

Christians condemn death penalty for Sudanese doctor accused of apostasy

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(RNS) Sudanese Christians have condemned the sentencing of a Christian woman to death by hanging after she married a Christian man.

Meriam Yehya Ibrahim, 27, refused to recant her Christian faith as ordered by the court.

A doctor who is eight months pregnant and currently in detention with her 20-month-old son, Ibrahim was charged with adultery last year. Recently, the court added an apostasy charge when she declared her Christian faith in court.

"This is very disturbing," said Roman Catholic Auxiliary Bishop Daniel Adwok of Khartoum.

Born of a Muslim father and an Orthodox Christian mother, Ibrahim married Daniel Wani, a South Sudanese Christian with U.S. citizenship, in 2012.

Adwok said he could not understand why the sentence was issued when the 2005 Interim National Constitution allowed freedom of religion throughout the country.

"She had openly declared her Christian faith," Adwok said. "I don't think it's right to deny her that freedom."

But the Sudanese minister for information, Ahmed Bilal Osman, told Agence France-Presse that Sudan is not unique in its law against apostasy.

"In Saudi Arabia, in all the Muslim countries, it is not allowed at all for a Muslim to change his religion," he said.

The Rev. Mark Akec Cien, a South Sudan church leader, said he wasn't surprised, either. Sudan is governed by Islamic law and has always persecuted Christians, he

said.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide, a British religious freedom advocacy group, has called for the annulment of the sentence and the release of Ibrahim, while Amnesty International said adultery and apostasy should not be considered crimes.