

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

barnabasaid

Natural disasters: practical help for Christians in distress

Indonesia: churches threatened by militant Islamism

The divine Name: how should we refer to God?

MAY/JUNE 2010



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

Front cover: An Indonesian Christian sits in the wreckage of a church destroyed by an earthquake in 2007

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FROM THE DIRECTOR

What is Truth?

Some years ago a major outbreak of violence in Kaduna State in Nigeria left hundreds of Christians dead. In the aftermath of this incident I went with two senior Christian leaders to visit the then British High Commissioner in Nigeria, to express our concerns about the pro-Muslim and anti-Christian bias of many of the media reports. The High Commissioner admitted to us that the British Government was disturbed by the inaccurate and slanted coverage, but added that they were unable to influence reporting on the ground.

Before and since that time there have been many further eruptions of anti-Christian aggression by Muslims in Nigeria, and sadly the media has continued to paint a distorted picture of it. In January this year there were reports that Christians had massacred the inhabitants of a Muslim village near Jos,

in Plateau State. Then in March, when at least a hundred Christians, and possibly as many as 500, were slaughtered in some nearby villages by Muslims armed with machetes, this was presented as a reprisal for the earlier attack.

In fact what happened in January was that a group of Muslims made a seemingly unprovoked and premeditated attack on a church, and went on to loot and burn Christian homes and shops. Many Christians died, and although others did retaliate, their response was not on the scale reported. Christian leaders in Jos believe that local Muslims deliberately fed false information to the international media to discredit the churches. A video report was circulated on the web that used footage from quite different places to support its untrue claim that Christians were to blame.

It is tragic enough that our Christian brothers and sisters in Nigeria frequently suffer terrible violence at the hands of their Muslim neighbours. It is even more tragic that the media in the West so rarely brings their distress to our attention. And

it is tragic beyond measure that its reporting should so twist the truth as to make Christians seem the aggressors, and thus expose them to unjust and brutal "retaliation".

Nor are Nigerian Christians the only ones affected by media misinformation. A recent report from the Evangelical Fellowship of India reveals that in the state of Karnataka, which has recorded a thousand attacks on Christians in the last 500 days, the regional government has allegedly paid money to sections of the local media so that they understate the extent of the anti-Christian violence.

In John's Gospel, when our Lord stands before Pilate, He says that everyone on the side of truth listens to Him. "What is truth?" replies Pilate mockingly – and goes away (John 18:37–38). It seems that many of those who shape our news are no more interested than Pilate in the answer to his question – and our Christian family suffers grievously as a result.

Dr Patrick Sookhdeo
International Director

These are the pages where we report on the ways in which your gifts have helped to build the Kingdom and transform the lives of Christians in places of pressure and persecution. We have space for only a small selection of the many projects we have been able to support, bringing aid and encouragement to individuals, families, Christian communities and ministries. Thank you for making this possible. Please pray as you read.

Uganda: Making the Vision a Reality



In a Muslim-majority area of north-west Uganda, Christians are very much under pressure from Muslim missionaries and sometimes from Muslim violence. The Muslims look down on the Christians and mock them for many things, including their dilapidated church buildings.

One congregation had the vision to build a large church, and thus provide a visible Christian presence in their town and facilitate their ministry and outreach. Around 70% of this congregation are under the age of 35. The young people started making bricks, and gradually the walls began to rise. But after the brickwork was completed, other materials were needed. Church members gave as they were able, yet still there was a shortfall of funds and the building could not be completed.

A grant of £8,030 (US\$12,010; €8,440) from Barnabas covered the remaining costs, including doors and windows, plastering, painting and constructing the toilets.

■ **Project reference** 00-637
(Church Buildings Fund)



Men, women and young people helped to complete the building work. Barnabas provided various items including doors and windows



The first two apartment blocks, now providing homes for Iraqi Christian refugee families

Iraq: Christian Refugees Move into Their New Apartments

The first two apartment blocks of the “Tadamon” project are now complete, providing basic housing for eight families of Iraqi Christian refugees. They have fled from anti-Christian violence elsewhere in their homeland to find security in parts of the north, but are in desperate need of decent accommodation.

A recent grant of £120,000 (US\$179,000; €132,000) has enabled work to start on the next site, where it is hoped to build a further 22 apartments.

■ [Project reference](#) 20-710



Planning begins for more apartments on another site

Sri Lanka: Enabling Displaced Pastors to Strengthen their Flocks

One year ago, in May 2009, the Sri Lankan government forces defeated the rebel LTTE (Tamil Tigers). But though the fighting came to an end, there was a huge ongoing need in the form of over 300,000 people displaced by war and living in overcrowded camps. Amongst these internally displaced people (IDPs) were Christian pastors, and Barnabas received a request to help them “restart their ministries and care for their flocks in the camps”.

In one huge camp, holding around 200,000 people, there were a significant number of Christians, including about 200 pastors and full-time Christian workers, who had established 40 worshipping communities in the camp. Many of them

had nothing but the clothes they were wearing.

A grant of £1,080 (US\$2,000; €1,190) provided 40 “church packs”. Each pack contained 5 Bibles, 10 hymn books in the Tamil language and 6 ground mats (for people to sit on).

A further grant of £2,120 (US\$4,000; €2,340) covered the basic personal survival needs of 40 pastors for five months.

“We lost our church and ministry due to the war. Living in the IDP camp, I had a great desire to being ministering again. The Bibles and church packs given by you were very helpful and fulfilled a great need to minister to the IDP church in this camp. Now my church is growing in numbers and we conduct our services every week.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for the great service you provided.” – Pastor P.

“At the end of these horrifying months of war, my family and I were moved to a camp for internally displaced people. I was unable to continue my ministry. The church was completely destroyed and we had lost everything. The church pack helped my believers and me to begin Sunday services again inside the IDP camp ... the Bibles and hymn books made this time more meaningful ... the church pack was a great encouragement to me personally to continue my ministry amongst the believers in the camp.” – Pastor L.

■ [Project reference](#) 85-760

Angola: The Persecuted Body of Christ Has a Place to Meet Again

We would like to share with you these photographs we received recently of a congregation celebrating the dedication of a new church building in Angola. But what is so special about this simple building, made of clay bricks, cement, grass, iron poles, wood and corrugated iron sheets?

It represents hope and a future for the Christians, whose old church building had been destroyed in an attack by Muslim extremists in January 2009. Christians in Angola are so poor and needy that this growing congregation could not afford the costs of building another place to gather for worship. Barnabas gave a grant of £6,300 (US\$; €6,700) to rebuild the church as well as

£4,500 (US\$9,600; €5,000) to re-build houses for ten Christian families whose homes had been destroyed in the same incident.

■ **Project reference** 00-345 (Victims of Violence Fund)



An Angolan church celebrates their new building. The previous church building had been destroyed by Muslim extremists



Teachers at this Christian school prepare to distribute blankets to needy Christian families. Barnabas Fund also supports the school itself

Bangladesh: Blankets for Believers

Four grants totalling £14,382 (US\$21,533; €15,838) went to provide 2,470 blankets for Christians in Bangladesh to help them endure the winter cold. Although it is a hot country for much of the year, in some parts the night-time temperatures in the coldest months can fall to freezing point. The average cost per blanket was £5.80 (US\$8.70; €6.40).

■ **Project reference** 04-845 (blankets)

■ **Project reference** 04-807 (school)

Central Asia: Women's Ministry in Dangerous Contexts

"Jamilya" is a Christian from a Muslim background whose husband was shot dead by Islamic extremists in 2004 as he was praying. For 13 years she has been active in ministry amongst women in the villages of the area and among women prisoners.

She has brought many Muslims to know the Lord and has set up a number of home fellowships. But since she lost her husband, Jamilya has struggled to support herself while continuing with her time-consuming ministry.

A grant of £2,111 (US\$3,243; €2,325) is helping to support Jamilya for one year and cover her travel and ministry costs.

■ **Project reference** XX-861 ("Jamilya")

In another Central Asian country, "Leyla" left Islam to follow Christ in 2001. Because of this decision she was dismissed from her job, so she decided to dedicate herself to Christian ministry.

Working amongst her own relatives in one town and also amongst people living in the mountains, she is helping to bring many people to faith in the Lord Jesus.

But the new converts in the mountains have been facing opposition in the last few months. The local elders have been threatening and intimidating them so much that some have been forced to return to Islam. Fifteen, however, are standing firm as Christians and are preparing for baptism.

Barnabas Fund is supporting Leyla at the rate of £100 (US\$160; €110) per month. Her own church covers her travel costs.

■ **Project reference** 00-113 (Convert Fund, supporting "Leyla")

Nigeria: Another Appalling Massacre of Christians in Jos

The world has been horrified by the recent bloodshed in Jos, the capital of Nigeria's Plateau State, as reported by the international media. It appears, however, that deliberate manipulation and deception at a local level have meant that international reporting has been inaccurate, and has created the false impression that Christians were the aggressors and Muslims the victims when the reality is the opposite. So Christians have become double victims, suffering not only violence but also unjust blame.

In the early hours of Sunday morning, 7 March, men from the Muslim Fulani tribe, armed with swords and machetes, arrived at three mainly Christian villages south of Jos. The residents of Zot, Dogo Nahauwa and Rastat were woken by the terrifying sound of gunshots. The shooting was so loud that frightened residents ran out of their houses on to the streets, where the attackers were waiting for them. A horrific massacre followed. Local police say 109 people



The remains of a church in Nigeria following the outbreak of violence in January

were killed, but other sources suggest this figure could be much higher, perhaps up to 500.

An eyewitness described how “attackers were shooting to herd fleeing villagers toward another group of attackers carrying machetes ... The attackers asked people, ‘Who are you?’ in Fulani, a language used mostly by Muslims, and

killed those who did not answer back in Fulani.” By Sunday afternoon the bodies of the dead were lining the dusty streets. Many of the victims were among the most defenceless – elderly people, women and children, including a four-day-old baby. All the churches in Dogo Nahawa had been burned down, and many homes had been torched.

UK: Noise Abatement Notices Amended and Withdrawn

Immanuel House of Worship Church in Walthamstow, east London, UK, which received a noise abatement notice in May 2009, has won an appeal to have the notice amended; however, a council spokesman said, “The noise abatement notice stands, with an extra requirement for the church to install a noise limiter.”

In *Barnabas Aid* January/February 2010 we reported that the church had received the notice following complaints from one Muslim neighbour about the volume of the music and sermons. The church took measures to minimise noise, including playing music for only 20 minutes on a Sunday morning; numbers at the church have fallen from

100 to 30 since the restrictions were enforced.

All Nations Church in Kennington, London, which had also received a noise abatement notice, had it withdrawn by Lambeth Council in January 2010 following the introduction of a number of noise reduction measures.

The next day Christians wailed in the street and sang hymns to Jesus as a truck carried dozens of bodies to a mass grave. Hundreds of Christians have fled their homes, fearing further violence. Significantly, Ben Kwashi, the Anglican Archbishop of Jos, has called the attacks “systematic and quite well organised”, indicating that they were pre-planned. On 11 March it was reported that 49 people are to be charged with murder; most of those facing charges are Fulani Muslims.

Some media sources have reported that this atrocity was in retaliation for an attack by Christians on Muslims in Jos in January, where up to 300 people died. It is clear, however, that this earlier violence was started by Muslims who attacked a church. Christian leaders in Nigeria acknowledge that some Christians retaliated and do not condone their actions, but there is no evidence to suggest that their response was on the size or scale reported in the media. There are conflicting reports about how many of the dead in January were Christians and how many Muslims.

Nigerian church leaders think that Muslims have carried false reports about the conflict to the international media in order to discredit the Church. Confirmation of this view may be found in a video report produced by the Aljazeera news channel in co-operation with Jama’atu Nasril Islam, a powerful Nigerian Muslim organisation. Not only does this video suggest that the January violence was simply a massacre of Muslims by

Christians; it also appears to use footage from other contexts altogether, spliced in to give bogus support to its story.

In a letter to *The Times* newspaper (11 March) Baroness Caroline Cox noted that “In the violent attacks, not only in Plateau state but also in neighbouring Bauchi and other northern states, a consistent pattern has emerged ... the Muslim militants take corpses to mosques, where they are photographed and released to the media, creating the impression that these are Muslim victims.”

In another gruesome incident on 17 March, a group of Muslims armed with machetes killed at least twelve Christians in the nearby village of Bei, some 20 miles from Jos. The dead included three children, four teenage girls and a pregnant woman, whose baby was removed from her womb. The attackers cut out the tongues of their victims.

Barnabas Fund is sending help to those bereaved or made homeless by the violence.



Burnt houses and cars are a stark reminder of the horrific massacre of Christians that took place in Jos in March

Pakistan: Local Staff of Christian Aid Agency Murdered

Six Christians were killed when armed gunmen stormed the offices of World Vision, a Christian aid agency, in the North-West Frontier Province of Pakistan on Wednesday 10 March.

The gunmen set off bombs or grenades before opening fire on the staff. Seven people were wounded, and the six dead included two women. All the staff in the office were Pakistani. As yet no one has claimed responsibility, but various news

agencies suspect that Islamist militants are behind the assault.

World Vision has indefinitely suspended all operations in Pakistan, where their relief and development work is carried out by local citizens. A statement from the organisation said, “World Vision remembers those staff who have died as dedicated people seeking to improve the lives of people affected by poverty and disasters.”

Uzbekistan: Christians Arrested at Private Prayer Meeting

A local church leader and two Christian women were arrested on 24 January as they met together in a private home in Nukus city, Karakalpakstan, to pray for their Christian brothers and sisters.

Midet and two women were gathered at his home when police officers arrived under the pretext of other matters. The police searched the house, despite not having a warrant, and found copies of the Bible and other Christian literature.

The Christians were arrested and taken to the police station, where police officers demanded that they write statements about their church and other Christian activities. All three were beaten, and the women were also threatened with being stripped and tortured by electric shocks. Following these threats one of the women wrote a statement admitting that they had been attending a prayer meeting at Midet’s home. They were all interrogated by the Office of the Public Prosecutor.

Subsequently, one of the women issued a complaint that they had been threatened by the police and that their statements had been given under duress. As a result of this her sister, who is not a Christian, was interrogated by the police, as a way of putting additional pressure on the women.

On 19 February, Midet was given a fine equivalent to 20 months of the national minimum wage, while the two women were fined an amount comparable to five months of the minimum wage. The court also ruled that the Christian literature confiscated during the search should be burned, even though it is not against the law in Uzbekistan to possess a copy of the Bible. Midet will appeal against this decision at the Supreme Court of Karakalpakstan.

Iraq: Mosul Christians Displaced and Murdered

Anti-Christian violence in the northern Iraqi city of Mosul has intensified alarmingly in recent months. In February eight Christians were murdered in the space of ten days.

On Sunday 14 Rayan Salem Elias was killed outside his home by armed assailants, and the next day a Christian greengrocer, Fatukhi Munir, was gunned down in his shop in a drive-by shooting. Then on Tuesday 16 two Christian students, Zia Toma (21) and Ramsin Shmael (22), were on their way to the local university when gunmen opened fire on them. Zia was killed and Ramsin wounded. They had already been displaced from their homes in Baghdad, the Iraqi capital, by the instability there.

On Wednesday 17 Wissam George (20), another student, went missing on his way to the institute where he was studying to be a teacher. His body was found in the street that afternoon, riddled with bullets. On Friday 19 Sabah Yacob Dahan was found murdered, having been abducted from his shop five days earlier. And on

Wednesday 24 Aiechoa Metoka and his two sons, Mukhlos and Basem, were killed in their home by three gunmen. They were the father and brothers of a prominent Christian leader, who was himself kidnapped (and later released) two years ago.

These attacks were only the latest in a long series of incidents that have spread terror among the Christian population of Mosul. They brought to twelve the number of Christians killed in the city since December, and seven bomb attacks on Christian targets have left many injured and property damaged.

Over 300 more families joined the many Christians who had previously taken refuge in the relative safety of the Christian townships in the Nineveh Plain. Some Christians struggled to escape because they are poor and do not have cars, and many taxi drivers were too afraid to provide transport for them.

A senior figure in the Church in Baghdad pleaded for an end to the murder of Christians. "Help us to continue to bear

witness to the Gospel as we have done for centuries," he said. "The Iraqi Christian community must not die. We Christians are innocent victims. We never hurt anybody; we just want to live in peace in our country."



Iraqi Christian Zia Toma was gunned down and killed at a bus stop on his way to his university in Mosul

Iran: Church Leaders Arrested

According to reports from Farsi Christian News Network, three well-respected leaders of churches in Iran were arrested in February, raising fears among the country's Christians of a more systematic and repressive campaign against them.

On 2 February the Rev. Wilson Issavi, the leader of a church in Karmanshah, was



Hamid Shafiee and Reyhaneh Aghajary

arrested while visiting friends. Security forces entered the home where he was staying and took him away, along with the host couple and another visitor. For weeks his family had no information about his whereabouts or state of health, but then his wife was allowed one visit. She says that he is being held in dreadful conditions and bears visible marks of torture. Intelligence officials told her that he "is awaiting his trial and his death sentence". He is accused of converting Muslims to Christianity and baptising them.

One month before Issavi's arrest, the church in Karmanshah had been sealed by a number of plain-clothes security agents, and they ordered the Christians not to re-open it. The church, a historic building and the only one in the west of the country, was used only for weekly Christian worship and was in dire need of repair.

Then on 28 February security officers arrested Hamid Shafiee and his wife, Reyhaneh Aghajary, leaders of a church in Isfahan, at their home. They handcuffed the couple and searched their house, and when Reyhaneh protested against her arrest, the officers insulted and assaulted her and squirted her with pepper spray. They confiscated hundreds of Bibles, along with books, CDs and computers. Reyhaneh is being held among political prisoners, and is reported to have begun a hunger strike in protest at her treatment by prison officers. Hamid's location and condition are unknown at the time of writing.

Hamid and Reyhaneh are converts from Islam to Christianity. For the last ten years they have been active in sharing the Gospel with the people of Isfahan. Despite coming under pressure, they have refused to deny their faith.

Apostasy Law Petition Closes

We are very grateful to all those who have signed our petition for the abolition of the Islamic law of apostasy. The petition was officially closed on Easter Day, 4 April 2010. We are delighted to report that at the time of writing **69,215** people have signed. We will let you know the final total in the next edition of *Barnabas Aid* as well as information about the presentation of the petition.

If you still have petition sheets with signatures, please send them to your national Barnabas Fund office as soon as possible (addresses on back cover). So long as they arrive before the petition is presented, they can be included.

Asylum Decisions Confirms Danger Faced by Converts from Islam

In an earlier *Campaign Update* we reported on the difficulties faced by many Christian converts from Islam who apply for asylum in Western countries. Because the officials dealing with these cases are unaware of the Islamic apostasy law, they do not realise the dangers that beset the converts in their country of origin, and so send some of them back to face the possibility of persecution and even death.

However, November 2009 saw an encouraging development in this area when an Afghan man who converted from Islam to Christianity while living temporarily in the UK was granted asylum. His lawyers had argued that as an apostate he would face persecution if he were deported back to Afghanistan, and that he might even be executed under sharia law. His conversion had already led to hostility from some Muslims in London who spat at him in the street, and he was threatened with death by two other Afghans with whom he shared a house.

A senior judge from the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Tribunal rejected the argument of Home Office lawyers that the man would be able to practise his faith in Afghanistan if he found some like-minded Christians and “kept his head down”. He said, “The plain fact is that a genuine apostate simply would not be able to openly express his change of faith without running a real risk of persecution. He would have to live a lie and would be constantly looking over his shoulder to avoid discovery in fear of the consequences.”

Granting the man’s request for asylum, the judge added, “We do not think it is reasonable to expect the appellant to pretend that he is something that he is not. The evidence demonstrates that his conversion will not be tolerated. He faces a real risk of detention and, at worst, trial before a Sharia Court and harsh punishment.”

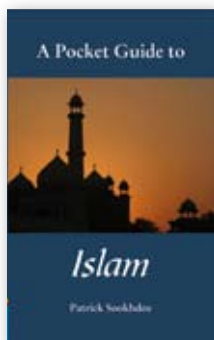
We give thanks for this evidence of increased awareness among those in authority of the perils that threaten Christian (and other) converts from Islam. Please join us in praying that it may presage a wider change of attitude towards the Islamic apostasy law and increase the pressure for its abolition.

The Next Step

For now, though, the Islamic apostasy law is still in force, and much remains to be done in convincing Muslim leaders of the case for its repeal. However, we are encouraged that during the course of the campaign there seems to have developed a better and more widespread understanding of the existence of the Islamic law of apostasy and its effects on the treatment of converts from Islam. This in itself is a very helpful achievement. Many thanks to all of you who have written letters to people of influence about this subject and have supported the campaign in prayer. We believe and pray that our petition will strengthen the voices calling for change, both within governments and in the Muslim community.

By the time you read this magazine a General Election campaign may well be under way in the UK. In order that the petition should not be overlooked but may have the maximum possible impact on the UK government, we have decided to present it only after the outcome of the election is known. Please pray for us as we make plans to do this, and also to hand over the petition to governments in other countries.

In this edition we feature a revised and updated version of Dr Patrick Sookhdeo's popular book *A Pocket Guide to Islam*, and two other titles on related themes.



***A Pocket Guide to Islam* Patrick Sookhdeo**

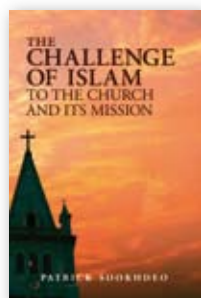
Islam has often been in the news in recent years, and many things have been said about it, both positive and negative. But some of these statements betray a very limited or flawed awareness of what Muslims really believe and how they behave.

Christians too may misunderstand their Muslim neighbours or colleagues. While it is true that Islam and Christianity *seem* to have some teachings in common, in fact there is a huge difference between them. This extends not only to beliefs about salvation and Christ, but also to many attitudes and aspects of daily life.

This book has been written to outline the central elements of Islam, so as to help non-Muslims understand their Muslim friends better. Topics covered include the origins of Islam, Islamic beliefs and practices, the Qur'an, key religious observances, the place of women in Islam, and the differences to be found among Muslims. The story of Islam is also traced, from its beginnings in the 7th century to the present.

Non-Muslims who read this book will gain a greater understanding of why Muslims think and act as they do. They will also be able to avoid some of the stumbling-blocks and difficulties involved in relating to Muslims and communicating with them.

Christian Focus and Isaac Publishing, paperback, 144 pages, £1.99 + £1.50 postage



***The Challenge of Islam to the Church and Its Mission* Patrick Sookhdeo**

The increasing impact of Islam on Western societies raises many questions and poses many challenges for the Church and its mission. This book is written for Christians as they seek to think through those issues and respond to those challenges in a wise, loving, Biblical, effective and Christ-like way.

The author explains the nature of Islam and how it differs from Christianity, and then looks at a number of questions raised by its presence in the West, including education, the treatment of women, the spread of sharia (Islamic law) and the treatment of converts. He also discusses the various aspects of Christian-Muslim relations, including worship, "dialogue" and evangelism. An appendix provides a response to a recent Christian statement on Muslim-Christian relations. Dr Sookhdeo encourages Christians to extend compassionate concern to Muslims while always remaining faithful to Christ.

Isaac Publishing, paperback, 200 pp, offer price £7.99 + £2.00 postage (RRP £9.99)



***Stepping Into the Shadows: Why women convert to Islam* Rosemary Sookhdeo**

Why is it that every year thousands of women, including Christians, are converting to Islam? What is the attraction of Islam to them, and what can we do about it?

This book goes behind the scenes into the lives of several women who married Muslims or converted to Islam by conviction, and reveals what happened to them. It uncovers and analyses the problems and challenges that such women encounter, and addresses the long-term implications of the decisions that they make.

The book will be invaluable to parents, pastors and church leaders, and will warn and challenge anyone about to marry a Muslim or convert to Islam.

Isaac Publishing, paperback, 121 pp, offer price £5.00 + £2.00 postage (RRP £7.99)

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".

God or Allah: which term to use?

Introduction

Many Christians in the West are concerned about the right and appropriate use of the words “God” and *Allah* in various contexts and with various meanings. At the same time, in Malaysia the authorities are attempting to prevent Christians from using the term *Allah* in their publications and worship, despite that fact that this is the word for “God” in the Malaysian national language.

To confuse matters still further, some Muslims in the West are trying to prevent Muslims from using the English term “God” instead of *Allah* in their sermons and writings, while others are recommending that they replace *Allah* with the English “God” when speaking or writing in English, presumably to improve receptivity for the message of Islam amongst English-speaking peoples.^[1]

The origins of the term *Allah*

The Arabic word for a god, *ilah*, is derived from a Semitic root and is similar to the Biblical Hebrew words *el*, *eloha* and *elohim*. In Aramaic (Syriac) the equivalent word is *alaha*. Even some early Muslim scholars held that the word was of Hebrew or Aramaic origin.^[2] The Arabic term for God, *Allah*, is derived from *al-ilah* and means “the god”.^[3] Pre-Islamic Christian Arab poets used *al-ilah* as a term for God.^[4]

The Arabic term *Allah*, used for the one God, pre-dates Muhammad, and Arabic-speaking Christians have always used this word to denote the God of the Bible. They have used it in Arabic Scriptures, hymns, poems, writings and worship, long before the religion of Islam was founded. The first extant mention of *Allah* in Christian Arabic is in a tri-lingual Greek, Syriac and Arabic inscription in Zabad (near Aleppo, Syria), dated 512.^[5]

For pagan Arabs, *Allah* referred to a pagan creator high-god who stood above the multitude of lesser gods worshipped in North Arabia and specifically in Mecca in pre-Islamic times. He was called simply “the god”, *al-ilah*,

a term that later developed into *Allah*. Allah was the creator and supreme provider, and alone of all the gods in Mecca he was not represented by an idol. However, the pagans focused their devotion and cult on the host of lesser deities that served as intermediaries between humans and the high god and that interceded with him on their behalf.^[6] Allah was relegated to the background.^[7]

Muhammad used the existing Arabic term *Allah* in his proclamation of the one God of Islam, most likely based on concepts borrowed from Judaism, Christianity and paganism. Muslim theologians later came to regard the term *Allah* as the personal name of the one God.

Christian arguments against the use of *Allah* for God

Most Christians hold that Christians and Muslims do not believe in the same God. They argue that since the understandings of God in the two religions are so different, they cannot be worshipping the same God.

Pull-out supplement

Others go further and claim that the god of the Muslims, Allah, is a pagan deity (usually identified with the moon god) who is still being worshipped in Islam. Still others claim that the term *Allah* is not simply the Arabic word for God, but the Muslim deity's personal name; they claim that it is equivalent to "Jehovah" (or "Yahweh") for the God of the Bible. Therefore, they argue, Christians must not use it in any context or language, as it does not generically signify God, but only the false, pagan god of the Muslims.^[9] Finally, some go further and assert that the Allah of Islam "is not God, but a demonic misleading spirit" that holds the whole Muslim world in bondage.^[9]

In one sense, the use of the name *Allah* in Arabic should trouble Muslims more than Arabic-speaking Christians. For Christians it has always referred to the one God of the Bible. For Muslims it has precedents in both pagan idolatry and the Christian Arabic term for the one God, both of which are very different from the Islamic concept of Allah.

The debate (mainly outside the Arabic-speaking world) about whether Arab Christians should use the word *Allah* for God seems strange to some. The English word "God" is derived from a Germanic word used by pagan Germanic tribes for their gods in pre-Christian times. When these tribes accepted Christianity, the term they knew and used was applied to the one true God of Christianity. The capital "G" is used to signify "the God" so as to distinguish Him from all other, false gods. Something similar is true of the Greek word for God used in the original Greek manuscripts of the New Testament and the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Old Testament (*ho theos*).

It would thus seem unnecessary to prevent Arab Christians from using the same methodology in Arabic that their critics employ in their own language. This is true even if we accept that for Muslims *Allah* is their God's personal name, the name for his essence, not an adjective like other terms used for God. Western Christians do not normally use Hebrew or Greek terms for God in their languages; they use words from their own language. The equivalent for Arab (and some other) Christians is to use *Allah* rather than a term that is foreign to their language and culture.

The *Allah* controversy in Malaysia

According to the constitution, Bahasa Malaysia (the language of the ethnic Malays) is the official language of the state of Malaysia. It was decreed to be the single official language of Malaysia through the National Language Act, originally passed in 1963, amended in 1967 and reviewed in 1987. It was viewed as a unifying national symbol, and its acceptance by the non-Malay ethnic groups in preference to their own indigenous languages or to English was seen

as a test of their loyalty to the state. It has also become a tool for maintaining and strengthening the dominance of the (Muslim) Malay ethnic group in the state, who are almost all Muslim^[10]. Indeed, part of the official Malaysian definition of a Malay is that he or she is a Muslim. As the pressure for an Islamic state has intensified, the use of the Malay language by the non-Malays was also seen as part of their submission to the political rule of Islam.

The Malaysian federal government as well as some state governments have, since the 1980s, banned non-Muslims from using certain Arabic Islamic terms, which have been reserved for Muslim use only. The argument is that these are exclusively Islamic terms and that their use by non-Muslims would confuse Muslims, tempt them to become Christians, and threaten harmony, security and public order.^[11] Originally 16 terms were banned, and then the government agreed to let Christian publications use twelve of these words on condition that the books or pamphlets had the word "Christian" printed on their front covers. The remaining banned terms include the term *Allah* for God, which must not be used in Christian publications, including Bibles.

Proponents of this view claim that the use of *Allah* by Christians in Bahasa Malaysia and other indigenous languages is part of an effort to convert Malay Muslims to Christianity. The ban is also seen by some as part of the ruling party's (UMNO) efforts at further Islamising Malaysia as it seeks to restore its weakening support among Muslim voters.^[12]

Christians in a variety of majority-Muslim countries have for centuries used the word Allah for the God of the Bible

The ban completely ignores the fact that Christians in a variety of majority-Muslim countries, including in the Arab world and Indonesia, have for centuries used the word *Allah* for the God of the Bible. Prominent Muslims in various countries have ridiculed the ban, some pointing to the following Qur'anic verse as a clear Islamic basis for the Christian use of the term:

And dispute ye not with the People of the Book except with means better (than mere disputation) unless it be with those of them who inflict wrong (and injury): but say "We believe in the Revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you; Our Allah and your Allah is one; and it is to Him we bow (in Islam)." (Q 29:46)

Even the Islamist "Islamic Party of Malaysia" (PAS) stated that there is no reason to bar Christians and Jews from using the word *Allah*.^[13]

Some Malaysian Christians have also argued that Christians should not use the term *Allah*, even though it is the most accurate term, because it identifies the Christian God too closely with the Muslim one. However, others have asserted that they have always used *Allah* for God in their various languages (many Christians are indigenous tribal people of Sabah and Sarawak with their own languages, such as Iban). They also point out that *Allah* as the term for deity predated Islam among the pagans and Christians of the Arabian Peninsula.^[14]

Government officials have repeatedly defended the ban, which has existed for two decades. It was never fully enforced until recently, although thousands of Bibles, books and CDs in Malay and other indigenous languages were confiscated by the authorities. But in December 2007 Che Din Yusoff, a senior official at the Internal Security Ministry's publications control unit, ordered the Catholic weekly *The Herald* to drop the use of the word *Allah* in its Malay-language section as a condition of having its publishing permit renewed. The official claimed that the term Allah referred only to the Muslim God. He claimed that:

Christians cannot use the word Allah. It is only applicable to Muslims. Allah is only for the Muslim god. This is a design to confuse the Muslim people.^[15]

The Herald filed a lawsuit against the government, claiming that the ban was unconstitutional and violated freedom of religion. On 31 December 2009 the Malaysia High Court overturned the ban on the use of *Allah* in the Malay language, ruling that the Catholic Church had a constitutional right to publish the word *Allah* in the Malay-language edition of its weekly newspaper. In the wake of the court decision there were arson attacks on nine Christian churches, a convent and a Sikh temple (*Allah* is used in the Sikh scriptures too). The government has appealed against the court's decision, and the final verdict on this issue has not yet been given. Nor is it clear how far the precedent set would affect other Christian publications and literature.

Malaysia is often seen in the West as a model of a successful and "moderate" Muslim state. The rise of Islamic extremism in the highest levels of its government is very worrying and threatens the future of its non-Muslim communities. There is also a danger that this intolerance will spread to neighbouring Muslim states, especially Indonesia, causing a further deterioration in the status of non-Muslim communities there.

What is at stake?

It is important to realise that there are vital theological truths at stake in these arguments. Christians believe in the one true God who rules over the entire universe, including all human beings, whether those human beings believe in Him

or not. There is only one God, exalted, majestic and sovereign. The God Christians believe in as revealed in the Bible is not a local God; not a mere "Christian God" or "Muslim God"; not God of the Jews only, or of the Christians only, but God of all and over all. As Paul says:

Is God the God of the Jews only? Is he not the God of the Gentiles too? Yes, of the Gentiles too, since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith. (Romans 3:29)

The important question is not whether Muslims and Christians use the same term for God or even whether they believe in the same God or in different gods, but what they each believe about God and His character. Christians understand the nature of God by looking into the face of Christ, who revealed God to humanity. They believe that God's primary attribute is love and call him "Father". They base their concept of God on the whole Bible.

The important question is not whether Muslims and Christians use the same term for God, but what they each believe about God and His character

The Muslim understanding of the character of their God is very different from the God revealed in the Bible. Islam stresses God's unity, greatness, transcendence, otherness and might. God is so "other" that he cannot be adequately described in human language; neither can he enter into the experiences of humanity; so he cannot suffer. In Christianity, God is personal and relational, and in Christ – and supremely in His cross – God has entered into His people's experience of suffering. Islam denies Christ's deity, incarnation and crucifixion, and thus His atoning sacrifice and resurrection. Muslims also deny the Trinity, which they understand in carnal terms as God's having sexual relations with Mary, who then bore Jesus. They state categorically that God can have no son, and they view the Trinity as blasphemy, a pagan belief in three gods. Muslims claim someone else was crucified in Jesus' place. Islam thus denies the very heart of the Christian faith. Jesus said:

I am the way, the truth and the life; no-one comes to the Father except through me". (John 14:6)

As Muslims do not accept Christ as the only way to God the Father, they can have no valid access to the one and only true God they claim to worship.

Conclusion

So the important theological argument over this issue concerns the character and attributes of the deity who is worshipped. For Christians in Muslim-majority contexts, the debate over the terms that are used to refer to God is a more practical one.

Arab Christians have faithfully used the word *Allah* for nearly two millennia, and they object to its being seized by

Muslims for their exclusive use. Other Christians in the Muslim world want to be true to their own language, culture and history and do not wish to be denigrated as second-class citizens or foreigners in their own land by being obliged to use a different term for God. All these Christians desire the freedom to use the words that most accurately express their beliefs. It is this freedom, not the Western theological debate over the meaning of *Allah*, that is of primary concern to our persecuted brothers and sisters.

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When Disaster Strikes

“We are overwhelmed with victims,” were the words of local mayor Fauzi Bahar as he appealed for help following two huge earthquakes near Padang, the capital of West Sumatra province, **Indonesia**. The first, which measured 7.6 on the Richter scale, struck at 5.15pm on Wednesday 30 September 2009. The second came shortly after, as people battled driving rain in the pitch dark to dig survivors out of the rubble. Huge cracks appeared in roads, and buildings buckled and collapsed; at least 1,100 people were killed.

Just four days earlier, on 26 September, Typhoon Ketsana caused catastrophic flooding in the capital of the **Philippines**, Manila, and surrounding areas, leaving 240 people dead and nearly half a million homeless. When the Marikina River burst its banks, streets became raging rivers within minutes. Homes and businesses were inundated with mud and flood waters; people scrambled to take refuge on rooftops as wind and rain lashed around them. One week later Typhoon Parma hit the Philippines; although it spared the already reeling capital city, it struck the northern part of Luzon Island. This was closely followed by a third storm, which caused flooding and landslides in two provinces of the northern Philippines.

In parts of Africa relentless rain caused disruption in September 2009. Flooding in **Sudan** demolished homes and a church in a camp for internally displaced people, mainly Christians from South Sudan, who had fled from the civil war that racked the country for 22 years. In **Niger** the intense rain caused rivers to break their banks and a dam to burst outside the town of Agadez. Destruction was widespread.

In **Haiti** a massive 7.0 magnitude earthquake on 12 January 2010 left up to 200,000 people dead. Haiti is considered one of the poorest countries in the western hemisphere. The earthquake is a historic disaster and served only to compound the problems faced by a nation that is suffering the legacy of decades of international neglect. As people struggled to find food and shelter, looting and lawlessness gripped the country.

Natural disasters are not all of such vast proportions; they do not always lead to large scale destruction, nor do they always gain world-wide media coverage. But for those caught up in smaller-scale disasters, the effects can be just as destructive. In 2009 the Chin Christians of Burma (Myanmar) were facing starvation due to a largely unreported famine. Severe drought was followed by a plague of rats. “My family normally eats rice, but the rats have destroyed everything we had. The only thing left is rats and wild potatoes for our family,” said one Christian. The immense hardship left thousands starving; at least 40 children died.

Christians are a minority, and particularly where they are despised, rejected and persecuted, they may suffer disproportionately when such an event happens.

When our vulnerable Christian brothers and sisters are amongst the victims of a natural catastrophe, they particularly need our help, as they are often sidelined when



A church pastor in Sri Lanka surveys the damage caused by the 2004 tsunami

How Christians suffer

A natural disaster can occur in any country around the world, and when one such event strikes, everyone is affected irrespective of their faith. But where

aid is distributed by non-Christian agencies and the majority community. This can happen in a Hindu, Buddhist or Muslim context. Sometimes this injustice is explicit, and Christians are even required to convert to another faith if they want to receive relief. The social exclusion caused by such religious discrimination and persecution can result in long-lasting economic marginalisation for the Christians caught up in these disasters.

In Padang, Indonesia, Christians live alongside a Muslim majority who harass and discriminate against them. The Chinatown area of Padang, where Christians are allowed to hold worship services, was the worst hit part of the city in the September 2009 earthquake, with some 80% of buildings damaged. Barnabas Fund's partners who distributed relief through twelve churches reported



In Bangladesh, homes were destroyed and families displaced following Cyclone Aila in May 2009

that none of the churches had received any support from Non-Government Organisations or the Indonesian government; they were at the bottom of everybody's priority list and without Barnabas Fund's help they would probably have had nothing.

A further example is that of Burma, which has a number of strongly Christian ethnic groups, including the Chin and Karen people; such groups are severely persecuted. The famine described above followed close on the heels of Cyclone Nargis in 2008, which left thousands dead, over a million homeless and hundreds of children orphaned. The Burmese government was reluctant to accept much international help, and Christians in particular had to wait many months before any government aid reached them.

Yet amidst the suffering and anguish, natural disasters can encourage strong expressions of prayer and faith as God's people turn to Him in times of distress. They may call forth great generosity on

Padang: rebuilding livelihoods

In Padang, Indonesia one local pastor identified a number of Christian families who were in desperate need of relief following the earthquake of September 2009. Before the disaster they earned about £4.80 (US\$8; €5.30) a day, working as brick-makers. They used cattle to tread the clay and then packed

it into moulds and fired them in an oven. But the ovens were destroyed in the quake. Now, just when bricks will be in great demand for rebuilding, they can only work as labourers earning £1.80 (US\$3; €2) a day. They were delighted to receive food aid from Barnabas and we shall soon be helping them to get new ovens.

the part of Christians around the world as they give to help those in need.

Faced by the terrible sufferings following the earthquake in Haiti, the global Christian population recognised that the churches there need support, and that Christians could play a vital role in the relief effort, becoming centres through which help and hope could be distributed in local communities. Reports from Haiti in the months following the disaster tell of great perseverance in the country, with church leaders telling survivors not to lose faith; God is with them regardless of what has happened. "People don't blame Jesus for all these things," said one resident. "They have faith. They believe that Jesus saved them and are thankful for that." When asked what kept him going when trapped underground for 48 hours, one survivor answered that he believes in Jesus Christ and he simply put his life in God's hands. Following the quake Haiti's president called for three days of prayer and fasting. People are asking not only for food but for Bibles as well.

Numerically Indonesia has the world's largest Muslim community; most provinces are predominantly Muslim, including West Sumatra, which has a Christian minority who suffer harassment as well as the effects of increasing Islamisation, not least the growing application of sharia law. But in Padang one congregation has a testimony of God's grace and mercy. While 70 of them were meeting for prayer last September, the pastor's wife had a sense of God's telling her that there would be an earthquake and that they should get out of the building. They did so, and when the quake struck they were safe.

In Burma, a country where Christians suffer the effects of the forces of nature and aggression from their own army, there are touching stories of faith in the Lord Jesus.

A Barnabas Fund partner who regularly visits Christians in Burma to distribute aid reports, "Christians have been through so much and are still clinging to God ... there is no anger or hatred, just thankfulness when they receive food and aid and meet other people who care for them and with whom they can pray."

Relieving the needy in their distress

In light of the suffering of Christians in these circumstances, what should our response be? The Bible reveals something of the character of God in the book of Isaiah, which tells us that the Lord is "a refuge for the poor, a refuge for the needy in his distress, a shelter from the storm and a shade from the heat". (Isaiah 25:4-5)

The New Testament encourages Christians not only to help all in need, but also to take special responsibility for caring for our brothers and sisters in Christ. In Matthew 25:40 Jesus says that whatever we do for one of the least of the members of His family, we do for Him, while in John 13:34 He instructs us to love one another as He has loved us. Paul says explicitly that our Christian family are to be the object of our special concern: "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, **especially to those who belong to the family of believers.**" (Galatians 6:10, emphasis added)

Thanks to the gifts of our supporters, Barnabas Fund is able to ensure that when natural disaster strikes those countries where Christians are persecuted, aid reaches the Christian victims. The assistance provided by Barnabas ensures that our Christian brothers and sisters do not suffer more than the majority population and enables them to survive and rebuild their lives in the aftermath.

In the last three years Barnabas Fund has sent aid to Christians affected by natural disasters (earthquake, tsunami, famine, drought, cyclone and floods), supporting over 40,000 Christian families in 13 countries.

In accordance with our principle of sending aid "from Christians through Christians to Christians" Barnabas Fund always works through local church partners on the ground. In disaster situations, this is often the fastest method of getting aid to those in need. Initially people require food, clean water and medical assistance to enable them to survive. Then they often need temporary shelter, blankets and basic equipment, as well as sanitation and help with clearing up. Long term goals may include rebuilding houses and churches and supporting economic initiatives to restart businesses and enable people to earn an income.

In Padang, Indonesia, Barnabas Fund's project partners arrived within days of the earthquake to bring relief to the minority Christian population. Many families were camping in front of the rubble of their houses to prevent looting. Within ten days of the disaster Barnabas Fund had provided kits containing 50kg rice, 48 packets of instant noodles, cooking oil and instant milk to 1,000 families to cover their needs for one month. Each kit cost £30 (US\$44; €33).



Christian children in Zimbabwe, where government policies have caused economic and social disaster

prepare food parcels, which contained rice, noodles, sardines, coffee and sugar and cost £1 (US\$1.50; €1.10) per family per day. The money was also used to provide drinking water, clothes and medical aid for the flood victims.

Following the flooding in Niger last year, Barnabas Fund sent urgent relief parcels containing maize, rice, lentils, sorghum, flour, milk powder and cooking oil to at least 164 Christian families. We also provided blankets, mosquito nets, plastic sheeting and medicine for the affected families.

In Haiti, after the disastrous January 2010 earthquake, Barnabas Fund channelled donations through a Christian partner organisation to provide relief in the short-term in the form of food, water filtration equipment, shelter and medical supplies. Through another Christian partner Barnabas is also helping to carry out some reconstruction, including income-generation programmes and church buildings, in order to help the evangelical church to be re-established.

After the clean-up has taken place, Barnabas Fund continues to provide long-term care where necessary. Following the 2004 tsunami, we not only provided immediate care for some Indian Christian children who were left orphaned, but later helped to build a home in India to care for

these children. Now that the orphanage is up and running, we continue to contribute towards the running costs of the building and to provide financial assistance for the care, school fees and clothes of the orphans.

But it is not just in response to natural disasters that Barnabas Fund provides assistance; there are also many man-made disasters that affect our Christian brothers and sisters. In Zimbabwe, self-serving government policies have created an economic and social crisis. Massive inflation, food shortages and a campaign of land expropriation led to desperate need among the people. Civil war in Sudan forced two million Southerners (mainly Christians) to flee their homes. In Iraq, the lawless situation since 2003 has allowed Islamic extremists to target Christians with threats and violence. The work of Barnabas has become critical in these circumstances as Christians find themselves displaced, homeless, jobless and hungry.

Please remember in your prayers Christians around the world who not only experience violence and persecution because of their faith, but also suffer discrimination when disasters occur.

■ **Project reference** 00-634 (Disaster Relief Fund)



Christians in the Philippines giving thanks to Barnabas Fund after receiving aid following Typhoons Ketsana and Parma

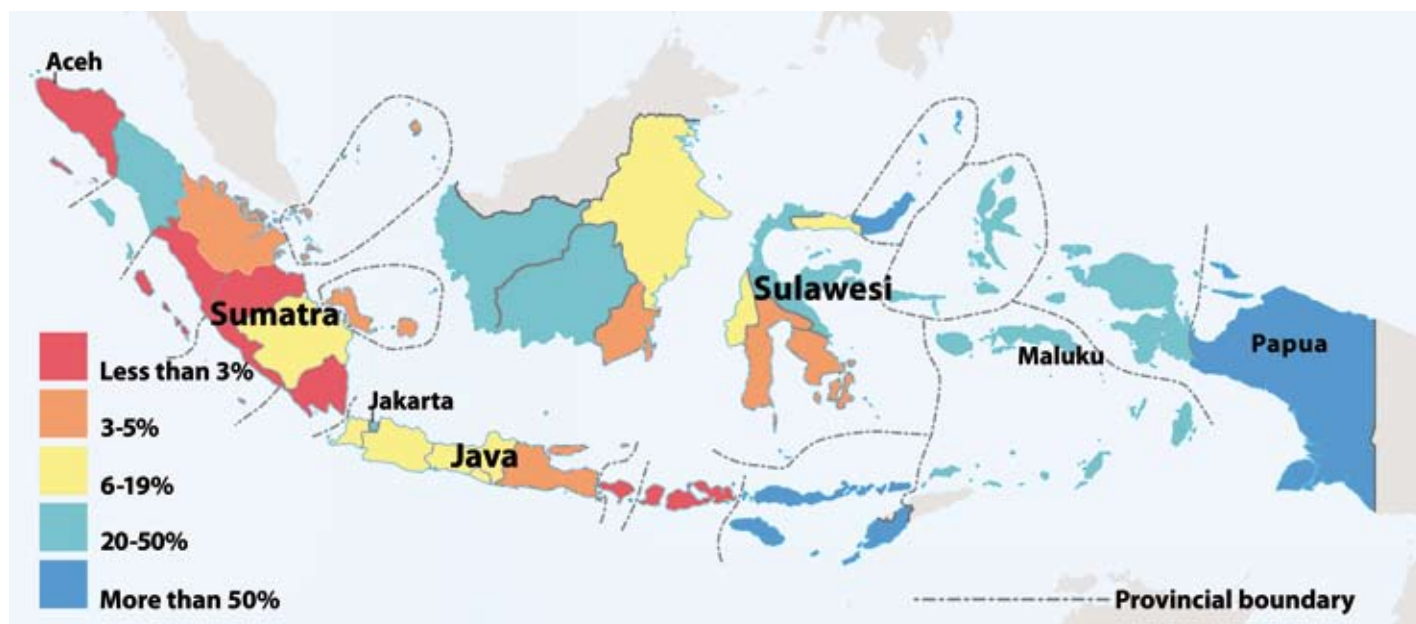
Local churches also helped by distributing instant milk and huge supplies of rice to 400 families. Further assistance was then delivered in the form of shelter kits for 500 families; these included a tent, a large mat, two blankets, an emergency lamp and a lighter. Each shelter kit cost £16 per family (US\$25; €18).

In the Philippines, Barnabas Fund supported 200 Christian families for one month following the September 2009 typhoons. Grants totalling £28,065 (US\$45,670; €31,168) were sent to

Indonesia

Indonesia is home to the world's largest Muslim population, who live alongside a sizeable Christian community and various other minorities. In this vast country, the situation of Christians varies from place to place. In some areas Christians are currently enduring intense pressure, which sometimes escalates into intimidation and violence. At times in the last 30 years Christians have been killed, churches burned and whole Christian communities displaced.

Yet it was not always so. Until the 1980s Indonesia was a model of good relations between Islam and Christianity.



This map of Indonesia shows the percentage of Christians in the country's various provinces

Muslim dominance

The vast archipelago of Indonesia comprises more than 17,000 islands and has a population of some 245,000,000 people. According to official figures, about 88% (215 million) of its people are Muslims, and around 9% (22 million) are Christians. However, many Christians and members of other minority groups believe that the proportion of Muslims has been seriously overestimated, and church leaders suggest that Christians may number 15% or even 20% of the population.

Christianity has a long history in Indonesia. Missionaries were active there from the 16th century, and a small

Christian presence was maintained throughout the centuries of colonial rule, mainly by the Dutch. In the 19th and early 20th centuries the churches experienced significant growth, which became explosive in the 1960s. Large communities of Christians form the majority population on some islands.

But Christianity has always been a minority faith in the country as a whole. For many centuries the population was mainly Hindu and Buddhist. Then Islam gained a foothold in the 13th and 14th centuries, introduced by traders and mystics from India, and by the 18th century Muslims were dominant in most of the territories. Their supremacy has been unchallenged since, either by the

growth of the churches or by the persistence of small groups of Buddhists, Hindus and others.

From harmony to discord

Indonesian Islam is predominantly traditional. The mystical tradition of Islam, known as Sufism, has exercised a major influence, and it has often become synthesised with local religious practice. Only about a third of Indonesia's Muslims are rigorous in their practice of Islam, and another third do not even identify strongly with it, mingling it freely with aspects of local mysticism or animism. These

restraining influences seem to have encouraged good relations between the huge Muslim community and minority groups.

When Indonesia gained its independence in 1949, the new nation was founded on the doctrine of Pancasila. This includes belief in one God and a commitment to national unity and communal peace. Every citizen was obliged to follow one of the following faiths: Islam, Christianity (either Protestant or Roman Catholic), Hinduism or Buddhism. (Another, Confucianism, was recognised later.) For many decades this ideology helped to promote stability, peace and equality between different religious communities. Christians and Muslims lived together in equality and harmony.

But in the 1980s the enormous social and political strength of the Muslim majority began to be exploited by Islamists, whose long-term goal was to bring the whole of Indonesia under the rule of sharia law. Then in the late 1990s, after the introduction of democracy, Islamist groups took advantage of initially lax government controls to launch an alarming campaign of violence against Christians. In some areas this amounted to a full-scale programme of ethnic cleansing. Hundreds of churches and thousands of homes were destroyed in Central Sulawesi, the Maluku Islands and elsewhere in eastern Indonesia. According to some estimates 30,000 Christians were killed and about half a million driven out. Some areas that were previously majority-Christian became majority-Muslim.

Conditions in these territories have eased, and the anti-Christian bloodshed of those years has not recurred elsewhere on the same scale. Yet three factors are combining to keep Indonesia's churches in a highly precarious position: government restrictions on religious freedom; the spread of sharia law; and the continuing activities of militant Islamists.

Restrictions on religious freedom

The constitution of Indonesia gives to all people the right to worship according to their own religion or belief, within the recognised faiths. In practice, however, this freedom is limited in various ways,

especially at a local level. Although the restrictions are supposed to apply to all religious groups, Christians seem to be particularly affected.

Religious groups that want to construct a building for worship need the declared support of 90 of their own members and 60 people from other religious groups. However, they must also obtain the approval of the local office for religious affairs. Sometimes Christian groups collect the required signatures, only for the authorities to refuse them permission to build, and even if a permit is granted, it may be revoked at any time. For example, in March 2009 a church in Bandung, having obtained a permit and begun construction, was forbidden to proceed further by the local mayor because residents had complained about the building. At the same time a massive programme of mosque-building has been proceeding in Indonesia since the 1990s.

Evangelism is banned in most circumstances. The government claims that it could prove disruptive, especially in religiously diverse areas. Distribution of religious materials to people of other faiths is also banned. Christian missionaries from overseas sometimes find it difficult to obtain or extend visas.

Since 1982 successive governments have been officially committed to a strategy of removing religion from the country's political life. However, this has amounted not to secularisation, but to the granting of a privileged status to Islam. Muslims are favoured in government, military and academic appointments, diminishing the influence of the country's Christians on policy – the so-called “greening” of the country's institutions. The marginalising of



This Indonesian church was destroyed in anti-Christian violence



A church in Papua, an area with a large Christian population where many Muslims have recently settled (Source: Wikimedia Commons)

the churches also makes them more liable to persecution by Islamists (see below), as they are perceived to be soft targets.

Spread of sharia law

The increased political power of Indonesia's Muslim majority has led to the extension of sharia law to and within various parts of the country. Facing considerable pressure from grassroots Muslims to cater specifically for their interests, the government has lacked the will or strength to resist.

Following a prolonged Islamist insurgency the territory of Aceh (known as the “gateway to Mecca” because it is so Islamic) achieved a measure of autonomy from the national government in 2001. Two years later its government established sharia courts and began to introduce elements of sharia law, which were enforced by special religious police.

Aceh is the only one of Indonesia's 32 provinces where sharia is officially permitted, and non-Muslims have been explicitly exempted from its laws. Many other provinces, however, use it as the inspiration for their ordinances, and since 2003 at least half have enacted their own variations of sharia. Some of these apply to Christians as well as Muslims. Schoolchildren, engaged couples and women are particularly affected. The national government has refused to intervene, claiming that the laws deal only with “public order”. It even shows signs of yielding to pressure for sharia-compliance in its own legislation: a bill is being considered that would require all food, drink, drugs and cosmetics to be tested for conformity to Islamic dietary rules.

Country Profile

The growth of sharia has also led to a hardening of attitudes among Muslims, with more of them calling for the introduction of such cruel punishments as stoning and maiming. The increased Islamisation of some areas is eroding Muslim tolerance of Christians, making them fertile ground for extremism and violence.

Another factor that has served to promote sharia is the government-sponsored policy known as “transmigration”, the organised movement of people (mainly Muslims) from Java into other regions and communities. Many Muslims are settling in the Christian-majority Maluku, and Christians expect that there will soon be a Muslim majority there. Papua is another Christian area where large numbers of Muslims have recently settled. By cleverly (and illegally) dividing the province the government has created a separate Muslim-majority area in the west. Once Islam holds the numerical ascendancy in an area, a much stronger case can be made for the imposition of sharia.

Activities of militant Islamists

The continuing presence and activity of numerous Islamist groups perhaps poses the greatest threat to the existence and well-being of Indonesia’s churches. One stated goal of these groups is to eliminate Christianity from the country altogether, and to this end they have sought to undermine efforts at reconciliation between Muslims and Christians. In some areas they have gone much further, mounting an aggressive and often violent campaign against Christians. Church growth through the conversion of Muslims to Christianity is likely to provoke an especially strong reaction.

Indonesian Islam remains generally traditional, and the Islamists are estimated to comprise less than 10% of the population. But because the authorities and other Muslims are afraid of them, they have extensive freedom of action and are able to punch well above their weight. Where they cannot take direct action, damaging, burning or bombing Christian churches and homes, they may raise a mob to act on their behalf; or they can influence local government to prevent the repair of



Indonesian Christians study the Bible together

buildings or to stop services and other Christian activities.

The results of these strategies can often be disastrous for Christians. Hundreds of churches have been destroyed by angry crowds, and permission for them to be rebuilt has often been withheld. Violence and intimidation have been used to close churches.

For example, in January 2010 two churches and a pastor’s house were set on fire by a mob of up to a thousand Muslims in the Padang Lawas regency of North Sumatra. Hundreds of Christians fled from their homes to avoid possible attacks. The Muslim community was reported to be “tired of seeing too many faithful and too many prayers”. The local police asserted that the buildings were not registered as churches, but the church leaders denied this claim.

In another incident 17 churches were forcibly closed down in one district of Aceh. Local Muslims, discontented with the repairing of churches in their area and the construction of new ones, threatened the Christians with death if they did not destroy the buildings. The Christians had also to promise not to meet for worship or teaching in their homes or carry out any missionary activity. Many of the Christians were so much frightened by the incident that they would no longer attend church at all; others had to hold their meetings in the plantations.

If Christians do try to continue their ministry in their own homes, they can be targeted there too. Three years ago three Christian women were sent to prison for allowing Muslim children to attend a Sunday School in one of their houses. Releasing them was scarcely an option

for the judge with screaming mobs of Muslims outside the courthouse threatening violence.

The activity of Islamists is often concentrated in specific areas where the local government or Muslim community are especially sympathetic to them. A spate of recent incidents in West Java provides an example of this tactic. In December 2009, at Islamic New Year, thousands of demonstrators stormed a church in Bekasi

regency, setting objects on fire. On 31 December the authorities in East Bekasi, under the influence of hard-line Muslim groups, ordered a large church to stop its services and other activities. On 3 January 2010 hundreds of residents of the North Tambun sub-district prevented members of another church from taking part in services. In Bogor Regency Muslims took to the streets to protest against the building of a permanent church. Repeated intimidation and constant insecurity undermines not only the ministry but also the morale of the local Christians.

Individual Christians may also be attacked, maimed or killed. In Palembang in South Sumatra a Muslim study circle opposed to the conversion of Muslims to Christianity was radicalised and decided to pursue its cause by means of violence against those who shared the Gospel with Muslims. In April 2009 ten of them were imprisoned for killing a Christian teacher and planning other attacks. In 2005 a group of Christian schoolgirls were attacked by Islamist militants



A Christian schoolgirl displays the scar of a machete attack that left her three companions dead

armed with machetes; three were beheaded and a fourth seriously injured.

Other behaviour that offends Muslim sensibilities may also spark violence. In December 2008 there was a riot in Masohi in the Malukus after a schoolteacher allegedly made a comment insulting Islam. Two churches and dozens of homes were burned by a crowd of more than 300 people.

Nor are Christian institutions immune from such action. In July 2008 the Arastamar Evangelical School of Theology was attacked by residents in West Jakarta, and more than 20 students were injured. The local authorities relocated the school to three separate sites, which provided only poor-quality accommodation and made teaching difficult. A year later they were moved on again, and they have only recently found a new campus.

The Indonesian security forces have not only failed many times to restrain the activities of Islamist groups. During the extreme anti-Christian violence from the late 1990s they often joined in on the side of the Muslim militants. In West Papua, with its large Christian population, the Indonesian military even burned a number of Christian villages and killed their inhabitants.

Islamist persecution also takes non-violent forms. A Christian group in Banda Aceh built more than 200 houses for Muslim victims of the Pacific Ocean tsunami of 2004. With support from Barnabas Fund it also provided seven houses for Christian victims, but local Muslims then refused to allow Christians to move back and occupy the houses.

A region on the brink?

The size of Indonesia, and its resulting power – economic, political and military – makes it crucially important in South-East Asia. If its Islamists were to achieve their goals of making it an Islamic state under the authority of sharia and eliminating Christianity from its territories, then the presence and mission of Christians in other parts of the region would also be endangered. Please pray for the churches of Indonesia as they seek to respond with wisdom, courage and faithfulness to the serious challenges that they face.

Examples of aid from Barnabas to Indonesia

Reconstruction of Horale village

The mainly Christian village of Horale in the Malukus was attacked by a mob from the neighbouring Muslim village in May 2008. Around 120 houses were burned, with three churches and the village school. Four Christians were killed and 56 wounded, and crops and fishing-boats were destroyed.

Barnabas has given funds to help the villagers rebuild their lives. These have been used to turn the semi-permanent houses provided by the government into permanent homes and to build new houses for those who had none. We have also provided rice, a generator, a village water tank, well and pump, and a bathing facility and public toilet. A longboat to carry supplies to and from the village has also been purchased with a Barnabas grant.



The Christian village of Horale was burned by a Muslim mob in 2008. Barnabas has given funds to enable the villagers to construct permanent homes

(Project reference 22-753)

Church planting in Java

An Indonesian ministry supports a church planting initiative in Muslim villages in East and Central Java, where pastors have started Bible study groups or small house churches. Sometimes they experience persecution, being chased out of their homes or villages, or threatened and attacked by armed mobs during services. The pastors are encouraged to start small enterprises of their own, such as baking or keeping chickens, to help support themselves. It is hoped that within a few years the churches they have planted will be able to cover the rest of their living costs.

Grants from Barnabas Fund have contributed to the living costs of 40 pastors and the administration costs of the ministry. We have also given an extra grant at Christmas to enable the pastors to organise a celebration with a special meal. The people from their neighbourhoods are all invited, and the parties provide a good opportunity to build friendships as a foundation for evangelism.

(Project reference 22-828)

Theological seminary in Jakarta

A theological seminary in Jakarta is currently training 61 Christians. Its graduates are in ministry all around Indonesia. The seminary is run very simply and costs are kept to a minimum; some of the staff give their time voluntarily. Barnabas Fund is assisting with the running costs and with developing the library.

(Project reference 22-766)

UK Supporters' Days 2010

"A People under Pressure"

"We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the hardships we experienced ... We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself." (2 Cor. 1:8, TNIV)

1-4pm Saturday 12 June: Queens Road Baptist Church, Coventry, CV1 3FZ

1-4pm Saturday 26 June: Reigate Baptist Church, Surrey, RH2 7LR

- "A PEOPLE UNDER PRESSURE: Christian vulnerability in the UK" - Dr Patrick Sookhdeo, International Director of Barnabas Fund
- "SUPPLYING THE NEEDS: updates on some of the projects you help fund" - Caroline Kerslake, Projects Director
- "HOW BARNABAS FUND BRINGS TRANSFORMATION: A case study" - Paul Mursalin, Guyana
- "SAVING OUR SONS: Confronting the lure of Islam" - Rev. Carl Ellis, USA

Many of you asked if we could hold a Supporters' Day in your part of the country, so we have left Wiltshire this year and come to the Midlands and South-East.

Please contact us first to book your place and get your **free** admission ticket and security pass.

Why not bring a group from your church? We have a poster and multiple booking

forms available.

You can get tickets, forms and posters by phoning 024 7623 1923, emailing tickets@barnabasfund.org, or writing to us at the UK Office: 9 Priory Row, Coventry CV1 5EX.

Please be sure to indicate which date and venue you would like.

We hope to see you there.

Stirring up Support in Cardiff

Paul Carpenter, a Barnabas Fund supporter and church rep from Cardiff, has a heart for the persecuted Church. Following a meeting in early February at which he heard a talk by Dr Patrick Sookhdeo, Paul felt challenged to speak to his church on behalf of persecuted Christians.

On Sunday 21 February Paul spoke at both morning services at his church; as a result of his enthusiasm Barnabas Fund received **14 petition sheets**, comprising **175 signatures**, in support of our campaign for the abolition of the Islamic law of apostasy (turn to page 9

for more details on this campaign). Praise the Lord for the passion He has given to Paul and for the way He equipped him to challenge his church!



Paul Carpenter challenges City Temple, Cardiff to support persecuted Christians

Christian missionary magazines needed

Barnabas Fund library collects old Christian missionary magazines that are related to Islam or the Muslim world. Do you have any old or unwanted magazines from Christian organisations, especially collections or missionary newsletters? Often magazines get thrown away; please help us keep them for future researchers to use. Please contact Mark, our librarian, on 01672 564938 if you have any material that you think might be of interest.

Keeping in Touch

Would you like to be the first to receive urgent prayer requests and press releases from Barnabas Fund and help us to stand in the gap in prayer for persecuted Christians? Our e-mails are not unduly frequent, but are a unique way of alerting you to the urgent needs of our Christian brothers and sisters worldwide or to special supporter events in your area. It is quick and easy to join our email service: visit our website at <http://barnabasfund.org/find-out-more> or e-mail us at subscribe@barnabasfund.org to be added to this service.

Additional Giving through Gift Aid

Are you a higher-rate UK taxpayer? Did you know that you can reclaim the difference between the higher rate of tax (40%) and the basic rate of tax (20%) on the total value of your charitable donations?

For example, if £100 is donated using Gift Aid, the total value to Barnabas Fund of the donation is £125. Furthermore, the donor can then reclaim 20% of this donation (£25), which can either be given to Barnabas Fund or retained by the donor. You must make this claim on your Self Assessment tax return.

For more information, visit <http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/individuals/giving/tax-return.htm>.

Raising Awareness for Christian Children

In the Christian family, children have an honoured place; they are to be the objects of our care. But in countries where Christians are persecuted, children are often more vulnerable and can suffer in terrible ways.

Barnabas Fund has produced a DVD entitled "Bringing Hope to Christian Children" (approx. 4.00 mins) which highlights the plight of needy Christian children and shows the ways in which Barnabas is helping them.



If you would like to use this resource in your church, to raise awareness and encourage prayer and support for vulnerable Christian children, you can order it free of charge from our online shop (www.barnabasfund.org) or your national Barnabas Fund office (addresses on back cover).