



Persecution & Prayer Alert

The Voice of the Martyrs Canada
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*"Persecution is simply the clash between
two irreconcilable value-systems."*

~ John Stott

PAKISTAN: Mixed Outcomes for Christians Accused of Blasphemy

Sources: The News International, India Today, Morning Star News, Kross Konnection, AsiaNews, USCIRF

In February 2018, 17-year-old Patras Masih allegedly shared content on social media which some found to be blasphemous. In the wake of this post, riots broke out in his neighbourhood of Lahore. Patras was taken into custody and authorities also tortured his cousin Sajid, who jumped from a window to escape, resulting in serious injuries.

Patras has been in custody since his arrest without being given a trial. His lawyer, Aneeqa Maria, attributes the delays to the involvement of an Islamic group that has called for the young Christian's death. When Aneeqa asked the Lahore High Court about bail, the judge refused to listen, directing her to go to the Supreme Court instead. "There's a clear hatred toward Patras that I fail to comprehend," she states.

A similar fate awaits Shagufta Kiran, who was arrested in July 2021 for forwarding a message in a WhatsApp group chat. After news of the charges spread, her husband and two teenaged daughters were forced to flee their home in Islamabad. Shagufta was charged under Pakistan's blasphemy laws but has yet to go to trial. The most recent hearing date was postponed because the complainants' lawyer failed to attend.

Recent events for another believer, Stephen Masih, have been more positive after he spent more than three years in prison. In March 2019, the Christian man was arrested on accusations of blasphemy after an argument with a neighbour. As commonly happens in Pakistan, the personal dispute led to false accusations as retribution. His family was forced to flee after a mob set their home ablaze.

Stephen suffers from a mental disability, and the Punjab Institute of Mental Health reported in July 2021 that he was unfit to stand trial. In support, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights joined in the call for his release last October. Finally, Stephen was granted bail on May 31st and released from prison on June 10th.

These are three of the many Pakistani Christians who have been falsely imprisoned, often for years, due to accusations of blasphemy. For more accounts of persecution in Pakistan, including ways you can pray for fellow believers in Christ, go to www.vomcanada.com/pakistan.htm.

Praise God for the release of Stephen after his lengthy imprisonment. Pray for his safety in the face of potential mob violence. May he be safely reunited with his family and receive the help he needs. Pray that the Lord will also provide greatly needed encouragement and fortitude to Shagufta and Patras as they continue to endure imprisonment. May the court delays be resolved in both of these cases, and may the judges receive wisdom so they can effectively ensure justice for these followers of Jesus. Furthermore, please pray for the emotional, spiritual and physical strength of all other believers presently being detained in Pakistan, as well as those eagerly awaiting the hopeful release of their imprisoned loved ones.

VIETNAM: New Restrictions Proposed

Sources: World Evangelical Alliance, Morning Star News

According to Christian leaders in Vietnam, new religion-related decrees are set to be introduced in the country which would further restrict religious freedoms. The proposed ordinances are apparently intended to resolve shortcomings in previous guidelines. However, as one Vietnamese analyst explained, "If you start with something which is very bad at its core, any additions to it can only be bad too.... Tinkering with the margins will not change the rotten core."

One example of the concerning proposals would be a requirement to report church activities for approval a year in advance. Any change in church staffing or office address would need to be reported immediately. Another requirement would be that any clergy training must include a study of the country's revolutionary history. Failure to do so could result in the closure of the training institution.

While the regulations are only at the draft stage, further restrictions by the repressive Communist government would merely compound the persecution being experienced by Christians in the country. To read further about the difficulties encountered by Vietnamese believers, go to www.vomcanada.com/vietnam.htm.

Pray that as Vietnam's governing leaders discuss the proposed legislative changes, they will take into consideration the need to uphold the rights of all Vietnamese citizens – including those of the Christian faith. May believers who are presently facing oppressive actions from the country's officials experience God's grace, wisdom and guidance as they navigate how to effectively respond. In spite of this persecution, ask the Lord to bless the ongoing ministry of the Gospel so it will thrive and grow among the people of this Southeast Asian land, also reaching those who are desperately in need of His eternal salvation.

ERITREA: Twenty Years of Oppression

Sources: Open Doors, Release International, Church in Chains

In May 2002, the Eritrean government closed all unregistered churches and established legislation outlawing any religious community except for Sunni Islam, Eritrean Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism and Lutheranism. Government oppression and control was strongly instituted, even within these approved religious groups.

Today, more than 20 years after these laws were put into place, the persecution continues in this country which has been referred to as the "North Korea of Africa." Dr. Berhane Asmelash states that "Eritrea is like a giant prison...the country is filled with jails." The treatments experienced by those detained in Eritrean prisons have been notoriously cruel, and they include the frequent use of metal shipping containers to hold these prisoners who are forced to sleep on bare floors in the extreme heat and cold of the desert. To view a recent video interview with Dr. Asmelash, go to www.vomcanada.com/video/asmelash.

There are currently an estimated 220 Christian prisoners in Eritrea at last report. Most are believed to be Pentecostal or Evangelical, and many of them have been detained indefinitely – held for years without charges. The United Nations estimates that half a million people have fled the country thus far. Yet, despite the tyranny facing those who remain in Eritrea, Christianity continues to grow. For more information on the persecution of Eritrea's Christians, along with stories of those needing your prayers, go to www.vomcanada.com/eritrea.htm.

Prayerfully uphold all Christians throughout Eritrea who are currently being detained, as well as others residing in this repressive country who must worship God in secrecy. May His Holy Spirit work mightily within the hearts of the nation's authorities, leading them to repentance and the saving knowledge of His Son, Jesus Christ. Additionally, remember those of our Christian family who have been forced to leave their homeland of Eritrea and are now challenged to live out their faith in other countries consisting of cultures that are frequently very different from their own.

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