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SUDAN | Court Confirms Pregnant Woman's Death Sentence

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) learned that the Public Order Court in El Haj Yousif Khartoum, Sudan, confirmed Meriam Yahia Ibrahim's death sentence for apostasy after she refused to renounce her faith. The court had given the heavily pregnant Christian mother until May 15 to convert to Islam, implying her sentence could be annulled or reduced if she did so.

Ibrahim was arrested on Feb. 17, 2014, and subsequently charged and sentenced to 100 lashes for adultery and death for 'apostasy' (leaving Islam) under articles 146 and 126 of Sudan's Penal Code respectively, after Sudanese authorities were made aware of her marriage to a Christian man. She is currently detained in Omdurman Federal Women's Prison along with her 20-month-old son, Daniel Wani.

Ibrahim testified before the court on March 4 that she is a life-long Christian, producing her marriage certificate where she is classified as Christian as proof of her religion. She was born in western Sudan to a Sudanese Muslim father and an Ethiopian Orthodox mother. Her father left the family when Ibrahim was six years old. She was subsequently brought up as a Christian by her mother. Three potential witnesses from western Sudan who went to the hearing to testify of Ibrahim's lifelong adherence to Christianity were prevented from giving evidence.

After the court confirmed the death sentence, Ibrahim's lawyers asserted their intention to launch an appeal, a process which could take several months.

Concerns about Ibrahim's health and welfare continue to be raised. Her husband has complained throughout her incarceration his wife has been prevented from receiving visitors and, more seriously, from accessing vital medical treatment. A family member said, "We are concerned for her wellbeing; it is not very safe for her to be in the prison with dangerous criminals."

Ibrahim's sentence is the latest and most significant in a series of repressive acts by the Sudanese government against religious minorities. If the sentence is carried out, she will become the first person to be executed for apostasy under the 1991 penal code, prompting concerns that the charge may increasingly be used against anyone who converts from Islam.

CSW's Chief Operating Officer Andy Dipper said, "CSW continues to call for the annulment the inhumane and unwarranted sentence and for the immediate of Mrs. Ibrahim and her son, who is being held in violation of article 37 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. As a Sudanese citizen Mrs. Ibrahim is entitled to freedom of religion of belief, constitution; consequently, this sentence amounts to a violation of the Sudanese Constitution and of international conventions to which Sudan is party, including the African Charter on Human and People's Rights."

