



6.8.15

SUDAN | Pastors Moved to High Security Prison

South Sudanese pastors Rev. Yat Michael and Rev. Peter Reith, who are facing serious criminal charges in Sudan, were moved to Kober Prison in North Khartoum last week.

The pastors were detained at Omdurman Men's Prison, a low security facility, since March 1. The men were last seen June 3 by their families and pastors from their church, who regularly visited them.

Concerns were raised June 4 when their families arrived at the prison and were refused access. On June 6, prison authorities confirmed the pastors were transferred to Kober Prison in North Khartoum. Neither their wives nor lawyers have been allowed to visit them. No reason has been given for the move. There are suspicions it may have been triggered by the actions of foreign visitors.

The pastors' lawyers met with the Director of Prisons Administration on June 7 to request access to the pastors and were told they should approach the Director of Kober Prison for access. However, the director refused the request and told the lawyers to get a court order, which was denied June 8 on the grounds that such decisions are at the discretion of the Prison Director. There is speculation the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) may have issued an order to the prison authorities preventing the pastors from having visitors.

The clergymen from the South Sudan Evangelical Presbyterian Church (SSEPC) are jointly facing charges for six serious crimes, including undermining the constitutional system (Article 50 of the Sudanese Penal Code) and waging war against the state (Article 51), both of which carry the death penalty or life imprisonment. The next hearing is scheduled for June 15.

Both men have spent an extended period of time in detention. Rev. Yat Michael was arrested on Dec. 14, 2014 and Rev. Peter Reith was arrested Jan. 11. The NISS detained both men without charging them or permitting them to access a lawyer or their families until March 1.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "We are concerned by this development in the clergymen's case. They already endured extended detention without access to their families at the beginning of this year and they and their families should be spared further emotional distress. Moreover, the refusal of access to their legal representatives is in violation of article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Sudan is party, and which guarantees the right of those charged with a crime to communicate with counsel of their own choosing. We urge the Sudanese authorities to ensure that the clergymen's detention is regularized, and they are permitted regular family visits and

unhindered access to their lawyers. The decision to detain them at a higher security prison should be reconsidered, given that they have not been found guilty of any crime.”