

Freedom Convoy Pastor Forced to Flee Canada Amid Persecution

Harold Ristau, a Canadian pastor, decorated veteran and chaplain, has made a courageous move to protect his family's religious freedom.

Faced with persecution from the Canadian government due to his participation in a peaceful protest against COVID vaccine mandates, Ristau decided to relocate his family to Kenya, where he now finds solace in teaching theology to local pastors.

The Freedom Convoy, a group of Canadian truckers opposing vaccine mandates, embarked on a journey from British Columbia to Ottawa last February. Ristau, along with nearly 10,000 others, joined this convoy to rally against the government's edict, which would require truckers entering Canada to be fully vaccinated against the coronavirus.

The journey to Ottawa was rife with challenges and threats from fellow Canadians, who disapproved of their peaceful assembly. Despite facing criticism and penalties from the government, Ristau stood firm in his faith and beliefs, drawing inspiration from biblical passages about persecution.

Second Timothy 3:12 resonates with Ristau's experience: "Yes, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." In the face of adversity, Ristau remained steadfast in prayer, remembering the words of Matthew 5:10, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

During the rally in Ottawa, smartphone footage captured Ristau

and other veterans working to dismantle a blockade around a war memorial. In moments of tension and uncertainty, they sought strength from Isaiah 41:10, "Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will help you, yes, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand."

Amidst the assembly, Ristau led the crowd in prayer, reciting the Lord's Prayer as a plea for divine protection and guidance. Drawing from 1 Peter 3:14, which says, "But even if you suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. 'Do not be afraid of their terror, do not be troubled,'" Ristau's prayer exemplified his unwavering faith.

In a heartfelt moment of unity, Ristau and the attendees sang the national anthem, reflecting a desire for a nation where freedom and faith coexist. This harmonious act of patriotism and devotion echoes Colossians 3:17, "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him."

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However, the aftermath of the protest proved challenging. Ristau faced threats of losing his security clearance, as well as the confiscation of retirement funds and his children's college savings. This unjust treatment resonated with biblical teachings on persecution such as John 15:20a, "Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you."

In June 2021, the Canadian government declared a public order emergency under the Emergencies Act, freezing bank accounts of protestors and donors. Such acts of suppression mirror 2 Thessalonians 3:3, "But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one," as Ristau and

others sought justice and accountability.

In response to the challenges faced by Canadian pastors like Ristau, fellow Christians rallied behind them. The Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedoms stood alongside Ristau and others, fighting for their rights, drawing inspiration from Galatians 6:2, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."

Today, Ristau and his family find a new sense of peace in Kenya, where they can freely practice their faith and share their beliefs without fear of persecution. While Canada remains dear to them, Ristau's wife, Elise, emphasizes the tranquility they experience in Kenya, where traditional values and a sense of community reign.

"Things are normal here; people have traditional values," Elise says of Kenya. "I had dreamed of this perfect life for myself in Canada ... [but] there was a kind of turning point where I said, 'We can go. Nothing is holding us here.' It was a 'shake the dust off our boots' moment.

"In Kenya, I know it's poor, and there's corruption, but we're not getting arrested for praying silently outside abortion clinics," she adds. "For a Christian in Canada, it's pretty bleak."

As Ristau teaches theology to Kenyan pastors, he finds strength in passages such as Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things because of Christ who strengthens me." Despite the challenges they've faced and the uncertainties ahead, the Ristau family remains steadfast in their faith, knowing that God's Word offers comfort and guidance in times of persecution.

In the words of Psalm 46:1, "God is our refuge and strength, a well-proven help in trouble." As the fight for religious freedom continues, Ristau and others like him draw inspiration from the Bible, relying on their faith to overcome adversity

and protect the rights of fellow Canadians.

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