



Voice<sup>of the</sup>  
Martyrs

PERSECUTION  
& PRAYER  
ALERT

## Persecution & Prayer Alert

Voice of the Martyrs Canada  
[www.vomcanada.com](http://www.vomcanada.com)

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*"The torture I suffered gave me  
a wonderful gift: faith in God."*

~ Gao Zhisheng, a human rights lawyer  
who has been missing since 2017

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### INDIA: Severe Restrictions Accompany Anti-Conversion Legislation

Sources: India Today, The Times of India, Mission Network News, International Christian Concern, Christian Solidarity Worldwide, Agenzia Fides

In early July, the Maharashtra state government announced plans to introduce stringent anti-conversion legislation. The new laws, which are expected to be the most severe of their kind in the country, are particularly aimed at preventing religious conversions within tribal communities. While the stated intent is to prevent incidents of coercion, legislators have used language demonstrating a broader aim to restrict religious conversions of any sort. During the announcement, the state's revenue minister, Chandrashekhar Bawankule, declared that the law would be so strict "no one will dare to undertake religious conversion."

In addition to the new anti-conversion measures, the government also revealed plans to demolish church buildings that are deemed "unauthorized." Although state officials did not specify how many worship facilities would be affected, sources estimate that the number could reach into the hundreds.

In a separate announcement, the state's chief minister, Devendra Fadnavis, stated on July 17th that "scheduled caste" certificates would be issued only to Hindus, Buddhists and Sikhs – specifically excluding Christians and Muslims. For those belonging to castes that are generally marginalized within Indian society, these certificates provide access to government benefits such as subsidized education, scholarships and certain public sector jobs. By restricting eligibility based on one's religious affiliation, many deserving individuals will be denied these essential support systems.

Such restrictions have already been applied in various other states throughout India. In April 2025, the Andhra Pradesh Supreme Court ruled that caste-based benefits should not be given to Christians from marginalized groups because "the caste system is alien to the Christian faith." The National Council of Dalit Christians has since filed appeals in several states, advocating for "religion-neutral" policies based on the constitutional principle of equality. For other reports on the various challenges facing India's Christians, go to [www.vomcanada.com/india.htm](http://www.vomcanada.com/india.htm).

- *Pray that the proposed legislation in Maharashtra state will be rejected, and that Christians would be free to practise their faith without fear and the threat of repercussion.*
- *May God intervene in judicial and legislative decisions throughout India, convicting the country's leaders of the injustice caused by such restrictions and empowering them to protect vulnerable religious minorities.*
- *Prayerfully remember our impoverished Christian brothers and sisters in India, especially those within tribal regions, asking the Lord to provide for their daily needs and strengthen their trust in Him (Matthew 6:11).*

### **AZERBAIJAN: Fines for Unapproved Religious Meetings**

Source: Forum 18

A court in the Azerbaijani exclave of Nakhichevan recently fined two local Christians and three visitors from the capital city of Baku for participating in a worship gathering without state permission. The ruling was announced on June 19th, two months after authorities raided the home of a Korean family where the believers had assembled for worship. The court also fined and deported members of the Korean family for hosting Christian meetings in their residence.

The visitors from Baku chose to pay the fine, which amounted to approximately the average wage for a citizen's three-month term of employment. However, the two local believers have not yet complied with the substantial penalty and are now being pursued by court bailiffs.

While state authorization is compulsory for worship gatherings throughout Azerbaijan, non-Muslim religious communities are routinely denied registration, rendering their activities illegal and subject to punishment. This policy continues to severely restrict freedom of worship for Christians and other religious minorities. To review further reports on the persecution of believers in Azerbaijan, go to [www.vomcanada.com/azerbaijan.htm](http://www.vomcanada.com/azerbaijan.htm).

- *Pray for wisdom, strength and encouragement on behalf of our Azerbaijani brothers and sisters in Christ who are presently facing fines and other penalties for practising their faith.*
- *Ask God to guide and equip all followers of Jesus residing within Azerbaijan as they seek ways to faithfully continue serving Him in the midst of opposition.*
- *May Christian families who open their homes for the purpose of ministry be divinely protected and hidden from the eyes of authorities, so they can continue to gather for meaningful times of worship, prayer and fellowship.*

## REPORT UPDATES

### **CHINA: Christian Lawyer Remains Missing After Eight Years**

Source: ChinaAid

For many years, Gao Zhisheng was a bold advocate for persecuted religious communities in China. While serving as a lawyer representing various faith groups, he himself was frequently harassed and arrested. In 2005, Gao's law practice was shut down by the government after he publicly condemned the human rights violations that were being committed against practitioners of a religious movement known as Falun Gong.

About a year after his legal practice was forcibly barred, the advocating lawyer was arrested for the first time – leading to a long cycle of repeated disappearances, detentions and house arrests. During his imprisonments, Gao endured beatings, electrical shocks and other forms of torture. In the midst of his suffering, however, he came to understand the truth of God's Word and eventually placed his faith in Christ.

Gao was last seen on August 13th, 2017. For the past eight years, there has been no information about the Christian man's whereabouts. His wife, Geng He, along with their two children, initially fled to Thailand and were later (in 2009) brought by ChinaAid to the United States, where they continue to reside today. Geng He has repeatedly appealed to the Chinese government for news about her husband, but her pleas remain unanswered. "I just want to know if he is alive," she cried. For previously published information concerning the disappearance of this Christian lawyer, go to [www.vomcanada.com/cn-2021-08-19.htm](http://www.vomcanada.com/cn-2021-08-19.htm).

- *Continue to lift up this courageous human rights lawyer before God's throne of grace, praying that news of his condition and whereabouts would soon come to light.*
- *With hopes that Gao has been kept safe throughout the years, pray that he would receive ongoing protection, strength and peace as he endures captivity.*
- *Also pray that Geng He and her children will be wonderfully comforted and sustained as they continue to await the hopeful return of their loved one.*

### **CHINA: John Cao Unable to Return to the United States**

Source: ChinaAid

In March 2017, Pastor John Cao was arrested by Chinese authorities for allegedly "organizing illegal border crossings" while conducting ministry work along the border between China and Myanmar. Sentenced to seven years in prison, he was finally released in March 2024. (For more information on the church leader's arrest, go to [www.vomcanada.com/john-cao.htm](http://www.vomcanada.com/john-cao.htm).)

Following his release from prison, Pastor John hoped to return to his wife in the United States, where he holds permanent residency. However, Chinese authorities have consistently refused to grant the Christian leader a passport, preventing him from leaving the country. Now, more than

one year after his release, the pastor remains unable to reunite with his wife and family, including his newborn grandson.

Reflecting on his situation, Pastor John remarked that it feels as though he left a "small prison" only to enter a "large prison." He is not alone in this experience, for many other former prisoners in China have been "exit-banned" for decades as an additional form of punishment. Despite the personal hardships he continues to endure, Pastor John expressed that he has no regrets over his ministry involvement in China. "Being able to return to China to serve the Lord is God's greatest blessing for me," he states. "Everyone, please share in my joy and continue to pray for me."

- *Pray that Pastor John will be able to return to the United States and finally reunite with his long-suffering wife and family.*
- *In the meantime, ask the Lord to bless this church leader's continued ministry work in China, granting him and his separated family renewed patience, joy and strength each new day.*
- *Continue to pray for peace, endurance and courage on behalf of the many believers throughout this Communist nation who are likewise encountering difficulties and harassment because of their faith.*

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