

Persecution & Prayer Alert

Voice of the Martyrs Canada
www.vomcanada.com

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"For the great and powerful of the world, there are only two places in which their courage fail them, of which they are afraid deep in their souls, from which they shy away. These are the manger and the cross of Jesus Christ."

~ Dietrich Bonhoeffer

NIGERIA: Recent Church Attack Results in Two Deaths

Sources: Morning Star News, Premium Times, Punch

On Sunday, December 7th, armed assailants entered the St. Andrews Anglican Church in Isiokwe, Anambra State, while the priest and other congregants were preparing for morning worship. The gunmen were said to be searching for the church's priest, who was thankfully able to escape to safety. However, the priest's wife and another church member were tragically shot and killed, while several other worshippers were wounded during the indiscriminate shooting.

The attackers also caused significant property damages, setting fire to parts of the church building, vehicles and other belongings. The priest's house was completely destroyed in the blaze. Although the gunmen remain unidentified, police have launched an investigation and strongly condemned the violence.

The state's Commissioner of Police described the incident as a "heinous and abominable act" that is "a grave affront to our shared values of peace, sanctity of life, and freedom of worship." To review other reports concerning the persecution of our Christian brothers and sisters in Nigeria, go to www.vomcanada.com/nigeria.htm.

- *Pray that the "God of all comfort" will greatly console and strengthen all those who are mourning the loss of these two believers (2 Corinthians 1:3).*

- *Ask the Lord to bring lasting change to Nigeria's state of security in the coming year, granting His people freedom to worship in safety and peace.*
- *Despite the present threats of danger, may believers throughout the country continue to compassionately reach out to the spiritually hungry in their communities with the eternal hope of the Gospel.*

CANADA: Bill C-9 Creates Uncertainty

Sources: Government of Canada, Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, CBC, Canadian Council of Catholic Bishops

VOMC's primary mission is to respond to the needs of Christians in countries where persecution is prevalent. However, we also remain alert to potential threats to our religious freedoms here in Canada – including those that hinder the proclamation of the Gospel. One of the more recent concerns relates to proposed amendments to Bill C-9, which is currently under review by members of the Canadian Parliament.

The proposed bill seeks to amend the Canadian Criminal Code in areas relating to propaganda and hate speech. During its review by the Justice Committee, some members advocated to remove an important exemption that protects individuals who – in good faith – express opinions based on religious texts. For many years, this safeguard has ensured freedom for those holding sincere religious beliefs, including pastors and other church leaders.

On the evening of December 9th, the committee voted to remove the clause. The bill and its amendments will return to Parliament in January 2026 for further consideration. During this season of uncertainty, prayerful and informed engagement is essential. As our CEO, Floyd Brobbel, reminds us: "Don't let negative fear take control.... When fear takes the reins, we might find ourselves panicking, feeling anxious or depressed, and ultimately making hasty and rash decisions."

Floyd's full statement regarding Bill C-9 will be distributed later this month to email subscribers of his monthly blog messages. The statement will provide a helpful overview of the situation and important factors to consider. If you have not previously signed up to receive Floyd's messages of encouragement, please click on "Update Subscription Preferences" at the bottom of this email and add "Blog Messages from CEO" to your selected options. For additional information on Bill C-9 and ways to respond to the proposed amendments, go to www.theEFC.ca/C-9.

- *Pray for Godly wisdom and discernment on behalf of Canada's appointed Members of Parliament as they deliberate how to best respond to the proposed legislation.*
- *Amid concerns about the potential negative effects of the bill's amendments, ask the Lord to sovereignly guide Canadian Christians so they can respond with prudent insight, grace and courage.*
- *May God's people continue to courageously and compassionately proclaim His truths in a manner that reflects both the character and peace of Christ so that many more hearts will be drawn to Him.*

REPORT UPDATE

IRAN: Five Christians Receive Lengthy Prison Sentences

Sources: Article18, IranWire

Five Iranian Christians were recently sentenced to a combined 55 years in prison. All of them have been imprisoned because of their Christian faith. Although the sentences were issued on October 21st, the believers only learned of them within the past two weeks.

Pastor Joseph Shahbazian had initially been sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment in 2022, but was released one year later. Nasser Navard Gol-Tapeh, who had been previously sentenced to 10 years in 2017, was suddenly pardoned in 2022. For unknown reasons, both of these men were rearrested in February and have since been sentenced to serve new 10-year prison terms. (For more details on these believers' rearrests, see www.vomcanada.com/ir-2025-02-20.htm.)

Aida Najafloo was also arrested in February. The 44-year-old Christian convert is presently suffering with various physical ailments after recently falling from an upper bunk in her prison cell, resulting in a spinal fracture. (See www.vomcanada.com/ir-2025-11-13.htm for more information.) Aida later had to be rehospitalized after a wound created by her spinal surgery became infected. Despite these health challenges, Aida has been transferred back to prison in order to serve her lengthy prison term. Altogether, she was sentenced to 17 years (based on three separate charges), the longest term among the five Christians.

Pastor Shahbazian's wife, Lida Alexani, who was arrested on April 12th, has since endured periods of solitary confinement. (See www.vomcanada.com/ir-2025-05-15.htm for information on her case.) Lida is now sentenced to eight years in prison. One additional Christian woman, whose identity has not been disclosed, was recently convicted and sentenced to a 10-year term.

While addressing the announcement of these lengthy prison sentences, Article18's director, Mansour Borji, commented: "These examples demonstrate clearly how Iranian Christians like Joseph, Nasser, Aida, Lida and the fifth Christian are convicted for no other reason than their ordinary Christian activities – including wanting to share their beliefs with others, and provide them with the opportunity to read the Christian holy book."

Iran's government does not legally permit conversions from Islam and considers Christian evangelism to be "a threat to national security." Further reports addressing the challenges facing our Iranian family in Christ are available at www.vomcanada.com/iran.htm.

- *Pray that these five believers will tangibly sense the Lord's comforting presence and sustaining strength as they await their release from imprisonment, hopefully before the full terms.*
- *Through the lives and witness of the country's detained Christians, may their guards and fellow prisoners respond to God's love and grace by receiving His gift of salvation.*

- *Pray for the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in Iran – whether it be through media outreaches, Bible distributions or other forms of evangelism – so that many more people will embrace the forgiveness and eternal hope that's only found in Jesus Christ.*
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