

***"Blessed are you when others revile
you and persecute you and utter all kinds of
evil against you falsely on My account."***

~ Matthew 5:11 ESV

CHINA: Bethel Church Pastor Arrested

Sources: China Aid, Radio Free Asia, Asia News, International Christian Concern

The founder of the Bethel Church near Zhangjiajie, Hunan, was formally arrested on charges of "incitement to subvert state power" on April 2nd. Just weeks prior, state security officials had raided the home of Zhao Huaiguo in the early morning of March 14th, taking him into custody.

Although there are few details on the specifics leading to the charges, Zhao's wife, Zhang Xinghong, says the arrest was likely due to him speaking to foreign news agencies about the COVID-19 pandemic. Another probable factor was his consistent refusal to merge his church with the official Three-Self Patriotic Movement, which resulted in harassment from authorities.

Last year, when the church was raided by nearly 50 government agents, Bibles, hymnals and musical instruments were confiscated and church property was damaged. Authorities have also been examining the church's finances in an attempt to find evidence of foreign influence, but their investigation has been hampered by the Christians' refusal to cooperate with the officials' tactics.

Action against the Bethel Church is reflective of the Communist government's nationwide campaign to eliminate non-official church communities. The government considers Christianity a foreign import and a way for "western hostile forces" to infiltrate the country. For more information on the persecution of Christians in China, go to our [country report](#).

Please pray that Zhao will receive proper legal representation and justice during the court proceedings, as well as needed spiritual strength and encouragement throughout the process. May the members of the Bethel Church he founded receive opportunities to continue with worship and fellowship. Also intercede for the country's governing authorities, praying that they will not only cease in their campaign against religion, and thus allow freedom of worship for every citizen, but that they would personally discover the reality of the Risen Christ themselves.



House church in China
Photo: Radio Free Asia

PAKISTAN: Pastor Arrested on Fabricated Charges

Source: Morning Star News



Pastor Sarfaraz Raja
Photo: Morning Star News

Sarfaraz Raja is the associate pastor of the Youngsen Memorial Church in the village of Youngsenabad, Punjab. He was preparing to deliver his Good Friday sermon on April 10th when his brother phoned, reporting that police had entered their family's house and were harassing their mother and other family members. Accompanied by the head of the village, Pastor Sarfaraz rushed to the scene, where he found six police officers in the courtyard of the family home.

Rather than receive an answer to his inquiry about the authorities' intrusion, Pastor Sarfaraz was forced into a police vehicle and transported to the station, along with his uncle. Once at the police station, liquor manufacturing equipment was brought in from a storeroom and pictures were taken of the two men next to it. With that fabricated evidence, the pastor and his uncle were charged with illegally making and selling liquor. Then the accused men were released on bail the next day.

Sarfaraz believes that the charges stem from complaints he had made earlier about the police wrongfully protecting criminals in

the community. He says that other villagers, including the village headman, Chaudhry Ranjeet Lal, will vouch for him regarding these matters. While police deny the allegations, the sub-inspector mentioned his willingness to make a deal if the complaints against the police officers in his charge would be withdrawn.

A government inquiry has been ordered by the provincial Minister of Human Rights to evaluate the actions of the local police. Cases of corruption in the country's villages are not surprising, as Pakistani Christians are frequent targets of local authorities and often must contend with false allegations. More on persecution in Pakistan is [available here](#).

May justice prevail on behalf of Pastor Sarfaraz and his uncle, proving their innocence and leading to the acquittal of the false charges against them. Ask the Lord to bring conviction to the hearts of the police officers involved in such corruption, helping them to realize the importance of rightfully upholding the very law they are called upon to represent. Pray that the Christians of the village will demonstrate exemplary lives of honesty and grace so that others in the community would be drawn to faith in Christ.

PRAISE REPORT

EGYPT: More Churches Approved

Sources: Church in Chains, Watani

In the past two years, a committee has been working through applications to legalize unlicensed churches in Egypt after a law was passed in 2016 to expedite the process. Last year, we reported that over 1,000 churches have received official approval ([read more](#)). We are thankful to report that the process has continued and, as a result, more applications have been granted. On April 2nd, another 74 churches were legalized, bringing the total now to 1,568 out of the 3,730 submitted applications.

Until the 2016 legislation, it was nearly impossible for churches to obtain required licensing to build or restore a building, resulting in a large number of unlicensed structures. For further information on the difficulties Egypt's Christians have encountered in past years, and to review previous reports, visit our online [country report](#).



Photo: Flickr / Andrew A. Shenouda (cc)

Praise God that this favourable legislative process is proceeding, even though it remains a lengthy progression. Pray that the committee will be equipped to continue their work of clearing up the backlog, so that churches still awaiting approval will have the needed documentation to continue in ministry. In the meantime, may Christians throughout Egypt find ways to effectively reach out with the Gospel of Christ.

If you would like to post a prayer of praise or petition on behalf of our persecuted family around the globe, visit [VOMC's prayer wall](#).

The Persecution & Prayer Alert is a ministry of:
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For information on additional ways to support members of the persecuted church overseas, review this [listing of options](#).