



Persecution & Prayer Alert

The Voice of the Martyrs Canada
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"These torture sessions over the years actually gave me a wonderful gift, which is my faith in God."
~ Gao Zhisheng

GEORGIA: Religion Law Proposed

Source: Forum 18

Despite assurances that freedom of religion is guaranteed, various statements from Georgia's ruling party, along with those from the State Agency for Religious Issues (SARI), indicate that a restrictive religion law may be in the works for the nation of Georgia. Many religious groups strongly oppose such legislation which would mandate government registration of their faith communities.

The government agency, SARI, has long awaited a religion law to help control religious issues in the country. A primary concern expressed by those from non-traditional faith groups is the lack of clarification regarding the requirements of the new law.

Over the years, the Georgian Orthodox Church has retained special status within the country. Its spokesperson, Archpriest Jaghmaidze, suggests one criterion for registration could be mandating "some kind of cultural and historical heritage," which would restrict new religious communities from entering the country. Further concerns were raised when he spoke of other religious groups having "anti-state activities or positions."

Overall, many proponents of the new religion law consider its implementation a means of restricting other faith groups from registering as a religious community. In contrast, Pastor Guram Imerlishvili argues that the law should instead be focussing on the punishment of hate crimes and the enforcement of existing legislation, rather than creating categories that will distinguish non-traditional religions from those that are traditional.

While such legislation is only at the stage of deliberation, pray that Georgia's governmental agencies and representatives will fairly consider all sides of the discussion. Pray that freedom

of religion will continue being made available to all, without partiality. Ask the Lord to guide the words of those who are seeking to raise their concerns. Despite the present religion law debate, may there be an ongoing spread of the Gospel throughout the nation.

SRI LANKA: Theology Student Assaulted

Sources: NCEASL, Methodist Church Sri Lanka

On August 4th, a student from the Evangelism Training College was leading a worship service at a home in the village of Mahiyanganaya. As the meeting concluded, a group of opposing villagers led by three Buddhist monks stood outside, demanding to speak with him. After questioning the worship leader about his religious activities, they began to physically assault him, demanding that he leave the village immediately. As a result, the young man suffered injuries to his head, stomach and spine.

To escape the attack, the injured theology student managed to ride his motorcycle 180 kilometres back to the college, where he was then taken to hospital for treatment. After his release two days later, a police report was filed.

Asiri Perera, head of the Methodist Church in Sri Lanka, shared the following message on social media: "I assure all Buddhists of Sri Lanka that we Christians will remain calm and peaceful in the midst of the persecution we face today in Sri Lanka. I humbly appeal to you to be kind towards the Christians who live with you...." For more information on the persecution facing Christians in Sri Lanka, go to www.vomcanada.com/srilanka.htm.

Pray for the complete recovery of the assaulted Christian student. May he persevere in his commitment to share the message of Jesus Christ among the people of Sri Lanka. Also prayerfully uphold the country's other Bible college students who are presently preparing for ministry, as they reflect on the cost that may be required of them when presenting the Gospel in areas of opposition. Intercede for those responsible for this recent attack, praying that they will come to understand the saving grace that God has made available to them through the atonement of His Son.

PRISONER UPDATE

CHINA: Human Rights Lawyer Still Missing After Two Years

Sources: ChinaAid, Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin

Gao Zhisheng, a prominent human rights lawyer, has personally experienced persecution for many years. The Voice of the Martyrs Canada has been reporting on Gao's case since his initial arrest in 2006. Since then, he has been released and re-arrested numerous times, often disappearing to undisclosed locations at the hands of the authorities.

When Gao had gone missing on August 13th, 2017, family and friends had assumed he had been apprehended by the authorities again. Yet, in reality, two of his supporters had smuggled him out of the province in an attempt to free him from house arrest and keep him safe. After three weeks of intensive searching, the authorities managed to locate him, and Gao has not been seen nor heard from since. There have been rumours of his location, but no one was able to verify them.

Chinese law dictates that it is illegal to detain a prisoner for more than six months without a charge. Yet, over the past two years, Gao has been unable to consult with lawyers, and his loved ones still do not know where he is being held.

In the time leading up to his latest disappearance, Gao secretly penned a book describing his sufferings. In the book, the human rights lawyer reveals how he came to faith while being imprisoned for defending Pastor Cai Zhuohua back in 2004 and 2005. His book, *Unwavering Convictions*, which was smuggled out of China and translated into English, is now available for purchase at: www.cap-press.com/books/isbn/9781531004712/Unwavering-Convictions.

May God's Spirit continue to wonderfully minister to Gao, wherever he may be located. May this imprisoned believer know with full assurance that his Heavenly Father's "everlasting arms" are supporting him (Deuteronomy 33:27) and that many fellow believers are praying for his eventual release. Lift up in prayer Gao's family and friends as they struggle with the resulting pain and uncertainty of his undisclosed location. Additionally, pray that God will mightily intervene not only on behalf of Gao, but for all of China's other persecuted and incarcerated Christians as well.

If you would like to post a prayer of praise or petition on behalf of our persecuted family around the globe, visit VOMC's prayer wall at www.vomcanada.com/prayerwall.htm.

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If you would like to encourage someone to read or receive this weekly prayer alert, please use our online form at www.vomcanada.com/pnpforward.htm and help spread the message of the persecuted church around the world.

For information on additional ways to support members of the persecuted church overseas, review the list of options at www.vomcanada.com/take-action.htm.