

Yat Michael and Peter Yein Reith, pastors facing execution in Sudan, freed

by [Fredrick Nzwili](#) in the [September 2, 2015](#) issue

After an international outcry, Yat Michael and Peter Yein Reith, pastors who faced possible death sentences in Sudan, were set free following a court hearing August 5.

Yat and Reith, pastors in the South Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church, were on trial in Khartoum on criminal charges of undermining the constitutional system, espionage, promoting hatred among sects, breach of public peace, and offenses relating to insulting religious beliefs. The first two charges are punishable by the death penalty or life imprisonment.

“I am feeling free because I was in jail for many months; I have become like I’m born again,” said Yat in comments to Christian Solidarity Worldwide, the global anti-persecution group that announced the release.

More than 220,000 people had signed a petition by the American Center for Law and Justice, which sought their freedom. Yat, 49, was detained on December 14, 2014, at the end of the service at Bahri Evangelical Church in Khartoum. The South Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church sent Reith, 36, with a letter to the authorities to demand his release. Reith was arrested on January 11.

After the pastors were released, they still faced a travel ban preventing them from leaving Sudan, according to the American Center for Law and Justice.

[Philip Akway Obang, general secretary of the South Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church, told Presbyterian News Service that the pastors were doing well while their lawyers worked on removing the restriction. On August 19 the pastors left Sudan and were received in Juba, South Sudan, with a service of thanksgiving, Obang wrote. Obang said that he believes that advocacy efforts by Christians around the world and the U.S. embassy’s presence at the hearings contributed to the pastors’ release.

“This situation will make believers strong in faith,” Obang said. “Even though there are difficult times they know God is with them. When one of the believers, a servant of God, is arrested they will know that the gospel is reaching out.”

He called for respect for all of the religious groups in Sudan. “Muslims and Christians and people with no religion must live together in peace,” he said.

Obang also noted the high number of displaced people because of fighting in South Sudan, including many pastors. Reith runs an orphan center of the church in Bor, South Sudan.

Tut Kony, another pastor of the South Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church, told Presbyterian News Service that the kind of treatment Yat and Reith received is common.

“Almost all pastors have gone to jail under the government of Sudan,” he said. “We have been stoned and beaten. This is their habit to pull down the church. We are not surprised. This is the way they deal with the church.”]

Since South Sudan, which is largely Christian, gained independence in 2011, Christians in the Republic of Sudan have faced frequent arrests, harassment, and interrogation by intelligence agencies. Islamic law is strictly imposed in Sudan.

Earlier this summer ten Sudanese Christian women, ages 17 to 23, were detained for wearing trousers and miniskirts to attend a ceremony at the Evangelical Baptist Church. Police charged some of the women under Sudan’s 1991 Criminal Act, and some were fined.

“We continue to urge Sudan to uphold its constitutional guarantees for freedom of religion or belief and its responsibility to promote and protect this right under international law, in order to preserve Sudan’s pluralism and diversity,” said Mervyn Thomas, chief executive of CSW, in a statement. —Religion News Service; added sources

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