



**"...Fear not, for I am with
you; be not dismayed,
for I am your God;
I will strengthen you,
I will help you,
I will uphold you with
My righteous right hand."**

~ Isaiah 41:10 ESV

INDONESIA: Christian Graves Vandalized

Sources: UCA News, Morning Star News, Kompas, Tempo

In what appears to be a targeted act against the Christian community, at least ten graves were recently vandalized in cemeteries throughout the Yogyakarta region of Java, Indonesia. Each of the graves bore a cross, symbolizing the Christian faith of the individuals interred there. The damages occurred in three different cemeteries between May 16th and 19th.

An arrest was made on May 21st. The perpetrator, a 16-year-old student, has allegedly confessed to committing the crimes. Although the police claim there was no religious motivation behind the attacks, all of the desecrated graves clearly identified the burial sites of Christians. It appears that sites bearing the symbol of the cross were specifically targeted in the destruction.



Photo: PxHere

This is not the only such incident in which Christian burial sites have been attacked.

Additional graves were reportedly vandalized in two other cemeteries within the region earlier this year. Moreover, in April 2019, several wooden crosses at the Bethesda Mrican Cemetery were pulled down before being partially burned; and, in June 2021, a group of students were caught vandalizing other Christian graves.

While the specific reasons for such violence may not always be apparent, these incidents reflect deeper societal tensions surrounding religious diversity within the country. According to a study by Kompas Research and Development, fears of "cultural dilution" have fuelled concerns for many Indonesians over the perceived loss of their cultural identity. Even though the country's constitution legally guarantees religious freedom, its predominant religion of Islam is regarded as an integral part of society. Consequently, the growth of Christianity is often viewed as a threat to traditional cultural values and national identity. For more reports addressing the challenges facing Indonesian Christians, go to our [country profile](#).

- ***Pray on behalf of the grieving families who have been affected by these disturbing acts of destruction, asking the Lord to minister His peace, comfort and healing in each of their lives – to the point that they would be willing to extend forgiveness towards the students responsible for the various attacks.***
- ***May Christians throughout Indonesia serve as testimonies of God's unconditional love, grace and truth, leading many of their fellow citizens to salvation in Christ.***
- ***Prayerfully remember the governing leaders of Indonesia, in hopes that they will realize the importance of seeking God's wisdom and justice, upholding the rights of all citizens, and fostering a society rooted in tolerance and respect.***

PAKISTAN: Court Rulings for Forcibly Married Christian Youth

Sources: Morning Star News, Christian Post, VOM Australia

The kidnapping of young teens in Pakistan continues to be a serious concern for Christians and other religious minorities. After being kidnapped, many of these girls are forcibly "converted" to Islam and then compelled to marry their captors or other men associated with the crimes. While some state governments have introduced legislation to stop this abusive practice – including a law that recently passed in the Islamabad area – the courts frequently favour the kidnappers because of the pressures they encounter from militant Islamic groups. Two recent cases highlight the many challenges facing Christian girls in this South Asian country.

In the first incident, a 15-year-old girl was kidnapped from her home in Punjab province on January 25th. For safety reasons, the victim's name has not been publicly disclosed. According to the family's attorney, the teen girl was taken captive by Muhammad Anees and his four accomplices. Police informed the girl's parents 12 days later that their daughter had purportedly converted to Islam and married the attacker of her own free will. However, the family quickly recognized that the documents presented to support this claim were fabricated. While the certificates stated that their daughter had married Muhammad on January 17th, and converted to Islam the next day, the teen's parents confirm that she was at home with her family at that time.



The parents of the unnamed 15-year-old with their attorney.
Photo: Christian Daily International/
Morning Star News

After police failed to recover their daughter, the family filed a petition with the Lahore High Court, ordering the authorities to locate those responsible. Thankfully, Muhammad and two others were brought before the court on May 6th and subsequently detained in prison. Due to the level of trauma experienced by the girl, the judge ruled that she would be placed in a government-operated rehabilitation shelter. While at the shelter, it was determined that the teen was four months pregnant. Two weeks later, the girl gave a statement expressing her desire to return to the custody of her parents, which was granted on May 21st.

In a similar incident, 16-year-old Jessica Iqbal was kidnapped from her home in Lahore, Punjab, during the early hours of April 30th. It was then discovered that the Christian girl had allegedly converted to Islam and married a Muslim neighbour named Azeem Ullah.

Accused of abduction, Azeem was brought before a judge on May 16th. During the trial, Jessica made a statement claiming that she had converted to Islam and married the man of her own free will. However, her family stated that she was clearly under duress. Throughout her testimony, the young girl repeatedly expressed concerns for the safety of her family. Additionally, when asked, Jessica was unable to recite the *Kalima* (the Muslim proclamation of faith) nor respond to any questions about Islam, raising further doubts about the legitimacy of her alleged conversion.

Despite evidence indicating that the teen girl had been coerced, the judge ruled in Azeem's favour and granted him custody of Jessica. Her family, with the support of several advocacy groups, intends to appeal the judge's ruling.

- ***Praise God for the safe return of the 15-year-old girl who is now reunited with her family. In addition to praying for her ongoing emotional and physical healing, please ask the Lord to grant her family and legal advocates wisdom and guidance as they navigate the challenges ahead – including the teen's unexpected pregnancy.***
- ***Pray for Jessica and the many other girls throughout Pakistan who presently remain under the control of their kidnappers, asking God to divinely protect them and make a way for their freedom.***
- ***May God give the judges in Pakistan courage to resist the external pressures placed upon them so that they would rule with integrity and fairness – and thus uphold justice for all victims of kidnapping and other forms of persecution.***

IRAN: Letter From Imprisoned Christian Reveals Abusive Treatment

Sources: Christian Solidarity Worldwide, International Christian Concern, Article18

Hakop Gochumyan and his wife Elisa are citizens of Armenia who were visiting Iran in August 2023. While this Christian couple were having dinner with friends, government agents raided the gathering, resulting in their arrest. Eventually, Elisa was released on bail and permitted to return to Armenia with their children. However, Hakop was convicted and sentenced to ten years in prison for allegedly "engaging in deviant proselytizing activity." For more details, see our [previously posted report](#).

On May 9th, a letter was made public in which Hakop described his experience behind bars. In the letter, he denied all the charges against him. The Christian man also stated that the investigation by the Iranian authorities was done without the assistance of a translator or lawyer. Additionally, threats were made against his life and the lives of his family members, some of whom are presently residing in Iran.



Hakop Gochumyan
Photo: Article18

Additionally, in a disturbing twist, Hakop revealed that his interrogators confessed to the murder of Haik Hovsepian, a well-known Christian leader who was assassinated in 1994. The Iranian authorities described Haik's death in detail and then threatened to kill Hakop in the same way. View the believer's [full letter](#).

Following Hakop's sentencing in February 2024, both the appeal court and the Supreme Court have rejected his appeal. As a result, the detained Christian continues to serve his sentence in Tehran's notorious Evin Prison, along with many other followers of Jesus who have been arrested for their faith. More details concerning the persecution of Christians in Iran are available at our [country report](#).

An informative documentary featuring the story of Haik Hovsepian has been produced by Hovsepian Ministries, a Christian organization that was founded by his family. To learn more about the dedicated life and ministry of this martyred bishop, you may view the short film at VOMCanada.com/video/hovsepian1.

- ***Please remember Hakop in your prayers as he continues to serve time in prison, praying that this detained believer would tangibly sense our Heavenly Father's sustaining presence, strength and peace as he awaits his hopeful release.***
- ***Also prayerfully uphold Hakop's wife Elisa, along with their children, during this difficult time of separation, asking God to comfort, strengthen and sustain them as well.***
- ***In light of the threats made against Hakop and his loved ones, ask that God's divine protection and peace would remain over each of their lives.***
- ***Continue to pray for the endurance, encouragement and release of the many other Christians in Iran who are presently being imprisoned simply because of their faith in Jesus Christ.***
- ***May the far-reaching ministry of Haik's surviving family be mightily used during these crucial days – not only to strengthen the faith of believers around the world but also to reach those in search of spiritual truth through the creative use of multimedia.***