



Persecution & Prayer Alert

The Voice of the Martyrs Canada
www.vomcanada.com

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"While the government's powerful backhoes can destroy church buildings, they can never destroy the faith in the hearts and souls of believers."

~ Bob Fu, President of ChinaAid

BELARUS: New Life Church Building Destroyed

Sources: VOMC Contacts, Forum18

In 2002, the New Life Church in Minsk, Belarus, purchased a cowshed on the outskirts of the city in order to convert the building into a suitable place of worship for the congregation of 600 members. Since that time, the government's religious affairs department has opposed their use of the building. For more than 18 years, The Voice of the Martyrs Canada has been following the plight of this church, calling for prayer as the believers continually sought to find ways to meet for services in the face of opposition.

When the Christians' use of the building was denied, any request to rent another location was also rejected. Since the church was not meeting in an approved facility, their registration, which they had held for ten years, was revoked. Despite this, the worshippers continued to meet in the building, but experienced repeated harassment over the years until the doors were finally sealed in February 2021. Unwilling to give in, the members convened each Sunday in the parking lot until their outdoor gatherings were also banned and the pastors received fines. To review our previously posted reports describing the numerous challenges this church has encountered, visit www.vomcanada.com/belarus.htm.

In a final act of opposition against the church, government officials arranged for heavy equipment to be transported to the church's location on June 20th and, as a result, the purchased building was reduced to rubble. Pastor Goncharenko has expressed his outrage in an open letter to the government. Looking to the future, he is uncertain about the direction that can be taken. "No one will sell us a religious building, and religious communities are not allowed to have regular religious meetings in a non-religious building," he lamented.

Pastor Goncharenko points out that, with the proposed changes to the religion law, any possibility of re-registering the church will be much more difficult. If passed into law, the draft legislation would impose numerous new restrictions and conditions on registration for religious communities, along with increased powers of censorship and monitoring by the government.

Please pray for peace, direction and comfort on behalf of Pastor Goncharenko and the members of New Life Church. May God miraculously intervene in this situation, making it possible for our Christian brothers and sisters in Belarus to find a suitable place in which they can honour Him by worshipping corporately together as a body of believers. Thank you for continuing to present this matter before God's throne in prayer, especially as governing officials now contemplate the proposed revisions to their religion law. Ask the Lord to work mightily in the hearts and minds of the decision-makers, so there will be no further restrictions placed upon these faithful believers and others who are residing in this Eastern European nation.

INDONESIA: Worship Services Stopped by Mobs

Sources: Morning Star News, Release International, JPNN

As Christianity spreads in Indonesia, local governments and community members are increasingly creating obstacles to restrict the activities of the country's churches. The process for believers who want to build a church facility is complicated and can take many years. In one case, a church finally received approval in April of this year after waiting for 15 years. (Further details about the situation can be reviewed at www.vomcanada.com/id-2023-05-04.htm.) Despite repeated calls from federal officials for local communities to be more accepting of religious diversity, in accordance with the country's constitution, the message of religious tolerance is not accepted by all.

On May 19th, mobs of opposing local Muslims stopped Christians from worshipping in two cities located on Sumatra Island. In the village of Binjai, at least 40 protesters disrupted a worship service that was being held at a café. The leaders of the mob claim that holding Christian worship services in a predominantly Muslim area is provocative, and thus should not be allowed. In the city of Riau, a service taking place at Bethel Indonesia Church (GBI) was prevented by a militant group believed to be outsiders. On May 28th, yet another GBI church had been forced to stop their worship activities in the village of Cilame, West Java.

More recently, a local official, along with other opposing community members, stopped the worship service of a house church located outside the city of Jakarta on June 18th. While speaking to the protesters, Pastor Elysson Lase assured them that they were not constructing a church building; they were merely worshipping in a private home. The pastor told the protesters: "The important thing has been conveyed to the village office, that we are not building a church. So, what's the problem?"

That same day, access to the Javanese Christian Church building in the Solo area of central Java was blocked by a demonstration. A banner proclaiming "*Allahu Akbar*" ("God is greater") was placed over the door to the building, along with another banner at the road in front of the

building. The next day, the mayor of Solo visited the site and ordered that the banners be removed.

While Indonesian law does not require a permit for worshipping in a home, some insist that such restrictions do exist. The onerous requirements for building a place of worship have resulted in many churches meeting without official permits. And although local governments can issue temporary permits when applications are pending, disapproving local Islamic groups will frequently oppose them. For more information on the difficulties encountered by Christians in Indonesia, go to www.vomcanada.com/indonesia.htm.

Pray for the ongoing ministry of churches throughout Indonesia. Ask the Lord to grant His direction, wisdom and encouragement to the country's church leaders as they continue seeking ways for their congregations to peacefully gather together for worship and teaching. May the message of the Gospel reach many more community members who are in desperate need of God's salvation, including those who strongly oppose Him, by giving them a revelation of Christ Jesus and His sacrificial love for them.

SRI LANKA: Request for Headstone on Christian Grave Denied

Source: NCEASL

In March 2023, following the passing of a pastor's son, arrangements were made for the burial to take place in a public cemetery. However, when the pastor of the "Jesus Lives Glorious Church" in Karuwalagaswewa asked for permission to erect a headstone on his son's grave, his request was denied by the Funeral Aid Society. When visited by officials on April 25th, the pastor was told that erecting a headstone on the grave of a Christian would thereby make the cemetery a Christian burial ground.

Despite the pastor's numerous requests, permission for the headstone placement has been repeatedly denied. Unfortunately, various forms of opposition from community members and local leaders, particularly in rural areas, are frequently experienced by Christians in Sri Lanka. To review additional reports addressing their struggles, and/or to learn how you can more effectively pray for our Sri Lankan family in Christ, visit www.vomcanada.com/srilanka.htm.

Please prayerfully uphold this pastor, along with other grieving family members and friends, as they mourn the loss of their loved one. Pray that the Holy Spirit will minister great comfort and peace to each one of them during this difficult time. May they rest assured in God's unfulfilling promises, finding needed solace, encouragement and hope. Additionally, ask the Lord to soften the hearts of the opposing local officials and community members, filling them with understanding and compassion, so they will grant this pastor his simple request.