



Voice of the
Martyrs

PERSECUTION
& PRAYER
ALERT

Persecution & Prayer Alert

Voice of the Martyrs Canada
www.vomcanada.com

Thursday, June 27, 2024

*"What should a church glory in?
It should glory in its suffering for Christ."
~ Pastor Wang Yi, Early Rain Covenant Church*

IRAN: Armenian Christian Faces Ten-Year Sentence

Sources: Article18, Barnabas Aid, Church in Chains

Hakop Gochumyan and his wife Elisa are citizens of Armenia who went to Iran for vacation in August 2023. While the Christian couple and their two children were having dinner at a friend's house, agents from the Ministry of Intelligence raided the property. The authorities took the Christian family to the home of Elisa's grandmother, where the believers had been staying, and proceeded to search the residence. During the raid, Christian books and other personal belongings were confiscated. The couple was then taken to Evin Prison where they faced interrogation and intense psychological torture.

Elisa was released on bail as of October 19th, allowing her to return to Armenia with the children. Hakop, however, remained in prison and was charged with "engaging in deviant proselytising activity." The only pieces of evidence against him were seven Farsi New Testaments that had been found in his possession, along with the fact that he had visited two Armenian churches and a Farsi-speaking house church while in Iran.

The Iranian penal code allows judges to use "personal intuition" when evidence is lacking. According to Hakop's lawyer, this was the case in the trial against the Armenian Christian visitor. As a result, Hakop was sentenced to ten years in prison this February, but the verdict was not publicly reported at the time. In early June, it had been announced that his appeal was unsuccessful and that he would be forced to serve the imposed sentence.

While Armenian and Assyrian Christian minorities are officially allowed to practise their faith in Iran, evangelism among the country's Muslims and Farsi-speaking majority is forbidden. Elisa happens to be the daughter of Rafi Shahverdian, a well-known Armenian-Iranian pastor who had

left Iran in 1993 and led a church in Armenia until his death last year. For more reports on Christian persecution in Iran, see www.vomcanada.com/iran.htm.

Prayerfully uphold Hakop as he faces the prospect of extended time in a notoriously known Iranian prison. May this brother in Christ receive greatly needed strength and encouragement through the ministry of God's Holy Spirit. Pray also for Elisa and the couple's two children, asking that they would tangibly experience the Lord's love, comfort and provision during this time of separation as a family. Continue to pray on behalf of the many other believers who are currently imprisoned or facing various forms of persecution in Iran because of their Christian faith. May the Lord also empower them spiritually, emotionally and physically so they may persevere and serve as effective witnesses of His great compassion for the spiritually lost and those in need of His abiding presence.

REPORT UPDATES

OCCUPIED UKRAINE: Verdict Expected for Priest Charged with Espionage

Source: Forum18

When Father Kostiantyn Maksimov was taken captive by Russian occupation forces in May 2023, little was known about the whereabouts of the Ukrainian Orthodox priest. In late March 2024, the Russian prosecutor for the Zaporizhzhia Region announced that Father Kostiantyn would be facing espionage charges. (For more details, see www.vomcanada.com/ua-2024-04-18.htm.)

Reports indicate that the criminal trial began on June 6th and was held at the Zaporizhzhia Regional Court in the city of Melitopol. However, Russian officials have refused to announce the identity of the judge hearing the case. Final judicial arguments are scheduled to be heard on July 31st, with a verdict to be announced on August 2nd. If convicted, Father Kostiantyn will likely be transferred to a prison in Russia, where he could be forced to serve up to 12 years.

Please remember to pray for Father Kostiantyn, along with all those who have been detained by Russian forces in the occupied territories of Ukraine because they are not associated with the Russian-approved churches. May these imprisoned believers continue to stand firm on the promises of God, relying on Him for needed provision, encouragement and strength. Pray that peace will soon come to this war-torn nation and that justice will prevail for our Christian brothers and sisters who have been affected by the ongoing violence.

CHINA: New Health Concerns for Elder Zhang Chunlei

Sources: ChinaAid, Church in Chains

Zhang Chunlei is an elder with the Ren'ai Reformed Church in Guiyang, China. He was detained in March 2021 and remained in detention without charge until his trial in November 2022, when he was accused of "inciting subversion of state power." The trial was held in secret, without any

witnesses, and a verdict has never been announced since then. In the meantime, Elder Zhang continues to remain imprisoned. (To review previously published reports about this church leader's case, go to www.vomcanada.com/tagged-items/zhang-chunlei.htm.)

On June 4th of this year, Elder Zhang's lawyer was finally notified that he could review the case files and transcript of the trial. While in prison, the Christian leader has been encouraging believers, saying that it is an honour to be imprisoned for the Lord. However, his wife Yang Aiqing has revealed that the church elder is suffering with worsening health conditions. In August 2023, he was taken to the hospital due to inflammation of his gallbladder (see www.vomcanada.com/cn-2023-08-31.htm).

It has now been revealed that Elder Zhang has been diagnosed with liver cirrhosis. Other prisoners have also developed liver problems while in custody which may be related to a long-term diet of mouldy spoiled rice. Yang has asked Christians to pray that her husband will be released for medical treatment and ultimately completely healed of his present liver condition.

Pray that God's ministry of physical healing, protection and strength will take place in Elder Zhang's life. May the Lord work powerfully within the hearts and minds of China's court officials and various other authorities so that this Christian leader will be able to receive the medical help that he urgently needs. Also pray that God's comforting peace will rest on his wife Yang – along with all their concerned loved ones, friends and church members – as they await the hopeful release of this beloved church leader.

The "Persecution & Prayer Alert" is a ministry of:
Voice of the Martyrs Canada, P.O. Box 608, Streetsville, Ontario, L5M 2C1
Tel. (905) 670-9721 Website: www.vomcanada.com