

Persecution Watch

Christian Teachers Sentenced to Three Years in Prison

Three Christian women in Indonesia were sentenced Sept. 1 to three years in prison for allowing Muslim children to attend a Christian Sunday school program, Compass Direct reported. Rebekka Zakaria, Eti Pangesti and Ratna Bangun were found guilty of attempting to convert children under the Child Protection Act of 2002. Jeff Hammond of Bless Indonesia Today said the women asked the children to get permission from their parents before attending the program, and those without permission were asked to go home. The Sunday school teachers were not given the maximum sentence of five years in prison but said they were devastated by the prospect of being separated from their students, who range in age from 6 to 19, Compass said.

International Church in Vietnam Shut Down

Local authorities shut down a 500-member international church in Vietnam Aug. 27, Compass Direct reported. Eric Dooley, pastor of New Life Fellowship, had sought a permit to meet since it was founded in 1997. Dooley said District 5 police ordered the church to close because it had no permit-though the government has repeatedly ignored the church's efforts to get permission to worship. On Aug. 28, the Sunday after the church was closed, Dooley stood outside the hotel where the church has been worshiping to inform those showing up that they would not be able to meet. Church leaders hope the action does not represent an effort by the national government to harass the church, Compass said.

Chinese Christian Denied Asylum in U.S.

In August, Xiaodong Li was denied asylum in the U.S. because he was a member of an “illegal” house church, Assist News Service (ANS) reported. Li, who is receiving assistance from Virginia-based Christian Freedom International (CFI), fled to the U.S. after police raided his apartment in Ningbo, China. CFI said Li was punched, kicked and shocked with electric batons until he “confessed” to organizing “unauthorized” Christian house-church meetings. The 11-member Board of Immigration Appeals determined that Li fled China because he feared legal action, not persecution, ANS reported. The Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals agreed with the board’s decision and denied Li asylum. CFI said the ruling will make it hard for others who face religious persecution to find refuge in the U.S. “America was founded by men and women fleeing religious persecution,” CFI said in a statement. “It is unfortunate that a group of unelected officials ... have lost sight of this.” The Alliance Defense Fund, a Christian law firm that specializes in religious liberty issues, has taken over as Li’s lead counsel.