



## Nigeria – Christian student stoned to death; Two Chibok girls gain masters degrees

A Christian student in Nigeria has been stoned to death after being accused of making “derogatory comments” about Muhammad, the prophet of Islam.

Deborah Samuel, a student at Shehu Shagari College of Education in Sokoto State, was accused of making the remarks in a WhatsApp group chat. Muslim students and some local Muslims stoned and clubbed her to death at the college on the morning of 12 May.

Two suspects, Bilyaminu Aliyu and Aminu Hukunci, were arrested, prompting riots in Sokoto in which church buildings were attacked. The two men pleaded not guilty in an initial hearing on 16 May.

Meanwhile, two of the 276 Chibok schoolgirls who were abducted by Boko Haram Islamist extremists in 2014 have completed their masters degrees in the United States. Lydia Pogu completed a masters in Human Services Administration, and Joy Bishara a masters in Social Work, at Southeastern University in Lakeland, Florida.

“Boko Haram told us that school is a taboo for women and warned us that if we go back to school, they will come for us,” said Lydia. “I thought all my dreams had changed, but God had a different plan for me.”

On 14 April 2014 Boko Haram abducted 276 girls, mostly Christian, from a secondary school in Chibok, north-east Nigeria. Around 160 of the girls have subsequently escaped, been rescued or released.

**Pray that** the Lord will spread His protection over the Christian community of Sokoto, a strongly Islamic region of northern Nigeria (Psalm 5:11). Ask that Deborah’s family and friends will be comforted at this difficult time. Give thanks for the success of Lydia and Joy, and that the threats of the Islamists did not triumph in their lives. Pray for more than 100 Chibok girls who are among

many Christians still held captive by Boko Haram and other Islamist groups.

## India – State government of Karnataka issues anti-conversion ordinance

The state government of Karnataka, India, has passed an anti-conversion ordinance that outlaws religious conversions secured by inducement or force. The “Karnataka Protection of Right to Freedom of Religion Ordinance” came into force on 17 May.

The government had previously introduced an anti-conversion bill, which was passed by the lower house of the Karnataka state legislature. However, the bill was not introduced to the upper house because the governing party does not have a majority.

Unlike a bill, an ordinance is a temporary measure. The anti-conversion ordinance will lapse either in six months’ time or after six weeks of the beginning of a new legislative session if the legislature does not grant its approval.

The ordinance penalises any conversion of faith by “misrepresentation, force, fraud, allurements or marriage” and carries a maximum punishment of five years’ imprisonment and a minimum fine of 25,000 rupees (£260; \$325; €310). When the intention is to convert a minor, a woman, or a person belonging to the Scheduled Castes (those viewed as having the lowest status according to the Hindu caste system), the offence is punishable with a maximum of ten years in prison and a fine of 50,000 rupees.

Peter Machado, president of the All-Karnataka United Christian Forum for Human Rights, expressed fears that Christians and other religious minorities would be targeted by extremists taking advantage of such legislation.

“There is no doubt that the fringe elements and groups will try to create problems for the members of our community,” he said.

**Ask that** the Lord will grant wisdom

to Church leaders and all Christians in Karnataka, that they may be “wise as serpents and innocent as doves” in responding to this ordinance (Matthew 10:16). Pray that they will be united in making a case against the need for this law. Pray that the ordinance will not remain in force, and that until it lapses it will not be used to target those who are simply sharing their faith without bribing, tricking or threatening anybody.

## Iran – Armenian pastor sentenced to ten years’ imprisonment

An Iranian pastor has been sentenced to ten years in prison for running a “house church” in Tehran, the capital city.

Anooshavan Avedian, an Iranian-Armenian, was also sentenced to ten years of “deprivation of social rights” – for example, restrictions on his employment – which will commence once he is released from prison.

Two members of the church, Abbas Soori and Maryam Mohammadi, both converts from Islam, were sentenced to ten years’ deprivation of rights but not given prison sentences.

Other members of the church were forced to sign official documents promising that they would not attend further house church meetings, nor make contact with any other Christians.

The house church was started following the closure of a Farsi (Persian)-speaking church in Tehran in 2013.

Unlike the historic Armenian- and Assyrian-speaking Christian communities, Farsi-speaking Christians are converts from Islam and therefore punishable according to Islamic law.

Although as an Armenian Christian he would be permitted to worship in his own language, it is therefore illegal for Anooshavan Avedian to minister to Farsi-speaking believers or to conduct church services in Farsi, the national language of Iran.

**Ask the Lord** to sustain Anooshavan, Abbas and Maryam throughout this difficult time, as well

as their families and the other former members of their house church in Tehran. Pray for the success of their appeals against imprisonment and deprivation of rights. Pray also for a change of heart from the Iranian authorities, that they will allow Farsi-speaking believers to worship freely.

### **Sudan – Pastor injured by Islamist attackers is given one-month sentence for “disturbing the peace”**

A pastor in Gezira State, Sudan, has been sentenced to serve one month in prison after an attack by Islamist extremists.

A judge decided to hand a one-month sentence to both Pastor Estefanos and his attacker for “disturbing the peace”.

The attack occurred during a church service on Sunday 10 April. Members of an Islamist group, who have previously appealed to the authorities to have the church closed, damaged Bibles and furniture belonging to the church. Pastor Estefanos and three women from the congregation required medical attention for their injuries.

Pastor Estefanos plans to appeal against his sentence.

**Intercede for** Pastor Estefanos and the Christians in Gezira State, that the Lord will act mightily to restrain the hand of those who oppose them. Pray that the Muslim extremists who have harassed and attacked the church will come to see their own need of the Christ whom they are persecuting (Acts 9:5). Ask that the pastor’s appeal will be successful and that this miscarriage of justice will be overturned.

### **Afghanistan – Christians in Afghanistan still at risk of death for apostasy**

The annual report of the US Commission for International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has reported that Christians in Afghanistan are still at risk of death for apostasy.

Since the August 2021 US withdrawal from Afghanistan and the subsequent Taliban takeover, the threat to Christians – all Muslim-background believers from Islam – has increased.

Since mid-2021 the Taliban have said that Christians must leave, re-convert to Islam, or face death.

“Christian converts,” says the 2022 USCIRF report, are among those who “practice their faith in hiding due to fear of reprisal and threats from the Taliban.”

The report recounts that the Taliban have gone door-to-door searching for Christians, adding that Taliban rule also places believers at greater risk of violence and death at the hands of their neighbours, friends and family.

Meanwhile, Christians who have escaped from Afghanistan and sought refuge in neighbouring Muslim-majority countries remain in need of safe countries in which they can settle and rebuild their lives.

**Lift up** to the Lord Afghan Christians who face constant danger of violence and death at the hands of the Taliban and other Islamist extremists. Pray that He will keep them safe from harm and provide for their needs despite the ongoing humanitarian disaster in Afghanistan, preparing for them a table in the midst of their enemies (Psalm 23:5). Pray also for Afghan refugees, that a place of safety will be provided for them where they will not face the threat of Islamist attack.

### **Egypt – Government committee registers 239 churches, its largest single batch**

Egypt registered its largest single batch of churches and church-affiliated buildings on 20 April. A total of 239 licences were granted by the committee overseeing the process, its biggest number since the licensing process began.

The 23rd batch brings the number of churches granted licences to 2,401 out of the 3,730 that applied for registration after a new Law for Building and Restoring Churches removed Ottoman-era restrictions on church buildings in 2016.

Before the committee started work in late 2017 it was extremely difficult for churches to obtain a licence and many congregations had no option but to worship illegally in unlicensed buildings.

In early 2018 the Egyptian

government permitted Christians to worship in unregistered buildings pending the completion of the licensing process.

**Give thanks** to the Lord for answering our prayers for the Egyptian Church. Pray that the situation will continue to improve for our brothers and sisters in Egypt and that the licensing process will reduce hostility towards the Christian community.

### **China – New laws governing church finances**

New regulations governing the management of religious organisations’ finances came into force in China on 1 June.

The new Measures for the Financial Management of Venues for Religious Activities – jointly drawn up by the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) and the Ministry of Finance – allow greater control of churches’ finances by the state.

Article 4 states, “The internal financial management system of a religious activity site shall be reported to the religious affairs department that handles the registration of the religious activity site.”

Article 43 adds that “religious affairs departments, financial departments and relevant government departments may organise financial and asset inspections and audits of religious activity sites”.

The new regulations follow the May 2021 implementation of Measures for the Administration of Religious Personnel, which state that church leaders must be those who “love the motherland, support the leadership of the Communist Party of China, support the socialist system, abide by the constitution, laws, regulations and rules, [and] practise the core values of socialism”.

**Pray for** our brothers and sisters in China and ask that they remain steadfast in their love for the Lord, casting their burdens upon Him because He cares for them (1 Peter 5:7). Pray that the new financial regulations, along with other state measures for administering religious activity, will not hinder churches in their ministries.

**“You, LORD, are a shield around me, my glory, the One who lifts my head high.” – Psalm 3:3**

UK Unit 23, Ash Industrial Estate Kembrey Park, Swindon SN2 8UN Telephone 01793 744557 Email [info@barnabasfund.org](mailto:info@barnabasfund.org)

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)

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)

New Zealand PO Box 276018, Manukau City, Auckland 2241 Telephone (09) 280 4385 or 0800 008 805 Email [office@barnabasfund.org.nz](mailto:office@barnabasfund.org.nz)

Australia PO Box 3527, Loganholme, QLD 4129 Telephone (07) 3806 1076 or 1300 365 799 Email [bfaustralia@barnabasfund.org](mailto:bfaustralia@barnabasfund.org)

  
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