Voice of the Martyrs CANADA

PERSECUTION & PRAYER ALERT

"…let all who take refuge in You rejoice; let them ever sing for joy, and spread Your protection over them, that those who love Your name may exult in You."

~ Psalm 5:11 ESV

IRAN: Urgent Prayer Needed for Middle East

Sources: VOMC Contacts, Open Doors, Al Jazeera

On February 28th, the United States and Israel launched a major military operation against Iran. The strike resulted in hundreds of casualties, including the country's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, along with dozens of other government officials.

Overlooking Tehran.
Photo: Shutterstock / PedramRostamian_shr

In response to this campaign, Iran and its allies have carried out counter attacks on Israel and countries in the Middle East that are perceived to be supporting the Israeli-American military efforts. Public protests have also begun in some Muslim-majority nations. As of March 2nd, at least 20 people have died in Pakistan as a result of pro-Iranian demonstrations; 10 of those fatalities occurred during a protest at the American consulate in Karachi.

Amid the crisis, many Christian leaders are hoping for major changes to take place within Iran, as well as opportunities to minister to the hurting people of this nation in peril. Under its oppressive government, believers in Christ have suffered intense persecution, even to the point of torture and imprisonment. In recent weeks, renewed calls for reform have resulted in widespread unrest within Iran and demonstrations around the world condemning the present regime. With the sudden loss of much of Iran's governing leadership, many citizens are now longing for a hopeful future. Dr. Hormoz Shariat of Iran Alive Ministries declared, "History is in the making in Iran today."

The situation across the Middle East remains volatile, placing innocent civilians in serious danger – including Christian minorities who are particularly vulnerable. VOMC's CEO, Floyd Brobbel, issued the following statement: "The crisis in Iran will ignite widespread outrage and provoke retaliatory violence against Christians in Iran and neighbouring countries. We must remember our brothers and sisters who are helplessly caught in the midst of this conflict." For further reports addressing the persecution of Iranian believers, along with specific ways you can pray, visit our country profile.

- ***As you pray for God's intervention and ministry to take place in the lives of people throughout Iran, please be mindful to uphold our Christian brothers and sisters who are presently at risk of retaliatory attacks.***
- ***May the Lord also bring greatly needed comfort to those in Iran and its surrounding countries who have lost loved ones or suffered trauma during the conflict.***
- ***As this Persian nation now faces the possibility of major political change, pray that wise and just leadership will be raised up, and that decisions made during this season would promote religious freedom and human dignity.***
- ***Amid the turmoil, prayerfully ask God to reveal His unchanging character to people throughout the region – leading many more to an understanding of His eternal love, spiritual truth and redemptive grace.***

INDONESIA: Social Media Comments Lead to Arrest

Sources: Morning Star News, BITV, USCRIF

Photo: Pixnio

A Christian leader in Indonesia was arrested on February 18th following the online comments he made about Muhammad. According to reports, Dedi Saputra allegedly referenced the Muslim prophet's multiple wives on his TikTok account. Before being removed, Dedi's video was viewed almost two million times and sparked widespread backlash.

In response to the public reaction, several Islamic organizations brought the matter to the police. As a result, Dedi has been accused of insulting the prophet and offending the religious sentiments of local Muslims within the region. As of the latest update, he remains in police custody while the allegations continue to be investigated.

This incident comes shortly after major amendments to Indonesia's criminal code took effect on January 2nd. Portions of the updated code apply directly to activities on social media and other digital mediums. Human rights observers have noted that the language used in the amendments relating to apostasy and blasphemy is "intentionally vague, allowing for broad interpretation and application." Learn more about the challenges facing our Christian brothers and sisters in Indonesia at our country profile.

- ***Pray for the Holy Spirit (Scripturally referenced as the "Advocate" and "Mediator") to work mightily on behalf of Dedi, so the truth would be made clear and this accused Christian leader can be acquitted of all allegations.***
- ***May wisdom, discernment and protection be granted to all Christians in Indonesia as they navigate conversations of faith in an increasingly sensitive environment.***
- ***As believers across the country courageously share the hope of God's salvation through Christ, may their words and lives reflect His compassion, mercy and grace.***

PAKISTAN: Christian Teen Labourer Forcibly Converted

Sources: CLAAS-UK, Morning Star News, Pakistan Christian Post

A village in Punjab.
Photo: Pexels / Rana Saif

A 14-year-old Christian boy from a village in Punjab has reportedly been forcibly converted to Islam by his employer and separated from his family. The boy, Jameel Masih, is the son of a poor labourer named Sharif. Due to financial hardships, Sharif was compelled to send his son to work at a local cattle farm. Instead of paying wages for the young teen's labour, the owner – Muhammad Boota Bajwa – supplied the family with wheat. Jameel's parents were permitted to visit their son once a month and occasionally bring him home overnight.

On February 22nd, Sharif and his wife Nazia attempted to visit their son, but they had been denied access. The Christian parents were then informed that Jameel had changed his religion and no longer wished to see them. Distressed, the parents brought the matter to village elders, who concluded that, as a minor, Jameel could not legally change his religion. They ordered that the boy be returned to his family, who brought him home. Only hours later, however, the employer arrived at their household with armed associates and forcibly took the boy away.

Despite repeated pleas, the family has not been allowed to see Jameel or receive confirmation of his safety. Fearing that he may have been harmed or sold to someone else, Sharif and Nazia have filed a formal complaint with police. The Christian advocacy group, HARDS, which has taken up their cause, intends to file necessary court petitions to secure Jameel's recovery.

Religious minorities in Pakistan frequently encounter exploitation and abuse, not only because of their faith but also due to the vulnerability that comes with deep poverty. To access other reports concerning the ill-treatment of Christians in Pakistan, go to our country profile.

- ***Pray earnestly for Jameel's protection and soon release from captivity, asking God to shield him from potential harm and safely reunite him with his family.***
- ***May local authorities act with courage, integrity and urgency on behalf of this boy and his distraught family, so that justice will prevail in their case.***
- ***May advocacy groups seeking equality and protection for Christians across Pakistan receive strength and wisdom as they diligently persevere in their tireless efforts to uphold justice.***

The Persecution & Prayer Alert is a ministry of:
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