

THE MAGAZINE OF BARNABAS FUND HOPE AND AID FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

barnabasaid

Feeding the hungry in Zimbabwe: farming, faith and fellowship

The churches in Eritrea: hard pressed and harshly persecuted

Islam's apostasy law: promoting change from within

JULY/AUGUST 2009



To guard the safety of Christians in hostile environments, names may have been changed or omitted. Thank you for your understanding.

Front cover: One of the Zimbabwean Christian children who have been helped by a feeding and farming project supported by Barnabas Fund

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FROM THE DIRECTOR

The widow's joy

When Job looked back on his past life, he recalled how he used to help those in need:

"I delivered the poor who cried out, the fatherless and the one who had no helper. The blessing of a perishing man came upon me, and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy." (Job 29:12-13, NKJV)

Job not only gave money or practical aid, but also he brought encouragement. He caused the widow's heart to sing for joy. Surely it was not just the change in her circumstances but the fact that someone had cared for her, had

perhaps spent time with her, that lifted up the spirit of a lonely and desolate woman so that she sang for joy in her heart.

We have been so encouraged at Barnabas Fund by the faithfulness of our supporters despite the current recession. Of course, your gifts do far more than encourage us at Barnabas: they enable us to continue helping persecuted Christians whose plight is so much worse than our own in the West. And that too has a double benefit. For, while we help to ease the physical difficulties of our brothers and sisters, we are at the same time bringing them spiritual encouragement. Over and over again, they tell us in their thank you letters how much it means to know that other Christians, far away, care for them. So often minority Christians feel that their very existence is forgotten by the Church

at large. But a gift from Barnabas Fund tells them they are remembered, they are prayed for, they are loved.

On the front cover of this magazine, you will read the words "Hope and Aid for the Persecuted Church". Barnabas is the aid agency for the persecuted Church, but through aid come encouragement, hope and fellowship with other believers across the globe. Thank you for enabling this to happen. Thank you for remembering the fatherless and the widows.

"Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world."

(James 1:27, NKJV)

Dr Patrick Sookhdeo
International Director

Encouraging Change from Within

Abdul Rahman, an Afghan who chose to leave Islam and follow Christ, was threatened with a death sentence by an Afghan judge and prosecutor in 2006. After international protests, a pretext was found to dismiss the case and he was able to flee Afghanistan.

In May 2009 a Jordanian Muslim convert to Christianity was threatened by his father that if he did not publicly return to Islam within seven days, the father would shoot him dead.

Muslims who choose to abandon Islam are in danger of death. This is true whether they embrace another faith or whether they only reject Islam. Death can be by judicial execution as almost happened to Abdul Rahman, and as really did happen to Iranian pastor Hossein Soodmand, who was hanged in 1990. Mauritania, Saudi Arabia and Sudan also have the death penalty for apostasy. More often the death of a convert is "unofficial", either murdered by family or community, or illegally beaten and tortured to death while in detention.

If they are not killed, apostates may face a whole range of persecution, some of it from the authorities, some of it from relatives and community. Women as well as men are at risk, and so are children. Strange as it may seem, many people who consider themselves Muslims are also at

risk of death or other penalties for being "apostates". This is because mainstream Islamic scholars condemn liberals as not true Muslims. Thus Mahmoud Mohamed Taha, an elderly Muslim religious scholar in Sudan, was executed for apostasy in 1985 after he had published a leaflet calling for *sharia* to be reformed to make it more humane. Whole sects, such as the Ahmadiyyas and the Bahais, are also condemned as apostates.

The punishment and persecution of converts is based on *sharia* (Islamic law), and it is only from within the Islamic community that reform of *sharia* can be achieved. So any change to the treatment of converts in Muslim countries – or elsewhere – must be brought about by Muslims themselves.

This issue has been debated for centuries among Muslim scholars. Although most Muslims do not dispute the classic teaching, the issue remains highly contentious in Islam, and the debate continues today.

In April 2009, a conference hosted by the International Islamic Fiqh Academy was held in the United Arab Emirates to consider a range of global issues, including whether apostates should face the death penalty under *sharia*. At the conference, some scholars called for a review of the death penalty, including Egyptian government minister Mahmoud Zaqqouq, who said "Religious freedom is a right that should be guaranteed to every human being". Others were adamant in their refusal to endorse a gentler approach towards apostates. A committee of six religious scholars was appointed to study whether apostates should face the death penalty.

At this time of intense debate among Muslims, we as Christians can seek to encourage changes to the apostasy law through prayer and action. We invite you to write to Muslim leaders and organisations, requesting that they support the calls for the abolition of the Islamic apostasy law so that Muslims have complete freedom to leave their Islamic faith without risk of any punishment.

UK Border Agency: Update

Thank you to our supporters who wrote to the UK Border Agency as requested in the March/April 2009 magazine. Many of you will have received a letter from the Agency and Barnabas Fund has drafted a response to this. If you would like to send this response letter under your own name, or use it as a guide to write your own, please contact the Barnabas Fund International Headquarters in Pewsey, UK (address details on the back cover of this magazine).

When you write:

- Be polite.
- Emphasise that under Article 18 of the United Nation's 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Muslims have a human right to choose another faith.
- Emphasise that you are not attacking Islam in general or individual Muslims.
- Ask the recipient to do all they can to call for a reform of *sharia* law so as to bring an end to the death sentence and all other penalties for apostates from Islam.
- Your letter does not need to be long.

In the UK write to:

Mr Muhammad Abdul Bari, Secretary General, The Muslim Council of Britain, PO Box 57330, London E1 2WJ

Mr Maajid Nawaz, Director, The Quilliam Foundation, PO Box 60380, London WC1A 9AZ

For other Western countries, please write to appropriate Muslim organisations within your own country, or feel free to write to the British organisations detailed above.

French petition available now

A French version of Barnabas Fund's petition for the abolition of the Islamic apostasy law, "Why should they be secret?" is now available on our website (<http://barnabasfund.org/whyshouldtheybesecret>).

Une version française de la pétition lancée par Barnabas Fund sur l'abolition de la loi d'apostasie, "Pétition pour l'abrogation de la loi islamique sur l'apostasie" est maintenant disponible sur notre site internet.

Please keep gathering signatures for our petition to abolish the Islamic apostasy law with its death sentence for those who leave Islam. <http://www.barnabasfund.org/whyshouldtheybesecret>

Ending hunger and dependency in Zimbabwe

What happens when you farm in God's way

God is wonderfully at work amongst and through His people in Zimbabwe, as they pray for their nation and seek His face in repentance. Despite everything they are buoyant, hopeful and trusting. Here we tell a good news story from Zimbabwe, a story in which Barnabas supporters play a key role.

It is a story of transformation, a story of doing what seems all but impossible. It is a story that begins with hunger, hopelessness and dependency and ends with self-sufficiency and faith renewed. It is a story that brings together Christians from Zimbabwe, South Africa and all around the world.



Typical contents of a food parcel. When a month's wages is needed to buy a loaf of bread, and desperate people even fry cotton bolls to eat, these food parcels have literally saved lives

Feeding

Through the generous giving of Barnabas supporters, a feeding programme to help some of the neediest of Zimbabwe's hungry millions has now been expanded to assist around 1,500 families a month, that is, almost 15,000 people. The total amount of food sent to date amounts to over 358 tonnes. Yet each monthly food parcel costs only £15 and will help to feed 9 or 10 people of an extended family – that is just 5p per person per day.

Zimbabwe, once the bread-basket of Africa, has been so ravaged by the

government of President Mugabe that it produces next to nothing in terms of food. This means that food must be brought in from neighbouring South Africa and taken to the churches and orphanages to distribute. This risky and arduous task is accomplished by teams of courageous South African Christians, giving their time voluntarily to help their suffering brothers and sisters, and taking turns to drive the food into Zimbabwe in their own cars.

But the need is so huge. How can people be enabled to sustain themselves? What about those whom the feeding programme cannot reach?

Farming

A Zimbabwe-based ministry called "Farming God's Way" (now called "Foundations for Farming") has developed a new method of farming which can easily increase yields ten-fold, sometimes far more. Not only is this method effective; it also does not need the heavy labour of traditional methods, because there is no ploughing. This means that even elderly widows or child-headed households can put it into practice.

The method depends on sowing the seed earlier, at the correct spacing, laying down a mulch, and keeping the crop well weeded.



This maize was grown according to traditional methods

Barnabas is helping to support this ministry, as they send out trainers to villages across Zimbabwe to teach the method. We are also providing seed for the first sowing by those who have been trained. "The seed was like ... like jewels to them!" said a Christian who had been distributing it, as he struggled to find words to explain how precious the gift of seed for planting was to those who received it.

Faith

"Farming God's Way" is based not only on tried and tested science but also on principles of Christian discipleship, for the method teaches people to be good stewards of God's creation, doing everything on time, to a high standard, without wastage, and with joy. Learning to farm "God's way" has brought many to a real and living personal faith in the Lord Jesus, and caused church attendance to soar.



Some of the agricultural trainers supported by Barnabas, in front of a crop of maize grown by the method they teach. They are as much evangelists as agricultural trainers, because "Farming God's Way" transforms lives spiritually as well as practically

Fellowship

The feeding programme and the farming training are closely coordinated, as farming training is given to communities who are being fed. If people in a community have applied the method well and the first harvest is good, then the food parcels for that community can be gradually reduced and eventually stopped altogether. That makes more food parcels available for other communities who have not yet received any aid. These communities in turn can then receive the agricultural training until they too are self-sufficient and help can again be diverted elsewhere.

This partnership involves not only the South African Christians delivering the food, not only the Zimbabwean trainers, but also Barnabas supporters around the world whose giving helps to cover the costs of the food, seed and training. And everything is undergirded by prayer, turning partnership into fellowship in the body of Christ.

■ Project reference

91-721 Zimbabwe feeding

91-751 Zimbabwe farming

91-806 Zimbabwe general



Prayer and fellowship are vital elements of the work. "Let's pray," were the first words said to visitors from Barnabas by those taking the lead on encouraging the new farming method in their local communities

Suffering for Christ in Zimbabwe

Last year a rural church was forcibly closed down by the government party's militia, who occupied it and used it as a torture facility. The congregation, numbering about 30, were beaten and accused of many things, but continued to meet for worship at their pastor's home whenever they could. But this was never possible on Sundays, because on Sundays they were ordered to attend indoctrination and re-education rallies. (Barnabas provided food parcels for this congregation.)

This is just one example of the anti-Christian persecution that forms part of the multi-faceted oppression characteristic of Zimbabwe in recent years. Church leaders who have called for justice or have opposed the government's brutal policies in any way have been especially victimised, but ordinary church members have suffered too, as this example shows.

Case study

One church congregation in Bulawayo joined together to clear a 4-acre plot of land, cutting down the trees and fencing it. Then they sowed it with maize seed provided by Barnabas Fund, and carefully tended the growing crop according to how "Farming God's Way" trainers had taught them. Their very first harvest, in March 2009, was so plentiful that it could feed 50 families for a year. This church used to get food parcels, but now they are self-sufficient and can support themselves.



This uncultivated land had to be painstakingly cleared by the church members using nothing but hand tools

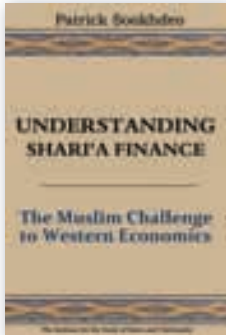


Nearly ready for harvest – the church's maize is twice the height of the crop of a nearby farmer who used the traditional methods



The first cobs picked, roasted and eaten. The full harvest was enough to support 50 families

In this edition we highlight three books by Dr Patrick Sookhdeo that help us to understand the nature of contemporary Islam and how we can respond.



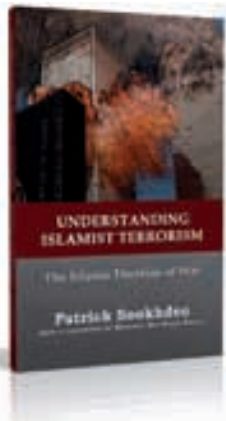
Understanding Shari'a Finance: The Muslim Challenge to Western Economics Patrick Sookhdeo

An Islamic financial system has rapidly become a major player on the world economic stage. Seeking to follow Islamic sharia law, many Muslims have rejected Western financial products and institutions. They have also generated a range of alternative economic tools, first in Muslim countries and now in the West, and a lucrative international market.

Patrick Sookhdeo sees this “shari’a finance” as part of the Islamist agenda to subvert and subjugate Western systems. In this study he discusses the history and ideas of the movement, the character and spread of the Islamic economy, and the problems and dangers that it may present. In particular he challenges the view that Islam forbids the payment of interest, and reveals the connections between Islamic finance and radical Islamist groups.

This stimulating and accessible book will interest anyone concerned about the Islamic resurgence and its possible implications for finance and politics.

Isaac Publishing, paperback, 114 pp, offer price £4.99 + £1.50 postage (normal price £6.99)



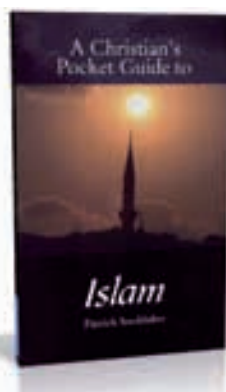
Understanding Islamist Terrorism: The Islamic Doctrine of War Patrick Sookhdeo

The doctrine of war in Islam has generated much discussion and disagreement, especially following the upsurge in Islamist terrorism in the last decade. Most would agree, however, that war has had a prominent place in Islamic theology from its earliest days. Although a multitude of different views on war are sincerely held and lived out by individual Muslims, there is also a classical Islamic doctrine, which was followed in the first years of Islam. It is to this that modern Islamists look in order to justify their violent actions.

This book traces the origin and development of the classical Islamic doctrine of war. Beginning with the primary sources, it expounds the various components of the teaching, and the ways it has been applied through history. It then focuses on the present, to consider the motivation and formation of Islamist terrorists and the contemporary Muslim debate on violence. It also outlines some possible non-Muslim responses to terrorism.

Out of print for a short time, this book has now been re-issued with a new cover.

Isaac Publishing, paperback, 280 pp, offer price £6.99 + £1.50 postage (normal price £9.99)



A Christian's Pocket Guide to Islam Patrick Sookhdeo

As Christians, we are understandably annoyed when we watch television programmes or read newspaper articles in which commentators exhibit the most basic misunderstandings of the Christian faith. We are unlikely to pay close attention to their point of view when they have clearly not taken the trouble to understand ours. But neither are Muslims likely to listen closely to us when we try to witness to them unless we have at least a basic and accurate understanding of what *they* believe and how *they* live.

This fascinating, easy-to-read book provides Christians with a simple description of the origins of Islam, what Muslims believe and how it affects their attitudes, worldview, everyday life and culture. Practical guidelines are offered for relating to Muslims in a culturally appropriate way, as well as for witnessing effectively and caring for converts.

If you long to reach out to your Muslim friends with the Gospel but are wondering how to start then this is the book for you.

Christian Focus and Isaac Publishing, paperback, 112 pp, £1.99 + £1.50 postage

To order any of these books, please visit www.barnabasfund.org/shop. Alternatively please contact your nearest Barnabas office (addresses on back cover). Cheques for the UK should be made payable to “Barnabas Books”.

Religious hatred and the threat to freedom of speech

“Based on this deep conviction, we the Kings and the Heads of State and Government of the OIC renew our pledge to work harder to make sure that Islam’s true image is better projected the world over in line with the guidelines contained in the Ten-Year Programme of Action issued by the 3rd Extraordinary Summit of Makkah Al Mukarramah, which seek to combat an Islamophobia with designs to distort our religion.”¹ *Dakar Declaration*

“The degree of thought control, of limitations on freedom of speech and expression [imposed by political correctness and multiculturalism] is without parallel in the Western world since the eighteenth century and in some cases longer than that.”² *Bernard Lewis*

Introduction

Demands for the worldwide protection of religions from incitement to hatred and violence are currently being made at the United Nations. The driving force is the 57 Muslim states united in the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC). Their goal is to safeguard the place of Islam within the public sphere in all societies. They believe that Islam, its source texts (Qur’an and *hadith*), its law (*sharia*) and Muhammad must be protected from any criticism. Because in Islam there is no separation of religion from the state, they see the state as the guarantor and protector of Islam, and they expect the UN, which represents all states in the world, to fulfil the same function.

The OIC

The OIC defines its aims as follows:

The Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) is an international organization grouping fifty seven States which have decided to pool their resources together, combine their efforts and speak with one voice to safeguard the

interests and secure the progress and well-being of their peoples and of all Muslims in the world.³

The OIC is part of the Islamic resurgence sweeping the Muslim world, which aims to restore Muslim power, glory, hegemony and dominion in all areas. One of its goals is to improve the image of Islam and present it as a religion of peace, tolerance, moderation and justice. In pursuit of this goal, in 1999 it began to introduce annual resolutions at the UN to ban the defamation of Islam.

Then in 2005, at the Third Extraordinary Session of the Islamic Summit Conference held in Mecca, the OIC initiated a Ten-Year Programme of Action to meet the challenges facing the Muslim global community (the *Umma*) in the 21st century and ensure its revival. The countering of Islamophobia was a main issue raised at the conference, which established a department at the OIC General Secretariat to monitor all forms of Islamophobia, issue an annual report, and ensure cooperation with relevant governmental and non-governmental organisations. It also resolved to:

Endeavor to have the United Nations adopt an international resolution to counter Islamophobia, and call upon all States to enact laws to counter it, including deterrent punishments.⁴

Pull-out supplement

In 2008, at the 11th Session of the Islamic Summit Conference held in Dakar (13-14 March, 2008), Resolution No.11/11-C (Is) “On the Defamation of Religions and Discrimination Against Muslims” was passed. Although this resolution professed to defend all religions, its focus was clearly on Islam. It expressed alarm at “the burgeoning tide of Islamophobia in certain non-Islamic countries and increasing incidences of acts of discrimination against Muslims on the basis of religion”, and concern at the failure of some non-Islamic countries to address these problems. It also strongly condemned all “defamation and desecration of the holy symbols of Islam”. It called on all states to:

Ensure the criminalization of all acts of defamation of religions and discrimination on the basis of religion, and to enact the appropriate penalties that represent adequate deterrence against such practices

The OIC also issued instructions to its delegation at the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC):

to endeavor to adopt an international instrument on the prohibition of the defamation of religions and to declare such practices as a violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The Final Communique of the “Annual Coordination Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the OIC Member States” at the United Nations Headquarters, New York, on 26 September 2008:

condemned the growing trend of Islamophobia and systematic discrimination against Muslims. It called upon the international community to prevent incitement to hatred and discrimination against Muslims and take effective measures to combat defamation of religions and acts of negative stereotyping of people based on religion, belief or ethnicity. The Meeting requested the Secretary General to continue the OIC initiatives to effectively counter Islamophobia through discussion and debates at various international fora and stressed the importance that Member States continue their support to the organization’s observatory on Islamophobia.

Also:

The Meeting *emphasized* the fact that defamation of religions constitute a form of incitement to religious hatred, hostility and violence against the followers of these religions which in turn leads to the denial of their fundamental rights and freedoms. It *further stressed* that combating religious discrimination in general requires a particular focus on preventing the direct and indirect consequences of defamation of religions, including its role in legitimizing discriminatory discourse and ideological violence.

And:

The Meeting reaffirmed the responsibility of the Islamic world in reviewing the condition of Muslim communities and minorities in Non-OIC countries to ensure promotion and protection of their basic rights including cultural and religious freedom.

The UN

The power of the OIC and of individual Muslim states has been marshalled at the UN to challenge offences against Islam and challenge resolutions to protect it from perceived criticism. This campaign is seen as a prelude to the introduction of legislative changes favourable to Islam in Western and other non-Muslim states. Muslim communities in the West often complain about Islamophobia and request laws to protect Islam.

The UN increasingly practises self-censorship to counter accusations of “blasphemy”, “Islamophobia”, “defamation of Islam”, or “sacrilege”. For the sake of political and diplomatic advantage, many states seem willing to accept the new rules being requested by the OIC, and especially by its member states Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Iran. Their constant pressure, and the resolutions adopted by the UN, have served to restrict open discussions of subjects not congenial to Muslim states, such as slavery in Sudan or Muslim anti-Semitism. Discussion about political issues within Islamic states is now out of bounds, and freedom of speech and expression is being voluntarily limited in many international organisations and conferences.⁵ Non-Muslim states seem to have decided to keep silent on topics relating to Islam.⁶

Representatives of Muslim states have requested, and to some extent received, special treatment, especially in the Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR) and its successor, the UNHRC.⁷ As a result the “representatives of Islam”, especially the OIC, have an unprecedented and exceptional status at the UN.

Pressure has been building in the UN in recent years specifically to forbid the defamation of Islam. As a result, terms such as “blasphemy” and “defamation of Islam” have appeared in UN documents. Support is growing in the West for this Muslim campaign. Since 1999 various resolutions have been passed by the UNCHR, and one in the UN General Assembly (2007), criticising and opposing the defamation of religions.⁸ The three most recent resolutions specifically mentioned Islam, but no other religions.

Durban II UN Conference against Racism

Durban II (Durban Review Conference, 20-24 April 2009 in Geneva) was a follow-up to the 2001 World Conference against Racism held in Durban, South Africa under UN auspices. The goal of these conferences is to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.⁹

However, the conferences have been used by developing world and Muslim states to criticise Israel as a racist state (no other state was mentioned by name). Muslim states are also trying to make defamation of religion equivalent to racism in the hope of protecting Islam. Muslim states attending Durban II pressed the conference to state that criticising Islam is a form of incitement.¹⁰ In this way the OIC tried to use Durban II to rewrite the rules of human rights and international law.

Analysis

Legal protection for *individuals*, including Muslims, from insults, defamation, and incitement to hatred and violence is acceptable to most people. The consensus within Western societies, however, is that *ideas* should be open to criticism and challenge in the public square. Western democratic principles of equality and freedom stand opposed to the practices of censorship and suppression of opinions and information that are widely practised by Muslim states and societies.

Thus accepted laws on defamation protect the reputations of individuals, not belief systems and worldviews. A religion should defend its position in the market-place of ideas and beliefs by setting forth its positions and defending them by argument and counter-argument, not by using the coercive force of the state and its legislation. Christianity in the West, for example, has long accepted criticism and disparagement as part of the liberal and democratic discourse.

The OIC, however, is seeking not to protect individuals from harm, but rather to shield a specific set of beliefs, namely the religion and ideology of Islam, from any question, debate, or critical inquiry. The aim of the Muslim states is not only to protect Muhammad and the Qur'an but also to silence any criticism of Islam and Islamism.

The OIC wants UN support for and legitimation of its state-sanctioned, sharia-based anti-blasphemy prohibitions, which stifle religious freedom, persecute religious minorities and outlaw conversions from Islam to other faiths. Its goal is to incorporate these prohibitions into international human

rights law. At present "defamation of religions" has no basis in that law, but it is likely soon to have one if the Muslim states keep up their campaign.¹¹

The very notion of individual human rights is at stake in this campaign. Such resolutions contradict not only the basic Western principles of free thought and expression, but also "the right to freedom of opinion and expression" enshrined in article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Following a row at the UNHRC in July 2008, in which Islamic countries intervened to stop mention of sharia, and the Romanian president appeared to back their stance, even Louise Arbour, outgoing UN Commissioner on Human Rights, raised concerns about debates on sharia and Islam becoming taboo at the UN:

It is very concerning in a Council which should be ... the guardian of freedom of expression, to see constraints or taboos, or subjects that become taboo for discussion.¹²

Yet because of the pressure on the UN by the OIC states and their allies the practice of avoiding the discussion of certain aspects of Islam has become deeply ingrained at the UNHRC and in other UN agencies and assemblies. No critique, even if valid, of aspects of Islam or of human rights breaches in Muslim states may be offered. UN documents and councils ignore and suppress any reports of discrimination and incitement to hatred in Muslim states, which fuels the widespread terrorist atrocities committed by jihad groups in the name of Islam. They also accept the claim that Muslims are always and everywhere the greatest victims of Western aggression and racism and never the perpetrators.¹³ In fact it could be argued that the majority of

Anti-hatred legislation in Western countries

In 2001 the Australian state of Victoria passed into law a Racial and Religious Tolerance Act. This law prohibited citizens from engaging "in conduct that incites hatred against, serious contempt for, or revulsion or severe ridicule of" another person or group on the ground of their religious belief or activity.

An exception written into the Act was conduct "engaged in reasonably and in good faith – in the course of any statement, publication, discussion or debate – for any genuine religious purpose". Yet in 2005 two pastors were convicted under this law for making critical statements about Islam in a church seminar. Although the Supreme Court of Victoria subsequently upheld their appeal, many Australian Christians fear the suggested introduction of similar laws nationally, believing that Muslims will try to use them to stifle all criticism of Islam.

Then in 2007 a Racial and Religious Hatred Act came into effect in the UK. It outlawed the use of threatening words or behaviour meant to incite hatred against groups of people because of their faith. Unlike the law in Victoria, this Act requires the prosecution to prove that any defendant *intended*

to stir up hatred. This stipulation was introduced in a House of Lords amendment that was accepted by the Commons against the wishes of the government.

The draft law was also intended to prohibit the proselytising of adherents of one religion by those of another, and insulting or making jokes about any religion. The House of Lords was concerned that these provisions violated the right to freedom of speech, and carried amendments designed to protect it. Again the government was determined to reject these, but they were nonetheless passed in the Commons, though one of them by only one vote. Baroness Cox said, "Britain's fundamental freedom of speech hung by a thread on that day."

But despite the limited scope and wide exemptions of this law, anxieties remain about how it will be used and implemented. Government ministers profess to accept that religious beliefs are a legitimate subject of public discussion and debate, but in a context where Christianity has become increasingly marginalised their commitment to free speech may be severely tested by an increasingly confident Muslim minority.

Pull-out supplement

incitement to racial hatred and violence is now coming from the Islamic world, but it is those who expose what is happening in Islamic states who are targeted for spreading hatred and defamation. Silencing discussion about the role of Islam in discrimination and terrorism tends to protect, strengthen and endorse Islamist terrorism and its sources of finance. It also helps radical Islamist elements to achieve their goals by paralysing the ability of the international community to address the real threats posed by the Islamist agenda and to fight them. Banning speech critical of religion, and particularly about radical Islam and Islamist terrorism, is a step towards legitimising violence committed in the name of Islam.

Not only in the UN, but also in some Western and other non-Muslim states, the seemingly moderate Islamic establishment is skilfully manoeuvring within the legal systems to enforce "hate speech" and libel laws. Large funds are set aside for hiring skilful lawyers to sue critics in the courts and silence them. Free speech is thus being attacked by Islamic organisations. This widespread use of Islamic "lawfare" is beginning to limit and control public discussion of Islam as well as of the threat posed by Islamist terrorism. It presents a real threat to both civil rights and national security in Western states.¹⁴

The first victims of the OIC's campaign are likely to be moderate Muslims and religious minorities in states such as Pakistan, Iran, Sudan and Saudi Arabia, which support the resolutions. Other victims will be writers, journalists and intellectuals in the democratic West, who will be targeted for the "deliberate stereotyping of religions, their adherents and sacred persons."

It could become impossible to criticise any religious teachings that seem to have detrimental social consequences, such as the execution of apostates from Islam, or the treatment of Dalits (untouchables) in Hinduism. Those who suffer discrimination, violence and death as a result of such teachings will be left without voice and protection. Anyone who tries to speak on their behalf will effectively be silenced.

The power of the OIC and its leverage at the UN are being used to further the Islamisation of the world, granting Islam a specially privileged and protected position not accorded to any other religion. While Muslim preachers and media continue freely to defame Christianity and Judaism, the whole weight of the UN and the threat of litigation have imposed strict censorship on those who point to negative aspects of Islam.

¹ "Dakar Declaration", 11th Session Of The Islamic Summit Conference, 13-14 March 2008, <http://www.oic-oci.org/is11/english/DAKAR-DEC-11SUMMIT-E.pdf> (viewed 23 April 2009).

² Bernard Lewis, keynote address to the Conference of the Association for the Study of the Middle East and Africa, Washington DC, 24-26 April 2008

³ "About the OIC", Permanent Mission of the Organization of the Islamic Conference to the United Nations Offices in Geneva and Vienna, http://www.oic-un.org/about_oic.asp (viewed 23 April 2009); see also "Charter of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference", new version ratified Dakar in March 2008, <http://www.oic-oci.org/is11/english/Charter-en.pdf> (viewed 23 April 2009).

⁴ "Ten-Year Programme Of Action To Meet The Challenges Facing The Muslim Ummah In The 21st Century", Third Extraordinary Session Of The Islamic Summit Conference, Makkah, 7-8 December 2005, <http://www.oic-oci.org/ex-summit/english/10-years-plan.htm> (viewed 23 April 2009).

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BARNABAS FUND HOPE AND AID FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

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A displaced family from Swat, who had to flee their home during a lull in fighting between the Taliban and the Pakistani military

“Save Christianity in Pakistan”

Taliban violence against Pakistani Christians in April 2009 has claimed the life of an 11-year-old boy, who died after receiving gunshot wounds to the head.

The violence started when the Christian community in Taiser Town, near Karachi, awoke to Taliban graffiti defacing their homes and churches, with such slogans as “Long Live Taliban” and “Be prepared to pay jizya [tax for non-Muslims] or embrace Islam”. The residents cleaned off the graffiti and staged a peaceful demonstration in the hope of attracting local government attention to their need for protection, but during the demonstration, the Taliban attacked. Homes, shops and Bibles were set on fire, several women were sexually assaulted and dozens of people were beaten with clubs, whips and iron rods. Three people were seriously injured and rushed to hospital, fighting for their lives. Five days after the violence, 11-year-old Irfan Masih succumbed to his injuries, leaving his family devastated.

Taliban control is threatening the stability of Pakistan as they seek to establish

sharia law across the country. Pakistani Christians are fearful that, following the Taliban invasion of Swat, their communities could be next. In the Swat Valley, many of the Pakistani Christian families have fled to nearby districts to escape the deadly violence between the military and the Taliban. Aid groups estimate that as many as 1.3 million people could be displaced by the fighting. Pakistani Christians, who are often poor day labourers, are particularly vulnerable in the mass exodus as prices of transport and products rise sharply. Some families have had to flee the valley on foot as they have no money for transport or to stock up on resources before escaping the war-ravaged area.

Islamic *sharia* law has an inbuilt bias against non-Muslims and the threat of the Taliban has been lurking in the background in Pakistan for some time. The Taliban have increasingly put pressure on Christians and other religious minorities in Swat to live according to Islamic customs. Many Christians, fearing for their safety, have tried to blend in with Muslim residents in Swat by growing beards and wearing Islamic attire. The Rt

Rev. Mano Rumalshah, Bishop of Peshawar, shared with Barnabas Fund how deeply distressed he was to see the desecration of a church in Bannu in mid-May 2009. He could not understand why the international Christian community was not coming to the aid of Christians in the North West Frontier Province at their time of need. “Save Christianity in Pakistan or it will be eradicated,” he said. There is widespread concern that Christians could end up having either to accept Islam or to face death.

Barnabas Fund is seeking to provide aid for displaced Christians in Pakistan. ([Project reference](#) 41-814).



A grieving Pakistani Christian from Swat Valley being comforted by friends

Kenya: Armed Sect Threatens Christians

In Central Province, Kenya, Christians are being threatened by the Mungiki sect, a politico-religious group that originated in the late 1980s and favours a return to African traditions and practices such as female genital mutilation. Mungiki began as a group that gave many disaffected, unemployed youth a sense of purpose and identity, but today, it has become a merciless gang, blamed for criminal activities such as extortion and gruesome murder. Those associated with Mungiki reject Westernisation and all things related to colonialism, including Christianity. Mungiki describe the Christian Church as slaves of Western values and are intimidating residents to turn away from Christianity, openly challenging the clergy to cease evangelism amongst the local community. They are forcibly recruiting children to their ranks.

Recently, a Mungiki leader armed with a machete raided a local church in Murang'a District as the Christians were praying; he marched up to the pulpit and commanded the Christians not to compete with him in recruiting followers. His actions were seen as a warning to the Christian community to reject the Gospel of Jesus Christ and turn to traditional shrines.



A group of armed members of the Mungiki sect sniffing tobacco, which is one of the traditional African practices that they promote.

Egypt: A Child's Prayer for his Mother

"Oh Daddy Jesus, bring Mum back and heal her. Bring Dad and heal him ... Daddy Jesus, may you forgive the bad guys who are striking Mum and Dad ... make them your children so that they will not strike Mum and Dad again."

These are the words of Emmanuel Samuel, aged 4, when asked if he would like to pray for his mother, Martha Samuel. Emmanuel and his younger brother Carlos (aged 2) witnessed their mother, an Egyptian Christian from a Muslim background, being stripped and kicked at Cairo airport in December 2008 as the family were leaving Egypt to settle in Russia in the hopes of escaping the persecution they were enduring from the police and Martha's Muslim relatives. During their detention at the airport, the children were reportedly deprived of food to increase the pressure on their mother to return to Islam.

Emmanuel says that Martha had always taught them, "When somebody struck us or insult us to tell him, may baba [daddy] Jesus forgives you." Emmanuel's prayer to the persecutors

continues: "Daddy Jesus set them free so we can go to the church [it was close to Christmas], do the manger ... and attend the feast and take our gifts ... and to see Santa and the baby in the manger. Daddy Jesus make Carlos sleep well and drink his milk today. Daddy Jesus heal my cough my cold and heal Carlos also ... Amen". Following her detention at the airport, Martha was arrested, charged and imprisoned for a month. She was released on bail but not before the judge hearing her case told her if he had a knife he would kill her for leaving Islam.



Carlos and Emmanuel Samuel, who witnessed their mother Martha being stripped and beaten in an attempt to force her to convert back to Islam

China: Christian Missionaries Arrested for "Illegal Assembly"

Two Chinese Christian missionaries have been detained following a raid by officers in Luoshan County. According to a local official, Ms Ren and Ms Xiong were arrested at Luoshan house church for holding "an illegal church meeting without government approval". House churches are not registered with the authorities, preferring to operate independently. Luoshan house church is the home of Ms Ren. Ms Xiong, who became a missionary after retirement and preaches in her local church every Sunday, was visiting Ms Ren at the time of the raid.

Officers also seized Christian materials including books, CD-ROMs and booklets and a banner with a cross and the church's name on it. At the time of writing, it was not known whether the two Christian missionaries had been released.

Religious Freedom Panel: Countries Added to Concern List

On May 1, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom released its 2009 report, which sends a set of recommendations to the American President, Secretary of State and Congress regarding countries of particular concern for violations of religious freedom. This year, the panel has added Iraq and Nigeria to its list of countries that are designated as having “systemic” or “ongoing” violations of religious freedom.

Iraq is now on the list as religious minorities are increasingly falling victim to killings, rapes and abductions, leading to large numbers of Christians fleeing their country. According to Nina Shea, one of the nine commissioners on the panel, Christian leaders and directors of churches are also being targeted as “... a terrorist tactic to show that even the most prominent Christian with the best protection is vulnerable”.

Nigeria has been added to the list following violence in Jos in November 2008, in which thousands of Christians were killed and churches destroyed. The US Commission says “the government has allowed these killings ... to occur with impunity, which is ample ground for designation as a country of particular concern.” The Commission also has a second-tier “watch list”, to which Laos, Russia, Somalia, Tajikistan, Turkey and Venezuela have been added this year.



Officers remove Luoshan house church’s sign, following a raid on the church. Two Chinese Christian missionaries were also arrested during the raid

A journey from pain and hatred to love and acceptance in Sudan

A tribal clash in January 2009 between the Shilluk and the Dinka at a peace rally in Malakal left at least 10 people dead.

A few days after the confrontation, a team of Christian teacher trainers funded by Barnabas travelled to Malakal to carry out some training of Christian school teachers. At the beginning a Dinka man called Deer Biar told the group that his brother had been speared and killed by a member of the opposing Shilluk tribe in the recent violence. The funeral was being held at the same time as the training, and although Deer ought to have been with his family at the funeral, he felt that God wanted him to attend the training.

During a session on spiritual development the group, which was made up of men and women from different tribes, was told about Jesus Christ’s death on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins. On hearing of this, William, a Shilluk, broke down in tears and received Jesus as Lord of his life.

On the last day the students were given the chance to share with the group what they had learned. William stood up and confessed that before the training started, his heart was filled with hatred for the Dinka people and he did not want even to speak to them, let alone be in the same room as them. But, filled with love for the Lord Jesus, William said he was very sorry about the death of Deer’s brother and asked for forgiveness for what his tribe had done during the recent fighting.

Following this testimony, Deer came forward and embraced William and they cried together. Most of the 50 people in the room also began to weep and cried out to God for reconciliation between the Shilluk and Dinka. After a short time of prayer, people were filled with joy and gratitude towards the Lord Jesus for the miracles He had performed among them.

A young man named Peter Dhuei also came forward to share a dream that he had recently had, in which he saw a lot of blood pouring in the streets of Malakal, and heard a voice saying “Peter! Peter! Who is going to stop this blood?” Peter told the group that the teachings about forgiveness and William’s testimony had given him confidence and assurance that God was calling him to bring about reconciliation between the Dinka and Shilluk tribes by talking to the chiefs and local people, and he assured the group that he would carry out this mission.

The leader of the teacher training team says “Jesus is the antidote to the pain and hatred in this world of ours – so never grow weary of teaching and preaching in His Name.”

■ **Project reference** 48-494 (Teacher training in Sudan)



A Burundian pastor standing in front of his straw-roofed house. Barnabas helped him to re-roof it with iron sheets

From straw thatch to iron roof in Burundi



Samuel's house after the provision of the iron sheets

Through our generous supporters, Barnabas Fund is able to provide materials for home building, such as iron sheets, nails, fuel, and payment for labour to support pastors returning to Burundi who fled to refugee camps in Tanzania following genocidal violence in 1993. This is the story of Samuel, one of the beneficiaries of this project, who serves the Lord as a teacher of the principles of the Christian faith, helping to prepare believers for membership in a Christian church.

“When I returned to my home province of Karusi in Burundi, with my wife and four children, I did not know where I was

going to live or how I was going to get a shelter for my family.

“One day, Muslims came to try and convince me that if I joined Islam, I would not lack anything as all my essential needs would be provided. But I did not doubt that the God who took care of us in Tanzania would not fail to take care of us in our home village in Burundi. So I refused to become a Muslim.

“With the help of family and church members, I was able to put up a basic home structure with a straw roof. It was hard for us to sleep at night especially when it rained because of rain drops that could find us in the house. We were also frightened because the risk of fire was high.”

Today, Samuel's home life is very different. He is a grateful recipient of a more robust shelter, through a project funded by Barnabas, which provided iron sheets and other materials to construct a much sturdier and safer roof. Samuel said that receiving this help was like being touched by God's hand; “God moved through those who donated and provided for my family and for many others who were like me. Through this action, my faith has grown and I have learnt that we Christians are united by God's love.”

■ **Project reference** 67-720
(Houses for returning pastors in Burundi)

Eritrea

When Eritrea won its independence from Ethiopia in 1993, it was widely hoped that the nation would become an example of good governance for the whole of Africa. Sadly it has not only failed to do so, but is now regarded as one of the worst persecutors of Christians in the whole world. How has this decline happened, and what is the condition of Eritrea's churches today?

Independence and a new constitution

Eritrea is located in the Horn of Africa, the easternmost projection of the continent. Its area is roughly that of England and Wales, comprising a dry, temperate plateau and a hot, desert lowland along the Red Sea coastline.

After 60 years of colonial rule by Italy and then Britain, in 1951 Eritrea became part of a federation with Ethiopia. Ten years later several Marxist liberation movements began a war for Eritrean independence, which took more than 30 years to reach the desired outcome. But although the economy was devastated in the conflict, Eritrea began its new life amid much optimism, as the former insurgents set aside their ideologies in the interests of building the nation.

A new constitution was ratified by the National Assembly in 1997. It provided for freedom of religion, conscience, movement, assembly, organisation and

expression of opinion, and guaranteed a fair legal system. Eritrea also acceded to various international human rights conventions, all of which stipulate freedom of religion. The country was established as a democracy, and elections were promised.

But the new constitution was never implemented, and the elections never happened.

Deterioration and injustice

Attempts to reconstruct Eritrea's infrastructure were frustrated by further war with Ethiopia over the countries' border, which has never been agreed. Conflicts in neighbouring Sudan and Somalia exacerbated the instability in the whole region. The Eritrean



Eritrea has a long-running border dispute with Ethiopia, and is also near to the unstable nations of Sudan and Somalia



Instability in the Horn of Africa has hampered the rebuilding of Eritrea after its long war of independence



Some imprisoned Christians are held in metal containers such as these, which can become baking hot or freezing cold

government has proved to be very suspicious of dissent, perceiving it as a threat to national unity and the work of internal enemies who wish to destabilise the nation. As a result most of the rights guaranteed by the constitution have been tacitly set aside.

So at present Eritrea is one of the most repressive countries in Africa in respect of human rights, and is high on the list of offenders worldwide. Press freedom was suspended in 2001 when the government closed down the independent media and arrested many journalists. At the same time eleven former members of the ruling party who had called for greater democracy in Eritrea were imprisoned, along with many government employees who had supported them. Compulsory national service, which used to last only 18 months, has now been made indefinite, and every year thousands of Eritreans flee the country to escape it.

Eritrea has become notorious for its appalling legal and detention systems. Prisoners may be kept in custody for years without charge or trial and are unable to communicate with the outside world, not even with their families. Some are held in harsh conditions, such as metal shipping containers or underground prisons; scores of people may be incarcerated together, and temperatures can fluctuate massively. Prisoners may lose their eyesight in the prolonged darkness. Reports of torture and beatings are common, and some people die in custody.

Yet the authorities have reacted dismissively to criticisms of their policies

by the media, human rights organisations and other countries. They have either denied the charges outright or refused to respond to what they regard as interference in Eritrea's internal affairs.

Hostility to religious groups

Reliable statistics for the different religious groups in Eritrea are not available. However, it is estimated that about 50% of the population of 3.6 million is Sunni Muslim and around 45% is Christian. The great majority of the Christians belong to the Eritrean Orthodox Church, and there is also a sizeable Roman Catholic community and a smaller Lutheran Church. Other Protestant groups are very small.

Eritrean citizens are generally tolerant towards one another's religious adherence and practice. Islam predominates in the lowlands and Christianity in the highlands, but mosques and church buildings co-exist throughout the country. In the capital, Asmara, Christian and Muslim holidays are respected by all religious groups, and some are celebrated jointly. There is however some prejudice against the smaller denominations.

But despite these mainly friendly relations among its people, Eritrea has the second worst record in Africa for abuse of religious liberty, and in 2006 the US government redesignated it as a Country of Particular Concern under the International Religious Freedom Act. The authorities fear that people who give their highest allegiance to God may at some point refuse to obey the commands

of the state. The Marxist origins of the ruling party may also contribute to its hostility towards religious groups, especially those perceived to have links with the West.

Restrictions on the churches

The government officially recognises only four religious groups: the Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Lutheran Churches, and Sunni Islam. In 2002 it declared that other religious groups must register and be approved by the authorities before they would be allowed to hold services or engage in other activities. Information required for registration includes the history of the group, an explanation of the unique benefit that it offered, its leaders' names and personal information, and its assets, property and sources of funding.

In practice registration has proved to be impossible, as the government has not approved any applications. A number of groups, Christian and non-Christian, have fully complied with the requirements, but they have been waiting many years for a response.

Following the decree requiring registration, buildings belonging to non-registered groups were forced to close. Some local authorities allow these groups to worship in homes or rented spaces, but sometimes these gatherings are disrupted and their hosts arrested; in other places no meetings are allowed at all, or are limited to small groups of five people or fewer.

Even the recognised churches are subject to extensive control. They too must provide details of their personnel, property and financial sources. The personnel lists are used to enrol the churches' leaders in national service, and only a proportion are exempted from this for a limited time. The government sometimes seizes church property, and it controls donations made to the Orthodox Church. Any church that wants a building other than a private home for worship must obtain government approval for it.



Buildings belonging to non-registered groups such as the Presbyterian Church were forced to close after the government denied them legal status

Persecution of the churches

The denial of legal status to the smaller denominations heralded the beginning of severe and increasing persecution. The Eritrean government is deeply suspicious of the links that some of these churches have with international Christian bodies, and in consequence regards them all as potentially subversive. Even the church leaders, who are Eritrean nationals and founded most of the churches without foreign assistance, are accused of being non-indigenous.



A small group of Eritrean Christians meeting for prayer in the open air

The Eritrean authorities monitor closely the activities of unregistered churches and regularly harass, arrest and detain their members. Government forces have raided weddings, funerals and social gatherings to apprehend those in attendance. Entire households have been arrested while engaged in private devotions in their own homes. Lists of names submitted for registration purposes have been used to trace and detain individuals, and neighbours are encouraged to spy on one another and report church-related gatherings.

In an example of this repression, in late November 2008 a campaign of mass arrests was initiated. More than a hundred men, women and children from a variety of Christian denominations were detained. It is reported that they were transferred to a military facility, where many were severely mistreated. Local sources indicate that some may have died after being denied access to medical treatment. Among the detainees were Dr Michael Mehari, a senior paediatrician in Asmara, and several Christian teachers from a church school in Dekemhare.

Although some detainees are released quickly, others spend long periods in confinement without charge, and are denied access to lawyers or to their families. They may be subject to the worst rigours of the Eritrean prison system, and some never emerge from it. Many individual stories are harrowing.

“Samuel”, aged 24, was arrested with 19 others in 2005 when he attended a friend’s wedding. For the next twelve months he was imprisoned and forced to do back-breaking manual labour, and he was also regularly beaten. On one occasion he was suspended by his arms from a tree, as though crucified, for three days. The authorities constantly pressured him to abandon his Christian faith, and some of his friends eventually did so, but Samuel refused.

Government restrictions make calculating the number of Christian prisoners at any one time difficult, and some releases go unreported. But it is estimated that the number of Christians in detention has risen from around 300 in 2003 to more than 2,000 in 2007; non-governmental sources place the figure in 2008 as high as 3,225. This includes many church leaders.

Many Christian detainees are required to sign statements as a precondition of their release. These may include a pledge to renounce or not to practise their faith, or to “return to the faith of their fathers”, which means becoming members of the Orthodox Church. Those who sign the document are closely monitored to ensure that they follow through on their pledge.

Mogos Solom Semere was 25 and about to get married when he was arrested and put in prison for the “crime” of evangelism. He was told that he would be released if only he denied Christ. He refused. After several years in prison he caught pneumonia. Again he was given a choice: deny Christ and you will get medical treatment. Again, he refused. Weakened from severe torture, his body succumbed to the pneumonia, and Mogos died in prison in February 2007.

Persecution is particularly severe in the armed forces. Reports indicate that prayer meetings are now forbidden, and anyone found in possession of a Bible is liable to severe punishment. No one is allowed exemption from military service on grounds of religious conviction. Given the extent of conscription, this kind of repression affects large numbers of people.

But it is not only the unregistered churches that suffer at the government’s hands. In 2005 a lay administrator was appointed to oversee and manage the operations of the Eritrean Orthodox Church, in contravention of its constitution. Shortly afterwards this political appointee engineered the ousting of the church’s Patriarch, Abune Antonios, who was placed under house arrest. Leaders who are supportive of Antonios have been imprisoned or removed from their churches. The government has installed a new Patriarch to bring the Church more fully under the control of the regime.

Pray for Eritrea’s Christians

Please pray for the persecuted Christians of Eritrea, as they seek to be faithful to the Lord under great pressure, inhibition and oppression. Pray for those who are imprisoned, beaten and tortured for their faith, and for those bereaved of their loved ones or living in uncertainty without any news of them. Pray that international pressure will persuade the government of Eritrea to implement the country’s constitution and grant full religious freedom to all its citizens.

Suffering Church Sunday 2009 Why should they be secret?

“You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.”

1 Thessalonians 1:6 (TNIV)

This year, our Suffering Church Sunday will focus on converts from Islam to Christianity, and the current Barnabas campaign on their behalf. Conversion from Islam is forbidden by sharia law on pain of death. It is normal for converts to face persecution and violence, and in Muslim contexts they may suffer various legal penalties.

We are encouraging local churches to set aside a Sunday, in November if

possible, to remember the plight of Christian converts from Islam, and also of other Christians who suffer for the Name of Christ. The next edition of *Barnabas Aid* will provide information, resources and suggestions to help you reflect and respond, in Sunday worship or in small groups.

Please put a date in your church's diary NOW!

A Harvest Gift for the Persecuted Church?

Many of your churches will already be making plans to celebrate harvest. At this special time of year we give thanks to God for His bountiful provision of food for our tables.

But many Christians do not have enough to eat, and for some their need is not a result only of natural disaster, famine or government mismanagement. In many contexts Christians are a despised minority and suffer discrimination in daily life, for example they may find it hard to get work or to get the promotion they should. As a result they can be trapped in desperate poverty, and not have enough money to feed themselves and their families adequately.

Hunger may also be caused by persecution. When shops, fields or fishing boats belonging to Christians are attacked and destroyed, the owners are likely to lose their livelihoods. In some places Christian businesses are boycotted by the majority community. Converts to Christianity may lose the financial support of their families or be dismissed from their jobs. Many church leaders are fined or imprisoned for carrying out their ministry.

On pages 6-8 of this edition of *Barnabas Aid* you can read about two projects that are helping to provide food for some of Zimbabwe's hungry Christians. A special leaflet about these is also enclosed with the magazine, with a tear-off form for donations.

Would you consider giving some or all of your church's harvest offering this year to support our needy brothers and sisters in Zimbabwe? They need our help as they struggle with the hunger and starvation of their desolate land. Please share with them the joy of your harvest celebration.



Barnabas Africa Conference Plans for the Future

A conference convened by Barnabas Fund in Pretoria, South Africa, in March brought together people in Christian ministry across the African continent from the Maghreb to Madagascar. Fifteen organisations or denominations were represented, including African missions such as Sheepfold Ministries and CAPRO, international missions such as AIM, SIM, CMS and TEAM, and churches such as the Church of Nigeria, the Church of Uganda, NCMI and the Baptist Union of South Africa.

First-hand reports from delegates described the situation of the Church in 25 different African countries, with special reference to the challenge of Islam and its advance across the continent. The delegates discussed a strategic response and plans for the immediate future as well as for the longer term.

First Fruits from New Zealand

A supporter in New Zealand has written to tell us that his 18-year-old son has just been appointed to his first job, and that “as a family tradition and Biblical principle” they have always given their first week’s pay as a first-fruits offering. The son has donated the sum of NZ\$398.34 (about £160) to Barnabas Fund. We are grateful for this remarkable and generous gift to help the persecuted Church.

Barnabas Fund UK

The chair of the board of trustees of Barnabas Fund UK, Mike Penny, has retired after eight years of faithful service to the work of Barnabas Fund. We are thankful to the Lord for all that Mike has done to help the persecuted Church. We welcome Robert de Berry as the new chair of the board. Robert has recently retired as minister of St Mark’s Church, Kennington, London.