

barnabas aid

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Thrown out of home

for refusing
to renounce
Christ



IN THIS ISSUE

Turmoil in Syria: Christians facing an unstable future

“Be on your guard”: understanding and responding to persecution

Middle East update: where now for the Arab revolutions?

Contents

3 Project News
Light and refreshment
for Christians in Egypt

6 Newsroom
Chinese church hounded
week after week

**9 Operation
Nehemiah**
Update on our new
education pack

10 Resources
Books and booklets on
key aspects of Islam

Pull-out supplement
Which way now for the
Arab revolutions?

11 Focus
Supporting worship and
ministry through church
buildings

14 Country Profile
Challenge and
uncertainty for the
churches of Syria

17 Biblical Reflection
Facing persecution for
sharing our faith

18 In Touch
Could you be a Barnabas
representative?

Hope in a time of hopelessness

The “Arab spring” is fast turning into a Christian winter. The rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the growing instability in Syria, and the unrest in neighboring countries of the Middle East are paving the way for an Islamist future. The rise of such movements, with all their calls for sharia and Islamic states, poses new challenges to Christians, not only in the Arab world but also further afield, in places such as Pakistan and Indonesia.

For Christians the situation could seem hopeless, but for the certainty of our eternal hope. We see beyond the turmoils and tumults, the anguish and despair. As Martin Luther King observed, we must accept finite disappointment but we must never lose infinite hope.

This came to me with fresh force as I read of the sad events in Bauchi State, Nigeria, in May. Muslim extremists had already killed two of Pastor James’s children, and his wife lay dying from gunshot and machete wounds. She said to her husband, “Is this the end between us, so we shall not be together again?”

“Hold on to your faith in Jesus,” replied Pastor James, “and we shall meet and never part again.”

Then the pastor heard the cries of his 13-year-old daughter, who had suffered a

severe machete cut to her abdomen. The militants had told her they would kill her and she should “see how your Jesus will save you”. The girl had replied that Jesus had already saved her and that by killing her they would simply be enabling her to be with Him.

Our heavenly hope should not lead us to earthly complacency and lack of action. Nor should we let a blind resignation to fate shackle our hands and prevent us from seeking to remedy injustice and suffering. It was Augustine of Hippo who said that hope has two daughters. Their names are anger and courage: anger at the way things are and courage to see that they do not have to remain that way.

As Christians we must feel a righteous anger and indignation at the injustices being suffered by our brothers and sisters in Christ, in the knowledge that things do not have to be this way, that there is hope of change. We must therefore have the courage to stand with our Christian family, however unpalatable it is in our day. Above all else we must have that unflinching hope that God is sovereign and that at the end, as Julian of Norwich wrote in the 14th century, all shall be well and all shall be well and all manner of thing shall be well.

Dr. Patrick Sookhdeo
International Director

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

Front cover: A widow in Kyrgyzstan stands in front of her new home, bought with help from Barnabas Aid (see opposite page)

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Your generous support is making a difference in the lives of brothers and sisters around the world. Even though many are facing discrimination, oppression or persecution on a daily basis, your gifts are bringing transformation and hope to their lives. Below and on the next pages you can find a selection of news of how recent grants from Barnabas Aid have transformed their lives. Please pray as you read.

New home for steadfast widow

“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:10).

Barnabas funded the purchase of a home for “Alima”, a newly widowed mother, and her five children at a cost of USD\$8,000 after they were thrown out of their home for refusing to renounce Christ.

Before Alima’s husband died, the family lived in a village in Kyrgyzstan where they and three

other families were known to be Christians, although most of the community was Muslim. Her mother-in-law told Alima that she would be turned out of her house once her husband died unless she renounced her Christian faith.

But when the time came, Alima stood firm in her faith. She wrote to us: “I was pressured to renounce Christ, but brothers and sisters prayed for us and God gave me strength to stand strong in faith. But we had to leave the

house. But God so merciful to us and helped us from your organization. He gave us accommodation and thank God for this.”

Even though her life as a widow in Kyrgyzstan is still tough, Alima and her children now have a place to call home.



Project reference
00-113 (Convert Fund)



“Alima” and her children in her new home bought with support from Barnabas Aid

Water and electricity lighten the load in Egypt

Many Christian women in rural areas of Egypt have to walk several times a day to the nearest water source and carry the heavy load back home, simply because they do not have clean water in their homes. Others struggle to cook their evening meal, or swelter in the summer heat without a fan, because they lack an electricity connection.

Water and electricity connections funded by Barnabas Aid have made an enormous difference in the lives of many Egyptian Christian women and girls. Barnabas sent a grant of USD\$73,200 to assist Christians in rural areas with health awareness, income generating loans, equipment and water and electricity. For example, in one isolated Christian village on the east bank of the river Nile, 25 impoverished Christian families received water connections, and nine families received electricity connections.

A mother of seven explained how the water connection was improving her life when one of our project partners stopped by her home just after a water tap had been installed there. Before, she and her oldest daughter had had to fetch water three times a day from elsewhere. Despite this good news, the project partner thought the mother still looked tired and unwell.

When the partner revisited some months later, the family had also recently received an electricity connection. The light was enabling the children to study at night and kept scorpions and snakes from coming into the home from the desert. And the mother looked much healthier than before.



This Christian girl in Egypt can now fill a cup with clean water in her own home



Project reference 11-424

Ethiopia: relief for displaced Christians after anti-Christian rampage

Thousands of displaced Christians in western Ethiopia received emergency relief from Barnabas in March 2011 through a grant of USD\$40,700. A total of 10,000 Christians had been forced to flee their homes when Muslim extremists went on a rampage in early March, setting 69 churches, 81 Christian homes and a Bible school on fire. They were in urgent need of food, medicine, shelter, blankets and clothing.



Project reference 00-345 (Victims of Violence)



Unloading relief aid for Christians who have fled their homes after anti-Christian violence in Ethiopia

Bible training courses grow in Pakistan and Nepal

"I worked in a pharmaceutical company and for many years I had no peace, feeling a failure and thinking I was good for nothing. Besides, I also had a great desire to enter the ministry but was not clear on that. However, after studying the life of Paul in the ... courses, God made my vision clear. I was convinced that this is the right time for me to take the step into the field."

Bible training courses are one of the ways in which Barnabas Aid helps persecuted Christians to develop in their faith. A training center in Pakistan received its latest grant of USD\$14,520 to support its visits, workshops and rallies. And a similar ministry in Kathmandu, Nepal, received a grant of USD\$13,000. Both schools train volunteer tutors throughout their respective countries, who then teach small groups of students locally. The field manager in Pakistan wrote to us, "These grants have helped us in a remarkable way to expand the [center's] work through the country." Thanks to Barnabas' support the school organized hundreds of pastor and tutor visits, as well as student rallies and tutor training workshops. The student rallies, where the students shared testimonies, poems and speeches, greatly increased the

morale of the students. The training center believes that motivating tutors and students has played an important part in increasing the number of active students by more than 30% from 2008 to 2010.

As of March 2011 a total of 4,722 students were actively following Bible courses in Nepal including courses on the life of Christ and Paul's life and letters. In that month 441 students received a certificate for completing "An Introduction to Biblical Studies".



Project references 89-946 (Nepal) 41-035 (Pakistan)



Graduated students and their staff in Nepal

Reaching Muslims with the Gospel throughout Rwanda

A Rwandan Christian mission has a strong desire to reach the Muslims living in their country with the Gospel. Barnabas sent them a grant of USD\$11,400 which they used to train entire churches to go out and evangelize locally among Muslims. During three- and four-day workshops the team taught the church members how to share the Gospel and expose false Muslim teaching. In the evenings they went out to marketplaces and areas close to

mosques for evangelism. Sometimes converts from Islam give their testimonies during these open-air sessions. Many Muslims listen, and they are often very disturbed by the Gospel message and ask many questions; some of them then make a decision to follow Christ. Every month the mission provides one or more workshops in different areas of Rwanda.



Project reference 66-171



A Muslim leader in Rwanda asks the missionary many questions about salvation and the Christian faith

Strengthening the faith of adults and children in Central Asia

Answering difficult questions

A solid foundation of Christian teaching is essential for the work of pastors and evangelists. It is especially important when they are working in a country with a Muslim majority.

Barnabas Aid recently supported a Bible school in Central Asia with a grant of USD\$22,044. The Bible school is equipping men and women to become church leaders and missionaries in their own country. The full-time courses run from six months up to three years.

One graduate related how the course has supported his work, "I have a deacon ministry in church and also take part in prison ministry. Knowledge that I get here helps me very much

in ministry. I very often visit our church members in home and I need to answer on many of their questions. It is especially important because we live in Islam majority country. Therefore we need to know Christian dogmatic questions to talk about Jesus and to explain many problems."

Another graduate testified, "I now have a ministry in church as one of the leaders. Study at the Bible school was a great blessing in my spiritual growth. Knowledge and skills, which I got, helped me in my church ministry very much. I use it... for preparing the sermons, Bible study in church home groups and in leadership groups. And it helps me in youth ministry more effectively."



Project reference 26-774



Students listen attentively to the teaching at a Bible School in Central Asia

Children love *Stories about Jesus*

"My name is Saule, I'm 11 years old. I like the stories about Jesus in this book. They are very clear and understandable. Many things from the Bible, which I didn't understand till now, I could understand by reading this book... I also enjoyed the nice illustrations."

Hearing and reading about Jesus' life is an important way for children to grow in their faith. In a country where few Christian books are available, there is a great need for Christian literature for children. A ministry in Central Asia gave away more than 16,000 copies of the book *Stories about Jesus* to children and teenagers, which they had been able to print thanks to a grant of USD\$14,456 from Barnabas Aid. Both parents and children are delighted with the book.

The ministry gave the books to libraries, and handed them out on special occasions such as evangelistic events in churches, special children's weeks, and Christmas. At their summer camps they also gave all 4,000 attending children and teenagers a copy of a workbook to accompany *Stories about Jesus*.



Young Christians look at a copy of *Stories of Jesus*, which they can take for free



Project reference 00-360
(Christian literature project)

CHINA: REPEATED ARRESTS OF CHRISTIANS PROMPTS PETITION TO GOVERNMENT

Pastors from unregistered churches (“house churches”) in China have lodged a petition with the Chinese government, calling for religious freedom and a peaceful resolution to an ongoing conflict involving one of Beijing’s largest house churches.

Shouwang Church has persisted in its efforts to worship in public despite many of its 1,000 members being detained by the police, placed under house arrest and losing their homes and jobs. Their attempts to hold an open-air service began on April 10 and have continued every Sunday since. At least 169 Christians were arrested by up to 1,000 police officers during the first meeting; 47 were detained the following week, and on Easter Sunday at least 34 were rounded up while a further 500 were confined to their homes. At least 31 members were detained on Sunday May 1 and the following Sunday 15 Christians were taken away by police, including one from another house church who turned up to show solidarity.

The presentation of the petition – the first of its kind in 60 years of repressive Communist rule in China – is bold and unprecedented and has been backed by Chinese church pastors in the United States and Canada. The petition to the National People’s Congress asks for a special commission to be set up to

investigate events surrounding Shouwang church’s clash with the authorities, and a review of the constitutionality of China’s current rules governing religious affairs.

When one of the pastors was released, he was given a message by the authorities to relay to the Shouwang Church Governing Committee, which stated, “...regardless of the circumstances, Shouwang Church must return to indoor worship”. Shouwang’s 1,000-member church had previously been evicted from the restaurant they had been renting as a meeting place. But government pressure has been applied to landlords not to rent space to the church, and they have been unable to close a deal to buy their own property after the seller was also pressured not to sign the contract or hand over the keys. Without an indoor place to meet for worship, the congregation has been forced to try and hold outdoor services.

In an announcement following the fifth outdoor service on May 8, the church said, “We are thankful to God that he stirs brothers and sisters’ hearts, so that they, despite the risk of being arrested, fired, forced to move out of their rented places are determined to join the outdoor worship service at any cost.”

SYRIA: CHRISTIANS PRESSURED TO JOIN UPRISING

In the village of Hala, Christians were given an ultimatum by their Muslim neighbors either to join the demonstrations against President Bashar al-Assad’s regime or to leave. Churches in some parts of Syria have received threatening letters, while in a Christian village outside the southern city of Deraa, a home came under fire by a group of masked men on motorbikes. Such action is making life extremely difficult for the Christians, forcing them to close their shops and consider what course of action to take.

Christians have largely stayed away from the protests, having generally been safe and well-treated by the secular Baathist government, which has allowed them a considerable amount of religious freedom. In a letter to Western leaders, a senior Syrian church leader appealed for them to “Ask the Heads of State of Arab countries to work for real development... But don’t encourage revolutions”. He said “Christians especially are very fragile in the face of crises and bloody revolutions! Christians will be the first victims of these revolutions, especially in Syria. A new wave of emigration will follow immediately.”

IRAN: THREE CHRISTIANS FREED FROM JAIL; PASTOR HELD

Three Christians were released on April 30 after 239 days behind bars, but a fourth person who was arrested with them remains in prison.

Arash Kermanjani and his wife Arezo Teymouri and Sonia Keshish-Avanessian were set free from Hamadan state prison, north-west Iran. It is not known why Sonia’s husband, Pastor Vahik Abrahamian, was kept in detention, as the judge had ordered the release of both couples following a court hearing on April 28.

The two couples were arrested on September 4, 2010 at Pastor Abrahamian’s home in Hamadan. They were accused of a variety of offenses including spreading Christianity in Iran and were held in isolation, suffering intense physical abuse and psychological pressure. Sonia was pregnant at the time of her arrest but suffered a miscarriage while in prison.



Sonia Keshish-Avanessian is now free but her husband, Pastor Vahik, remains in prison

PAKISTAN: CHRISTIANS TARGETED IN SHOOTING AND MOB VIOLENCE

The son of a Pakistani pastor has been severely injured in a drive-by shooting.

Pastor Ashraf Paul (55) was traveling by van in Lahore with his wife Rubina Ashraf (45) and their eldest son Sarfraz Ashraf (23) on April 27 when two youths on a motorbike started chasing their vehicle. The attackers, whose faces were covered with black cloth, opened fire, and Sarfraz, who was driving the van, was shot through the windscreen in the face and hip. He was rushed to hospital, where he underwent surgery to remove the bullets. Sarfraz is now recovering; Pastor Ashraf and Rubina escaped unharmed.

The attack follows threats against Pastor Ashraf by a Pakistani Islamic organization warning him to stop his Christian activities. They also demanded that he pay the Islamic *jizya* tax on non-Muslim minorities (a sign of subjugation to Islamic rule) of one million rupees USD\$11,800 or else they would kill him and his family. Mr. Ashraf, 55, runs a Christian ministry in Lahore and is a writer of Christian books and poetry for the encouragement of young Christians in Pakistan.

In another incident, around 3,000 Pakistani Christians were forced to flee their homes when hundreds of Muslims targeted Christian property following blasphemy accusations

against local Christians. The angry mob, armed with sticks, iron rods and stones, descended on Aziz Colony and Gulzar Colony, Gujranwala, early on Saturday morning, April 30, after a burned Quran was found in the area. They attacked a newly-built Christian seminary and ransacked a Christian school run by a pastor who was accused of burning the Quran. A number of people, including the school janitor and police officers, were injured during the riot.

Tensions in Gujranwala have been building for

made against Christian father and son Mushtaq Gill and Farrukh Mushtaq Gill around six months ago; they were arrested but freed after a police investigation found them innocent. They were rearrested on April 15 after being accused of desecrating a copy of the Quran. Muslims were incited by loudspeaker announcements from the local mosques to attack the family's home and the Christian Technical Training Center (CTTC), where Mushtaq Gill is a teacher. A number of Muslim ring-leaders in the area have since been arrested.



Christians were forced to flee their homes in Gujranwala, Pakistan, when a Muslim mob targeted Christian property after blasphemy accusations against local Christians

EGYPT: CHRISTIANS ATTACKED IN VIOLENT CLASHES WITH MUSLIMS

Several hundred Salafist Muslims descended on a church in Imbaba district, north-west Cairo, on Saturday April 7 and set fire to two churches and Christian property. The unrest, which has been described as one of the most serious outbreaks of sectarian violence since the revolution, left 12 people dead and more than 200 injured.

Christians barricaded themselves inside and around one of the buildings in a bid to protect it, and as demonstrations turned violent, Islamists stormed a six-story residential building, claiming that Christian

snipers were positioned inside. Fire bombs were thrown at the church and at Christian homes and shops; the Muslim mob later set ablaze a second church, chanting, "With our blood and soul, we defend you Islam".

The violence was triggered by false but long-running allegations that the Egyptian church is holding captive women whom Muslims claim have converted to Islam. The Muslim mob gathered on Saturday evening after one of the women, a church leader's wife, gave a televised interview denying the rumors and saying that she remained a

Christian and had never become a Muslim. The Egyptian church has refused to cede to Muslim demands that the woman be handed over, fearing for her welfare and safety. They are also concerned that the case may set a precedent that will endanger Christian women more generally.

The dispute over the women was the motive for the siege at a Baghdad church last October in which more than 50 people were killed.

NIGERIA: CHRISTIAN VILLAGES ATTACKED, DOZENS KILLED

On Friday May 6 at least 16 people were killed and more than a dozen homes set ablaze during an attack on the predominantly Christian town of Tafawa Balewa, Bauchi State, Nigeria. This followed a similar assault on Kurum village, near Bogoro, Bauchi state, on May 4 in which 12 Christians died, including a pastor's wife and three of his children.

These are just the latest in a series of recent attacks on Christian communities

across Nigeria that have left at least 500 people dead as enraged Muslims protested against the re-election of Christian president Goodluck Jonathan in April. At the time of writing, Barnabas Aid's partners in Nigeria have confirmed that 194 churches and over 1,200 houses have been burned or destroyed and 15,000 people have been displaced. Barnabas Aid has sent relief for Christian victims of the violence.



This church in the town of Malumfashi, Katsina state, was torched in the recent violence in Nigeria. (Photo courtesy of SIM)

ETHIOPIA: CHURCH WORKER MURDERED BY MUSLIMS

Church worker Abraham Abera (35) was killed and his wife Bertukan (25) seriously injured in a machete attack by a gang of Muslims.

Abraham, his wife and a third person were ambushed by six Muslim assailants while on their way to visit a sick friend on April 20. The couple, who had been married for less than a year, were taken to hospital, where Abraham was pronounced dead that evening. Bertukan, who was six months pregnant, needed a blood transfusion and was informed of her husband's death after receiving treatment. Thankfully, her unborn baby has survived the ordeal.

IVORY COAST: CHRISTIANS CAUGHT UP IN CIVIL WAR

Churches in Ivory Coast have been vandalized and torched, and pastors and Christians have been kidnapped, beaten and killed following disagreements over presidential elections in November 2010. At least 1,500 people were killed and a million forced from their homes as authorities struggled to overcome the chaos, which included violence, lootings, rape and murder.

Ivory Coast's Constitutional Council, the body that certifies election results in the country, declared Laurent Gbagbo the winner of the November poll based on valid votes cast, but the country's electoral commission announced Alassane Ouattara as the winner with 54% of the vote. This verdict was backed by the United Nations. Gbagbo, who had been president since 2000, refused to relinquish power, saying that voting in the north was rigged.

The predominantly Muslim north largely backed Ouattara, a Muslim, while support for Gbagbo came from the mainly Christian south. Fighting erupted as forces loyal to Ouattara fought to install their man, and Christians, who are associated with Gbagbo, were particularly targeted; imams have reportedly called on Muslims to attack Christians. The fighting continued even after the arrest of Gbagbo on April 11.

As a result of the violence, tens of thousands of people had to take refuge in churches, where they lacked adequate food, water, sanitation and medical care. In one incident, between 800 and 1,000 people who were seeking shelter at a Christian mission compound in Duékoué were killed, reportedly by descendants of immigrant Muslims from Burkina Faso loyal to Ouattara.

The contribution of religion to the conflict is difficult to ascertain. Many tribes have both Muslims and Christians within them, who historically have lived peacefully side by side. The issues of corruption, criminality and habitual violence remain central to the conflict, but can be easily exploited by religious elements.

Operation Nehemiah

Evangelism pack – coming soon!

Evangelism, especially mission to Muslims, remains a priority for Operation Nehemiah. As we confront the increasing Islamization of the West, we recognize the serious need to reach out to our Muslim neighbors with the saving grace of Jesus Christ. Operation Nehemiah is in the process of developing a special Evangelism Resource Pack that will contain some useful tools for churches and individuals who want to gain a better understanding of Islam, answer Muslims' questions and share the Gospel with them.



Please help us find *halal* products!

Operation Nehemiah is looking to identify the *halal* certification logos that are stamped on *halal* products across the world. If you find a product that is certified as *halal*, please take a photo or scan the special *halal* stamp and send to on@barnabasfund.org, including details of

the product brand, and the name of the shop, town or village, and country where it was found. The photos will be used in a future guide to *halal* logos. This photo was sent in by a supporter who was shocked to find a *halal* logo on their Spanish olive oil bought in the UK!

Operation Nehemiah: News in brief

Members of Parliament and peers have urged the British Government to tackle Islamic extremism in British universities as a matter of “utmost urgency”.

The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Homeland Security has warned that there is a serious problem of radicalization in UK universities that requires urgent and sustained attention by the Government. Witnesses said there is evidence of a “serious problem” of radicalization that raises “grave concern”.

A separate study, *Radical Islam on UK campuses*, cites a list of 15 leading British universities that have hosted extremist preachers, including supporters of the terrorist group Hamas and members of Hizb ut-Tahrir, a group subject to a National Union of Students' ban. Other speakers have spoken in support of armed jihad and the Taliban, warned Muslims not to integrate into Western societies, argued in favor of domestic

violence and advocated the destruction of Israel.

British universities have received hundreds of millions of pounds from Saudi and other Islamic sources, which are apparently intended to change the intellectual climate of the UK.

Between 1995 and 2008, Oxford, Cambridge, Durham, University College of London, Exeter, Dundee, the London School of Economics (LSE) and City University accepted more than USD\$381.9 million from Muslim rulers and those closely connected to them. Islamic donations are now the largest source of external funding for universities in the UK. The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Homeland Security has warned that in many cases unregulated foreign funding has a political purpose and can have direct effects upon the institutional structure, curriculum, appointments and events schedule at the recipient university or center.

Is some of the money paid by consumers in Britain for *halal* meat being used to finance Islamic mission and Muslim construction projects in New Zealand?

The Federation of Islamic Associations of New Zealand (FIANZ) claims to certify over 90% of meat exports from the country as *halal*, making New Zealand the leading global exporter of *halal* meat with the largest *halal* slaughterhouses in the world.

FIANZ issues over 9,000 *halal* certificates each year, for which they charge the meat suppliers, who will pass on some of these costs to customers. But in addition, over the past 20 years FIANZ has been providing annual grants to its regional associations for *dawa* activities and has been at the forefront of financing the construction of mosques and Islamic centers in eight cities across New Zealand.

For more Operation Nehemiah news, go to www.barnabasaid.org/operation_nehemiah

Mission Statement: Operation Nehemiah is committed to maintaining Christian values of freedom of conscience, speech and religion for the next generation in church and society.

In this issue we feature four short booklets about Islam, as well as books that address the impact on contemporary society of the Islamic financial system and the Muslim view of women.

Why Christian women convert to Islam Rosemary Sookhdeo



“Weak, inferior, inherently evil, intellectually incapable and spiritually lacking...” This is how women are traditionally viewed in Islam. Men are considered superior, and this is reflected in family life. Yet every year, thousands of women, including Christians, are converting to Islam.

In her book *Stepping into the Shadows*, Rosemary Sookhdeo explores what attracts women to Islam and what we can do about it. For over 30 years Rosemary has been involved in the lives of women

who have married Muslims. This book is a reflection of her experience, going behind the scenes into the lives of several of these women and revealing what happened to them.

The book is an invaluable tool for parents and church leaders and will warn and challenge anyone about to marry a Muslim or convert to Islam.

**Isaac Publishing, paperback, 121 pages, Retail Price USD\$10.00
Postage USD\$2.50**

Understanding Shari'a Finance Patrick Sookhdeo



The Islamic financial system has become a major player on the world economic stage in the last 20 years. Some Muslims believe that Western financial products and institutions are incompatible with sharia law (though many reject this view) and so have established their own.

In this significant study of sharia finance Patrick Sookhdeo discusses the problems and dangers presented by the Islamic economy. He identifies it as part of the Islamist agenda to subvert and subjugate Western systems, and reveals its connections to fundamentalist groups. His book highlights a current issue relating to the Islamic resurgence and its implications for global economics and politics, while also looking at the nature and implications of sharia itself.

**Isaac Publishing, paperback, 114 pages, Retail Price USD\$10.00
Postage USD\$3.00**

Booklets about Islam

Barnabas Aid has produced a series of booklets to provide background information about a range of issues relating to the nature and practice of Islam.



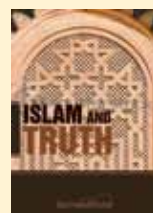
What is Islam?

This booklet provides an introduction to the basics of Islam. Topics covered are: the meaning of “Islam”, Muhammad and the origins of Islam, the Islamic sources (Qur'an, *hadith* and sharia), the six articles of faith and the five pillars of Islam, the main Islamic festivals, and the different forms of Islam.



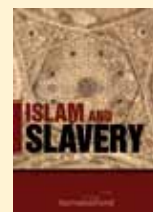
What is Sharia?

Sharia law, the detailed system of religious law developed by Muslim scholars in the first three centuries of Islam, embodies and still governs the Islamic way of life and is key to understanding Islam and Muslims. This booklet explores five main areas in which sharia is incompatible with human rights and then looks at the challenges of sharia in Western countries.



Islam and Truth

This booklet looks at what Islam says about truth and lying. It explores the doctrines of *taqiyya*, which permits Muslims to lie and deceive on certain occasions, and abrogation, which deals with the contradictions in the Quran.



Islam and Slavery

The European slave trade is well known; the Islamic slave trade is not. Yet this booklet shows that slavery is accepted uncritically in the Quran and sharia and is supported by the example of Muhammad. The expansion of Islam included the large-scale enslavement of many conquered peoples, and slavery still exists today in some Islamic countries.

9-12 pages, USD\$1 each (postage free)

To order any of these items, please visit www.barnabasaid.org/shop. Alternatively please contact your nearest Barnabas office (addresses on back cover). Checks for the USA should be made payable to “Isaac Publishing”.

The Arab Revolutions: which way now?

“Revolutions
are dangerous,
unpredictable events”¹



The protests sweeping across the Middle East and North Africa are shaking the established order and reverberating throughout the Muslim world. Arabs have been suffering greatly from the region's economic, social and political failings, which include oppression, injustice, corruption and discrimination. Authoritarian police states with all-powerful and unaccountable security services, large-scale unemployment, massive gaps between rich and poor, callous and corrupt autocracies, bureaucracies that treat citizens with indignity and contempt – all these have fueled popular grievances, anger and frustration.

The modern electronic media revolution has deprived governments of their monopoly over the news and has empowered many ordinary citizens. The Arab masses are now expressing their yearnings for individual freedoms, justice and accountability, democracy, the rule of law and civil liberties. For the first time they have breached and broken the barrier of fear imposed by their rulers, and many are exhilarated by the resulting freedom and empowerment. Established leaders such as Zine Ben Ali of Tunisia, Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, Muammar Gaddafi of Libya, Ali Abdallah Saleh of Yemen and Bashar al-Assad of Syria have faced, and some are still facing, demands for their removal from power. The Western media have hailed the protests as an “Arab Spring”.

Yet several of the revolutions have faltered and stalled. The two states that first experienced mass protests, Tunisia and Egypt, have entered an ambiguous transition phase as the forces of change confront the old ruling classes, who are intent on clinging to power and privilege. Elsewhere, in Yemen, Syria, Bahrain and Libya, the

leadership is hanging on (at the time of writing), through violent suppression of protest coupled with offers of reform. Getting rid of dictators does not necessarily produce democracy. Old leaders have left, but the underlying political systems have not been overthrown.

The protest waves are also increasing the dangers posed by other destructive social forces in the area: regionalism, tribalism, sectarianism and radical Islamism. The divisions between Sunni and Shia Muslims, and between Muslims and Christians, are particularly severe and have the potential to generate serious disorder and violence. The old regimes have largely succeeded in separating religion and the state and in countering the threat posed by political Islam. Their fall may dissolve the boundary between the religious and the secular altogether and lead to the establishing of Islamic states.

Even the Western media, which at first attributed the revolutions only to a popular desire for secular and democratic states, have quietly admitted their mistake. The *New York Times* says:

In post-revolutionary Egypt, where hope and confusion collide in the daily struggle to build a new nation, religion has emerged as a powerful political force, following an uprising that was based on secular ideals. The Muslim Brotherhood, an Islamist group once banned by the state, is at the forefront, transformed into a tacit partner with the military government that many fear will thwart fundamental changes. It is also clear that the young, educated secular activists who initially propelled the nonideological revolution are no longer the driving political force — at least not at the moment.²

¹ Kenneth M. Pollack, “Winds of Change in the Middle East”, Brookings Institution, March 9, 2011.

² Michael Slackman, “Islamist Group Is Rising Force in a New Egypt”, *The New York Times*, March 24, 2011.

The consequences for Christians of the current upheavals are hard to predict in detail, but they are likely to be serious and possibly harmful. Perhaps the worst scenario is that Islamism seizes control of the various revolutions, imposes a much stricter Islamic character on politics and society in each country, and suppresses the local Christian minorities. Were this to happen, the very survival of Christianity across the entire region would be in jeopardy.

In this article we consider the general role of Islam in the Arab revolutions, and how this is worked out in the very different conditions of the various countries involved, including the place of the churches. We also look at the ambiguous and sometimes unhelpful involvement of the West in the movements for change, and the possible future for the churches.

The role of Islam

No accurate analysis of the events in the Middle East and North Africa can ignore the role of Islam. The increasing Islamization of societies and states since the 1970s has left the great majority of the population devoted to traditional and Islamist versions of Islam. Liberal and secular movements are small, marginal and often repressed. There is therefore a deep dichotomy between the genuine wish of the Arab masses for freedom and justice and their devotion to Islam and sharia law. Real freedom and justice for all can never be achieved until religion and the state are fully separated and as long as sharia is seen as the main source of civil law and the source of legitimacy for governments.

A survey taken by the Pew Forum before the start of the revolution found that the overwhelming majority of Muslims in the Middle East welcomed the influence of Islam in politics and the state. In Egypt, for example, 85% favored a large role for Islam in politics; 82% approved of stoning adulterers; 77% wanted whippings and the cutting off of hands for robbery; and 84% favored the death penalty for Muslims who convert to another religion. The legal enforcement of gender separation in public places was favored by 54% of Muslims. Only 27% of Egyptians aligned themselves with the modernizers, while 59% said that they backed the Islamists. A substantial minority (20%) even favored Al-Qaeda. The figures for other Arab states were fairly similar.³

At the same time the survey found that most people thought that democracy was the best form of government. In Egypt, some 88% wanted an impartial judiciary and 80% favored free speech, while 75% were opposed to censorship.

The tension between the two sets of figures is apparent. Many of the protestors aspire to the individual and democratic freedoms of the West, yet in the West it was the separation of religion from the state and its coercive powers that made possible and then guaranteed those freedoms. If a greater role is given to Islam in the state in the future, the prospects for positive political change will become more remote.

In fact the survey results reveal that any new system of government,

even if it starts as a democracy, will tend to gravitate towards the repression of all views that it considers un-Islamic or contrary to sharia. It will also tend to discriminate against women, non-Muslims and dissident Muslims. Such a process of Islamization is clearly evident in states outside the Arab world that are held up as models of Muslim democracy, such as Malaysia and Turkey. In countries where Islamists are both numerous and well organized, the threat of an Islamist takeover of the government will always be present.

The question is not whether Islam will play a role in determining the region's future, but what that role will be. For the moment, Islamist groups are speaking the language of democracy and national unity. They realize they are being given an opportunity, denied to them under the old regimes, to enter the political arena, and they are seeking to use it to their best advantage. Like the liberals, they are adept at using and manipulating modern media technology.

Variety in the Arab world

The Western media tends to ignore the vast differences between the Arab states. While Arabs share grievances over autocracy, brutality, corruption and unemployment, they express those grievances differently in each country. Some Arab countries have huge oil reserves and are very rich. Others have none and are desperately poor. Some (such as Syria, Iraq and Lebanon) are ethnically and religiously diverse; others are much more homogenous.

In **Egypt** the decisive force in removing former President Mubarak was the generals, who are not reformers, and it is they who currently hold power. They are carefully guarding their own interests and making only small concessions to progressive demands, seeking to preserve their long-standing role as the main influence in the state. The government has used violence to crack down on demonstrations and has arbitrarily arrested protesters.

The military sponsored a constitutional referendum on March 19, where proposed changes to the constitution were passed by a large majority. In fact the existing constitution has been left largely unchanged, and a wholly new one will be discussed only after parliamentary and presidential elections. Secularists, liberals and Christians wanted a new constitution promulgated before the elections. The delay would have given them time to organize politically so as to be able to compete with the well-organized Islamists.

The constitutional changes were supported by the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamists who are resisting the secularization of the state and supporting the imposition of sharia. Muslim spokesmen publicly declared that the "yes" vote was a clear affirmation that the majority of Egyptians want an Islamic state. A government minister said that the article of the present constitution that defines Islam as the official religion and sharia as the primary source of legislation would override any new constitutional provisions. Some Islamist terrorists have been pardoned and released from prison.

Some 10% of the Egyptian population of about 85 million are

³ "Muslim Publics Divided on Hamas and Hezbollah", Pew Global Attitudes Projects, December 2, 2010, <http://pewglobal.org/2010/12/02/muslims-around-the-world-divided-on-hamas-and-hezbollah> (viewed April, 19 2011). See also Barry Rubin, "Poll Reveals Frightening Popularity of Revolutionary Islamism", *Rubin Reports*, December 20, 2010, <http://rubinreports.blogspot.com/2010/12/poll-reveals-frightening-popularity-of.html> (viewed April 19, 2011).



Christians (the vast majority are Sunni Muslims). Since the revolution Christian leaders have complained at being left out of the political process. The dream that many had of a truly democratic, secular state seems to be fading. It is being reported that increasing numbers of Christians are seeking to leave Egypt to escape possible Islamist dominance in the new order.

In the chaos caused by political upheaval and protests, law and order are weakened, and Christians are often left without protection against attacks by hostile groups. In Egypt radical Islamists have been continuing to attack Christians, often with the collusion of the military and security forces. Christian women and girls continue to be abducted, raped and forcibly converted to Islam. In some villages in Upper Egypt, armed gangs are attacking Christians, kidnapping Christian women and children for ransom, extorting money, looting and raping. Three church buildings were attacked by militants who want them relocated outside Muslim areas and will not allow desperately needed repairs. The authorities and the military were again unwilling or unable to protect the Christians. At least 20 Christians have been killed in sectarian violence with Muslims, and some have even died at the hands of the army that should have been defending them. The attackers are rarely brought to justice and punished.

Syria has many minorities. Arab Sunnis are in the majority, but Muslim sects also have a sizeable presence. A further 8-10% of the population are Christian (not counting the many Iraqi Christian refugees currently living in the country). The government and security forces are monopolized by the Shia Alawi sect, a fact deeply resented by the Sunni majority.

The Syrian regime may have thought itself immune from the protest movement shaking other Arab countries because of its opposition to the US and Israel and its support for terrorist groups such as Hizbullah and Hamas. But protests have quickly spread to many cities, and it is estimated that at least 700 people have been killed by the security forces.

At the time of writing President Assad has not resigned but has responded with both concession and coercion. On the one hand, he installed a new cabinet, which pledged to lift the emergency law, abolish the state security court and allow peaceful demonstrations. On the other hand, the security forces have also fired on demonstrators, and they arrested a prominent opposition figure and former political prisoner just after the cabinet agreed to rescind emergency rule. Security officers are immune from prosecution for any crime committed in the line of duty. So far there is little sign of real democracy or freedom emerging from the unrest.

The Christians in Syria are deeply concerned about these developments. While the Assad regime is authoritarian and presides over a strict police state, it has been good for the Christians and the other minorities. A return of Sunni majority rule could lead to their violent suppression, and in the worst case even to an anti-Christian bloodbath similar to that in Iraq.

Tunisia is the most likely candidate among the affected countries for some kind of real democracy. It is the most secular of the Arab states and has a significant middle class and civil society. Ben Ali resigned quickly, and following his departure a campaign of mass civil disobedience forced the interim government to make significant

reforms and announce national elections. However, few structures have been put in place to eliminate corruption, and the courts and the police still need reforming. Some pro-democracy campaigners are concerned that the army may feel forced to intervene to stabilize the country.

However, although at least 44 political parties have registered so far for the elections, the main Islamist party, al-Nahda (which was banned under Ben Ali), is one of the most likely to succeed. Unlike the disorganized revolutionary protesters, al-Nahda is well organized as a political party, and it is hoping to secure 30 to 35% of the vote. Observers predict constitutional battles once the elections are over and that al-Nahda will press for a more rigorous imposition of Islamic law.

There are very few indigenous Christians in Tunisia, many of them isolated or secret believers. While political reform would be welcome in principle, a more fervently Islamic regime could turn violently against them.

Libya is the country most likely to replace one totalitarian system with another. It is a tribal state that Gaddafi managed to unite only by smashing all the principal institutions of the state and civil society. The rebels have a government in waiting, and they have called in the support of a coalition that includes the West, thus transforming internal dissent into a major international conflict. If Gaddafi is finally removed, Islamist militants will most likely gain prominent positions in the new Libyan military and security services. There are very few indigenous Christians in Libya, all of them converts from Islam, and they are often vulnerable and isolated. The violence and political instability puts them at still greater risk.

Bahrain is unique in the Arab world in that a majority Shia population, who are poor and disempowered, are ruled by a powerful Sunni monarchy that has favored the Sunni community. After the outbreak of unrest the government offered a modest reform, but this was rejected by the reformists. As a result the reform movement was accused of promoting Shia sectarianism and Iranian interests, and Saudi and UAE forces entered the country to bolster the regime and brutally repressed the dissent. The Christian community in Bahrain enjoys greater freedom than Christians in most of the Gulf States. But as the revolution threatens to mushroom into a regional conflict between Sunni and Shia Islam, its position is becoming increasingly precarious.

Yemen is falling apart and descending into chaos. The main competitors for power are President Ali Abdullah Saleh and his party, the Islamist opposition (linked to the Muslim Brotherhood), and protesters demanding democracy. Tens of thousands have been on the streets, and many have been killed by the security forces and competing factions. A Shia rebellion in the North, on the border of (Sunni) Saudi Arabia, is adding to the instability, along with a secession movement in the South that is open to an alliance with al-Qaeda. Tribalism is still a powerful force in the country.

Yemen is more likely than any other Arab country to fall into chaos and become a failed state in which many factions will fight each other in an endless cycle of violence. Al-Qaeda will be the big winner in this scenario. The very few Yemeni believers already have to practice their faith secretly for fear of severe reprisals, and converts from Islam face arrest and torture. If full-scale civil war

breaks out, they may find themselves caught in the middle, with everyone against them.

In **Jordan** the monarchy enjoys popular support and religious legitimacy among the Jordanians, although the Palestinians are less loyal. Recent protests have challenged the established order with demands for a constitutional monarchy. The Islamic Action Front, the political wing of the Muslim Brotherhood, is playing an active part in the opposition. As a result of the protests the King has appointed a new Prime Minister to preside over a program of reform. The monarchy styles itself as the protector of the country's Christian minority, and although conditions are not always easy for Christians in Jordan (especially converts), the prospect of greater Islamist influence in government is even more alarming for the churches.

In **Morocco** King Mohammed VI has managed to quieten the unrest by announcing comprehensive constitutional reform and promising to give up some power to a Prime Minister elected by parliament. It is yet to be seen whether he can establish a modern constitutional monarchy while reaffirming the sacred nature of his kingship. The freedom of Christians in Morocco is already very limited and insecure; the political future is too uncertain to assess their prospects under a reformed or new regime.

The role of the West

Up to the time of writing the contribution of Western governments to the developing crisis in the region has been neither consistent nor constructive. In Egypt the West abandoned its long-time ally Mubarak after he lost the support of key interest groups, and also applauded the fall of Ben Ali in Tunisia, but it has continued to give support to a similarly repressive regime in Bahrain, probably to safeguard its own military and oil interests. Its military involvement in Libya was ostensibly to prevent a massacre, but it has held back from similar adventures in Syria and Yemen, where hundreds have been killed.

In Syria, traditionally hostile to the US, the West is believed to be encouraging the revolutionary movement, thus risking a repeat of the Iraq scenario, when the removal of an authoritarian regime led to brutal sectarian violence. In Libya it apparently hoped to achieve a quick victory, but the resulting stalemate threatens to draw it in to another military and political minefield like Afghanistan. Its interventions have aroused the hostility of Saudi Arabia (despite its failure to criticize or challenge Saudi repression), which resents its assumption of the role of the world's policeman. The West has largely ignored the complicated nature of the Middle

East and the different conditions prevailing in each nation. It has also misjudged the forces pressing for democratic reform, supposing first that these are the dominant players in the region, and secondly that "democracy" can mean the same in an Arab and Muslim context as it does in a Western one.

Most importantly, perhaps, the West has ignored the powerful hold of Islam in its various forms on the great majority of Arabs. It has opened the way for Sunni Islamists gradually to take over power in Egypt and Tunisia, while strengthening the role of Shia forces allied to Iran in Bahrain and Yemen. Its weakening of staunch allies such as Jordan and Morocco and its encouragement of instability in various countries are likely to benefit these movements more than anyone else.

What of the churches?

In none of the countries discussed above can Christians be confident that the changes resulting from current unrest will be to their advantage. Of course, if it proves possible to establish a genuine liberal democracy in any of these places, they can hope to enjoy greater freedom from restrictions and harassment, and something nearer to equal rights with the Muslim majority. But the obstacles to such a political system are formidable, even in the more secular states.

"Democracy" in the Middle East and North Africa is more likely to favor Islamists and may well lead to the establishing of more strongly Islamic regimes. In this scenario Christians may find themselves suffering even greater discrimination than they did under the authoritarian but largely secular governments of the past. Worse still, they may face a much fuller imposition of sharia law, further restricting their worship and witness and putting the lives of converts in still greater danger.

Finally, the growing instability of the Middle East and North Africa of itself puts Christians in peril. Often perceived as allies of the West, they are easy targets of hostility from both sides of any conflict, and when law and order break down they are left without protection from forces that would like to eradicate them altogether. Many Iraqi Christians fled from violence in their homeland to Syria and Jordan. Where will Christians go if the whole region becomes toxic for them?

BARNABAS AID HOPE AND RELIEF FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

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BUILDINGS TO BUILD GOD'S KINGDOM

In many countries where Christians are persecuted, congregations are thriving and growing, but they have no buildings of their own. Some are too poor to buy or build a church, while others face restrictions on the repair or extension of their buildings. Still others have seen their churches forcibly closed or destroyed in violent attacks. For these brothers and sisters, their lack of adequate meeting-places represents a major problem that compounds their other sufferings. Yet this problem is not always well understood by Christians in the West.

WHAT USE ARE CHURCH BUILDINGS?

In the West, and especially in Northern Europe, owning a large, historic, traditional building can be more of a burden than a blessing owing to the resources and time that have to be invested in repair, upkeep and renovation. Many church buildings have been abandoned by their congregations, and are now standing empty or converted into homes, theaters or nightclubs. This can lead some Western Christians to question the usefulness of church buildings in countries where Christians are poor and persecuted for their faith in Christ.

But just as congregations in the West use buildings for a multitude of activities, so do those in countries where our Christian family are despised and mistreated. They can be places for worship, outreach, youth work, discipleship training and other forms of ministry. And there are a number of other important reasons why the persecuted Church in particular needs its own buildings.

For impoverished Christian populations, church buildings are often the center of all the Christian community's activities, since no other facilities are available to them. They are a place where Christians can gather together, feeling safe and secure, and a venue for any kind of community event, for example distribution of food parcels provided by Barnabas.

A building can help bring self-respect and dignity to a despised minority. A church building is a visible symbol of a Christian presence and of hope for the future, bringing encouragement to Christians who are viewed with contempt by the majority community.

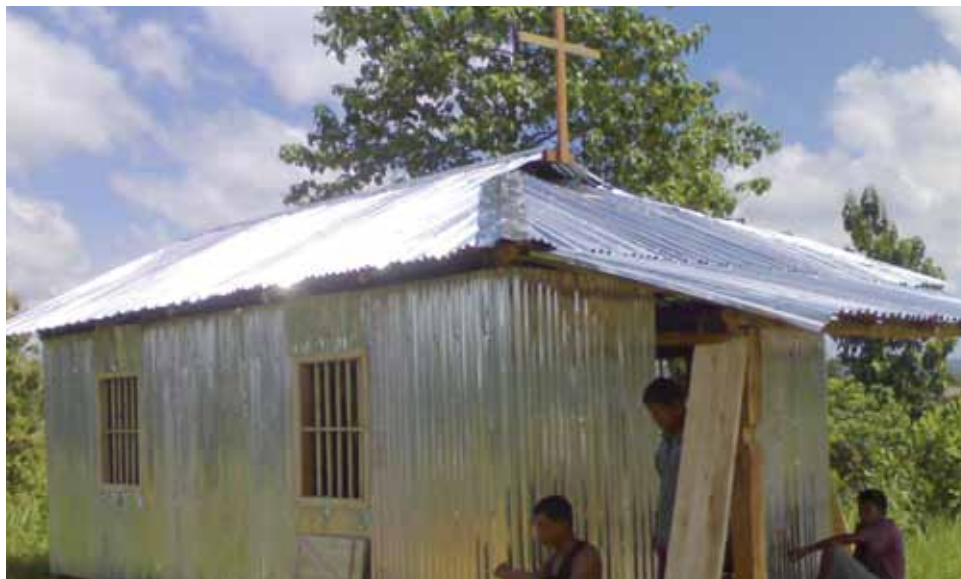
Church buildings are also centers of witness. This is particularly so in certain cultures where it is considered inappropriate to meet for worship except in a "proper" place. In such contexts, it can seriously hamper outreach to other faiths if there is not a church building to

which seekers can be invited for Christian worship services.

A church building may also be a place of safety. In many countries where Christians are harassed and persecuted for their faith families often live in homes made of flimsy materials. Their church will not be a grand structure, but it will usually be made of stronger materials, more likely to withstand targeted violence. So when Christians find themselves on the receiving end of violence, as for example during the recent unrest in Nigeria and Ivory Coast, their reaction is often to flee to the church buildings for refuge.

DON'T BUILDINGS ATTRACT PERSECUTION?

Sometimes Western Christians wonder why those in contexts of persecution want to have places of worship when these make them more visible and thus easier to attack. This is a legitimate question. Church buildings are symbols of the Christian faith, and in many countries those who persecute Christians think



Barnabas Aid helped to rebuild three churches in Bangladesh after an attack on a Christian community in September 2010



Dozens of churches in Ethiopia were destroyed by Islamists in March 2011. The violence forced 10,000 Christians to flee their homes and shelter at churches in nearby Jimma city

that if believers cannot meet together, their faith will be weakened. By attacking the buildings, they are also saying that they are targeting the Christian community because of their faith. Sometimes this can have tragic consequences. But persecuted Christians may be still more vulnerable if they have to meet somewhere other than a church building (see below).

AREN'T BUILDINGS UNBIBLICAL?

All Christians agree that the Bible tells us to meet together as believers and to encourage one another (Hebrews 10:25). As members of Christ's Body (Romans 12:5), we recognize our need to come together to build each other up (1 Corinthians 14:26). We can also agree that in the New Testament the word "church" refers to people, not to buildings. But some Christians go further, claiming that because the New Testament churches did not have buildings of their own, there is no Biblical warrant for such buildings today.

However, others would argue that the Bible does not pronounce on where or how a congregation should meet to worship the Lord. When Noah was told to build the ark, God specified the type of wood (Genesis 6:14-16), but not the particular tools required. Just as Noah used his judgment in choosing his tools,

so the type of venue that a church chooses is left to their own judgement. One congregation may meet in a home; another may rent a place to meet; still another may use a permanent building of their own.

Besides, the Bible certainly does not forbid the use of buildings especially designated for the worship and service of God's people. The Tabernacle, first Temple and second Temple were each a significant focus for the people of Israel, and the synagogues were also places to bring them together. Church buildings have continued this tradition.

"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another..."

Hebrews 10:24-25

WHY CAN'T CHRISTIANS MEET IN A HOME?

In some countries it is illegal for congregations to own or rent worship space, and in a few places they are unable even to meet or share their faith openly. In Saudi Arabia no church buildings are allowed and all forms of non-Muslim worship are forbidden, while in North Korea punishment for taking part in religious activity outside of the few government "show churches" ranges from fines to imprisonment and even execution. In these circumstances, Christians may have no alternative but to worship in a home. But there are many reasons why church buildings may be preferable in other contexts.

Many Christians live in extreme poverty, especially in countries such as Pakistan and India. Houses are small and barely sufficient for

the family who live there. Inviting the Christian community into the home for a time of worship would be a cramped and uncomfortable experience. In China and many parts of Central Asia, meeting in a home for prayer is illegal.

In Uzbekistan, the government places severe restrictions on all religious activities and it is illegal even to meet to pray in homes. In January 2010, a local church leader and two Christian women were arrested and fined as they met together in a private home to pray for their brothers and sisters.

WHY CAN'T THEY RENT A BUILDING?

Where the congregation is too big for a home or where meeting there is illegal, another option for a church might be finding a place to rent. But many congregations discover that landlords refuse to rent to them. This could be because of the anti-Christian feelings of the individual landlord, or sometimes because pressure is put on them by others not to rent to Christians. The 1,000-member congregation at Shouwang Church, Beijing, China, were evicted from the restaurant they had been renting and were unable to find an alternative venue owing to government pressure on landlords. In April and May 2011 Shouwang Church members were arrested every Sunday for several weeks as they tried to meet for worship outdoors.

In some other places it is illegal to meet for worship in any place not officially assigned for such use. On May 22, 2011 the authorities in Algeria issued a notice ordering the permanent closure of all Christian meeting places not designated for religious purposes. They threatened the churches with severe punishments if they failed to comply.



A congregation in Angola worships in their new building after the previous church was destroyed by Muslim extremists. Barnabas Aid helped with the costs

WHY CAN'T THEY MEET OUTDOORS?

Some people argue that congregations without a church building should meet outdoors, as a witness to their faith. However, this may not be practical for environmental reasons (such as temperature, weather conditions or insects) and it may be even more dangerous for vulnerable Christian communities than the physical presence of a church building. On September 2, 2010 two church leaders were assaulted while on their way to conduct morning prayers at an outdoor worship service in Bekasi, Indonesia. This was the sixth reported attack on the congregation, which had been forced to meet in an open field following a land dispute with local Muslims.

WHAT ABOUT OWNING A BUILDING?

Purchasing a building or land on which to construct a church may be fraught with difficulties for persecuted Christians. Where Christian communities live in extreme poverty, they will not have enough money for a purchase. Congregations that do have the finances can face many restrictions in relation to acquiring, constructing, maintaining, repairing or extending their building. Shouwang Church (see above) had been unable to close a deal to buy their own property after the seller was pressured by the government not to sign the contract or hand over the keys. In Egypt, presidential permission is required to build churches (but not mosques), while permission from local governors is needed for repairs to church buildings. Such permission can take years to obtain, and applications are often turned down.

In Uzbekistan churches must have a building in order to register with the authorities and function legally. Elsewhere in Central Asia they must at least have an address. Legally this can be a home, but in practice the authorities insist that it be a non-residential property. So if a congregation is unable to rent (see above) it will need its own building in order to register. Churches in Azerbaijan have the opposite problem: they have to be registered in order to own a meeting place.

BARNABAS HELPING TO BUILD THE BODY OF CHRIST

Barnabas Aid helps congregations around the world to obtain, renovate or extend their own meeting-places so that they are able to gather for worship and fellowship with other believers and to learn more about Christ. In 2010, we provided the resources for the construction or repair of 21 church buildings in 12 countries across, Asia, Africa and the Middle East. These churches are not huge or grand buildings; many are made of clay bricks and cement, with wood and iron poles for the structure and corrugated iron (metal) for the roof. Very simple, but a practical help that can transform the situation of believers.

A grant from Barnabas Aid is covering the costs of rebuilding six churches in Burma (Myanmar) that were destroyed by an earthquake on March 24, 2011. Labor for the rebuilding will be provided by church members and local volunteers, so the cost per church is only USD\$1,420.

In Angola, a growing congregation saw their church destroyed by Muslim extremists. The Christians were so poor that they were unable to afford to put up even a simple building in place of the wrecked one, but with help from Barnabas Aid, they were able to construct a new place of worship.

Christians in a Muslim-majority area of north-west Uganda were mocked by the local Muslims for their dilapidated church buildings. The congregation had a vision to build a large church, and so the young people in the church started to make the bricks. Gradually the walls began to rise. Once the brickwork was completed, other materials were needed, so funding from Barnabas covered the remaining costs, including doors and windows, plastering, painting and constructing the toilets.

In one Central Asian country, a congregation purchased some land and started to build their church. Members took part in the construction work and the inside was completed successfully but they did not have enough money for the outside work. With the help of funds from Barnabas, they were able to complete the building. They said, "In our context it is very important to have church building [so] that people don't think [we're a sect]."

Give thanks that Barnabas Aid has been able to help so many congregations around the world through the provision and repair of church buildings. Please remember in your prayers those Christians who are persecuted and unable to meet together to worship and proclaim their faith due to lack of meeting space and government restrictions.



00-637 Church Buildings Fund

Around 100 church buildings were destroyed in the long-running civil war in Sri Lanka and the congregations currently meet together to worship in tents and sometimes under trees. New churches at a typical cost of USD\$10,000* per building will provide places to worship and pray as well as to be beacons of hope in these broken communities.

*Price estimated at time of writing. It may vary with exchange rate fluctuations and other factors.

Project reference 85-927



Christians in Tanzania gather outside their church. Barnabas Aid provided money to cover the church with a metal roof

Syria



Students at a Christian school in Syria that Barnabas Aid helped to build

It was on the road to Damascus, the capital of modern Syria, that the risen Christ appeared to Saul, the persecutor of Christians, to commission him as an apostle. There was a church in the region from the earliest years of Christianity, and the Roman province of Syria was the birthplace of international Christian mission. Paul and his companions set out from there on their great evangelistic journeys.

Twenty centuries later Syria is again a hospitable place for Christians. Indeed, it is perhaps easier to be a Christian there than anywhere else in the Arab world, and recently the country has even thrown open its borders to hundreds of thousands of Christian refugees from neighboring Iraq. But many external and internal pressures for political change are currently threatening the stability of Syria and may undermine the security of its large Christian minority.

Flourishing churches

Christianity in Syria has had an unbroken history since it was planted there in New Testament times. A number of strong churches were well established by the time of the Muslim invasions in the 7th century, and they have survived the many regime changes between Arabs, Crusaders and Turks. Most Christians in modern Syria belong to these ancient groups, though some other denominations are also represented.

Estimates of Syria's Christian population vary. It was generally reckoned at some 10% of the total (more than 2 million people), but many Christians have either left or come to the country in recent years. On the one hand there is a high rate of emigration to the Americas and Africa, but on the other nearly 2 million refugees, many of them Christians, have arrived from Iraq, and a smaller number from the Holy Land.

But whatever the precise proportion of Christians in the country, the Syrian churches are generally safe and stable, owing to the favor they enjoy from the Muslim majority and the secular Baathist government. The degree of respect, even warmth, shown to Christians by their Muslim neighbors is unparalleled in the Arab world and unusual among Islamic nations generally, while the welcome extended to Christian refugees goes back at least as far as the Armenian genocide of 1915, when many thousands found refuge in Syria from the murderous policies of the Turkish government.

After independence from France in 1946 Syria experienced repeated political upheavals, until a coup in 1970 established a military-civilian, socialist and secular government. This regime has until recently ensured the country's internal stability and has clamped down hard on Islamist movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood. It is dominated by the Shia Alawi minority, which is keen to ensure that most other minorities (including Christians) are well

treated and grants them various rights, including a good measure of religious freedom.

Thus although 85 to 90% of the population is Muslim, Syria is a secular state, and Islam is recognized only as the religion of the majority (although the president must be a Muslim). Easter and Christmas are observed as national holidays alongside principal Muslim festivals.

In this generally supportive environment the churches enjoy many benefits. They are able to worship and practice their faith largely without interference, provided that their activities do not disturb public order (see further below). Churches can establish their own buildings, which are then supplied with free electricity, like mosques, and they are exempt from taxes on their property and vehicles. Syrian state education provides classes on Christianity for Christian students. Christian literature is freely available, and the churches can also make use of other media such as radio and television. Links with Christians in other countries are allowed, and foreign Christian organizations are free to operate in the country, though they must either register with the authorities or operate under the auspices of the historic churches. Many Christians hold influential positions in the professions and politics.

A restrictive state

But there is another side to the Syrian regime. It presides over an authoritarian and strict police state in which political freedom is severely limited. A state of emergency was in force for decades (until April 2011), and under its provisions a special court was empowered to judge security cases; it did not have to respect the constitutional rights of defendants. Dissidents are often imprisoned and anti-government demonstrations are prohibited, while members of the security forces are immune from prosecution for offences committed in the line of duty.

Although the churches have benefited from the stability achieved by these measures, they are not themselves immune from government restrictions. They have to register with the government, which subjects them to close surveillance and monitoring and requires them to obtain permits for all meetings except those for worship. Any activity that is perceived to be extreme, to threaten the authorities, or to

“pose a threat to the relations among religious groups” is forbidden.

In practice this means that evangelism among Muslims, while not illegal, is strongly discouraged, and Christians have to exercise great wisdom and caution in sharing their faith. In 2010 the authorities ordered the closure of ten Protestant churches (although some were later reopened), and various church camps were also cancelled by the authorities. A few expatriate missionaries have been arrested and deported, or prosecuted and imprisoned, and others have been denied permission to renew their visas.

Conversion from Islam to Christianity is forbidden, and although there are no reports of this law being enforced, the government regards Christian converts as still being Muslims. The positive attitude of Muslims to Christians in Syria does not extend to converts, who may be in danger from their families and communities. Many have had to relocate within the country or move elsewhere in order to practice their new faith openly. Converts are being required one by one to sign statements that they will not attend an evangelical church for a year. Despite these restrictions and pressures it is said that the number of converts to Christianity is increasing.

Sharia law is not generally in force in Syria, but the constitution does state that Islamic jurisprudence is a principal source of legislation. The law of inheritance and most of those relating to personal status are based on sharia and apply to the majority of Christians. The civil code allows the use of *fatwas* derived from sharia. It is also reported that discrimination against Christians in employment and housing is increasing.

Growing instability

Syria's stability was threatened even before the recent protests broke out in the Arab world. The country's economic performance has been relatively poor, leaving many young people without jobs or hope for the future, and the huge numbers of refugees coming in and out have exerted additional pressure on an overstrained system. Political reforms have been promised but not delivered, so that much of the population (including the Sunni Muslim majority) remains without effective political power. The government has supported the

activities of the Islamist group Hamas in the Holy Land, and Sunni Muslims in Syria are becoming more open to Islamist influence.

At the same time, Syria is the only Arab ally of the Shia Muslim regime in Iran and has joined with it in promoting the role of the Shia Islamist group Hizbullah in Lebanon. The political strength of the Shia minority has even raised fears among Sunnis of a “Shia crescent” centered on Iran and extending from Syria through Iraq and on to Bahrain. The country's involvement in the Lebanese civil war and its opposition to US policy have increased international tensions and confirmed its isolation.



Builders finish work on a new community center, funded by Barnabas

Country Profile

The Arab revolutions of 2011 are threatening to ignite this explosive mix and radically change the political landscape of Syria. Protests started in the southern Syrian city of Deraa in January and quickly spread to many other cities. At the time of writing, more than 200 people have already been killed by the security forces, and the government's mixed response of coercion and concession has so far failed to quell the violence.

The Christians of Syria are watching the unfolding events with great concern. On the one hand, the overthrow of the present regime could lead to a relaxation of the restrictions on their activities, and political and democratic reforms would be welcome in principle. But on the other hand, the establishing of Sunni-majority rule could lead to suppression of the country's minorities, including its Christians, and in the worst case to a violent bloodbath similar to that in Iraq.

Please pray for Syrian Christians as they seek the Lord's wisdom in these challenging and uncertain days, that they may know how best to respond to the developing crisis. Pray too that they may be protected from harm, whatever the future may hold for them and for their troubled country.

Barnabas Aid is helping Christians in Syria

Support for desperate Iraqi refugees

An extremely vulnerable group of Christians in Syria are refugees from Iraq. Even though Syria has shown remarkable hospitality by opening up its borders to them, Iraqi refugees are not allowed to work and therefore look to the churches for practical help. Many are living in overcrowded and unsuitable conditions. Barnabas Aid is helping thousands of Iraqi Christians with food parcels distributed by local churches. We also provide funds to help with medical needs.

Project reference 20-383



An Iraqi Christian carries a tray of eggs, part of the food aid he receives

Flourishing Christian community center

Helped with support from Barnabas, a Christian community center is now flourishing in a city in north-eastern Syria. It was built alongside a large church in the city center and is being used by several congregations. Before, the church members had to gather in the streets after funerals to pay condolences to grieving families, and then the city council forbade them to do so. Now the church members have a place to meet after celebrations such as baptisms, funerals and weddings. The center also contains a foreign language school, provides training in computer skills and houses a library.

Christian schools: a dream becomes reality

Syrian Christians consider teaching their children in a Christian environment to be a major priority. In recent years Barnabas has contributed to the building of a church-run kindergarten, two elementary schools and a high school in Syria.

A Christian community in the north-east of Syria had themselves raised one-fifth of the total costs for a new high school and had bought a site. But they needed help to build the school, and Barnabas contributed to the costs. It is educating 650 Christian students and provides jobs for 65 Christians. Our partner in Syria wrote to us, "It was like a dream for us many years ago, but now it has become a reality. This work has become a historical event in the life of our ... church in this town. We feel so happy to have our first high school."

Growing congregation gets new building

A congregation of 150 Christians in Syria was in urgent need of a new church building. Their existing building was too small to hold the growing congregation and was in such a bad condition that it had become dangerous. With the help of a grant from Barnabas they are now constructing a church closer to the city's employment and residential centers, which has the capacity to hold the entire congregation.



Members of another Syrian congregation sing in their new church building, which was bought with the help of Barnabas

Biblical Reflection

Matthew 10:16-33

Barnabas Aid has reported many times on persecution experienced by Christians who have sought to share their faith with others. Azamat from Uzbekistan was thrown into jail for seeking to convert Muslims to Christianity. When "Joshua" from Africa acknowledged Christ before the congregation of his local mosque, his Muslim father gave him 20 minutes to flee and warned that he would then send people to kill him. Ravi from India was found murdered after showing the Jesus film with a group of other missionaries.

Imprisonment, rejection by family, even death: in many parts of the world these may be the consequences for brothers and sisters who witness to the Lord Jesus. Some of these people are "full-time" missionaries or church leaders, but others are simply faithful Christians seeking to fulfil the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). So why does this persecution happen, and how should believers respond to it?

In this passage from Matthew's Gospel (10:16-33), the Lord Jesus is instructing His twelve disciples as He sends them out on their first mission in Galilee. But His teaching has a wider perspective: it looks ahead to the worldwide Christian mission that will follow His death and resurrection and guides us in how to respond to the rejection and hostility that we suffer for His sake.

Expecting the worst (10:16-25)

Jesus warns the disciples that they will be in danger as they engage in their mission, and so they must be realistic and on their guard. They will be brought before hostile authorities and will have to testify before them, although they should not worry about what to say on these occasions, because the Spirit of God will give them the words to speak.

Families will be divided among themselves, with brothers, parents and children even delivering each other up to death. The disciples can expect to be hated by everyone, but those who remain faithful throughout their afflictions will be saved at the last. At the same time they are not to be complacent about their ability to endure, but to flee persecution when

it breaks out against them.

These verses show that Christians' experience of hostility in response to our mission reflects that of Jesus Himself and results from our relation to Him. Disciples are His servants: we are sent out on mission by Him; we are put on trial because of Him; the witness we bear is to Him; the hatred we suffer is because of His Name. It would not be appropriate for us to escape the suffering of our Master; if He has experienced reviling and hatred, how much more should we expect to do so.

Acknowledging Jesus (10:26-33)

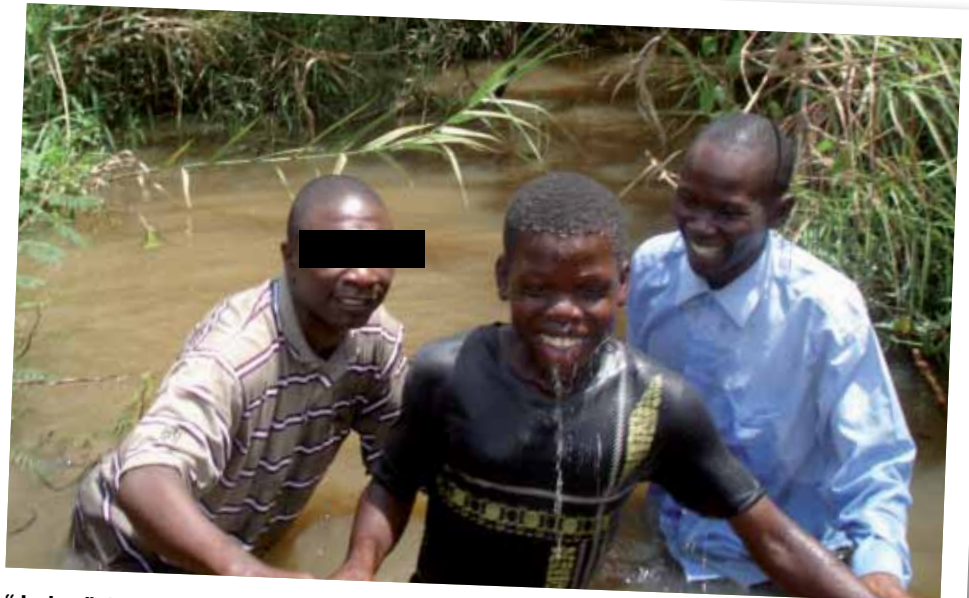
Jesus tells His disciples that they are not to fear those who persecute them and so keep the Gospel hidden; instead they are to proclaim His message openly. Their enemies can certainly hurt them, and can even kill them physically, but in the end that is the worst that they can do. So the disciples should fear not them but God, who has the power to destroy both soul and body in hell.

In fact it is foolish for the disciples to fear others. Not even the sparrow falls from the sky without God's knowledge and consent. He knows the disciples intimately, and they are worth more than many sparrows. So whatever

persecution they may have to endure, they can trust in Him as their heavenly Father; within his providential care they have nothing to fear from other people.

So these verses explain how Christians are to respond to persecution. They offer us both warning and encouragement to remain faithful in witnessing to the Lord despite human opposition. We do this not only by putting our confidence in God, but also by keeping an eternal perspective. Jesus will acknowledge before His heavenly Father those who acknowledge Him before others, but He will deny those who deny Him.

Unlike Christians in so many countries, we may face little danger of violence or death when we share Christ with our families and neighbors. But like them, we may well suffer ridicule and contempt, and perhaps discrimination and injustice, even if on a smaller scale. So just as these verses sustain our brothers and sisters in their ordeal, they can also instruct and inspire us. We face persecution because we are servants and witnesses of our persecuted Lord, and our calling is to remain faithful to that task in the face of it.



"Joshua" (left) baptizes a new Christian. When "Joshua" announced his conversion from Islam, his father threatened to send people to kill him

God's Sovereignty & Me

1. Conditions are always changing, so I must not be dependent on them.
2. What matters above all else is my relation to God.
3. God is concerned about me and all that happens to me. He knows about it and has allowed it.
4. God's will is a great mystery, but I know that whatever He allows is necessary and for my very best in His eyes.
5. Every situation is an unfolding of some evidence of God's love and goodness.
6. I must view all that comes my way as part of God's way of perfecting my soul and bringing me to final perfection.
7. Whatever my conditions are at this moment, they are only temporary and can never rob me of all that I have now or will ultimately have in Christ.

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

Advance Notice

Suffering Church Sunday 2011 – 2012

This year our Suffering Church Sunday edition of *Barnabas Aid* (September/October 2011) will focus on South Asia. These countries, with their large Hindu, Muslim and Buddhist majorities, their nationalism and Marxism, their political instability and their vulnerability to poverty and natural disaster, exhibit in a single region all the main sources of persecution faced by our brothers and sisters across the world.

Ask your church leaders NOW to mark a Sunday in your church's calendar, in November or whenever suits you best, to focus on this theme and to remember those in South Asia and elsewhere who suffer for their faith in Christ. Look out for a range of helpful resources in the next magazine; others will be available to order or from our website.

Large Print Prayer Diary

Did you know that Barnabas Aid's bi-monthly prayer diary *Barnabas Prayer* is also available in large print? Printed in this font at this size on plain paper without pictures, this format is particularly useful for those supporters who may struggle with the smaller print and colors of the prayer diary. Large print prayer diaries are posted to you free of charge in time for the arrival of the magazine. Please contact your nearest national office if you would like to receive *Barnabas Prayer* in this format.

Do you have email?

In this age of instant technology, sometimes the best way we can inform our supporters of a crisis and an urgent need for donations or prayer is via email. If you would like to receive information and prayer requests about emergency needs and other news-related emails about the persecuted Church, please join our mailing list by visiting www.barnabasaid.org.

Can you represent Barnabas Aid in your church?

Barnabas Church Representatives give some of their time and energy to promoting our work and helping their church to understand the plight of Christians in contexts of persecution. Do you have a heart for the persecuted Church?

Here are some of the things our representatives do:

- **Raise awareness** of the persecuted Church in their church – distributing our magazines and prayer materials, DVDs and Suffering Church Sunday resources to leaders, small groups and mission committees.
- **Encourage prayer** for persecuted Christians – our monthly prayer focus has all the information you need to expand your church's prayer life to include those who suffer for their faith in Jesus Christ.
- **Run special events** to raise funds for vital projects supported by Barnabas Aid.

If you share our passion for serving those Christians who are suffering for their faith, please contact our Church Representatives team at our USA office.

Mission Statement

The mission of Barnabas Aid is to support Christians where they are in a minority and suffer discrimination, oppression and persecution as a consequence of their faith. Our goal is to strengthen Christian individuals, churches and their communities by providing material and spiritual support in response to needs identified by local Christian leaders.

We do this by making their needs known to Christians around the world, and encouraging prayer, advocacy and financial giving in support of these brothers and sisters in Christ, working with existing local Christian organizations.

Barnabas Aid channels this flow from donors to the needy recipients with minimum overheads. All gifts are monitored to ensure they are used in line with the stated need.

In accordance with biblical teaching, we believe that Christians should treat all people of all faiths with love and compassion, even those who persecute them.

RECURRING GIFTS

For US supporters who would like to give regularly

Please use these gifts by Recurring Gifts for

- Wherever the need is greatest (General Fund)
 Other _____ *

Amount USD\$ _____

Starting on (date) _____ and then every month/quarter/year (delete as applicable) until further notice.

- Please debit my Visa Mastercard
 American Express Discover

Number _____

CV Number (last 3 on back of card) _____

Expiration date ____/____/____

Name _____

Address _____

Zip code _____

Signature _____ Date ____/____/____

This Recurring Gift is a new one / in addition to / replaces an earlier Recurring Gift in favor of the Barnabas Aid (delete as applicable)

Please send this form to Barnabas Aid and not to your bank

Yes, I would like to help the persecuted Church

Here is my gift of _____

Please use my gift for

- Other _____ *
 Wherever the need is greatest (General Fund)

I enclose a check payable to "Barnabas Aid".

Please debit my Visa Mastercard American Express Discover

Number _____

CV Number (last 3 on back of card) _____

Expiration date ____/____/____

Signature _____ Date ____/____/____

I do not require an acknowledgement of this gift.

Billing Information

Name _____

Address _____

Zip code _____

Phone Number _____

Email Address _____

Alternative Gift Card To make an alternative gift for a loved one, please complete the following and we will send you an attractive gift card to give to show how their gift will be used to bless their Christian brothers and sisters. Please write clearly.

Dear _____, A gift of USD\$ _____
 (check if you do not want the amount stated) has been received on your behalf from _____.

This gift will assist Christians who are persecuted for their faith.

With many thanks on behalf of the persecuted Church

Please send the following resources (indicate quantity required):

- South Asia house building leaflet _____
 Hope & Aid DVD _____
 Barnabas Aid Poster _____
 Compilation DVD _____

Please add me to your email news service. My email address is _____

Please return this form to Barnabas Aid at your national office or to the US office. Addresses are on the back cover. Barnabas Aid will not give your address or email to anyone else.

Phone 703-288-1681 or toll free 866-936-2525 or visit our website at www.barnabasaid.org to make a credit card donation.

*We reserve the right to use designated gifts for another project if the one identified is sufficiently funded.

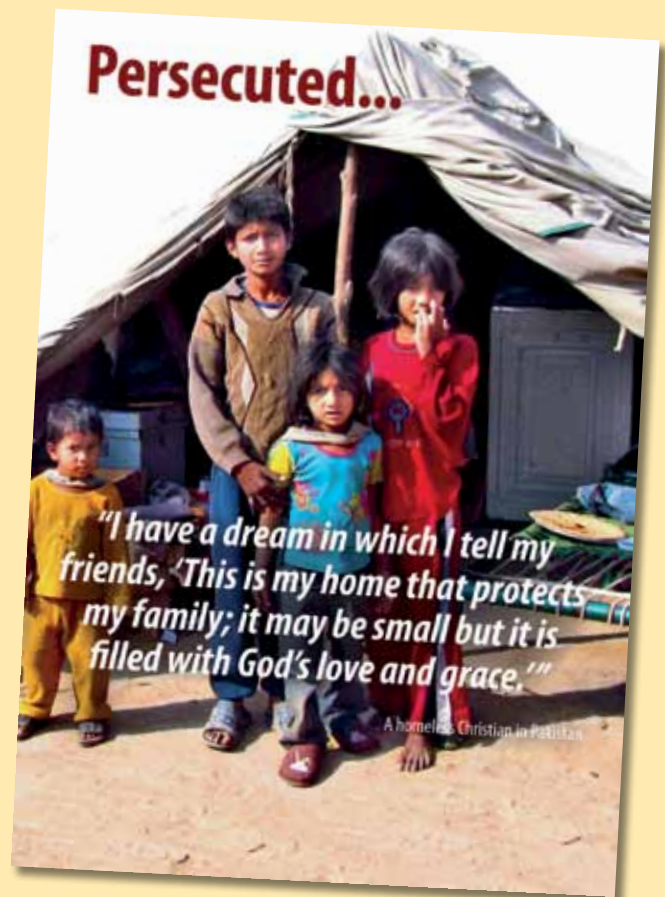


A higher standard.
A higher purpose.

Help us rebuild homes for Christians in South Asia

Thousands of Christians in India, Sri Lanka and Pakistan have been living in squalid conditions for years, without proper homes or places to worship. Violence, persecution and discrimination have left many in a hopeless spiral of homelessness and joblessness. They would love to start their lives afresh and build new houses and churches themselves, but they do not have the resources. Enclosed with this magazine is a leaflet detailing how Barnabas Aid is supporting house- and church-building projects in South Asia to provide Christians with new homes and places to worship. Please let us know if you need further copies for your congregation.

Project reference 00-977 (Houses for homeless Christians in South Asia)



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Company registered in England number 4029536

For a list of all trustees, please contact Barnabas Fund UK at the Coventry address above.

Germany

German supporters may send gifts for Barnabas Fund via Hilfe für Brüder who will provide you with a tax-deductible receipt. Please mention that the donation is for "SPC 20 Barnabas Fund". If you would like your donation to go to a specific project of Barnabas Fund, please inform the Barnabas Fund office in Pewsey, UK.

Account holder: Hilfe für Brüder e.V.

Account number: 415 600 **Bank:** Evang. Kreditgenossenschaft Stuttgart

Bankcode (BLZ): 520 604 10


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