



Persecution & Prayer Alert

The Voice of the Martyrs Canada
www.vomcanada.com

Thursday, August 3, 2023

*"We are willing for the Word of
the Lord to spread quickly, even if our
own interests will suffer as a result."*

~ Xuncheng Reformed Church statement

CHINA: Youth Summer Camp Raided

Source: ChinaAid

The Xuncheng (Zion) Reformed Church has faced repeated raids and arrests in recent years, as the government attempts to forcibly shut down the church. The most recent incident, which took place on July 25th, involved a raid on a youth summer camp.

As the church anticipated a three-day youth camp, starting on July 24th, the believers met for Sunday worship and determined to spread the Gospel message in spite of any opposition they would potentially encounter. "We are willing for the Word of the Lord to spread quickly, even if our own interests will suffer as a result," they proclaimed. "Therefore, we, in this church, have also been gathering in the name of the Lord and making it as public as possible."

On the second day of the church's youth ministry program, police officers and representatives from the religious affairs bureau burst into the building where the believers were meeting. Four Christian leaders were apprehended, and each one of them was given a 15-day "administrative detention." Bibles, cell phones, and other belongings were confiscated the following day.

The four arrested Christians have all faced detentions before. Pastor An Yankui and Zhang Chenghao had each been sentenced to one year in prison for attending a Christian conference in Malaysia (see www.vomcanada.com/cn-2022-11-17.htm). In June of this year, Wang Yingjie and his wife Wang Ying served 15-day detentions as part of the authorities' ongoing harassment of their church.

When this youth camp had been raided, and these church leaders detained, the children attending the summer camp that day were left in the care of Pastor An's wife and the wife of Zhang

Chenghao. The authorities summoned the youths' parents to the camp and permitted them to leave with their children as their names were called. Some of the parents spoke with law enforcement officers about their children's Bibles, which had been confiscated during the raid.

Pray for strength, courage and peace on behalf of the four recently arrested Christian leaders who are presently serving their detentions. May these faithful believers, along with other members of the Xuncheng Reformed Church, receive greatly needed encouragement as they endeavour to continue steadfastly serving the Lord. Please also pray for the children who were attending the summer camp and thus witnessed the leaders' arrests, asking that these youngsters be surrounded by the comforting presence of our loving Heavenly Father.

PAKISTAN: Christian Charged Under Anti-Terrorism Laws

Sources: Eurasia Review, Morning Star News, AsiaNews

In September 2022, Imran Rehman was accused of blasphemy because of the material he posted on a WhatsApp group chat. The Pakistani believer was arrested and detained to await trial. Unfortunately, since his arrest, proposed changes to Pakistan's laws were drafted. If approved, blasphemy cases could be tried under the revised anti-terrorism laws. Even though the legislation is still only in draft form, Imran recently had terrorism charges laid against him.

Imran's lawyer has filed a petition for the terrorism charges to be removed, referring to them as "illegal and illogical." However, that petition was dismissed on July 6th. An appeal to the Lahore High Court is planned. The Christian man denies ever sharing blasphemous content on the WhatsApp's text messaging service.

The blasphemy laws in Pakistan are frequently used to settle personal scores or cause problems for religious minorities. While those convicted may face a death sentence, an actual judicial execution for blasphemy has never occurred. Instead, prisoners continue to be held in custody with little hope for release. One such prisoner is Anwar Kenneth, a Christian man who was sentenced to death in 2002 and continues to remain in captivity. For additional reports on persecution in Pakistan, go to www.vomcanada.com/pakistan.htm.

May Imran and his lawyer be filled with the Lord's wisdom and peace as they seek a resolution to these additional charges. Pray that justice will prevail in Imran's case, and that the charges against this Christian man would be dismissed. Continue to remember all those who are presently suffering in prison under Pakistan's widely abused blasphemy laws, praying that God will grant these prisoners and their families protection, strength, endurance and hope so they can courageously carry on each day in anticipation of His needed intervention.

IRAN: Imprisoned Christian Grieves Over Loss of Son

Sources: Church in Chains, Article18, The Mirror

In January 2019, Mehdi Akbari was arrested along with fellow Christian converts during coordinated raids on their homes. In October 2020, he was sentenced to ten years in prison for

"acting against national security" by "forming an illegal evangelical Christian group." During the trial, which lasted mere minutes, the judge ridiculed the believer's faith and referred to Christianity as a "deviant religion."

Mehdi, who prefers to go by Yasser, was a single parent whose only son, Amir-Ali, had cerebral palsy. Upon Yasser's detention, the 18-year-old boy was sent to a care facility in Tehran. In December 2021, the detained Christian father received news that Amir-Ali had passed away due to health complications. Despite pleas to the court, Yasser was not given leave to attend the burial of his son. Thankfully, he had been granted a short visit two months before his son died.

After serving three years in Tehran's notorious Evin Prison, the Christian man continues to suffer from the trauma of his grievous situation. A letter was recently smuggled out of the prison, giving a first-hand account of the struggles he has been facing.

Yasser describes how he was being tortured in the Tehran prison while his terminally ill son lay dying outside its confining walls. Now, more than a year and a half later, Yasser states that he still carries his grief within him "like a suppressed cry and an unexpressed sorrow." After describing the final visit he had with his son while surrounded by prison officials, he writes, "I consider the best moment of my life to be the last time I hugged my Amir-Ali."

In his letter, Yasser also reflects on the charges against him. "Is worshipping God a crime?" he asks. The detained believer states that, when taken to court, he naively believed he would appear before a fair judge who would rule according to the country's constitution. "But what an illusion that was!" he adds. Having no lawyer to represent him, Yasser writes that he had no idea how to reply to the accusations that he somehow acted "against national security."

Considering his faith, Yasser writes, "When the night drags its black mantle over the prison, and the sadness sinks in with the sunset, the beats of the seconds of the clock hit like a whip in my mind, and I begin to wonder...if this faith of mine is worth enduring such pressures." But then, when Yasser ponders on his relationship with God, he receives greatly needed reassurance. "Time and time again, I have found myself surrounded with these thoughts, and each time I have answered firmly: 'Yes, of course it is worth it.'" The imprisoned believer is thankfully able to firmly testify, "I only know that I am, and will remain, a Christian; and that I will preach about the light of God and Kingdom of heaven to everyone."

Iran has been described as a country that is home to the fastest growing church in the world, with an estimated one million Christian converts from Muslim backgrounds. The Islamic theocratic government has actively fought against this growth, imprisoning many followers of Jesus, including Yasser. For more details, go to www.vomcanada.com/iran.htm.

Praise God for Yasser's resilient faithfulness to the Lord, despite his painful circumstances. Please keep this dear Christian brother in your prayers, asking that he would soon be released from captivity and that, in the meantime, he will be granted continued strength of heart, mind and body. Finally, pray that God will continue working mightily throughout Iran by leading many to faith in Christ – including the country's opposing governmental and judicial officials.

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