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## **SUDAN | Religious Leader, Human Rights Defender Face Trial**

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) learned that Pastor Hafiz Mengisto, leader of the Khartoum Bahri Evangelical Church, and the church's lawyer Mohaned Mustafa, are on trial charged with obstructing a public servant from performing the duties of his office.

Mengisto and Mustafa were arrested July 1 when police officers arrived at Khartoum Bahri Evangelical Church in the early hours of the morning to execute a court order to demolish a building on the church's property.

Approximately 300 police officers closed the road leading to the church in order to oversee the demolition. When Mustafa and Mengisto noted that the engineers were dismantling a building that was not stipulated in the court order, they informed police officers, who responded by arresting both men.

While Mustafa was transferred directly to the police station in a police car, Pastor Mengisto was handcuffed and taken on foot through a busy market place between the church and police station. Pastor Mengisto sustained injuries to his head and ear while in police custody and required medical attention upon his release. Both men were charged with obstructing a public servant from performing the duties of his office then released on bail.

The trial began Dec. 14 and is due to continue later this week with evidence from prosecution witnesses.

Khartoum Bahri Evangelical Church is part of the Sudan Evangelical Presbyterian Church (SEPC) denomination. The church is embroiled in a legal dispute with government-backed Muslim businessmen. The businessmen were sold church property by an illegally-constituted committee that was authorized to administrate on behalf of the church by a March 2013 order issued by the Ministry of Endowments and Religion, the body that governs religious affairs in Sudan.

In August 2015, Khartoum Administrative Court restored administrative powers to the official

lands and buildings committee of the SEPC denomination.

CSW Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "We are deeply concerned by the spurious charges brought against Pastor Mengisto and Mr. Mustafa as they attempted to prevent the police from executing a court order incorrectly. The mistreatment of Pastor Mengisto in police custody is deplorable, and the trial of Mr. Mustafa, a respected human rights defender, is clearly an attempt by the authorities to discourage lawyers from assisting religious minorities. We call on the Sudanese authorities to drop these charges immediately and unconditionally. We also call for an investigation into Pastor Mengisto's mistreatment, which violates his inherent dignity as a detained person as guaranteed by Article 10 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Sudan is a party. We also appeal to the international community, in particular the African Union, to hold Sudan to its obligations under international law."