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SUDAN | Evangelical Church Minister Acquitted

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) learned that Pastor Hafiz Mengisto, senior minister of the Khartoum Bahri Evangelical Church, was acquitted of obstructing a public servant from performing the duties of his office on Dec. 29. Mohaned Mustafa, lawyer for the church who was charged with the same crime, had his case dismissed on Dec. 23.

The trial for both men began on Dec. 14 at the Khartoum Bahri Criminal Court. On Dec. 23, the court accepted that the prosecution had failed to follow procedure when initiating a criminal case against a registered lawyer and dismissed the case against Mustafa. The case against Mengisto continued until Dec. 29 when the court ruled that the church leader had not committed a crime.

Pastor Mengisto and Mustafa were arrested and charged on July 1 after police officers arrived at Khartoum Bahri Evangelical Church with a court order to demolish a building on the church's property. Mengisto sustained injuries to his head and ear while in police custody and required medical attention upon his release.

The trial of Mustafa and Mengisto occurred in the midst of a crackdown against Christians in Sudan. During December 2015, National Intelligence and Security Service agents arrested a Christian activist and two religious leaders. Talahon Nigosi Kassa Ratta, an activist and member of the Sudan Evangelical Presbyterian Church, was arrested Dec. 14 in Khartoum and Rev. Kwa Shamal and Rev. Hassan Abduraheem of the Sudan Church of Christ were arrested Dec. 19. While Ratta's parents were able to visit him in Kober Men's Prison at the end of December 2015, he has since been moved to an unknown location and remains detained without charge. Shamal and Abduraheem are also being held in unknown locations without charge.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "We welcome the court's decision to acquit Pastor Mengisto and dismiss the case against Mr. Mustafa. However, we remain deeply concerned by the State's repressive actions against religious minorities in Sudan, as exemplified by the arrest and detention of Mr. Ratta and Reverends Shamal and Abduraheem. We call for their immediate and unconditional release. Their detention without charge is in clear violation of their

right to liberty and security of person as detailed in article 9 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to which Sudan is a party and we appeal to the international community, and in particular to the African Union, to hold Sudan to its obligations under international law by pressing for their immediate release.”