



Voice of the
Martyrs

PERSECUTION
& PRAYER
ALERT

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Voice of the Martyrs Canada
www.vomcanada.com

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*"Rejoice not over me, O my
enemy; when I fall, I shall rise;
when I sit in darkness, the Lord
will be a light to me."
~ Micah 7:8 ESV*

INDIA: Concerns of Imminent Violence in Odisha

Sources: VOMC Contacts

Recent reports from reliable sources indicate that Hindu leaders in the state of Odisha are preparing a list of Christian leaders to be attacked during the days to come. Christian leaders have spoken with governing authorities who intend to provide protection. However, the situation is further compounded by the fact that the state is governed by the Hindu nationalist BJP (political party), and the planned attacks coincide with a sensitive time in Hindu/Christian relations.

On August 23rd, 2008, a prominent Hindu leader named Swami Laxmanananda Saraswati was assassinated (see www.vomcanada.com/in-2008-08-27.htm). Though evidence revealed that Maoist rebels were responsible for the incident, several Hindu militant groups pointed the blame at the Christians. As a result, major riots erupted in the Kandhamal district of Odisha State. In the violence that ensued, hundreds of churches – along with thousands of homes and other buildings – were destroyed. More than 90 people, the majority of whom had been Christians, were killed in the rampage, and thousands were injured and/or displaced.

Despite a confession from a senior Maoist leader who claimed responsibility for the assassination, suspicions against the country's Christians remain to this day. This year, Hindu leaders are making several demands to honour the slain swami. Along with those demands, the Hindu festival of Janmashtami will be observed on August 25th and 26th in the village of Jalespata where he was murdered.

With hundreds of thousands of Hindu devotees planning to gather in Kandhamal to honour the life of Saraswati (whose murder case was recently reopened), along with threats against Christian

leaders in the area, the possibility of violence is significant. While protection will be given to local Christians "as far as possible," the District Magistrate also warns of the many factors that could lead to a riot.

Please prayerfully uphold the Christians of Kandhamal as they face this potentially volatile situation, asking our Heavenly Father to provide His divine protection to every believer living in this region. Pray that the necessary steps will be taken by the police to prevent any violence from taking place during the upcoming celebration, and that the evidence revealing the true assassins of the 2008 murder will be acknowledged by the Hindu population. May Hindu leaders not only observe this holiday peacefully, but may they also extend the same privilege to the country's Christians who likewise want to practise their faith in peace and freedom.

NIGERIA: Church Building Burned Down

Sources: Morning Star News, Punch, Daily Post, Premium Times, Independent

During the early morning hours of August 10th, the building of the Redeemed Christian Church of God in Kontagora was burned to the ground. Residents in the area reported that they witnessed a group of men loot the church building before setting it on fire. This is the second time that the church facility has been destroyed and, on both occasions, militant Muslim activists are believed to have been responsible.

According to the church's associate pastor, Samson Ogbebor, there were several previous attempts to prevent the congregation from building their facility. Ever since the place of worship was initially burned to the ground ten years ago, the Christians have faced many obstacles while rebuilding.

The destruction has been widely condemned by both members of the government and an association of Muslim imams. The governor of Niger State described the action as a "mindless and cowardly act." In the aftermath of the violent incident, the director of religious affairs called on both Christians and Muslims within the community to "join hands to end antics of enemies of peace trying to cause religious disaffection between them."

Nigeria has been referred to as the most dangerous place in the world to be a Christian. Although the violence comes from numerous sources, attacks generally stem from those following a militant Islamic ideology. For more information on the persecution of Christians in Nigeria, go to www.vomcanada.com/nigeria.htm.

Pray for the members of this congregation as they determine their next steps and look ahead towards the future of their ministry. Ask the Lord to provide these long-suffering congregants needed emotional healing, as well as the financial resources required to replace all that has been looted and destroyed. May their ongoing ministry efforts among the Muslim members of this community serve as catalysts of God's compassion and wonderful message of salvation. Also prayerfully remember to uphold the country's governing officials, asking the Lord to grant them wisdom and guidance as they seek to resolve the ongoing concern of violence.

INDIA: Christians Forced to "Reconvert" to Hinduism

Source: International Christian Concern

Around 120 tribal Christians from two villages in Odisha State were forcibly "reconverted" to Hinduism on August 4th during a ceremony known as "*ghar wapsi*" (meaning "*homecoming*"). The ceremony involved Hindu and tribal rituals which are believed to "cleanse" those who had previously accepted Christ and wash away any remnants of Christianity.

According to some of the Christian villagers who were forced to participate, the event took place following intense pressure from local governing authorities who had stopped providing followers of Jesus with subsidized food, including basics such as rice and lentils. Hindu leaders also barred Christian families from accessing the local water well unless they agreed to take part in the conversion ceremony.

During the incident, 83 men from 19 families were pressured into "reconverting" to Hinduism, along with several women and girls who were likewise forced to participate in the ceremony. Some of the families had been Christians dating back by four generations. Despite the long Christian heritage of these community members, Hindu nationalists throughout the country believe that to be Indian is to be Hindu. Further reports on the persecution encountered by Christians in India are available at www.vomcanada.com/india.htm.

Please intercede on behalf of all the villagers who were recently forced to participate in the reconversion ceremony. Pray that those who remained Christians within their hearts will be mindful that Christ has not forsaken them and that they can turn to Him at any time. Despite the persecution taking place in various areas of India, may the "Good News" of Jesus reach the country's general populace, including those who are fiercely opposed to the Gospel message – in hopes that many more hearts will become open and receptive to God's love, mercy and saving grace.

NICARAGUA: Increasing Arrests and Forcible Closures

Sources: Christian Daily, Catholic News Agency, Vatican News, EWTN

Opposition to Christians from the dictatorial government of Nicaragua continues to intensify, resulting in many religious leaders being arrested/deported and more faith-based organizations forcibly shut down. In April, a report was released outlining some of the harassment being perpetrated by government forces against churches and NGOs (see www.vomcanada.com/ni-2024-04-11.htm).

From July 26th to August 3rd, authorities arrested 11 Roman Catholic leaders in northern Nicaragua. On August 7th, Rosario Murillo, the wife of dictator Daniel Ortega, announced that seven other Nicaraguan priests who had left the country "arrived safely" at the Vatican. In the most recent incidents, Father Leonel Balmaceda was arrested on August 10th, as were two laywomen. The next day, Father Denis Martínez García was arrested while on his way to celebrate mass.

Along with these recent arrests and deportations, the legal statuses of 15 non-governmental organizations were revoked on August 12th, including one of the branches of the Catholic aid agency, Caritas, and some groups linked with Protestant denominations. It was reported that nine of the organizations voluntarily closed down. According to a report from the *National Catholic Reporter*, 3,552 organizations within the country have been terminated in recent years. The most recent statistics indicate that around 45 percent of the nation's population consider themselves Roman Catholic and 40 percent Protestant.

Pray for wisdom on behalf of all the remaining Nicaraguan followers of Jesus as they seek to meet the spiritual needs of fellow citizens in their country. Please also intercede for President Ortega and other leaders within the nation, praying that God's Holy Spirit would move powerfully within their hearts so they would not only end their crackdown on the country's churches and Christian organizations, but also personally experience a divine life-changing encounter with the Living Christ. In the meantime, as believers in Nicaragua seek to remain faithful amid an hostile environment, may they receive continued guidance, courage and protection, as well as the strength they need to stand strong for Jesus.

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