



Uzbekistan – Military ransack church in Sunday morning raid

Forty police accompanied by National Guard military personnel raided a church in the Uzbek capital Tashkent on 25 November, ransacking the property during Sunday morning worship.

Fourteen Christians, including a 14-year-old boy, were detained and held by police outside in the winter cold. They refused to admit they had attended an “unauthorised meeting” and were subjected to nine and a half hours of interrogation before being released. Churches are required by law to register in Uzbekistan, but stringent requirements make it nearly impossible for most churches to do so.

During the raid on the unregistered church, every member of the congregation was photographed and their details recorded. Hymn books and 7,800 other items of Christian literature were confiscated and police later cut off the church’s heating. Officials told the congregation, “We will come every Sunday and disrupt the church service

every time until you give up and stop your activity.”

Bring to the Lord the congregation in Tashkent. Ask that they will be strong and courageous despite pressure and threats from police, knowing that there is a “greater power” with them (2 Chronicles 32:7). Pray that their steadfastness will lead their persecutors to Christ and that the Uzbekistan government will remove restrictions on religious freedom.

Source: Forum 18 and Barnabas Fund contacts

Bulgaria – Protests as religious minorities threatened by proposed changes to the law

Christians gathered in the Bulgarian capital Sofia for three consecutive Sundays in November, protesting planned changes to the law which would place limitations on evangelising, ban worship outside officially recognised buildings and restrict church leader training. Religious groups would require 300 members to be officially recognised.

Baptist Christian leaders wrote to the Bulgarian Prime Minister, Boyko Borissov, stating, “The implementation of this law could lead to unintended restrictions on religious freedom and the direct persecution of churches and individuals of faith.” Religious freedom advocates also wrote to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, outlining that the proposed amendments to the law in Bulgaria violate the UN Convention on Freedom of Religion or Belief, as well as similar European conventions. The Bulgarian constitution itself states that “the practising of any religion shall be unrestricted”.

Pray that the proposals to amend the law in Bulgaria will be overturned and despite concerns over their future religious freedoms, that Christians will fix their eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of their faith (Hebrews 12:2). Ask that the Lord will grant wisdom to Prime Minister Borissov and his government as they make decisions that will have a profound impact on the future direction of the nation.

China – Could “social scoring” surveillance increase pressure on Christians?

The roll-out of an AI (artificial intelligence) controlled “social credit” system across China has the potential to severely affect the day-to-day existence of Christians and other minorities, especially if they are deemed to demonstrate “dissent”.

The system, already being piloted in cities including Beijing and Shanghai, uses a vast network of advanced surveillance technology, including face recognition, to monitor location and track individuals. Social “scores” are updated live and can be affected by minor misdemeanours such as jaywalking.

Those who break government rules or do not conform will be subject to a variety of punishments that range from the inconvenient – internet throttling and slower hotel checkouts – to the life changing, including flight bans and restrictions on loans and rent, with family and known associates also being awarded lower scores. It is planned that all Chinese citizens will be scored on the system by 2020.

Ask that Chinese Christians will look to the Lord – who knows the secrets in all men’s hearts (Psalm 44:21) – and trust in Him that as authorities closely monitor their actions, movements and finance, the authorities will see their righteousness shine like the dawn (Psalm 37:6) and be drawn to Christ by witnessing Christians’ daily walk. Pray that the Lord will bring about a change of heart among government officials, so that Chinese Christians will no longer be regarded as a threat to social cohesion.

Nepal – Four Christians detained on charges of “forced conversion”

After being secretly followed and filmed, four Christians (two Nepalis and two Japanese) were reported to the police and arrested in early November near Kathmandu, charged with breaking anti-conversion laws.

It was alleged they were “proselytising” door-to-door, “targeting Dalits” (the lowest level of the Hindu caste system, considered “untouchable” by high-caste Hindus). If convicted, the two Nepalis could face five years in prison and a 50,000 rupee (£340; \$440) fine, while the Japanese Christians could potentially receive the same prison sentence or be deported.

A law came into force in Nepal in September 2018 which makes it an offence to “involve or encourage in conversion of religion” or “hurt religious sentiment”. While the constitution already prohibited proselytization, the new law is very vague about what an “attempt” to convert someone might involve and means any public Christian activity is potentially illegal. Although Nepal is now officially a secular nation, it was a Hindu kingdom until 2008, and Hindus form a large majority of the population, some of whom want to return their country to being a Hindu kingdom again.

Praise God for the rapid growth of His Church in Nepal in recent years. Intercede for the four Christians arrested in Nepal; pray that all charges against them will be dropped. Ask that the vague laws against conversion – seemingly implemented to “protect” the Hindu majority – will not be used to curtail Christians’ freedoms, and they will continue to boldly testify to the Good News of God’s grace (Acts 20:24).

Iraq – Hundreds more Christian-owned homes stolen in areas liberated from Islamic State

An investigation by an Iraqi television network has uncovered the theft of at least 350 Christian-owned homes in Iraq. This is in addition to the many Christian properties already seized by Islamic State terrorists when they overran Mosul and the Nineveh Plains in 2014.

The recent investigation revealed that the empty properties of hundreds of Christians who have fled the country have been occupied or seized. The problem is particularly serious in the historical Christian heartlands of the Nineveh Plain surrounding the northern Iraqi city of Mosul.

Church organisations have tried to intervene, but one Christian leader in Baghdad told journalists, “In some cases, our intervention has led to restitution; in others, nothing could be done. We ran up against powerful people.” Properties have been transferred under false names and sold on.

Lift up Iraqi Christians whose houses have been stolen or seized over the last four years, leaving displaced or refugee believers with no place to return to, even if they felt it was safe to go home. Pray that authorities will take decisive action to prosecute those responsible for the thefts and return property to the rightful owners. May Iraqi Christians take comfort in the Father’s promise that whatever may befall them, “we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven” (2 Corinthians 5:1).

Yet give attention to your servant’s prayer and his plea for mercy, LORD my God. Hear the cry and the prayer that your servant is praying in your presence this day.

1 Kings 8:28

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