



## Persecution & Prayer Alert

The Voice of the Martyrs Canada  
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*"To preach the Gospel for  
us is to die; to be safe is to stop  
preaching the Gospel."*

~ Mac Philips, a Nigerian Christian

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### **UKRAINE: Churches Closed in Russian-Occupied Areas**

Source: Forum18

Since pro-Russian militants seized areas of eastern Ukraine in 2014, the rebel administration has been targeting religious groups, with the exception of the Russian Orthodox Church. Amid the ongoing Russian occupation, opposition against Christians has increased and numerous churches have been closed in areas controlled by the invading army. Among the places of worship that were forcibly closed in recent months are an Orthodox Church of Ukraine, a Baptist Union church and a Roman Catholic church.

Father Serhi Moskovets is the parish priest for the Orthodox Church of Ukraine in Basan, a town located in the Zaporizhzia Region. Along with recently closing the church building where he served, occupation forces filmed a video of him admitting that religious meetings had been held there without Russian permission, and that he possessed literature allegedly containing anti-Russian content. It is unknown if his confession was made under duress.

A Baptist Union church, also located in the Zaporizhzia Region, was invaded by militants in September, making it the seventh Baptist Union church to have been seized since Russia's more recent invasion in February 2022. Although the congregants were allowed to enter to retrieve their communion supplies, the military has since taken over the building. As members of the church gathered their belongings, they prayed for those who had moved into their facility.

In Skadovsk, a city located in the Kherson Region of southern Ukraine, the Roman Catholic Church of St. Therese of the Child Jesus was searched by Russian forces on August 22nd. Breaking the windows and door of the church building, the troops claimed to be searching for

explosives and drugs. They alleged that a previous parish priest was a drug lord. The building is now closed and the priest, Father Dominik Fiszer, has returned to his native Poland.

As part of a propaganda campaign, a Russian-controlled television station broadcasted a report on October 1st about the "odious sects" of Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia Region. Making various false claims, the report attacked members of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, as well as the country's Protestants, Catholics and Jehovah's Witnesses in general. Such reports not only give Russian militants justification for their invasion of Ukraine, but they also demonstrate their intentions to enforce the same restrictions mandated in Russia.

*Please continue to pray for peace in Ukraine during the ongoing occupation of Russian forces. In the midst of the violence and uncertainty, may our Ukrainian family in Christ receive courage, strength, guidance and protection as they seek to spread the hope of the Gospel among their communities. Additionally, ask the Lord to fill the many believers encountering persecution in occupied areas of the country afresh with the Holy Spirit, so they can supernaturally demonstrate His love and grace in the face of opposition.*

## REPORT UPDATES

### **NEPAL: Appeal Denied for Pastor**

Sources: International Christian Association, Eurasia Review, Church in Chains

In November 2021, Keshav Raj Acharya, the pastor of the Abundant Harvest Church in Pokhara, Nepal, was convicted of proselytising and, as a result, sentenced to two years in prison. Even though his sentence was reduced to one year upon appeal, Pastor Keshav subsequently appealed to the Supreme Court of Nepal. For more details, go to [www.vomcanada.com/keshav-raj-acharya.htm](http://www.vomcanada.com/keshav-raj-acharya.htm).

Regrettably, the Supreme Court upheld the lower court's decision, affirming Pastor Keshav's one-year sentence. Responding to the ruling, the pastor's lawyer, Indra Aryal, expressed concern that the decision curtails the principles of religious liberty and freedom of expression, particularly for the country's religious minorities. Pastor Keshav conveyed his deep sadness about the judgment, reiterating that his actions were driven by faith and a desire to spread God's love and blessings.

*Remember Pastor Keshav in your prayers as he serves his one-year term in prison. Though incarcerated, pray that he will be empowered to minister to fellow prisoners and prison officials, serving as a vibrant witness of God's love, grace and peace. Also prayerfully uphold Pastor Keshav's concerned family, including his wife Junu, along with the members of his church. May they also tangibly sense the Lord's comforting presence with them during this difficult time of separation. Continue to pray that believers throughout Nepal will find effective ways to share the love of Christ in a society that opposes the Gospel message.*

## **NIGERIA: Leah Sharibu's Parents Respond to Rumours**

Sources: Open Doors UK, Church in Chains

As new rumours circulate about the fate of Leah Sharibu, the parents of this young Christian woman are calling for her release from captivity. While awaiting this hopeful outcome, they ask for continued prayers on behalf of their abducted daughter. Over five years ago, Leah was kidnapped by Boko Haram terrorists, along with fellow students from a school in Dapchi, Nigeria. While many of the students were eventually released, Leah was retained in captivity for refusing to renounce her faith in Christ. See [www.vomcanada.com/ng-2018-03-29.htm](http://www.vomcanada.com/ng-2018-03-29.htm) for more details. (Additional reports on her situation are available at [www.vomcanada.com/nigeria.htm](http://www.vomcanada.com/nigeria.htm).)

Recent reports suggest that Leah had been forcefully married to one of her captors, but that he either died or they divorced. She is now supposedly married to another commander from the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) and has two children. However, these reports are unverified and may be designed as propaganda intended to further distress the Christian community.

In light of these unsubstantiated rumours, a statement was recently issued on behalf of Leah's parents, Nathan and Rebecca Sharibu, in which the couple expressed: "Why should we believe these local security sources? If they have intelligence on Leah's whereabouts and any information, then where are the Nigerian armed forces? Why isn't the government involved in securing her release?" Their statement continues with the following heart-felt plea: "Our family remains grief-stricken by our daughter's capture and ongoing imprisonment. We demand the rescue of Leah Sharibu and all others who are in captivity [and] in the hands of terrorists."

*Whatever situation Leah is presently facing, please pray that God will sustain her with daily courage, comfort and strength. Pray that those responsible for her kidnapping would be located and justly prosecuted, and that Leah will finally be free to return to her distraught family and Christian community. Continue to remember the many other innocent followers of Jesus who are currently being held against their wills by various militant groups in Nigeria.*

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