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SUDAN | EU Envoy Calls for Presidential Pardon

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) welcomes the call by the European Union (EU) Special Envoy for the Promotion of Freedom of Religion or Belief outside the European Union for a presidential pardon for two men who are facing 12 years in prison in Sudan.

Jan Figel raised the case of Rev. Hassan Abduraheem and Abdulmonem Abdumawla while visiting Sudan March 14-17 to promote freedom of religion or belief, intercultural and interreligious dialogue, peaceful coexistence of communities and better relations between Sudan and the EU.

Despite their innocence, Rev. Abduraheem and Abdumawla were convicted of assisting EU and Czech national Petr Jašek with espionage, inciting hatred between sects and the propagation of false news. Jašek was pardoned and allowed to leave Sudan last month; however, Rev. Abduraheem and Abdumawla remain in prison. Their case illustrates the politicization of the criminal justice system by the National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) which, under the pretext of investigating national security crimes, has brought charges against members of the political opposition, human rights defenders and leaders of minority religions, as occurred in the case of Reverends Yat Michael and Peter Reith in 2015.

During his visit, Figel met with representatives of political, religious and civil society organizations and visited Nour Mosque and a Coptic Church. During a meeting with Sudanese legislators, Figel raised the issue of church demolitions. At present, 25 churches in the El Haj Yousif neighborhood of Khartoum Bahri have been issued with a confiscation and demolition order on their buildings. The order was issued in August 2016, but only three of the 25 churches were notified. A complete list of affected churches was not disclosed until January 2017. The issue has been brought before the Khartoum Bahri Administrative Court which, on March 13, announced the creation of a judicial committee to consider the case and reach a decision.

The EU Special Envoy also discussed constitutional amendments and Sudan's legal framework. The case of Meriam Ibrahim in 2014 highlighted the conflict between Sudan's constitutional guarantees for freedom of religion or belief and a legal system that classifies apostasy as a criminal offense. The Sudanese parliament strengthened apostasy and blasphemy legislation in 2015, widening the definition of blasphemy and increasing the penalties for apostasy. Months after the amendment was passed, 25 Muslims were charged with apostasy. The case was withdrawn by the Ministry of Justice; however, no amendments have been made to the legislation.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "We welcome and echo Mr. Figel's call for a presidential pardon for Rev. Abduraheem and Mr. Abdumawla. Their continued imprisonment after Mr. Jašek, the main defendant in their case, was pardoned and released amounts to an injustice. We also call on Sudan to protect all places of worship, including the 25 churches under threat of demolition. As the EU increases its engagement with Sudan through initiatives such as the Khartoum Process, we urge the EU to ensure that human rights, including freedom of religion or belief, are prioritized in all areas of cooperation."