

"Nevertheless, I am continually with You; You hold my right hand. You guide me with Your counsel, and afterward You will receive me to glory."
~ Psalm 73:23-24 ESV

RUSSIA: Rising "Tax on Faithfulness"

Source: The Voice of the Martyrs Korea

Evangelical believers in Russia were forced to pay what is being called a "tax on faithfulness" in 2022, and this year that price is expected to increase. Throughout the country, basic Christian activities have been investigated and punished as crimes. "Believers paid fines, appealed their decisions, and in most cases lost their appeals," reported Dr. Hyun Sook Foley from The Voice of the Martyrs Korea. "It is a trend that The Voice of the Martyrs Korea is monitoring closely as 2023 begins."

The report from VOMK gives several examples. In one case, Stefan Valery was convicted on November 8th. The charges centred around the "missionary activities" he conducted, along with his sharing of a publication titled, *Do You Believe?* – even though that document was legally printed by a registered media company. The activities he was convicted of include holding worship services, organizing concerts, and speaking with people who were not members of his church.

Similar charges were also laid against Vladimir Popov in Armavir and Vladimir Kharchenko in Sochi, who were likewise charged with conducting missionary activities in 2021. In February 2022, Stepan Prokopovich was questioned about the activities of his church in Ulyanovsk, including its relations with those belonging to other faith groups. Ultimately, the court instituted a ban on all activities of his church.

These cases represent just a few of the many believers who were investigated and convicted for alleged violation of the federal law on "Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations." In each case, the Christians faced fines of 5,000 rubles (about \$95 CAD) and, in some instances, were ordered to cease all church activities. The law that was used to justify the charges, along with the Russian Constitution, specifically forbids restrictions on the freedom of conscience, religion or religious association – including the teaching and disseminating of religious beliefs.

The practise of religious freedom, while severely restricted under the USSR, significantly improved in the years that followed. However, in recent years, the government has begun to oppress various religious groups under the guise of combatting extremism. A list of previously published reports addressing the suppression of Christianity in Russia can be reviewed at VOMCanada.com/russia-reports.

Prayerfully uphold Christian ministries in Russia that are encountering increased oppression from governing officials, asking God to provide all those affiliated with these ministries spiritual guidance, strength and perseverance. Pray that Russia's governmental leaders would realize the need to value and uphold freedom of religion for people of all faiths, and thus cease their harassment against the country's various religious groups. May the Lord work powerfully in the hearts of those in Russia who oppose the message of the Gospel, leading them to eternal salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.



Do You Believe? newspaper.
Photo: VOM Korea

REPORT UPDATES

NEPAL: Pastor Keshav Released on Bail

Source: Church in Chains

Since March 2020, Pastor Keshav Raj Acharya of the Abundant Harvest Church in Pokhara, Nepal, has faced numerous allegations and charges. Initially charged with spreading false information about COVID-19, the pastor was eventually cleared of all accusations. However, he was later arrested for two cases of "outraging religious feelings." In July 2022, he was convicted and sentenced to one year in prison. (For more information, [click here](#).)

An appeal of Pastor Keshav's conviction has since been filed, and the upcoming court hearing is scheduled to take place on February 10th. Thankfully, as of January 8th, this father of two young children has been released on bail in the meantime. Pastor Keshav's wife, Junu, is currently leading churches in two locations with a combined membership of about 500 people.



Photo: Voice of America

Praise God that Pastor Keshav has been released from prison as he awaits the scheduled court hearing. Remember to pray for this upcoming session, asking our Heavenly Father to divinely intervene by encouraging court judiciaries to ultimately rule in favour of dismissing all charges against this God-honouring Christian man. Furthermore, prayerfully uphold the members of Pastor Keshav's churches as he deals with these legal issues, and also for Junu as she faithfully continues with their ministry work – in addition to caring for their young children.

CHINA: Lawyer Visits Imprisoned Church Elder

Source: ChinaAid

Elder Hao Ming was arrested in November 2021 because of his ministry activities with the Early Rain Qingcaodi Church, which is located in the city of Deyang. Though retired from the pastorate, he continued to be actively involved in the church as a volunteer. At the time of his arrest, Hao was detained along with several other Christian leaders. (The initially published report may be reviewed at [this page](#).)

When Hao's lawyer was able to visit him in May 2022, it was reported that he was in poor health and not receiving needed medical treatment. Concerns were raised that his life may be at risk. (Further details are [available here](#).)

According to a January 6th update from Hao's wife, Yang Yufeng, his case has been moved to the People's Court for prosecution on charges of alleged fraud. Hao's lawyer, Zhu Shujin, announced that he was recently able to meet with his client and reports that he looks well. Hao continues to deny all charges against him.



Elder Hao Ming and his wife
Photo: ChinaAid

The lawyer further explained that with no Bible to study and no opportunities to meet for worship, Hao recites the Apostles' Creed each Sunday. He has been reflecting on Chinese culture and his life, recognizing that his time on earth is short in comparison to eternity. At the end of their visit, Hao asked his lawyer to read to him from Psalm 73.

Praise God for the physical, emotional and spiritual strength that He has been providing to Elder Hao throughout the ordeal. Pray that the court case will take place soon and that all charges against this dear Christian man would be dropped. Additionally, pray for the many Christian prisoners in China who are being kept from accessing Bibles and other sources of Biblical teaching and encouragement. May the Lord bring to their remembrance relevant passages of Scripture, nourishing each one of them with His Word and ministering to their daily spiritual and practical needs.

CHINA: Christian Evangelist Released on Bail

Source: ChinaAid

In June 2022, Lin Xuesui was arrested by China's Public Security Bureau and accused of "organizing and financing illegal gatherings."

These accusations resulted from his ministry work in a remote region located approximately 2,000 kilometres from his home, where he shared his Christian testimony with local villagers. (A previous report on Lin's arrest is [available here](#).)

On January 14th, authorities released Lin on bail. After learning that his father had contracted COVID-19, the Christian evangelist was granted permission by the court to go home so he could take care of his father.

Please join us in praising God that Lin was released from detention to care for his father during this time of illness. May his father experience full recovery and renewed strength. Pray also that the courts would drop all charges against Lin, so justice will prevail in his case. May this brother in Christ not be forced to return to custody but rather granted the freedom to continue boldly spreading the "Good News" of the Gospel throughout China.



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