

Bible Study Lands Arizona Pastor in Guantanamo Bay-Like Jail

Pastor Michael Salman is serving his 60-day sentence for holding a **home Bible study** in Tent City Jail, a prison compound in Maricopa County, Ariz. The Phoenix pastor's attorney describes conditions there as similar to the infamous Guantanamo Bay detention camp in Cuba.

"This is where you would put Osama bin Laden, not Michael Salman," says Rutherford Institute founder and attorney John Whitehead in an interview yesterday with International Christian Concern (ICC).

"The temperature there has been around 140 degrees, and there is no air conditioning. They're [living] in tents. They have stun fences ... barbed wire ... large German shepherds walking the perimeter, armed guards and facial recognition software so that the prisoners are studied all the time."

According to Whitehead, Salman has reported being imprisoned with "really hardened criminals." He is unsure why the pastor has been specifically sent to Tent City. In late June, the jail was the focus of thousands of protesters who gathered outside the Maricopa County Sheriff's office to express their disapproval of the allegedly prison camp-like conditions.

Whitehead warns that the same zoning laws used in Arizona to imprison Salman for holding home **Bible studies** will probably be passed across the United States. As he sees it, the laws, which were written by the International Code Council, are very specific about controlling religious groups.

"If you have a small gathering in your home for any kind of

religious meeting, you're going to be harassed by the government to somehow square with the zoning regulations for a formal institution," says Whitehead. "We're getting people who now are getting phone calls from zoning agents because they have five or six people meeting in their home."

The Rutherford Institute is petitioning the Arizona Supreme Court to intervene in Salman's case, challenging his imprisonment as a violation of the **First Amendment** of the United States, which guarantees **freedom of religion**.

"The arrest of Pastor Michael Salman and his subsequent detention in a military-like compound for holding Bible studies in his home would not be much of a surprise if it had taken place in an authoritarian police state like North Korea," says Ryan Morgan, regional manager of ICC.

"The fact that it happened in the same state as the Grand Canyon should be a resounding wake up call to every American who holds the right to **worship** freely close to their heart. Around the world, governments are using all sorts of laws to control and suppress religious gatherings. We cannot stand idly by as the United States does the same. ICC urgently calls on the Arizona Supreme Court to intervene in the case of Michael Salman for his immediate release."