



7.1.15

## **SUDAN | Women Arrested After Leaving Church**

Twelve women, reportedly aged between 18 and 23, were arrested on public indecency charges June 25 by Sudan's Public Order Police after leaving a celebration service at the El Izba Baptist Church in Khartoum, Sudan.

The women, who were wearing skirts and trousers, were taken to a police station and forced to remove their clothes, which were submitted as evidence to the prosecutor. Two of them, Lemyaa James and Mawaheb Suilman, were released without charge. However, Ferdoos Eltoum, Hala Ibrahim, Ishraga James, Uthan Omer Eljaily, Diana Yagoub Abd Alrahman, Seema Ali Osman, Inas Mohamed Elkomani, Rehab Omer Kakoum, Nasra Omer Kakoum and Wegdan Aba Alla Salih were charged with indecent or immoral dress under Article 152 of the Sudanese Criminal Code. They were released on bail and are awaiting hearings.

Under Article 152 of the Sudanese Criminal Code, the Public Order Police have broad scope to define what constitutes indecent or immoral dress. In a comment to Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), lawyers representing some of the women highlighted the arbitrary application of Article 152, "Two of the women were released. Who decided that their dress was no longer immoral if when they were arrested their dress was considered indecent? The law needs to be clarified."

In unrelated news, CSW learned that Mohaned Mustafa, the chief counsel for South Sudanese pastors Rev. Yat Michael and Rev. Peter Reith, was arrested July 1 along with Pastor Hafez of the Khartoum Bhari Evangelical Church, which is involved in a land dispute with the government. They were both charged with Obstructing a Public Servant from Performing the Duties of His Office and released on bail.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "We are deeply concerned by the unwarranted arrest of these 12 young women and are alarmed by reports that three of them may be minors who have been arrested arbitrarily and charged as adults in violation of their rights under Articles 37 and 40 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Sudan is a party. Furthermore, forcing these young women to undress amounts to degrading treatment, as defined by Article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Sudan is also a party. We urge the Sudanese authorities to discontinue the cases against these young women and to clarify the law, ensuring consistency and equality before the law for all Sudanese citizens. In addition the arrests of Pastor Hafez and Mr. Mustafa, who also face unwarranted charges, are a cause for great concern. This unacceptable harassment of a human rights defender during the discharge of his duties may be an indication of high-level efforts to interfere with the judicial process in cases involving religious minorities by discouraging lawyers from

offering assistance. Once again we appeal to the international community, in particular the African Union, to hold Sudan to its international obligations.”