



Persecution & Prayer Alert

The Voice of the Martyrs Canada
www.vomcanada.com

Thursday, November 2, 2023

Join in this year's "International Day of Prayer," which is taking place on Sunday, November 5th, by praying for believers who are encountering persecution in hostile or restricted nations of the world. Invite your friends and church family to join you. For more information and free helpful resources, visit www.idop.ca.

PAKISTAN: Parents Accused in Kidnapping Case

Sources: CLAAS-UK, The Friday Times

In a situation that has become far too common in Pakistan, a young Christian girl was abducted on August 22nd and then forcibly converted to Islam and married against her will to the abductor. The victim, Samreen Aftab, was a ninth-grade student at a school in Jaranwala where her father is employed as the principal. According to her father, Aftab Joseph, she was abducted by a Muslim man named Muhammad Amir.

The girl's parents attempted to recover their daughter from the kidnapper, including filing a police report. Unfortunately, the process was delayed by the local village council, who expressed their intent to resolve the matter internally. A week later, a marriage certificate and a certificate of conversion to Islam were presented, further complicating the process.

In a strange twist of events, a police report has since been filed against the victimized girl's father, Aftab, and five other members of her family, accusing them all of kidnapping Samreen. The accusers are listed as Muhammad Amir and "Kaneez Fatima" (the new Muslim name given to Samreen during her supposed conversion to Islam).

The use of false accusations to turn the sentiments of the police against victims of persecution is not an uncommon occurrence in Pakistan. However, an accusation of kidnapping filed by the kidnapper and his abducted victim is most unusual. This reversed accusation not only diverts

attention from the gravity of the crime, but it can also obstruct the investigation. In response, Samreen's family intends to seek justice for their daughter by taking the case to the high court.

The use of kidnapping and forced conversions against those of religious minorities, along with false accusations of blasphemy, are common ways in which many Christians in Pakistan experience persecution. For more reports addressing the injustices experienced by believers in this South Asian country, go to www.vomcanada.com/pakistan.htm.

Please pray that Samreen will be able to safely return to her family, despite the pressures she may be facing from her abductor. Also prayerfully uphold her father Aftab and the other members of this victimized family who are now having to deal with the perpetrator's false accusations. May the charges against this family not be enacted, but instead may our Heavenly Father – the Righteous Judge – work mightily in the hearts of Pakistan's judicial leaders so that justice will ultimately prevail in their situation.

KYRGYZSTAN: New Bill Further Restricts Nonprofit Groups

Sources: Human Rights Watch, Human Rights Without Borders

Human rights organizations are cautious as a new bill works its way through the Kyrgyz parliament, passing its first reading on October 25th. If implemented, the legislation would require a nonprofit organization or human rights group receiving international funding to register with the Justice Ministry as a "foreign representative." This act would target any organization engaged in "political activity," which the proposed legislation defines as "action aimed at changing state policy and shaping public opinion for these purposes."

If approved, the law would allow government involvement in all internal activities of an organization to ensure they are consistent with their designated purpose. If the organization is found to be "inciting citizens to refuse to perform civic duties or to commit other unlawful deeds," those responsible could face up to ten years in prison.

The vague wording of the legislation, along with the risk of misuse, has raised concerns from human rights organizations and the United Nations. A spokesperson for the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights called this proposed law "ill-defined, broad and open to subjective interpretation," adding that it could be used for "selective prosecution of legitimate human rights advocacy."

While Kyrgyzstan's laws promise to uphold religious freedom, in reality, numerous restrictions have been placed on churches and the practice of religion. For further information about the challenges being encountered by Christians in this country, and/or to review previously posted reports, go to www.vomcanada.com/kyrgyzstan.htm.

Pray for God's intervention in the minds and hearts of Kyrgyzstan's parliamentary leaders as they deliberate this new legislation, giving them wisdom throughout the process. Ask the Lord to also work in and through the lives of Christians who are seeking to reach out in their

communities with the message of the Gospel, despite the opposition they may encounter or the restrictions that could potentially be placed upon them if the new bill is implemented.

OCCUPIED UKRAINE: Mysterious Disappearance of Imprisoned Church Leaders

Source: Forum18

A recently published *Persecution & Prayer Alert* report had requested prayer for various churches that were forcibly closed in Russian-occupied regions of Ukraine. (To review this previously posted report, go to www.vomcanada.com/ua-2023-10-19.htm.) Further reports have since been released informing that other churches have faced similar trials.

On October 8th, a Council of Churches Baptist congregation in the city of Melitopol, located within Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia region, was raided by armed men wearing military uniforms. The men threatened the pastor with a fine and demanded that the church be closed until it acquired the necessary Russian registration. The same demands were also made of the city's Central Baptist Church on October 23rd, the day it too was forced to close.

One church group that experienced opposition of particular concern is the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. On September 22nd, a court in the Donetsk Region found two priests guilty of violating Russian law by conducting missionary activities. The two church leaders, Father Khristofor Khrimli and Father Andri Chui, had been facing pressure from the Russian occupiers to transfer to the Russian Orthodox Church, but they refused.

As a result, both leaders of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine were fined the equivalent of two months' wages and given deportation orders specifying that they go "beyond the bounds of the Russian Federation," meaning an area of Ukraine not under the control of Russian forces. Since their appeal of the court's decision, the two imprisoned men have mysteriously disappeared while in detainment. When relatives attempted to take personal items to the prison for them, it was discovered that the men were no longer there. At last report, the diocese has received no information on the church leaders' whereabouts.

Pray for the safety of the two missing church leaders, wherever they may be located, and for their soon release from captivity. In addition, please intercede for their concerned loved ones and all the other believers who are experiencing religious oppression in occupied areas of Ukraine, along with the military invasion of their homes. Ask the Lord to minister His peace, protection and provision in each of their lives – and also in the lives of so many other innocent victims of war. May those endeavouring to share the love of Christ during this crisis be further strengthened and encouraged by God's Spirit, so they can serve as effective witnesses among the people of their communities – including the Russian occupants.

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