

***"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood,  
but against the rulers, against the authorities, against  
the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against  
the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."***

~ Ephesians 6:12 ESV

### **PAKISTAN: Kidnapped Girl Returns to Family**

Sources: Church in Chains, Morning Star News, UCA News

On Saturday, December 5th, 2020, police in Faisalabad, Pakistan, found 12-year-old Farah Shaheen chained in the home of Khizar Hayat. Five months earlier, Khizar had kidnapped her, taken her to the local mosque to be converted to Islam, and then forced her to marry him. According to police, the dark marks on her ankles indicated that she was chained for most of her time in captivity.



Farah recuperating from her injuries.  
Photo: Morning Star News

The family became concerned when Farah testified on January 23rd that she had converted and wed of her own free will. However, the lawyer representing Farah's family believes that her testimony

was the result of being pressured by the staff of the shelter where she was staying after the rescue. Even though marriage is illegal at her age, and would constitute statutory rape, in many cases a falsified conversion certificate can influence the courts to pardon the involved kidnapers.

Despite any pressure placed on her, Farah finally came to the decision that she wanted to return to her family. In a February 16th court ruling, custody was given to her father, Asif Masih. The court further ruled that since the marriage was not legally registered, she could not be kept at the shelter indefinitely. Subsequently, Farah was returned to her family. Asif proclaimed, "She is deeply traumatized and fearful, but my child is very happy to be back in her family."

Though the kidnapper was taken into custody, he was released on bail. At last report, Khizar has not been formally charged for his crimes. As a result, Farah's safety remains a concern.

A bill has been proposed to the Pakistani government to help prevent forced religious conversions. This new law would require verification of conversion, including an interview. While the proposal is endorsed by many church leaders, similar bills have been used in other countries to prevent legitimate religious conversions. For more on the persecution facing Christians in Pakistan, go to our [country report](#).

***Please pray for the emotional healing of Farah, as well as her family. May God's loving presence fill their hearts with an overwhelming sense of peace, comfort and even joy as they recover from the traumatic event. Pray that Khizar will be held accountable for his actions and experience a dramatic transformation in his life. Ask God to also intervene in the government's upcoming decisions so that new laws will be passed to prevent other girls in Pakistan from experiencing similar incidences, and to ensure the protection of citizens who have legitimately converted to Christianity from Muslim backgrounds.***

## SUDAN: Christian Leader Beaten for Protesting Church Burning

Sources: Morning Star News, International Christian Concern



Photo: Shutterstock/Claudiovidri

The ninth church building within the past two years was set ablaze in Sudan on January 3rd, 2021. In the weeks leading up to the recent arson attack, hate messages against the Sudanese Church of Christ (SCOC) in the rural Tambul area of Al Jazirah state were circulating on social media, calling for action against Christians. Pastor Jubrial Tutu describes the incident as direct persecution. According to Rev. Kuwa Shamal, head of the SCOC, the attackers "targeted the church because they do not want to see any sign of the cross in the area."

Osama Saeed Kodi, chairman of the Christian Youth Union for Al Jazirah state, is one of the Christian leaders who has spoken out against the violence. On February 19th, Osama was seized by masked men believed to be national security personnel. After he was handcuffed and blindfolded, the perpetrators beat him and announced, "We will kill you if you continue with Christian activities in Tambul." Osama was released after a few hours, and presently is recovering from the injuries he sustained during captivity.

After military leaders deposed President Omar al-Bashir in 2019, the transitional government promised greater freedoms. Apostasy laws were abolished in 2020 and Christians, while cautious, had some optimism that significant changes could lead to expanded religious freedoms. However, Sudan remains a predominantly Islamic country, and militant Muslim leaders continue to have a significant voice in political decisions. For further information on the persecution of Christians in Sudan, go to our [country report](#).

***Remember Osama in your prayers as he recovers from his injuries, asking God to provide him protection from any further attack, and the wisdom and courage required to persevere in his call to share the Gospel. Pray that all ministry outreaches in the Tambul area will continue unabated, and that Christians will have the strength to stand firm in their faith despite opposition. May those opposing them realize the error of their ways, repent before God, and ultimately accept His provision of salvation by placing their faith in His Son Jesus Christ.***

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## REPORT UPDATE

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## BELARUS: Congregants Evicted After Nearly 20-Year Struggle

Source: Forum18

In 2002, the New Life Church purchased a cowshed on the outskirts of Minsk, Belarus, for use as a church building. All government agencies approved the change of use, except for officials of the religious affairs department who repeatedly blocked the process. Harassment from this department has continued for several years.

The church, which consists of about 1,000 congregants, was denied re-registration in 2005. Officials claimed that the unapproved building was one of the reasons. Shortly after, the city attempted to confiscate the building, but the church members resisted. Numerous court battles took place over the next few years, eventually leading to a decision in 2009 mandating the church to vacate the premises ([read more](#)).



Click to view video.  
Photo: YouTube/New Life Church (screenshot)

Authorities continued to oppose the church, with attempts to evict the congregants in 2013 and 2017. The conflict finally culminated on February 17th, 2021, when 30 bailiffs and other officials cut locks off the building and forcefully entered, interrupting a prayer meeting in session. Everyone attending the meeting was ordered to leave or risk arrest. The church members have since been allowed to retrieve some of their equipment and other property.

The pastor plans to discuss the use of an alternative building with the city council but is mindful that finding a suitable location large enough to accommodate the congregation will be a challenge. Additional reports on the persecution of Christians in Belarus, including several outlining the difficulties encountered by members of New Life Church, are available at our [country report](#).

***Prayerfully uphold those representing New Life Church as they negotiate with Minsk's governing authorities regarding a future location, asking God to grant them wisdom, guidance and favour. May these persevering Christians not only be abundantly blessed with a suitable new church facility, but also greater opportunities for expanded evangelistic outreach. Also pray for the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the opposing officials, so they too will surrender to God's good purposes for their lives and for the community as a whole.***

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