

"... 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you."

~ John 15:20 ESV

Quoted by Li Yunyan

INDIA: Prison Sentence for Alleged Forced Conversions

Sources: Morning Star News, Hindustan Times, Church in Chains, Release International

A Christian couple was recently sentenced to prison after accusations were made that they had been involved in pressuring others to convert to Christianity. Pastor Ramesh Ahirwar and his wife Sakshi are from the village of Vivek Nagar in Madhya Pradesh. A man had accused the couple of abducting his estranged wife Sapna (who also happens to be Pastor Ramesh's niece) before allegedly pressuring her to convert, holding the woman against her will, and not allowing her to return home to be with him. He also purported that the Christian couple offered to build Sapna a home and give her money each month. The complainant, Abhishek, further claimed that the Christians attempted to convert him as well, offering him a job in return.



Pastor Ramesh Ahirwar and his wife Sakshi.

Photo: Morning Star News

During the court hearing, Sapna testified that she was neither coerced into changing her religion nor offered any financial incentives. She stated that the pastor did not, in any way, pressure her to stay away from her estranged husband, but that she did so of her own volition. Despite Sapna's testimony, the district court convicted the two believers and sentenced them to two years in prison, along with a fine. The verdict has since been appealed and the next court hearing is scheduled for April 30th.

While anti-conversion laws have already been passed in 12 of India's states, some Hindu nationalist groups are pushing for nation-wide legislation. Considering that the country's general elections are starting on April 19th, VOMC joins its sister mission, Release International – along with other Christian organizations – in the call for an end to this divisive and widely misused legislation, which has resulted in an increase in violence and arrests against religious minorities. To review previously posted reports addressing the persecution of Christians in this South Asian country, please go to our [country report](#).

As the nation of India holds its national elections in the coming days, pray that the country's voters will be guided by a desire for equality and the protection of human rights for all citizens. Also prayerfully remember Pastor Ramesh and his wife Sakshi, along with the many other followers of Jesus who are facing the threat of violence or incarceration because of the false allegations against them – in hopes that justice prevails in each of their cases. While awaiting judicial and/or governmental intervention, may the Lord grant them divine protection, peace, strength, as well as the provisions necessary to meet their individual spiritual and practical needs. Additionally, please intercede for Abhishek, asking God to work in his heart and mind so that any vindictive motives would cease, and that he will ultimately experience a life-changing encounter with the Living Christ.

CHINA: Members of Raided Church Detained

Source: ChinaAid

On March 10th, the members of the Maizhong Reformed Church in Fuyang, Anhui province, were gathered at a restaurant when their meeting was suddenly raided by local police. Without showing identification or giving reasons for the raid, the police began interrogating the Christians. Officials from the local religious affairs bureau, along with national security agents, also entered the restaurant and began taking pictures.

After questioning the believers who had attended the gathering, the authorities took 18 Christians, including two children, to the police station. The interrogation continued until well after midnight before Elder Chang Shun was given a 15-day administrative detention for "carrying out activities in the name of an illegal social organization."

This is the third time that Elder Chang has been detained within the past six months. Additionally, as a result of the raid, eight other church members were each given a 13-day detention.

After learning of Elder Chang's detention, his wife, Li Yunyan, released a letter calling for prayer and expressing deep concern for her husband. The couple's children, unable to grasp what was happening, asked their mother, "Why do they have to take Daddy? Daddy is not a bad person." For more information on the persecution of our Christian brothers and sisters in China, go to our [country report](#).

Prayerfully uphold the members of this persecuted church as they contend with ongoing oppression because of their desire to meet together for worship. Pray specifically for Elder Chang and his family, along with the other recently detained church members and their loved ones, asking that each of these believers would receive the encouragement, strength, courage and perseverance they need to remain undeterred by the governmental opposition. May God also work mightily in the lives of the Chinese Communist Party officials, turning their hearts towards repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus.



Elder Chang Shun and his son.
Photo: ChinaAid

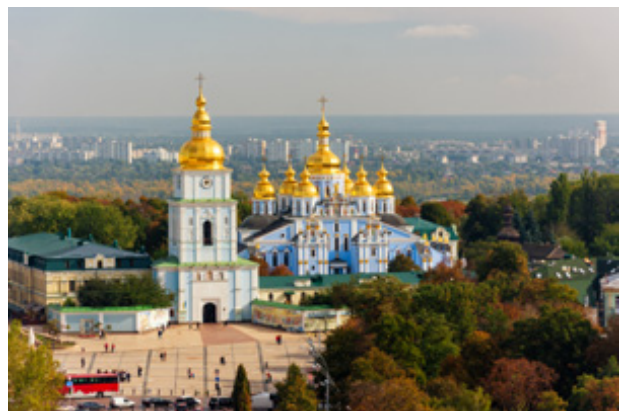
OCCUPIED UKRAINE: Russian Forces Charge Another Church Leader

Source: Forum18

In May 2023, Father Kostiantyn Maksimov, a priest from the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, was taken by Russian occupation forces. Several other religious leaders have either been killed, tortured or reported missing after being detained by members of the Russian forces.

In late March of this year, the Regional Prosecutor's Office for the occupation forces in the Zaporizhzhia Region announced that Father Kostiantyn was to face trial on charges of espionage. The prosecutors allege that the priest had reported the location of Russian air defences to the Ukrainian security service via Telegram, an instant messaging app. At last report, no details have been released regarding when and where the trial will be held.

In a separate incident, two priests from the Orthodox Church of Ukraine were convicted of "conducting missionary activities" in September 2023. (Read a [previously published report](#).) Father Khristofor Khrimli and Father Andri Chui are from the Donetsk Region of Ukraine, an area currently considered part of Russia by occupational forces. Both church leaders were ordered to be deported from Russian territory, but since court



An "Orthodox Church of Ukraine" monastery.
Photo: Wikipedia / Rbrechko (cc)

officials claim that the region of their home is now within the jurisdiction of Russia, there was uncertainty at the time as to where the priests would be sent.

According to a recent update, the two men were deported to the country of Georgia in March. Since then, they have returned to Ukraine but are living in an area that's under the control of the Ukrainian government. Due to orders of the court representing Russia's occupational forces, they are forbidden to return to their home community within the Donetsk Region.

Continue to pray for peace in Ukraine, especially within the hearts of those residing in occupied or volatile regions of the country. In the midst of the ongoing threats of violence and oppression, may God also minister His divine protection, love and provision. Specifically pray that the charges issued by Russian officials against Father Kostiantyn and other falsely accused religious leaders will be dropped. And may Father Khristofor and Father Andri, along with the many other Christians who have been forced from their homes, receive the resources and support required to continue reaching out with the hope of the Gospel – wherever they happen to be located. On behalf of all the remaining Ukrainian church leaders and their congregants, pray for ongoing strength, wisdom and guidance as they faithfully gather together for worship and continue in their endeavours to meet the needs of others in their communities.

The "Persecution & Prayer Alert" is a ministry of:
The Voice of the Martyrs Canada, P.O. Box 608, Streetsville, Ontario, L5M 2C1
Tel. (905) 670-9721 Website: www.vomcanada.com