

Human rights group calls for the release of detained Sudanese pastors

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(RNS) Sudanese Christians and human rights groups are urging the government to produce two clerics, whose location has been unknown since their arrest in December.

Hassan Kodi, 49, secretary general of the Sudanese Church of Christ, and another pastor, Telal Ngosi, 44, were detained after attending a Christian conference in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in October.

The two represented the Sudanese Church of Christ at a meeting to discuss the plight of Christians in Sudan and South Sudan.

Both men are from the Nuba Mountains region of South Kordofan, a province with many Christians who often face forced conversion to Islam under pressure from the Sudanese government.

The Human Rights and Development Organization, an independent Sudanese rights group, said the pastors' whereabouts are unknown.

The organization said in a statement: "Their families and church authorities were prevented from visiting them. Both are at risk of torture."

Lawyers have also been denied access to the two. Kodi is allegedly suffering from a duodenal ulcer and there are fears the condition could worsen following the detention.

The organization is appealing to the government to disclose the location of the two, charge them or release them.

The Sudan Council of Churches has also written to the government requesting access to the men.

The latest arrests draw attention to what analysts say is an attempt to erase Christianity from Sudan.

In June 2014, Meriam Ibrahim, a Christian doctor accused of apostasy and sentenced to death, was released after international pressure. In August, pastors Peter Reith and Michael Yat were acquitted after they previously faced possible death sentences.