



Persecution & Prayer Alert

The Voice of the Martyrs Canada
www.vomcanada.com

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*"For the Lord hears the needy
and does not despise his own
people who are prisoners."*

~ Psalm 69:33 (ESV)

RUSSIA: Theological Education Facing Obstructions

Source: Forum 18

Several religious educational institutions are facing fines, suspension orders, and more, as part of what is considered systemic and intentional obstruction. Yet, the institutions insist there were no violations committed.

Two prominent institutions -- the Baptist Union's Moscow Theological Seminary and the Pentecostal Union's Eurasian Theological Seminary -- are included in recent actions taken as a result of inspections from the federal education inspectorate. In each case, no specific deficiencies were identified to justify the penalties.

The Moscow Theological Seminary was forced to suspend all activities for 60 days, starting on January 25th. The inspections found fault with its bachelor's degree programs, as well as staff qualifications. The seminary was also banned from admitting new students.

The Eurasian Theological Seminary is the primary training establishment for the Russian Pentecostal Union. Its license to operate was revoked in November and seminary officials are currently in the process of applying for a new one. In the meantime, the school may continue teaching on an informal basis, but no degrees or diplomas can be awarded.

Other schools have faced similar actions, and church leaders fear the restrictions will pose further opportunities for government authorities to curtail their activities and place them under greater official scrutiny and control. A spokesperson for the Pentecostal Union sees this as pressure on non-traditional confessions and "perhaps another act of intimidation."

As church groups seek to raise up new leaders, pray that these Christian institutions will be able to carry on in ministry without undue restrictions and pressure. Additionally, may the theological seminaries be able to resume with their teaching and training so that the spread of the Gospel will continue unhindered. Pray that the Russian government will provide equal opportunities to those representing all faith groups, without demonstrating partiality.

BELARUS: Registration Refused for Church Activities

Source: Forum 18

Officials have rejected the registration application for the *Pentecostal Your Will Be Done Church* in Minsk for the sixth time after a government official pressured a potential landlord to not rent their facility to the church. Due to fear of punishment, the congregation has chosen to not meet for worship without registration.

The Baptist Union has also faced registration problems while planning for an *International Festival of Hope* event which was initially scheduled to take place in Minsk on May 4th and 5th. Members of this denomination have faced continued delays in obtaining permission. Ultimately, they had to cancel their plans when no answer was received by mid-February. Earlier plans to have Franklin Graham as one of the featured guest speakers were cancelled when permission for him to speak had been denied. The Baptist Union intends to continue with plans for the festival at a later date, provided permission can be obtained.

In response to systemic refusal to register religious organizations, the United Nations Human Rights Committee released a statement in October 2018, expressing concerns and calling on Belarus to repeal the requirement for mandatory state registration of religious communities. The UNHRC sees the repeated denials as "undue restrictions." For more details on persecution in Belarus, go to www.vomcanada.com/belarus.htm.

Pray for the many churches in Belarus that are facing undue delays and registration denials. Despite the attempts of governing officials to hinder the work of the Gospel, may the Lord make a way for needed ministry to take place among the country's Christian community, as well as those who are spiritually searching for truth. Remember the organizers' plans for the "International Festival of Hope," praying that they will be able to use this opportunity to reach out to the people of Minsk and surrounding areas.

UPDATES FROM CHINA

CHINA: Prominent Church Closed

Sources: Bitter Winter, AsiaNews, ChinaAid

Over the past eight years, we have been reporting on numerous incidents of hardship faced by members of the Shouwang Church in Beijing, one of the most prominent unregistered churches

in the country. On March 23rd, the police moved in to completely shut down and liquidate the church. For a list of previous reports, go to www.vomcanada.com/shouwang.

The church, which has encountered mounting pressure to join the official Three-Self Church since 2004, was forced to meet outdoors since April 2011. Over the years, the pressure of persecution caused the membership to dwindle to less than 100 congregants. As a final act to shut down the church, government officials accused the church leadership of refusing to register as a "social organization."

Students meeting for Bible classes affiliated with the ministry were interrogated and then informed that the church was officially shut down. Various subsidiary organizations were also closed and all of the church's assets were seized. The pastor, Jin Tianming, who has been under house arrest since 2011, is experiencing increased restrictions. This includes not being permitted to leave his apartment, even to go to another part of the building.

Please uphold Pastor Jin in your prayers, along with other members of the Shouwang Church who are now facing increasing uncertainty. May the Lord mediate on their behalf, and also for the sake of other believers who are experiencing opposition. Intercede for the authorities involved, praying that they will ease their ongoing campaign against religious groups in China and instead respectfully consider the rights of all citizens.

CHINA: John Cao's Appeal Delayed Again

Sources: ChinaAid, International Christian Concern

Despite continued efforts to submit an appeal, local authorities have again postponed the hearing for John Cao, who was convicted in 2017 of "organizing an illegal border crossing" between China and Myanmar, and thus sentenced to seven years in prison (see www.vomcanada.com/cn-2018-08-02.htm).

Pastor Cao, along with his co-worker Jing Ruxia, were carrying on humanitarian work with the Wa people in Myanmar when he was arrested while rafting across the border with China -- a crossing he frequently made with the knowledge of Chinese authorities.

Despite international pressure, the pastor (an American citizen) has had his appeal delayed six times. It is now scheduled to take place on May 22nd. His family has been denied any access for visitation and all letters addressed to him are being screened. The lawyers representing him have expressed concerns for his health, due to a lack of exposure to sunlight and proper healthcare.

Thank you for your continued prayers on behalf of Pastor Cao, as well as his family, especially during this ongoing ordeal. May his appeal be heard soon, resulting in a successful outcome.

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.