

Beat: News

Sudanese woman sentenced to death after converting to Christianity

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USPA News - A Sudanese court has sentenced a pregnant woman to death by hanging for apostasy and adultery after abandoning her Muslim faith and marrying a Christian man, human rights activists said on Thursday, calling on the government to intervene. Meriam Yahia Ibrahim, 27, is nine months pregnant and was convicted earlier this month for adultery and apostasy.

She was sentenced to 100 lashes and to die by hanging, but the court gave her three days to recant Christianity to avoid the death sentence, which she refused, according to the African Center for Justice and Peace Studies (ACPJS). "Ms. Ibrahim has been convicted solely on the basis of her religious beliefs, contrary to equality and non-discrimination guarantees in Sudan's own Constitution and commitments made by the Government of Sudan under regional and international law," ACPJS said on Thursday after Ibrahim's death sentence was confirmed. The Al-Haj Yousef Criminal Court in Khartoum Bahri had convicted Ibrahim of adultery when it ruled her marriage invalid due to her Muslim faith and upbringing, which was based on the testimonies of family members. Ibrahim's conviction of apostasy came after family members lodged a complaint alluding to the fact that she had converted from Islam to Christianity, which is a crime according to the 1991 Sudanese Penal Code. ACPJS condemned the use of the death penalty and said it believes there is an urgent need for the Sudanese government to issue a moratorium on all executions and to abolish the death penalty. They also urged the government to "revise all legislation that has the purpose or effect of discriminating against religious and ethnic minorities, women and other individuals on account of their personal characteristics," the organization said. London-based human rights group Amnesty International also condemned the conviction and punishment for apostasy and adultery, calling it "appalling and abhorrent." They added that Ibrahim's acts "were not crimes" and her conviction represents a "flagrant breach of international and human rights." Earlier this week, the embassies of the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and the Netherlands expressed their concerns with the situation in a joint statement, stating that the Sudanese government should respect "one's right to change one's faith or beliefs, a right which is enshrined in international human rights law as well as in Sudan's own 2005 Interim Constitution," they said. The governments urged authorities to approach the case with "justice and compassion" and, in addition, expressed concern over the "brutal sentence." According to the Sudan Change Now Movement, Ibrahim's case exposes the government's blatant interference in the personal lives of citizens. Criminalizing Ibrahim with apostasy and adultery discriminates women, social groups and religious sects, they said. Ibrahim grew up with Christianity considering her Christian mother and a Muslim father who was absent from her life, according to the organization. "We demand an immediate release of Mariam Yahya Ibrahim and a formal apology to her and her family about this shameful interference in the affairs of their personal lives," the Sudan Change Now Movement said.

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Editorial program service of General News Agency:

United Press Association, Inc.

3651 Lindell Road, Suite D168
Las Vegas, NV 89103, USA
(702) 943.0321 Local
(702) 943.0233 Facsimile
info@unitedpressassociation.org
info@gna24.com
www.gna24.com