



7.24.14

## **SUDAN | Meriam Ibrahim Arrives in Italy**

Meriam Ibrahim and her family arrived safely in Italy after criminal charges against her and her husband were dismissed and they were permitted to leave Sudan.

On June 24, Ibrahim and her husband, Daniel Wani, were detained as they attempted to leave Sudan and were later charged with forgery and provision of false information under article 123 and 97 of the 1991 Criminal Code, due to alleged irregularities with her travel documents. Sources informed Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) these charges have been dismissed, clearing the way for the family to leave the country. They left at approximately 4 a.m. Sudanese time on an Italian government plane, accompanied by the Italian Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs. Meriam and her children travelled on passports issued by Sudanese authorities and CSW was informed the family will eventually travel to the United States.

On June 23, the Appeal Court overturned the decision of the Public Order Court in El Haj Yousif, Khartoum to sentence Ibrahim to death for apostasy and 100 lashes for adultery. The Appeal Court also recognized Ibrahim's marriage to Daniel Wani and ordered her immediate release. The following day Ibrahim and her husband were detained at Khartoum Airport by the National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS).

Ibrahim was born in western Sudan to a Sudanese Muslim father and an Ethiopian Orthodox mother. Her father left the family when she was six years old. She was subsequently brought up as a Christian by her mother. The case against Ibrahim began after alleged family members made Sudanese authorities aware of her marriage to Daniel Wani, a Christian with joint Sudanese and American citizenship. Morning Star news reported that 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 evidence. Three potential witnesses from western Sudan who went to court to testify of Ibrahim's lifelong adherence to Christianity were prevented from giving evidence.

Ibrahim's alleged family attempted to challenge the Appeal Court's decision to release her; however, CSW was informed this too has been dismissed. Her lawyers continue to face threats from extremists for working on her case. In a comment to CSW one lawyer said, "Now we are a target," adding that days earlier extremists had protested and reiterated they would kill Ibrahim and anyone who helped her. According to the lawyer, one of the people involved in this protest was arrested.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "We are delighted by the decision to drop the unwarranted cases against Mrs. Ibrahim and her husband, and to allow the family to leave the country, and we commend the Italian government for its effective interventions on behalf of this family. However, the legal anomaly that allowed the prosecution and harassment of Mrs.

Ibrahim and her family continues still exists. In order to prevent further cases like Mrs. Ibrahim's, we urge the Sudanese authorities to uphold the right to freedom of religion or belief for all of its citizens, as guaranteed in Sudan's Interim Constitution and in international statutes to which the nation is party. The Sudanese authorities must also ensure that human rights defenders are able to practice their profession without experiencing harassment and intimidation."