



6.26.15 SUDAN | Prosecution Closes Case in Trial

The prosecution in the trial of South Sudanese pastors Rev. Yat Michael and Rev. Peter Reith closed its case June 25 after presenting its final witness, an officer of the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS). The trial judge set the next hearing for July 2, when he will question the pastors and make a decision regarding which charges, if any, will be defended by their lawyers.

The pastors have been charged jointly with acts of criminal conspiracy (Article 21 of the Sudanese Penal Code); undermining the constitutional system (Article 50); espionage (Article 53); disclosure and receipt of official information or documents (Article 55); promoting hatred amongst sects (Article 64); breach of public peace (Article 69); and offences relating to insulting religious beliefs (Article 125). Of the six charges, Articles 50 and 53 carry the death penalty or life imprisonment in the event of a guilty verdict. Both Rev. Michael and Rev. Reith are still being detained at the high security Kober Prison but are no longer chained or in solitary confinement. The pastors are not allowed visitors and can only meet with their families and legal team when attending hearings.

The prosecution of the pastors is the latest form of harassment targeting the minority Christian community in Sudan. The repression against minorities is not restricted to the capital city Khartoum. Since 2011, the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) has increased its attacks on non-Muslim communities in South Kordofan. On May 25, two SAF fighter jets dropped three bombs on the town of Kauda in the Nuba Mountains killing a four year-old girl and dropped two bombs over the Catholic Church, school and priest's compounds. On May 27, two SAF fighter jets dropped four cluster bombs over a residential area in Kauda that did not deploy properly. Later that day, 12 bombs were dropped near the town market, injuring three people, killing livestock and destroying six homes.

In a letter dated May 28, His Excellency Macram Max Gassis, the Catholic Bishop (Emeritus) of El Obeid raised concerns about the targeting of civilians in the Nuba Mountains, highlighting that the May 25 bombing occurred almost a year after the bombing of the Mother of Mercy Hospital in Gidel, South Kordofan. It was the only functioning hospital providing humanitarian assistance to the people of the Nuba Mountains.

Mervyn Thomas, Chief Executive of Christian Solidarity Worldwide, said, "We continue to call for the immediate and unconditional release of Rev. Yat Michael and Rev. Peter Reith and the revocation of the extreme and unwarranted charges against them. We urge the prison authorities to allow regular family and lawyer visits. The denial of these visits is in violation of the principles of fair trial articulated in Article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political

Rights, to which Sudan is a party. The international community must hold Sudan to its obligations to protect and promote freedom of religion or belief and to ensure the right to a fair trial. We also urge the Sudanese authorities to end the indiscriminate targeting of civilians and civilian structures in the Nuba Mountains."