



Persecution & Prayer Alert

The Voice of the Martyrs Canada
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*"All the darkness in the world cannot
extinguish the light of a single candle."
~ St. Francis of Assisi*

PAKISTAN: Alleged Blasphemy Instigates Outrage

Source: CLAAS-UK

A blasphemy allegation has created unrest in the Sargodha district of Punjab, leaving Christians concerned about their safety. This is the third such incident to have occurred in the area over the past month – including one ongoing case involving Haroon Shahzad, who was accused of blasphemy after posting a Scripture passage to his Facebook page on June 29th. (To review the previously posted report, go to www.vomcanada.com/pakistan/pk-2023-07-06b.htm.)

In this latest incident, a Muslim man by the name of Mohd Abdul Gaffer was returning home after his morning prayers to Allah on July 16th when he spotted a pamphlet tucked into a section of the wall surrounding his house. According to Mohd, the contents were highly disrespectful of Muhammad and the Quran, and it included praise over a recent incident that took place in Sweden where a Quran had been burned. News of the pamphlet rapidly spread, resulting in outrage among the members of the Muslim community. Police quickly responded as demonstrations of protest began to build. Although the officers at the scene were able to quell any violence, a police report was issued in compliance with the demands of the angered mob.

This area of Punjab is home to several Christian communities, and some local Muslims who were angered by the pamphlet have placed blame on the neighbouring Christians. While police intervention likely prevented immediate violence, believers are very mindful of past instances of persecution and feel uneasy about the potential for more mob violence. "The unknown identities of the culprits are cause for alarm, and it is unfortunate that fingers are being pointed towards Christians," states Nasir Saeed, who serves as the director of CLAAS-UK.

Some Christian leaders have suggested that this incident could be the work of individuals hoping to exploit the anger of the Muslim community following the public burning of a Quran in Stockholm, Sweden, on June 28th. Christians throughout Pakistan have condemned the Quran burning, demonstrating their commitment to peaceful coexistence and respect for all faiths. Nevertheless, some militants in Pakistan have endeavoured to stir up hatred against their Christian neighbours, to the point of fabricating stories to incite increased volatility.

Praise God for the swift intervention of the police in this most recent incident. Pray that the authorities will be able to continue defusing any further violence amid ongoing religious tensions throughout this area of Punjab. Prayerfully uphold our Christian brothers and sisters in Pakistan as they endeavour to live peaceable lives within a very volatile nation. May each believer be filled with God's wisdom as they seek to interact with those around them – conveying His love, grace and peace to their Muslim neighbours.

SRI LANKA: Christians Assaulted and Threatened

Source: NCEASL

As the pastor of the Good Shepherd Church in the Polonnaruwa district of Sri Lanka seeks to demonstrate the love of Christ to the members of his community, part of his ministry includes overseeing a drug rehabilitation centre in the local village. According to a recent report, a Christian man working at the centre was attacked on June 16th by two opposing villagers, resulting in abrasions on his neck. The perpetrators also threatened to "break the church."

On June 19th, two other individuals who worked at the centre were travelling by bicycle when they were assaulted by a few people armed with iron rods. One of the Christian workers suffered an injury to his head, while the other sustained wounds to his hands. Both believers received medical treatment in hospital. That evening, the same perpetrators went to the homes of two other families who were members of the Good Shepherd Church and threatened these believers, demanding that they stop attending the church.

Police reports have been filed for each of these instances. However, at last report, no charges have been laid against any of the attackers. For more information on the persecution of Christians in Sri Lanka, go to www.vomcanada.com/srilanka.htm.

Pray for divine protection on behalf of the members of this Sri Lankan church, along with those serving the needs of vulnerable community members. May the Gospel message of God's love, healing and deliverance reach the hearts of many more people in this community. Additionally, pray that those responsible for these attacks would not only be held accountable for their actions, but that they would turn to Christ in sincere repentance.

REPORT UPDATE

PAKISTAN: Accused Christian Blocked from Bail Hearing

Source: Morning Star News

Police in Pakistan prevented a Christian who was accused of blasphemy from attending his bail hearing on July 11th. As a result, the judge bowed to pressure from a crowd of protesters and thus denied the believer's release. The accused, Haroon Shahzad, has been held in "protective custody" since July 3rd, even though he was initially released on bail. Haroon is presently facing charges of blasphemy because of a Scripture passage he posted on Facebook without any comment. (See www.vomcanada.com/pakistan/pk-2023-07-06b.htm for more details.)

At the bail hearing, Haroon's lawyer, Aneeqa Maria, was taken aback when police entered the courtroom without her client. One of the officers claimed that Haroon was not in police custody and denied knowing the Christian man's whereabouts. Consequently, since the accused had not appeared in court, the judge rejected Haroon's bail application. When leaving the courthouse, Aneeqa and those with her were warned about angry protesters outside, forcing them to leave through a rear exit. She has since learned that the police had also delayed formally recording her client's arrest until after the hearing in order to keep him incarcerated.

In Pakistan, accusations of blasphemy regularly result in mob demonstrations. Those suspected of the alleged crimes subsequently face threats of death even if they are found innocent. To learn more about the unjust treatment of Christians in this South Asian nation, and/or to review reports on other cases of persecution, go to www.vomcanada.com/pakistan.htm.

Pray that Haroon will not only be released soon from custody, but that he and his family – as well as all those defending him – will be kept safe from vigilante attacks. May necessary steps ultimately leading towards improved religious freedom conditions throughout the country be taken by the government sectors and courts of Pakistan, in hopes that accusations of this nature will no longer be used against our innocent brothers and sisters in Christ.

The "Persecution & Prayer Alert" is a ministry of:
The Voice of the Martyrs Canada, P.O. Box 608, Streetsville, Ontario, L5M 2C1
Tel. (905) 670-9721 Website: www.vomcanada.com