



7.23.15

SUDAN | Defense Submits Closing Statement in Pastors' Trial

The defense team of South Sudanese clergymen Rev. Yat Michael and Rev. Peter Reith submitted their written closing arguments July 23, as requested by the judge after the last hearing.

In their closing statement, the defense team, led by Mohaned Mustafa, challenged the prosecution's evidence and asked the court to uphold the constitutional principles of a fair trial. They also drew attention to the irregular manner in which the pastors were arrested and held incommunicado, the manner in which their laptop computers and other electronic devices were confiscated and the procedures by which the prosecution built its case.

The pastors have been charged with at least six crimes, including undermining the constitutional system (Article 50); espionage (Article 53); promoting hatred amongst sects (Article 64); breach of public peace (Article 69); and offences relating to insulting religious beliefs (Article 125). Of the charges, Articles 50 and 53 carry the death penalty or life imprisonment in the event of a guilty verdict.

The next hearing is scheduled for Aug. 5 when the judge is expected to deliver his verdict and sentence, if he finds the pastors guilty.

Rev. Michael and Rev. Reith have been in detention since Dec. 14, 2014 and Jan. 11, 2015, respectively. Until March 1, they were held incommunicado by the National Intelligence and Security Service, after which they were transferred to the Attorney General's custody, charged with the six crimes and brought before court. Since being moved to the maximum security Kober Prison on June 6, the pastors have not been allowed visits from their families or legal team, despite repeated appeals to the court and prison service.

Andy Dipper, Chief Operating Officer at Christian Solidarity Worldwide, said, "We renew our calls for the unwarranted and extreme charges against Rev. Yat Michael and Rev. Peter Reith to be dropped and for them to be released unconditionally and without further delay. That Sudan continues to prosecute these men, and without even allowing them free access to their legal team, makes a mockery of the judicial process and is a clear violation of fair trial principles, as articulated in Article 7 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights and Article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Sudan is a party. In addition, the ongoing denial of family visits compounds the mental and emotional distress of the men and their families. We urge the African Union and the wider international community, to challenge

Sudan on its treatment of the pastors and its failure to protect and promote freedom of religion or belief and the right to a fair trial.”