

Leading petitioner AC Michael described the order as “very satisfactory”, adding, “It will help bring out the truth.”

The petitioners stated that on average 45 to 50 violent attacks are perpetrated on Christian institutions and church leaders every month in India, with a record 57 incidents recorded in May 2022 and more than 500 such attacks in 2021.

The court’s order demonstrates that these allegations of anti-Christian violence are being taken seriously.

**Give thanks** for the Supreme Court’s decision to investigate these allegations of persecution thoroughly. Pray that the verification process will be thorough, fair and a true reflection of the persecution Indian Christians experience. Ask that the findings will cause the government to take steps to ensure that Christians can choose, profess, practise and propagate their faith unhindered, in accordance with the Indian constitution. Pray that the Church in India will be further emboldened in prayer and action following this welcome confirmation that God will bring justice to His people who cry out to Him (Luke 18:7-8).

### **Egypt – Islamist terrorists kill Christian father and son in Sinai**

An Egyptian Christian father and son have been shot dead by Islamist terrorists in the Sinai peninsula.

The shooting happened outside the village of Gelbana, near the town of al-Qantara Sharq in mid-west Sinai, on 30 August.

Salama Moussa Waheeb and his son Hany were working in the fields belonging to their family farm when they were shot by jihadists from Islamic State (IS, ISIS, ISIL, Daesh). Islamist terrorists have been active in the Sinai since 2011.

Salama Moussa Waheeb was father to five children, two sons and three daughters. Hany, 40, leaves behind a wife and two daughters.

**Cry out** to God for the family of Salama and Hany that they will receive the Lord’s comfort and strength as they mourn their loved ones (Matthew 5:4). Pray for an end to violence towards Egyptian Christians in Sinai. Ask that the government’s acceptance of Christians, shown in many ways including the progress made in legalising church buildings, will spread to rural areas and that hostility towards followers of Christ will cease.

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## Prayer Focus Update

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### **Pakistan – Supreme Court grants bail to three Christians charged with “blasphemy”**

The Supreme Court of Pakistan in Islamabad has taken the unusual step of granting bail to three Christians charged with “blasphemy” in separate cases.

Salamat Mansha Masih was bailed on 23 August. Defence lawyer Abdul Hameed Khan Rana refuted the claims of four Muslim students that a Christian booklet Salamat gave them in February 2021 contained any sacrilegious material.

The bench of two judges ruled that the accused should be protected until the allegation was proved, emphasising the state’s special responsibility to ensure protection of those accused of “blasphemy”, who are often the target of mob reprisals.

The judges issued a nine-page opinion that highlighted concerns around enforcement of the “blasphemy” law, such as false and malicious accusations, the lack of credible evidence in many cases,

and the mob violence with which the accused person is often threatened.

The court also affirmed that the preaching of Christianity “is not a crime, nor can it be made into one”.

Patras Masih and Raja Waris, alleged separately to have posted offensive material online, were both bailed on 24 August.

The Supreme Court referred Patras’s case back to the lower court with clear directives to base its judgment on the evidence without succumbing to outside pressure.

“Blasphemy” laws in Pakistan 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 the lower courts usually favour the testimony of Muslims, in accordance with sharia (Islamic law). Judges are often reluctant to acquit those accused of “blasphemy” for fear of reprisals.

**Give thanks** for the decisions of the Supreme Court in recognising the lack of evidence against the three Christians. Praise God for the highly significant affirmation that preaching Christianity is legal. Pray that Salamat, Patras and Raja will all be acquitted. Pray for their protection from any attacks by extremists. Continue to pray for other Christians imprisoned in Pakistan on charges of “blasphemy” that they too will be vindicated (Psalm 26:1).

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### **Mozambique – At least eight Christians killed by Islamists in northern provinces**

At least eight Christians have been killed by Islamic State (IS)-affiliated terrorists in attacks across northern Mozambique in September.

Six were killed in three attacks in three days in Nampula Province.

On 6 September terrorists from IS-affiliated organisation Ahlu Sunnah Wa-Jama, known locally as Al Shabaab (not the Somali-based group of the same name), killed an 83-year-old Christian by shooting her in the head.

In separate statements Al Shabaab claimed responsibility for two further attacks in Nampula, saying that one Christian was killed and a church building burned on 7 September, and four Christians were killed along with 120 houses and two church buildings burned on 8 September.

The Islamist group also reported the killing of two other Christians in separate attacks in Cabo Delgado Province.

**Lift up** our brothers and sisters in northern Mozambique, asking that they will be strengthened in faith (1 Corinthians 16:13) despite the difficult circumstances they face. Ask that the LORD will overturn the plans of the terrorists (Psalm 33:10) and establish peace for all people in this troubled region.

### **Myanmar – Military lays mines around church in Shan State**

The Myanmar military, known as the Tatmadaw, laid mines around a church in Shan State which it occupied for several days in early September.

The interior of the church building, in the town of Moebye, showed signs of having been taken over by the Tatmadaw, including the presence of abandoned articles of military uniform.

Local residents were warned not to approach the church building until mines had been cleared from the area.

Heavy Tatmadaw shelling of the town destroyed 100 homes and killed a seven-year-old boy in the first days of September. More than 5,000 people fled their homes in Moebye in June 2021 as a result of the military’s repeated attacks on the town.

The Tatmadaw, which seized power in Buddhist-majority Myanmar in a coup on 1 February 2021, has for many years persecuted the Christian-majority Chin, Kachin and Karen ethnic groups, as well as the large Christian communities in Kayah and Shan states, and the Muslim-majority Rohingya.

**Intercede** for believers in Moebye that they will be protected from mines and be able to rebuild their lives (Psalm 27:5) following heavy bombardment. Pray that those displaced will find safe havens. Ask that attacks on Christians in Myanmar will cease.

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### **Libya – Christian convert from Islam sentenced to death for apostasy**

A Christian convert from Islam has been sentenced to death by the Court of Appeal in Misrata, north-west Libya.

The young man became a Christian four years ago while studying at university. He has since been arrested several times

by Libyan militias, which serve as law enforcers in the disordered country.

He was issued with the death sentence for apostasy after refusing to return to Islam.

The complex political and legal situation in Libya means that it is not clear whether an anti-apostasy law passed around ten years ago can be enforced. In this case the court chose to apply the death penalty based on this law.

The Maliki school of Sunni Islam – which is dominant in Libya – teaches that the death penalty is mandatory for sane male and female apostates from Islam.

**Pray for** our brother in Libya, asking that the death sentence will not be carried out and that he will be allowed to practise his Christian faith in peace. Ask that whatever the outcome (Daniel 3:18), the Lord will sustain him strong in his relationship with Himself and remain close to him. Pray also for a resolution to the political and legal turmoil in Libya.

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### **Iran – Five Christians lose appeals against sentencing for involvement in “house churches”**

An Iranian-Armenian pastor and four female Christian converts have lost their appeals against jail terms and fines imposed because of their involvement in “house churches”, that is, churches of converts from Islam.

The 26th Revolutionary Court of Tehran in June 2022 confirmed sentences against Pastor Joseph Shahbazian, 58 (ten years), Mina Khajavi, 59, and Malihe Nazari, 48 (six years each), and fines for Masoumeh Ghasemi and her daughter Somayeh (Sonya) Sadegh of £950 (\$1,100; €1,109) to £1,513 (\$1,751; €1,765).

Pastor Shahbazian also faces a two-year ban on travelling abroad and two years of internal exile when he is released.

All five were convicted in 2020 of “forming and operating illegal organisations (house churches) with the aim of disrupting the security of the country”. Pastor Shahbazian was also found guilty of propagating evangelical Christianity and of having “established a group to attract Muslims”.

Lawyer Iman Soleimani, acting on behalf of the Christians, condemned the appeal court’s ruling that had been reached “without an actual hearing, and with a complete disregard of the extensive and well-reasoned defence offered”.

**Pray that** all five Christians remain steadfast in their trust in the Lord, despite the rejection of their case by the appeal court, knowing that their labour is not in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58). Ask that Joseph, Mina and Malihe receive the courage to endure their time in prison, and that their faith will be an inspiration to other prisoners.

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### **India – Christians welcome Supreme Court directive to verify persecution claims**

Indian Christians have welcomed the Supreme Court’s directive to state governments to supply information about the persecution of Christians.

The court’s order, issued on 1 September, requires eight Indian states to submit detailed evidence from more than 20 cases of violent attacks against Christians, including police reports. The states concerned are Bihar, Haryana, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.

The order is the result of a submission (known as a petition) to the Supreme Court in July by church leaders and Christian organisations calling for a directive to end “hate speech” targeted against Christians and attacks on their places of worship.