

Muslims Free Ethiopian Christians After Punishment for Prayer

Saudi Arabia on Wednesday deported the last of the 35 Ethiopian Christians who were detained for holding an all-night **prayer vigil**.

Saudi security officials assaulted, harassed and pressured the Christians to **convert to Islam** during their incarceration.

"We have arrived home safe. We believe that we are released as the result of the pressure exerted by ICC and others," said one of the prisoners speaking to International Christian Concern (ICC). "The Saudi officials don't tolerate any other religions other than Islam. They consider non-Muslims as unbelievers. They are full of hatred towards non-Muslims."

The Christians were detained on Dec. 15 last year while holding a prayer service at a private home. The Saudi officials originally accused the Christians of "mixing with opposite gender" but when pressured by the U.S. officials, they started giving other reasons for the detention, including: being in the country illegally, and engaging in drug and **human trafficking**.

"Saudi Arabian officials clearly demonstrated their utter disregard for **religious freedom** by arresting, mistreating and deporting the Christians for holding a prayer meeting," says Jonathan Racho of the ICC.

"The Saudis deceive the international community by pretending to promote tolerance among followers of different religious beliefs; however, in reality they don't tolerate any other religion besides Wahhabi Islam. The international community must pressure Saudi Arabia to respect religious freedom."