



Persecution & Prayer Alert

The Voice of the Martyrs Canada
www.vomcanada.com

Thursday, April 11, 2024

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

~ Psalm 40:1 ESV

SOMALIA: Christian Merchants Killed by Suspected Militants

Sources: Morning Star News, The Star, Citizen Digital

Six Kenyan merchants, all of them professed followers of Jesus, were killed in a border town between Kenya and Somalia on March 29th. The perpetrators of the crime then fled the Somalian town of Dhobley and travelled further into the country. It is believed that those responsible for the attack are members of al-Shabaab, a militant Islamic group based in Somalia.

The six slain believers had been selling plastic utensils and other household goods in Dhobley for the past six years. On the day of the attack, these merchants were just opening their shops for business when a group of gunmen with covered faces drove by and shot the Christian men at close range. Four of the believers died immediately, while the other two succumbed to their injuries later while in hospital.

It is widely believed that the slain followers of Jesus were targeted for their religious affiliation and activities. Along with their business pursuits, the Christian men frequently shared the compassion of Christ to Muslims in the community. It was reported that several Muslims had been secretly attending the believers' evening prayer services to learn more about Christianity, which likely angered local Islamic militants.

Prior to the mass shooting incident, one of the victims, Joseph Githonga, reported to a local church leader in February that some Muslim community members had complained about the Christians' worship activities. For the church members' safety, the Christian leader advised Joseph and the other believers to avoid singing but continue quietly holding their Bible study meetings.

In the 2024 *World Watch List*, Open Doors ranked Somalia as second among the 50 listed nations considered to be the most difficult for those practising Christianity. For more information on the

persecution of Christians in this East African nation, and/or to review other posted reports, go to www.vomcanada.com/somalia.htm.

Pray that the Lord will minister greatly needed comfort to the friends and loved ones of these men who were recently killed for their faith. May those responsible be held accountable for their criminal actions. Also prayerfully uphold other believers living within this region of the world whose lives are at risk because of their faithful Christian witness, asking God to provide them protection, courage and strength. Last, but not least, please intercede for the salvation of those in East Africa who are opposed to the Gospel message, in hopes that many of them would turn to faith in Christ and experience His saving grace.

NICARAGUA: Increased Difficulties for Christians

Sources: Reuters, Evangelical Focus, Christianity Today, LaCroix International, Vatican News, Mountain Gateway

Under the regime of President Daniel Ortega, life for Christians in Nicaragua has become increasingly difficult. Many Catholic priests have been detained, often for being overtly opposed to the abusive actions committed by the country's governing authorities. During the last week of December alone, nine priests were detained.

According to another report, between the years of 2019 and 2023, the Catholic church experienced 1,200 cases of aggression, including dozens of arrests and expulsions from the country. More recently, on January 14th of this year, 19 members of the Catholic clergy were expelled from their posts in Nicaragua and deported to the Vatican. Included among these clergymen was Bishop Rolando Alvarez, a prominent critic of the Nicaraguan president, who had earlier been sentenced to 26 years in prison on charges of treason.

While the Catholic church has been repeatedly harassed by the government, other organizations within the nation that stood against the regime were also targeted. In July 2023, the Red Cross was expelled from the country for criticizing the inhumane treatment of prisoners. The members of many other Christian organizations have been subjected to harassment and false allegations. Altogether, the government has seized the properties of numerous non-profit groups, including 256 evangelical Christian associations.

For one particular American-based agency, Mountain Gateway, this opposition has resulted in charges against 14 pastors, including three church leaders from the United States. All assets of the ministry were confiscated and the 11 Nicaraguan pastors, along with two lawyers, were accused of money laundering and sentenced to prison terms ranging from 12 to 15 years. Additionally, the Christians received huge fines of over \$100 million CAD each. Charges have also been filed against the three American pastors. However, since these three Christian leaders were not in Nicaragua at the time of the arrests, they had not been detained.

Speaking of the difficult situation, Jon Britton Hancock, who serves as the President of Mountain Gateway, stated: "This is not the outcome we hoped for, and it is heartbreaking to know that people who we consider family are sitting in prison for sharing the Gospel. We trust that God is in control of this situation and have faith that He will have the final say on this all."

Despite the harassment and persecution, followers of Jesus throughout Nicaragua are continuing to practise their faith. A recent survey showed that 45 percent of the country's citizens identify themselves as evangelical Christians, with a similar percentage of the population referring to themselves as Catholics. Even so, lawyer Wendy Flores describes the persecution of Christians as a "silent" matter, since many in the country still support the government and others avoid addressing the injustices of the regime for fear of reprisals.

In the midst of the increased hostility from Nicaragua's governing officials, pray that Christians throughout the country will receive greatly needed wisdom. And whenever there is uncertainty as to when they should speak up and when they need to remain silent, may these believers receive the Holy Spirit's divine guidance. On behalf of all our imprisoned Christian brothers and sisters in Nicaragua, pray that the Lord will sustain each of them with His strength, encouragement and peace, while intervening in each of their legal cases so that they can be released from custody. Ultimately, may the powerful life-transforming message of the Gospel reach all levels of Nicaraguan society – including the country's leadership – so that many more people will come to know Jesus as their Saviour and Lord.

REPORT UPDATES

The following three reports provide up-to-date information received from ChinaAid regarding the recent court cases of Christian leaders in China.

Xi'an Church of Abundance

In August 2022, three ministers from the Church of Abundance located in Xi'an, Shaanxi Province, were detained on allegations of fraud. (See www.vomcanada.com/cn-2022-11-03.htm for more details on their detentions.) The three church leaders were identified as Lian Changnian, Lian Xuliang and Fu Juan. Though these believers were placed in "residential surveillance at a designated location," their families received no information on their whereabouts for a duration of six months. During that time, the detained Christians endured starvation, deprivation and other forms of torture.

While the three believers have been held in custody since August 2022, they were not formally detained until February 15th, 2023, and then officially arrested one month later. Finally, in late January 2024, the Christian workers were brought before the court. At the time of publishing this report, their trials have not yet concluded. In the meantime, the accused church leaders are facing recommended sentences of five years in prison, along with fines exceeding \$70,000 CAD.

Prisoned Evangelist: Chen Wensheng

Known as a "Gospel Warrior," Chen Wensheng has been arrested multiple times for his evangelistic work. Even during his imprisonment, he found opportunities to share the Gospel with fellow prisoners. His most recent encounter with the authorities was on August 29th, 2023, when he was apprehended while attempting to board a plane to South Korea. (For more information on his arrest, visit www.vomcanada.com/cn-2023-10-12.htm.)

Chen's wife recently visited him while he was in custody. She reported that he appeared to be "radiant and joyful." Additionally, she described how Chen had been spreading the Gospel throughout the detention centre and wanted to be transferred to another facility so he could continue reaching others! Accused of "organizing and funding illegal gatherings," Chen's case was heard by the court on March 27th. However, no further details about the trial have been made available to date.

Detained Church Leader: Chang Hao

On March 28th, a report was released calling for prayer on behalf of Chang Hao, a detained church leader who had experienced mistreatment and extensive court delays after being charged by Chinese authorities (see www.vomcanada.com/cn-2024-03-28.htm). It has since been revealed that the believer's case was scheduled to be heard in court on March 25th. However, when Chang's lawyer appeared in court, he was informed that the case involved state secrets and therefore would not be heard in public. The court officials then attempted to conduct the trial via video conference. After strong protests from the lawyer, the judge postponed the trial. The new hearing date is yet to be determined.

Accused of "picking quarrels and provoking trouble," Chang was detained on April 14th, 2023, and held in custody for more than four months. Throughout that time, no information had been provided to his concerned family. Chang was finally charged on November 28th of that same year. (To learn more about the challenges encountered by this Christian leader, a previously published report is available at www.vomcanada.com/cn-2023-12-07.htm.)

Despite concerns for Chang's health, the imprisoned believer's family members continue to place their trust in the Lord. His 87-year-old mother, who considers her son's arrest to be one of "grace and honour," continually thanks God for His sovereignty over the situation. After finding out about the latest trial delay, Chang's wife, Enlin, was also able to confidently declare that "everything is in God's hands."

Prayerfully remember each one of these detained Chinese believers who are enduring imprisonment and mistreatment because of their faithful witness for Christ. Pray that these devoted followers of Jesus – along with the many other believers who are suffering in various areas of China – will be filled with the strength, hope and grace they need to continue serving as steadfast witnesses of God's unconditional love. Also remember their concerned families who often receive no news for extended periods of time. During this difficult season of familial separation, may they also receive God's sustaining grace, comfort and peace.

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