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SUDAN | Meriam Ibrahim Released, Lawyers Receive Death Threats

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) confirms the appeal court reviewing the case of Meriam Ibrahim, the Sudanese Christian woman who was sentenced to death for apostasy and 100 lashes for adultery on May 11, has quashed the original verdict, ordered her release, recognized her marriage and declared her innocent of all charges.

According to information CSW received, while in Omdurman Women's Prison along with her two young children, Ibrahim was visited by an Islamic scholar who read to her continuously from the Qur'an in order to help her to "return" to the Islamic faith.

On March 4, Ibrahim was charged with adultery and apostasy under articles 146 and 126, respectively, of Sudan's Penal Code, after alleged family members whom she had never met informed the Sudanese authorities of her marriage to Daniel Wani, a Christian. The Public Order Court in El Haj Yousif Khartoum, chaired by Judge Abbas Khalifa, gave her three days to renounce her faith, and she was visited by Islamic scholars who attempted to pressure her to "return to the faith of her fathers." Her sentence was confirmed May 15, after Ibrahim refused to renounce her faith.

Ibrahim was brought up as a Christian by her Ethiopian Orthodox mother after her Sudanese Muslim father left the family when she was six years old. She testified of her lifelong Christian faith in court on March 4, and Morning Star News reported potential witnesses who also sought to testify of her lifelong adherence to Christianity were prevented from giving evidence to the court.

The Catholic Church of Khartoum issued a statement June 11 confirming Ibrahim and Wani were married on Dec. 19, 2011, and intimating the alleged family members may have been motivated by a desire to access the couple's businesses, which include a barber shop and agricultural product. The statement also said a lawyer, who initially dealt with Ibrahim and Wani's case in September 2013, was forced to stop representing them due to pressure from Ibrahim's accusers, including from her alleged brother.

Members of Ibrahim's current legal team have received threats from extremists who have deemed their actions as "un-Islamic," adding they too should receive death sentences. Pressure has also come from Ibrahim's accusers. Her alleged brother publicly stated the family would carry out the death sentence should the court acquit her. According to local sources, other alleged family members have also issued daily threats, statements in the Sudanese press against the lawyers, and AFP News Agency reports extremist groups have lobbied the Sudanese government to uphold the sentence.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "We are delighted to hear that Mrs. Ibrahim and her children have been released into the care of her husband and that the unjust, inhumane and unwarranted sentences have been annulled. However, we remain appalled by the threats and hate speech that has been aired seemingly unhindered against Mrs. Ibrahim and her lawyers and urge the international community to hold the Sudanese authorities to account for her safety and that of her lawyers. The right to freedom of religion or belief is guaranteed both by international statutes to which Sudan is party and article 38 of Sudan's Interim Constitution. The Sudanese authorities have a duty to ensure the protection of any citizen who seeks to exercise or uphold this right."