



Voice ^{of the}
Martyrs

PERSECUTION
& PRAYER
ALERT

Persecution & Prayer Alert

Voice of the Martyrs Canada
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*"I have learned that faith
means trusting in advance what will
only make sense in reverse."*

~ Author Philip Yancey

UZBEKISTAN: Church Buildings Demolished Without Warning

Source: Forum18

As the members of a Baptist church in the city of Urgench began to increase in numbers, they soon found themselves exceeding the capacity of their worship facility. To accommodate the growth, the congregation purchased a plot of land and began to construct a new church building. They had received all the necessary building permits to do so, and other developments were being built around them in various parts of the same vicinity.

Unbeknownst to the Christians, a civil suit had been filed against the church. At the court hearing, which took place on April 25th, the judge ordered the demolition of the building – along with the home of a church member that was being built on the same property. As the Christians had not been informed of the hearing, they weren't able to represent themselves in court.

More than a month later, the order came into effect. The resulting demolition unexpectedly began on July 30th but was halted when the church members announced that they would be filing a complaint against the decision. A week later, the destruction resumed, but then it was delayed again on August 8th after numerous believers further protested the action. While the teardown efforts have ceased for the present time, officials told the former landowner that they are "determined to complete the demolition sooner or later."

Reasons for the demolition order have been unclear. One official claimed that it was due to "a tax issue" but refused to give any details. Additionally, while the judge referred to the land as "arable" (suitable for cultivation of crop), and thus disqualified for construction development, no action has been taken against the buildings surrounding the worship facility. Church members described the land parcel as "full of buildings and construction work," clearly confirming that no prospective farming initiatives have been planned for the area.

Though officially a secular state, the Uzbek government has relentlessly oppressed Christians, particularly those who belong to unregistered fellowships. For more details on the difficulties facing believers in this Central Asian nation, go to www.vomcanada.com/uzbekistan.htm.

Pray that the Lord would provide these church leaders and congregation members His divine peace, strength and direction as they determine their next steps of action. At the same time, may He also powerfully work in the lives of the judge and governing officials involved with the demolition order by speaking to their hearts – in hopes they will obediently respond to the Holy Spirit's promptings and reconsider their decision. As the congregants await the outcome, may they continue to boldly reach out to others in their community with the message of the Gospel, knowing that the Lord will ultimately meet their growing needs.

REPORT UPDATES

PAKISTAN: Christians Await Justice One Year After Jaranwala Riots

Sources: Christian Daily, International Christian Concern, VOMC Contacts

On August 16th, 2023, thousands of people stormed the streets of Jaranwala in Punjab, angered by allegations of blasphemy against two Christian brothers. Due to the frenzied nature of the mob's multiple attacks, numbers vary widely; but at least 26 church buildings were destroyed, along with hundreds of Christian homes. For more details, along with video footage of the destruction, go to www.vomcanada.com/pk-2023-08-24.htm.

One year later, Christians suffering from the aftermath of the incident are still seeking justice. While more than 5,000 people were involved in the violence, less than 400 were arrested for their part in the riots. Of the assailants who were arrested, over 225 have been released on bail, including the individual who incited the vast mob attack through the use of a mosque loudspeaker. Discrimination against followers of Jesus within Pakistan's legal system was further demonstrated by the recent conviction of Ehsaan Masih, a Christian man who has been sentenced with blasphemy – a crime punishable by death – merely for protesting the violent riots via social media (www.vomcanada.com/pk-2024-07-11.htm).

For those who've lost so much during the attacks, any provision of assistance from the government has come slowly – if at all. While governing officials stated that relief would be provided to those whose homes were destroyed, the distribution efforts have been plagued with difficulties. For some homes, multiple families were living under the same roof, so payment went only to the more prominent families, leaving some without assistance. Amnesty International reports that 40 percent of the victims are still awaiting desperately needed government compensation.

In addition, many of the affected believers continue to suffer from the psychological and social repercussions of the trauma. Children "still tremble with fear" and have lost their confidence when it comes to interacting with others in the community. Relations between local Christians and Muslims have also become increasingly tense. Some Muslims are refusing to conduct any business with Christians, and a number of believers have lost their jobs.

In conjunction with our ministry partners, VOMC was able to provide for some of the daily needs of Christians in Jaranwala through the mission's *Relief & Development Fund*. To contribute towards the assistance being provided to persecuted believers in such situations, visit <https://store.vomcanada.org/category/donations/relief-and-development-fund>. On behalf of our suffering Christian brothers and sisters in Pakistan and other parts of the world, we want to express our appreciation for your generosity and continued prayers.

Thank you for prayerfully remembering these victimized followers of Jesus in Jaranwala who are still recovering from the detrimental effects of last year's violent riots. Pray that those trying to cope with the subsequent losses of their homes, churches, jobs, and practical necessities will receive needed assistance, comfort and healing. Additionally, may Pakistan's officials govern justly by holding the assailants of such crimes accountable. Please also intercede for the country as a whole, asking God to move by His Spirit so that those in desperate need of eternal salvation – including the perpetrators – will be dramatically transformed by His unfailing love.

CHINA: Pastor John Cao Blocked from Leaving China

Sources: Mission Network News, ChinaAid

After serving seven years in a Chinese prison, Pastor John Cao was finally released on March 4th of this year (see www.vomcanada.com/cn-2024-03-14.htm). Despite his release from custody, the Christian leader is not truly free, as the authorities are refusing to give him an ID card and passport. According to Todd Nettleton from the Voice of the Martyrs USA, an ID card is required for most transactions in China – whether it involves travel or making a doctor's appointment. "You can be arrested if the police ask you for an ID card and you don't have one," he explains.

Pastor Cao is a Chinese citizen who also happens to be a permanent resident of the United States. Since his release, the pastor would like to return to the United States where his wife is residing, but he has repeatedly been blocked from doing so. The Christian man also remains under constant surveillance. For other reports addressing Christian persecution in China, including previously published information regarding Pastor Cao, go to www.vomcanada.com/china.htm.

Pray that God will work mightily within the hearts of governing officials, allowing Pastor Cao to receive the necessary documentation so he can be reunited with his wife in the United States. May those monitoring the activities of this Christian leader witness the love and hope of the Gospel through his dedicated life and, as a result, come to faith in Jesus. Finally, pray that God's provision, protection and encouragement will sustain Pastor Cao and the many other harassed believers in China – including those remaining imprisoned for their Christian faith – as they continue to serve the Lord despite the opposition they receive from members of the Communist government.

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