the scenes to get Jašek and the others freed. In Oct, a resolution to that effect was passed by the European Parliament.

Background

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.

Following South Sudan's independence in 2011, President 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' 2017 World Watch List, Sudan ranks 5th of 50 countries where Christians come under the most pressure. The country has a rating of "extreme," and for the past three years has remained among the top 10 offenders. {eoa}

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