

Barnabas Prayer Focus

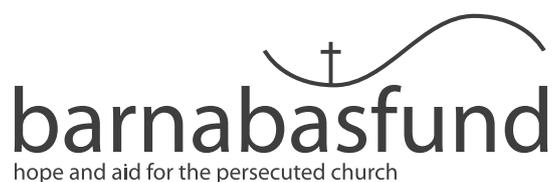
HOPE AND AID FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

Prayer Focus | Update Number 306 | May 2022

**“For the power of the wicked
will be broken, but the LORD
upholds the righteous”
— Psalm 37:17**

A monthly resource for individuals and prayer groups produced by Barnabas Fund.

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Nigeria – Anti-Christian violence in Middle Belt kills scores of people in multiple attacks

Scores of people have been killed in repeated Islamist attacks on Christian communities in Nigeria's Middle Belt.

There were at least 80 fatalities and more than 60 abductions when gunmen riding motorcycles attacked ten predominantly Christian villages in southern Plateau State on Sunday 10 April (Palm Sunday). More than 115 houses were destroyed.

There were twelve deaths on 2 April as suspected Fulani Islamists invaded a cultural festival in the Irigwe Chieftdom of Bassa Local Government Area, also in Plateau State. The Irigwe, an ethnic group with a sizeable Christian population, have been under increased attack by Fulani militants since mid-2021.

In the last week of March around 80 were killed and more than 100 abducted in similar attacks against Christian villages in Kaduna State.

According to a recent report more than 13,000 people in Nigeria's Middle Belt have been killed in attacks by Fulani extremists between 2009 and 2021, including children and elderly. Christian farming communities were repeatedly attacked, while the vast majority of Muslim communities were undisturbed.

Pray for an end to violence against Christians in Plateau, Kaduna and across the Middle Belt (Isaiah 60:18). Intercede for the protection of the Irigwe people and other Christians from targeted attacks and pray that the authorities will take decisive steps to prevent them. Ask that the Lord will comfort and sustain those bereaved, bring healing to all those injured and release of those abducted.

Pakistan – Muslim arrested after desecrating church in Lahore

A Pakistani Muslim man was arrested after desecrating a cross on top of a church building in Lahore.

Muhammad Bilal climbed the roof of One in Christ Church in Green Town, a Muslim-majority district of Lahore, at 10am on 16 March.

He initially attempted to break a concrete cross on the roof 12 metres from the ground. He then sat on the cross and chanted “Allahu Akbar” (God is the greatest) for half an hour. The phrase is a traditional Islamic affirmation, often used by jihadists when they attack.

When a crowd assembled and the police had been notified, Bilal jumped down from the cross and was caught by locals gathered in the street below. He was arrested under section 295-A of the Pakistan Penal Code, concerning hurting religious feelings.

Church leaders urged the Christian community to remain calm. Christian human rights spokesman Samson Salamat called on the government of Pakistan to address the increasing hostility towards minorities in Pakistan.

Ask the Lord that the Christians’ conduct towards their persecutors will be seen positively as an example of forgiveness and a witness to the grace and peace to be found in the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 5:44-45). Ask that God’s people will know the joy that such a counter-cultural stance brings to their spirit and be spurred on to even greater deeds of love and compassion (Hebrews 10:24). Pray that Muslims will allow Christians to worship unmolested and not treat church buildings as Islamic territory. Ask that the government will take action to reduce hostility towards Christians and other minorities.

D. R. Congo – Islamists “mercilessly killing Christians” in North-East

At least a dozen people have been killed in an attack by Islamists on the village of Masambo in the north-eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

The attack, on Sunday 3 April, was carried out by the Islamist group Allied Democratic Forces (ADF).

A church leader in neighbouring Uganda confirmed that that ADF militants are “mercilessly killing Christians”. He added that many people are fleeing north-eastern DRC and seeking refuge in western Uganda.

These attacks are part of a spate of Islamist violence across North Kivu province and the neighbouring province of Ituri.

In March 2022 more than 50 people in Ituri and at least 30 in North Kivu were killed in attacks by the ADF.

The two provinces were placed in a state of emergency (known as a “state of siege”) by DRC President Felix Tshisekedi in May 2021. This state has yet to be lifted.

In a video released on 1 April, ADF leader Musa Baluku renewed the group’s pledge of allegiance (*baya*) to Islamic State (IS, ISIS, ISIL, Daesh).

In April 2021 Christian leaders in DRC warned of ADF’s strategy to “kidnap and force victims to join the Islamic faith”.

Pray that the Lord will instil in His children in the north-eastern DRC an awareness of His strength and righteousness upholding them, stronger than any human support (Isaiah 41:10). Call on Him to deliver Christians from evil and guide both those forced to flee and those remaining. Pray that they will experience an overwhelming sense of security in their relationship with their Heavenly Father. Intercede for those abducted that they will have courage and strength to remain faithful to their Lord despite violence and threats to try to make them convert to Islam.

Turkey – Deportation of 78 foreign pastors in the last three years

Turkey has deported 78 foreign pastors and their families since the beginning of 2019, according to a report published by the Association of Protestant Churches in Turkey.

A frequent ground for deportation is that the pastors pose a threat to national security. These claims are based on attendance at Christian conferences or participation in missionary activities.

“Many congregations were left in difficult straits,” the report announced. Whilst the number of Turkish church leaders has been increasing, many churches still rely on foreign-born pastors.

The report denounced the deportation orders that were issued “without any evidence to members of the Protestant community who are focused on living their faith, who are opposed to violence and who do not have criminal records”.

Although Turkey remains technically a secular state, repression of religious minorities is increasing in a country that is at least 99% Muslim.

Lift up the Church in Turkey and pray that God’s people will set their hope firmly on Him who raises the dead (2 Corinthians 1:9). Ask that their trust in His resourcefulness and provision will be undiminished, whatever the apparent void in leadership. Pray that God will sovereignly intervene to stop deportations and that He will raise up strong Turkish pastors who will grow powerfully in their role and lead their flocks towards fruitful labour for the Kingdom. Ask for the easing of tight government restrictions on church leadership training that have severely limited opportunities for gaining suitable qualifications within the country.

India – Supreme Court rejects call to monitor missionaries; Haryana passes anti-conversion bill

The Supreme Court of India has rejected a petition by an extremist group to monitor the activities of Indian Christian missionaries and local evangelists.

The group had called for all Christian missionaries to be checked and their income to be monitored.

In turning down the petition, the two Supreme Court Justices declared, “You are actually disturbing the harmony with these kinds of petitions.”

Extremists have alleged that Christians seek to gain converts by force, fraud or allurements. Such claims are generally unfounded.

The decision came amid encouraging news that Prime Minister Narendra Modi was planning meetings with representatives of the Christian community to discuss ongoing concerns about anti-Christian violence and the misuse of anti-conversion laws.

On 22 March the state assembly of Haryana became the latest to pass a bill criminalising religious conversions secured through force, fraud, allurements or marriage. Haryana is one of ten Indian states with an anti-conversion law.

Conversions solicited illegally carry a term of imprisonment of one to five years, up to ten when the intended convert is a minor.

AC Michael, convener of the United Christian Forum, commented, “None of these state governments [that have brought in anti-conversion legislation] have produced any believable data to establish that forced religious conversions were indeed taking place within their jurisdiction.”

Give thanks for the judges’ decision to reject the petition and pray that Christian missionary activities across India will continue unimpeded. Ask that Christians will be wise in sharing their faith (Matthew 10:16) in the light of the Haryana

anti-conversion legislation and that attempts to discredit them will be shown to be unfounded. Pray against any disruption of church meetings in Haryana or other states with similar laws. Ask that discussions between the Prime Minister and Christian leaders will lead to fair application of anti-conversion laws and avert anti-Christian violence.

Egypt – Church minister stabbed to death in Alexandria

An Egyptian church minister was stabbed to death in Alexandria on the evening of 7 April.

Arsanios Wadid, 56, the minister of a church in the Muharram Bek district, was stabbed three times. He was taken to hospital where he died from his wounds.

The attack took place on a seaside promenade where Arsanios was supervising an outing for children from the church.

The attacker, since identified as 60-year-old Nehru Abdel-Moneim Tawfiq, was quickly apprehended. He has been referred to criminal court, charged with murder, but has claimed diminished responsibility due to mental illness.

Call on the Lord to comfort the family and friends of Arsanios Wadid in their grief (Psalm 34:18). Pray for the Holy Spirit to minister to the congregation in Muharram Bek as they adjust to the loss of their shepherd. Ask that justice will be served as the evidence is gathered.

Barnabas Fund provides practical aid for persecuted Christians in over 60 different countries.

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