



# Praying for the Persecuted Church

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hope and aid for the persecuted church

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**Published by Barnabas Aid** 1934 Old Gallows Road Suite 350 Vienna, VA 22182, USA

Registered charity number 1092935 Company registered in England number 04029536

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**Front cover:** A Pakistani Christian woman at a brick-kiln

# Praying for the Persecuted Church

2022-2023

On the Mount of Olives, the Lord Jesus Christ outlines for His disciples how the world will be judged in righteousness. At His return all nations will be gathered together and separated into two groups: at His right hand the righteous, referred to as the sheep, and at His left the unrighteous, referred to as the goats.

*Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was ill and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me ... Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." (Matthew 25:34-36, 40)*

Much here is mysterious, but one clear message is that those who belong to Christ will serve the least of His brothers and sisters – Christians around the world who face hardship,

hunger, oppression and persecution. Covid and other natural disasters have greatly added to their trials

There are many practical ways to serve, and as Christians we know that prayer is among them. The Apostle Paul encourages the Christians in Ephesus, "always keep on praying for all the Lord's people" (Ephesians 6:18).

This booklet is provided to inspire and focus your prayers for our Lord's suffering people. Most pages are dedicated to a particular country, others focus on a particular group of persecuted believers, and the final page encourages us to rejoice in the glorious hope that we have in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

*Some Christians like to observe the traditional season of Lent to prepare themselves for Good Friday and Easter Day. The booklet has been structured for use during this time, with a page for every day from Ash Wednesday, 2 March, to Easter Day, 17 April. A reading plan for this period can be found on the inside back cover.*

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# Afghanistan



**T**he withdrawal of US troops and the Taliban takeover of the country has severely affected the position of Christians remaining in Afghanistan. Taliban fighters took control of the capital city Kabul on Sunday 15 August 2021 and, on 7 September, announced the formation of a new government and the implementation of strict Islamic law (sharia).

In this strongly Islamic country, the few Afghan Christians are either converts from Islam or the children of converts; they risk severe penalties if their faith becomes known – the Taliban announced before their takeover that Christians must re-convert, leave, or be killed.

Only the Lord knows what was the exact number of believers in Afghanistan, but it is estimated at 5,000 to 8,000. Many Afghan believers fled abroad in the years before the Taliban's return to power, and others have subsequently been helped to find refuge in safe countries.

As well as those who fled into neighbouring countries, Barnabas Fund is in direct contact with several hundred Christians who remain in Afghanistan. Working in much secrecy and danger, our Afghan Christian project partners have channelled donations in order to support the living costs of believers who are internally displaced and trying to evade capture by the Taliban.

In 1973 Afghan soldiers destroyed the last official church building on Afghan soil but its expatriate congregation continued to meet in other premises until 2010.



This Christian family got out of Afghanistan overland in August 2021. Barnabas Fund is helping to support them

Pray that Afghan Christians will receive practical support and encouragement from Barnabas project partners as they come to terms with the increased dangers. Ask the Lord to guide those who have fled the country to rebuild their lives in security and that governments of safe countries around the world will be willing to open their doors to receive Afghan Christians in sufficient numbers.

# Algeria

A small but growing indigenous Christian population, mainly converts from Islam and their children, is estimated to number around 90,000 among Algeria's 98% Muslim majority. Many Algerian converts are Berbers, indigenous to North Africa, but an ethnic minority in this Arab-majority country. Whilst conversion from Islam is not a criminal offence, those who evangelise Muslims risk a five-year jail sentence.

The constitution declares Islam the state religion but guarantees freedom "to exercise worship", which is protected only if exercised in accordance with the law. But other laws restrict its practice for non-Muslims. According to a 2006 ordinance, the National Commission for Non-Muslim Worship grants permits for churches but, so far, no permits have been issued, despite repeated requests by churches.

One historic church building appropriated by a local authority in the port city of Mostaganem was finally returned to the Église Protestante d'Algérie (Protestant Church in Algeria) in May 2021 after a campaign lasting more than ten years. The building is one of several places of worship of historical significance requisitioned for secular use.

This overdue legal redress contrasts sharply with the continued closure of many other church buildings by the authorities as part of the clampdown on Algerian Christians.

Building safety committees have inspected many church buildings since November 2017. Part of their remit is to decide which churches are eligible for permits under the 2006 ordinance. Whereas some 20 churches have been sealed shut since the beginning of 2018, only three of these churches have been granted permission to reopen.



This historic church building in Mostaganem was returned to the Church in May 2021 after a decade under local authority control

Call on the Lord to intervene on behalf of Algeria's Christians, that full religious freedom will be granted with the reopening of sealed churches. Pray that permits for church buildings will start to be issued and that the authorities will recognise that Christians are a force for good and blessing in their society.

# Azerbaijan

**A**zerbaijan's population is estimated at 96% Muslim (mainly Shia). Although nominally a secular republic, the country's religious activity is tightly controlled and it is often difficult for churches to gain official registration. In June 2021 amendments to both the Religion Law and Administrative Code placed further restrictions on churches, including a requirement to gain state approval for the appointment of church leaders.

Most of the small Christian community, around 3% of the population, live in the ethnic-Armenian enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh (mountainous Karabakh) which was placed within Azerbaijan by the USSR in 1923. The region has been largely self-governing since the end of the first Nagorno-Karabakh war in 1994.

Azerbaijan, supported politically and militarily by Turkey, invaded Nagorno-Karabakh at the end of September 2020. The conflict ended with a ceasefire agreement in November 2020, and resulted in Azerbaijan taking control of significant territories which had formerly belonged to the Armenian community. In 2021 Azerbaijan began to make incursions into Armenia itself. After fighting in November 2021 Armenian Church leaders stated that they were "deeply concerned" about the threat.

Azerbaijan has been accused of "cultural crime" against Christian sites in Nagorno-Karabakh by the Armenian

National Committee for UNESCO. In March 2021 church buildings in Shushi and Mekhakavan were demolished. In October 2020 Azerbaijani forces were reported to have shelled Ghazanchetsots Cathedral, also in Shushi.

Azerbaijan has also been accused of war crimes against captured Armenian soldiers and civilians, including physical and psychological torture, denial of access to medical care, and murder.

In April 2021 Azerbaijan opened a Military Trophy Park in the capital Baku which includes a tunnel lined with hundreds of helmets from killed Armenian soldiers, and waxworks of Armenians with exaggerated racial features in humiliating poses. As of September 2021 an estimated 200 military and civilian prisoners are still held captive by Azerbaijan.



Ghazanchetsots Cathedral in Nagorno-Karabakh was shelled by Azerbaijani forces in October 2020

Pray for Christians in Nagorno-Karabakh who fear for their safety in the face of Azerbaijani hatred, and for those across Azerbaijan, that they will be able to live out their faith in peace.

# Bangladesh



**F**ormed in 1971 after a bloody civil war saw East Pakistan secede from West Pakistan, Bangladesh is a poor country prone to flooding and cyclones. Whilst Bangladesh is a parliamentary democracy, Islam is the state religion, although the constitution allows minorities to practise and share their faith.

The Christian minority of less than 1% enjoys greater freedom than in many Muslim-majority countries, but, along with the 9% Hindu population, experiences discrimination from the 90% Muslim majority.

Secular factions have resisted attempts to Islamise the country. Bangladeshi Christians and other minorities staged a 500-strong peaceful protest march in November 2020 in Dhaka against relentless Islamist extremist attacks on minority communities. Between March and September 2020 at least 17 people from ethnic and religious minority groups had been killed.

In July 2021, Christian villagers in Chittagong Hill Tracts were forced to flee after two violent attacks by Buddhist extremists who demolished the church building when the Christians refused to re-convert to Buddhism. Barnabas is building homes for desperately poor and persecuted Santal Christians, 5,000 of whom were made homeless by arson in 2016.

Covid cases caused by the highly infectious Delta variant soared in July

2021. This third wave was by far the worst in Bangladesh up to that point. In some places, 60% of Covid tests came back positive.

A few hundred Rohingya Christians live among 900,000 Rohingya Muslims who fled genocide in Myanmar to refugee camps in Bangladesh. Some Christian families lost homes and possessions when fire engulfed a sprawling Rohingya refugee camp in Cox's Bazar in March 2021. Twelve Christians were seriously injured in January 2020 in multiple attacks by Rohingya Muslim elements in the camp.



Barnabas supports the education of more than 50 primary school children from the persecuted Santal Christian community in Bangladesh

Ask the Lord to encourage and provide for Bangladeshi Christians, especially converts, and also Rohingya Christian refugees. Pray that He will guide His people to respond with Divine wisdom to plans to Islamise the nation further, and be a powerful testimony of unflinching love for the Muslim majority and boldness inspired by His Spirit.

# Victims of Violence and Injustice



*"The lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold." (Psalm 18:2)*

Many Christians suffer violent attacks for their faith in the Lord Jesus, whether from authorities or the community at large. This is especially so where the majority religion is closely aligned with national identity.

North Korea continues to be the most dangerous country to be a Christian. Its communist government's repression of Christians is unrelenting. Laws suppressing freedom of religion in Eritrea and Iran result in police raids, arrest and torture, sometimes martyrdom.

Boko Haram, its offshoot Islamic State in West Africa Province, and other Islamist terrorist groups have killed at least 10,000 people in Nigeria since 2015. In Cameroon, Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger hundreds of Christians have been killed and thousands displaced by Islamist groups in recent years.

Al Shabaab continues violent operations in Somalia and Kenya, and Al-Sunna wa Jama'a took control of Cabo Delgado in Mozambique's far north in March 2021, subjecting the population to shocking violence, including the decapitation of a pastor in December 2021.

Poverty and low social status make justice elusive for Christians in

Pakistan, where courts often uphold false "blasphemy" allegations or the police turn a blind eye when Muslim men abduct, forcefully marry and forcefully convert Christian women and girls.



Myanmar military set alight vehicles after shooting dead their 35 occupants near the village of Mo So, Kayah State, a predominantly Christian area, on Christmas Eve 2021

Cry out to the Lord on behalf of Christians living under the constant threat of violence or injustice for their faith. Pray that those bereaved and injured in such attacks will know the Lord's comfort and healing and be able to entrust their future to the faithful Judge of the whole world and to forgive those who persecute them. Praise God for those who remain faithful when suffering unjust imprisonment, and ask that He will be a shield to them and their families.

# Burkina Faso

violence. The Covid-19 pandemic has added to the country's misery.

In one of the worst attacks of recent years, more than 130 people, including many children, were killed on one night in June 2021 in the north-east mining town of Solhan, Yagha province. At the time of writing, Burkina Faso President Roch Kabore had been detained by soldiers demanding more support for the military campaign against Islamist extremists.



Fulani Christian converts from Islam, forced to flee their homes in Burkina Faso because of jihadi attacks, receive food aid from Barnabas

Ask God to shield our brothers and sisters, and all other citizens, from attack. Pray that He will heal them from the physical, mental and spiritual trauma of the violence and provide for the daily needs of the displaced. Pray that the God who makes wars cease will restore peace to this troubled land.

The rise of Islamist terrorism has devastated landlocked Burkina Faso, where around 60% of the population are Muslim, 30% Christian and 10% are followers of traditional African religions. Until a few years ago the impoverished country was viewed as a bastion of religious tolerance, in which people of different religions lived in peace together, despite political instability and military coups.

Since 2015, jihadi violence has spread from neighbouring Mali and Niger to affect most regions of the country, particularly the north and north-east. Extremist Islamist groups have carried out relentless attacks on civilians, frequently targeting Christians, Christian leaders and places of worship. In one attack jihadists warned, "Flee, convert or die." Most Christians have fled the worst-affected areas, church buildings are closed or destroyed and the few remaining believers worship in secret.

Armed groups target people's livelihoods, destroying crops and food reserves, forcing 3.5 million people to rely on humanitarian assistance. In September 2021 it was estimated that more than 1.4 million people had been internally displaced by the escalating violence, representing a 50-fold increase over the previous three years. In 2020 violent attacks claimed almost 2,300 lives. By late 2021, more than 2,000 had been schools closed and more than 320 health centres shut because of the

# Cameroon

**C**ameroon, formed by an amalgam of former French and British colonies, has a Christian population of around 70% with Muslims comprising 20%, mainly in the troubled Far North. Once considered a beacon of stability, the country is, at the time of writing, suffering three simultaneous humanitarian crises. In 2021 the UN estimated 4.4 million people in Cameroon needed humanitarian assistance as a result of a spike in violence in two regions and the influx of refugees in a third, combined with the impact of Covid.

The situation in the north-western Francophone region and the smaller south-western Anglophone region remains volatile, with clashes between state forces and armed separatist groups driving more than 711,000 from their homes.

The Far North, which borders Boko Haram's bases in north-eastern Nigeria, has seen a surge in Islamist attacks, often targeted against rural Christian communities, forcing more than 322,000 to flee. The Africa Centre for Strategic Studies logged 400 violent incidents in 2020, a 90% increase over the previous year. The surge in violence forced the Cameroon authorities to close more than 60 schools on its northern border in late 2020 to protect children and staff from continuing Boko Haram suicide bomb attacks, often perpetrated by women and children.

In one of the worst attacks of 2021, five children were among 13 killed in predominantly Christian Mozogo town when Boko Haram militants attacked, driving fleeing residents into a park where a young female suicide bomber detonated her explosives.

Since 2013 violence in the mainly Christian Central African Republic has resulted in a large influx of refugees in Cameroon's eastern region. There are an estimated 321,000 CAR refugees in Cameroon, adding pressure on basic services and local resources.



A Cameroonian Christian woman, displaced by violence in the Far North, signs for Barnabas food aid

Pray for stability and unity of society and Church in Cameroon. Pray that the needs of those displaced will be met, and ask for comfort for people who have lost loved ones, especially for widows and orphans and the Lord's protection and provision.

# China

**P**astors in the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, the official Protestant Church of China, were ordered in July 2021 to deliver sermons based on a speech by President Xi Jinping celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) – just one example on how the CCP is stepping up its attempts to “sinicise” (i.e. make Chinese) the Church.

Other measures taken in 2021 saw further restrictions on Christian content on social media platforms, including the blocking of Christian search terms and the removal of Christian accounts. Christian businessmen were jailed for producing and selling audio Bibles. Stringent religious regulations, introduced in 2020, were tightened further to introduce a database listing all those authorised to perform religious ministry. In order to be registered, church leaders must “support the leadership of the CCP” and practise the “core values of socialism”.

Government action against unofficial congregations, known as “house churches”, and state-regulated Three-Self churches, has been intensifying since 2018. Nevertheless, the number of Christians is thought to be around 150 million and growing fast.

The intensity of the persecution varies across the vast country. It is often instigated at the level of a province or city but in the knowledge

that the CCP will approve. Many house churches have been shut, and members arrested. Authorities have removed crosses from churches and ordered churches to replace Biblical paintings or Scriptures with portraits of President Xi or his quotes. In Zhejiang province in July 2021, local officials ordered Christian fishermen to remove crosses from the masts of their boats, and paint over the word “Immanuel”.

The CCP is continuing its development of high-tech surveillance systems to target non-atheist minorities, including ethnic Muslim Uyghurs. Tens of thousands of Uyghurs are interned in “re-education” camps in Xinjiang province in a sustained campaign of persecution against them.



A cross is forcibly removed from a boat in Zhejiang province

Pray for strength and perseverance for Christians in China to enable them to stand firm against persecution. Pray the authorities see that Christians are a force for good and harmony in society and stop their persecution of the Church.

# Egypt



**C**hristians say that their situation in Muslim-majority Egypt is now better than it has been in living memory.

President al-Sisi has been quick to give verbal and practical support to Christians, who make up 10% of the population, whenever anti-Christian incidents occur. Al-Azhar University now controls most mosques so that the extremist Muslim Brotherhood has become less influential. In October 2021 the president lifted a nationwide state of emergency imposed after Islamist bomb attacks on two major churches on Palm Sunday 2017 killed at least 65 people. He said it reflected that the country is more stable and secure.

However, Christians still face pressure and hostility from local communities, especially in rural areas. Two brothers, both Muslims, were jailed for life in November 2021 for stabbing to death Christian shopkeeper Ramsis Hermina in an attack motivated by anti-Christian hatred. In December 2020 a Muslim mob attacked Christian homes and a church in al-Barsha village, Minya governorate.

President al-Sisi's government has worked steadily to legalise churches following the repeal of Ottoman-era restrictions in September 2016. Prior to that only a few churches were registered and it was difficult to obtain a licence. In January 2022 the number of licensed churches was 2,162 out of 3,730 that applied. Worship is permitted

in unlicensed churches pending completion of the licensing process.

In other positive developments, the government introduced in 2021 teaching about Christianity and Judaism as part of religious education in schools, with lessons aimed at highlighting "common values" with Islam. President al-Sisi later described freedom of belief as a God-given right.

Christianity in Egypt dates from the first century AD and there has been a continuous Christian presence despite centuries of anti-Christian discrimination since the arrival of Islam.



Thanks to a microloan from Barnabas, Christian widow Azza started a grocery shop and can now support her three children

Give thanks for President al-Sisi's support for Christians and for improved stability and security in Egypt. Ask that all Muslims will take to heart the president's calls for tolerance and pray for protection for Christians from Muslim mobs. Ask that the church licensing work continues.

# Eritrea

**E**ritrea is one of the worst countries in the world for Christian persecution. Since 2002 the Marxist government has legally permitted only three Christian denominations – Eritrean Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Lutheran – as well as Sunni Islam (the population is roughly half Christian and half Muslim) but even having official recognition does not guarantee freedom from intimidation and harassment.

Christians from prohibited denominations are often imprisoned, beaten, tortured, starved and forced into hard labour. Pastors and theological students in detention get especially severe treatment. Many Christians are held indefinitely, usually without trial.

The release of 160 Christian prisoners between September 2020 and February 2021 as part of measures to combat Covid-19 raised hopes that the state might be relaxing its repressive policies against believers; however, these hopes were dashed following subsequent arrests of Christians at prayer meetings in March 2021 and the arrest of two pastors, both in their 70s, in July.

The discovery by the authorities of a list of Christian contacts led to the re-arrest of 15 Christians in September 2021. All had been imprisoned for their faith before. Most had served between five and six years, but some had endured 16 years of incarceration until being

freed the previous September from the Mai Serwa maximum security prison.

At the time of writing, it is estimated that there are some 160 Christian prisoners in Eritrea. Tens of thousands of Eritrean Christians have fled persecution, many seeking refuge in Ethiopia, Sudan, Uganda and Israel.

Eritrean troops have perpetrated terrible atrocities against the ethnic Tigrayan population, which is almost entirely Christian, in neighbouring Ethiopia from late 2020.



Distribution of food and practical support for Eritrean Christian refugees in Israel, funded by Barnabas

Give thanks for the faithful witness of Eritrean Christians and pray that our imprisoned brothers and sisters will be given the strength and grace to endure. Ask that, by their example, the authorities will have their eyes opened to the love and power of God and will allow believers of all denominations to worship freely.

# Ethiopia

**T**housands of civilians have been killed and around 1.7 million internally displaced because of conflict in Ethiopia's northern Tigray region, where the population is almost entirely Christian. The UN warned towards the end of 2021 that 5.2 million people were in need of urgent food assistance in Tigray if "the world's worst famine situation in decades" was to be averted.

Soldiers from neighbouring Eritrea carried out terrible atrocities in Tigray. They are accused of the massacres of Christians in and around the historic church of Axum and in the village of Dengelat, crowded for a Christian celebration, in November 2020.

Tigrayan Christians have suffered torture, rape and forced removals. Many pastors and church ministers are among the dead, churches and monasteries have been destroyed or looted, and harvests razed. The conflict began in November 2020 when Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed ordered a military offensive against the region's dominant political party, the Tigray People's Liberation Front, in response to an attack on a government military base.

Christians are also being subjected to attack in parts of Ethiopia's western Oromo region. Two church ministers were among 24 Christians killed by members of the militant group OLF Shenie, an offshoot of the Oromo Liberation Front, in March 2021. It

followed the massacre of at least 54 ethnic Amharas, mostly Christian women, children and elderly, in November 2020 when terrorists swept into Gawa Quanqa village, razing 120 homes.

Christians displaced by conflict in the southern Gedeo-Guji region in 2018 are returning to their ruined farms and homes. Barnabas has rebuilt five of the 120 churches destroyed in the conflict, enabling Christians to worship together as a community again.

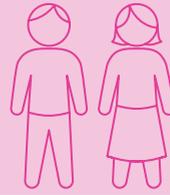
Ethiopia is the second most populous country in Africa with many ethnic groups. It officially accepted Christianity in the fourth century. Christianity is the dominant religion, and about a third of the population is Muslim.



Christians displaced by conflict in Tigray give thanks for food provided by Barnabas

Pray for protection for Christians in Ethiopia and for an end to violence. Ask for comfort for the bereaved, healing for the wounded, and food and shelter for the displaced.

# Children



*“Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.’” (Matthew 19:14)*

Schooldays present challenges for Christian children in many contexts. Hostility from teachers and classmates and the pressure to convert to the majority religion can be daily experiences. Christian students can be marked down or failed in exams. Many Christian parents are caught in a poverty trap through anti-Christian discrimination and cannot afford to send their children to school at all.

Children in Tajikistan are banned from attending Sunday school or any church services, even if accompanied by parents, thus severely restricting children’s ability to grow in the Christian faith.

In Nigeria’s Middle Belt a wave of kidnappings by militants included the abduction of 121 children from Bethel Baptist High School in Kaduna State in July 2021. Most were set free or escaped, but in January 2022 one student was still being held captive, as were more than a hundred of 276 girls abducted by Islamist extremists from a school in Chibok, Borno State in 2014.

Christian girls in Pakistan and Egypt are often abducted and raped, forced to marry their kidnapper and convert to Islam. In September 2021 the Lahore High Court validated such a marriage, deeming 14-year-old

Chashman Kanwal mentally mature enough to marry.

In Heilongjiang Province, China, police raided Maizi Christian Music High School in September 2021, arresting all staff members and students present. The school specialises in equipping Christian musicians to serve in Church worship teams. The government recently published textbooks for Chinese schools instructing pupils from age seven in President Xi Jinping’s ideology.



Bethel Baptist High School students in Nigeria reunited with their parents after weeks in captivity in 2021

Pray that children who follow the Lord will draw strength from their Protector and Good Shepherd and not be discouraged by setbacks, persecution and injustice. Call on the Lord to protect Christian girls in Pakistan from forced marriage and conversion. Ask that God will strengthen those held hostage and restore them to their families.

# India

India is a secular state with a Hindu majority of 80% and Christians estimated at 4% of the population. Extreme Hindutva nationalism under the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is growing, and since Narendra Modi became Prime Minister in 2014 persecution of Christians has increased with police often dismissive in response to anti-Christian violence.

Despite persecution, the number of Christians in India continues to grow. Around 40% of Indian Christians are Dalits, who are at the lowest level of the Hindu caste system. They suffer discrimination because of this as well as their faith.

The second Covid wave of 2021, in which over 2,000 pastors and church leaders died, intensified the severe suffering caused by the 2020 lockdown. Surviving leaders were exhausted in trying to address their congregations' spiritual and practical needs. In states where the BJP holds political power, Christian families and especially pastors were sometimes refused government food aid by distributors.

Lockdown saw a marked increase in targeted hatred and violence against Christians. Amongst numerous examples, in May 2021 a crowd of around 150 Hindu extremists attacked and destroyed a church building being constructed in the village of Bodoguda, Odisha. The Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI) recorded 145 instances of persecution against Christians in

the first half of 2021. These numbers represent the known cases; the true figures are thought to be much higher.

Freedom of Religion Laws introduced in nine states, with Karnataka planning to join them, ban the use of force, fraud or allurement in conversion, but in reality serve as anti-conversion laws. Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat tightened their legislation in 2021. Christians actively sharing their faith are particularly vulnerable to false accusation.



Untrained Indian pastors, elders and Bible women received packages of Christian literature funded by Barnabas

Ask God to sustain and comfort Christian communities devastated by the Covid crisis, especially those who have lost leaders during the pandemic. Pray that Christians will maintain a faithful witness even in the face of rising extremism from the majority community and that their loving, compassionate spirit will draw many of their neighbours to Christ.

# Indonesia

**O**n Palm Sunday 2021 two Islamist suicide bombers blew themselves up outside a church in Makassar on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi, injuring 19 people. The attack on 28 March was orchestrated by terrorist group Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD), which has links to Islamic State (IS, ISIS, ISIL, Daesh). Months later police foiled a JAD plot to bomb several other churches and assassinate a church minister.

Another smaller Islamist terrorist group, the East Indonesia Mujahideen, killed eight Christians in two attacks in Central Sulawesi province in May 2021 and November 2020.

The attacks illustrate the effects of the rise of hard-line Islamist ideology in recent years on the archipelago, which is home to the world's largest Muslim population. Only a generation ago, Muslims and Christians lived peaceably as respectful equals in accordance with the state-promoted philosophy "Pancasila".

Indonesia's President Joko Widodo has taken steps to combat extremists, including dissolving two hard-line Islamist organisations. He has appointed a Christian as national police chief. Widodo's son, Gibran Rakabuming Raka, the mayor of Surakarta, called for the closure of an Islamic school after pupils aged between five and twelve desecrated graves at a Christian cemetery in June 2021.

More than 1,000 church buildings have been forcibly closed on various pretexts since the introduction of a 2006 decree requiring churches to have at least 90 members and approval from 60 households of other religions. An attempt by Christians to overturn the decree was rejected by the Supreme Court in June 2020.

Muslim-background Christian Muhammad Kace, arrested in Bali for posting YouTube videos criticising Islam, was beaten in jail in October 2021 by inmates, including a former police chief, with the alleged collusion of prison officials.

Hostility from the Muslim community towards Christians varies across Indonesia. It is most severe in the semi-autonomous province of Aceh, the only province governed by sharia (Islamic law).



A Barnabas self-sufficiency project provided sheep to Indonesian Christian converts from Islam

Pray for God's protection over Christians amid the threat of Islamist attack. Give thanks for the measures taken by President Widodo and his son to support the Christian community.

# Iran



Iran is the leading Shia Muslim country and has been an Islamic Republic since the 1979 revolution, ruled by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Al Khamenei, an Islamic cleric, since 1989.

The constitution officially recognises Christianity (as well as Islam, Judaism and Zoroastrianism). Historic Assyrian and Armenian Christian minorities, whose languages are not understood by the majority Muslim population, are permitted to worship in their languages. The main target for persecution are Muslim-background Christians, as well as Christians who evangelise Muslims or conduct worship in the national language Farsi.

The policy is designed to discourage the conversion of Muslims and is likely to be stepped up following the appointment in August 2021 of Iran's new president, Ibrahim Raisi, an extremist. Nevertheless, the Christian convert community has grown from a few believers in 1979 to hundreds of thousands, with many more in the Iranian diaspora.

All Farsi-speaking churches have been closed by the authorities and underground house churches, where worship is in Farsi, have an average life of six months to a year. Converts are often charged with "acting against national security".

It is a common tactic of the authorities to release and re-arrest believers continually, in order to

exhaust them psychologically, and push them to either flee the country or return to Islam. Another common practice by Iranian intelligence officers is to force arrested converts to sign an agreement on condition of release promising never to meet with other Christians again.

With many leaders in self-imposed exile, convert groups are lacking in leaders with the necessary theological and Biblical education.

In a significant November 2021 decision a court in Dezful ruled in the case of eight Christian converts that "religious conversion" is not criminalised in Iran's Islamic Penal Code.



In January 2022 Roksari Kanbari, a Christian convert from Islam, who has already served time in prison for "propaganda against the regime", was summoned to answer the same charge again

Ask that new Christian leaders to be given wisdom to strengthen and uphold even newer persecuted converts in Iran. Lift up jailed believers and Christians forced to flee their homeland. Pray that the November 2021 court decision will protect other converts too.

# Iraq

The ethnic cleansing and conquest of Mosul and the Plains of Nineveh (the historic centre of Iraqi Christianity) by Islamic State (IS) militants in 2014 caused huge numbers of Christians to flee to the autonomous Kurdistan region of Iraq.

The very few who remained, and those who have since tried to return, face an uncertain future. Many Christians' homes in this area were destroyed and others fraudulently sold. Furthermore, the brief IS occupation has created an ongoing "culture of hate" amongst Muslims towards Christians.

In Mosul members of the Christian and Muslim communities were seeking to counteract this culture in 2021 by working together to rebuild a mosque and two church buildings which had been destroyed by IS.

In March 2021 Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the leader in Iraq of Shia Islam – the majority religion – issued a statement affirming that Christians should "live like all Iraqis, in security and peace and with full constitutional rights".

While IS no longer controls any territory, a report from the US Pentagon pointed out that in late 2021 "ISIS-related violence and recruitment continued throughout vulnerable areas of Iraq".

Christians in Kurdistan are now being displaced again by Turkish forces deployed against Kurdish PKK fighters in the region; Kurdish Muslims are also affected. By the end of May 2021

Turkish troops had forced farmers off their property while air strikes had destroyed many acres of agricultural land. An estimated 720 people were forced to flee, including from the Christian-majority village of Chalke and the village of Miske where a church building was attacked.

An estimated 75% of Iraq's Christians (around 1.5 million in 1990) have left the country altogether in the last 30 years, due to anti-Christian hostility and violence, which began after the 1990-91 Gulf War and intensified after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003.



Iraqi Christians in church in Erbil

Pray that Christians will be treated as equals with the Muslim majority in Iraq. Ask the Lord to protect our Iraqi brothers and sisters under attack from Turkish forces.

# Kazakhstan



Christians comprise about 25% of the population of Kazakhstan. Many are from a Russian background, but some are ethnic Kazakhs who have converted from Islam. Protestant Christians, especially those from a Muslim background, are viewed with great distrust.

Kazakhstan's constitution guarantees freedom of religion. However, a draconian Religion Law passed in 2011 greatly increased restrictions.

The Religion Law requires that religious groups must have at least 50 members locally, 500 regionally and 5,000 nationally in order to register – an impossibility for smaller churches. Unregistered churches are raided by police who seize property and fine or arrest and imprison Christians for worshipping “illegally”.

Churches are sometimes subject to surveillance. A Baptist church in the city of Oral, north-west Kazakhstan, reported that an official regularly attended worship in 2021, monitoring activities and recording the service.

The law also prohibits evangelising and bans religious organisations from receiving foreign donations. In 2018 the government approved a raft of amendments imposing even harsher restrictions, including a ban on religious teaching unless within a registered organisation – effectively making religious discussions in private homes illegal.

In 2021 the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) praised the government of Kazakhstan for taking steps to foster religious tolerance – including meetings between members of different religious groups – but this has yet to result in any legislative changes.

In January 2022 the government approved amendments to the Religion Law that will make it more difficult for registered religious groups to hold meetings away from their normal place of worship. Also in January 2022, Kazakhstan's major cities suffered a week of unrest and violent anti-government protests that led to, at the time of writing, at least 164 deaths.



A training conference for Christian workers from Kazakh-speaking churches, funded by Barnabas

Pray that the Lord will give peace and comfort to Christian converts from Islam who suffer much hardship. Ask that moves towards religious tolerance will continue. Pray that Christians will be protected if unrest and instability persist throughout 2022 and beyond.

# Kenya

**K**enya continues to be threatened by the Somalia-based extremist Islamist group Al Shabaab, which has openly declared Kenyan Christians an enemy to be subjugated, converted or eradicated. It began its murderous campaign in Kenya in 2011 after the Kenyan government sent troops into Somalia to counter terrorist activity.

Whilst Kenya is 80% Christian and 12% Muslim, the coastal regions are predominantly Muslim. The strong Muslim presence, with especially high numbers of Somalis, in the north-east near the Somali border has left Christians living there vulnerable. The violent, radical Islamist group the Muslim Youth Centre (MYC), based in Mombasa, is active in the coastal areas. The MYC, also known as al-Hijra, has links to Al Qaeda and Al Shabaab.

Numerous bus attacks have been carried out in the north-east. Typically non-local passengers are singled out, assumed to be Christians. In January 2021 Al Shabaab militants held up and robbed passengers on a commuter bus in Wajir county travelling from Nairobi to Mandera near the Somali border. The driver was warned not to carry any non-locals (likely to be Christians). In December 2019 eight Christians and three other non-Muslims were killed in another bus attack on the same route.

Three teachers were murdered by Al Shabaab in an attack on a primary school compound near Garissa in

January 2020, the fourth such raid in the area in less than two weeks. It was at Garissa University where the group carried out a massacre of 148 students, mainly Christian, in 2015.

Christians can also face legal discrimination as Muslims are permitted by Kenya's constitution to have certain civil cases decided in Islamic (*Kadhi*) courts. Christian leaders have urged President Uhuru Kenyatta to or abolish Kadhi courts so that every religion is equal.



Despite being the majority faith, Kenyan Christians are vulnerable to attack by Islamists, especially in the north-east

Pray for an end to violence against Christians in Kenya. Ask the Lord to protect vulnerable Christians in Muslim-majority areas. Pray that there will be no eradication in religious freedoms and that equality before the law will be maintained.

# Refugees and Internally Displaced People



*"The LORD is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble." (Psalm 9:9)*

Persecution causes Christians to flee their homes and even their countries. Whether through sudden political upheaval or ongoing intensifying repression believers often escape with nothing but their lives.

The Myanmar military (Tatmadaw), committed to a Buddhist nationalist ideology, has increased repression of Chin, Kachin and Karen Christians since the military coup of 1 February 2021, ransacking houses and destroying churches. Thousands have fled their homes to seek refuge in the jungle. Many have been displaced more than once as violence continues and shifts to new areas. Some have crossed into Thailand or India.

Following the Taliban takeover in August 2021 many Christians left Afghanistan, crossing borders overland into neighbouring countries but still seeking refuge in safe countries.

In Cabo Delgado province, Mozambique, 800,000 people have been displaced by militant Islamists since 2017. Over 40,000 fled from the area when dozens were killed in an attack in March 2021.

Christians have been expelled from villages in Odisha, India for converting to Christianity and refusing to return to the tribal religion. Inhabitants of an entire Christian village in Bangladesh

fled after violent attacks by Buddhist radicals during which the church building was demolished. Christians in Laos have often been evicted from their villages for their faith.

Boko Haram and Fulani militants have forced hundreds of thousands of Christians to take refuge in IDP (internally displaced people) camps in Nigeria.

Christians in Iraqi Kurdistan have abandoned homes because of Turkish bombardment in the region, supposedly aimed at groups Turkey regards as terrorist, but seemingly also targeting Christian communities.



Christians in Myanmar fled into the jungle to escape attacks by the Myanmar military

Intercede for all Christian refugees and those displaced within their own country. Ask that God will be their refuge and strength and that He will direct them as they rebuild their lives. Pray that dispossessed Christians will experience God's peace amid the trauma of displacement, and be filled with the assurance of their heavenly homeland that the Lord has prepared for them.

# Kyrgyzstan



**T**he population of Kyrgyzstan is 86% Muslim and there has been a revival of Islamic practices since the country gained independence from communist Soviet rule in 1991.

The Religion Law (2009) prohibits “insistent attempts to convert followers of one religion to another” and “illegal missionary activity”, which refers to any missionary or evangelistic activity by a group not registered with the government.

As of January 2022, there were 285 evangelical churches registered in Kyrgyzstan – approximately 26 new churches added since September 2020. Churches must have 200 members in order to apply for registration, and the process can last for several years. Many churches, mostly small (10-20 members), are unregistered, therefore operating illegally.

In December 2021 a new Religion Law was drafted that, if adopted, would tighten restrictions – all 200 church members must live in one region, all attend one founding meeting, and all have personal details officially notarised at that meeting.

Christians can be punished for sharing their beliefs in public and religious literature requires state censorship. However, most persecution comes not from the authorities but from Muslim clerics, relatives, employers and the community, especially in rural areas.

During the Covid-19 pandemic the economic situation worsened, with many businesses closing and people struggling to find work. It is even harder for those who have left Islam, as the Muslim majority often refuse to employ them. Many Christians suffered drought and economic downturn in Issyk Kul, eastern Kyrgyzstan, one of the worst areas for anti-Christian discrimination.

Emigration is affecting the economy and also the Church, as church leaders leave the country in search of work.

In Kyrgyz culture there is great concern about what happens to the body after death; converts fear being given Islamic funerals. In 2021 it was reported by Christians that it remained difficult for religious minorities to arrange for burials in public cemeteries.



Theological training for Christians in Kyrgyzstan, supported by Barnabas Fund

Pray that churches in Kyrgyzstan will be able to register and no longer be forced to act unlawfully. Ask that the Christians’ witness during the pandemic will allow opportunities to share the Gospel.

# Laos

Laos' approximately 150,000 Christians are targeted by local authorities, even as central government takes a more lenient approach. Local officials are typically highly suspicious of Christians, partly because of a perceived connection with the West, and subject them to harassment and violence. Christians in rural areas are often abused, evicted from their homes and even imprisoned and sometimes tortured.

In December 2019 a "Law on the Evangelical Church" came into force giving Christians the right to conduct services, preach throughout the country and maintain contacts with believers in other countries. To make the law more widely known Christian communities worked with the government to provide seminars. Despite this Christians are still subject to abuse. In July 2020 four Lao Christians were jailed for planning a Christian funeral that was deemed by local authorities to violate traditional customs.

Two Christian families had their homes in Salavan Province demolished in October 2020 and had to live in the forest, with relatives and other villagers forbidden to help them. Three more families suffered the same in January 2021. Eight months later it was reported that these five families were still homeless.

Religious organisations are required to register with the government, but some churches

are unable to meet the onerous registration requirements. Approval is required before importing printed or electronic literature. Local authorities sometimes ban house churches and confiscate Bibles, even from those belonging to registered churches.

A 2017 decree prohibited "associations" from disturbing the "social order" or "national harmony". The vagueness of the wording means authorities are free to define what constitutes threatening "social order". In April 2021 Pastor Sithon Thippavong was convicted of causing disruption for holding Christian services. Thankfully the pastor, who refused to renounce his faith, was released three days later as he had already been detained for a year prior to his conviction.



Pastor Sithon Thippavong was convicted of "disrupting unity"

Pray that Laos' official commitment to freedom of worship will be recognised in practice, and that the Lord will provide for Christians who have lost homes and land because of their faith in Him.

# Libya



**L**ibya's interim constitution (2011) declares Islam the state religion and sharia (Islamic law) the principal source of legislation, but guarantees non-Muslims the freedom to practise their religion and prohibits religious discrimination. The internationally recognised Government of National Accord (GNA), however, seems either unwilling or powerless to investigate crimes against religious minorities.

Christians are predominantly migrant workers and refugees, but also a growing number of indigenous Libyan converts. Islamists target Christians for killing, kidnap, forceful conversion and sale in “modern-day slave markets”.

Violence is commonplace in detention centres against Christian refugees, mostly West Africans or Eritreans, attempting to reach Europe. In April 2019 militias opened fire on Christian refugees gathered for prayer at the Qasr bin Ghashir detention centre, killing two and injuring up to 20. A tuberculosis outbreak at another centre in 2019 killed 22 people, mostly Eritrean Christians. With no provision made for non-Muslim burials, the bodies remained in refrigerators for months.

Libya has experienced chaos and civil war since the overthrow of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi in 2011; rival factions claimed legitimacy in Tripoli and Benghazi. Optimism created by the October 2020 ceasefire and a new unity government was

tempered by the postponement of the presidential election in December 2021 amid security fears.

Militant Islamist groups established themselves after Gaddafi's fall. Several thousand IS fighters moved to Libya when ousted from Syria. In 2019, Turkish militias were deployed to support the GNA and in January 2020, the Turkish parliament authorised sending troops to Libya.

Meanwhile, Mohammad Mohammad al-Sayyid, the suspected mastermind behind the bombings of several churches in Egypt by Islamic State (IS), was captured by the Libyan National Army, in April 2020.



Mohammad Mohammad al-Sayyid was arrested in Libya for the bombing of St George's Church, Tanta, Egypt on Palm Sunday 2017 (above) which killed 30 Coptic Christians

Ask that the Lord will protect Christians in Libya from violence and that justice will be pursued fervently by the authorities. Pray that believers will be strengthened in the trials they face and that even Islamist militants will be convicted to turn from their violent ways to the Living God.

# Mali



**M**ali is a Muslim-majority country where Christians, most of them in the south, number only around 2% of the population. The Christian minority continues to suffer persecution despite Mali's secular constitution and legal guarantee of religious freedom.

Since 2012 jihadists have been waging a war to occupy northern and central Mali with the declared aim of establishing sharia (Islamic law) throughout the country. Islamic governance is fairly popular with local people, who like sharia courts that deal out justice that is quick, cheap and understandable, and the low crime levels that result from sharia punishments. Islamists also provide Quranic schools where there is little formal education available.

Mali has suffered increased jihadi violence in recent years. In August 2021 at least 51 people were killed in an Islamist attack on three villages in northern Mali. According to local sources, between December 2019 and January 2021 more than 50 Christians – men, women and children – were shot, beheaded or burned to death.

Seven Christians were abducted by Islamists in November 2020 and held until March 2021. They reported being forced to speak in Arabic and recite Islamic prayers in an effort by their captors to force them to deny their faith. In some parts of central and northern Mali Christians cannot meet for worship,

such is the likelihood of being attacked. More than 200,000 Christians have fled to safe areas, but these places have insufficient food and shelter.

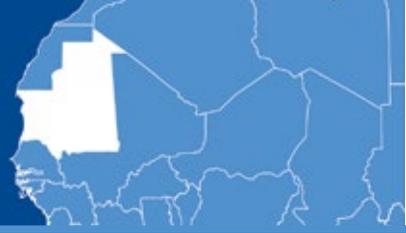
As well as Al Qaeda-affiliated groups, Mali suffers from the violence perpetrated by the Islamic State of the Greater Sahara (ISGS), which operates across Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. In October 2021 France began withdrawing troops from Mali. This, combined with the Malian government's plan to bring in soldiers from Russian paramilitary company Wagner, has raised fears of instability across Mali and the wider West African Sahel.



Malian Christians will suffer more if there is an increase in Islamist violence and regional instability

Please pray that God will strengthen believers who have lost their homes, who live in poverty, and who are in fear of Islamist violence and repression.

# Mauritania



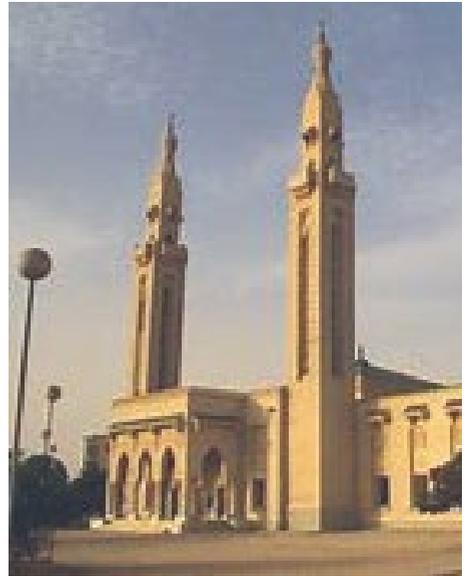
**S**trongly Islamic with almost 100% of the population Muslim, for some years the north-west African nation of Mauritania had the reputation of being the only country on earth with no known indigenous believers. The Mauritanian Church dates from the 1980s but the number of Christians (all converts from Islam and their children) is still small.

Mauritania is one of the few countries in the world where apostasy from Islam is officially punishable by death (in line with sharia), although no known executions in recent years for leaving Islam have occurred. Article 11 of the Press Act, which criminalises the publication of any material that is against Islam or contradicts or otherwise threatens Islam, is used to prohibit evangelism of Muslims.

Christians meet discreetly in homes and are gradually growing in numbers and in confidence. Christian groups in Mauritania became very active during the Covid crisis in 2020-21, providing help to needy people. This lessened hostility to Christians. Many doors opened through social media during lockdowns and more people were made aware of the Gospel message.

Society in general is beginning to resist the Islamic discourse that dominates media and politics. Until 2018 anyone found guilty of converting from Islam was supposedly entitled to three days to repent and so receive a lesser sentence or be released without

conviction; in 2018, however, Article 306 of the penal code was enacted, making both blasphemy and apostasy from Islam mandatory capital offences. Several protesters against the apostasy law in February 2020 were subsequently handed fines and prison sentences of between six months and a year.



Islam dominates in Mauritania but gradually Muslims are turning to Christ

Pray that the government of Mauritania will pursue equality and justice for all and be moved to repeal Article 306 to allow greater freedom for citizens to choose their faith. Ask that Christians meeting in secret will grow in the knowledge and love of the Lord as they build one another up in faith.

# Mozambique



**A**t least 3,000 people are estimated to have been killed and 800,000 displaced since 2017 when militant Islamists began a brutal campaign to establish an Islamist caliphate in Cabo Delgado province in the north-east of Mozambique. Ahlu Sunnah Wa-Jama (ASWJ), known locally as Al Shabaab (not the Somalia-based group), is linked to Islamic State and gained control of an area of Cabo Delgado by early 2021. The province, though rich in oil and gas reserves, is isolated, neglected and under-developed.

In March 2021 dozens were killed in an attack on Palma, a coastal town in Cabo Delgado. Over 40,000 fled on foot, or by bus or boat from the area.

ASWJ's methods of killing are particularly savage. Bodies are routinely hacked to pieces. Militants turned a village football pitch in northern Mozambique into an execution ground where they beheaded over 50 people during three days of brutal violence in November 2020. Villagers who tried to flee were caught and taken to the sports ground in Muatide village where they were decapitated.

Sharia (Islamic law) is imposed in areas controlled by ASWJ. Those who try to escape are killed. Locals are encouraged to join its jihad and train for military operations, one of the few ways of earning an income in Cabo Delgado. In April 2020, 52 young men in a mainly

Christian village were slaughtered when they refused to join ASWJ.

The 16-member Southern African Development Community, along with Rwanda, deployed troops to combat the insurgency in Cabo Delgado and had started to take ground from the Islamists by October 2021 with a pledge to remain in Mozambique as long as necessary.

Mozambique has a Christian majority of nearly 60%. Muslims comprise less than 20% but form the majority in Cabo Delgado.



About 800,000 people have been displaced fleeing Islamist violence in northern Mozambique

Lift up the people of northern Mozambique and pray for peace and stability in the region. Thank the Lord that many Muslims reject brutality in the name of Islam. Pray that atrocities will cease and that the government will be mobilised to intervene against the violence.

# Pastors and Evangelists



*“The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.”*

(1 Timothy 5:17)

Around the world, there are many full-time Christian workers faithfully carrying out God’s call to share the Gospel and build up the Body of Christ in their own countries or people-groups. Living at a very simple level, in places where they face hostility from the majority community and the authorities, their ministry can be very lonely, under-resourced and dangerous.

During the pandemic when churches were closed, pastors maintained practical and spiritual care for their members, many of whom had lost their jobs and incomes due to lockdown, or were bereaved, sick or frightened. Pastors were struggling to meet their own families’ needs because they were no longer receiving donations from Sunday service offerings on which they used to live. Many died from Covid-19, leaving behind a grieving family and a congregation bereft of spiritual care. More than 2,000 pastors and Christian leaders died in the first 14 months of the pandemic in India alone.

Pastors ministering in areas where Christians are a minority are often singled out for attack. Pastor Yohanna Shuaibu was murdered by a Muslim mob in Nigeria’s Kano State in September 2021. Aware that an attack

was likely, the pastor fled with his family, but was killed when he returned to his village to evacuate children from a Christian school.

Christian leaders are also subjected to harassment from government authorities seeking to weaken the Church. In Iran and Eritrea, those active in evangelism or leading house churches will be imprisoned for longer periods than other Christians.

Barnabas supports pastors and evangelists by providing funding for their personal support, ministry costs, training and resources.



Barnabas-funded training empowered Nepali missionary “Noah” in his ministry in a remote area of Hindu-majority Nepal

Lift up to the Lord pastors, church planters and evangelists who share God’s Word in the face of violence and hostility. Pray that He will grant them wisdom, protection and strength.

# Myanmar

**In** February 2021 the democratically elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy was deposed in a coup undertaken by the Myanmar military (Tatmadaw). Commander-in-chief of the Defence Services Min Aung Hlaing became the head of a new military government. The coup has led to widespread violence and thousands of deaths.

The Tatmadaw has for decades persecuted Myanmar's small Christian population, estimated at 6.2% of the overall population, both for their religion and their ethnicity – most Christians belong to the Chin, Kachin and Karen ethnic groups. The Tatmadaw represents the dominant cultural identity of Burman (or Bamar) Buddhist – Myanmar is 68% Bamar and 88% Buddhist.

Shortly after the coup a chilling document was discovered instructing soldiers to “punish and break down” ethnic-minority Christians and other civilians deemed to be against the military regime. The official document recommended firing a 12mm weapon (equivalent to a powerful machine gun) at individuals or using a 38mm weapon (a gun capable of launching grenades) on groups of civilians.

Violence was constant throughout 2021. In March bombing raids against Karen villages killed three, injured eight, and led to many thousands being

displaced. In May bombing raids against Kachin villages led to two deaths, eight injuries, and an estimated 5,000 having to leave their homes. Displaced people are often attacked as they take refuge in camps or church buildings – four people were killed and more than eight injured in such an attack on a church in Loikaw, Kayah State.

In late 2021 and early 2022 repeated attacks on the town of Thantlang, Chin State, displaced 10,000 people and destroyed or damaged six church buildings. Pastor Cung Biak Hum was shot and killed as he tried to put out a fire. Soldiers then hacked off his finger in order to steal his wedding ring.



Pastor Cung Biak Hum was shot and killed on 18 September 2021 by Tatmadaw soldiers who then hacked off his finger

Ask that the Lord will sustain the faith of Christians who face what the UN Human Rights Council has called “persecutory intent” and “ethnic cleansing”. Pray for peace in troubled Myanmar.

# Nepal

**T**he Church is rapidly growing in the former Hindu kingdom of Nepal, officially a secular nation since 2008. In the early 1950s there were virtually no Christians in the Himalayan country, but today there are estimated to be 1.5 million believers, or about 5% of the population (which overall is 85% Hindu). A growing religious nationalist movement is demanding that Nepal return to a Hindu state.

A law came into force in 2018 which made it illegal to attempt to convert a follower of a religion “being practised since ancient times”. This is interpreted as a religion passed down through at least three generations, thus protecting Hindus and Buddhists but excluding most Nepali Christians, who are either first- or second-generation believers. The 2018 law also bans “hurting religious sentiment”, a wording that makes almost any public Christian activity potentially illegal.

Nine Nepali Christians were facing charges under the anti-conversion law in late 2021.

Christians are generally marginalised and treated as second-class citizens. In February 2021 the government demolished a church building in Nepalgunj after taking mandatory possession of the church’s land and the surrounding area, including a Hindu temple which was left intact.

Covid-19 brought an upsurge in anti-Christian hostility. Even Christian Covid patients in hospital were discriminated against and given inferior care compared with other patients. However, in some places local governments gave relief supplies to churches for distribution among believers affected. The second Covid-19 wave in 2021 struck Nepal very severely, which had few resources available with which to cope.



Christians in Nepal are bereft of pastoral care with many pastors and church leaders dying from Covid-19

Give thanks that the Church in Nepal is growing in spite of opposition. Pray that Christians will know Divine wisdom in proclaiming God’s Word in the context of the current legal restrictions. Ask that new leaders will emerge in Christian communities who have lost pastors to Covid and encourage God’s people in perseverance.

# Niger



**N**iger is estimated at 98% Muslim, with Christians representing as little as 0.4% of the population. The country has a secular constitution with legal guarantees of religious freedom; Christians, however, still suffer from violence and repression perpetrated by Islamist groups including the Al Qaeda-affiliated Jama'a Nusrat al Islam wa al Muslimeen (JNIM), the Islamic State of the Greater Sahara (ISGS), and the Nigeria-based Boko Haram.

In 2019 the government affirmed its support for religious freedom in the first article of a new law: "The purpose of this law is to guarantee the free exercise of religion in the Republic of Niger." The law also highlighted that all are free to worship, but religious observance should be exercised with respect for "public order, peace and social tranquillity". This law, however, led to violent protests and to reprisals against Christians.

Most churches are in the Tillabéri region near the border with Mali and Burkina Faso, which includes the capital Niamey. In March 2021 Islamists killed 58 people in several attacks in the region, and in May a further five were killed by suspected jihadists in an attack which left a church building vandalised. A Barnabas Fund contact reported that a church minister in Tillabéri was in late 2020 abducted and held hostage for several months.

Islamist militants have stepped up attacks on civilians, having previously focused their efforts on military personnel. The Nigerien army and armed forces representing the G5 Sahel (a group organised by France, comprising Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, Chad and Mauritania) struggle to fight against Islamists who are often better armed.

Niger, along with the wider region of the Sahel and West Africa, is becoming the global epicentre of Islamist activity and an increasingly dangerous place for Christians.



Barnabas Fund has provided vocational training and start-up funds to enable Nigerien Christians to set up small businesses

Please pray that Niger's legal guarantees of freedom of religion will continue to be honoured. Ask the Lord that He will protect His people from Islamist movements that want to destroy them.

# Nigeria



**N**igeria is roughly 50% Muslim and 50% Christian. The majority of Muslims live in the north, the south is mainly Christian, and the Middle Belt has approximately equal numbers. For Christians living in the Middle Belt and north persecution is rife and life precarious. Christian communities are targeted in deadly assaults by Boko Haram, Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), and Fulani militants.

Since 2015 Islamist violence has killed around 10,000 Christians nationwide. Thousands more have been maimed, kidnapped or had their homes and livelihoods destroyed.

On Christmas Eve 2020 Islamist militants killed 24 and abducted more than 20 in separate attacks in Borno and Adamawa states. The militants said that the killings were a “Christmas present”.

In April 2021 attacks in Benue and Kaduna states led to the deaths of four Christians. The same month ISWAP attacked Geidam in Yobe State, killing two Christians. In August militants killed 34 in Plateau State after destroying a bridge to prevent residents escaping the murderous rampage.

In Kaduna State alone, eight were killed in an attack in May which also destroyed a church building; in July at least 28 more were killed; in September as many as 47.

The response of the Nigerian government has often seemed inadequate, with Pastor Baba Panya,

president of the Evangelical Church Winning All, declaring that “all human authorities have woefully failed us”.

In its 2021 report the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom warned of a “Christian genocide” if the Nigerian government failed to protect Christians from Islamist terrorism, adding, “More Christians have been killed for their faith in Nigeria in the last year than in the entire Middle East.”



In September 2021 Pastor Yohanna Shuaibu was attacked and killed by Islamists, despite his work for the community including helping to provide a water supply for a local mosque

Ask God to strengthen the faith of Christians who live in constant fear of violence, and to protect them from constant persecution. Pray that the government of Nigeria and the international community will find ways to better combat the problem of Islamist terrorism.

# North Korea



**N**orth Korea's status as the most dangerous place in the world to be a Christian is backed up by considerable weight of testimony. The closed country is under the despotic rule of Kim Jong-un and strict communist control. The state ideology of *Juche*, or "self-reliance" was established by his grandfather, Supreme Leader Kim Il-sung. Yet in 1907 Pyongyang was known as the "Jerusalem of the East" after a Protestant revival and the north remained the powerhouse of Korean Christianity until 1945.

Some Christians have been executed for the "crime" of owning a Bible and believers have to keep their faith secret. Many parents dare not even let their own children know that they follow Christ as pupils are encouraged at school to report on their parents if they see them praying or reading the Scriptures.

A report in 2020 by a London-based campaign group, Korea Future Initiative, gathered patterns of religious freedom violations perpetrated against North Korean citizens. The torture and abuse of tens of thousands of Christians in "re-education" camps was documented through harrowing testimonies of exiles. One prisoner who endured three years in a camp weighed just 27kg (59lbs) on release and suffered lasting kidney damage. Another was forced to sit curled inside a tiny steel cage, measuring 120cm (4ft)

long by 100cm (3ft) high, and its bars were heated with an electric current.

There is close collusion between the communist authorities in North Korea and China over the arrest, punishment and forced repatriation of Christians who cross North Korea's only active border. That border was closed in response to Covid-19, further exacerbating the shortages of food and medicine in the already hunger-stricken country.



Pyongyang, capital of North Korea, was dubbed "the Jerusalem of the East" for its many church buildings following rapid growth of Christianity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries

Pray that Christians in North Korea will experience God's protection as they face danger daily. Ask God to fill with hope by His almighty strength those enduring the harsh realities of the labour camps.

# Pakistan



**P**akistan's Christians, around 3% of the population, are generally despised by the Muslim majority. Many Christians experience great poverty, compelled to work in low-paid, dirty, dangerous jobs such as cleaning sewers.

In October 2021 Christian sanitation workers, Faisal and Nadeem, died in a sewer. They had been sent down to rescue another Christian who had lost consciousness. All three were refused protective equipment, although the sewer was known to contain toxic gases. Muslim emergency workers refused to assist, believing that touching Christians would make them ritually "unclean". Also in October, two Christian brothers, Yaqoob and Haroon, were shot dead by a group of Muslims in a dispute over the irrigation of fields.

Pakistan's notorious "blasphemy" laws are often used to make false accusations in order to settle personal grudges. Christians are especially vulnerable as simply stating their beliefs can be construed as "blasphemy" and lower courts usually favour Muslims' testimony, in accordance with sharia (Islamic law). Mob violence is frequently stirred up by such cases. However, a Christian married couple, Shafqat Emmanuel and Shagufta Kausa, on death row since 2014, were acquitted of "blasphemy" in June, and granted asylum in a safe country. The European Parliament highlighted their case in May and called for the laws' abolition.

In January and April 2021 six Christian nurses in three separate incidents were ensnared in unsubstantiated "blasphemy" accusations, including allegedly desecrating the Quran by removing a sticker with a Quranic text.

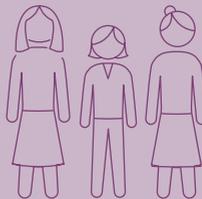
Each year, hundreds of Christian women and girls are kidnapped, forcibly converted and forcibly married to Muslims. In September 2021 the Lahore High Court ruled that Chashman Kanwal, an abducted 14-year-old Christian girl, was old enough to marry, a decision based on sharia reasoning rather than Pakistani law.



Barnabas provides food parcels for 400 desperately poor Pakistani Christian widows and their children each month

Pray for the repeal of Pakistan's "blasphemy" laws and for falsely accused Christians to be acquitted. Ask the Lord to protect Christian women and girls from abduction and forced marriage and conversion, and that the judicial system will apply the law fairly in bringing abductors to justice.

# Women



*“Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfil His promises to her!” (Luke 1:45)*

In many areas where Christians are marginalised and persecuted, women are doubly vulnerable because of their gender. Christian women whose husbands are imprisoned, maimed or even martyred for their faith are often left with little or no income to support themselves and their children.

In some countries, widows are trebly vulnerable, having lost the respected place in society of a married woman as well as their husband’s protection and earnings. They can be despised and rejected. A newly widowed Christian woman in India was attacked and forced to reconvert by the village tribal group, which largely follows animism, in June 2021. Villagers then conducted her husband’s funeral in a traditional, non-Christian way. “I have no other way and so accepted their custom,” the widow said. “But I will not leave the Lord Jesus. I will come back again.”

Some Muslims consider that all Christian women are “immoral” and that they therefore deserve abuse. In countries such as Egypt and Pakistan, Christian women and girls are vulnerable to kidnap, forced conversion to Islam and marriage against their will to a Muslim (often, their abductor). Robbers who brutally raped a 16-year-old Pakistani girl in

Punjab in January 2021 told police they assaulted her only because she was a Christian.



Aicha and her children were thrown out of their home in Burkina Faso after her husband discovered she had become a Christian. “He told me to choose between my home and my faith,” she said. “Not being able to deny my faith, I decided to be faithful to my Lord.” Aicha has since struggled to meet her children’s needs and find work. She and her children are thankful for food aid from Barnabas. “We are humbled that Christians from far away are helping us with so much food,” she said

Pray for protection for Christian women and girls. Ask that their tears will be wiped away and that their needs will be met. Pray that the joy of the Lord will be their strength, knowing that He will never forsake them.

# Russia

**R**ussia is a majority-Christian country that recognises in general Christianity, Judaism, Islam and Buddhism as its “traditional” religions and in particular the Russian Orthodox Church as having a special role in the religious life of the country. Russia’s constitution officially guarantees freedom of religion.

In practice, however, Russian Christians, especially non-Orthodox, are not always given this freedom of religion. In April 2021 Christian leaders raised concerns about amendments to the country’s Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations. The main concern is a requirement that ministers of religion trained overseas must now obtain “re-certification from a Russian religious organisation” before they can begin their ministry. Those already ministering in Russia are exempt from this requirement.

On 6 April 2021 the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Ingria Theological Institute in St Petersburg was stripped of its higher education licence, leaving it without the ability to conduct the formal theological education and training required under the new law. Other Protestant colleges had their licences revoked.

Another troubling provision of the new amendments is that persons “whose actions have been recognised by a court ruling to contain signs of extremist activity” are barred from taking up leadership positions in religious

organisations. The vague way in which extremism is defined could make any minister of religion vulnerable to being barred from undertaking pastoral ministry at the whim of the authorities.

On 2 December 2021 armed officers from Russia’s Federal Security Service disrupted a Christian conference in Ramenskoye, near Moscow, confining attendees for around ten hours. The majority of attendees were charged with an “administrative offence” – an act considered to violate “the rules and norms” of the Russian Federation – because the Christian ministry that had organised the event had been declared an “undesirable” foreign organisation.



A music group at a church service in St Petersburg

Pray for Russian Christians who increasingly have their activities monitored and restricted by the Russian government. Ask the Lord to provide for churches whose future leaders may be both unable to undertake training in Russia at the same time as the government refuses to recognise any training undertaken outside the country.

# Saudi Arabia

Islam began in Saudi Arabia and its most holy sites, Mecca and Medina, are located there. The kingdom's constitution is the Quran and the words and deeds of the Islamic prophet Muhammad. The judicial system operates under strict sharia (Islamic law) interpretation.

Over a million expatriate Christians live in Saudi Arabia, but the number of indigenous believers (converts from Islam) in the country is unknown. It is a capital offence, albeit not known to have been enforced in modern times, for a Muslim to leave their Islamic religion and all Christians meet in secrecy. Blasphemy carries a potential death penalty, and charges of blasphemy suppress free speech and debate, including on social media.

However, some significant relaxation in the application of sharia is evident in Saudi Arabia's top court's announcement in 2020 that flogging would cease as a form of punishment for drinking alcohol and adultery.

A Christian convert from Islam, named as "A", was acquitted of a fabricated charge of theft in 2021. He had been accused by his sister's husband. "A" had reportedly aided his sister, also a Christian convert from Islam, and her children to escape from Saudi Arabia.

The judge dismissed his brother-in-law's case, but "A" faced further charges, for helping his sister to flee against her family's wishes, and allegedly trying

to convert Muslims to Christianity. "A" sent his wife and son abroad for their safety and in August 2021 was able to join them in a safe country.

Saudi Arabia propagates its strict Wahhabi interpretation of Islam worldwide and has provided massive financial support to Islamist groups abroad. Various networks funnel its oil money into *dawa* (Islamic mission) projects across the world.



The ruins of Jubail church date back to the fourth century

Pray for the protection of all Christians in Saudi Arabia, indigenous or expatriates and that they will be built up in their faith through the study of God's Word. Ask that the small steps towards a more lenient interpretation of Islam will lead to Muslims being free to leave Islam without penalty.

# Somalia

**S**omalia is one of the most dangerous places in the world to be a Christian. The tiny Christian community, in a land that is almost 100% Muslim, consists almost entirely of converts from Islam. Many have been murdered for apostasy by family, community members or Al Shabaab jihadists.

The 2012 provisional constitution declares Islam to be the state religion, and no law can be enacted that opposes the principles and objectives of sharia (Islamic law). Promoting any religion except Islam is illegal.

Somalia has been ravaged by conflict since 1991, when rival warlords vied for control. This has created a Somali diaspora estimated at almost two million, mainly in Kenya.

In 1991 the self-proclaimed Republic of Somaliland asserted its independence from the rest of Somalia. Though not internationally recognised, it has experienced relative stability.

Its constitution prohibits Muslims from converting to another religion. In 2020 a Christian couple arrested for being apostates and evangelists were released and deported after European governments' intervention. Six other converts charged in April 2021 with offences against Islam were released in August when a regional court dismissed all charges.

In 2006 Islamist militant group Al Shabaab, linked to Al Qaeda, began waging an insurgency against the

Somali government. The group controls much of southern and central Somalia and collects at least \$15m (£11m, €12.8m) in taxes a month, from businesses and government employees.

Al Shabaab has carried out numerous attacks in Kenya, and on its Christian residents, since the Kenyan government sent troops into Somalia to counter terrorist activity in 2011.

In April 2020 a spokesman for Al Shabaab, Ali Dhere, incited Muslims to “join the war against unbelievers” and work towards the end of democracy and implementation of sharia in Somalia.



Somali convert from Islam Liibaan Ibraahim Xasan was martyred in 1994 after a fruitful pastoral ministry

Pray for the protection of Somali Christians, for whom identifying with Jesus carries the real and ever-present danger of being subjected to violence, even death. Call out to the Lord for peace and stability in a land that has known constant conflict for so long.

# Sri Lanka

In predominantly Buddhist Sri Lanka, Christians are found amongst both the Sinhala majority and Tamil minority ethnic groups.

The three-decade civil war, which ended in 2009, casts a long shadow for the ethnic minorities, who have been oppressed and disadvantaged by majority-dominated governments since the country's independence in 1948.

The Christian community includes families who have been Christian for generations and new converts from Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam. Most Christians are poor. Many have suffered violence at the hands of Buddhist extremists, and church services have been disrupted.

On Easter Sunday 2019 Islamic State (IS) suicide bombers killed at least 254 people, mostly Sri Lankan Christians, in six coordinated attacks on churches and other Christian targets. Church leaders criticised the government's slowness to investigate with trials of suspected masterminds finally starting in November 2021.

Radical Muslims are pressurising both Christian and Hindu Tamils in the east to convert to Islam. At least ten Tamil villages are now 100% Muslim and have new names.

Buddhist hardliner Gotabaya Rajapaksa's election as President in 2019 and his landslide victory in the general election in August 2020 opened the door to criminalising religious conversions.

Christians continue to be targeted in violent incidents. In January 2021, a pastor visiting a Christian home in Passara was threatened by a 75-strong mob including a Buddhist monk. The crowd threw stones at the house, violently attacked the pastor's driver, and forced the pastor and his wife to leave the village.

In September 2021 a deceased Christian woman in the Hindu-majority eastern coastal region was buried according to Hindu rites after residents refused to allow a Christian ceremony. Since local temples control burial grounds, they regularly exercise the power to forbid Christian ceremonies.



A Sri Lankan family praying together. Christians make up 8% of the population

Pray that those in positions of power will be guided by justice and will allow Sri Lankans the freedom to choose their faith without harassment or coercion. Ask that hostility and injustice towards Christians will cease and they will be able to worship freely without threat.

# Sudan

The positive changes experienced by Sudan after the ousting of Omar al-Bashir's Islamist government and establishment of a Transitional Military Council (TMC) in April 2019 have been put in jeopardy with the military coup of October 2021. The TMC, since renamed the Sovereign Council, had been due to hand over power with a general election in November 2022.

Under al-Bashir, the Christian minority (estimated at 3%) had suffered fierce persecution. There are now fears of such a situation returning. Islamists have repeatedly called for the transitional government to be overthrown in an angry backlash against the reforms which move Sudan away from its previous very strict form of Islam.

On 3 September 2020, Sudan adopted the principle of separation of religion and state, ending 30 years of (mainly Arab) Islamic rule and Islam as the official religion.

A few days earlier the government had signed a peace accord with an alliance of rebel groups, ending decades of conflict in Darfur and the border states of Blue Nile and South Kordofan, including Sudan's oldest Christian region in the Nuba Mountains, which had left hundreds of thousands dead and millions more displaced.

On 9 July 2020, Sudan's apostasy law, which under the 1991 Criminal Code carried a death penalty, was abolished.

On 25 October 2021, the Sudanese military, headed by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, arrested Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok only to reinstate him in a deal strongly opposed by the pro-democracy movement. Hamdok's resignation in January 2022 amid political deadlock makes extended military rule more likely. The coup has met with considerable resistance within Sudan and widespread international condemnation.



A church in Khartoum. Fears of a return to severe persecution of Christians have resurfaced with the military coup of October 2021

Pray that God will guide His people to contribute to Sudan's peace and security in the uncertain times created by the military coup. Ask that stable, just government will be established that respects the rights of all citizens and that hard-won gains for Christians will not be reversed. Pray that calls for a return to a stricter Islam will be rejected.

# Syria

**Y**ears of civil war, beginning in 2011, stretched the faith and endurance of Christians in Syria. On top of the war horrors that all Syrians endured, the rise of Islamist militant groups, including Islamic State, fuelled violent anti-Christian persecution such as kidnappings and murders.

Along with the rest of the country Christians faced gruelling hardship, cut off from outside help by sanctions. The ravages of Covid-19 that caused the death of several church ministers added to the food and medicine shortages, bombed-out homes, and lack of employment opportunities endured in parts of Syria.

Christians made up around 10% of Syria's 22 million population before the civil war. Many were descendants of survivors of the Armenian genocide perpetrated by the Ottoman Turkish government, which peaked in 1915. Unusually for a Muslim-majority country, Christians in Syria had enjoyed respect and equality until the rise of Islamist groups during the civil war.

Tens of thousands of Christians live in the breakaway Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES). Its mainly Kurdish military force, who call themselves the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), maintain an uneasy peace over the region.

In August 2021 Turkey launched numerous airstrikes in Syria and Iraq supposedly targeting Kurdistan

Workers' Party (PKK) terrorists. The offensive, however, displaced Christian communities in a manner that has evoked comparisons with the Ottoman era genocide and oppression suffered under Islamic State (IS, ISIS, ISIL, Daesh) in 2015.

Thus Christians face pressure from three sources: IS, Turkey and the Kurds.

It is estimated that around half a million Christians left the country since the outbreak of war but have often faced discrimination and sometimes violence in the countries where they found themselves.



Debris in a Christian home in Qamishli that was hit by a shell as Turkey launched a military offensive in northern Syria

Ask that the faith of Christians in Syria will remain strong through suffering. Pray that Christians forced to flee Syria will know the Lord's guidance and protection as they seek to rebuild their lives.

# Converts



*“When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.’” (John 8:12)*

Converts to Christianity from Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and other religions often face rejection from their family and community, hostility and violence. They are at risk of losing their spouses, children and homes – sometimes even their lives. Many converts, including those from traditional African religions and animistic beliefs in south-east Asia, are driven from their villages.

Relatives of converts from Islam may seek to kill them to restore “honour” to the family, or zealous Muslims may try to enforce sharia (Islamic law) regulations that demand death for apostates. According to all schools of sharia, mentally sane adult male apostates face the death penalty. Three schools of sharia also prescribe a death sentence for sane adult female apostates, and hold that even inward unspoken apostasy is punishable.

In the few countries whose laws have an official death penalty for apostasy, it is rarely enforced and converts are most likely to be imprisoned or harassed in other ways. However, Christians who remain in Afghanistan, all of them converts from Islam or the children of converts, are likely to be murdered by the ruling Taliban.

The Islamist group has ordered that Christians must reconvert to Islam, leave the country or be killed.

In Bangladesh, radical Buddhists wrecked a church built by Christian converts in Chittagong Hill Tracts in 2021, and ordered them to reconvert to Buddhism. The converts stood firm, declaring, “Jesus Christ is our Saviour. We will die for Him.” In India in 2021, villagers prevented Christian convert families from drawing water from the communal well, before driving them from their homes.



Barnabas funds a refuge in Uganda that provides discipleship, counselling and vocational skills to Christian converts and their children

Give thanks to the Lord for the steadfast faith and courage of new converts. Pray that they may be given the grace to bear patiently the suffering they endure. Ask that their tormentors will have a life-changing encounter with the Prince of Peace.

# Tajikistan



**T**ajikistan is more than 90% Muslim and is one of the most religiously conservative, as well as poorest, of the Central Asian republics. Christians suffer from extremists within society and state anti-extremism measures.

Since 2011 children under 18 have been prohibited from taking part in public religious activities. Even the presence of children on church premises can be punished severely.

Converts from Islam are persecuted by authorities and often subjected to violence from their relatives, or threatened with death. Many converts, and other believers, have fled the country.

The “extremism law” (Criminal Code article 189) is used to crack down on religious activities. Churches are frequently inspected by officials who use intimidation, blackmail, illegal searches and seizure of church property to put pressure on Protestant congregations. In prisons Christians and other religious minorities are often the target for harsh treatment from officials and other prisoners.

Pastor Bakhrom Kholmatov served nearly three years in prison, having been found guilty of “singing extremist songs in church and so inciting religious hatred”. During his imprisonment the congregation were evicted from their building.

Only one church has been granted registration in the last decade, though many easily meet the minimum

requirement of ten members. Since 2018 all religious activities must be reported to the state. The import and distribution of religious publications must be approved by the authorities. Between August 2019 and January 2020 four church leaders were given huge fines for arranging a translation of the Bible into modern Tajik.

A census taken in October 2020 included a question about religion, for the first time since 1937, when Tajikistan was part of the USSR. Results are due to be published in 2022. There are concerns they will be used to track down Christians, who fear for their safety if identified.



A young believer is baptised in Tajikistan

Ask the Lord to sustain Christians who face obstacles preventing them from meeting for worship, especially for children who are prevented by law from doing so. Pray that the census results will not be used to target believers.

# Turkey



**P**resident Recep Tayyip Erdogan is increasingly open about his ambitions to spread Turkish Islamic influence, as if to re-establish the Ottoman Empire. Turkey has aspirations to be both the centre of a pan-Turkic empire that stretches from the Mediterranean to the Great Wall of China, and the head of the Sunni Islamic *umma* (global community of Muslims).

In 2020 Erdogan ordered two historic buildings in Istanbul – Hagia Sophia and Church of the Holy Saviour – originally churches, then mosques, and latterly museums – to be turned back into mosques, seemingly as a sign of Turkey’s ambitions.

Repression of religious minorities is increasing in Turkey, which is at least 99% Muslim. Although Turkey remains technically a secular state the Christian population, which includes a small number of converts from Islam, has continued to be treated as inferior to the Muslim majority.

The Christian community still bears the trauma of the Armenian, Assyrian and Greek genocides of the early twentieth century, in which at least 3.25 million believers were killed by Ottoman Turks. Before the genocide Christians were around 20% of the population of Turkey – today that figure is less than 0.1%.

In February 2021 Michael Feulner, a German pastor who has worked in Turkey for more than 20 years, was arrested and threatened

with deportation on the grounds of national security. Since early 2019 approximately 70 foreign Christians have been expelled.

The 2020 Azerbaijani invasion of ethnic-Armenian Nagorno-Karabakh was supported militarily and politically by Turkey. In March 2021 Turkey published a report, *Victory in Karabakh*, in which Erdogan claimed that Nagorno-Karabakh belongs to the Turkic people and warned, “This victory does not mean that our struggle is over.”

In late summer 2021 Turkey escalated a supposedly anti-terrorist military campaign in Syria and Iraq that appears to be in fact targeting Christians and other religious minorities.



In August 2021 an Armenian cemetery in eastern Turkey was destroyed by bulldozers

Pray that Christians in Turkey will be allowed to practise their faith without interference. Pray that any Turkish plans that threaten Christians across the world will come to nothing.

# Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus

**T**he Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus represents around a third of the island of Cyprus.

Turkey invaded Cyprus and captured the territory in 1974, declaring it an independent state in 1983.

Northern Cyprus is recognised only by Turkey; both the UN and EU regard it as belonging to the Republic of Cyprus.

Approximately 142,000 Greek Cypriots were forced to leave. Today an estimated 73% of the overall Cypriot population are Christian, but this falls to less than 1% in Northern Cyprus, the population of which is around 99% Muslim. As many as 500 church buildings are alleged to have been vandalised or demolished; 77 have been converted into mosques.

In 2016 the government of Northern Cyprus barred many churches in the region from holding more than one service each year, citing the difficulty of policing Christians who wished to cross the border to worship. Christians undergo police surveillance of their church services. Converts from Islam report facing harassment, and fear losing their jobs.

In April 2021 Ryan Keating, originally from the US, was charged with illegal importation after being found in possession of Bibles, New Testaments and other Christian books. The books were discovered after police and customs officials raided a café owned by Keating which also serves as the meeting place for a church. Keating,

just one example of Christian workers being harassed in Northern Cyprus in 2021, had already received a lifetime ban from Turkey, purportedly due to national security.

Also in April 2021, Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan threatened Northern Cyprus over a court decision that kept religious education under the authority of the Ministry of Education rather than an Islamic “religious affairs committee”, stating, “We will never tolerate steps that impede the Quranic education of our children in Northern Cyprus.”



At time of writing Ryan Keating’s case has yet to be heard

Pray for Christians in Northern Cyprus who face restrictions on religious freedom, and those in the Republic of Cyprus unable to return to their homes and churches. Ask God to support and help Ryan Keating, and others who seek to witness.

# Turkmenistan



**T**urkmenistan has an 89% Muslim population, with Christians, most of them Russians and Armenians, representing 9-10%. All aspects of public life in this impoverished and isolated nation are under strict government control.

The US Commission on International Religious Freedom reported that in 2020/21 “religious freedom conditions in Turkmenistan remained among the worst in the world”. Police monitor church activities, raid Christian homes and arrest Christians, particularly church leaders. If imprisoned, Christians often face torture and starvation.

Religious meetings in private homes are banned. In March 2020 police raided two house church meetings, forcing participants to sign confessions of unlawful religious activity and threatening to take children into state custody.

There are just 20 registered churches – the only places where it is legal for Christians to meet. Churches find it almost impossible to get registration. Since 2016 churches have been required to have 50 adult members in order to apply.

In 2021 Christians were thankful that the government gave permission for registered churches to continue meeting, if they followed Covid-19 precautions, rather than using the pandemic as an excuse to close churches.

The religious context is dominated by Islam and a pervasive presidential

personality cult, first established by former President Niyazov and continued under current President Berdymukhamedov, who can remain president for life.

Turkmenistan’s Council for Religious Affairs is staffed entirely by Muslims and rarely grants permission for Bibles to be imported. Missionary activity is considered harmful to society. Christianity is associated with negative foreign influences.

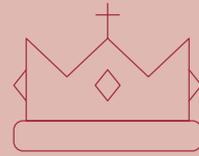
There is a small, growing community of Muslim-background believers, who are normally rejected by their family and will often lose their job, be removed from any public office and come under intense pressure to return to Islam. Yet they are full of joy and thirst for the Word of God; leaders long for training and equipping for ministry.



Barnabas Fund provided food and medical aid to Christian families in Turkmenistan

Give thanks that registered churches were able to continue meeting despite the pandemic, and pray that the government will further soften its stance on church registration. Ask that the Lord will sustain hard-pressed believers.

# Martyrs



*“They were put to death by stoning; they were sawn in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and ill-treated – the world was not worthy of them.”*  
(Hebrews 11:37-38a)

Christians in many parts of the world risk their lives for their faith, and some pay the ultimate price. Believers are killed by governments and by their communities – converts especially are targeted, even by their own families.

Radical jihadists believe that they are pleasing Allah by killing non-Muslims. Hindutva and Buddhist nationalists launch lethal attacks against Christians to preserve national purity. Communist governments round up and kill Christians as those who would undermine their totalitarian rule.

Pastors and church leaders are often singled out. In August 2021 Nitish Kumar, a teenage church leader from a family of Christian converts in Bihar, India, was the victim of an acid attack carried out by radical Hindutva nationalists after he refused to stop holding prayer meetings; he died from his injuries around six weeks later.

In Chin State, Myanmar, Pastor Cung Biak Hum was shot and killed by the Tatmadaw (Myanmar military) as he tried to put out a fire. Soldiers then hacked off his finger in order to steal his wedding ring. Lethal violence against ethnic-minority Christians has

been a persistent feature of Buddhist-majority Myanmar.

Sometimes Christians die because their lives are counted worthless. In October 2021 two Pakistani Christian sanitation workers, Faisal Masih and Nadeem Masih, lost their lives after they and a Christian colleague were sent into a poisonous sewer by the Muslim supervisors without protective equipment. Emergency responders who were Muslims refused to intervene as they believed contact with Christians would make them ritually unclean.



The funeral of young convert Nitish Kumar, who was killed by radical Hindutva nationalists after he refused to stop leading prayer meetings

Praise God for the bravery of Christians who had to give up their lives in Christ's service. Give thanks that their killers could never take away their faith in Christ, and that they were willing to lay down their lives for Him.

# Uzbekistan



Christians were disappointed in July 2021 when Uzbekistan's new Religion Law came into effect, as most of the previous restrictions on religious freedom were maintained.

A ban on religious teaching without state permission, for example, was retained. Any gathering for religious purposes in a home, such as a Bible study group, is thus prohibited.

Religious events continue to be heavily controlled with most existing constraints maintained. A registered religious community must still submit the reasons for any event, the address, date and time, number of attendees, sources of finance, and provide copies of any literature or audio-visual material to be used at the event. Details of any foreign citizens attending must also be supplied.

Article 3 prohibits any form of proselytism, effectively banning Christian evangelism or missionary work.

The number of adult members required for a church to apply for official registration (so that its activities are legal) has been reduced from 100 to 50. However, an additional restriction requires all founders (church members at time of registration) to be resident in the same city or district.

For many years officially secular Uzbekistan, whose population is mainly Muslim, was the harshest Central Asian country in its treatment of the small Christian community. But President

Mirziyoyev, elected in December 2016, has shown a more tolerant attitude.

In 2019 a historic breakthrough saw several churches registered, including one in the notoriously strict, autonomous region of Karakalpakstan, and at least a further eight churches were registered in 2020. Church registration had previously been very difficult to obtain. In 2021, however, there were no further registrations among the country's estimated 120 evangelical churches.

Uzbekistan recognises the Russian Orthodox Church, but discriminates against other Christian denominations. Evangelical churches are growing, with many converts from Islam who face ostracism and pressure from their Muslim relatives and harassment by the authorities and Islamist extremists.



In 2021 Barnabas Fund provided food parcels for 226 Christian families in Uzbekistan

Pray that the Lord will help Christians to share their faith and worship Him in freedom and safety. Ask that the government of Uzbekistan will go further in bringing about religious liberty.

# A Living Hope



*“Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said.”*  
(Matthew 28:5-6, ESV)

A Christian’s hope is based upon the Lord Jesus Christ and His victory over sin and death – “that Christ died for our sins ... that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4, ESV). By grace alone all believers share in Christ’s victory, and gain the promise of everlasting life.

This is the hope that sustains our persecuted brothers and sisters around the world. When they meet on the Lord’s Day – the day on which Christ rose from the dead – they are strengthened by remembering what He has accomplished, even though they fear attack or must meet in secret. If they are imprisoned, even in the midst of death and despair there remains hope. So many endure suffering and hardship with this hope in mind – because He lives they can face tomorrow.

Nadeem Masih was one of two Christian sanitation workers in Sargodha, Pakistan, who died after being sent into a poisonous sewer without protective equipment. Neither his Muslim supervisor, nor the Muslim first responders who refused to come to his aid because contact with a Christian would make them “unclean”, valued his life.

“Nadeem’s death is a shock to our family,” said his widow Mariam. “We miss him so much but God has called him to His breast, and we thank God for His gift of heaven.” Praise the Lord for this glorious hope, that, in the words of our Saviour, “he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live” (John 11:25b, AV).



Young Christians worshipping in Uganda. The living hope found in Christ brings joy to believers from every nation, tribe, people and tongue

Thank God for the great and glorious hope which is the inheritance of all who put their faith in the risen Lord Jesus Christ. Pray for His people around the world that this hope would sustain them in times of darkness.



# Practical help for persecuted Christians

Thank you for your prayers for the persecuted Church.

Praying is the most important thing we can do to help our suffering brothers and sisters. But if you would also like to send them practical help, you will find details on the tear-out form opposite of how you could send a gift to Barnabas Fund. We will forward your gift to places where Christians live with pressure, harassment and violence so that it can be used to fund Christian-run projects that help needy and persecuted Christians.

We greatly welcome donations to our General Fund, which we can use wherever the need is greatest or most urgent, and for projects we cannot publicise because they are too sensitive or for other reasons.

However, if you would like to direct your gift more specifically, here are some suggestions:

**Feeding Fund** (reference 00-636)

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

**Small Business Start-ups and Self-Sufficiency Fund** (reference 00-356)

**Vocational Training Fund** (reference PR1535)

**Christian Schools for Christian Children** (reference 00-794)

**Convert Fund** (reference 00-113)

**Leadership Training Fund** (reference 00-430)

**Bibles and Scriptures Fund** (reference 00-362)

**Resources Fund** (reference 00-479)

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

or

**General Fund** – to be used where most needed – (reference 00-000)

For more information, please visit [barnabasfund.org](http://barnabasfund.org) or call your nearest Barnabas Fund office (contact details on back cover).

LIVING  
STREAMS

## Living Streams Sponsorship

We have sponsorship programmes available for regular donations to certain kinds of project. Please contact your nearest Barnabas Fund office for details.



# Yes, I would like to help persecuted Christians

Please return this form to Barnabas Fund at your national office or to the UK office. Addresses are on the back cover. Barnabas Fund will not give your address, telephone number or email to anyone else.

Title	Full Name		
Address			
			Postcode
Phone			
Email			

**Please remember to complete the Gift Aid form below if applicable**

**Please use my gift for: (Mark your preference)\***

- Wherever the need is the greatest (General Fund)
- Other  (give reference number of project to be supported)

I do not require an acknowledgement of this gift

**Here is my single gift of:**  £25  £50  £100

I enclose a cheque/voucher payable to "Barnabas Fund"

**OR** Please debit my  Visa  Mastercard  American Express

**CAF**  CAF card /other charity card  Other

Card Number

Expiry date   /   Signature

## *giftaid it* **Gift Aid Declaration** (Applicable to UK taxpayers only) Boost your donation by 25p of Gift Aid for every £1 you donate

Gift Aid is reclaimed by the charity from the tax you pay for the current tax year. **Your address is needed to identify you as a current UK taxpayer. Please fill this in below if different from the details above.**

**In order to Gift Aid your donation you must mark the box below:**

I want to Gift Aid this donation and any donations I make in the future or have made in the past to: **Barnabas Fund**. I am a UK taxpayer and understand that if I pay less Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations in that tax year it is my responsibility to pay any difference.

Title	Full Name		
Full Home Address			
			Postcode

**Please notify Barnabas Fund if your circumstances change.**

If you pay Income Tax at the higher or additional rate and want to receive the additional tax relief due to you, you must include all your Gift Aid donations on your Self-Assessment tax return or ask HM Revenue and Customs to adjust your tax code.

\*If the project is sufficiently funded, we reserve the right to use designated gifts either for another project of a similar type or for another project in the same country.



# Lent prayer diary

For those who are using this prayer booklet in Lent 2022, the following schedule of readings and prayers is suggested. It begins on Ash Wednesday, 2 March, and finishes on Easter Day, 17 April.

			2 March	3 March	4 March	5 March
			<i>Afghanistan</i>	<i>Algeria</i>	<i>Azerbaijan</i>	<i>Bangladesh</i>
6 March	7 March	8 March	9 March	10 March	11 March	12 March
<i>Victims of violence and injustice</i>	<i>Burkina Faso</i>	<i>Cameroon</i>	<i>China</i>	<i>Egypt</i>	<i>Eritrea</i>	<i>Ethiopia</i>
13 March	14 March	15 March	16 March	17 March	18 March	19 March
<i>Children</i>	<i>India</i>	<i>Indonesia</i>	<i>Iran</i>	<i>Iraq</i>	<i>Kazakhstan</i>	<i>Kenya</i>
20 March	21 March	22 March	23 March	24 March	25 March	26 March
<i>Refugees and IDPs</i>	<i>Kyrgyzstan</i>	<i>Laos</i>	<i>Libya</i>	<i>Mali</i>	<i>Mauritania</i>	<i>Mozambique</i>
27 March	28 March	29 March	30 March	31 March	1 April	2 April
<i>Pastors and Evangelists</i>	<i>Myanmar</i>	<i>Nepal</i>	<i>Niger</i>	<i>Nigeria</i>	<i>North Korea</i>	<i>Pakistan</i>
3 April	4 April	5 April	6 April	7 April	8 April	9 April
<i>Women</i>	<i>Russia</i>	<i>Saudi Arabia</i>	<i>Somalia</i>	<i>Sri Lanka</i>	<i>Sudan</i>	<i>Syria</i>
10 April	11 April	12 April	13 April	14 April	15 April	16 April
<i>Converts</i>	<i>Tajikistan</i>	<i>Turkey</i>	<i>Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus</i>	<i>Turkmenistan</i>	<i>Martyrs</i>	<i>Uzbekistan</i>
17 April						
<i>A Living Hope</i>						

## International Headquarters

The Old Rectory, River Street, Pewsey, Wiltshire  
SN9 5DB, UK

**Telephone** 01672 564938

**Fax** 01672 565030

From outside UK:

**Telephone** +44 1672 564938

**Fax** +44 1672 565030

**Email** [info@barnabasfund.org](mailto:info@barnabasfund.org)

## 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 International e.V.

**Account number:** 415 600

**Bank:** Evang Kreditgenossenschaft Stuttgart

**IBAN:** DE89520604100000415600

**BIC:** GENODEF1EK1

## Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland

Office 113, Russell Business Centre,  
40-42 Lisburn Road, Belfast BT9 6AA  
Please send post to our UK office address.

**Telephone** 02891455246

**Email** [ireland@barnabasfund.org](mailto:ireland@barnabasfund.org)

## Published by Barnabas Aid

1934 Old Gallows Road Suite 350  
Vienna, VA 22182, USA

## Singapore

Cheques in Singapore dollars payable to "Olive Aid Trust" may be sent to: Olives Aid Sdn Bhd, P.O. Box 03124, Subang Jaya, 47507 Selangor, MALAYSIA

Singaporean supporters may send gifts for Barnabas Fund online via Olive Aid Trust:

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**Bank Name:** United Overseas Bank  
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**Swift Code:** UOVBYMYKL

**Location:** KUALA LUMPUR

**Account Number:** 140-901-654-0

## South Africa

Office 301, 3rd Floor, Eikestad Mall, 43 Andringa  
Street, Stellenbosch 7599

**Telephone** +27 21 808 1668

**Email** [bfsa@barnabasfund.org](mailto:bfsa@barnabasfund.org)

## UK

9 Priory Row, Coventry CV1 5EX

**Telephone** 024 7623 1923

**Fax** 024 7683 4718

From outside the UK:

**Telephone** +44 24 7623 1923

**Fax** +44 24 7683 4718

**Email** [info@barnabasfund.org](mailto:info@barnabasfund.org)

Registered charity number 1092935

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