



Persecution & Prayer Alert

The Voice of the Martyrs Canada
www.vomcanada.com

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*"Seven years of suffering, seems a little too long.
But the Holy Spirit gives me courage to bear.
Taking this opportunity to sharpen the knife to
train my heart, to be ready to protect the sheep
from the wolves, even if it seems a little too long."*

~ Poem by Pastor John Cao, who was arrested in 2017
and sentenced to seven years in prison.

AFGHANISTAN: Report Highlights Dire Conditions for Religious Minorities

Sources: USCIRF, International Christian Concern, Christianity Today

The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has stated that Christians and other religious minorities in Afghanistan face "dire consequences, including death, if discovered by the Taliban" for openly expressing their beliefs. Since most Afghan Christians are converts from Islam, all Christians are considered "apostates" by the Taliban – a crime that is punishable by death.

Reports coming out of the country describe Taliban members going door-to-door looking for American allies, former government workers, human rights activists, and Christian converts. After receiving threatening phone calls, some Christians have turned their phones off and moved to undisclosed locations.

The USCIRF report concludes: "While religious freedom conditions in the country were poor under the previous government, these conditions have already worsened and have become dire under the Taliban, and are likely to continue to deteriorate." To view the report (PDF download), go to www.vomcanada.com/af-uscirf.

In September, VOM Canada's Greg Musselman interviewed John Weaver, a longtime humanitarian relief worker in Afghanistan, about the challenges facing the country's Christians. To watch the interview, go to www.vomcanada.com/video/John-Weaver. More recently, Greg

spoke with the Christian worker again on *100 Huntley Street*. To view their televised conversation, visit www.vomcanada.com/video/100-weaver.

Prayerfully uphold the people of Afghanistan as they reside under the repressive regime, asking the Lord to help them walk through this fearful time. Pray that the country's Christians will be given the courage to stand strong in their faith, seizing opportunities to reach out to those around them with the Gospel of Christ. May the believers who have fled Afghanistan in search of safety find ways to keep in touch with family members and friends who are still residing within the country.

CHINA: Church Leaders Arrested

Source: ChinaAid

The Early Rain Qingcaodi Church, a church plant previously established by the Early Rain Covenant Church (ERCC), is located in the city of Deyang, which is part of the Chinese province of Sichuan. Shortly after the police initially raided the ERCC in December 2018 (for more details on this incident, see www.vomcanada.com/cn-2018-12-13.htm), they also broke into the Qingcaodi church, expelling the Christians and posting a notice on the gate of the building in their efforts to ban the believers from meeting. In March 2021, the Sichuan Provincial Department of Civil Affairs published a list of illegal organizations, including both the ERCC and the Qingcaodi church.

During a more recent raid, which took place on November 17th, the police arrested several Christian leaders from the Qingcaodi church. Elder Wu Jiannan and his wife were detained, but then released that evening. At last report, retired pastor Hao Mingchang and his wife, Yang Yufeng, remained in detention, along with Liu Wuyi, Liu Yongbo and Lan Enguang.

Please remember to pray for the arrested church members who are still in custody. May each of them be mindful of God's continued presence with them through the ministry of His Holy Spirit. Also pray for the ongoing ministries of the ERCC and the Qingcaodi church, along with many other Christian groups in China, as they all seek to remain faithful to Him in the face of increasing opposition.

PRAISE REPORTS

PAKISTAN: Christian Prisoner Acquitted

Sources: Morning Star News, UCA News

Blasphemy accusations have been used as weapons against Christians in Pakistan for many years. The world's attention was most recently drawn to this situation through the case of Asia Bibi, a Christian woman who was accused in 2009 and sentenced to death. After finally being acquitted and released ten years later, Asia was forced to secretly flee the country.

Sajjad Masih Gill faced false accusations similar to those made against Asia. Charged in 2011 for allegedly sending blasphemous text messages (see www.vomcanada.com/pk-2013-07-29.htm), he was sentenced to life in prison. This sentence was changed to the death penalty in March 2021.

During his time of imprisonment, Sajjad endured torture and ostracism. His brother and nephew were also attacked and threatened after visiting him in prison. Sajjad's appeal was delayed over a hundred times because the judges were not prepared to hear his case.

In light of the terrible treatment experienced by Sajjad, it brings great joy to report that he was released from prison on November 13th after being acquitted of all charges! The Lahore High Court ruled to acquit the Christian man on October 26th on the grounds of insufficient evidence. The news of the ruling was intentionally silenced to avoid putting his life, along with the lives of his family members and lawyer, in danger. According to his lawyer, Javed Sahorta, Sajjad is "very happy" but cannot return to his normal life. For security reasons, no further details are expected to be released.

Praise God that Sajjad has been acquitted! Please uphold this Christian man in your prayers as his advocates work to provide him with ongoing protection from the dangers of mob violence. Also prayerfully lift up his family members, legal representatives, and others who are connected to his case, praying for their safety during this time as well. May incidents such as these serve as an impetus for positive political and legal change in Pakistan, ultimately leading to the repeal of the country's coercive blasphemy laws.

PAKISTAN: Christian Nurses Released on Bail

Sources: Morning Star News, UCA News, International Christian Concern, Christian Post

In a decision referred to as "unprecedented," a Pakistani court granted bail for two Christian nurses who were accused of "defiling the Quran." The women received bail on September 23rd, but the decision was kept secret to avoid backlash from militant Islamists.

On April 9th, Maryam Lal and Navish Arooj were directed by their superior to remove any stickers and wall hangings off the walls of the hospital in Faisalabad. In obeying, however, the nurses were accused of desecrating wall hangings containing verses from the Quran. For more details on the event, as well as a video report, go to www.vomcanada.com/pk-2021-04-15.htm.

News of the release was only made public on November 19th after a photo was published showing the two Christians holding a victory sign. The attorney representing the women, Atif Jamil Paggan, states that they are currently in a secure location, since it is unsafe for them to return to their homes. Their lawyer is optimistic that they will be completely absolved of the charges. Even if acquitted, however, it will be impossible for the nurses to return to work at the hospital, or even for them to collect any outstanding wages. "We are hoping that the situation remains under control," states Atif, "but the danger of violent protests will always loom."

In court, the accused Christians admitted to removing a torn sticker with a prayer on it. However, when granting bail, the judge presiding over their case ruled that there was no proof supporting the claim that Maryam and Navish intentionally defiled the Quranic inscription. "Charging someone with blasphemy for simply holding a religiously inscribed sticker is not sufficient evidence," he concluded.

Praise God that Maryam and Navish have been released! May the courts fully acquit these dedicated followers of Jesus of the charges against them. Please pray for their safety, as well as that of their families, legal representatives, and all others involved in their case. Also pray that politicians in Pakistan will listen to the arguments being presented by human rights activists around the world and, as a result, abolish the widely abused blasphemy laws.

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