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SUDAN | Christian Activist Released, Reverend Still Detained

Talahon Nigosi Kassa Ratta, a Christian activist and member of the Khartoum Bahri Evangelical Church, was released from prison May 10.

Ratta was arrested in Khartoum by National Intelligence and Security Service agents on Dec. 14, 2015. No reason was given for his arrest and for the majority of his detention Ratta was not permitted any visits from his family or legal representatives. On May 10, NISS agents contacted Ratta's father requesting he collect his son from their offices. Ratta is reportedly in good health.

Rev. Hassan Abdullaheem of the Sudan Church of Christ, who was arrested shortly after Ratta, remains in detention. On May 9, he was transferred into the custody of the Attorney General and was informed a criminal case is being filed against him. The charges that Rev. Abdullaheem is facing have yet to be confirmed, but his legal representatives were informed they will include security crimes, which carry the death penalty.

Meanwhile, the Sudan Evangelical Presbyterian Church continues to face government interference in its internal affairs, specifically concerning its land and buildings committee. In March 2013, an illegally-convened lands and buildings committee was recognized by the government body responsible for religious affairs in Sudan as the official group charged with administering the SEPC's affairs and was subsequently involved in the unlawful sale of church property to Muslim businessmen. A court order reinstating the legitimate committee, chaired by senior church member Rafat Obid, continues to be disregarded. In April 2016, the illegally-convened committee elected new members, renewed the terms of older ones and was recognized once more by the Ministry of Religious Endowments and Guidance as the group with authority to administrate on behalf of the denomination.

On May 8, Rafat Obid was arrested and charged with impersonation, forgery and criminal misappropriation. He was released on bail and is awaiting trial. The decision to charge him came from the Ministry of Religious Endowments and Guidance.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "We welcome the decision to release Mr. Ratta; however we continue to be concerned by his prolonged detention without charge. Mr. Ratta's case shows the power that NISS wields within Sudan to detain private individuals without any legal recourse, which it is currently using to harass and detain members of the Christian community and civil society. We are calling for a review of the agency's powers of arrest and detention and for the criminal proceedings against Rev. Abdulraheem and Mr. Rafat Obid, which have no basis, to be dropped. Furthermore, we call on the Ministry of Religious Endowments and Guidance to overturn its decision to recognize the illegally-convened committee of the Sudan Evangelical Presbyterian Church and to end its interference in the church's affairs."