

# Religious Groups Demand Saudis Release Christian Prisoners

Religious liberty groups are banding together to demand the release of 35 Ethiopian Christians who were arrested for **praying** in a private home in Saudi Arabia on Dec. 15.

The Christians were meeting for their weekly Bible study and were arrested, supposedly for “mixing with the opposite sex.” But religious liberty groups agree that it’s clear the 35 Ethiopians were arrested for being Christians.

Non-Muslim religious **worship** is forbidden in the Saudi Kingdom. Saudi Arabia does not permit even immigrant workers to worship at small gatherings in the privacy of their homes.

Both the Institute on Religion and Democracy (IRD) and International Christian Concern (ICC) are charging that Saudi Arabian government officials have severely mistreated the prisoners because of their **Christian faith**.

Saudi officials assaulted the men and performed humiliating body cavity searches on the female prisoners. One high-ranking official told the Ethiopians, “You are nonbelievers and animals. You are pro-Jews and supporters of America.”

In February, the Saudis also began pressuring the Christians to **convert to Islam**. A Muslim preacher who, according to one prisoner, “vilified Christianity, denigrated the Bible, and told us that us that Islam is the only true religion” visited the Christians.

“Once again we have a striking example to demonstrate the intolerance, lack of human rights and **religious freedom**, and total hypocrisy of the Shariah-adherent Islamic Kingdom of

Saudi Arabia,” says J.H. McDonnell, religious liberty program director for the IRD. “The Saudi government hypocritically funds innumerable interfaith dialogues on religious tolerance around the world, but has zero tolerance for religious freedom in their own country.”

In addition to participating in Tuesday’s demonstration, IRD will help promote ICC’s petition to the Saudi government and also urges concerned Americans to call the Saudi Embassy (202-342-3800) and ask them to release the Christian prisoners and allow them to leave the country.