



Persecution & Prayer Alert

The Voice of the Martyrs Canada
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*"For the sake of Christ, then, I am content
with weaknesses, insults, hardships,
persecutions, and calamities. For when
I am weak, then I am strong."
~ 2 Corinthians 12:10 ESV*

CHINA: Opposition Expands and Grows

Sources: ChinaAid, South China Morning Post, Bitter Wind

For months, an ongoing campaign against house churches has resulted in closures throughout the country. As Eric Foley from VOM Korea says, "When China shut down more and more smaller underground churches earlier this year, they watched the world's reaction carefully and found that Christians around the world would do little. This has given them boldness to shut down the largest underground churches."

In September, the Zion Church, one of Beijing's largest underground churches, was forcefully shut down (www.vomcanada.com/cn-2018-09-27.htm). Earlier in December, the Early Rain Covenant Church faced coordinated attacks against their members. At last report, well over 100 members of the church have been detained, though many have since been released. Thirteen of the leaders have been formally detained with charges pending (see www.vomcanada.com/cn-2018-12-13.htm).

The latest campaign has been against the Rongguili Church in Guangzhou. More than 60 police officers and government officials interrupted a children's Bible class on the morning of December 15th. The officers stayed throughout the day, confiscating church property, including more than 4,000 books. All access to the building has been sealed off by police. The church, which attracts thousands of worshippers each week, was founded by Samuel Lamb Xiangao, one of the leading figures in China's independent house church movement.

While recent attention has been drawn to the large churches, many others throughout the country face a similar fate. As stated by Piao Junying in *Bitter Winter*, "Each house church suppression displays a common, disturbing pattern. However, each story is unique, and deserves to be told." Christians continue to meet, despite the danger. One church in Daqing is meeting at a remote pig farm for security reasons. Others are worshipping outdoors, even during the cold winter season. Despite the opposition and added challenges, the Lord is continuing to build His church in China (Matthew 16:18).

Remember these bold believers who are continuing to stand up in the face of opposition. Pray for their ongoing strength and willingness to put Christ first in their lives. Also uphold those who are meeting in the country's official Three-Self Patriotic Movement (state church) and, as mandated, must frequently comply by giving their primary allegiance to the Communist government. May the world's leaders arise, standing up against this clear violation of freedom against the Chinese people.

PAKISTAN: Brothers Sentenced to Death for Blasphemy

Sources: Asia News, CLAAS

Two Christian brothers, Qaisar and Amoon Ayub, have been in Jhelum Jail since 2015 on accusations of blasphemy. The allegations go back to 2009 for website material that was considered offensive against Islam. On December 14th, the brothers received notice that they had been convicted and sentenced to death. For security reasons, the two did not appear in court for the sentencing.

The brothers are being represented by members of the Centre for Legal Aid Assistance and Settlement (CLAAS), who believe that the conviction may have been influenced by threats against the judge. They intend to appeal the decision to the Lahore High Court as soon as possible. CLAAS-UK director Nasir Saeed stated: "Because of threats from hardliners, lower courts pass their responsibility to the higher court and then it takes years to prove the accused innocent. We have seen this in the recent case of Asia Bibi.... I am afraid now Qaisar and Amoon will have to wait years to get justice."

Qaisar is married with three children. Amoon is married to a school teacher in Lahore. For more information on the situation facing Christians in Pakistan, go to www.vomcanada.com/pakistan.

Please lift up Qaisar and Amoon as they face an uncertain future in prison. Also remember Qaisar's wife Amina and their children, along with Amoon's wife Huma, during these long days of separation and lack of spousal/paternal support. Also continue to remember Asia Bibi, who has been acquitted and released, but remains in hiding from militants seeking her life. Pray that the governments and courts in Pakistan will take the bold step of standing up and removing the blasphemy laws; and that the general public will realize the injustice and suffering these harsh laws cause many accused victims and their families.

PRAISE REPORT

INDONESIA: Former Governor to be Released Early

Sources: World Watch Monitor, Asia News

In May 2017, the governor of Jakarta was convicted of blasphemy and received a two-year prison sentence. The charges arose from a statement made by Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, questioning a claim of some clerics that the Quran forbade Muslims from voting for a Christian. For more details, go to www.vomcanada.com/id-2017-05-18.htm.

The judge's sentence came despite calls from prosecutors for probation. An appeal of the conviction was rejected by the Supreme Court in March. During the month of July, Indonesia's Human Rights Commission also proposed guidelines in an effort to avoid sectarian clashes in the 2019 national elections. The new code attempts to prevent future issues like this conviction.

On December 10th, it was announced that Basuki, also known as "Ahok," will be released more than three months early due to good behaviour. His family and supporters are thankful to receive the encouraging news that he is scheduled to be released on January 24th.

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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If you would like to encourage someone to read or receive this weekly prayer alert, please use our online form at www.vomcanada.com/pnpforward.htm and help spread the message of the persecuted church around the world.

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.