



19 May 2014 – A group of UN human rights experts Monday [expressed alarm](#) after Meriam Ibrahim, a Christian woman pregnant with her second child, was sentenced to death and 100 lashes for marrying a Christian man and refusing to renounce her faith. Her trial did not comply with basic fair trial and due process guarantees, said the experts.

“This outrageous conviction must be overturned and Ms. Ibrahim must be immediately released,” urged the UN experts. They also called upon the Government of Sudan to repeal all legislation that discriminates on the grounds of gender or religion, to protect the religious identity of minority groups and to embark on a comprehensive reform of the justice system in compliance with international standards.

Ms. Ibrahim, 27, born to a Muslim father and a Christian mother, was arrested in 2013 on the grounds of adultery by the Sudanese authorities for being viewed as a Muslim woman cohabitating with a Christian man, whom she married in 2012.

The UN human rights experts pointed out that the right to marry and found a family is a fundamental human right of both women and men. Furthermore, prosecution for adultery is contrary to international law as “the criminalization of sexual relations between consenting adults is a violation of their right to privacy under international human rights law,” said the

experts.

In February 2014, an additional charge was brought against her for the crime of apostasy, or publicly renouncing Islam – a faith she never professed. Ms. Ibrahim was given until her next hearing to convert to Islam. On 15 May 2014, the Public Order Court in El Haj Yousif Khartoum confirmed her death sentence for apostasy after she refused to renounce her faith.

Ms. Ibrahim is currently detained at Omdurman's Women Prison near Khartoum in harsh conditions with her 20 month-old son and will give birth to her second child in the coming month.

The UN experts expressed serious concern that "Ms. Ibrahim was convicted for exercising her right to freedom of religion and belief." They stated that "according to international law the death penalty may only be imposed for "the most serious crimes", if at all. Choosing and/or changing one's religion is not a crime at all; on the contrary, it is a basic human right."

They further emphasized the right of every person to "adopt, change or retain a religion of one's choice, and to manifest their religion in practice, observance and worship, as well as the right not to be subject to discrimination or coercion on religious grounds."

Sudan's population is predominantly Muslim, but there are Christian minority communities particularly in the southern region.

The experts also expressed serious concern that the capital punishment sentence did not comply with the most stringent due process and fair trial guarantees. They stressed that "the imposition and enforcement of the death penalty on pregnant women or recent mothers is inherently cruel and leads to a violation of the absolute prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment."

The UN experts noted that capital or corporal punishment can never be justified in the name of religion and condemned "all forms of violence that would impair the right to have or adopt a religion, including the use of threat of physical force or penal sanctions to compel believers or non-believers to renounce their religion or to convert."

Given the ongoing discrimination and inequalities faced by women, including inferior roles attributed to them by patriarchal and traditional attitudes, and power imbalances in their relations with men, maintaining flogging as a form of punishment, even when it applies to both women and men, means in practice that women disproportionately face this cruel punishment, in violation of their human rights to dignity, privacy and equality.

"There is a pressing need to address the pattern of discrimination, abuse and torture as well as the subjugation and denigration of women in the country," said the UN experts.

"We urge the Government of Sudan to put an end to these grave violations of women's human rights," they said.

