



Persecution & Prayer Alert

The Voice of the Martyrs Canada
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*"If a Christian is not
afraid to die, this person is
ready to preach the Gospel."
~ Eritrean persecuted Christian*

UKRAINE: Increasing Restrictions in Breakaway Regions

Sources: Forum 18, Release International, Mission Eurasia

Areas in eastern Ukraine, now controlled by Russian-backed rebels, have placed increasingly harsh restrictions on any non-Orthodox religious groups. Christians are facing demands to register, as well as orders to stop all religious activities.

In the region of Luhansk, officials have ordered Baptist Union churches to halt public worship or risk punishment. Rebel leaders previously insisted on registration; however, for church leaders who have attempted the process, all applications from Protestant communities have been rejected. The rebels' demands have since escalated, leading to this recent ban.

Fearing arrests and other reprisals, many of the churches have ceased public meetings. Those who are continuing to meet are at risk of raids, which was the case for the Path of Salvation Independent Baptist Church. This church was raided in February and its 82-year-old pastor is now facing charges of leading "illegal worship."

During the raid, literature labelled "extremist" was allegedly seized, though friends of the church claim the books were planted by the officers -- as demonstrated by the fact that some of it was Jehovah's Witnesses material.

In the neighbouring region of Donetsk, religious freedom is likewise deteriorating. All non-Orthodox religious organizations were given until March 1st to register, but none of the registrations were approved, making hundreds of churches now illegal.

Please remember the thousands of Christians in eastern Ukraine who are now being challenged with the newly imposed restrictions and potential punishment for not complying to

such demands. Pray that these believers will be able to stand firm, resting in the strength and reassuring peace that comes from God alone. Despite the severe restrictions and political uncertainty, may the Gospel continue to powerfully spread throughout the region.

KAZAKHSTAN: Raided Churches Ordered to Stop

Source: Forum 18

Three Baptist churches in the city of Taraz have been subjected to raids from anti-terrorism officers in recent weeks. Despite claiming "our laws don't ban praying," officials defend their punishment of those who meet for worship without state permission.

On February 10th, officers entered a home where a worship service was taking place. They filmed the worshippers and, at the end, demanded statements from some of the participants to explain why they were meeting without registration. Two brothers, Yakov and Viktor Fot, have been issued fines for their part in the unregistered meeting.

The following Sunday, February 17th, another worship service was raided. The attackers initially demanded statements from everyone in attendance, though they eventually only took statements from a few. The next day, Vitaly Ryzhkov was issued a fine and two others were given warnings.

A third church service faced similar action on March 3rd. Officers waited until the end of the service before demanding statements from everyone in attendance. After recording the statements, they took the pastor, Pyotr Skorniyakov, along with a church member, to the police station where both were fined.

The Council of Churches Baptist has taken a position opposing state registration, which will also include the refusal of payment for fines handed down because of the exercise of their faith. The organization deems such fines as being "unjust" and, therefore, appeals will generally be filed against them. In the case of Yakov Fot, however, this pensioner did not appeal his fine. As one church member explains, "We don't pay the fines voluntarily, so they'll take the money from his pension." For more information on the challenges facing Christians who practise their faith in Kazakhstan, go to www.vomcanada.com/kazakhstan.

Lift up to God's throne of grace the many churches in Kazakhstan that are facing opposition from governmental forces in the guise of taking security measures. Also remember in your prayers those who are encountering significant financial hardships due to these fines. Pray that these Christians will be a testimony to those opposing them and that the officers sent to monitor the worship services will hear the Word of God and come to faith in Christ.

SRI LANKA: Mob Disrupts Worship Service

Source: NCEASL

As the pastor and congregation of the Christian Family Church in Galgamuwa prepared to begin their Sunday worship service on the morning of February 24th, a mob consisting of around 200 people, led by Buddhist monks, forced their way into the church premises.

Members of the mob demanded that the service stop immediately; one monk even threatening them with death. To further demonstrate their point, they broke chairs and damaged roofing sheets. As they were leaving, one woman was dragged into the street where she was beaten. When police arrived, the pastor and the woman who was assaulted were taken to the police station. When they got to the station, the monks were already there filing a complaint against the pastor for "breaching the peace." Complaints were also filed by the pastor and the assaulted woman who was then admitted to the hospital for treatment.

Incidents of this type are unfortunately common in Sri Lanka where Buddhism is considered by many as part of the nation's culture. To learn more about the persecution of Christians in Sri Lanka, as well as the ways VOMC is assisting them, go to www.vomcanada.com/srilanka.htm.

May the Gospel of Christ continue to permeate the nation of Sri Lanka. Pray that these Christians will continue reaching out with the message of God's love to those around them through both word and deed. Intercede for the injured woman, asking the Lord to heal her completely from the injuries. Pray that the nation's leaders will stand up in defense of the religious freedoms for all 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.

The Persecution & Prayer Alert is a ministry of:
The Voice of the Martyrs Canada, P.O. Box 608, Streetsville, Ontario, L5M 2C1
Tel. (905) 670-9721 Website: www.vomcanada.com

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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.