



Voice^{of the}
Martyrs

PERSECUTION
& PRAYER
ALERT

Persecution & Prayer Alert

Voice of the Martyrs Canada
www.vomcanada.com

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"Coming out of prison during this month of [China's] Thanksgiving has been full of God's grace – I have seen the Holy Spirit's presence every day."
~ Pastor Zhang Shaojie

NIGERIA: Hundreds Kidnapped in School Attacks

Sources: BBC, CBC, Aljazeera, AP, Pique Newsmagazine, Reuters, Peoples Gazette

Shock and grief have spread through Niger State in central Nigeria after gunmen raided a Catholic boarding school in the village of Papiri on November 21st, taking 303 students and 12 staff members captive. According to the Christian Association of Nigeria, 50 of the kidnapped students managed to escape within the first two days and have been reunited with their families, leaving 265 still missing.

In a separate raid, gunmen abducted 25 girls from a high school in Kebbi State during the early morning hours of November 17th. A teacher and a guard were both killed in the assault. One of the kidnapped girls has since been located, while authorities continue to search for the remaining 24 students. At the time of publishing this report, no group has claimed responsibility for either of the recently occurring school attacks, and the abductors' motives remain unclear. The total number of victims resulting from these two incidents now surpass the infamous Chibok school kidnapping of 2014, when 276 students were abducted.

Security agencies and local hunters have been "combing the forests" in search of the remaining captive students. In response to the kidnappings, Pope Leo issued the following statement: "I make a heartfelt appeal for the immediate release of the hostages and urge the competent authorities to take appropriate and timely decisions to ensure their release."

Abductions and other atrocities continue to surge across Nigeria, leaving authorities struggling in their attempts to curtail the violence. The Christian Association of Nigeria is calling on churches

throughout the country to come together in prayer on December 7th, interceding for the following five needs:

1) Divine intervention to end Christian killings in Nigeria, 2) the resettlement of displaced churchgoers, 3) a stop to the activities of terrorists, 4) heavenly wisdom for political decision-makers, and 5) restoration of peace in the country. For more reports addressing the violence facing Nigeria's Christians, see www.vomcanada.com/nigeria.htm.

- *Please join in the call to prayerfully uphold our long-suffering Nigerian brothers and sisters in Christ, pleading for an end to the perpetual onslaught of violence in their nation.*
- *Intercede for the kidnapped students and staff members, asking that they would be divinely shielded from harm, immediately rescued from their plight, and safely reunited with their concerned loved ones.*
- *In the interim, pray on behalf of the abducted victims' families as well, that they will receive great comfort, peace and strength while awaiting urgent intervention.*
- *Lift up those who are responsible for these attacks, praying that they would repent, turn from their wicked ways, and receive the truth, forgiveness and eternal salvation that have been made available to them through Christ.*

CHINA: Pastors Released from Prison

Sources: ChinaAid, Church in Chains, Release International

In November 2013, Pastor Zhang Shaojie was arrested on charges of fraud and "disrupting public order." Despite multiple appeals, the church leader was sentenced to 12 years in prison. His family reported that, while imprisoned, Pastor Zhang suffered mental and physical mistreatment – including a time of "concentrated education." With great thankfulness, he completed his sentence this month and has since been freed from prison.

Upon his release, the pastor stated that he feels "deeply grateful" for the support of the international community. "Otherwise," he remarked, "I might not be here today, and might have... 'disappeared.'" However, even though he has been physically released from prison, Pastor Zhang is still not free from the oppression of the Chinese Communist regime. Authorities have installed facial recognition cameras throughout his home and restricted his ability to receive visitors.

In 2016, Pastor Xing Wenxiang was also sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment after being arrested on similar charges. She had been ministering with her husband, Pastor Bao Guohua, in an officially recognized "Three-Self Church." Yet, when the pastoring couple refused to comply with the Zhejiang provincial government's widespread order to remove all crosses from church buildings, both of these believers were arrested. Pastor Bao, who was sentenced to 14 years in prison, presently remains in custody.

After a two-year sentence reduction, Pastor Xing was recently released. According to ChinaAid, "The decade behind bars has left visible trauma on her physical and emotional well-being." Upon

regaining her freedom, Pastor Xing's first action was to visit the grave of her mother, who had passed away during the recently released church leader's imprisonment. More information concerning Christian persecution in China, including video-recorded interviews, are available at www.vomcanada.com/china.htm.

- *Praise God for His sustaining grace throughout the years of imprisonment endured by each of these dedicated pastors, whose perseverance amid trial and mistreatment is in itself a powerful testimony to numerous people in China and many other parts of the world.*
- *As Pastor Zhang and Pastor Xing readjust to life outside prison walls, and yet remain under continued government surveillance, may they receive further strength and healing in every area of their lives (physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually and relationally).*
- *Prayerfully remember all those in China who are presently imprisoned for their faith, including Pastor Bao, asking that their lives would brightly shine the light of Christ's love and hope – even in the darkest places.*

BELARUS: Priests Pardoned by the Nation's Presidential Leader

Source: Forum18

Two Catholic priests who had been convicted and sentenced to more than 10 years in prison were pardoned and freed from a Belarusian labour camp on November 20th. State media claimed that the church leaders, who were granted clemency by President Alexander Lukashenko, had been "convicted of serious crimes against the state, as well as other crimes."

Father Henryk Okolotovich served as the priest of St. Joseph's Church in Volozhin, a town located near the country's capital of Minsk. He was arrested in November 2023, and then sentenced for treason one year later. During his imprisonment, the Soviet Union's KGB officers approached him on multiple occasions to offer freedom in exchange for planting evidence against the Vatican's nuncio (official state representative). The priest refused each time.

Father Andrei Marianovich Yukhnevich was arrested on May 8th, 2024. Originally, he was given a short-term sentence for posting an image of a Ukrainian flag on his Facebook page. Following this initial sentence, Father Andrei was then subjected to fabricated accusations of committing sexual abuse against minors, resulting in an extended sentence of 13 years in prison. Other reports referencing his crimes against the state reflect the questionable nature of the added allegations.

While the presidential pardons for the two church leaders were unexpected, it is unknown whether these priests will be allowed to return to their ministerial roles. Upon their release, they were taken to the airport for flights to Rome where both of them are presently staying. To review further reports, outlining the Belarusian government's harsh regulations regarding religious registration and practice, go to www.vomcanada.com/belarus.htm.

- *In addition to thanking God for the unexpected release of Father Henryk and Father Andrei, please pray that He would minister healing and restoration in each of their lives following the ordeals of their trials and imprisonment.*
- *Continue to pray for other Christians who are currently imprisoned in Belarus because of their faith, asking the Lord to sustain them with His strength, peace and hope.*
- *Pray for wisdom on behalf of church leaders throughout the country as they faithfully minister under oppressive restrictions – asking the Holy Spirit to not only inspire them with innovative ways of sharing the Gospel, but to also provide further opportunities for their congregations to meet the spiritual and practical needs of those in their communities.*

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