



***"...that I may know [Christ] and
the power of His resurrection, and
may share His sufferings, becoming
like Him in His death."***

~ Philippians 3:10 ESV

NICARAGUA: Public Easter Celebrations Banned

Sources: International Christian Concern, Catholic Review, Havana Times

This year, Christians across Nicaragua are celebrating Holy Week under the watchful eye of police and paramilitary forces. The heightened tensions follow the decision of the Sandinista government led by Daniel Ortega and Rosaria Murillo to ban many public celebrations, including processions that are common among Latin American churches.

In Nicaragua, the public religious celebrations have been outlawed for the past two years. Since then, harassment against Christians throughout the country has intensified, resulting in hundreds of religious leaders having been either imprisoned or exiled. In place of the traditionally church-run festivities, some municipalities have organized government-operated events.



A church in Nicaragua.

One exiled Nicaraguan political leader, Felix Maradiaga, believes that "the model Sandinistas want to implement is very similar to that of China," with its government-operated churches promoting government propaganda under the guise of religious instruction. In February, governing officials stated that they may stop recognizing episcopal appointments from the Vatican and instead begin appointing their own church leaders. Some Christian leaders have been required to report to the police on a weekly basis for approval of their sermons. Additionally, churches throughout the country are under surveillance from plainclothes officers as well as uniformed officials. It has been reported that around 14,000 governing agents were deployed to monitor churches this week in order to prevent Easter celebrations from taking place. One church member stated that although she enjoys the Holy Week religious activities, she is considering not attending these services for fear of being "marked" by the government. To review other reports addressing the oppression of churches in Nicaragua, [click here](#).

- *Pray that the message of Jesus' death and glorious resurrection would be widely proclaimed throughout Nicaragua, despite the restrictions being imposed on the public celebrations of Easter.*
- *Intercede for the country's political leaders, Daniel Ortega and Rosaria Murillo (along with others who are serving in various levels of governance), praying that they would recognize the Lordship of Christ above all else and, as a result, come to faith in Him.*
- *As our persecuted Christian brothers and sisters in Nicaragua reflect on Jesus' sacrifice on the cross – as well as His victorious resurrection – may they find profound peace, encouragement and joy in the blessed hope that was made possible for all humanity through His atoning blood.*

INDIA: Christian Pilgrims Harassed by Hindu Nationalist Group

Sources: Catholic News Agency, International Christian Concern, The Free Press Journal

Two busloads of Christians that had embarked on a Lenten pilgrimage tour were stopped by members of a Hindu nationalist group on March 31st and subsequently handed over to police. The incident led to the physical and verbal assault of some Christian leaders.

The believers were travelling by bus to visit various churches in the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh as part of a "Jubilee Year" celebration. However, several Hindu members of the Bajrang Dal group intercepted the buses and forced them to stop.

The pilgrims were forcibly taken to a police station where they were soon released and permitted to continue their journey. As they were travelling to visit another church, the buses were stopped once again; this time, the believers were detained for questioning at the Jabalpur police station. When a group of Catholic leaders, including the Vicar General of the local diocese, came to assist the believers, the militants then turned on the church leaders, physically assaulting them at the police station.

The Bajrang Dal activists alleged that the individuals on the buses were Hindus from tribal communities who had been gathered for the tour with the intention of forcibly converting them to Christianity. However, the individuals in question insisted that they were followers of Jesus who had paid to be part of the bus tour. The believers were ordered by the militants to show identity cards proving that they are Christians, despite the fact that Indian identity cards do not indicate one's religious affiliation.

When the police found no evidence of illegal religious conversions, they instead registered a complaint against the attackers. In India, false accusations of coercive conversions are commonly used against Christians in many parts of the country. For additional reports on the challenges encountered by our Indian brothers and sisters in Christ, see our [country profile](#).



Two buses in India.

- ***Please pray for the complete healing of all those who were injured and traumatized in this recent attack.***
- ***As special days on the Christian calendar are commonly used as an impetus for violence and opposition, pray that believers in India and throughout the world will be able to peacefully celebrate the death and resurrection of their Saviour throughout this Easter season.***
- ***May those who oppose the "Good News" of the Gospel in India be convicted of their own need for eternal salvation, come to a point of sincere repentance, and ultimately acknowledge Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour.***

REPORT UPDATE

IRAN: Imprisoned Pastor Suffers Stroke

Sources: Article18, HRANA, VOM-USA

In 2017, Pastor Nasser Navard Gol-Tapeh was sentenced to ten years in prison for his Christian ministry activities. Though pardoned and released in 2022, the pastor was suddenly rearrested on February 6th of this year. ([Read more.](#))

Following this recent rearrest, Pastor Nasser was held without charge and denied legal representation. As a last resort, the detained believer began a hunger strike not long after his imprisonment. Regrettably, he was found unconscious in his solitary-confinement cell on March 17th. The Christian leader was subsequently rushed to hospital, where it was determined that he had suffered a stroke.



Pastor Nasser Navard Gol-Tapeh
Photo: Article 18

The 63-year-old convert received basic medical treatment and was provided with exercises to help regain movement on the left side of his body. Despite the physician's recommendations for physiotherapy and continued treatment, he was then returned to prison. While Pastor Nasser has since ended his hunger strike, he continues to suffer from lack of movement in his left arm and leg.

In addition to Pastor Nasser's arrest, Pastor Joseph Shahbazian and two Christian women were also taken into custody on February 6th. Concerns are presently being raised over the fate of the two women, one of whom has since been identified as "Aida." It is understood that this recently imprisoned believer is being detained in the women's ward of the notorious Evin Prison. To review previously posted reports and/or informative video documentaries concerning the persecution of Christians in Iran, go to our [country profile](#).

- ***As you pray for Pastor Nasser's physical healing and strength, ask the Lord to put it on the hearts of prison officials to ensure this long-suffering Christian leader receives the recommended medical treatment to help him during his journey to recovery.***

- ***While prayerfully upholding Pastor Nasser, and the three mentioned believers who were recently detained, please also remember the many other Christians presently imprisoned in Iran – as well as their concerned families.***
- ***While awaiting their hopeful soon release, may these imprisoned followers of Jesus receive opportunities to share their hope in Christ with those around them, helping to lead fellow prisoners and officials to faith in the Risen Lord.***

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