

***"Suffering in life can uncover
untold depths of character and
unknown strength for service....***

***Only deeply plowed earth
can yield bountiful harvests."***

~ Evangelist Billy Graham (1918-2018)

EGYPT: Christian Homes and Businesses Burned

Sources: Mission Network News, International Christian Concern, Christian Solidarity Worldwide

Late into the evening of April 23rd, Islamic militants set fire to several homes and shops owned by Coptic Orthodox Christians in the village of Al-Fawakher, which is located in Egypt's southern Minya province. Although the attackers attempted to prevent the occupants from leaving their burning homes, thankfully there were no reported fatalities.

It is believed that the attack may have been triggered by plans to build a new church building in the village. The local Christians had received a permit to build the new place of worship, but they then began receiving threats from opposing community members. Even though the threats were reported to the authorities (who promised to provide protection), no assistance was given to the Christians during the attack, and security forces arrived only after it occurred. Arrests were made in connection with the incident but, at last report, no official statement has been issued by the police.



Rev. Riadh Jaballah, VP of International Ministry for The Voice of the Martyrs Canada, believes that the attack was intended "to create sedition and division between the community's Muslims and Christians." He adds that the persecution of those practising Christianity is not new, especially leading up to the Orthodox observance of Easter. In the aftermath of the violence, Rev. Riadh urges us as fellow believers to respond in four ways: 1) encourage one another, 2) be aware of the situation, 3) share that information, and 4) pray. "We are [all] believers," he further explains. "It doesn't matter about [our] denominations. We need to stand up together." To review more reports addressing the challenges facing followers of Jesus in Egypt, go to our [country report](#).

Prayerfully remember the many Christians in this village who are now homeless and/or without a source of income, asking God to fill them with His peace and provide for their daily needs – including those such as protection and encouragement. May His Holy Spirit convict the militants responsible for perpetrating this violent attack, stirring their hearts to the point of repentance and the surrender of their lives in faith to Jesus. Further, pray that our Christian brothers and sisters in Egypt will respond to the opposition in a Christ-like manner – serving as testimonies of His love, mercy and grace to the community members who stand against them – resulting in an easing of tensions and the cultivating of harmonious relationships among all the villagers.

VIETNAM: Christian Found Dead After Meeting with Police

Sources: Christian Solidarity Worldwide, Morning Star News, International Christian Concern, Radio Free Asia

On March 8th, the body of Pastor Y Bum Bya was found hanging from a tree at a cemetery near his home in the Dak Lak Province of Vietnam. Though local authorities declared the Christian leader's death a suicide, reports indicate that

his body showed signs of torture. The believer's death happened shortly after he had been summoned to meet with police.

Pastor Y Bum Bya, who served as the leader of an unregistered evangelical church, was experiencing severe persecution because of his Christian activities. Prior to the fatal incident, he had been publicly humiliated and charged with trying to "destroy the great national unity." Additionally, in December of 2023, he was beaten and forced to renounce his association with the church. Also during that time, the pastor's cell phone was confiscated.

On the day of his death, local police contacted the targeted church leader, allegedly to arrange a meeting with him in order to return his cell phone. However, about the time the officers were scheduled to be at his home, they sent word to him requesting that the meeting take place at the nearby cemetery instead. When Pastor Y Bum Bya did not return home from the meeting, his relatives began searching for him – only to discover his body hanging by a rope.

Calling for an investigation into his death, local Christian leaders organized a petition, which has been signed by 31 associated congregations. In doing so, the leaders of these unregistered churches have placed themselves and their congregations at risk of retribution from the authorities. For additional reports on the persecution of believers in Vietnam, and/or to view formerly videotaped documentaries, go to our [country report](#).

Pray that our Heavenly Father will intervene in this situation, ensuring that justice prevails and that those responsible for Pastor Y Bum Bya's death are held accountable for their wrongful actions. May God's comfort, peace and strength rest on the slain church leader's family and congregation members as they now mourn this unexpected loss. Please also pray that the Lord will provide for the physical and spiritual needs of all those who are facing danger or imprisonment because of their Christian activities, asking that these persecuted followers of Jesus will be reassured of His unfailing presence and sustaining promises during difficult times.



Pray that believers in Vietnam will remain faithful to Christ.
Photo: VOMC

INDONESIA: Pastor Accused of Blasphemy

Sources: Morning Star News, Jakarta Globe

During a recent Sunday sermon, Pastor Gilbert Lumoindong made mention of Islamic prayer and compared the practice of almsgiving with Biblical tithing. After being posted online, the sermon quickly gained attention on social media. According to Jumzar Rahman, who serves as the head of the South Sulawesi Arimathea Forum, offence was taken by some Muslim viewers. "The video hurt us," he states. "We Muslims feel offended." Consequently, two complaints were filed with the police, claiming that Pastor Gilbert had blasphemed against Islam.

The Jakarta Metro Police have taken the lead with the investigation but, at last report, official charges have not yet been laid against the accused Christian leader. Pastor Gilbert has offered his heartfelt apologies, stating that he had no intention of insulting Muslims nor their Islamic practices. He further claims that some social media users had edited his video to render his comments offensive.

Pastor Gilbert has since personally met with leaders of the Indonesian Mosque Council (DMI) and the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) to offer his apologies. After meeting with the pastor, Cholil Nafis from the MUI council said that he accepts the apology. "Gilbert Lumoindong said that he had no intention of insulting Islamic teachings, let alone creating divisions," he explained after the meeting on April 16th. "We as religious people certainly accept his apology. We all forgive as we ask that this incident be a lesson for him and all of us."

Indonesia has the largest Muslim population in the world. While freedom of religion is mandated by law, followers of Islam – who account for more than 85 percent of the country's population – often receive preferential treatment by the



government. Churches also frequently encounter opposition, particularly from local governments and organizations. To learn more about the persecution of Christians in Indonesia, go to our [country report](#).

Pray that this investigation will conclude without any charges being laid against Pastor Gilbert. On behalf of this accused church leader, ask the Lord to provide him continued guidance, direction and needed assistance as he endeavours to wisely deal with the situation. The same applies to other Christians who are residing in the country, especially as they seek ways to minister to their unbelieving neighbours. May this incident bring about opportunities for the message of the Gospel to spread throughout Indonesia, leading many more people to faith in Jesus Christ.

REPORT UPDATE

IRAN: Ebrahim Firouzi Dies of Heart Attack

Sources: Release International, Article18, Open Doors

Ebrahim Firouzi, an Iranian convert who was arrested several times for his Christian activities, unexpectedly passed away on February 20th from a heart attack. The Christian man's body was found in his home by his brother, who went to check on the believer after not hearing from him for a few days. Ebrahim was only 37 years old.

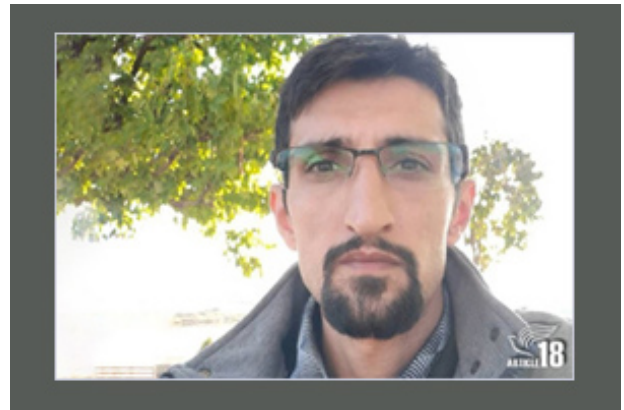
Following his first arrest in January 2011, Ebrahim was held in custody for several months before being conditionally released. He was arrested again in 2013 and sentenced to six years in prison because of his involvement in a house church. Throughout his time in prison, Ebrahim sought ways to make the Scriptures available to those who were imprisoned with him.

Upon his release in 2019, the persecuted believer was banished to a remote region of Iran for two additional years.

During his exile, Ebrahim became a respected member of his new community, where he started his own business and volunteered to serve in local schools. While paying tribute to the deceased Iranian believer, Mansour Borji from Article18 said: "Ebrahim did not lose hope, even during all those years in prison. He had an incredible fighting spirit."

In 2020, Ebrahim was interviewed during his time in exile by Joseph Hovsepian, founder of Hovsepian Ministries. You may [view this videotaped interview](#) which has been translated into English. For previously published *Persecution & Prayer Alert* posts reporting on the opposition Ebrahim endured due his faith in Jesus, along with information about the many other believers imprisoned in Iran, see our [country report](#).

While Ebrahim is assuredly now in heaven rejoicing in the wonderful presence of our Saviour, please prayerfully uphold his family members and friends who are now grieving over the sudden loss of their loved one. As they mourn the end of Ebrahim's young earthly life, may they tangibly experience the peace, love and blessed assurance that comes from the "Father of mercies and God of all comfort" (2 Corinthians 1:3). May the Lord also minister to the individual needs of our other Christian brothers and sisters in Iran, ensuring that they are equipped spiritually, emotionally and physically to continue serving as lights amid the darkness of this needy world by conveying the hope of the Gospel.



Ebrahim Firouzi
Photo: Article18

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