



Kyrgyzstan: Team Attacked

A Christian worker in Kyrgyzstan has filed a case against a village Islamic leader who, along with a small mob, attacked the worker and his friends as they attempted to distribute humanitarian items in Ak-Kyia village. The case is of crucial importance for all Christians in Kyrgyzstan, who risk beatings or even death by local extremists even though they are officially protected by the law.

Narsbek was invited by the school principal and several village leaders to distribute gifts in his home village of Ak-Kyia in the Naryn region of Kyrgyzstan. He and a team arrived in the village on the morning of April 11, 2012 in two vehicles. As they greeted the principal and other leaders, the village mullah (mosque leader) appeared with his students in tow. He ordered the group to stop the distribution immediately. Instead, the principal directed the team to move their vehicles on to the school yard, and the mullah left.

But a few moments later, he reappeared, this time with a group of about 20 young zealots with him. The mob shouted "Allahu Akbar" and rushed in to pummel the visiting Christians, flinging rocks through the air. They grabbed Narsbek and his brother-in-law, Marazat, pinning them to the ground to beat them. Narsbek was hit in the back of the head with a rock, and another attacker clenched his hands around his throat.

"At that moment, I remembered how I used to encourage the young in faith to persevere even when it hurts. This was my test," Narsbek said. As he felt himself about to lose consciousness, he prepared himself to meet Jesus.

Unexpectedly, the grip on his neck loosened. His slight wife had fought through the mêlée to reach her husband and her brother and surprised them into releasing their holds. Narsbek and his wife scrambled through the crowd to reach their minivan. They slammed the vehicle into gear and drove out in a shower of rocks that damaged all but the minivan's windshield. Marazat and the other two team members also fled in the second vehicle, though the attackers pursued them for several kilometers.

The remaining zealots collected the gifts and burned them in the school yard in front of the students and school staff.

The distribution team notified local authorities of the incident, but police took no action. Narsbek and Marazat were both treated at the hospital, but Narsbek still has remaining damage to his right eye, as well as reoccurring headaches. His wife has been under constant stress since the incident.

The man who attacked them was same person who managed to put Narsbek in prison 14 years ago after he became a believer. He claimed Narsbek was injecting people with a special drug, then "programming" them to become Christians. He even produced a false witness, and Narsbek spent a year in prison. For his zeal in the fight against infidels, the mullah was promoted.

Narsbek decided to file a case against the mullah to prompt authorities to act, but even that didn't get results until Narsbek and his family got a lawyer from another city to come speak to the local state attorney, police and village leaders. The lawyer reminded the local officials that Kyrgystan's new president had stated it was important not to have conflict over ethnic or religious issues and that the country's laws must be followed.

Kyrgyzstan's laws do promise to uphold religious freedom, but in practice these laws are not always followed. Believers face property destruction, intimidation and physical harm regularly. The 2009 Religion Law requires churches to seek registration, which is often denied. A proposed amendment to the law would further limit and censor any religious literature imported, stored or distributed in the country.

It appears that Narsbek's case will go all the way to the country's Supreme Court. Narsbek wrote, "We are pushing this case not for our own benefit, but so that everyone will feel safe and not afraid of being beaten or killed because of their religion. People... are very afraid to think about following Jesus. ... Please pray that justice would reign and that there would be freedom, and not fear, in following Jesus."

The team has not been able to continue their work for the last three weeks because they have to be available to the prosecutor's office. They are thankful for their bold lawyer, as well as others who are supporting them in prayer. "Without your prayers and encouragement and letters, we would not have had the strength to continue," said Narsbek.

Source: VOM contacts

