



Persecution & Prayer Alert

The Voice of the Martyrs Canada
www.vomcanada.com

Thursday, December 7, 2023

*"Seek the Lord and His strength;
seek His presence continually!"*
~ 1 Chronicles 16:11 ESV

SRI LANKA: Pastor Arrested for Controversial Remarks

Sources: NCEASL, Daily Mirror, Newswire, Colombo Gazette, UCA News

Pastor Jerome Fernando is the leader of the Glorious Church in Katunayake, Sri Lanka. Along with his regular church ministry role, he also holds evangelistic meetings in various areas of the world. As a prominent religious leader, his messages are heard by many online, as well as by those attending his speaking engagements in person.

In a message he presented this past May, Pastor Jerome spoke about the differences between Christianity and religions that are prevalent in Sri Lanka. After hearing his message, critics claim that he insulted Buddhism, Islam and Hinduism. Various Buddhist groups called on police authorities to press charges, accusing him of inciting hatred among religious groups in contravention of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) Act.

Following the posting of his controversial message, Pastor Jerome left the country on May 15th to minister in Singapore, and then later travelled to the United Kingdom. During his travels, he issued an apology via live video streaming on May 21st for any misunderstanding or hurt his comments may have caused. Despite the apology, the case against him proceeded. When Pastor Jerome returned to the country on December 1st, he was arrested by governing authorities. Prosecutors claim that there is adequate evidence to prove that the preacher was "inciting hatred" through his sermons.

In response to Pastor Jerome's arrest, the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka (NCEASL) issued a press release that included the following statement: "His arrest underscores concerns regarding the increasing intolerance towards freedom of expression and the continued use of Section 3(1) of the ICCPR Act...to stifle free expression in the country.... We believe that

fostering an environment where individuals can express their views without fear of reprisal is crucial for a healthy and robust democracy."

Although Sri Lanka is a democratic nation, there are ethnic and religious struggles between the predominantly Buddhist Sinhalese population and the mainly Hindu Tamils. Pressure from members of these prominent religious groups have frequently caused problems for churches in communities throughout the country. For more information, and/or to read previously published reports on Christian persecution in Sri Lanka, go to www.vomcanada.com/srilanka.htm.

As these charges are being deliberated by court officials, pray for God's divine intervention in Pastor Jerome's case. May the judge rightfully respect the Christian leader's freedom of expression and, as a result, consider Pastor Jerome innocent. Pray that the Lord will also provide guidance, wisdom and strength to Christians representing other churches throughout Sri Lanka as they endeavour to share the Good News of God's love with community members who have yet to receive Jesus as their Saviour.

CHINA: Preacher Charged with "Picking Quarrels"

Source: ChinaAid

Chang Hao is a house church preacher in Zhenxiong, Yunnan Province. Because of his Christian faith, as well as his frequent advocacy for social justice issues, he has been interrogated by police several times. On the evening of April 14th, Chang was taken into custody by the Public Security Bureau. The believer's Bible was also confiscated by authorities, along with various other items.

For more than four months, no information had been made available regarding Chang's welfare, and his lawyer was prohibited from meeting with him. When the concerned legal representative was finally able to connect with the detained house church leader, he discovered that Chang was suffering from significant health issues, such as elevated blood sugar levels and high blood pressure. Further compounding these challenges is the fact that Chang happens to be nearsighted and struggles with an additional physical disability, yet he has not been allowed to wear eyeglasses while in custody. His wife, Yao Fazhen, who is also in poor health, has been advised by doctors that she receive medical treatment as soon as possible.

On November 28th, it was announced that formal charges have been laid against the preacher for apparently "picking quarrels and provoking trouble." The procuratorate accused him of repeatedly spreading false information and inappropriate remarks on the Internet. His case has been submitted to the Zhenxiong County People's Court for prosecution.

Chang Hao is one of the many Christians being currently incarcerated in China because of their faith in Jesus. For more details, and to review other reports on persecution in this Communist nation, go to www.vomcanada.com/china.htm.

Prayerfully ask the Lord to help Preacher Chang by renewing his strength and advocating judicially on his behalf, in hopes of a miraculous release from custody. May this faithful servant and his wife, Yao, receive greatly needed healing, peace and comfort during their

difficult time of separation. Please continue to remember the many other believers in China who are presently being detained because of their faith and ministry, as well as those throughout the country who continue to courageously gather together for worship despite the dangers.

REPORT UPDATE

ALGERIA: Church Leader Loses Appeal

Source: Middle East Concern

Pastor Youssef Ourahmane is a senior pastor who oversees a number of churches and Bible schools in Algeria, in addition to serving as the vice president of the Église Protestante d'Algérie (EPA) – an association composed of more than 45 Protestant churches.

After holding a small gathering with a few Christian families in March, Pastor Youssef was charged by governing officials for organizing an unauthorized religious assembly. Without notice, he was tried and convicted in absentia, receiving a sentence of two years in prison, along with a fine of 100,000 dinars (approximately \$1,000 CAD). For more details, see this previously posted report: www.vomcanada.com/dz-2023-09-21.htm.

Subsequently, the pastor's conviction was appealed, and the hearing for this took place on November 19th. Although the verdict, which was announced on November 27th, ruled to uphold the church leader's conviction, the judge presiding over his case reduced the prison sentence to one year. Pastor Youssef now intends to appeal this latest verdict to a higher court.

The EPA has faced an escalating campaign of harassment to the point where only a few of the churches remain open. There are at least ten ongoing court cases against Christians presently in process at the time of publishing this report. For further information on the persecution of believers in this North African nation, go to www.vomcanada.com/algeria.htm.

Pray that justice will be upheld in Pastor Youssef's case, and that he will be able to resume his ministry work without any further interference from Algeria's governing officials. Also prayerfully uphold our other persecuted Christian brothers and sisters in this North African nation – including those who are likewise facing the threat of prosecution – asking God to provide them encouragement, strength and guidance. Even during this time of uncertainty, may these faithful followers of Jesus seize every divinely orchestrated opportunity presented to them by demonstrating the love of Christ and sharing His wonderful plan of eternal salvation.

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