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Christopher H. Smith (R-NJ), Chairman

Testimony on The Troubling Case of Mariam Ibrahim

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Ten years ago yesterday, the United States Congress determined that the violence that plagued the Darfur region of Sudan is a genocide perpetrated by the country's own government. The brutal Janjaweed militia recruited, armed and financed by the government of Sudan rode through the villages terrorizing civilians, raping women, burning homes and markets and destroying the livelihood of a great number of communities. That same tyrannical government is the government that is persecuting Mariam Ibrahim and sentenced her to death by hanging because of her religious convictions. Across the country, the government of Sudan is the main perpetrator and culprit in the violence visited on millions of Sudanese who this government considers enemies for no other reason than being different than the image it sponsors. This government flaunts a brand of Islam and promotes a racial identity that is exclusive and divisive and is met with wide rejection and resistance among the majority of the Sudanese people.

According to credible reports, Mariam Ibrahim was born to a Muslim father and a Christian mother, and she chose to be a Christian. In any democratic society that respects human rights, Mariam would not be considered a criminal because she would be granted the right to choose her own religion. The government of Sudan, however, not only ignores its citizens' human rights, it disrespects its own constitution and the laws drawn from it. According to the Sudanese Interim National Constitution of 2005, "every person shall have the right to the freedom of religious creed and worship." In spite of this, the practice of the government of Sudan is all but adhering to its contract with the Sudanese people.

Shortly after the secession of South Sudan from the mother country became inevitable, President Bashir declared in Al-Gadarif in eastern Sudan in 2010 that Sudan would become a country "with no racial or religious diversity." Successive events that took place thereafter proved that his statement was not a slip of the tongue but a government policy that spares no one that opposes it. The issue of racial diversity was dealt with by continuing the raging wars in the periphery that, in addition to Darfur, witnessed unprecedented violence in the Nuba Mountains and South Blue Nile in addition to callously dealing with dissent in the urban centers by killing students in cold blood and committing widely practiced rape and torture. The

violence has led to hundreds of thousands displaced in addition to refugees that have fled to the neighboring countries, including the restive South Sudan. Food is used as a weapon of war, and the fate of close to a million Muslims, Christians and practitioners of indigenous religions and other faiths is in jeopardy.

The genocidal regime in Khartoum was not satisfied with the social engineering that it ushered in to distort the ethnic composition of the country, but it coupled that with a no less lethal policy of religious intolerance. In April of 2012, an old church in the outskirts of Khartoum was burned down to the ground by a mob of supporters of an Islamic cleric, who is a member of the government appointed Islamic *Ulama* Council. In addition, many Sudanese Christians complain about discrimination in getting jobs or in the workplace, when they are employed, in addition to a general atmosphere of intimidation and intolerance. In academia, staunch fundamentalists were appointed to the faculty of the universities and devised syllabi to indoctrinate the students and they banned all opposing activities in the schools. Furthermore, the State of Khartoum issued a decree banning all building permits for new churches and Christian schools claiming that the capacity of the existing churches and schools is more than enough to serve the Christian minority of 3% of the population. This figure was not supported by a census or any credible statistics.

In the areas of the Nuba Mountains and South Blue Nile, mosques, as well as churches and the limited number of hospitals, are subject to indiscriminate bombing that is meant to scare civilians and drive them into the horrors of displacement. The government authorities and the security apparatus are used to harass peoples of different faiths other than Islam through intimidation and terror. The case of Mariam Ibrahim has backfired by making citizens more aware of the extent of the callous behavior that their government is willing to reach in order to achieve its objective of remaining in power at any cost. Her case is also serving as a wake-up call to all peace-loving nations that this regime should be dealt with in a manner that will force it to alter its behavior.

In conclusion, I respectfully ask this honorable institution, which represents the American people, to support the moderate Sudanese opposition that is working diligently for democratization and the respect for human rights. The Sudanese Muslims, Christians and practitioners of other faiths deserve to live in peace among themselves and with other fellow human beings. History will look kindly at those who help them live in dignity and with the most sacred value of all, freedom.