



"I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the Gospel, so that it has become known...that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers...are much more bold to speak the word without fear."

~ Philippians 1:12-14 ESV

REPORT UPDATES

INDONESIA: Easter Services Continued Amidst Protests

Sources: International Christian Concern, Bandung Bererak, Morning Star News

On March 5th, local residents in Bandung City held a protest against members of the Santa Odilia church. The community members opposed the use of a multipurpose facility for worship, even though the building is owned by the Catholic church. (For more details on the incident, see [this report](#).)

Despite the opposition, church members were determined to continue with their plans to hold Easter weekend services. However, as worshippers attempted to gather at the facility for "Maundy Thursday"

(in commemoration of the Lord's Last Supper), they were forced to find a different route to the location because of a road blockade. Additionally, near the building, protestors set up loudspeakers and broadcasted nationalist songs in an attempt to disrupt the Christian service. Undeterred by these disturbances, the believers continued to pray and worship together.

On Saturday, April 19th, the church members gathered for another time of worship, entering the building through a side door. As the service started, opposing villagers once again began loudly protesting in their efforts to interrupt the worship gathering. Thankfully, local police officers, along with civilian security personnel, surrounded the building to protect the congregants. The authorities were also able to intervene when some demonstrators attempted to break into the building. After the service, the worshippers returned home via a specified route that provided police protection. The church members were deeply thankful



A church in Indonesia.

for the security measures afforded to them, and the assistance they received was described as a "glimmer of tolerance amidst the wave of protests."

The use of buildings for religious purposes is frequently a source of conflict for those opposed to Christian worship in Indonesia. In addition to strong resistance from local Muslim residents, the registration process for a new worship facility can take many years. For more reports on the various challenges facing Christians in Indonesia, go to our [country profile](#).

- ***Praise God that the authorities were able to assist members of the Santa Odilia church and prevent the incident from escalating to violence.***
- ***Pray that these believers will receive divine wisdom as they seek to share the love of Jesus with opposing residents and establish amiable relationships within their community.***
- ***Pray that this congregation, along with the many other churches facing similar situations in Indonesia, will be able to peacefully gather for worship without further harassment.***

INDIA: Released Murderer Receives a Hero's Welcome

Sources: Christian Solidarity Worldwide, Morning Star News, The Hindu, Anglican Ink

On January 23rd, 1999, Australian missionary Graham Staines, along with his two young sons Philip and Timothy, were burned to death by Hindu nationalist militants. Initially, authorities denied that the assailants had any connection to the Hindu nationalist group, Bajrang Dal, though such ties were later substantiated. While 14 men had been arrested in connection with the incident, 12 of the perpetrators were acquitted due to lack of evidence. The other two men, Mahendra Hembram and Dara Singh, were convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment.



Graham Staines with sons Philip and Timothy.
Photo: VOM USA

As news of the shocking murders spread around the world, plans were made to depict the events in a film, which was eventually released as *The Least of These: The Graham Staines Story*. Shortly after, however, leaders of the Bajrang Dal organization announced plans to release their own movie, titled *Dara: The Hero*, which would celebrate the murderers' horrific actions. It is unknown if such a film was created.

While Dara Singh presently remains in prison, Mahendra Hembram was released on April 16th on the grounds of "good behaviour." This decision was authorized by the Odisha State Sentence Review Board. As he walked free from the Keonjhar jail, Mahendra was celebrated by supporters who welcomed him as a hero, placing garlands on him and shouting Hindu slogans. Mahendra also proclaimed his innocence and insisted that he had

been wrongly imprisoned, even though he previously claimed sole responsibility for the incident in 2002.

The early release of this prisoner has reignited questions and concerns relating to justice, forgiveness and the treatment of religious minorities in India. Having witnessed the response of the crowd celebrating Mahendra's freedom, Father Ajay Kumar Singh, a human rights activist in Odisha, described it as "a shocking sight for anybody believing in peace and tranquility of a society."

While the initial murders brought about worldwide condemnation and calls for justice, many Hindu nationalists argued that the incident took place in response to the alleged coercive conversion activities of Christian missionaries. Following his release from prison, Mahendra even referred to the murders simply as "an incident related to religious conversion."

In the 1999 Wadhwa Commission probing the situation, Graham's wife Gladys responded to the perpetrators of the violence that tragically ended the lives of her husband and two young sons. "It is my desire and hope that they [will] repent and be reformed," she stated. Further information about the martyrdom of Gladys' family members is [available here](#).

- ***Please join Gladys in praying that a radical transformation would take place in the hearts of Mahendra and Dara, asking that these men would come to a point of sincere repentance and place their faith in Christ.***
- ***Pray that other Hindu militants who support such horrific acts of violence and intolerance would likewise experience a life-changing encounter with Jesus, the Prince of Peace, and acknowledge Him as their personal Saviour and Lord.***
- ***May God continue to strengthen, equip and embolden believers throughout India to share the hope they have in Jesus and accomplish the tasks He has set before them.***

CHINA: "Gospel Warrior" Resumes Ministry Work

Source: ChinaAid

As a former drug addict, Chen Wensheng understands firsthand the liberating power of Jesus Christ. Since experiencing spiritual freedom from bondage, he has become a ceaseless evangelist, sharing his faith with anyone who is willing to listen. In the past, he even expressed gratitude for his incarceration, since it gave him opportunities to testify of God's transforming love among fellow prisoners.



Chen Wensheng and his wife.
Photo: ChinaAid

As a result of his desire to reach others with the Good News of the Gospel, Chen has been detained numerous times, which includes his most recent sentencing in June 2024 for "organizing

and funding illegal gatherings." (To read previously posted reports about this devoted Christian evangelist, see [these reports](#).)

On April 2nd, Chen was finally released from his most recent detainment. Despite having lost a significant amount of weight, the believer reportedly remained in good spirits and was "full of joy" following his release. Chen later announced that, during this latest imprisonment, he was able to pray with 300 fellow inmates and baptize three of them.

Upon being released, the believer reunited with his wife in Hengyang city. That same day, the married couple resumed their ministry work as street evangelists. Chen was also able to post the following message on social media: "Thanks to God, today my wife and I have...arranged to travel and evangelize for free again. Please continue to pray for us."

- ***Praise God for the recent release of this impassioned follower of Jesus, as well as the fruitful ministry work that took place during his incarceration.***
- ***Pray for the Lord's continued guidance in the lives of Chen and his wife as they continue their ongoing evangelistic activities, asking that these devoted believers would have many more opportunities to share the message of God's grace with others.***
- ***May their resilient faith serve as an inspiration to people within China and beyond, furthering the spread of the Gospel message and leading many more to salvation and deliverance through the power of Jesus Christ.***

IRAN: Appeal Denied for Three Christian Converts

Source: Article18

On March 8th, three Christian converts in Iran, including a woman pregnant with her first child, were sentenced to lengthy prison terms for participating in activities relating to their religious beliefs. (More details about the charges against these believers are available at VOMC's previously [published report](#).)

The ruling was appealed by all three followers of Jesus, who had each received sentences of over ten years' imprisonment. However, it was announced on April 26th that the appeals court had rejected their petitions, stating that the judicial decisions were made "in view of the scope of [the Christians'] activities, and their harmful effects."



Left to right: Abbas Soori,
Narges Nasri, and Mehran Shamloui.

Photos: Article 18

- ***Prayerfully remember these detained followers of Jesus as they contend with the recent court decision to not amend the initial sentencing they each received for sharing their faith, nor the consequential lengthy prison terms.***
- ***Pray that the Lord will provide greatly needed encouragement, strength and comfort to each one of these recently incarcerated believers, along with the many other Christians who are currently being imprisoned in Iran.***

- ***May God's Holy Spirit work mightily in and through the country's legal system by helping political and judicial officials to realize the great need for reform, justice and tolerance on behalf of our Iranian brothers and sisters in Christ.***
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