



Persecution & Prayer Alert

The Voice of the Martyrs Canada
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***"I am convinced that it is through
your prayers that I was able to
survive all the trials I faced."***

~ Helen Berhane, former Eritrean prisoner

ERITREA: More Church Leaders Detained

Sources: Christian Solidarity Worldwide, Church in Chains, BBC

In 2002, the government of Eritrea outlawed every religion except for Sunni Islam, Eritrean Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism and Lutheranism. Since then, the oppression against other religious groups has been severe. Even those within the approved faith groups have been at risk of opposition, particularly if they are perceived to be in conflict with the country's authoritarian regime. To review previous reports on the persecution of Christians in this East African nation, go to www.vomcanada.com/eritrea.htm.

Recently, three Catholic clerics were detained, despite them belonging to an approved faith community. On October 11th, security agents detained Mihretab Stefanos, the parish priest of St. Michael's Church in Segheneity. The next day, Abba Abraham Habtom Gebremariam, a priest from Teseney, was also detained. Then, on October 15th, the Bishop of Segheneity, Abune Fikremariam Hagos, was detained at the Asmara International Airport after his return from a trip to Europe.

At last report, Abba Abraham was being held at the Adi Abeito prison, north of Asmara. The whereabouts of the other two church leaders are unconfirmed, but it is believed they may be imprisoned at the same facility. When the Catholic church inquired about the reported detainment of the bishop, authorities confirmed that he was in custody but they would not disclose the reason for the arrest nor his location.

While the motives behind the detentions remain unknown, Catholic bishops within Eritrea have repeatedly called on the government to end its authoritarian behaviour and govern more

democratically. The ruling governmental leaders have been unhappy about these calls for political reform, which may have led to their recent oppressive actions.

Continue to prayerfully remember the many Christians in Eritrea who are presently imprisoned because of their faith in Christ, asking that each one of them will be sustained by God's strengthening presence and grace. May justice and democracy prevail in each case, including those involving the three recently detained men, resulting in their release from custody. Additionally, ask the Lord to touch the hearts of the country's governing leaders with His transformative love so they will come to realize the importance of honouring Him and respecting the rights and freedoms of all citizens.

REPORT UPDATES

SRI LANKA: Municipal Authorities Order Demolition of Church

Source: NCEASL

The "Jesus Calls You" church in Abepradesa, Anuradhapura District, has been facing repeated harassment from local municipal council members, who claim that the church is unauthorized and therefore operating illegally. On September 23rd, the pastor received a letter ordering that all worship services be discontinued within 14 days or legal action will take place. (For more information, see www.vomcanada.com/lk-2022-10-27.htm.) When the church failed to comply, a different approach was taken by the officials. On October 11th, the pastor received a letter demanding that their church building be demolished within seven days. The statement warned that failure to comply will result in the demolition taking place anyway without further notice.

Following up on the threat, eight officers from the municipality arrived at the church premises on October 18th. Their intent was to take items from the church building and remove its sign. However, the pastor's house and the church building were both locked because he and his family were not home at the time. When the officers were unable to enter the premises, they left. The pastor's father-in-law, who lives nearby, observed what was happening and informed his daughter. The next day, the pastor lodged a complaint against the officers at the police station.

Much of the opposition that Christians encounter in Sri Lanka comes from local authorities and residents who oppose the presence of Christianity in their predominantly Buddhist nation. To learn more about the challenges experienced by followers of Christ in this country, go to www.vomcanada.com/srilanka.htm.

Prayerfully uphold this pastor and his congregation, asking God to give them wisdom as they deal with opposing neighbours and governing officials. May these believers be able to peacefully and diplomatically resolve this ongoing issue, receiving the Lord's intervention and direction in the process. Please also remember to pray for the country of Sri Lanka as a whole, asking that, in the midst of the devastating economic crisis, God would bestow His provision and peace upon the inhabitants of this struggling nation.

CHINA: Imprisonment Nearing Completion for Detained Christians

Source: ChinaAid

In January 2020, Pastor An Yankui and Zhang Chenghao, along with five other Christians, travelled from China to attend a conference in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The conference speaker was highly critical of the Chinese Communist Party, which led to multiple arrests of all seven believers who were subsequently charged for "illegally crossing the national border" (see www.vomcanada.com/cn-2022-04-07.htm).

Since the conference, the five other Christians were tried and sentenced in January 2022 to terms ranging from six to eight months' imprisonment. These believers have since completed serving their sentences (www.vomcanada.com/cn-2022-01-20.htm). Pastor An and Zhang, however, have been detained since November 22nd, 2021, even though the outcome of their cases were not determined until recently.

On November 3rd, the Fenyang City People's Court ruled that the two Christians were each sentenced to one year in prison, along with fines to be paid within ten days of the verdict. Pastor An was required to pay 5,000 yuan (the equivalent of about \$942 CAD) and Zhang was fined 4,000 yuan (approximately \$754 CAD). Thankfully, the prison sentences of these Christians included the time they have already served since the day of their arrests and, therefore, they are both scheduled to be released on November 21st.

Pray for these two believers as they approach the end of their incarceration terms. May the testimonies they've shared remain in the hearts and minds of all those with whom they have interacted throughout the legal process. Furthermore, pray that the country's governing authorities will realize the importance of permitting religious freedom, and thus take necessary steps to ensure the oppression presently inflicting Christians in China will subside.

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