



2.18.15

SUDAN | Authorities Detain Two Clergymen, Harass Church Official

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) confirmed that South Sudanese clergymen Rev. Yat Michael and Rev. Peter Yein Reith are currently detained in Khartoum by Sudan's National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS). NISS officials are also orchestrating a campaign of harassment against the chairman of the Sudan Evangelical Presbyterian Church (SEPC) council responsible for church buildings and land, Rafat Samir Mussad Obid.

According to local sources, NISS agents arrested Rev. Michael on Dec. 21, 2014 after he addressed the congregation at Khartoum Bhari Evangelical Church, a church belonging to the SEPC denomination which was partially demolished by the authorities Dec. 2, 2014. NISS officers said they were offended by his reference to government confiscation of church property in his sermon. Rev. Michael was later charged with instigating Sudanese citizens against their government. Local sources also report that Rev. Peter Yein Reith was arrested Jan. 11 shortly after arriving in Khartoum from South Sudan. The two clergymen have been held incommunicado since their arrest.

As chairman of the SEPC council responsible for buildings and land, Obid has challenged government attempts to sell land belonging to the Church. On Dec. 8, 2014, lawyers representing the SEPC and 12 tenants in one of the church's properties in Omdurman, Khartoum State, lodged a constitutional appeal following a dispute over ownership of the property, which resulted in the Ministry of Justice issuing the tenants with a one-week eviction notice. The NISS campaign of harassment began as a result of his work as chair of the council.

During January 2015 the NISS harassed Obid on five separate occasions. Between Jan. 11-18 he was summoned to the NISS office daily, and was detained from morning until evening. During this time, government agents attempted to initiate a re-election of the SEPC church council with the aim of relieving Obid of his position. In addition to the daily detentions, NISS agents confiscated one of Obid's businesses and a vehicle. On Jan. 29, they confiscated property belonging to his brother valued at approximately \$400,000. NISS agents also falsely accused Obid of supporting rebels in Darfur and inciting hatred among religions.

These incidents occur against the backdrop of rising restrictions on other fundamental freedoms in the lead up to national elections, which are due to be held in April 2015. The government continues to detain two opposition leaders despite protests from civil society groups, including the Alliance of Democratic Lawyers. On Feb. 16, NISS agents confiscated the print run of 14 newspapers without explanation, including some that were pro-government. On the same day, President al Bashir reiterated his support for a fully Islamic constitution at a meeting of the

Sudan Islamic Board.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "CSW is deeply concerned by the continuing arbitrary and incommunicado detention of Rev Michael and Rev Reith, in violation of Sudan's obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which the country has signed and ratified and which in Article 9:1 prohibits arbitrary detention. Furthermore, the continuous interference by the Sudanese authorities into the affairs of religious institutions is in violation of Article 18 of the ICCPR. We urge the Sudanese authorities to release Rev. Michael and Rev. Reith unconditionally and without delay, to cease the campaign of harassment against Mr. Obid and his family and restore their property. We also urge the government to release detained opposition leaders, end its restrictions on civil society and facilitate the drafting of a constitution reflecting the nation's religious, cultural and ethnic diversity."