



Persecution & Prayer Alert

The Voice of the Martyrs Canada
www.vomcanada.com

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*"A martyr is one who
refuses to be separated from
the promises of God."*

~ Dr. Eric Foley
CEO for VOM Korea

INDIA: Land Dispute Escalates to Violence

Source: Christian Solidarity Worldwide

For several years, villagers in Janwada, which is located within India's Telangana State, have been demanding that a road in their community be widened. On February 13th, workers moved into the area to start construction. However, it was discovered during the building process that the construction had encroached by several feet onto the property belonging to the community's Methodist Church, which had existed there for 50 years.

Members of the congregation who were present at the time of the construction demanded that the work stop until their church leaders arrived on the premises to discuss the matter. In retaliation, a mob of over 200 villagers eventually gathered and began quarrelling with the church members. By evening, the mob turned violent, throwing stones and bricks at the church building. Some of the participants in the mob violence began chanting a Hindu slogan while vandalizing the building. Of the 14 Christians who were injured during the incident, three of them had to be admitted to hospital as a result of head injuries.

When the violence erupted, Christians at the scene called the police who were thankfully able to disperse the crowd. However, the authorities placed an order on the village that until February 21st, there were to be no gatherings of more than three people. Although 12 perpetrators were arrested in connection with the mob violence, a counter complaint was filed against the assaulted Christians. The accusers claimed that people of the church had instigated the violence, leading to the arrest of five congregation members.

While some effort has been taken to ensure justice is upheld in this case, there remains concern over the frequency of communal violence committed throughout various areas of India. For more reports on incidents of this nature, go to www.vomcanada.com/india.htm.

Please pray that each of the individuals who have been injured in this attack will experience full recovery – both physically and emotionally. In the meantime, may those responsible for inflicting the violence be held accountable for their destructive actions. Ask the Lord to give all parties wisdom, so they will be prepared to discuss positive alternatives and come to an amicable resolution to this disagreement. Also pray that any further tensions in the community will ease so peace and harmony can ultimately prevail.

REPORT UPDATES

PAKISTAN: Acquittals in Blasphemy Cases

Sources: Pak Christian News, Christian Solidarity Worldwide, Morning Star News

In August 2023, thousands of citizens demonstrated in the streets of Jaranwala, Punjab, after allegations of blasphemy were announced against two Christian brothers. Umair Saleem Masih (known as Raja) and Omar Saleem Masih (known as Rocky) were accused of burning pages from the Quran while disposing of garbage. More details on the original allegations, and the resulting violence that took place in the community, are available at www.vomcanada.com/pk-2023-08-24.htm.

In a March 1st judicial hearing, the Anti-Terrorism Court in Faisalabad acquitted the brothers, ruling that they had been framed by individuals with a personal grudge. Despite the verdict, Raja and Rocky were not able to return to Jaranwala due to threats against their lives and concerns of renewed mob violence.

In an unrelated ruling, a court in the Punjab city of Bahawalnagar determined on February 20th to acquit a Christian man named Noman Masih of the blasphemy charges filed against him within that vicinity. In addition, Noman was convicted in May 2023 of the same charge yet in a different city of Punjab, one known as Bahawalpur, where he received a death sentence. The February acquittal raises hope that the Lahore High Court will consider the merits of Noman's appeal for the Bahawalpur conviction.

All allegations against Noman have been denied by his family and, according to his attorney, witnesses have failed to corroborate the police allegations against him. For more details on his case, go to www.vomcanada.com/pk-2023-06-08.htm.

Praise God that Raja and Rocky have been acquitted of all charges! Pray that community tensions will dissipate to the point where these brothers will be able to safely return to their home area again. Also pray that this ruling will serve as a precedent for other cases involving allegations of blasphemy. As Noman's case is presented to the judicial leaders of the Lahore

High Court, may the merits of the appeal be rightfully considered so he too can be released. The same applies to the many others in Pakistan who are facing similar false allegations.

IRAN: One Convert Released on Bail; Another Remains Detained

Sources: Mohabat News, Article18, Church in Chains, Christianity Today

Iman Golzar, a Christian convert, was detained on January 26th when agents from the Ministry of Intelligence raided his house. While held in detainment, he was not allowed to have any communication with his family or friends. The accused also reportedly faced "severe mental and emotional pressure" during interrogation.

Iman's parents, who are deaf, were greatly concerned. Yet, when they inquired about his location, authorities threatened that they would be "dealt with" if they kept asking questions. Thankfully, on February 7th, Iman was released on bail for \$45,000 (CAD equivalent). Even so, it is not known at the time of publishing this report whether he has been officially charged.

In another recent case, an arrested Christian convert, Esmaeil Narimanpour, remains in custody. Fortunately, after being taken from his home in Dezful on Christmas Eve, he was allowed to briefly speak with members of his family the next day. Despite being granted this privilege, Esmaeil has been held since his arrest. See www.vomcanada.com/ir-2024-01-11.htm for more details on his situation.

This is not the only time that Esmaeil has faced imprisonment. In 2021, he was detained and tortured along with three others (see www.vomcanada.com/ir-2021-05-06.htm). Eventually cleared of all charges in November of that year, he was ordered, along with several prisoners, to attend meeting sessions with Muslim clerics who were to "guide" them back to Islam.

Although we can rejoice with Iman and his parents over his release on bail, please pray that he will not be officially charged. Also uphold Esmaeil as he anticipates his hopeful release from prison, which we pray will take place soon. In the interim, as this believer waits for a favourable outcome in the courts, may he – and others like him – have opportunities to share the love of Christ with those in the prison through their lives and testimonies.

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