

***"Have I not commanded you?
Be strong and courageous.
Do not be frightened,
and do not be dismayed,
for the Lord your God is
with you wherever you go."***

~ Joshua 1:9 ESV

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

November 5th, 2023

Today, there are more than 360 million Christians living in nations where they are subjected to high levels of persecution for their faith. As these believers undergo daily threats to their freedoms, securities and safety, their courageous faithfulness remains based on the reassuring promises that God's presence is with them in the midst of every difficulty they face.

Courage to Rise Above is the theme for this year's International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church (IDOP), which will be taking place on Sunday, November 5th. This is a day set aside by Christians around the world for the purpose of collectively praying on behalf of our brothers and sisters in Christ who are suffering persecution because of their faith. Each year, specific countries of focus are featured. For 2023, these nations are Nicaragua, Nigeria and India.

In preparation for this annual event, IDOP's ministry partners collaborate together to produce helpful resources that will encourage the body of Christ here in Canada to engage in active prayer for believers around the world who are encountering persecution. These easy-to-access resources are specially designed to help churches across our country incorporate the International Day of Prayer into their worship services or small group gatherings. To download your free resource kit, go to IDOP.ca.

Please join us on Sunday, November 5th, in praying that our suffering global family in Christ will experience continued strength and confidence in the presence of our Saviour and Lord. As these persecuted believers receive the courage to "rise above," may they be empowered and equipped to testify as bold witnesses of God's unending goodness and love. And as we pray for them, may we likewise be motivated to remain resolute in our faith, living courageously and without fear, knowing that our Heavenly Father will assuredly be with us at all times as well.

SOMALIA: Al-Shabaab "Peace" Offer Poses Threat to Christian Minority

Sources: Religion News, MEMRI, The Lindisfarne Centre, Human Rights Watch

For years, the nation of Somalia has been in a state of political turmoil caused by rival factions that are fighting for control of the country, including the al-Qaeda affiliated group known as al-Shabaab. While this militant terrorist group frequently conducts indiscriminate attacks on innocent civilians in general, it is particularly known to target Christians.

Followers of Jesus in this East African nation, most of whom happen to be foreign workers, must worship in secret for fear of persecution. "Pastor John" is a Kenyan building contractor who leads a small group that meets in the home of a local believer. "We meet secretly in one of our houses and pray," he explains. "It's always a normal service, but there's no shouting and singing loudly.... It's very dangerous for anyone to identify you as a Christian in this country. You will, in fact, be counting your days on earth." To learn more about the hardships faced by Christians in Somalia, go to our [country report](#).



Photo: Voice of America

Al-Shabaab remains a dominant force as it wages war against the Somalian government. Although the United States has been providing military support for African Union forces seeking to stabilize the nation, challenges remain. In July, al-Shabaab published a proposal calling for the U.S. to engage in dialogue with them so they could negotiate a withdrawal similar to the peace agreement that was made with the Afghan Taliban in 2020.

The proposal, if accepted, would give the militants control of the country. For Christians, the dangers they presently experience would become much worse, since al-Shabaab has made it clear that they intend to totally eradicate Christianity from Somalia. The timing of the article published by al-Shabaab correlates with plans to reduce African Union troops in the country.

While there is no indication that the U.S. is prepared to accommodate this proposal, the situation raises further concerns for Christians who already fear for their lives. If this extremist group were to gain control of the country, it would result in a deliberate attempted eradication of the entire Christian minority from Somalia.

Remember your Christian brothers and sisters in Somalia who must worship in secret. Pray that these believers will receive the Lord's peace, protection and strength as they face ongoing danger from militants, and the possibility of increased threats against their lives. May God's Spirit continue to move powerfully throughout this East African nation, convicting the hearts of the militants and other Somalians in need of salvation – stirring them to repentance and faith in Christ Jesus.

PAKISTAN: Supreme Court Agrees to Hear Nayab Gill's Case

Sources: Eurasia Review, Kross Konnektion, Morning Star News

In May 2021, 13-year-old Nayab Gill was forcibly converted and married to a 30-year-old Muslim man named Saddam Hayat. Despite court challenges, custody was given to her "husband." (For more details, go to [this report](#).) A year later, reports surfaced indicating that the young Christian girl may have been sold to someone else as a bride ([details here](#)). With support from various advocacy organizations, Nayab's parents have continued to fight for justice on behalf of their daughter.

In a promising update, the Supreme Court of Pakistan agreed on August 29th to hear a petition on behalf of Nayab. At the heart of the petition is the girl's age. Pakistani law specifies that any sexual relations with a girl under the age of 16 is rape and punishable by death. However, in contradiction, Islamic law states that any consenting girl who has reached puberty can marry. The family's lawyer argued that, even if allowed under Islamic law, Nayab was not of legal age to make such a decision without consent from one of her guardians.

The Supreme Court, in deciding to hear this case, has recognized the disconnect between the penal laws and Islamic Sharia laws over the concept of "adulthood." Consequently, the court has called on the government to respond to this discrepancy and resolve the issue by enacting legislation governing the age of marriage.

Since Nayab's "marriage" in 2021, the Islamabad High Court ruled in March 2022 that marriage under the age of 18 is prohibited, even if an individual claims to do so of their own free will. It is hoped that this ruling will direct the nation's government to establish a minimum age for marriage across the country.

Forcible conversions and marriages of underaged girls are far too common for impoverished religious minorities in Pakistan. Often, such families have little to no recourse against the influence of their employers and community leaders. For additional reports on the persecution of Christians in Pakistan, go to our [country report](#).

Pray that the hope and resolve of the Gill family will be strengthened in light of this recent action by the Supreme Court. As they anticipate the safe return of Nayab, may the members of her family receive greatly needed comfort, encouragement and peace. Specifically ask the Lord to lovingly watch over Nayab and tangibly convey His reassuring presence and care in her life, despite the circumstances in which she presently finds herself. Finally, pray that the courts will rule equitably in her case, and that the governing leaders of Pakistan will enact just legislation – providing protection to the country's most vulnerable citizens – regardless of the pressures they may receive to do otherwise.



Supreme Court of Pakistan
Photo: Flickr / Guilhem Vellut (cc)