



Persecution & Prayer Alert

The Voice of the Martyrs Canada
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"It was strictly forbidden to preach to other prisoners. It was understood that whoever was caught doing this received a severe beating.... So we accepted their terms. It was a deal; we preached and they beat us. We were happy preaching. They were happy beating us, so everyone was happy."

~ Rev. Richard Wurmbrand

EGYPT: Mob Protests Church Legalization Application

Source: World Watch Monitor

For more than 30 years, Christians in the village of Al-Koumair had been gathering at the home of one of their community members for worship. As numbers increased, they purchased a house in 2006, along with an adjacent building to provide their community a church, meeting hall, nursery and accommodations. Muslim villagers were aware of the de-facto church, having attended weddings and funerals over the years.

After recent changes were made to Egyptian laws, making it easier for churches to obtain permits, the church applied for legalization. However, when inspectors arrived to begin the process in late March, they were met by a group of angry Muslim villagers who threw bricks and stones at the church as well as neighbouring houses.

On March 31st, a mob gathered again in protest; and the police, in response, detained eight Muslims and seven Christians for 15 days. When asked why the church members were arrested, they were told it was "in order to keep the balance." The detention was extended twice, until both sides signed a reconciliation agreement on April 26th, dropping all charges. The authorities also closed the church, despite the law stating that religious activities cannot be suspended during the application process.

Another church in Halilah also faced a similar mob on April 16th, forcing their church to close, even though they were in the midst of the application process. In that instance, there were no

arrests. At last report, over 3,500 applications are pending throughout the country. For more reports on the challenges facing Christians in Egypt, go to www.vomcanada.com/egypt.

Pray that Egyptian authorities will be willing and able to uphold their laws while keeping peace in these volatile situations. May the Christians in Egypt be able to continue meeting together for the study of God's Word and worship.

NORTH KOREA: Prisoners Released Amidst Peace Talks

Sources: BBC, Mission Network News

Three American prisoners were officially released from custody in North Korea on May 9th in a move widely viewed as a goodwill gesture ahead of a summit between the leaders of the United States and North Korea. The three men -- Kim Hak-song, Kim Dong-chul and Tony Kim -- were all being held in labour camps on charges of anti-state activities. They are all Christians who had been involved with various ministries in North Korea. The three had been transferred to a hotel earlier this month.

Recent meetings between the leaders of North and South Korea have been praised by many as a critical step towards peace. However, Dr. Eric Foley with Voice of the Martyrs Korea says such talks are empty if they ignore North Korea's human rights violations against its own people. When North Korean Christians were asked for their opinion on the talks, their response was, "This is not what we've been praying for."

Though the release of the three Americans is a positive move, 30,000 Korean Christians remain in concentration camps. Real change can come only through Christ. Dr. Foley states: "What we need to be praying for is what North Korean Christians have taught us to pray...for several generations. Pray for the transformation of the heart of the leader." To read the full interview, go to www.bit.ly/2K3uNY0.

Pray that the heart of Kim Jong-Un will be transformed by the love and peace of Christ, and that he will come to understand his need for a relationship with the Living God. Continue to remember the many believers suffering in labour camps throughout North Korea. Uphold the ministry of VOM Korea and others reaching out to Korean Christians.

PRISONER UPDATE

IRAN: Sentences Upheld

Sources: Middle East Concern, World Watch Monitor, Mission Network News

An appeal court in Iran has upheld a ten-year prison sentence against four Christians accused of "promoting Zionist Christianity" and propagating house churches. The lawyer representing Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani, Mohammad-Reza Omid, Yasser Mossayebzadeh, and Saheb Fadaie received the notice on May 2nd.

Pastor Youcef and Mohammad-Reza were also sentenced to two years' internal exile to an area far away from their families. Additionally, Yasser, Saheb and Mohammad-Reza face a sentence of 80 lashes for the consumption of wine, since they were arrested while taking communion in May 2016.

In another case, an appeal hearing for Shamiram Isavi Khabizeh, wife of pastor Victor Bet Tamraz, was held on May 9th. Shamiram was sentenced in January to five years in prison for acting against the regime by organizing small groups, attending seminary abroad, and training church leaders and pastors "to act as spies."

During Shamiram's appeal, the judge accused her entire family of various crimes. She was not allowed to speak in response, except through her lawyer. No date has been set for a further appeal hearing. According to Miles Windsor of Middle East Concern, sentences for Iranian Christians have become increasingly harsh in the past year. Despite this, Christians remain bold in sharing their faith.

If you would like to post a prayer of praise or petition on behalf of our persecuted family around the globe, visit VOMC's prayer wall at www.vomcanada.com/prayerwall.htm.

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For information on additional ways to support members of the persecuted church overseas, review the list of options at www.vomcanada.com/take-action.htm.