

US Pastor Remains Jailed in Russia on Bribery Charge

Russian Ministries is advocating for the release of U.S. citizen Pastor Thomas Kang. Russian Ministries Project Manager for Religious Freedom Issues in Eurasia Wade Kusack says Pastor Kang “has been held for more than five months already in custody on an attempted bribery charge. The bribe was a \$30 donation he provided in conjunction with a fine he willfully paid.”

On Sept. 28, Pastor Kang and his assistant, Ekaterina, answered a summons from the Office of the Federal Migration Service regarding a builder working on Kang’s house, an Uzbek whose work visa had recently expired. While there, Pastor Kang was accused of unspecified illegal actions himself and threatened with punishments not in accordance with the law.

After hours of meaningless questioning, it became clear to Pastor Kang, from San Diego, Calif., that they were simply trying to extort a bribe—an all-too-common practice. He declared his intention to leave, paid the fine for employing the Uzbek worker, and added a 1,000 ruble bill (\$30 U.S.) “open giving of thanks” to help the police in their work.

Immediately, the officer he was speaking to called in other officers who were waiting outside and arrested Pastor Kang on a charge of attempted bribery.

Ekaterina, who is in fragile health, was detained overnight without food or water while they continued to question her about vague accusations of wrongdoing. She was released the next day, but Pastor Kang was sent to a detention center.

Kusack says it’s suspicious that this questioning and arrest came the day before Pastor Kang—a well-respected member of the community and former military chaplain—was due to open “House

of Joy.” He says the house was for “low income families, for military families to spend vacations, and for religious groups to hold church retreats. [On] the same day that this house was to officially open, he was arrested and has now been in prison five months waiting for his trial.”

The ironic thing? Kuzack says, “A court paper stated that they cannot release him even before trial because of the severity of his crime.”

Kusack, along with two of Pastor Kang’s children, are in Washington to advocate on Pastor Kang’s behalf. Says Kusack, “We visited the Russian Embassy, the U.S. Department of State; we’re going to participate in a congressional briefing on this issue, and we’re going to meet specialists from the Helsinki Committee.”

In the meantime, U.S. Embassy officials are committing to attend his court hearings and any other proceedings, while trying to secure his release.

Beverly Chan is Pastor Kang’s daughter. “It’s a hard thing to deal with, and sometimes I feel a little hopeless or helpless. But I’m reminded that God will provide us with strength, and ... we need to have compassion with the people who are keeping him there.”

Kusak says this is another example of more loss of religious freedom in Russia. “We can observe increased persecution of all minorities, especially of protestant churches in Russia. And unfortunately this case is just one more example of local police and local authorities that can do anything they want against protestant minorities. They just go unpunished.”

More than four months have passed, and investigators still have not produced the legally mandated report of the search to Pastor Kang. He is still being held at the detention center. Russian Ministries is committed to raising awareness about Pastor Kang’s plight and advocating for his release.