



Persecution & Prayer Alert

The Voice of the Martyrs Canada
www.vomcanada.com

Thursday, January 31, 2019

*"It is before the Cross, and not
before us, that the world trembles."
~ Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

PHILIPPINES: Bomb Blasts Kill At Least Twenty

Sources: BBC, ABS-CBN, Christianity Today

Coordinated bombs at a cathedral in Jolo, southern Philippines, killed at least 20 people and injured over 80 on January 27th. The first bomb went off during the church service; the second exploded outside the door, as people fled and troops responded to the disaster. Those killed included five soldiers. ISIS has claimed responsibility for the incident, and the Philippines military has been conducting raids in an effort to track down those responsible.

The blast happened less than a week after a referendum in which the people of Mindanao voted in favour of setting up a Muslim-controlled region in southern Philippines. There are questions as to whether this incident will affect a second vote on February 6th for other areas to be included.

There has been much speculation on any possible connection between the referendum and the attack. Many of the Christian minority in the region have been in favour of the proposed autonomous region, despite the Islamic control. Efraim Tendero, the general secretary of the World Evangelical Alliance, believes the attack was instigated by a group that did not want a peace agreement and so created terror. For more information on persecution in the Philippines, go to www.vomcanada.com/philippines.

Please remember those who were injured, as well as the families and friends of those killed, during this horrific attack. Pray that justice and peace will prevail in this violence-torn area of the Philippines. May those responsible for this recent attack experience the conviction of God, leading them to repentance and salvation.

KENYA: Christian Beaten and Arrested

Sources: Morning Star News, International Christian Concern

A Christian man named Hassan and his widowed mother, who were both living in Ngong, located on the outskirts of Nairobi, have been facing constant pressure to recant their Christian faith and return to Islam. Pressure has included threats, bribes and beatings on several occasions. On January 19th, Hassan was arrested. The police officers, along with two others, then severely beat him -- knocking out teeth and causing leg, chest and back injuries.

The two believers fled Somalia after the death of Hassan's father and went to Kenya, hoping to find a safe place to lead their new Christian lives. However, pressure from militant Muslims in the local community, including family members, has resulted in years of suffering. Hassan's mother said, "I have suffered several persecutions from the Muslims for converting to Christianity. My stomach is ailing from the attack I suffered a few years ago. I cannot stand in an upright position. Me and my family have chosen the cause of Christ. No turning back."

Remember these two dear believers as they suffer great hardships for Christ. Pray for the healing of their wounds, and that their hearts will be filled with patient endurance (Revelation 3:10). Also lift up their attackers in prayer, asking that they will experience the grace of Christ and turn to faith in Him.

REPORT UPDATES

PAKISTAN: Asia Bibi Freed; Pervaiz Masih Acquitted

Sources: Global News, Pakistan Christian Post, BBC, World Watch Monitor, Release International, The Voice Society

In a much-anticipated decision, Pakistan's top court has rejected a challenge to the acquittal of a Christian woman on blasphemy charges. The ruling is the final legal option, allowing **Asia Bibi** to freely leave the country.

Originally convicted in 2010 after accusations of insulting Mohammed, Asia spent eight years on death row. The case has polarized the country, and government leaders who provided their support have been killed. The Supreme Court threw out all charges against the accused believer on October 31st, at which time she was taken into protective custody due to threats against her life. Although a final appeal was filed, the Supreme Court ruled on January 29th that the petitioners gave no evidence that the original acquittal was wrong. In fact, the Chief Justice stated that, if the case had not been so sensitive, her accusers would be guilty of perjury and should be jailed for life.

Asia's safety remains a priority. While she has been freed, calls for her death by militants continue. Believing it was not safe in Pakistan, Asia's lawyer and daughters have left the country after the October 31st ruling. Asia intends to likewise leave Pakistan for her safety. Despite much speculation, her intended destination has not been made public. Canada's foreign ministry

representatives, who have been offering support throughout Asia's ordeal, say that her safety is top priority. They are also calling on Pakistan's government to take necessary steps to provide protection. In a statement, the department announced, "Freedom of religion is a fundamental human right, and must be fully respected."

In a separate ruling, a lower court has ruled to acquit **Pervaiz Masih** on blasphemy charges over a business disagreement (see www.vomcanada.com/pk-2015-09-17.htm). Normally blasphemy cases are passed along to higher courts. However, on January 19th, a lower court judge accepted the application for acquittal, though allowing the complainants to re-open the case in the future.

While rejoicing over this ruling, Pervaiz is still considered a blasphemer, leaving his life at risk from vigilantes. Since the initial accusation in 2015, his family has also suffered greatly. The accused man's wife Zareena was severely beaten under interrogation by police, leaving her unable to walk or stand properly. Since she was physically unable to properly watch their young daughter, the couple's three-year-old child wandered away and was later found drowned. The exact cause of the tragic drowning remains a mystery.

At the time of this report, there are 218 other Christians currently facing blasphemy charges.

While grateful for these encouraging court rulings, the tragic loss of the Masih family's young child is yet another reason to continue upholding these suffering believers in prayer. May God's comforting presence sustain the young couple as they grieve over their loss, assuring them that their little girl is eternally secure in the loving arms of Jesus. Also continue to pray for Asia and her family, asking the Lord to lead them to a safe place where they can begin a new life reunited together without constant threats. Additionally, intercede on behalf of the Pakistani government, that they will abandon their blasphemy laws, allowing freedom of religion for all of their citizens.

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.