



Persecution & Prayer Alert

The Voice of the Martyrs Canada
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" Strive in prayer; let faith fill your heart -- so will you be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might."

~ Andrew Murray

KAZAKHSTAN: Appeal Fails to Halt Seizures

Source: Forum 18

On September 17th, a court in the city of Almaty upheld an earlier decision to seize two buildings owned by the New Life Protestant Church. The facilities were being used for worship, as well as a means of support for those suffering from drug and alcohol dependency.

The seizure follows the arrests and convictions of the church's three pastors. In November of last year, they were sentenced to terms of up to five years for allegedly "causing psychological harm" and having involvement in illegal associations (see www.vomcanada.com/kz-2019-11-21.htm). As part of the court ruling, the properties belonging to the church were also confiscated.

Since the seized church properties were not owned by the accused pastors, and as the church had no legal representation in court when the ruling was made, the church intends to file a complaint. In addition, there are plans to appeal the conviction of the pastors, which will have a bearing on the outcome concerning the church properties.

In a separate incident, the Grace Church in Nur-Sultan went to court to challenge the legalities relating to the confiscation of their property, as the government had seized it to make room for a kindergarten (see www.vomcanada.com/kz-2020-08-06.htm). However, on September 7th, the judge rejected their lawsuit. The church was given one month to file an appeal. For more on the difficulties facing Kazakh Christians, go to www.vomcanada.com/kazakhstan.htm.

Pray that the courts will recognize the positive impact these churches have had on their communities and thus rule equitably. Ask the Lord to grant wisdom to the leaders of both churches as they work their way through the legal mazes before them. May the Lord be their "refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble," also ministering in this manner to their

families and congregation members (Psalm 46:1). As they await God's vindication, may they seize every opportunity they are given to share their faith with others.

ERITREA: Additional Prisoners Released; Five Others Arrested

Sources: Release International, Barnabas Fund

Recently, we had reported that 31 Christian prisoners were unexpectedly freed from custody (see www.vomcanada.com/er-2020-09-17.htm). With thanksgiving, we are now pleased to announce the exciting news that more Christians have been conditionally released, bringing the total to 69! While many of these prisoners have spent years behind bars, none of them ever faced trial.

The release of these prisoners understandably brings great joy to their family members and friends. Yet, when Eritrean Christians took to the streets in praise and celebration, five women were arrested on the spot. All of the apprehended women were mothers.

While some people within the country have suggested that the recent releases took place due to the pandemic, Dr. Berhane Asmelash, Director of Release Eritrea, is skeptical. Given these new arrests, he believes it's premature at this stage to expect a drastic change of policy within the Eritrean government. Dr. Asmelash estimates that approximately 300 Christian prisoners are still being held without charge in Eritrea.

After the initial releases took place last month, VOMC's Greg Musselman was able to interview Dr. Asmelash. To view this informative interview, go to www.vomcanada.com/eritrea-videos/video/er-berhane.html.

Praise the Lord with us over the wonderful news that these faithful servants of God have finally been freed from captivity. Continue to prayerfully uphold them, as well as their families, as they adjust to life after so many years of imprisonment. Also intercede for the women who were recently arrested, asking God to grant them grace and strength as they await His divine intervention. May their families -- especially the children -- also experience the Lord's abiding peace and comfort, knowing they can place their hope in Him.

IRAN: Updates on Christians in Exile

Sources: Article18, Middle East Concern

On October 31st of last year, Ebrahim Firouzi was gratefully released from prison. However, the court mandated that his prison term be followed by two years of internal exile, resulting in Ebrahim having to complete his sentence at a location a far distance away from his family.

As the sentence was extended by another eight months this spring, it appears the authorities are intent on finding more ways to punish him. For on September 27th, Ebrahim was notified that he was to be charged with "propaganda against the state." Thankfully, the prosecutor closed the case the next day, citing there was lack of evidence.

In another case, Iranian convert Mohammad Reza (Youhan) Omid has faced ongoing legal charges for many years. Arrested in 2016, he was sentenced to ten years in prison, plus two years in exile. His sentence was eventually reduced to two years in prison. After Mohammad was released in August, he began his exile on September 14th at a location a thousand kilometres away from his wife and daughters. VOMC's Greg Musselman asked Dr. Hormoz Shariat from *Iran Alive* about these cases. You can watch this video excerpt to gain valuable background information at www.vomcanada.com/video/hormoz.

Pray that both of these exiled Christian men, Ebrahim and Mohammad, will be encouraged by the Lord as they fulfill the requirements relating to their sentences. May these men and their families face this season of separation with God's provision and strength. Also remember the many others still being held in Iranian prisons for their faith, praying that they too will be comforted by God's presence, and kept strong in their faith and witness.

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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