



Persecution & Prayer Alert

The Voice of the Martyrs Canada
www.vomcanada.com

Thursday, August 24, 2023

*"I waited patiently for the Lord;
He inclined to me and heard my cry."*

~ Psalm 40:1 ESV

PAKISTAN: Mass Violence After Blasphemy Accusations

Sources: VOMC Contacts, International Christian Concern, Kross Konnection, Pakistan Observer, Church in Chains, Open Doors Canada

On August 16th, thousands of people stormed a Christian colony in Jaranwala, a town located in the Faisalabad district of Punjab. Angered by allegations of blasphemy, and spurred on by urgent announcements that had been broadcasted over mosque loudspeakers, the incited mob either damaged or utterly destroyed up to 26 church buildings and as many as 400 homes. Thankfully, there were no reports of casualties following this recent attack. Please take the time to view the informative video alert that VOMC released the next day, which includes footage of the actual attacks, by going to www.vomcanada.com/pk-videos.htm.

This incident was sparked after two Christian brothers, named Rocky Saleem Masih and Raja Amir Saleem Masih, had been burning waste paper. Accusations that they were desecrating pages of the Quran ensued. Three local men also produced a letter that allegedly contained blasphemous comments about Muhammad. The brothers have been detained and charged under Pakistan's blasphemy laws.

Members of the military and police force were called in to stop the rampage, and their emergency intervention eventually settled the protestors. While the violence had abated in the days that followed, underlying tensions remain. The government has publicly condemned the attacks, and more than 100 warrants of arrest have been issued against the rioters. Governing leaders have promised to help the victims rebuild, but the survivors are sceptical.

On the Sunday following the attacks, the victimized Christians gathered for worship, but with apprehension. "We used to come here without any fear, but today we need the police," stated

Nosheen Farman, who was unable to return to her burned home. At the Salvation Army church, around 200 Christians sat on chairs in an alley, amidst the rubble of their destroyed building. Worshippers were urged to remain steadfast in their faith, especially those who had experienced tremendous loss.

While the attacks are considered the result of a planned attempt to disrupt peace, not all Muslims in the area have sided with the rioters. In fact, at least one local mosque has announced that its facility is available to be used for Christian prayer services while the rebuilding takes place.

Tensions remain high in a country that's renowned for the violence of militants sparked by allegations of blasphemy. In Sahiwal, a city located about 100 kilometres south of Faisalabad, an attack of similar outrage was narrowly averted on August 20th. Ehsaan Shan Masih, a member of the Sahiwal Baptist Church, came across a video about the Jaranwala incident and shared the post on social media. Militant Islamic leaders in the area quickly called for protests, claiming that the Christian had committed blasphemy. Due to the timely intervention of police, thankfully the violence was prevented, and Ehsaan and his family were taken into protective custody. However, as demands were made for an arrest, the accused believer has been formally charged and remanded.

Please remember to pray for the hundreds of believers in Jaranwala who have been terribly affected by this most recent incident of senseless violence. In the aftermath of the riots, may the Lord greatly comfort our Christian family in Pakistan and provide His divine protection from further attacks. Ask that He would also meet the practical needs of all those who have lost so much – not only providing for their daily sustenance, but also the funds required to rebuild their homes and church buildings. Additionally, please pray for Rocky, Raja and Ehsaan, who are now facing allegations of blasphemy – along with the many other Pakistani Christians already imprisoned on similar charges – asking that they would be found innocent and kept safe from vigilante violence.

BELARUS: More Harassment and Sentences for New Life Church

Sources: Forum18, Facebook posts by Sergiy Melyanets

For several years, the New Life Church in Minsk has faced opposition from the government, including the complete destruction of their place of worship on June 20th. (For more details, see www.vomcanada.com/by-2023-06-29.htm.) That act of destruction, however, did not stop ongoing harassment from government officials.

Each summer, the church organizes camps for children. Unfortunately, on July 10th, a bus carrying 50 children overturned on a poorly maintained road. Thankfully, there were no serious injuries nor any complaints. Even the state-controlled media published a report blaming the poor road conditions for the accident. However, the next day, the district tax office demanded financial reports from the church, along with any records between the church and the bus company. It is believed that the accident is now being used as an excuse to further harass the church.

On July 25th, the church's website was blocked by the government without warning. It was discovered that the prosecutor has banned the website for six months, alleging that the church was publishing "extremist" information, along with inciting threats to national security. A hearing regarding this case is scheduled for August 25th.

The government's opposition continued on August 14th when Pastor Vyacheslav Goncharenko's house was searched by officers from the Organized Crime and Corruption Department. The pastor, along with his son-in-law, Ilya Budai, who serves as the church's youth pastor, were arrested. The next day, Pastor Ilya was sentenced to five days' detention for allegedly waving his arms and swearing at the police – an accusation strongly denied by a witness. The sentencing for Pastor Vyacheslav's detention was ten days. The authorities gave no explanation for the senior pastor's arrest, but it is believed that his detention may have been extended in order to keep him from attending the August 25th hearing in regards to the alleged publishing of "extremist materials."

Pray for God's wisdom, endurance and provision on behalf of the church's leadership as they attempt to deal with the multiple recent incidents of harassment. May these believers serve as testimonies of His love and grace as they respond in a Christ-like manner to those who stand strongly against them. In the face of continuing opposition, pray that ongoing ministry opportunities will be presented to the members of the New Life Church so they can share the hope of eternal salvation that's available through Jesus Christ.

CHINA: Infirm Pastor Handcuffed in Hospital

Source: ChinaAid

Pastor Ru Zongren, who suffers from kidney failure, was in the hospital for kidney dialysis on July 30th when police handcuffed him to his bed. He was detained in the hospital for five hours before finally being released.

Originally from a rural area of Anhui Province, Pastor Ru came to faith in Christ at an early age through the Christian witness of his parents. He eventually went on to study theology, graduating from seminary in 2007, prior to returning to his hometown where he has compassionately served the community since. Through his faithful ministry over the years, the Chengxi Christian Church has grown to establish a membership presently consisting of about 400 believers.

In May 2015, when local urban management officials entered the community, they destroyed the church's building. As Pastor Ru attempted to stop them, he was strangled and badly beaten. His injuries resulted in the permanent kidney damage he is dealing with today. The reasons behind his recent detention in the hospital are unclear.

Over the years, Pastor Ru has frequently encountered harassment from government officials, including added surveillance during times that were considered by authorities as "sensitive." To read more accounts of the challenges experienced by China's Christians, and/or to view recorded video reports further addressing these concerns, go to www.vomcanada.com/china.htm.

Please pray for the physical healing of Pastor Ru. May this faithful brother in Christ receive daily strength, comfort and peace through the power of God's indwelling Spirit. Also pray that the Lord will enable other believers in this community to persevere amidst governmental opposition so that the work of the Gospel will continue to thrive and spread throughout this Communist nation.

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