

# International Outrage Grows For Sudanese Woman Sentenced To Death for Apostasy

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*Meriam Ibrahim and Daniel Wani married in a formal church ceremony in 2011. The couple has an 18-month-old son, Martin, who is with Meriam in jail.*

International outrage is mounting over the death sentence a Sudanese judge ordered for the pregnant wife of an American citizen — all because she refuses to renounce her Christian faith.

Meriam Ibrahim, 26, was sentenced Thursday after being convicted of apostasy. The court in Khartoum ruled that Ibrahim must give birth and nurse her baby before being executed, but must receive 100 lashes immediately after having her baby for adultery — for having relations with her Christian husband. Ibrahim, a physician and the daughter of a Christian mother and a Muslim father who abandoned the family as a child, could have spared herself death by hanging simply by renouncing her faith.

"We gave you three days to recant but you insist on not returning to Islam," Judge Abbas Khalifa told Ibrahim, according to AFP. "I sentence you to be hanged to death." But Ibrahim held firm to her beliefs. "I was never a Muslim," she answered. "I was raised a Christian from the start."

Ibrahim was raised in the Christian faith by her mother, an Orthodox Christian from Ethiopia. She is married to Daniel Wani, a Christian from southern Sudan who has U.S. citizenship, according to sources who spoke on condition of anonymity.

The cruel sentence drew condemnation from Amnesty International, the U.S. State Department and U.S. lawmakers. "The refusal of the government of Sudan to allow religious freedom was one of the reasons for Sudan's long civil war," Rep. Chris Smith, R-N.J., chairman of the House congressional panel that oversees U.S. policy in Africa, said in a statement. "The U.S. and the rest of the international community must demand Sudan reverse this sentence immediately."

Amnesty International called the sentence a "flagrant breach" of international human rights law and the U.S. State Department said it was "deeply disturbed" by the ruling, which will be appealed.

Khalifa refused to hear key testimony and ignored Sudan's constitutional provisions on freedom of worship and equality among citizens, according to Ibrahim's attorney Al-Shareef Ali al-Shareef Mohammed. "The judge has exceeded his mandate when he ruled that Meriam's marriage was void because her husband was out of her faith," Mohammed told The Associated Press. "He was thinking more of Islamic Shariah laws than of the country's laws and its constitution."

Ibrahim and Wani married in a formal ceremony in 2011 and have an 18-month-old son, Martin, who is with her in jail. The couple operate several businesses, including a farm, south of Khartoum, the country's capital. Wani fled to the United States as a child to escape the civil war in southern Sudan, but later returned. He is not permitted to have custody of the little boy, because the boy is considered Muslim and cannot be raised by a Christian man.

Sudan's penal code criminalizes the conversion of Muslims into other religions, which is punishable by death. Muslim women in Sudan are further prohibited from marrying non-Muslims, although Muslim men are permitted to marry outside their faith. Children, by law, must follow their father's religion.

Islamic Shariah laws were introduced in Sudan in the early 1980s under the rule of autocrat Jaafar Nimeiri, whose decision led to the resumption of an insurgency in the mostly animist and Christian south of Sudan. An earlier round of civil war lasted 17 years, ending in 1972. In 2011, the south seceded to become the world's newest nation, South Sudan.

Sudanese President Omar Bashir, an Islamist who seized power during a 1989 military coup, said his country will implement Islam more strictly now that the non-Muslim south is gone. A number of Sudanese have been convicted of apostasy in recent years, but they have all escaped execution by recanting their faith. Religious thinker and politician Mahmoud Mohammed Taha — a vocal critic of Nimeiri — was sentenced to death after his conviction of apostasy and was executed at the age of 76 in 1985.

Ibrahim's case first came to the attention of authorities in August, when ...

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