



Persecution & Prayer Alert

The Voice of the Martyrs Canada
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"In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

~ Matthew 5:16 ESV

PAKISTAN: Sentenced to Death for Blasphemy

Sources: Aljazeera, Deutsche Welle, Daily Mail

In 2013, Asif Pervaiz was working in a garment factory where he was reportedly pressured by his supervisor, Muhammad Saeed Khokher (also referred to as Saeed Ahmed Khokher), to convert from Christianity to Islam. After Asif sent text messages resisting the supervisor's demands, the father of four was accused of blasphemy and taken into custody where he has since been awaiting trial for seven years.

On September 8th, a court in Lahore ruled that Asif was guilty of blasphemy, sentencing him to three years in prison for "misusing" his phone and fining him \$400 CAD. After serving his sentence, he is to be put to death by hanging. Asif rejects the charges against him and intends to appeal the ruling. On the other side, Muhammad denies that he had ever pressured Asif to convert.

At present, more than 80 people are in Pakistani prisons on charges of blasphemy. The contentious law drew international outrage in the case of Asia Bibi, a Christian mother who was sentenced to death over alleged blasphemous remarks but finally acquitted in 2018 after nine years of imprisonment (see www.vomcanada.com/pk-2018-11-01.htm).

Despite Asia's release, the ongoing threats of angered civilians made it necessary for her to flee the country to an undisclosed location in Canada where immigrated family members were awaiting her arrival. Even when not convicted, such allegations alone can pose risk of endangerment to accused Christians and their families. For further reports on the various perils facing believers in Pakistan, go to www.vomcanada.com/pakistan.htm.

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Muhammad Saeed Khokher

Muhammad Saeed Khokher

Remember Asif, along with his family, during this time of danger and suffering. Pray that the courts will rule justly on his behalf and that the government will curb such abuses by revoking the country's blasphemy laws, which have been frequently exploited to target vulnerable Christian minorities. May religious freedom be brought to the nation so believers can live in safety and peace among the other members of their communities. In the meantime, please continue to prayerfully lift up the many Pakistanis who are still imprisoned for their faith, along with those like Asia Bibi who have been forced to live in fear beyond the prison walls because of these allegations.

SRI LANKA: Disruptions by Mob Violence

Source: National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka

Mob demonstrations are a common way to disrupt and protest Christianity in the nation of Sri Lanka. Although opposition often comes from the dominant Buddhist community, two recent incidents in the Batticaloa District appear to have been instigated by Hindu leaders.

On July 19th, a group of 45 people, including a member of the Hindu temple's board of trustees, forced their way into the Jesus Witness Church in Kommanthurai soon after the worship service had concluded. During the attack, the pastor and his family were assaulted and chairs were broken. The pastor's mobile phone was also damaged after he attempted to record the incident, which has since been reported to the police.

On August 8th, a funeral service in Palliyadithona was halted when approximately 50 villagers raided the cemetery and demanded that the funeral be conducted according to Hindu rites. The pastor called the police and the burial was finally able to take place two hours later, under the watchful protection of several officers.

While Christians can officially gather for worship in Sri Lanka, the tensions caused by opposing community members have become more complex. These followers of Christ are now finding themselves caught between the predominantly Buddhist Sinhalese population and the mainly Hindu Tamils. More information on the persecution of Christians in Sri Lanka is available at www.vomcanada.com/srilanka.htm.

Please pray for the emotional, physical, and spiritual protection of Christians in Sri Lanka as they seek to practise their faith by faithfully gathering for worship despite the threat of danger. As they demonstrate the love and grace of God, may their commitment to the teachings of Jesus serve as a powerful testimony to those around them. Pray that the hearts of all people groups in Sri Lanka -- including those opposing the churches -- will be open to the Gospel so they too will understand the truth of God's Word and turn in faith to Christ.

INDIA: Christians Face Rising Threats

Sources: CBN, International Christian Concern, Morning Star News

Christians in India are facing horrific levels of violence from Hindu radical extremists. This deadly campaign coincides with a government agenda to turn the country into a Hindu nation. A report from VOM Canada's partner, *CBN News*, provides context for some of the situations being reported. Go to www.vomcanada.com/video/india-cbn to view the report.

A recent incident in Uttar Pradesh illustrates the severity of the hate crimes inspired by religious intolerance against Christians in India. On August 21st, "Prasanna Kumar" (whose name has been changed for security reasons) was attacked and brutally beaten. Claiming that Pastor Kumar was forcibly converting Hindus to Christianity, ten men pulled him from his motorcycle and threw him to the ground, where they relentlessly kicked him and beat him with wooden clubs.

The attack became so savage that Pastor Kumar thought he would not survive. "God gave me the grace to accept even death," he proclaimed. However, the thought of leaving his wife and young daughter was excruciating. After physically assaulting him for nearly two hours, the men finally left, promising to kill the pastor if he ever returned to the village.

After Pastor Kumar was found, members of his congregation assisted him to the police station. However, local officers refused to file a complaint, claiming he was attempting to register a false report. Finally, after the intervention of a church leader from outside the district, a report was filed but to date no action has been taken against the attackers.

Shifting the blame from the offenders to the victims is not uncommon. In Badaguda, Odisha state, followers of traditional tribal religions have blamed the prayers of Christians for driving away their gods. In one instance, the village headman told a pastor: "When you pray, our gods leave us. So you must stop praying. We will not let you conduct prayers inside the village."

The Christians erected a temporary shelter outside the village, but it was destroyed and the church members were beaten. Rather than attempting to stop the attackers, however, the police have threatened to arrest the Christians for "disturbing the peace" should they continue to gather for worship. For more on the persecution committed against believers in India, go to www.vomcanada.com/india.htm.

May the Lord mightily use His people in India as bright lights amid the darkness surrounding them. Pray that He will strengthen and protect His followers as they rebuild their Christian communities, share their stories of faith, and encourage others who have experienced the trauma of persecution. Ask Him to specifically intervene on Pastor Kumar's behalf, fully healing and strengthening him. Additionally, intercede for the authorities in India, that they will cease to ignore the mob violence directed towards Christians by taking a stand against discrimination and intolerance – using the law to protect the rights of all India's 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.