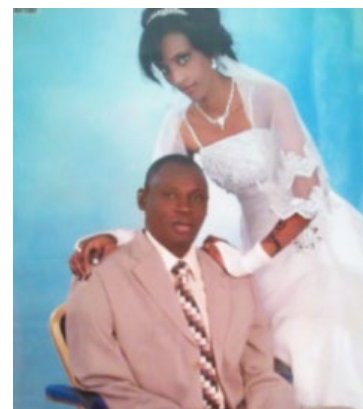


Today's Martyrs – Meriam Yahia Ibrahim Ishag

On June 27, 2014, the United States Embassy in Khartoum opened its doors to a young Sudanese-American family in need of asylum. Meriam Yahia Ibrahim Ishag, her husband Daniel Bicensio Wani, and their two children, Martin (aged 22 months) and Maya (aged 1 month), were shown their accommodations in the cramped building: they would be sleeping on the floor of the small library. This refuge must have been a great relief after their detention by the dreaded NISS secret police at the airport three days earlier as they attempted to flee the country.



A doctor was summoned and quickly allayed most of Meriam's concerns about Maya. Meriam had given birth to Maya with her legs shackled together and to the floor of the clinic in the Omdurman Federal Women's Prison. A medical professional herself, Meriam had been concerned that Maya's legs had been injured due to her inability to properly give birth, but they now agreed that Maya most likely would be fine.

Why was Meriam in prison? She was awaiting her execution. Her crime? She was a Christian.

This tale of horrors began in September 2013, as Daniel Wani was preparing to move his family to his residence in Manchester, New Hampshire. Daniel was born in what is now South Sudan and overcame muscular dystrophy to become a biochemist and a naturalized U.S. citizen. Married in December 2011, their son Martin was born in late 2012 and Meriam was two months' pregnant with Maya when the accusation was made that she was an apostate from Islam.

Meriam Yahia Ibrahim, as it turns out, had a Christian mother and a Muslim father. Her father abandoned the family when she was very young. Her mother had her baptized and raised in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. She has no memory of any other faith and certainly never voluntarily "left" Islam. Under Islamic law, otherwise known as the sharia, none of that mattered. Her father was Muslim, therefore she was Muslim. Because she married Daniel, a Latin-rite [Roman] Catholic who did not convert to Islam, she was guilty of apostasy, which is punished with death, and their marriage was illegal. Because she and Daniel were illegally married and became the parents of Martin and Maya she was guilty of adultery, which is punished with 100 lashes. Daniel was also deemed guilty of proselytizing a Muslim for having married her.

Both Meriam and Daniel were arrested in February 2014, but the charges against Daniel were soon dropped. However, Martin was incarcerated with his mother in prison, since under sharia Daniel could not have parental custody. Daniel appealed for help to the U.S. Embassy, since Martin held U.S. citizenship under U.S. law, but he

was told that he would have to prove parentage with a DNA test before the Embassy would assist him, a demand that under the circumstances was impossible to fulfill. Meriam was shackled to a wall with swollen legs, denied pre-natal medical care, taunted that her husband was not a man because he used a wheelchair, and beaten.

Meriam's trial was held in May 2014. During the trial she faced the judge and defiantly told him "I was born a Christian and I will die a Christian". On May 11 she was found guilty of all charges. On May 14 the judge imposed his sentence: "We gave you three days to recant, but you insist on not returning to Islam - I sentence you to be hanged".

Under sharia the sentence had to be deferred until Maya was born and weaned. This gave ordinary American citizens time to demand that Congress and the State Department act to save the family. Maya was born on May 27, 2014 under "horrific" conditions, and on June 23 the family was brought into court, the sentence was reversed, the charges were dropped, and they were set free. The court gave no explanation for its decision.

The U.S. Embassy then moved to expedite the family's exit from Sudan. They arrived at the airport the day after they were freed, only to be detained for 'national security reasons' by 40 NISS secret agents. The family's attorneys could do nothing because there is no judicial oversight of the NISS and so no way their detention could be challenged. The next day Meriam was charged with fraud, which carried a 7 year sentence. Why? The visa given her by the U.S. Embassy carried the Christian name given her by her mother and not the Muslim name given her by her father.

Two days later the family was released and brought to the U.S. Embassy for asylum. In the meantime the Embassy worked to dismiss the fraud charge and to secure their freedom. The Vatican and the Italian governments joined in these negotiations, and so Meriam and her family were allowed to leave the country. They arrived in Rome on July 24, 2014. The many prayers said for them around the world had been answered.

Please say more prayers for their full recovery from this ordeal, and for all the other nameless Christians in Sudan. In a September 15, 2014 television interview Meriam asked for exactly that, and added "I had my trust in God. My faith was the only weapon that I had in these confrontations with Imams and Muslim scholars, because that's what I believed...It's my right to follow the religion of my choice. I'm not the only one suffering from this problem. There are many Meriams in Sudan and throughout the world. It's not just me, I'm not the only one...Faith means life. If you don't have faith, you're not alive".

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