



Persecution & Prayer Alert

Voice of the Martyrs Canada
www.vomcanada.com

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*"In Your righteousness deliver me
and rescue me; incline Your ear to me,
and save me! Be to me a rock of refuge,
to which I may continually come; You
have given the command to save me, for
You are my rock and my fortress."*

~ Psalm 71:2-3 ESV

PAKISTAN: Allegations Lead to Mob Violence

Sources: Voice of America, Pakistan Today, Morning Star News, CLAAS, British Asian Christian Association, The Times of India

An angry mob consisting of hundreds of people rampaged through a Christian community in Sargodha, Punjab, on May 25th. Thankfully, police were able to disperse the crowd with tear gas and rescue at least two Christian families whose homes had been surrounded. However, significant damages took place during the mob attack, and 74-year-old Nazir Masih was left with life-threatening injuries. Stirred up by Islamic clerics who accused Nazir of blasphemy, the mob ransacked and burned the Christian man's home and shoemaking business. The crowd also attacked other Christians in the community and threw stones at responding police, injuring at least ten officers.

The elderly shoemaker had been accused of desecrating the Quran after a neighbour saw him burning wastepaper outside his home. According to Nazir's family members, when the accused had gone inside his home, someone threw a copy of the Muslim holy book into the fire, leading to the accusation. His family also claims that a group of people from the city who were jealous of Nazir's successful business had instigated altercations in the past.

As of May 27th, Nazir had undergone head surgery and was reported to be in stable condition. Police state that his family is presently staying in a governmentally operated safehouse, and can return to their home when the situation in the community stabilizes. Over 100 individuals were

arrested in connection with the violence and police were deployed to restore and maintain order in the area.

In Pakistan, mob violence is relatively common when accusations of blasphemy are made and then broadcasted over mosque loudspeakers. In a similar incident that took place during August 2023, thousands of people attacked a Christian colony in Jaranwala, resulting in the destruction of hundreds of buildings (see www.vomcanada.com/pk-2023-08-24.htm). Blasphemy allegations are not always propelled by religious fervour, as they may also be used as a means to settle personal scores in disagreements. For more information on the persecution encountered by Christians in Pakistan, go to www.vomcanada.com/pakistan.htm.

Pray for complete healing on behalf of Nazir, as well as protection for him, his family and other Christians within the community. May peace and harmony be restored in this area of Pakistan, bringing an end to the violence and destruction. Pray that legal safeguards will be instituted to prevent blasphemy laws from being misused in any way. Continue to prayerfully uphold Christians throughout Pakistan who are endeavouring to share the love of Christ in their communities, despite the animosity they may face.

REPORT UPDATES

NIGERIA: Hundreds Rescued from Boko Haram Captivity

Sources: The Associated Press, International Christian Concern, Voice of America, Reuters

On May 20th, the Nigerian military reported that 350 captives had been recovered from Boko Haram bases in the Sambisa Forest, a well-known enclave for the militant group in eastern Nigeria. Some of the captors were killed during the military operation. All of the rescued former hostages were taken to the Borno state government house where they will be cared for until they can safely return to their homes.

Most of the rescued victims, who were mainly women and children, had been held captive for months; and some of them for years. The 209 children, 135 women and six men, who were wearing worn-out clothing, appeared exhausted during the press conference. Some of the women had infants with them, believed to have been born from forced marriages to their captors. Hajara Umara has seven children and spoke of how she and other captive women were unable to escape because of the need to care for their children.

In another raid against Boko Haram, which took place during mid-May, the military of Cameroon rescued over 300 civilians along the country's borders with Chad and Nigeria. Additionally, during the previous month, a number of other civilian hostages were rescued by troops from Chad and Cameroon. Negotiations between officials of these neighbouring countries are presently underway to help the rescued civilians return to their homes.

Unfortunately, these recent raids against Boko Haram have not resulted in a cessation of violence. On the evening of May 24th, gunmen – believed to be belonging to a faction of the

militant group – attacked the Kuchi community in Niger State, killing ten people and kidnapping dozens of others. The assailants returned two nights later, seizing livestock and food while also setting fire to local shops. At least 700 residents were forced to flee to nearby communities.

Members of the Boko Haram terrorist group seek to overthrow the Nigerian government and establish an Islamic nation. Often, Christians are particularly targeted in the attacks. Since the establishment of Boko Haram in 2009, its members have been inciting terror against many Christian communities. Additional information on the violence committed against Nigeria's followers of Jesus is available at www.vomcanada.com/nigeria.htm.

Praise God that hundreds of innocent victims have recently been released from captivity! Pray that the Lord will meet all of their practical and spiritual needs as they recover from the trauma and gradually reintegrate into their communities; all the while, helping them to navigate through the changes that have taken place over the months/years since their captivity. May the peace of Christ not only be sensed within their own hearts, but also in the lives of others throughout Nigeria – including the terrorists – thus bringing an end to the violence. In the interim, ask God to provide our Nigerian Christian brothers and sisters safety and encouragement as they continue to steadfastly proclaim the message of Jesus.

ERITREA: Christians Imprisoned for 20 Years Without Charge

Sources: Church in Chains, Christian Daily

On May 23rd, 2004, Eritrean authorities arrested two pastors from the Full Gospel Church in Eritrea: Dr. Kiflu Gebremeskel and Pastor Haile Nayzgi. The arrests were made in response to a government ban instituted in 2002 against all but four of the country's religious communities. Throughout 2004, arrests continued against pastors of the banned organization, which consisted of between 120 and 150 home church congregations at the time. Pastor Meron Gebreselasie was arrested in June 2004. Then in November of that year, Dr. Futsum Gebrenegus, Dr. Tekleab Mengisteab and Rev. Gebremedhin Gebregiorgis were also detained.

All six church leaders remain in prison without trial 20 years later. They have had no contact with their loved ones nor anyone else outside of the prison throughout the duration of that time. Since there has been no legal process, the imprisoned believers are being held without official cause and with no indication of how long they may be detained.

A colleague who was also influential in starting the Full Gospel Church, Rev. Ghirmay Araya, recently passed away while in custody (see www.vomcanada.com/er-2024-05-23.htm). Estimates concerning the number of believers currently being detained without charge in Eritrea vary from 350 to as many as 1,000. Among those known to be in custody is the son of Rev. Ghirmay. To review other reports on the imprisonment of Christians in Eritrea, along with ways that you can pray for your persecuted Eritrean family in Christ, visit www.vomcanada.com/eritrea.htm.

Ask God to rescue all those currently being held in Eritrean prisons because of their faith in Christ. As they continue to wait for this anticipated outcome, pray that He will minister His peace, hope, and unfailing comfort in the lives of these imprisoned believers and their long-

suffering families. May those of our dear Eritrean Christian brothers and sisters who are enduring inhumane conditions and abuses while in detainment tangibly experience the supernatural strength, protection and endurance of our Heavenly Father, knowing that He promises to never leave nor forsake His children (Hebrews 13:5).

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