



Persecution & Prayer Alert

The Voice of the Martyrs Canada
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*"Suffering can refine us rather
than destroy us because God Himself
walks with us in the fire."*

~ Timothy Keller

Be assured that VOMC's ministry team and international partners are carefully monitoring the volatile situation in Afghanistan. While we await more details, in order to gain a better understanding of how these changes will impact the Christian Afghan community, we ask that you please keep these believers in your prayers. Updates will follow as we learn more about the situation.

IRAN: Proposed Law Leads to Concerns

Sources: Heart4Iran, Mission Network News, Associated Press

Finding encouragement in the Christian faith can be especially difficult in a country like Iran, where tight government controls prevent followers of Christ from meeting together. In recent years, modern technology created a platform for ministries to reach out with the Good News of Jesus and provide spiritual help to the many believers who often must worship in secret. Yet a newly drafted proposed law now threatens to silence the voices of believers from being expressed via the Internet.

In order to get past the rigorous restrictions already in place, many Iranians use proxy servers or VPNs to work around the government-imposed Internet filters. However, the proposed law would criminalize the sale or distribution of any such technologies. Restrictions are also being placed on social media platforms. Foreign services such as Facebook, YouTube and Instagram would then require registration with Iranian authorities and thus be subjected to their oversight. The bill also puts control of the Internet into the hands of Iran's armed forces.

In a country where the government maintains strict control over all forms of print media (including newspapers), and serves as the only entity legally permitted to broadcast on television or radio, social media has been an invaluable communication tool for those who do not share its hard-line Islamist views. For further information on the challenges encountered by Christians in Iran, and to review previously posted reports, go to www.vomcanada.com/iran.htm.

Please pray that this new proposal will not pass into law. Also prayerfully intercede for ministries that are presently using the Internet to reach into Iran with the message of Christ, asking God to grant them wisdom and innovative new ways to proclaim the Good News throughout this Muslim-majority nation. Pray that the country's millions of existing Iranian Christians will receive ongoing encouragement and strength, trusting in the Scriptural truth that no humanly devised restrictions can fully halt the effectual work of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 16:18). May God soften the hearts of governing leaders seeking to block all forms of Christian communication by revealing to them the error of their ways and the reality of the Risen Christ.

REPORT UPDATES

NIGERIA: Chibok Schoolgirl Recently Reunited with Family

Sources: International Christian Concern, The Guardian, This Day

Ruth Pagu was one of over 200 girls abducted during the 2014 raid on a secondary school in Chibok, Nigeria. Although some of the students have managed to escape captivity over the past seven years, more than 100 of them remain missing to date. Therefore, it is with great joy we report that another girl has been safely reunited with her family as of August 7th.

According to a statement by the government, the man whom Ruth was forced to marry while in captivity surrendered himself to the military on July 28th. Accompanying him was Ruth and their two children whom she bore while held captive in a terrorists' camp. Over a period of ten days, government agencies have worked to ascertain this young woman's identity and contact her parents. Ruth will be receiving psychological counselling and medical care which are being provided by the state to help her reintegrate into society.

The governor of Borno State, Babgana Zulum, announced that Ruth's reunion with her parents has greatly boosted the hopes of the many other suffering families longing to be reunited with their missing loved ones. The girls were kidnapped by members of the jihadist group, Boko Haram, who vehemently oppose Western education.

Schools continue to be targeted by various militant groups in northern Nigeria. Memories of the Chibok kidnapping come to mind with the recently reported news of a school that was raided by armed bandits on July 5th, 2021, this time involving the abduction of more than 100 students (see www.vomcanada.com/ng-2021-07-08.htm).

In the midst of Nigeria's troubling abductions, we praise God for the deliverance of Ruth and her children, and also for the wonderful heart change evidenced by her husband's surrender to local authorities. Pray for each family member's physical, mental and spiritual health as they integrate into society and connect with estranged loved ones. May God surround them with a loving community that will provide needed support through this period of transition. Please remain mindful to pray for the many students still waiting to be released from captivity. May their families experience the joy of being miraculously reunited as well.

CHINA: Four Years Since Legal Advocate's Disappearance

Sources: ChinaAid, Amnesty International, First Things

For many years, Gao Zhisheng provided legal services for those in China facing trial because of their religious beliefs. In response, he suffered frequent harassment from officials of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). In 2005, he wrote letters exposing the government's human rights violations against practitioners of the Falun Gong religious movement. As a result, his law practice was shut down by the authorities. Subsequent to being taken captive for the first time in 2006, Gao was either missing, detained, or under house arrest during the past 15 years.

Through his work as a human rights lawyer, and the repercussions he encountered as a result, Gao came to faith in Christ. He was able to proclaim, "The torture I suffered gave me a wonderful gift: Faith in God."

Gao was last seen in August 2017. Even though friends had attempted to free him from house arrest and smuggle him out of the province, the authorities managed to locate him. Nothing has been seen nor heard of him since that time (see www.vomcanada.com/cn-2019-08-22.htm).

Describing the emotional toll that his disappearance has had on her life, Gao's wife Geng He stated, "I have run out of tears." Though she has had to flee the country with their two children, Geng continues to search for answers. "At one time, I believed that the malicious CCP had murdered Gao Zhisheng," she wrote. "Now, however, I know that I should not give up."

Please continue to remember Gao in your prayers, along with his concerned wife Geng and their children. Despite the long days of uncertainty this family have endured, may they be filled with peace and hope, remaining steadfast in the Lord's promises to help them through this time. Ask that Gao would be kept safe from all harm; and, regardless of the circumstances, that his faith will remain strong. Finally, please pray that the authorities will soon reveal the whereabouts of this missing Christian man and, in hopes he is still alive, release him from captivity.

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