

Persecution Watch

Colombian Student Alleges False Arrest

First-year theology student Luis Alberto Vera, 24, was arrested Nov. 26 on charges of firearms trafficking and aggravated theft. Though he said the charge is bogus, he faces a lengthy and likely expensive legal battle to clear his name, Compass Direct reported. A student at the Biblical Seminary of Colombia in Medellín, Vera is not an isolated case, observers say. Special anti-terrorism laws and a growing network of anonymous informants have increased the risk of regular citizens being wrongly accused of terrorism, Compass said. Ricardo Esquivi of the Evangelical Council of Colombia said at least 30 pastors and church leaders across the nation are currently imprisoned because of anonymous tips from informants.

Pentecostal Churches Double in Egypt

The president of the Pentecostal Churches in Egypt reported in December that the number of Pentecostal churches in Egypt has doubled in the last three years, Assist News Service (ANS) said. "When God called me [to] the ministry of being responsible for the Pentecostals in Egypt February of 2001, the number of the churches was only 35," Bishop Azez Morgan told ANS. "However, in this last three years, the Lord has blessed us with the strategy for church growth and it now has doubled to 75. There are churches all over the country, but there are still places we still do not have our churches, but we have plans for this."

House Church Leader Arrested In China

One of China's most prominent house-church leaders was recently arrested for his religious activities. Voice of the Martyrs (VOM) reported that pastor Zhang Rongliang, 53, was detained Dec. 1 in Xuzhai village in Zhengzhou, located in Henan Province. At press time, no one had heard from him. Zhang, whose wife and children are now in hiding, leads the Fangcheng Mother Church and the China for Christ Church, which is one of the largest house-church networks in the country, with more than 10 million members.