

Two pastors in Sudan face death penalty

by [Fredrick Nzwili](#) in the [June 24, 2015](#) issue

Two Christian pastors have been jailed and face a possible death sentence in Sudan.

Yat Michael and Peter Yein Reith, both ministers in the South Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church, have been charged with undermining the constitutional system and spying, offenses punishable by death or life imprisonment. The clerics are charged with waging a war against the state and assaulting religious belief.

“We know they have been arrested, but we don’t know where they are being detained,” said Kori Romla Koru, general secretary of the Sudan Council of Churches. “We are trying to find them.”

Yat, 49, was arrested last year at the end of the service at Bahri Evangelical Church in Khartoum, according to Presbyterian News Service and Christian Solidarity Worldwide, a charity that works on behalf of persecuted Christians.

The congregation had resisted the takeover of the church by a Muslim businessman, who had demolished part of the worship center. In December, police beat and arrested 38 Christians for worshipping in the church.

After Yat’s arrest, the South Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church sent Reith, 36, with a letter to the authorities to demand his release. He was arrested on January 11.

Human rights groups have expressed deep concern over the charges, warning that the two clerics could face torture.

“It is unacceptable that after enduring extended detentions without charge, the men now face extreme and unwarranted charges,” said Mervyn Thomas, CSW’s chief executive, said earlier this month.

Since the separation of Sudan and South Sudan in 2011, Sudan has forced out all foreign missionaries, raided churches, and arrested and interrogated Christians on grounds that they were connected to South Sudan.

Last year, a death penalty sentence slapped on a Sudanese doctor, Meriam Yahya Ibrahim, for refusing to renounce her Christian faith, stirred international outrage and heightened calls on the government to increase religious liberty. She was released a month later. —Religion News Service

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