



Voice of the
Martyrs

PERSECUTION
& PRAYER
ALERT

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Voice of the Martyrs Canada
www.vomcanada.com

Thursday, September 12, 2024

*"Our business is to spread our cases
before the Lord, in childlike simplicity;
to pour our hearts out before God."*

~ George Mueller

INDIA: Family of Deceased Pastor Forcibly Converted to Hinduism

Source: International Christian Concern

Pastor Manju, an outspoken leader and prominent advocate for Christian rights in India, pastored churches in two different villages within Chhattisgarh State. Sadly, Pastor Manju suffered a heart attack on August 28th and suddenly passed away, leaving his surviving wife, daughter and two sons grief-stricken and in a state of shock.

The next morning, his grieving family and church members gathered for the funeral service, where they were joined by ten other pastors from outside their community. However, the service was suddenly interrupted when a group of villagers refused to allow the pastor's body to be buried in the local cemetery. After pleas from Pastor Manju's family, the villagers agreed to the burial if a fine of approximately \$3,200 CAD was paid. In addition, the family was asked to participate in a *ghar wapsi* ritual – a ceremony that would symbolize the Christians' conversion to Hinduism.

When local police arrived to deal with the situation, the officers concurred with the villagers' demands – stating that those living within a village must comply with the rules of that village. They warned the visiting pastors to leave if they did not agree with the conditions. Ignoring pleas from the church leaders, who made valid arguments about religious freedom, the officers chased the pastors away. Without any help from the authorities, or the supportive presence of the ousted pastors, Pastor Manju's wife and children were forced to participate in the village's Hindu ceremony, and the church leader's body was buried with non-Christian rites.

While arrests and violence frequently occur in India when Christians are accused of conducting "forcible conversions," the same conditions do not apply when followers of Jesus are pressured

to convert to Hinduism. For instance, in early August, a similar incident took place in Odisha State involving the forced conversions of over 100 tribal Christians. (A report of the situation can be reviewed at www.vomcanada.com/in-2024-08-22b.htm.) For further information on the persecution of our Indian brothers and sisters in Christ, go to www.vomcanada.com/india.htm.

Please prayerfully uphold Pastor Manju's family and congregation members as they grieve the loss of this dear husband, father and church leader. May they tangibly sense God's love, comfort and strength as they now cope with the emotional distress of not only their sudden loss but also the recent circumstances involving the burial service. As a result, may this deceased pastor's wife and children be fully restored in their relationship with the Lord. Overall, pray that our persecuted Christian family in India's state of Chhattisgarh will not become despondent in the face of opposition, but rather that they be divinely encouraged, empowered in their faith, and emboldened to reach out to those around them with the hope of the Gospel.

RWANDA: Thousands of Churches Face Closures

Sources: Christianity Today, BBC, INcontext International, CHVN Radio, Monitor

In 2018, the Rwandan government introduced legislation requiring churches to comply with new regulations. At the time, more than 7,000 churches were closed due to alleged health, safety and noise issues. Other restrictions banned pastors from encouraging long fasts, mandated increased financial disclosure, and required church leaders to hold a degree in theology. While thousands of churches were closed at the time, other congregations were given five years to comply with the demands.

Starting in July of this year, the governing officials began a campaign to further enforce their regulations. According to a statement from the Rwanda Governance Board, which oversees the country's places of worship, 14,000 prayer houses were inspected in July. As a result, 70 percent of the investigated church groups were closed for "noncompliance with established regulations, including registration, building codes, safety, hygiene/sanitation, and financial or other exploitation of followers."

Many of the affected congregations are small, independent Pentecostal churches; some of which had been meeting in caves or by riverbanks. By contrast, the more established churches (including those that are part of an umbrella organization) were, for the most part, unaffected. This is likely due to the fact that smaller congregations without an association of affiliated churches usually lack the financial resources required for meeting the authorities' expectations – whether it be adequate greenery, painted walls, air conditioning, security cameras, and other expensive upgrades. The leaders of at least one denomination have since called on their churches to contribute to a fund that aims to help reopen the forcibly closed places of worship.

Along with shutting down congregations for noncompliance, the country's president, Paul Kagame, recently condemned "mushrooming churches" that supposedly "squeeze even the last penny from poor Rwandans." During his speech, he also proposed a tax on church collections in

order to prevent Christian leaders from allegedly enriching themselves on the backs of Rwandan citizens.

Pray for greatly needed encouragement on behalf of the many believers throughout Rwanda who have been forced to close down their places of worship. May God mightily intervene in each of their situations so that our Rwandan brothers and sisters in Christ will be granted opportunities for fellowship and spiritual growth. Additionally, pray that the country's governing officials will be willing to work with the congregations that are not able to meet the strict requirements, reaching an amiable resolution so their churches will be permitted to reopen. Ultimately, despite the barriers that have recently been put in place by the authorities, pray that the message of salvation through faith in Christ will continue to spread across the nation of Rwanda.

REPORT UPDATE

NICARAGUA: Recent Release of 135 Prisoners, Including Christian Workers

Sources: Christian Daily, Mountain Gateway, Voice of America, Reuters

Churches and nonprofit organizations in Nicaragua have been encountering increasing harassment from the government under the leadership of President Daniel Ortega. In recent years, dozens of religious leaders were arrested or expelled from the country and hundreds of organizations have been shut down.

One of the many organizations affected by the ongoing crackdown is the American-based ministry, Mountain Gateway. In December 2023, the organization's registration was revoked. Following this action, all assets were seized, and charges were laid against 11 local pastors, three American staff members and two lawyers who had been working for the organization. The Americans were not in the country at the time, but the other 13 Christians were detained and convicted of money laundering in March 2024.

On September 5th, the American government announced that, through secret negotiations, the release of 135 imprisoned Nicaraguan citizens had been arranged on humanitarian grounds, including the 13 believers from Mountain Gateway. Also among the recently released prisoners were Catholic ministry workers, students and other individuals who had been considered a threat to Nicaragua's authoritarian regime. All those who were released have since been transported to Guatemala, where they will be processed as refugees and given the opportunity to seek residence in the United States or other nations.

In response to this news, the founder of Mountain Gateway, Jon Britton Hancock, exclaimed: "This is the day we have prayed and believed God for. These pastors and attorneys have suffered greatly for the sake of the Gospel, but it has not been in vain. The Kingdom of God is advancing because of their persecution. Today, we cry tears of joy because our brothers and sisters are free!" To review previously published reports addressing persecution in Nicaragua, go to www.vomcanada.com/news-articles/nicaragua.

Praise God for the safe release of these prisoners! Continue to pray for the many other innocent people who continue to be arbitrarily detained in Nicaragua, as well as those who have been unjustly expelled from the country. Pray for the ongoing ministry efforts of the nation's remaining believers, asking that they be given continued wisdom, protection and courage, as well as the spiritual strength needed to withstand the oppressive campaign of their governing leaders.

The "Persecution & Prayer Alert" is a ministry of:
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