

185 Christians Arrested During Raid in Eritrea

Believers have been arrested again in Eritrea as the U.N. raises a red flag over human rights violations.

“The government of Eritrea denies that there’s any **religious persecution**; we know it’s not true,” says Greg Musselman, a spokesman for Voice of the Martyrs Canada (VOMC).

A U.N. expert recently called international attention to the “extremely concerning” human rights situation in Eritrea.

“The current human rights picture is very bleak,” the U.N. special rapporteur on Eritrea, Sheila B. Keetharuth, stated last week. “People feel trapped in a long, hopeless situation as they see no end to it, to the point that they take the irreversible decision to flee, forcing them on the road to exile.”

Around 3,000 people flee Eritrea every month, despite a “shoot to kill” policy targeting escapees. Earlier this month, two boats carrying refugees sank off the coast of Italy. One was carrying around 500 people, mostly from Eritrea and Somalia, when it went down.

Some 30,100 asylum-seekers arrived on Italy’s coastline between January and the end of September. According to a BBC report, 7,500 of them were Eritrean.

Release International, a VOMC partner in Eritrea, says 185 believers gathered recently to pray about the exodus. Suddenly, police broke into the house and arrested them all. Church leaders fear this may be a sign of things to come.

“They’re [afraid] that the government’s going to become even more intense in terms of the persecution,” Musselman explains.

But there's a silver lining.

"In spite of all this persecution [and] imprisonment, people are still coming to know Jesus, and the gospel is moving forward," he says.

For the safety of their partners and staff, Musselman isn't able to share details of VOMC's work in Eritrea. However, he shared briefly the plight of one imprisoned pastor, Abraham*, and his family.

Abraham's daughter began a Christian fellowship at her school. When Eritrean officials began tracking her movements, Abraham's wife felt their family was no longer safe and that it was time to flee the country, though it meant leaving Abraham behind. When her letter reached him in prison, Abraham's response was simple yet powerful.

"He said, 'No matter where you go, keep our children in the church,'" recounts Musselman. "'I don't want to pay the price for nothing.'"

You can read the complete story in an upcoming VOMC newsletter. [Click here](#) to sign up and make sure "I Won't Be Home for Christmas" reaches you in December.

"Christmas is a time that families come together, and here we go again in Eritrea, where families will be separated [at Christmastime]," Musselman says. "There are many Eritreans living in Canada and the United States. If you have contacts ... know Eritreans, just reach out to them, and maybe you can help them as they help their families."

"You know, I think it always comes back to the most important thing we can do, and that's pray," Musselman adds. "We need to remember our brothers and sisters as if we were in prison with them."

Pray for Christians in prison, especially those being held in

metal shipping containers. Ask God to encourage and strengthen them as they endure horrendous conditions. Pray for those who manage to escape Eritrea. Pray that their stories will inspire Christians to pray for this small African nation.

**Names changed for security purposes.*

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