

Hope in Persecution

**EVERYONE WHO
WANTS TO LIVE
a GODLY LIFE IN
CHRIST JESUS
WILL SUFFER
PERSECUTION.
II TIM. 3:12**

In January, the latest data was released on persecution by country. The persecution index categorizes countries by restricted, hostile, and open. While a status of “open” does not mean that there is no persecution, there is generally freedom to share the Gospel. In the other two categories Jesus followers regularly suffer for their faith and are prevented from sharing openly.

Global Teams is called to take the Good News to those with least access to it, most of whom live in restricted countries. Of the 33 countries where Global Teams field partners serve, 23 of those countries, or 70%, are restricted or hostile and our brothers and sisters experience suffering for their faith.

In this issue of the *International Update*, we share some of our field partners’ stories of persecution. Like the accounts in the Book of Acts, sometimes they are gloriously rescued, while in other instances the glory comes through the continued suffering. As you read their stories, please take some time to pray for them – and for Jesus to be more fully revealed in and through them to the people they serve.



**A CASE HAS BEEN FILED CHARGING YOU WITH
CRIMES AGAINST ISLAM AND OF INCITING
UNREST IN YOUR COMMUNITIES.**

“I have called you here today to give account for these accusations before I decide what to do with you.” The police chief looked hard at the three summoned house church leaders, waiting to see their reaction before he continued.

Though flooding, COVID, and then a cyclone had devastated the country, the Kingdom of God had been advancing dramatically as disciples of Jesus boldly served the needy in their communities. This naturally opened doors for them to share about the love of God. In the last few months of 2020, hundreds had professed a saving faith in Jesus, most of them making the decision as entire families! Such dramatic growth did not go unnoticed by local Muslim leaders.



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ARE YOU GIVING THEM money TO convert? JJ

Members of a local Islamic fundamentalist group, listed in the United Kingdom as a terrorist organization, visited the area of the country that had experienced the most growth, stirring up the local imams. About twenty of them marched to the local mosque where with megaphones they began denouncing by name the followers of Jesus present there. They shouted, "These people are deceiving poor, illiterate Muslims, tricking them into becoming Christians and speaking against Islam. We must stop them now or they will take over the country!"

Afraid for their lives, the believers gathered in small groups throughout the Mosque courtyard, crying out to God. God encouraged them from Psalm 46: "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." From that place of trust, they decided to call the police who, unexpectedly, arrived very quickly. As soon as the police showed up at the mosque, the instigators quickly fled. The officers detained the followers of Jesus and questioned them thoroughly. Two days later, the leaders were summoned to the station.

The police chief continued pointedly, "Why are these imams and the mosque leaders speaking against you? Are you trying to convert people to Christianity? Are you giving them money to convert?

One of the house church leaders spoke up, "Sir, we are born into Muslim families and are followers of Jesus, the son of Mary. He is a prophet of Islam and spoken highly of in the Koran. His teachings attract us and so we do our best to follow in His footsteps so that we can know God and come closer to him. Isa al-Masih (Jesus the Messiah) revealed the love, mercy and grace of Allah."

The chief interrupted them, "This is all very interesting and I would like to come and listen more to you, but today I am very busy. Now, tell me about the money you give to make converts."



"Sir, we do not give money and are ourselves too poor to provide our neighbors with jobs. But, we do try to help the needy among us by collecting gifts and providing them food. As you know, the lockdown and the flood have been very difficult for all of us, but we followers of Jesus gather together to help the poor, widows and jobless."

Once again the chief cut them off. "Yes, I know all about this. I have investigated and interviewed many villagers and they all tell of your deeds. This is very good and I do not see any wrong here. Actually, I have discovered that the leaders of this riot have come from outside of our district to cause problem and I have arrested five of them for inciting violence and disturbing community harmony. I have nothing against you. Go now, and if anything happens in the future, inform me immediately and I will do my duty."

This account, including the quotes, was provided by a Global Teams leader in country. He reported this to us while shouts of praise to God from the believers were resounding the background! This case is reminiscent of God's intervention in Acts 19.





TWO WOMEN, ONE STORY

Janar and Saltanat live on opposite sides of their Central Asian Muslim country. Though separated by hundreds of miles, the two women are both part of God's family as followers of Jesus and share a similar story of suffering for their Savior. In Muslim contexts, women who follow Jesus often bear the heaviest and most severe persecution for their faith. Already considered second class citizens, they have few avenues of recourse within their culture.

Living in the strict Islamic eastern part of the country, Janar has four children and is pregnant with her fifth child. When she came to faith six years ago, her husband was adamantly against it. At first, he would just yell at her, demanding she deny her new faith in Jesus. But when she remained faithful, and joyful, he began beating her and locking her out of the house. To cause her further dishonor, he began openly having relationships with other women. Finally, at the urging of fellow Muslim men, he announced he would divorce Janar since she was a traitor to the faith and a dishonor to her husband, even though she was pregnant with his fifth child. A sister in the Lord called to console her and Janar replied, "I count it a privilege to suffer for Jesus in this way!"

WOMEN WHO FOLLOW JESUS OFTEN BEAR THE HEAVIEST AND MOST SEVERE PERSECUTION FOR THEIR FAITH.

On the opposite side of the country, Saltanat lives in a large, more moderate city. But the opportunities of the city attract many seeking to influence the direction of the country, including a number of radical Islamic factions. Disillusioned with her life, Saltanat came to faith through the vibrant witness of followers of Jesus from her home area. As she began living out her faith with her three young children, her husband Amantai paid her little attention at first. But as her faith grew, her husband began verbally abusing her.

As he more closely associated with a fundamental Islamic group, Amantai became more belligerent. He issued an ultimatum: renounce Jesus or be disowned. Because she had no job and no financial resources to feed their three young children, he assumed she would return to Islam and make the mandatory public apology. But believers prayed with her and Saltanat found a house cleaning job. She told her husband she would not deny the One who saved her and gave her hope. Infuriated, he threatened to take the children and kill her in her sleep. She continued to pray with other believers for her husband's salvation.

In December, a heartbroken Saltanat informed us that, under his Imam's instruction, Amantai had announced his intention to divorce his wife and leave his three children. He moved out of their apartment a couple of days later. The Apostle Paul suffered much for the Gospel, but he reminded Timothy that God rescued him from all of them (II Timothy 3:10ff). Pray for these sisters to experience God's provision and that the Holy Spirit would convict these men of their sin and their need for a sacrificial Savior.

POLICE CONFISCATE BIBLE

On our blog, we reported that police had illegally entered the home of a believer in Uzbekistan, confiscating her Bible and charging her with possession of an illegal book. The charges carry a hefty penalty – up to one year's salary – or even jail time. Visit our blog for regular news at: www.global-teams.net/blog

Since reporting this incident, believers around the world have been praying for Gulisa. After the confiscation, police have “invited” her to the station a number of times to answer to the charges. The police initially demanded that Gulisa sign a renouncement of her faith. Though frightened, she refused. The police continued to question and pressure her, hoping to extract a bribe from her. After each interrogation, Gulisa's boldness grew.

On her most recent visit to the station, she asked the commander for her Bible back. When he refused, Gulisa replied, “Then please keep it for yourself so that you can find life and peace.” Apparently her boldness in the midst of the current political situation have made the police hesitant to take further action against her.

**AFTER EACH
INTERROGATION, HER
BOLDNESS GREW.**

THE WICKED FLEE THOUGH NO ONE PURSUES, BUT THE RIGHTEOUS ARE AS BOLD AS A LION. PROVERBS 28:1

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