

Saudi Arabia Arrests Ethiopian Christians for 'Mixing with the Opposite Sex'

Ethiopian Christians who were arrested seven days ago in Saudi Arabia for holding a prayer meeting are now being charged by Saudi officials with mixing with the opposite sex, according to International Christian Concern (ICC). In Saudi Arabia, it is illegal for men and women who are not family to be in the same room together.

Here's the backstory: The six men and 29 women were holding a weekly prayer meeting on Dec. 15 when the Saudi police arrested them. Christian leaders say that the accusation of "mixing with the opposite sex" is only an excuse and believe that the Christians were arrested for practicing their faith. The Christians have not yet been brought before any court.

"The Saudi officials are accusing the Christians of committing the crime of mixing of sexes because if they charge them with meeting for practicing Christianity, they will come under pressure from the international human rights organizations as well as Western countries. In fact, when an employer of one of the detainees asked for the reason for their employee's arrest, the Saudi official told him that it was for practicing Christianity," said a church leader from Saudi Arabia in an interview with ICC.

Asked what Christians around the world could do for their brothers and sisters, another Saudi church leader said, "I ask people who belong to the kingdom of God to show their solidarity with the detained Christians by speaking on their behalf and asking government officials for their release."

ICC's Jonathan Racho stresses the freedom of religion, including the freedom to assemble together to worship, is a basic right recognized under international human rights law: It is ironic that Saudi Arabia, the country which engages in construction of mosques around the world, clamps down on Christians who worship in their private homes. We urge the media, international human rights bodies and others to put pressure on Saudi Arabia and condemn its actions."