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EYGPT | Eritrean Hostage Given Five-Day Ultimatum by Sinai Traffickers

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) has learned that an Eritrean refugee held hostage by Bedouin traffickers for three months has been given five days to raise \$25,000 or face illegal organ harvesting. His case highlights a continuing lack of protection and assistance for refugees and migrants from the Horn of Africa, who are routinely abducted and abused by people traffickers in the Sinai Peninsula.

Twenty-two year old Philemon Semere escaped from Eritrea to Ethiopia in 2010, where he sang in the church choir in Adi Harish Refugee Camp. Early in 2012, he travelled to Sudan and was attempting to reach Israel when he was abducted by Rashaida traffickers and taken to one of several torture and extortion facilities in the Sinai. He was beaten and abused regularly, and at that time, his captors asked him to source \$33,000 to ensure his release, or lose a kidney.

In October, Semere was moved to another facility where he was subjected to electric shock torture, amongst other things. On Nov. 21, his captors informed him he had five days to either produce \$25,000 or lose a kidney.

In a telephone conversation with CSW's Special Ambassador, Rev. Stuart Windsor, a clearly distraught Semere confirmed that, "If they don't get the money, they will kill me in five days."

The abduction, torture and extortion of refugees in purpose-built facilities in the Sinai have been extensively documented since 2010. Hostages are generally bound for extended periods, deprived of adequate food, given salty water to drink, and tortured using extreme methods. Methods of torture include electric shocks and branding, while friends and relatives are obliged to listen via telephone to screams and pleas for assistance. Women are particularly vulnerable to abuse, including gang-rape. Some hostages have been used as slave labor. Initially, demands for payment ranged between \$3,000 and \$8,000 but have increased enormously. When payments are not forthcoming, vital organs are illegally harvested in unhygienic conditions, generally resulting in the death of the person concerned.

Windsor said, "Our heartfelt prayers are with Philemon Semere as he faces this horrific ultimatum. The abduction and torture of human beings for profit and the illegal traffic in their organs is one of the most abhorrent forms of modern slavery and an appalling affront to human dignity. The continuation of this phenomenon is a terrible indictment of the failure of several signatories to international and regional refugee conventions to provide adequate protection for

this vulnerable community. CSW urges the Egyptian authorities to act decisively to rescue Semere and others in his position, and to combat trafficking by ensuring perpetrators are brought to justice. However, we also recognize that trafficking is an international crime that spans national borders, and therefore call for concerted international action to bring this appalling phenomenon to an end.”