

"...Peter and the apostles answered, 'We must obey God rather than men.'"

~ Acts 5:29 ESV

BELARUS: Christian Threatened With Prosecution for Sharing Faith

Source: Forum18

On June 1st, Vladimir Burshtyn was detained because he had been sharing his Christian faith on the streets of Drogichin, Belarus. The elderly man received a \$300 fine for his actions. (For further details on this incident, go to [this report](#).) However, this was not the first time Vladimir was punished for practising his faith. He was previously fined in 2005 for leading an unregistered congregation, and again in 2008 for sharing his faith publicly.

The latest fine is equivalent to more than one month's average pension for a senior citizen like Vladimir. Despite the substantial opposition, the elderly man has determined to walk in the footsteps of the disciples who, in Acts 5, were forbidden from teaching publicly. In response to the persecution they encountered, these first-century believers replied, "*We must obey God rather than men*" (Acts 5:29). As a result of Vladimir's desire to share the eternal hope that's available through Christ, the district prosecutor threatened him on July 27th with criminal prosecution for "incitement of racial, ethnic, religious or other social hatred or discord" if he continues to share his faith in public.

A new and more restrictive religion law is presently being reviewed by the parliament of Belarus. If adopted in its present form, current restrictions would continue and, in some cases, increase. Not only will all churches be required to register with the government, but even those currently registered will be ordered to re-register within one year. For more on the persecution facing Christians in Belarus, read our [country report](#).

Praise God for the unwavering commitment of this elderly believer, who is determined to spread the Gospel despite personal risks. Pray that Vladimir will receive renewed strength, fortitude and peace in the days to come. May God guide the actions of Belarusian parliament officials as they consider the proposed revisions to the country's religion law, directing their decisions so that our Christian brothers and sisters in this Eastern European nation will be granted religious freedom.



Vladimir Burshtyn consistently faces opposition for sharing his faith.
Photo: Baptist Council of Churches

INDONESIA: Church Opponent Sentenced to Three Months in Jail

Sources: UCA News, Morning Star News

On February 19th, the members of the Tabernacle of David Christian Church were gathered for worship when an angry village leader, Wawan Kurniawan, stormed into the building. Pushing the pastor aside, he demanded that the service end immediately. Ten other villagers joined him, resulting in turmoil, as well as injuries to the pastor. (See [this page](#) for more details.)

Because of the violent nature of the confrontation, the matter was referred to police officials. In May, a settlement had been reached in which the church members agreed to leave any prosecution to the authorities in exchange for a public apology from Wawan, along with a temporary permit to continue worshipping ([read more](#)).

When the case went to court, the prosecutor asked that the village leader be sentenced to four years in prison. However, the judge reasoned that because Wawan had sought peace with the church, he



An evangelist in Indonesia.
Photo: VOMC

would instead be sentenced to only three months in jail. Since the perpetrator had already been detained for nearly two months by that point, he was ordered to just serve the remaining 34 days.

The reactions of Christian leaders and those who provide leadership to human rights organizations have been mixed. While some speculate that a Christian would receive a much harsher sentence, others view this verdict as "a wake-up call for intolerant people." This is seen as the first case in Indonesia where perpetrators have not simply walked free. Andreas Harsono from Human Rights Watch calls the decision "a small step," but also praised the judge for "showing courage."

Pray that this situation will lead Wawan and others who oppose Christianity to reconsider their attitudes, bringing about greater religious equality throughout Indonesia. Praise God for the judge's verdict, which appears to demonstrate some progress in recognizing the right for Indonesian followers of Jesus to worship in freedom and safety. While further progress is being made, pray that Christians in this Southeast Asian country will continue to be powerful examples of God's love and grace to all those around them.

CHINA: Imprisoned Church Elder Hospitalized

Source: ChinaAid

Elder Zhang Chunlei, along with several other members of the Ren'ai Reformed Church, were arrested by authorities on March 16th, 2021 (see [this page](#)). The church elder's trial was held during November 2022; yet, in the months that have followed, his family received no news in regards to the verdict.

Elder Zhang's lawyer reports that the imprisoned Christian leader has been optimistic and remains in good spirits. However, he suddenly came down with a bout of cholecystitis (inflammation of the gallbladder), resulting in severe pain. Although he was sent to Sanjiang hospital for treatment in early August, at last report, there has been no update provided about his condition. This situation has raised new concerns amongst Elder Zhang's family; this time, relating to his health and well-being in prison.



Elder Zhang Chunlei and his wife
Photo: ChinaAid

Please lift up Elder Zhang and his physical condition before God's throne of grace, praying that this imprisoned believer will receive divine healing and strength. Also prayerfully remember his concerned family and church members as they await news of his well-being, asking that each one of them would experience the Lord's comforting presence and peace. Pray that Elder Zhang will soon be freed from custody and that, in the meantime, he will serve as a testimony of God's salvation and grace to all those whom he encounters during imprisonment.

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