



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on July 25, 2014

Meriam Ibrahim and Family Fly to Freedom, Heading to U.S.

Meriam Ibrahim, the Sudanese Christian woman who was condemned to death by an Islamic judge for refusing to renounce her faith, has been released by her Muslim captors. The 27-year-old Christian woman, her husband (a U.S. citizen), and their two children — one of whom Ibrahim delivered in a Sudanese prison — were flown on an Italian government jet to Rome on July 24, bringing to a close months of persecution and ongoing threats of execution by Sudanese authorities.



In late April Ibrahim, who was eight months pregnant and confined with her 20-month-old son in a Sudanese jail cell, was convicted by a Muslim court of apostasy for refusing to abandon her Christian faith for Islam, as well as of adultery for marrying a Christian man. Islam considers such relationships illicit, although Ibrahim had never practiced the Muslim faith and was raised by her mother as a Christian after her Muslim father abandoned the family.

Following her conviction, Ibrahim was given 15 days to recant her Christian faith and convert to Islam, but she refused, telling the judge, “I am a Christian, and I have never been a Muslim.” Her response earned her a sentence of death by hanging, as well as 100 lashes on the adultery charge — to be administered at some unspecified time following the birth of her baby.

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While given continued opportunity to save herself from execution, Ibrahim steadfastly refused to deny her Christian faith. According to one of her attorneys, Ibrahim told her husband during a rare visit that “if they want to execute me then they should go ahead and do it because I’m not going to change my faith. I refuse to change. I am not giving up Christianity just so that I can live.”

Ibrahim’s dire plight prompted several governments to appeal to Sudan on her behalf, including the Obama administration, which “strongly” condemned the sentence and urged Sudan “to meet its obligations under international human rights law. We call on the government of Sudan to respect Ms. [Ibrahim’s] right to freedom of religion.” Observers noted that the flaccid statement was not followed up by any substantive action on the part of the Obama administration.

Overall, however, international pressure appeared to pay off, as Sudan announced it had released Ibrahim on June 23. But the next day Ibrahim was again taken into custody, along with her husband and children, as the family attempted to board a jet in Khartoum to leave the country. The family’s future remained uncertain until the announcement that the four had boarded the Italian government jet and landed safely in Rome on July 24.

[Reuters News](#) reported that Ibrahim and her family were “accompanied on the plane by Italy’s vice minister for foreign affairs, Lapo Pistelli.” The Italian official told reporters that Italy had been in “constant dialogue” with Sudan in an effort to win Ibrahim’s freedom. According to Reuters, a senior



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Italian official said that the Sudanese government had approved of Ibrahim's release, and "did not prevent her departure."

Al-Sharief Ali, one of Ibrahim's attorneys, told reporters that "the Italians had the greatest influence on Sudan and were able to secure her release," emphasizing that Pistelli had negotiated the release.

According to Reuters, "Pistelli told reporters at the airport that the family was in good health and would stay in Italy for a few days before leaving for the United States."

[BBC](#) quoted another of Ibrahim's attorneys, Mohamed Mostafa Nour, as saying that Ibrahim's departure from Sudan was not without heartache. "She is unhappy to leave Sudan," the lawyer said. "She loves Sudan very much. It's the country she was born and grew up in." He added, however, that "her life is in danger so she feels she has to leave. Just two days ago a group called Hamza made a statement that they would kill her and everyone who helps her."

Following her arrival in Rome, Ibrahim met with Pope Francis, according to Vatican spokesman Father Federico Lombardi. "The Pope thanked her for her witness to faith," said Lombardi, explaining that the short meeting with the Pope was intended as a "sign of closeness and solidarity for all those who suffer for their faith."

Among the U.S. groups offering their congratulations on Ibrahim's release was the [Family Research Council](#) (FRC), which had earlier launched an online petition, signed by more than 53 million individuals, asking President Obama to grant Ibrahim's family safe haven in the United States. "We celebrate Meriam Ibrahim and her family's escape to freedom," said FRC president Tony Perkins in a statement. "It is our hope and prayer that Meriam and her family will now enjoy the liberty to practice their Christian faith without government interference or persecution."

Perkins noted that "Meriam's bold stand for Jesus Christ as she faced death is both an inspiration for Christians to be courageous, but also a reminder of the vigilance required to preserve and promote not just our First Freedom as Americans, but the basic human right of the freedom of religion."

The day before Ibrahim's release on July 24, Perkins testified before House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations, criticizing President Obama for not taking a more active role in securing Ibrahim's release. "While other governments have called attention to Meriam's situation, including the European Parliament passing a resolution and the British Government's Prime Minister speaking publicly, the U.S. government has been practically mute — even after multiple activist groups have initiated petitions with hundreds of thousands of signatures," said Perkins. "The U.S. government's disinterest in the plight of an American and his family is simply indefensible. Religious freedom is a fundamental, inherent, and international human right. It is a core American ideal, but its defense should not be limited to America."

Following Ibrahim's release, Perkins expressed his appreciation "to several members of Congress on both sides of the aisle who have worked to secure Meriam's freedom and facilitate her entry into the United States." Among those he named were Representatives Mark Meadows (R-N.C.), Chris Smith (R-N.J.), and House Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio), whom Perkins said "were very instrumental in Meriam's release."

In addition he applauded the efforts of Representatives Trent Franks (R-Ariz.) and Frank Wolf (R-Va.), along with Senators Roy Blunt (R-Mo.), Ted Cruz (R-Texas), and Mary Landrieu (D-La.), whom he said "were deeply involved in securing Meriam's freedom."



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Perkins added that “the ordeal of Meriam and her family underscores the need for the Obama administration to make the promotion of religious freedom a priority at the State Department rather than an afterthought. The reality is that there are thousands of Meriams looking toward America, hoping they are not forgotten and that someone will speak out on their behalf.”

Photo of Meriam Ibrahim, her daughter Maya, and Pope Francis



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