

Girl in Uganda Loses Use of Legs after Leaving Islam for Christ

11 AUG- Nairobi, Kenya - A 14-year-old girl in western Uganda is still unable to walk 10 months after her father tortured her for leaving Islam and putting her faith in Christ, according to area Christians.

Susan Ithungu of Isango village, Kasese district, has been hospitalized at Kagando Hospital since October 2010 after neighbors with police help rescued her from her father, Beya Baluku. He was arrested shortly afterward but quickly released, sources said.

Susan and her younger brother, Mbusa Baluku, lived alone with their father after he divorced their mother. In March 2010 an evangelist from Bwera Full Gospel Church spoke at Susan's school, and she decided to trust Christ for her salvation.

"I heard the message of Christ's great love of him dying for us to get everlasting peace, and there and then I decided to believe in Christ," she said from her hospital bed. "After a month, news reached my father that I had converted to Christianity, and that was the beginning of my troubles with him. Our father warned us not to attend church or listen to the gospel message. He even threatened us with a sharp knife that he was ready to kill us in broad daylight in case we converted to Christianity."

Pastor Joseph Baluku of Bwera Full Gospel Church in Kasese said neighbors took her to the government hospital about 45 kilometers (28 miles) from Kasese town after she was freed.

"He locked her up in a room of the semi-permanent house for six months without seeing sunlight," the pastor said. "The younger brother was warned not to tell anyone that Susan was locked up in a room and was not given any food."

Young Mbusa said that when their father was away, he roasted bananas for his sister.

"I also dug a hole under the door, where I could pour water through," he said. "My sister could drink the water using her tongue. But most days she could only feed on mud."

A nearby resident who requested anonymity said neighbors became concerned after not seeing her for several months.

"Her brother then disclosed to us that Susan was locked up in one of the rooms in the house," the area resident said. "We then reported the case to the Harukungu local council and then to the Bwera police station. The police went to the house and broke the door."

Susan was immediately taken to the provincial government hospital about 17 kilometers (11 miles) away near Bwera town, where Pastor Baluku visited her.

"The miserable young Susan was bony, very weak, and not able to talk or walk," said the pastor. "Her hair had turned yellow, she had long fingernails and sunken eyes, and she looked very slim, less than 20 kilograms [44 pounds]."

Members of the Full Gospel Church in Bwera prayed for her and visited her in the hospital, which like many government-subsidized hospitals in the region does not customarily bill until the patient is discharged, and at rates well below those of private hospitals. It is unknown

when Susan will be released, but Pastor Baluku said area residents and church members will try to gather funds for medical costs incurred.

The pastor said billing from such government hospitals can often be deferred until enough money is raised.

“It could be a challenge, but we will try to do our best,” he said.

“By God’s grace Susan is still alive,” he said after a visit last week. “Though she can’t walk, she can now talk. She is still feeding on soft foods. The great news is that Susan is still strong in the Lord Jesus Christ. She needs prayers and support, so that she can resume her education soon.”