



Persecution & Prayer Alert

The Voice of the Martyrs Canada
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"I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me."

~ Philippians 4:12-13 ESV

PAKISTAN: Young Teens Forcibly Converted by Employers

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

Two 13-year-old girls from Christian families have been forcibly married to their employers and converted to Islam in separate incidents. These recent cases further demonstrate the ongoing abuse of young Christian girls in the country. It is estimated that about 1,000 believers were married against their wills to militant Muslims between November 2019 and October 2020. For information on Christian persecution in Pakistan, and to read reports about other instances of forced conversion, go to www.vomcanada.com/pakistan.htm.

Nayab Gill

On May 31st, Shahid Gill received the devastating news that the custody of his 13-year-old daughter had been given to a 30-year-old man who forcibly converted her to Islam and then married her.

Due to the pandemic, Shahid lost his tailoring business and was struggling to provide for his family. It seemed like a good idea when Saddam Hayat, the owner of a local beauty salon, offered to give the grade seven student, Nayab, a job as his assistant. Saddam, a married father of five, said that he would treat her like one of his own children and provide training for her to work in the business. Each day, he picked up Shahid's daughter from her home and dropped her off after work, with the promise that she would be provided a monthly salary of 10,000 rupees (about \$78 CAD).

After a few months, however, Saddam stopped paying for Nayab's assistance. Then, on May 20th, Nayab went missing. Shahid and his wife went to Saddam's home to inquire about her. The employer helped search for Nayab, and even assisted the parents in filling out the police report. However, he instructed them to say nothing to the authorities about his connection with the girl. Believing at the time that Saddam was trustworthy, the parents went along with his instructions.

On May 26th, the parents were informed by police that their daughter was in a women's shelter. The court documentation claimed that she was 19 years old and had willfully converted to Islam a month before. Further, the documentation declared that her life was supposedly at risk and, therefore, she needed to be kept away from her Christian family. A certificate indicating her marriage to Saddam had been registered on the day she went missing.

During the court hearing, Nayab claimed that she wished to remain with Saddam, supporting the documentation that had been filed. On May 31st, the judge accepted the documentation without any question and ruled against the parents. Nayab was allowed to leave with Saddam's family. The judge refused to consider her birth certificate as proof of age or order biological tests. An appeal is being prepared by church leaders who learned of this situation, and free legal assistance is being provided to the Christian family.

Neha Masih

Manuwar Masih and his wife Mehtan Bibi, who have eight children, live on a monthly income of 8,000 rupees (approximately \$62 CAD). Four years ago, a local doctor, Altaf, offered to pay 10,000 rupees per month to have the oldest two girls -- Neha and Sneha -- help in his kitchen as live-in workers. The family agreed to this arrangement. Yet, at the end of the first month, Dr. Altaf gave the girls only 3,000 rupees, claiming that they were too young. Despite being treated like slaves, the girls continued to be employed by him for four years.

Over time, Sneha's health began to deteriorate, and she was allowed to return to her family. However, the doctor refused to allow 13-year-old Neha to return. Dr. Altaf claimed that he had overpaid them 275,000 rupees (\$2,149 CAD), which would need to be repaid before he would allow Neha to move back home. He also stated that the girl had converted to Islam since non-Muslims were not allowed to touch their food.

CLAAS-UK, an organization advocating for Christians in Pakistan who are persecuted for their faith, describes this case as one of the "most egregious example(s) of modern slavery and religious abuse."

Prayerfully uphold these young girls, Neha and Nayab, who are both experiencing terrible confusion as a result of the manipulation and abuses inflicted on them. Ask the Lord to provide needed ministry, advocacy and comfort to each of the girls and their distraught parents throughout the court trials. Pray that these parents will be successful in rescuing their children from captivity. In the midst of the spiritual and judicial battles the girls' parents are facing, may they be greatly encouraged by the assurance of God's timeless promises and faithfulness. Additionally, pray that the judges presiding over these cases will well consider the

truths in each situation, basing their decisions on the facts, so they can act justly on behalf of the victimized girls and their families.

INDIA: Christians in Three Villages Forced to Flee

Sources: Morning Star News, AsiaNews, Barnabas Fund

Tribal animists have forced more than 50 Christians to flee their homes and seek shelter in the jungles of Odisha. These believers represent several families that are now stranded without proper shelter, food and water.

The conflict began within the past two months in the village of Sikapai where opposing villagers destroyed the roofs of homes belonging to as many as eight Christian families. Not only had the belongings of the targeted Christians been looted, these victims were also subjected to physical beatings and consequently driven into the jungle. When five Christian families in the nearby village of Kotlanga received similar threats, they remembered what had happened in Sikapai and likewise fled their homes, joining the other displaced families in the jungle.

Similar threats of violence were also made by tribal animists in Chichinga, resulting in two families having to flee their homes for safety. Emboldened by the actions of these anti-Christian mobs, locals in three other villages within the district -- Siripai, Kona and Tongapai -- have also begun oppressing Christians. Although several police complaints were made, the authorities have offered little protection. According to one of the victims, police told them that peace would only come to the area if they denied their Christian faith and returned to the tribal fold.

Village leaders in Sikapai have met with the police but are not prepared to settle the matter. It has been noted that the targeted Christians are not new converts but rather have been Christians for years. The fact that this hostility has suddenly started indicates that someone is responsible for instigating the opposition. To learn more about the persecution facing Christians in India, go to www.vomcanada.com/india.htm.

Pray that these targeted village believers will receive the provisions and protection they need while trying to survive in the jungle. May God work mightily in the hearts of those opposing them, opening the way for peaceful negotiations so the Christian families can safely return to their homes without having to compromise their faith. Ask the Lord to minister His love, peace and grace among these areas of conflict, and in other troubled communities throughout India, making a way for there to be harmonious relationships between villagers of differing faiths and greater receptivity to the Gospel.

REPORT UPDATE

PAKISTAN: Life Sentence Upheld

Sources: International Christian Concern, Morning Star News, Church in Chains

Pakistani pastor, Zafar Bhatti, has been in prison since July 2012, after being accused of sending blasphemous text messages. In May 2017, he was sentenced to life imprisonment. The accused pastor denies any involvement in the texts, stating that the phone in question was not even registered in his name (see www.vomcanada.com/pk-2019-06-27.htm).

After numerous delayed appeal hearings, a court in Rawalpindi ruled on June 22nd, 2021, to uphold the sentence, despite the fact that new evidence had been presented proving Pastor Zafar's innocence. His lawyers now intend to appeal to the High Court.

Pastor Zafar suffers from multiple health concerns. In addition to being diagnosed with diabetes, he has experienced two minor heart attacks during 2019, and another in September 2020. His eyesight is also poor, and he requires cataract surgery, which is scheduled to take place this fall, thanks to the provision of financial assistance.

Please continue to lift up Pastor Zafar in your prayers, asking God to provide him greatly needed healing, renewed strength and courage as he awaits the declaration of a favourable outcome by the High Court. In the meanwhile, may he experience the wonderful peace and hope that comes from knowing Christ as his personal Saviour and the help of God's Spirit as his Advocate, Vindicator and Deliverer. In addition, pray for Pastor Zafar's wife Nawab who was recently injured due to a fall. May she too receive needed healing and encouragement through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

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