



Persecution & Prayer Alert

The Voice of the Martyrs Canada
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"Christian martyrdom is not about standing up for one's beliefs. It's about proclaiming, in word and deed, the Lord's forgiveness and love for His enemies, in faithfulness to the Lord's command. It's about the Lord and His enemies, not about us and ours."

~ Rev. Dr. Eric Foley

MEXICO: Christians Jailed by Village Mayor

Sources: Morning Star News, La Jornada

Three Christians in San Pedro Chimaltepec, a Mexican town located in eastern Oaxaca state, were jailed by the local mayor after refusing to contribute monetarily to an annual religious festival. Many residents of Oaxaca state practise a "traditionalist" mix of Catholic and indigenous religions involving rituals in which all villagers are expected to participate. The three Christian men, who are all members of the Emmanuel Mission Center Church, believed that it would be wrong for them to contribute to a festival that honours idols.

The community leaders demanded payment from the Christians, citing local regulations that require villagers to make contributions to the religious festivities. On orders from the mayor and another official, two Christian brothers, Bonifacio and Donato Martínez Sánchez, along with Gerino Hernández Martínez, were imprisoned on January 3rd and held incommunicado for declining to provide the payment.

After news of the arrests reached governing state authorities, officials spoke with the village leaders and convinced them that no laws had been broken and, as such, they could not hold the believers. As a result, the three men were released on January 6th.

In a press conference following the Christians' release, Pastor Cipriano Gazca Maldonado noted that this was not the first time members of the church have faced problems because of their faith. On November 21st, another one of its members, Ruperto Domínguez Teodoro, was detained and

then expelled from the community. The church has also suffered vandalism and theft. For more information on the difficulties facing Christians in Mexico and, in particular, the nation's southern states, go to www.vomcanada.com/mexico.htm.

While we praise God for the intervention of governing state officials and the resulting recent release of these Christian men, we remain mindful of the need to pray for wisdom and strength on behalf of each believer, their families, as well as other members of their church as they face ongoing opposition and estrangement from other villagers in their community. Pray that our Christian brothers and sisters in Mexico will be examples of God's grace and compassion, reflecting the light of His love to all those around them.

REPORT UPDATES

PAKISTAN: Death Penalty for Longtime Prisoner; Bail for Another

Sources: Jubilee Campaign, AsiaNews, Church in Chains, International Christian Concern, Agenzia Fides

On January 3rd, a judge at the Rawalpindi District Court in Pakistan ruled to change a Christian pastor's sentence of life imprisonment to the death penalty. Zafar Bhatti has been imprisoned on charges of blasphemy since July 2012. After five years, he was ultimately convicted and sentenced to life in prison. The charges arise from an alleged text message, yet Zafar denies that the phone in question was even registered to his name. For more information on the ordeal facing this Pakistani pastor, go to www.vomcanada.com/zafar-bhatti.htm.

The recent ruling, which changed his sentence to the death penalty, came after a long series of appeals. In a December 24th court hearing, the prosecution argued that the correct punishment for blasphemy would be death. Zafar's lawyer, Naseeb Anjum, intends to appeal this judgement, as well as the original conviction. However, he has also said: "Zafar Bhatti has confided in me and...is willing to face the worst. He knows he is innocent and God will have the final judgement."

A separate ruling from the Supreme Court of Pakistan on January 6th brings a measure of relief to some Christians sentenced with blasphemy. As in the case of Zafar Bhatti, those facing charges of blasphemy frequently spend several years in prison before their cases are decided. However, Pakistani law requires that, if a trial is not concluded within two years, the accused may be granted bail.

This ruling came as the court heard arguments relating to blasphemy charges against Nadeem Samson, who was accused of posting blasphemous content on Facebook in 2017. During the hearing, Nadeem's lawyer argued that he should be released on bail and urged the judge to make his decision strictly based on law and not allow religious sentiment to cloud his judgement. When the decision was announced, the judge ultimately ruled to grant the Christian bail.

The road to justice is still long for Nadeem, as this ruling does not increase his chances of being considered innocent. The case is still pending in the Lahore District Court and could take years before it concludes. However, human rights activists are hopeful that the decision will serve as a precedent for others facing long periods of imprisonment without a conviction. To learn more about the persecution of Christians in Pakistan, go to www.vomcanada.com/pakistan.htm.

Praise God that Nadeem Samson is now free on bail while he awaits the court's decision. Pray that justice will prevail in the Pakistani courts. Prayerfully remember all those who are serving time in prison under the country's notorious blasphemy laws. May God's peace and comfort rest on Zafar Bhatti, along with his family and friends, as they come to terms with the latest setback in his case. Pray that the appeals made on his behalf will be successful and that this faithful follower of Jesus will be rightfully exonerated.

ALGERIA: Court Hearing Postponed for Accused Christians

Source: The Voice of the Martyrs Canada

Pastor Salah Chalah is the senior pastor of the largest Protestant church in Algeria, where governmental restrictions in opposition to Christianity have escalated to an alarming degree. As a result, he was recently summoned to appear in court, along with three other Christians, and is now facing multiple charges. The court hearing was scheduled to take place on December 5th (see www.vomcanada.com/dz-2021-12-02.htm). However, on January 10th, new details emerged indicating that the hearing has been postponed until January 16th.

Please continue to prayerfully uphold Pastor Salah and the three other accused believers as they plead their case before court officials in the coming days. Pray that all the charges against them will be dropped. May the many churches that have been forcefully sealed by the Algerian government be allowed to reopen, so the love of Christ can be demonstrated through both word and deed throughout the country (John 13:35).

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