

Saudi Pressure Christian Prisoners to Convert to Islam

Saudi Arabian officials sent a Muslim preacher to **pressure Christian prisoners** into converting to Islam, according to International Christian Concern (ICC).

Saudi Arabia arrested 29 Christian women and six Christian men, all Ethiopian citizens, on Dec. 15 after they held a **prayer meeting** in Jeddah.

"The Muslim preacher vilified Christianity, denigrated the **Bible** and told us that Islam is the only true religion. The preacher told us to convert to Islam. When the preacher asked us, we didn't deny about our **Christian faith**. I was so offended with her false teachings that I left the meeting," said one of the female prisoners who spoke to ICC in a telephone interview from Briman jail in Jeddah.

The Muslim preacher stated that she was sent by officials to teach the prisoners about Islam. This is the first time a Muslim preacher has been sent to the prison. The Christian prisoner expressed fear that the teachings would incite the Muslim prisoners held in Briman to harass and even **attack the Christians**.

"Why don't they release us? We want to go back to our country and worship freely," said the prisoner. Several different media outlets, including the BBC, have reported that the **Christian prisoners** will be deported back to Ethiopia. However the prisoners themselves reported to ICC today that they are unaware of any such decision and do not know when or if they will be released.

This latest incident comes on the heels of the strip search/body cavity search by Saudi Arabian security officials of the female prisoners on entry to the prison. In a recent

interview with the Voice of America, one of the female prisoners stated that Saudi security officials took off the prisoners' underwear and inserted their fingers into the female prisoners' genitals.

"We are deeply concerned by the Saudi Arabian officials' recent attempts to pressure the Christians into converting to Islam," says Jonathan Racho, regional manager for ICC in Africa. "We ask that all concerned individuals and groups continue to pressure Saudi Arabia to release the Christians. We urge Saudi Arabia to respect the right of these prisoners to follow the religion of their choice and to immediately release them."