

"We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed."
~ 2 Corinthians 4:8-9 ESV

IRAQ: Church Leader Faces Accusations of Blasphemy

Sources: Middle East Concern, Rudaw

Bahzad Mziri, the bishop of an Anabaptist church in the Kurdistan city of Duhok, is facing threats of blasphemy charges after social media comments were published. Considered by some Iraqi Facebook recipients to be offensive to Islam, the post comparing Jesus to the Islamic prophet Mohammed was made in response to insulting statements published online earlier by a Muslim leader. The post on the bishop's Facebook account was reposted on February 16th by Muslims intent on inciting anger.

The Iraqi Ministry of Religious Affairs, along with several Islamic leaders, has filed a court case against Bishop Mziri. In his defence, the bishop has apologized and explained the context of the statements. Unfortunately, the original post from the Muslim cleric could no longer be found online. Bishop Mziri also stated that he was not the one to make the responding post. Instead, someone in his office had posted the comment without his approval. Bishop Mziri told reporters that he has been actively involved in promoting religious tolerance in the Duhok region and, therefore, would never have done anything to jeopardize religious coexistence.



Bishop Bahzad Mziri
Photo: Middle East Concern

Despite the Christian leader's apology, the authorities are intent on proceeding with the charges against him. However, they have also assured the church that protection would be provided against any reported threats, and that further measures will be taken to contain outrage from militant Islamic groups. Despite these assurances, the church has been curtailing its public activities – including worship services – at last report. For more information on the difficulties facing Christians in Iraq, go to our [country report](#).

Ask God to provide protection, peace and wisdom to Bishop Mziri, as well as members of the affiliated church, during this time of heightened tension. In light of the circumstances surrounding the social media post, pray that those who have been offended by the responding statement will extend mercy and forgiveness. As a result, may the charges against this Christian leader be dropped. Ultimately, may the light of the Gospel spread throughout the country so that many Iraqis will have opportunities to respond to God's provision of eternal salvation by placing their faith in His Son, Jesus Christ (John 3:16).

LAOS: Homes Demolished for the Second Time

Source: Open Doors Canada

For the second time within the past five months, the homes belonging to a group of believers in Laos were demolished by angry villagers. The village is located in an area of the country considered a "hot spot" for persecution because of the increasing number of Christians.

In November, the homes of five Christian families had been destroyed by other community members who were intent on driving them from the village. Needing shelter, the families set up temporary tent structures in a nearby rice field. However, when the believers went to visit another village for fellowship, they returned to find the shelters destroyed, along with the barns they used for storing their rice.

According to a local source, many of the villagers and community leaders reacted in anger driven by fear over the expanding number



A village in Laos.
Photo: Vinko Rajic ([cc](#))

of Christians in the area. They had been told that placing one's faith in Jesus would upset the spirits, and thus bring harm to their village. To learn more about the challenges encountered by Christian in Laos, go to our [country report](#).

As these Laotian followers of Jesus seek answers to resolve the ongoing onslaughts perpetrated against them, may they receive His divine guidance and provision. Pray that this persecuted group of believers, as well as the many other faithful followers of Christ living in Laos, will be effective testaments of His grace, love and peace to those who have yet to receive His gift of eternal salvation. Please specifically intercede on behalf of the Christian villagers who have lost their homes and belongings because of their faith, asking God to greatly encourage them and provide for their every need.

PAKISTAN: Court Sends Child Bride to Shelter

Sources: Pakistan Christian News, CLAAS-UK, AsiaNews, Pakistan Christian Post

Hoorab Masih went missing on December 28th after she failed to return from grocery shopping. It was soon discovered that the 12-year-old had been kidnapped by a local shopkeeper, Muhammad Mustafa, and his co-worker, Muhammad Usman, who then forcibly converted the Christian girl to Islam. A few days later, Hoorab was found in a women's shelter after the arrests of Mustafa and Usman. However, when the two men were released on bail, they disappeared, along with Hoorab.

Ultimately, Hoorab and her captors were found by the authorities and, on February 17th, the young girl was brought to court. After a statement was made that she had converted to Islam of her own free will and no longer wanted to live with her single-parent family, the court sent Hoorab to a women's shelter where she was to live. Hoorab's father, Basharat, is a poor labourer whose wife passed away six months ago. He has since been raising their four children on his own. Not having the money to pursue legal action, Basharat is calling on governing officials to intercede.



The kidnapping and forcible conversion of young girls from religious minority groups is far too common in Pakistan. In the aftermath, some, like Hoorab, make false statements out of pressure from their kidnappers or others, or due to societal shame. Speaking of this particular case, Lala Robin Daniel, from the National Minorities Alliance of Pakistan, stated: "This is a very unfortunate situation for underage Christian girls and for their families. We don't know when the government will realize and stop this ongoing situation." For more reports addressing the injustices and violence committed against Christians in Pakistan, or to view videotaped podcasts/commentaries, go to our [country report](#).

Pray that the Lord's peace, comfort and hope will surround Basharat and his children as they grieve their loss and now must face this terrible family situation. Prayerfully intercede for young Hoorab, asking God to replace feelings of fear or bondage over the situation with His love, strength and encouragement, so she will readily receive continued help and protection. Additionally, pray for the ongoing efforts of Lala Robin Daniel and the many other human rights advocates who are diligently working to achieve equality for all members of Pakistani society, especially those who are most vulnerable.

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