



Persecution & Prayer Alert

The Voice of the Martyrs Canada
www.vomcanada.com

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*"God, who foresaw your tribulation,
has specially armed you to go through it,
not without pain, but without stain."*

~ C.S. Lewis

BELARUS: Seven Young Christians Fined

Source: Forum18

A court in Minsk has fined seven young Christians the equivalent of two months' average wages each. The charges were laid against the believers as punishment for talking to others about the meaning of Easter on April 15th, the day before Orthodox Easter Sunday.

The young people were charged for organizing "a demonstration or mass event," even though they were merely speaking with individuals on the street. When governing officials were asked to explain the reasons for the arrests and fines, they refused to comment. The Christians were fined the maximum penalty allowable under the statute. It appears that the believers have chosen not to appeal their sentences.

Five of the seven Christians who received charges are members of the New Life Church, which has faced repeated incidents of persecution over the years and was sealed by the authorities in February 2021. For details on the challenges encountered by this church, along with other reports addressing the persecution of believers in Belarus, go to www.vomcanada.com/belarus.htm.

Pray for God's provision on behalf of the young believers who have been fined for sharing their faith. May He give them wisdom, courage and peace as they face the charges, as well as the strength required to continue carrying out Christ's call to spread the Gospel message. In general, pray for the ongoing ministry of other Christians throughout Belarus who are also encountering ongoing hostility from governing officials. Ask the Lord to bring conviction to those who oppose His Word so their hearts will be stirred towards repentance and the need to receive His eternal salvation.

REPORT UPDATES

IRAN: Christian Couple Acquitted

Sources: Article18, Middle East Concern

Homayoun Zhavesh, a 64-year-old Christian with advanced Parkinson's disease, and his wife, Sara Ahmadi, have thankfully been acquitted by an Iranian court and released from prison. On April 9th, it was reported that their application for a retrial had been accepted. (See the following previously posted report for further information on their case: www.vomcanada.com/ir-2023-04-20.htm.) On May 9th, the appeal court judge found no evidence that either of these Christians had acted against national security, as initially accused.

In his ruling, the judge stated that gathering with people of one's own faith is "natural," and that having books relating to Christianity is "an extension of their beliefs." However, many of the Christians presently in Iranian prisons are there because of their participation in house churches. For more details on the persecution of believers in Iran, go to www.vomcanada.com/iran.htm.

Sara and Homayoun were arrested in June 2019. Sara was initially sentenced to 11 years, which was later reduced to eight years in December 2020. Yet, both of them were allowed to remain at home until August 2022, the time they were summoned to Evin Prison and subsequently detained. Sara and Homayoun were finally released the evening after the recent court announcement.

Praise God for this very positive outcome! Pray that the recent court ruling will serve as a precedent in determining the outcome of cases involving Christians still imprisoned in Iran. May the ruling also result in the general ceasing of governmental oppression towards followers of Jesus throughout the country. As for Homayoun's health concerns, please pray that he will experience God's healing touch; and that, during his recovery, Sara will be strengthened while assisting with his medical needs.

NIGERIA: More Chibok Girls Rescued

Sources: International Christian Concern, Open Doors, Daily Trust, The Guardian, Punch, BBC, CTV

In 2014, a secondary school in the predominantly Christian town of Chibok, Borno State, was attacked by members of the militant Islamic group, Boko Haram. During the raid, 276 girls were kidnapped. (For details on the initial attack, go to www.vomcanada.com/ng-2014-05-08.htm.) In the nine years since that time, some of the girls have been released, while others either managed to escape or were rescued by governmental forces. Although the exact number of students who remain missing is unknown, it is estimated that approximately 100 of them are still in captivity.

Over the years, as the families continued to hope and pray for the recovery of their missing girls, at least 38 parents have died without witnessing their daughters' safe return home. Others are left wondering whether their abducted loved ones are still alive and, if so, where they are located.

In a recent announcement, Nigerian authorities were pleased to present two more surviving girls, Hauwa Maltha and Esther Marcus, who were rescued in April. Hauwa, who was over eight months pregnant when she was recovered, has since given birth to her baby on April 28th. During captivity, Hauwa was forcibly married three times to different Boko Haram members.

When announcing the return of these two young women, the military commander stated that a total of 14 girls have been recently rescued. Although he gave the names of each one, no further details on the recovery of these students were released. It is assumed that both Hauwa and Esther became mothers while in captivity, as they were seen with children after their rescues.

The homecoming of the 14 recently rescued young women brought joy to so many; yet, at the same time, it also created a renewed sense of pain for the families whose girls have not been recovered to date. "It has made the memories fresh for the parents [whose] children are still missing," states Hassan Chibok, a local Nigerian leader.

Added Note: In a separate report just released this week, it was announced that yet another missing schoolgirl, Saratu Dauda, was found on May 6th by Nigerian troops. Regrettably, Saratu's three children remain in the custody of her former captor, Abu Yusuf, the Boko Haram member she was forced to marry while in captivity. Abu serves the terrorist group as an explosives expert. The country's officials have stated that they are endeavouring to rescue Saratu's children, along with any others they locate.

Saratu was taken to the hospital for treatment and has since been released. She is planning to complete her secondary and university education with the support of the state government. During the announcement of her rescue, Major General Ibrahim Ali proclaimed: "We thank God for rescuing Saratu Dauda. This will enable [her] to have a better life with [her] parents and other families in [the] Chibok community." More reports on the difficulties experienced by Christians in Nigeria are available at www.vomcanada.com/nigeria.htm.

Along with the rejoicing families and friends of the recently rescued students, we can give thanks to our Heavenly Father that these girls are now safely home. Pray that each one of them will receive God's ministry of healing – both physically and emotionally – from the aftermath of the kidnapping and subsequent captivity. Ask the Lord to also provide guidance to these young women and their families as they endeavour to integrate back into their communities, some now having to raise the young children who were fathered and born in the terrorists' camps. Last, but not least, please continue to pray for the rescue and well-being of Chibok schoolgirls who remain missing, along with other kidnapped victims presently being held hostage by militant groups across Nigeria.

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