

***"As long as this church is still proclaiming the Gospel, as long as God's Word is still in the mouths and hearts of our brothers and sisters, this church cannot be destroyed."***

~ Pastor Wang Yi  
Early Rain Covenant Church

## IRAN: Christian Detained on Christmas Eve

Sources: Article18, HRANA, Church in Chains

Esmail Narimanpour\* is an Iranian believer who has faced repeated detentions because of his faith in Christ. In April 2021, he was detained along with three others and tortured by the authorities. Two days later, due to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, these four Christians were released on the condition that they would agree to return to custody when summoned ([read more](#)). Although they were eventually cleared of any criminal offence in November of that same year, they were ordered to take "re-education" classes about Islam.

On Christmas Eve of 2023, Esmail was again apprehended by security forces. During this most recent arrest, his home in Dezful was thoroughly searched, and Christian books were confiscated, even though no warrant had been issued. The next day, Esmail was allowed to make a short phone call to his family. While conversing with his loved ones, Esmail explained that he was being held in Ahvaz, a city located 150 kilometres south of Dezful. When his wife and brother attempted to follow up on the case, they ended up being detained and questioned for several hours as well. At least three other Christians were also reportedly arrested around Christmas, but no details can be released at this time.



Esmail Narimanpour  
Photo: Article 18

Today, numerous Iranian Christians remain in prison because of their faith, and often they are being detained without any conviction. Such is the case for Hakop Gochumyan, who has been in Evin Prison for five months while awaiting trial. Although his hearing was scheduled for January 7th, no details have yet been announced regarding the outcome. For more information on Christian persecution in Iran, including previously posted reports and podcasts, go to our [country report](#). (\*Note: This is the spelling variation more commonly used for the transliteration of Esmail's name.)

***Prayerfully remember Esmail, Hakop, and the many other Iranian followers of Jesus who are presently detained because their personal beliefs have been based on the teachings of Christianity. Ask the Lord to work by His Holy Spirit in and through the court system so that these Christians will be released and protected from further persecution by the authorities. In the meanwhile, may these believers receive many wonderful opportunities to reach out to those around them with the Gospel message of God's salvation through Christ.***

## BELARUS: Officials Issue Threats to Church Leaders

Sources: Forum18, Christian Vision

On December 20th, a meeting was held for the Minsk Orthodox Diocese. During the gathering, which consisted of more than two hundred priests, Olga Chemodanova from the Ideology Department of the Minsk Executive Committee was invited to speak. She told those present that state agencies were monitoring more than 500 religious communities and openly warned against committing any act that could potentially be perceived as being political in nature, including the use of "non-religious symbols." Her address clearly threatened any church leaders who may be considered "ideologically alien," further indicating that such leaders should expect to serve time in prison.

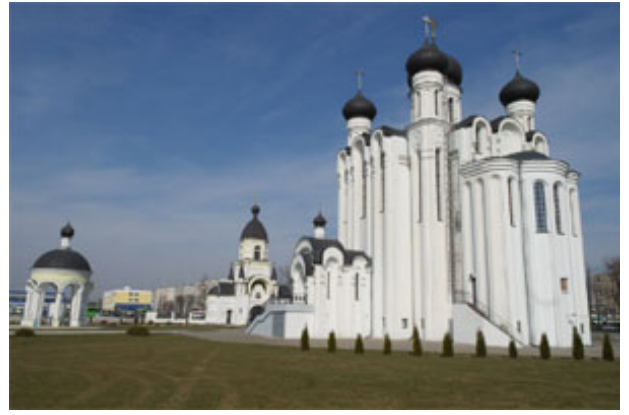
Also addressing the assembly was Religious Affairs official Aleksandr Rumak. His office was directly responsible for the development of a newly drafted religion law which is presently working its way through parliament. For more information on this law and its implications, which would consequently impose significantly tighter restrictions on the religious practices of the country's Christians, see [this report](#).

The threats against the Belarusian Orthodox Church echo the measures recently taken by the government to liquidate the New Life Church in Minsk (see [this page](#)). Though the church had appealed the government's action, a Supreme Court ruling on December 12th dismissed

the appeal, supporting the actions of the Minsk City Executive Committee. Not only did the liquidation order come into effect that day, the court's decision also closed any future legal avenue for the church.

While the New Life Church no longer legally exists, threats of criminal prosecution continue against its pastor, Vyacheslav Goncharenko. Any future religious activities carried out by Pastor Vyacheslav, or other members of the church, could lead to fines or jail terms.

***Continue to pray for Pastor Vyacheslav and the many other disappointed members of the New Life Church as they navigate this new situation. May these enduring believers be further strengthened and equipped to face any additional challenges that lie ahead as they endeavour to remain unified in the love of Christ. Also prayerfully uphold fellow Christians throughout the country who likewise must now contend with these increased threats from the government, praying that they too would receive the wisdom, courage and spiritual fortitude to faithfully persevere in the midst of trial – and thus ultimately "obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).***



An Orthodox church in Belarus.  
Photo: Wikimedia / Horakvlado (cc)

## **CHINA: Police Question Church Elder and Confiscate His Computer**

Source: ChinaAid

For the past five years, Elder Li Yingqiang has been repeatedly subjected to questioning and detention since the Chinese Communist Party began targeting the Early Rain Covenant Church. (For previously published reports on Elder Li, see [this list](#).)

In the most recent incident, Elder Li was taken by Deyang police officers for interrogation on December 15th. They questioned him about a pre-recorded message that was played on December 9th as part of an online event commemorating the fifth anniversary of the government's crackdown on the church. After being summoned again on December 19th, the church elder was detained for another eight hours for further questioning. In addition to warning him against participating in any future online church activities, the authorities confiscated his computer.

In a public letter issued that day, Elder Li expressed his concern over the various challenges being experienced by members of the Early Rain Covenant Church and requested that followers of Jesus please continue to pray for them.

To review additional reports addressing the persecution of believers in China, go to our [country report](#).



Elder Li Yingqiang  
Photo: ChinaAid

***As you 'pray without ceasing,' please remember your Christian brothers and sisters in China who are undergoing relentless opposition – including Elder Li and the church's pastor, Wang Li, who is presently serving a nine-year prison term. As they navigate the different challenges, may the Lord provide for their every physical, emotional and spiritual need. Also continue to uphold Christians throughout China who are reaching out to others with the message of the Gospel, praying that the church in this Communist nation will continue to grow exponentially despite intensifying persecution.***

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