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# **Temarapport**

## **Sudan Marriage for the Eritrean and Ethiopian Diaspora in Khartoum**



Khartoum, Sudan

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This report was written by the Country of Origin Information Unit at the Swedish Migration Board. All the information provided has been researched, evaluated and processed with the utmost care within a limited time span. The report does not pretend to be exhaustive. Neither is this document conclusive as to the merit of any individual claim in an alien's case. The information in the report does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the authority and makes no political statement whatsoever.

## 1. Background

On the 12 and 13 May 2010, the Swedish Migration Board (now Swedish Migration Agency) visited the Eritrean Orthodox Church, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church St. Peter and Paul in Khartoum to obtain information about the process used by churches to marry refugees. Interviews were also conducted with staff from UNHCR in Khartoum. The information below was compiled during the visits and interviews, and can be contradictory.

The information collected in May 2010 has in parts been revised. The new information is indicated with footnotes.

## 2. The Eritrean Orthodox Church in Khartoum

There is only one Eritrean Orthodox church in Khartoum, St. Michael and Abune Aregawi. Address: Al Taif Street, Al Nekil block 22.<sup>1</sup>

### 2.1. Confirming identity

The persons to be married are required to fill in an application form and submit to the church together with copies of identification documents such as passports, or national identification cards, and documents showing their marital status i.e. that both parties are single. Sudanese and UNHCR refugee cards are accepted, including refugee cards issued in eastern Sudan. The Sudanese refugee cards are issued by Commissioner for Refugees (COR).<sup>2</sup> If a person who is living in Sudan cannot provide these documents, he/she should be known to the church or three witnesses can verify his/her identity and marital status. The three witnesses need to produce identification documents for themselves.<sup>3</sup>

A foreigner who is not living in Khartoum and wants to get married has to show a copy of his/her passport in order to get married. An Ethiopian passport or identification card is also accepted.

Weddings at the Eritrean church are conducted regardless citizenship as long as the couple can identify themselves same as described above. Regarding religion, at least one of the persons getting married should be an Orthodox Christian and member of the church. The person can verify his/her religion by three witnesses. If the other person who is not an Orthodox Christian is willing to convert, the church baptizes him/her before the marriage in order to convert.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Embassy of Sweden in Khartoum, e-mail 2015-06-06

<sup>2</sup> COR is the Sudanese authority for registration and assessment of asylum seekers. COR issues identification cards for persons who have been assessed to have refugee status in Sudan.

<sup>3</sup> Embassy of Sweden in Khartoum, e-mail 2015-06-06

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

Remarriages are accepted in the Eritrean Orthodox Church.<sup>5</sup>

## **2.2. Proceedings before marriage**

The couple has to fill in the application form and submit supporting documents if available. The church will then post their names and photos on the notice board outside the church for a period of one month. If no one objects to the marriage within that month, the church conducts the wedding.<sup>6</sup>

## **2.3. Marriage ceremony**

Marriages, both new marriages and remarriages, are conducted every day of the week, except Fridays and Sundays, at the church. This has been the case since the summer of 2012. The marriage ceremony is conducted in the church office or at the main hall of the church. The priest prays when he gives the holy oil (only for first marriages) and blesses the rings. After the couple exchanges rings they say their vows (different for first marriages and re-marriages).<sup>7</sup>

A marriage ceremony requires three witnesses. The three witnesses' names should be on the marriage certificate. The witnesses are from the congregation and are known by the person officiating the wedding and the congregation.

It is up to the family or the bridal couple to make a decision about dowry and not the church. The church has no opinion about if it should be paid or not.

Marriage between cousins or second cousins is not allowed. Marriage between close relatives is not allowed at all. If the church suspects that a couple is related, for example they share similar names, a comprehensive assessment is done by the church to ensure that they are not closely related.

The fee for marriage for those living outside of Sudan is currently 525 SDG (Sudanese pounds) and the fee for those living in Sudan is 425 SDG.<sup>8</sup>

## **2.4. Marriage certificate**

Marriage certificates are issued and archived at the church. The church keeps all names and serial numbers of the weddings conducted at the church. The Embassy of Sweden can refer to the church, as the church keeps

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<sup>5</sup> Embassy of Sweden in Khartoum, e-mail

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

archives, to verify a marriage. A marriage can be verified by the serial number, church's stamp and the priest's personal stamp with his name, currently Zerezghi Gebremariam (aka Father Menkir). Thus, marriage certificates are currently issued by Zerezghi Gebremariam.<sup>9</sup>

### **3. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church in Khartoum**

There is only one Ethiopian Orthodox Church in Khartoum, Medhanie Alem Ethiopian Orthodox Church, located in Khartoum 2.<sup>10</sup>

#### **3.1. Confirming identity**

Before the wedding, the bridal couple must show documents to confirm their identities. The church accepts national passports, including Eritrean passports, national identification cards and also refugee cards issued by COR. If the couple does not have any documents to prove their identities, the church can verify an Ethiopian citizen through the Embassy of Ethiopia in Khartoum.

#### **3.2. Proceedings before marriage**

The couple must be Orthodox Christian to be married in the church. This is confirmed through an interview. The couple has to answer questions about their backgrounds and about their religion. The wedding is announced on a notice board during a period of at least one week (and up to two years). It provides an opportunity for the community to object to the marriage before the ceremony is performed. Lifos notes that it is unclear if the church uses a notice board as described above.

The couple is also required to submit documentation to confirm their marital status i.e. that they are both single. The church accepts a "single status" document issued by the Embassy of Eritrea in Khartoum and other similar foreign documents, for example an extract from the Swedish civic registration "personbevis". Couples staying in Khartoum also have the possibility to confirm their marital status through six witnesses, three for the bride and three for the groom. Death certificate or record from a court is required for someone who was previously married.<sup>11</sup>

The church marries anyone who is an Orthodox Christian regardless country of origin.

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<sup>9</sup> Embassy of Sweden in Khartoum, e-mail

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Embassy of Sweden in Khartoum, *Äktenskap i de ortodoxa kyrkorna i Khartoum*, 2012-12-17

### **3.3. Marriage ceremony**

Witnesses are required to validate the marriage. The number of witnesses required has not been confirmed. According to the church, the whole family usually attends the wedding but if the family is not present, the couple can marry anyway.

Weddings are conducted in the church every day of the week, except on Fridays and during religious holidays and the fasting period. This has been the case for several years. The wedding ceremony is the same for first marriages and remarriages. Weddings take place on Sundays, but no marriage certificates are issued on Sundays. Couples who are married on a Sunday have to collect their marriage certificate on a different day.<sup>12</sup>

In December 2012, a marriage certificate was 300 SDG. The wedding ceremony and marriage certificate cost 400 SGD. If both the bride and the groom are staying in Sudan, the couple only has to pay 231 SDG.<sup>13</sup>

### **3.4. Marriage certificate**

The church registers all marriages using a registration number. It is possible to ask the church to verify a marriage officiated by them. The registration number must be included in the request.

The marriage certificate is currently signed by Reu Gereselassie Yeresau. The person who signs marriage certificates changes at regular intervals.

## **4. The Catholic Church St. Peter and Paul in Khartoum**

Address: Street 37, Amarat, Khartoum

### **4.1. Proceedings before marriage**

One month before the marriage, the bridal couple is requested to show birth certificates and proof of confirmation to the church. In St. Peter and Paul's church, information is collected about who conducted the confirmation and where the confirmation took place. The bridal couple does not have to show any documents to prove their identity. Their marital status, i.e. that the two persons who intend to marry are unmarried, can be verified through an affidavit from relatives. For example, the couple's parents can confirm their marital status by fax or telephone if they are out of the country. If the parents are dead or have disappeared, the relatives can confirm marital status. Unlike the parents, the relatives have to be present to confirm marital status.

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<sup>12</sup> Embassy of Sweden in Khartoum, *Äktenskap i de ortodoxa kyrkorna i Khartoum*

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

A person who is an Orthodox Christian can be married in the church if the future spouse is Catholic. The Orthodox Church can give their permission to a Catholic priest to marry a person who is an Orthodox Christian but this rarely happens. Father Guido Ganji (who was interviewed) has never experienced this.

Divorced persons cannot get married without exemption from the Pope. It can take years to get an annulment. Widows and widowers can get married.

Marriage between cousins or second cousins is not allowed.

#### **4.2. Marriage ceremony**

Four witnesses are required, two from the bride and groom respectively, to make the marriage valid. The witnesses should have been married in the Catholic Church.

The church does not have a fee for marriage, but the bridal couple has to pay a small amount for electricity and other expenses.

#### **4.3. Marriage certificate**

A marriage certificate will be issued in connection with the marriage. In May 2010, it was stated that Father Guido Ganji had signed the marriage certificates for the last four years. Father Guido Ganji's full name is Guido Ganji Bakhit.

The marriage certificates are registered in the church register. A marriage certificate can be verified by the church if the registration number is provided. The number on the marriage certificate corresponds with the number of the book and the serial number.

#### **4.4. Other Catholic churches in Khartoum**

All Catholic churches in Khartoum follow the same routine with regard to marriages. The Catholic churches in Khartoum are the following:

St. Peter and Paul  
St. Matthew Cathedral  
Uganda Martas  
St. Joseph Parish  
St. Charles Luanga  
Masalma  
Holy Spirit Bana  
St. Stephen  
St. Kisito  
St. Bakhita

Secret Heart  
Mediatrix Parish Khartoum North  
Holy Family

There are many Eritreans and Ethiopians in St. Peter and Paul, but in general it is not possible to say that one church hosts a specific nationality. For example Uganda Martas is only a name and does not indicate that it is mostly Ugandans who attend.

UNHCR stated that it is not unusual for Eritreans and Ethiopians who are Orthodox Christians and in need of a marriage certificate to turn to St. Peter and Paul Catholic Church. This is because the cost of obtaining a marriage certificate in the Orthodox Churches is often beyond reach.

## **5. Verification of marriages**

All three churches, the Eritrean Christian Orthodox Church, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church St. Peter and Paul stated that the Swedish Migration Agency has the possibility to contact them to verify marriages.

The Swedish Migration Agency can also ask persons married in Khartoum to verify their marriage at a Sudanese court to ensure the authenticity of the marriage. The process can take about a week. Identification documents are required and there is a fee to pay. A marriage certificate verified by the court will have a stamp.

A marriage conducted in Sudan has to be registered at the Sudanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs to be valid abroad.

In October 2015, the Embassy of Sweden in Khartoum provided Lifos with the following information: Generally the marriage conducted at the Eritrean and Ethiopian Churches is recognised by the Sudanese authorities. According to the information collected from the authorities by the Embassy of Sweden in Khartoum, the marriage certificates issued by the churches must go through some authorities to be registered and recognised in Sudan:

Step 1: The Department of Non-Muslims Affaires at the Ministry of Welfare Affaires approves the marriage and sends an approval letter to the Court NMMA (Non-Muslim Marriage Act).

Step 2: The court's role is basically to verify the marriage certificates (verifying the church signature and the priest's personal stamp). The Court keeps archives of the certificates and puts a stamp on the original marriage certificate. Applications sent directly to the court are rejected as they must first get a permission from the Department of the Non-Muslim Affaires. The Court also conducts civil marriages and/or issues a civil Marriage Certificate upon request.

Step 3: The Judiciary of Sudan ‘double checks’ the marriage certificate and registers the marriage. The Judiciary keeps the archives with copy of the marriage certificate, copy of passport or ID card of the applicants and registers the certificate with a serial number. The Judiciary of Sudan puts a stamp on the original as to prove the marriage has legal binding in Sudan. The marriages and the churches (Medhani Alem Ethiopian Orthodox Church and St. Michael and Abune Aregawi Eritrean Orthodox Churches) are recognised by the Judiciary of Sudan.

Step 4: Finally, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs puts a stamp on the Original Marriage certificate following the Judiciary of Sudan. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs do not keep archives or register the certificates at all.

Marriages performed by these churches are invalid in Sudan if this procedure is not followed ; all four steps need to be fulfilled.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Embassy of Sweden in Khartoum, e-mail 2015-10-14 and 2015-10-15

## 6. References

### Unpublished sources

The Eritrean Orthodox Church in Khartoum, Sudan, visit May 2010

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church in Khartoum, Sudan, visit May 2010

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UNHCR, Khartoum, Sudan, interview May 2010

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Embassy of Sweden in Khartoum, *Äktenskap i de ortodoxa kyrkorna i Khartoum*, 2012-12-17