

Prisoner List December 2019

The following prisoner list is compiled from *The Voice of the Martyrs*. For more detailed information on the prisoners' situations, other ways to support persecuted Christians, and about this fantastic organization, please visit www.prisoneralert.com or www.persecution.com.

Tajikistan

Bakhrom Kholmatov
Yavan Prison
Shamsova St.
Yavan, Khatlon Region
Tajikistan
735310

Pastor Bakhrom Kholmatov

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The harassment of Pastor Bakhrom Kholmatov (also spelled “Holmatov”) began in February 2017, when his church was raided and church members were threatened, beaten, and told to recant their faith. During this time of harassment, Pastor Kholmatov attempted to move his family and begin pastoring in a different region. At the time of his arrest in July 2017, he had not yet joined his family in safety, and has been imprisoned ever since—charged with “possession of extremist materials” and materials promoting the “overthrow of the government.” The materials the government cited were the book, *More Than a Carpenter*, by Josh McDowell and songs on his computer such as “Praise God, O Unbelieving Country,” “Army of Christ” and “Our Battle is Not Against Blood and Flesh.” Many believe that Pastor Kholmatov was arrested because the government would like to seize the building of his Sonmin Sonbogym church. His most recent appeal was denied and his family are not sure if he remains in the city prison or if he has been transferred to a work camp to serve his sentence. Many church members have been harassed, beaten, and lost their jobs. They along with Bakhrom’s family are forbidden from speaking about the case. As recently as December 2018, his sons were able to visit him and report he is in good condition and looking forward to his potential release in April 2020.

Iran

Naser Navard
Gol-Tapeh
Evin Prison
Saadat Abad
Tehran
Islamic Republic of Iran

Naser Navard Gol-Tapeh

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In June 2016, Naser Navard Gol-Tapeh was attending an engagement party at a private home in near Tehran, when it was raided by 30 Iranian intelligence agents. All attendees were arrested, including three Azeri Christians from Baku, Azerbaijan. Most were released after questioning, however, Naser—perceived to be a leader because he is older—was transferred with the three Azeris to Evin prison to stand trial for “illegal gathering, collusion, and evangelism.” They had been held in solitary confinement for two months, and denied consular assistance and legal counsel. All four were convicted and sentenced to 10 years in prison, though the Azeri Christians were allowed to leave Iran after forfeiting their bail. During the trial, Naser’s lawyer was denied access to documents, and recently in prison, Naser was denied medical attention for a severe gum infection. However, as recently as January 2019, Naser was reported to be fairly well and in good spirits, despite his ongoing unjust imprisonment.

Mahrokh Roksare Kanbari
Alborz Province Prison Office
Alvand Building
Daneshgah Boulevard
Karaj
Islamic Republic of Iran

Mahrokh Roksare Kanbari

3



Her charges were “acting against national security” and “propaganda against the system.”

Mahrokh Roksare Kanbari is a 65-year-old Muslim-background convert to Christianity, whose home in Karaj was raided by Iranian intelligence agents just before Christmas 2018. Cell phones, Bibles, and Christian materials were confiscated, and Mahrokh was detained for ten days, enduring intense interrogations from morning to night. After a conditional release, Mahrokh was tried in January 2019, forced to go to a religious leader to be “instructed” to return to Islam, and was ultimately sentenced to one year in prison, which she began serving in October 2019.

China

Cao San-Qiang
Pastor John Sanqiang Cao
Kunming Prison of Yunnan Province
No. 416 Si Wa Lu, Wang Da Qiao
Dongjiao, Panlong District,
Kunming City,
Yunnan province
China 650216

Pastor John Cao

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Pastor Cao San-Qiang (John Cao) was arrested on 5 March 2017 for his work among Myanmar’s poor and charged with “organizing illegal crossings of national borders.” He was subsequently convicted and sentenced to seven years in prison. Through his work, 16 schools were established serving around 2,000 impoverished children, along with setting up projects to alleviate poverty among local minority groups. John became a believer in his 20s, attended seminary in the United States, and married Jamie Powell, and American citizen. They lived for many years in North Carolina, and have two sons, Benjamin and Amos. Eventually, John felt called back to work as a missionary in China, and prior to his work on Myanmar-China border, John also set up numerous schools in China and worked with the house churches there. The work in Myanmar was more humanitarian in focus, and was embarked upon with the knowledge of the Chinese government, leading those knowledgeable about the case to be certain his arrest is motivated by a governmental crackdown on house churches.

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Alimujiang Yimiti
Section 11
The Xinjiang No. 3 Prison
No.1339, Dongzhan Road
Urumqi city
Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region
China 830013

Alimujiang Yimiti

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More than ten years ago, Alimujiang Yimiti converted from Islam to Christianity. In 2007, the Chinese government closed down his business, and in January 2008, they accused him of “subversion of the national government and endangering national security,” a crime punishable by death. Eventually, he received a 15-year sentence, and this court decision has been upheld as recently as February 2011, despite numerous appeals. Alimujiang Yimiti’s situation is doubly precarious as he is both ethnically a part of the Uyghur Muslim minority, which is being severely persecuted by the Chinese state, and a Christian convert, also a longtime cause for oppression. In the many years he has been imprisoned, his wife and two children are only allowed to see him for 15 minutes every three months, and the children in particular face are very sad, discouraged, and missing their dad.

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Zhang Shaojie
P.O. Box 14
Xinxiang City
Henan Province
China 453002

Pastor Zhang Shaojie

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Originally detained in November 2103, Pastor Zhang Shaojie of Nanle County Christian Church in Henan Province is currently serving a 12-year prison sentence. He was arrested as part of a crackdown on the church because of a land dispute the church is having with the county, and at least 20 other church members were arrested. Pastor Zhang Shaojie's daughter, son-in-law, and baby fled the region after receiving numerous menacing phone calls, one of which threatened to "wipe out their entire family." His appeal in August 2014 was denied.

Wang Yi
Chengdu Detention Center
Zhengyi Road #3
Anjing Town,
Pi County
Chengdu City,
Sichuan Province
China 611731

Pastor Wang Yi

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Pastor Wang Yi is a former lawyer and longtime advocate for human rights and religious freedom in China. In December 2018, he, his wife Jiang Rong, and about 150 other church leaders and seminary students were arrested in raids on their homes. In the many months that have followed, most have been released, but many reported that they have lost their homes and/or jobs, and were abused and deprived of food and water while in custody. Pastor Wang is the author and a signator of the "Declaration for the Sake of the Christian Faith," which is a statement of faith and a call for the end of persecution. He and the hundreds of Chinese pastors who also signed it have faced more persecution since doing so in 2018. Currently, Pastor Wang's whereabouts remain unknown, he was denied access to a lawyer of his own choosing, and officials refuse to release any information about him or the status of his case. As Voice of the Martyrs reports: "The provided address is one of the locations where he could likely be held."

Pakistan

Imran Ghafur
Central Jail of Faisalabad
Faisalabad, Punjab
38001
Pakistan

Imran Ghafur Masih

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Imran Ghafur is a Christian businessman who, along with his family, had managed many businesses in Pakistan. However, in July 2009, he was arrested and severely beaten for allegedly burning pages of the Koran while he was burning some trash. Shortly thereafter, he was sentenced to life in prison. His family has fled the region due to local hostility towards them. Despite trials and a disheartening life sentence, he says he often prays and sings spiritual songs at midnight, and is even asked by Muslim prisoners to pray for them. Still, Imran is eager to be released to continue missionary work in Pakistan. He has faced setbacks and delays in his appeal process but remains steadfast. During a recent visit with his brother, Imran said he uses his time in prison for Bible study. "I am happy the Lord wants to use me for his Kingdom."

Twen Theodros
Mai Serwa
Asmara, Eritrea

Twen Theodros

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Twen Theodros was 23 when she was first arrested in 2004, then released after her father persuaded her to sign a paper vowing she would not meet with other Christians or pursue Christian activity. However, in 2005, she was arrested again for attending a prayer meeting. She was a fellow prisoner with the well-known Eritrean gospel singer, Helen Berhane. Twen often defended Helen, took her beatings when she was sick, carried her to the toilet when she was too weak to walk—in addition to her own beatings and torture. For years, she and a large group of women who were imprisoned for attending a Christian wedding were first held at Wi'a prison on the Red Sea Coast—one of the most inhospitable places on the planet. Held in shipping containers that are unbearably hot during the day and frigid at night, the conditions at Wi'a were so horrific, the government eventually closed it down. For quite a few years, she was at Me'etr prison, which is barely better in terms of conditions, has no town nearby, and no access by public transportation, so the prison population mostly made up of Christians is largely cutoff from all visitors. Twen has had opportunities to escape, yet has persevered at the prison, acting as a mentor and protector of younger women, as well as discipling them in their faith. In 2017, Twen was transferred, along with the group of women arrested for attending the wedding, to Mai Serwa prison camp, which is much less hot than the other prison locations, more accessible to visitors, and family are allowed to bring prisoners food.

Mussie Ezaz
Wenjel Mermera
Asmara, Eritrea

Mussie Ezaz

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Mussie Ezaz had worked as an evangelist for 14 years, first with Youth for Christ and then as Youth Pastor at Word of Life Church, when he was arrested for his Christian activity. He made an almost successful attempt to flee the country after his arrest in 2007, but was captured just after reaching the border. He is described as kind, generous, and a gifted leader. Sadly, his phone call while he was fleeing Eritrea to Pastor Oqbamichel Haiminot led to the arrest and imprisonment of the latter as well. As is the case with most Eritrean Christians, Mussie Ezaz has never been formally charged with a crime, given a trial, or been given an actual sentence for his time in jail. For a long time, his wife and three children did not know where he was and feared he was dead. It is unknown if he will ever be released.

Pastor Meron Gebreselasie
Wenjel Mermera
Asmara, Eritrea

Pastor Meron Gebreselasie

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Arrested in June 2004, Meron Gebreselasie was pastor of Massawa Rhema Evangelical Church and also worked as an anesthetist at Massawa Hospital. After being detained at a checkpoint while on his way to return the belonging of another arrested pastor and friend, Meron himself was arrested and has been held without charge or trial ever since. He is unmarried.

Haile Nayzgi
Wenjel Mermera
Asmara, Eritrea

Haile Nayzgi

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At the time of his imprisonment on May 23, 2004, Reverend Haile Naizgi was serving God as the chairman of the board of the Full-Gospel Church of Eritrea, the largest Pentecostal denomination in the nation. Previously, he was a senior accountant with World Evangelical Alliance in Eritrea. Rev. Haile Naizgi, who is married with three children, was one of the key organizers of the Church's activities in Eritrea. In 2016 Haile's family had to flee Eritrea after threats his wife might also be arrested. Sometime later, a message from Haile was smuggled out of prison thanking those who

assisted his family.

Dr. Kiflu Gebremeskel
Wenjel Mermera
Asmara, Eritrea

Dr. Kiflu Gebremeskel

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Dr. Kiflu Gebremeskel was the pastor of South-West Full-Gospel Church in Asmara until his imprisonment on May 23, 2004. Dr. Kiflu, a former dean of science and lecturer of mathematics at Asmara University, left his job to serve the Lord as a pastor and Bible teacher in 1999. He has a Ph.D. in mathematics from the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago. Dr. Kiflu was also the chairman of the Eritrean Evangelical Alliance, a union of all the churches belonging to the Baptist, Mennonite, Presbyterian, Pentecostal, and

other Charismatic churches. His wife, Elsa, and four grown children have never been allowed to see him, and it was uncertain as to whether he was still alive. However, he was seen in a hospital in 2014, so there is some hope that he is still living.

Kidane Weldou
Wenjel Mermera
Asmara, Eritrea

Pastor Kidane Weldou

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Pastor Kidane Weldou was the senior pastor of the church of the Asmara Full Gospel Church in March 2005, when his vehicle was found abandoned downtown, and he was presumably imprisoned by Eritrean security forces. His wife and four daughters have been unable to visit him in prison, and his exact whereabouts remain unknown. He has a degree in science from Asmara University and had been a high school biology teacher. In addition to his church's work, he was also involved in many gospel-related activities among students and professionals from various churches in

the nation.

Mussie Eyob
Me'etr Prison
Asmara, Eritrea

Mussie Eyob

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A believer since 2008, Mussie Eyob was arrested in 2011 while living in Saudi Arabia for sharing his Christian faith at a local mosque in Jeddah. For this he would have received the death sentence in Saudi Arabia, however, after the intervention of human rights group, he was deported to Eritrea instead. Upon arriving in Asmara, Mussie's whereabouts were unknown, and it took several weeks to determine that he had been transferred to Me'etr prison—a work camp established especially to imprison Christians in Eritrea. It is located in remote and barren place with harsh

weather conditions year-round, and numerous Christians have died while imprisoned there. Before his imprisonment, Mussie supported his mother and sister. Most prisoners are held incommunicado and the length of his sentence is unknown.

Released in 2019

Released in Indonesia

Abraham Ben Moses

16



Voice of the Martyrs workers report Abraham Ben Moses received parole on April 26, 2019, after 509 days in prison in Indonesia. He is back home with his family, but he must report weekly to the police station.

Released in Iran

Ibrahim Firouzi

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In and out of prison since 2011, Ibrahim Firouzi was released by his Iranian persecutors the last week in October. He is serving two years of internal exile but was first permitted to put his affairs in order, including retrieving personal documents being held by Iranian intelligence. He is in good health but requests prayers for a friend in prison with urgent needs. He also requests prayer for himself, particularly for patience.