



Persecution & Prayer Alert

The Voice of the Martyrs Canada
www.vomcanada.com

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"But I say to you who hear, 'Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.'"

~ Luke 6:27-28 ESV

PAKISTAN: Woman Killed for Refusing to Convert to Islam

Sources: CLAAS, Kross Konnection, Morning Star News

A Christian widow and mother of three was abducted, raped, murdered, and doused with acid after she refused to convert to Islam and marry one of her abductors. Shazia Imran worked at LUMS University in Lahore, Pakistan. On June 6th, at the end of her work shift, she failed to return home. Worried family members searched throughout the night for her and, the next day, they filed a police report. The police contacted the family that same day to notify them that a body was found in the morning. The family was able to identify the body as their missing loved one.

For some time prior to the attack, Shazia had been receiving pressure from a local Muslim man, Mani Gujjar. Not wanting to cause problems for the rest of her family, she did not share this concern with them until a few days before her murder. At that time, she told her sister-in-law that Mani had threatened to kill her if she did not convert to Islam and marry him.

When questioned by the authorities, Mani confessed to the crime. However, the police have not pursued the arrests of three accomplices: Mani's brother and two cousins. The accused claims that the Christian woman had been in a relationship with him but recently started blackmailing him. "We doubt that we'll get justice for our sister, as the police [officials'] bias is evident," stated the victim's brother Zafar. He and his family have gone into hiding due to fear of retribution.

Shazia's husband had passed away 18 months earlier under suspicious circumstances. The family believes that Shazia's attackers are the same people who were responsible for her husband's death, which was ruled an accident by the police in order to protect the accused. Shazia leaves behind two sons, Salman (16) and Abrar (6), as well as a daughter, Aliza (7). While they are under the care of their uncle Zafar, Salman is working to provide for his siblings. The younger children have been unable to continue their education because of financial constraints.

Forced conversions and marriages happen frequently in Pakistan but are often not reported, nor are they sufficiently pursued within the country's legal system. For more information on the persecution of Christians in Pakistan, go to www.vomcanada.com/pakistan.htm.

Please prayerfully remember Shazia's family members, including her three children and brother Zafar, as they grieve the tragic loss of their loved one. May each of them tangibly experience the Lord's comforting presence during this time of mourning. Pray that justice will be upheld by the officials, and that those who perpetrated the crimes would be held responsible. Also pray that the family will be safe from the threats made against them.

CHINA: Church Members Arrested for Alleged Illegal Business Activities

Source: ChinaAid

Four Christians from the Shingjia Church in Shunde City have been arrested on suspicion of conducting "illegal business practices." The accused believers include Pastor Deng Yanxiang and three coworkers: Zhu Longjiang, Wang Weicai and Zhu Qiaoling.

On the morning of May 24th, police officers raided the church's education centre. After the facility was searched, all educational materials – including computers, desks, chairs and books – were loaded into a truck. The door to the facility was then sealed and the four Christians were taken into custody. They were given a 30-day administrative detention. However, none of the detained believers were released at the end of that term.

Zhu Longjiang's wife describes him as a devout Christian. She prays that he will soon be released so he can continue to serve his elderly parents who need extensive care. Wang Weicai's wife questions the reasons for the charges against her husband. "He is always devout and loves the Lord and actively helps brothers and sisters," she stated. "How does he suddenly become a criminal?" Zhu Qiaoling is known for her hospitality and, through an online group, often distributed items to Christians in need.

The Shingjia Church is one of many places of worship in China presently facing opposition in the form of arrests, harassment or fines. To learn more about the persecution of Christians in this Communist nation, go to www.vomcanada.com/china.htm.

Pray that these detained believers will be released from custody and not subjected to further legal problems. Also remember the family members who are missing their loved ones during this time of separation. Continue to pray for the ongoing ministries of Christians throughout

China, asking the Lord to bless and multiply their efforts so that the message of the Gospel will continue to transform many lives in spite of governmental opposition.

PAKISTAN: Hundreds Flee After Blasphemy Charges

Sources: Pakistan Christian Post, Kross Konnection, Morning Star News, Steadfast Global

Police have charged a Christian man, Haroon Shahzad, with blasphemy after he posted a Bible passage onto his Facebook page on June 29th. The passage, 1 Corinthians 10:18-21, refers to the sacrificing of food to idols, and the timing of the post coincided with the beginning of the Islamic feast of *Eid al-Adha*. The post was made without comment.

The Islamic feast commemorates God's provision of a lamb for Abraham to sacrifice in his son's place. A local villager took offense to Haroon's post, stating that it disrespected the Abrahamic tradition of animal sacrifice and likened Muslims to pagans. The villager shared a screenshot of the post with local social media groups and, as a result, it stirred up anger within the community.

The next day, leaders of local mosques called for people to gather in protest of the post after Friday prayers. Mobs from other villages also joined the angered community, and police were called to avert potential attacks made against the 250 to 300 Christian families in the village. While the authorities were able to deter any such attacks from occurring, the majority of the Christians were forced to flee the village, including Haroon and most of his family.

Charges were laid against Haroon for blasphemy, despite the argument that he had made no personal statement when posting the Scripture passage. In an effort to force him to surrender, the authorities detained his two sisters-in-law who had stayed behind to care for their disabled parents rather than fleeing. The women were released on July 2nd after Haroon's brother and two others presented themselves for detention in their stead.

Haroon was detained and then released on bail as of July 3rd. However, he was taken into "protective custody" the next day. The attorney representing him is hopeful that he will again be released on bail at the next hearing. It is believed that the charges against Haroon were largely based on a personal grudge harboured against him by the complainant, Imran Ullah.

Speaking of the original post, Christian and former lawmaker Tahir Naveed Chaudhry conceded that "there was no inflammatory comment in it, but perhaps the timing was not right." Unfortunately, the calls for protests from the mosque loudspeakers led to the possibility of mob violence being committed against Christians of the community in general.

The blasphemy laws in Pakistan have led to numerous cases of arrests and convictions, often due to interpersonal conflicts which have little to do with religion. It is believed that around 80 people are currently being detained in Pakistan on blasphemy charges, half of whom are facing life in prison or the death penalty. Even in cases where the accused individuals have been released, many of them were forced to hide or flee for their lives. One such example is Sawan Masih, an acquitted Christian man who remains virtually in prison because of the threats on his

life. (For information on Sawan's situation, go to www.vomcanada.com/pakistan/pk-2023-03-23.htm.) VOMC's ministry partner, Steadfast Global, continues to work diligently to get Sawan and his family out of the country, despite the roadblocks they are facing.

Prayerfully uplift Haroon, his family, and the other Christians in their community, who are living in fear because of this threatening situation. May each one of these believers be given the right words to say to help dispel the anger of hostile community members. Pray for the Lord's protection over the numerous followers of Jesus who have been forced to flee through no fault of their own. Finally, remember all those who have been unjustly sentenced with blasphemy and, as a result, presently remain in prisons across Pakistan (Hebrews 13:3).

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