



Voice of the
Martyrs

PERSECUTION
& PRAYER
ALERT

Persecution & Prayer Alert

Voice of the Martyrs Canada
www.vomcanada.com

Thursday, October 3, 2024

*"Remember those who are in
prison, as though in prison with
them, and those who are mistreated,
since you also are in the body."*

~ Hebrews 13:3 ESV

International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church

November 3rd, 2024

This year's International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church (IDOP) will be held on Sunday, November 3rd. We invite you to set some time aside on this day to prayerfully remember our Christian brothers and sisters around the world who share our faith but not our freedom. A full resource kit is available for free download to help you and your church pray more effectively. It includes a three-minute video, bulletin inserts, children's resources, sermon outlines, and more!

This year's theme is *Remember Her*. While all followers of Jesus can suffer for their faith, the various forms of persecution that Christian women face often look different than those encountered by Christian men. For women and girls, persecution is often complex, hidden and violent. It can be characterized by sexual violence and forced marriage, as well as by insidious, invisible abuse behind closed doors.

Let's pray for the members of our global family in Christ who are living with immense pressure due to their faith, and remember our Christian sisters in particular for the hidden persecutions they endure. For more information, visit IDOP Canada at www.idop.ca. To download the resource kit, visit www.vomcanada.com/idop-resources.

PRAYER & PRAISE REPORTS

PAKISTAN: Kidnapped Teen Forcibly Converted to Islam and Married

Sources: Morning Star News, ECSPE

A 16-year-old Christian girl in Jaranwala, Punjab, was kidnapped on September 12th before being forced to convert to Islam and marry one of her captors. On the day of the attack, Diya Iftikhar was at home with her four sisters. The family's neighbours state that they saw three armed men force Diya into a white Suzuki van, which then sped away. The men have since been identified as Ghazaal Jutt, Afzal Jutt and Ramzan Jutt.

Although Diya's parents reported the crime to the police immediately, any actions of response made by local officials have been delayed. Since the three abductors are reputed to be hostile towards Christians, the parents are not only concerned for Diya's safety but also that of their other family members. (These same three men were known perpetrators in the Jaranwala riots during August 2023. To review a previously posted report on this massive rioting incident, go to www.vomcanada.com/pk-2023-08-24.htm.)

On September 16th, four days after the kidnapping, the family received a video message from Diya via WhatsApp in which she claimed to have voluntarily converted to Islam and married Ghazaal Jutt of her own free will. However, the teenage girl's parents are convinced that their daughter was coerced into recording the video message. Additionally, Diya's mother states that the young woman "detested Ghazaal," for he and his friends had regularly harassed her.

This past summer, a legislative bill that deems it illegal for Christians in Pakistan to marry before the age of 18 was officially passed. One of the primary purposes of this bill is to prevent coercive marriages involving minors from taking place. However, this law is not applicable if a Christian minor converts to Islam prior to marriage. A further provincial law, which will raise the age of marriage for all people in Punjab, is presently pending. But until that law is passed, the legal age for Muslim girls remains at 16.

Unofficial statistics suggest that as many as 1,000 girls are victims of forced conversions and marriages each year in Pakistan. To review other previously published prayer alert reports concerning the suffering of Christian women and girls in this South Asian nation, go to www.vomcanada.com/pakistan.htm.

Please remember Diya in your prayers during the days to come, specifically interceding for her need of protection, strength and comfort – physically, spiritually and emotionally – as she deals with this terrible situation. Also prayerfully uphold Diya's family members as they desperately seek legal justice on her behalf. May the Pakistani authorities work diligently to return this precious teenage girl to her concerned family and ensure the perpetrators responsible for committing these crimes are duly held accountable.

IRAN: Imprisoned Christians Released!

Sources: Article18, AsiaNews, Middle East Concern, Open Doors UK

With thankfulness to God for His faithfulness, we are pleased to announce that the following two believers, both of whom were imprisoned for their faith in Iran, have been released during recent days:

Pastor Anooshavan Avedian was arrested in 2020 and charged with spreading "propaganda contrary to and disturbing to the holy religion of Islam." In 2022, an Iranian court convicted and sentenced him to ten years in prison. The pastor officially began serving his sentence in the notorious Evin Prison as of September 18th, 2023.

On September 24th of this year, an appeals court acquitted Pastor Anooshavan of all charges and ordered that he be released from prison. Upon his release, the Christian leader was reported as being excited and glad. He was also deeply relieved to learn that everyone in his family had been doing well. For background reports published by VOMC regarding Pastor Anooshavan's case, go to www.vomcanada.com/tagged-items/anooshavan-avedian.htm.

Mehdi "Yasser" Akbari, a single parent of a disabled son, was arrested in 2019 on charges of "acting against national security" – a common accusation used against Iranian Christians. After being sentenced to ten years in prison, Yasser had been taken into custody and his son was sent to a facility where he sadly passed away in 2021. Despite Yasser's pleas to the authorities, he was not allowed to be present for his son's burial. See www.vomcanada.com/ir-2023-08-03.htm for more details about this heartrending situation.

After Yasser had served more than four years in prison, judicial officials of the country's Supreme Court agreed to hear his case in April 2024. As a result of this most recent hearing, the Christian man's sentence was reduced to four years and five months. On September 29th, Yasser had finally received permission to leave the prison as a free man! Just outside of the Evin Prison facility, his elated family members joyfully greeted him. Joining in this momentous event was Mehdi Rokhparvar, a fellow Iranian believer who had formerly been imprisoned because of his faith but released last year.

Praise God that these imprisoned believers have been released from custody! Pray that the court officials will likewise respond impartially when hearing the cases of other innocent Christians who are serving time in various prisons across this Middle Eastern nation. May these presently incarcerated followers of Jesus be safely released as well. In general, please continue to pray for the ongoing ministry of all our Iranian brothers and sisters in Christ as they courageously reach out to those around them with God's love – seizing opportunities to speak of the blessed hope and joyous spiritual freedom that are readily available through faith in Jesus.