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ERITREA Two orthodox deacons murdered by people traffickers in Sinai Desert

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) has received reports that two Orthodox deacons were murdered by people traffickers in the Sinai Desert on December 11th.

The two deacons were singled out for punishment because their captors believed they were instrumental in alerting human rights NGOs of the plight of over 250 refugees and asylum seekers from Eritrea, Sudan, Somalia and Ethiopia who have been imprisoned for over a month in degrading conditions by Bedouin people traffickers in the Sinai Desert. The traffickers are demanding payment of up to US\$8,000 per person for their release despite charging them \$2,000 for passage to Israel.

The deacons were among 100 Eritrean refugees who had been separated from the group on December 10th. Prior to the move, the traffickers tore up the refugees' religious materials and assaulted them severely for failing to make the ransom payments. Agenzia Habeshia also reports that others in the group were beaten, tortured and forced to drink their own urine after being denied water. There are also reports of organ harvesting and of some pregnant women being forced to undergo abortions.

The exploitation of asylum seekers from the Horn of Africa by people traffickers in the Sinai Desert is an ongoing problem. Kidnapping, organ trafficking and the trading of groups of asylum seekers between different gangs is common, and there are fears that the 100 Eritreans may have been sold on to other dealers in the area.

On December 1, CSW, Agenzia Habeshia, EveryOne Group and Human Rights Concern Eritrea issued a joint appeal calling for urgent international intervention and highlighting the degrading and inhumane conditions suffered by the refugees, who have suffered extreme methods of torture, including electric shocks, as well as being bound by chains around their ankles and denied adequate food and water. Agenzia Habeshia and the EveryOne group also filed a lawsuit in Cairo against named traffickers, and passed on details of the location of the initial detention facility.

CSW-UK's National Director Stuart Windsor said, "We are saddened to hear of the deaths of the two deacons. The situation for these refugees is deteriorating daily and despite assurances by the Egyptian government that they are working hard to free these people, scant progress has been made. The people traffickers have little regard for human life and have shown that they will not hesitate to kill, maim and abuse their victims. Time is running out and the international community must urge the Egyptian government to act decisively to prevent further loss of life by freeing these people and granting them unhindered access to the local offices of the UNHCR. Egypt must become more proactive in bringing its treatment of refugees and asylum seekers in line with international norms, and ending human trafficking within its borders."