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Religious liberty denied

by Pat Perriello

NCR Today

Let me bring to your attention the plight of Rudwan Dawod, a Sudanese Muslim. The cited article is taken from the website of Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good. Dawod is currently in prison on charges of terrorism that could lead to his death. His major crime appears to be his interest in working with his Catholic countrymen to rebuild the Catholic Cathedral in South Sudan.

Three thoughts come to mind.

First, with the verdict in his trial expected as early as Aug. 13, efforts to secure his release are critical.

Second, the obvious lack of religious liberty in the Darfur region of Sudan stands in stark contrast to whatever the Catholic bishops are calling a lack of religious liberty in the United States.

Finally, how inspiring it is to see leaders from various faiths and no faiths finding common cause in seeking positive outcomes for all people.

Here are excerpts from an article Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good sent out in its email newsletter. The article is by the Rev. Tom Pritchard, an Episcopalian priest, one of the founders of Sudan Sunrise; and Dr. John Zogby, a Senior Fellow at Catholic University's Institute for Policy research and Catholic Studies. For more information, go to www.sudansunrise.org and www.FreeRudwan.org.

Rudwan Dawod, a Muslim from the Darfur region of Sudan and non-violent activist, is jailed in Khartoum on charges of terrorism awaiting a verdict on August 13. If convicted, Dawod could be sentenced to death. Dawod is a project director for the Washington, DC-based charity Sudan Sunrise, leading an initiative of Sudanese Muslims planning to rebuild the Catholic Cathedral in Torit, South Sudan.

Since the independence of South Sudan, on July 9, 2011, the northern Sudanese regime of Omar al Bashir has been increasingly belligerent towards Sudan's Christian minority. In April three churches in Khartoum were burned by a mob as police and security officials looked on in tacit approval. Dawod, a Sudanese citizen married to an American and living in Springfield, Oregon, was grieved by the news of the burning of churches. He set his sights on rebuilding a church with Sudan Sunrise as a symbol for Sudanese Muslims who stand for peace.

Passing through the Washington area on his way to Sudan, Dawod met with Imam Mohamed Magid, the President of the Islamic Society for North American, who is Sudanese by birth, who wholeheartedly endorsed the project. (See, www.sudansunrise.org/project/building-reconciliation-torit).

Dawod met with Bishop Johnson Akio in Torit, South Sudan to present his vision. Bishop Akio enthusiastically responded, proposing that the best symbol for peace would be to rebuild the Cathedral in Torit. ?

Prior to meeting Bishop Akio, Dawod estimated that he had 200 volunteers. That number grew when Dawod presented his vision to the leaders of the mosque in Torit, when an elderly Imam recounted how the mosque was built in 1941 with help from Christians who contributed financially and with volunteer labor.

Following their meeting, Bishop Akio traveled to the Vatican, where he spoke about the initiative on Vatican Radio. Dawod proceeded to present the vision to Muslim leaders in South Sudan, and South Sudan government officials, and to make it public by announcing it on radio and through Southern Sudanese newspapers. The initiative was enthusiastically received in the South by Muslims, Christians and by the government.

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