

# Prayer Focus Update

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BRINGING HOPE FOR SUFFERING CHRISTIANS

Prayer Focus Update | Number 316 | February 2023

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***“So this is what the Sovereign LORD says: ‘See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who relies on it will never be stricken with panic.’”***

**– Isaiah 28:16**

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A monthly resource for individuals and prayer groups  
produced by Barnabas Aid

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## **Nigeria – Pray for general election on 25 February; at least 39 Christians killed by suspected Fulani militants in Kaduna State**

Christians in Nigeria are particularly in need of prayer this month in the run-up to the general election. Tensions are rising as the country prepares for the poll on 25 February 2023. Nigerian presidential candidates normally choose a vice-presidential running mate from the other religious community; however, All Progressive Congress candidate Bola Tinubu, a Muslim, announced another Muslim as his running mate, sending shock waves through Nigerian politics. The Christian Association of Nigeria has denounced it as a “declaration of war”.

In a New Year message, the President of the Christian Association of Nigeria Archbishop Daniel Okoh appealed to security agencies to maintain their efforts to ensure safety and security, especially for the conduct of the forthcoming election. Okoh also urged Christians to “continue praying that the Lord will strengthen our present political leaders to oversee the elections and a successful transition to a new administration in 2023”.

Meanwhile, in Kaduna State, at least 39 Christians, including six entire families, were killed in separate attacks by suspected Fulani Islamist militants on 13 and 18 December 2022. The assaults targeted the village of Mallagun and seven surrounding villages. Among the victims was 105-year-old Monica Kunal Ajuwai. The attackers looted homes of grain and valuables before burning down 102 houses.

**Call on** the Lord for protection for His people as the election draws near. Pray that Christians will continue to trust in God’s will throughout the election, and exercise their right to vote with prayerful consideration (Philippians 4:6). Ask that the Lord will supply wisdom to whoever is elected, regardless of their religion, and that Christians will play a key role in shaping the country’s future, knowing that righteousness exalts a nation (Proverbs 14:34). Pray that the election will serve to draw a line under the violence of militants in Nigeria, especially in the north and Middle

Belt. Lift up to the Lord those bereaved, homeless and deprived of their livelihoods after the attacks in Kaduna; pray that He will comfort them and provide means to rebuild their lives as they trust in Him.

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## **Pakistan – Female security officer at airport threatened with false accusation of “blasphemy”**

Lift up in prayer a female Christian security officer at an international airport in Pakistan, who was threatened by a Muslim male colleague with accusations of “blasphemy”.

The altercation happened on 6 January at the cargo area of Jinnah International Airport, Karachi. The security guard admonished her colleague for allowing an acquaintance’s vehicle through security without the required pass.

In footage of the incident on social media, the colleague is heard threatening to register a “blasphemy” case against her, saying he will “call preachers ... I am mad and will cut [you] up”. The female officer responded by refusing to back down despite the threat.

“Blasphemy” accusations are highly dangerous as the death sentence is mandatory for those who make defamatory remarks about Muhammad, the prophet of Islam. The accused, their families, and Christian communities can also suffer mob violence at the hands of extremists.

Pakistan’s Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) have since dismissed the man who issued the threat.

Former Pakistan president Asif Ali Zardari demanded an inquiry into the incident, urging the federal and provincial authorities to provide security to the female officer. “It was shameful that the woman security in-charge was threatened with a blasphemy case when she performed her duty,” he said.

**Praise God** for our sister’s courageous stand against these threats. Thank the Lord for swift and widespread condemnation of the colleague’s actions from many in the Muslim community, including those in positions of influence. Pray that our sister and

her family will be protected from any retaliation by extremists (Luke 21:15).

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## **Iraq – Christians were victims of Islamic State, investigators confirm**

Accounts by Iraqi Christians of abuses committed against them by Islamic State (IS – also known as ISIS, ISIL, Daesh) have been independently verified by a team of investigators. The investigators established that Iraqi Christians were victims of IS war crimes after the jihadists seized around a third of the country in 2014.

In their report issued on 1 December 2022 the United Nations team said evidence collected in Iraq supports preliminary findings that IS seized Christian-owned properties, looted and destroyed churches and subjected believers to sexual violence, forced conversions and enslavement.

These acts constitute crimes against humanity and war crimes, Christian Ritscher, head of the UN Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Islamic State, told the Security Council. It has also started collecting evidence on crimes committed against the Christian community in Iraq's second largest city, Mosul.

Although IS was officially declared defeated in Iraq in 2017 following a three-year reign of terror that left tens of thousands dead, its cells continue to stage attacks in Iraq.

In February 2022 more than 120 houses, factories, shops and parcels of land seized from Christians and Sabians (a religious minority indigenous to Iraq) were restored and given back to their rightful owners (see *Prayer Focus Update*, April 2022).

An estimated 75% of Iraq's Christians (around 1.5 million in 1990) have left the country in the last 30 years because of anti-Christian hostility and violence, which began after the 1990-

91 Gulf War intensified after the US-led invasion of 2003, and intensified again after the emergence of IS.

**Give thanks** for the diligence and courage of the investigators in revealing the terrible crimes inflicted by Islamic State. Pray for all the victims, including the Sabeans and the Yazidis, and especially our Christian brothers and sisters. Ask that they will be affirmed as full and equal members of Iraqi society. Pray that Iraqi Christians will be a channel of blessing to their society.

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## **Egypt – Vital church repairs halted by mob attack**

Egyptian Christians need prayers after essential repairs to a church building were halted by an attack by Muslim extremists in the village of Ebis in Beheira, west of the Nile Delta.

Christians were replacing the church's dilapidated, leaking tin roof and had secured a licence to replace the roof with a concrete one. However, on the evening of 24 December, as the concrete mixer entered the village, a mob of local Muslim extremists threw stones at the Christians and the church while chanting Islamist slogans.

The police were soon on the scene to restore order, but the mob subsequently blocked the main road, preventing trucks carrying building material from entering the village. Construction has been suspended and has yet to resume at the time of writing.

The church also runs a health centre for children with disabilities, serving Muslims and Christians alike. After incidences of Muslims throwing stones at a bus transporting disabled children to the clinic, the church temporarily closed the centre in the interest of staff and patients' safety.

**Pray for** a reduction in tension in Ebis to enable Christians to resume and complete the essential repairs to the church. Ask that they will have the faith and courage to depend on the Lord in the hour of trial. Pray that the church will be seen as a benefit to the village as Christians shine as beacons of light who

will impact the entire community (Matthew 5:14-16). Pray that Egyptian Muslim extremists will cease their efforts to prevent Christians having suitable and sufficient places of worship.

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## **food.gives – Aid reaches Christian families in Jordan and Ukraine; Shipments prepared for Zimbabwe**

Both shipping containers mentioned last month – one from New Zealand for Ukraine, as well as the container from the UK for Jordan – have now been cleared through the ports and their contents are being distributed (see *Prayer Focus Update*, January 2023). Thank you for your prayers.

This container was the second sent from the UK to Jordan and brings to around 2,000 the number of Christian families who have benefited from Barnabas Aid's food.gives containers in Jordan.

The boxes contain dry food items – rice, lentils, chickpeas, flour and salt. They were distributed both to Jordanian Christians and to Christian refugees from Yemen, Syria and Iraq. More than three million refugees currently live in Jordan, a huge number accounting for a third of the country's population.

Two 40-foot food.gives containers – one from Australia and the other from the US – had earlier carried urgently needed food aid to hundreds of Christian families. A second 40-foot container carrying dried soup mix is now heading from the US to Jordan, with a third 20-foot container from the UK to follow.

Sixty families in the growing community of refugees from Yemen living in Jordan are among the grateful recipients. Some of the Yemenis became Christians before fleeing the conflict and persecution in their country, but a larger percentage have come to faith in Christ since arriving in Jordan. The community has grown in numbers and faith in recent years.

Further shipments are planned to follow, including two to Zimbabwe – a container of lentils from Australia, and a container of maize from Brazil. We are currently finalising the necessary paperwork, and value your prayers that these documents will be in order and the shipping process goes smoothly.

**Give thanks** for the safe delivery of food.gives boxes to Christians in Jordan. Pray that food security will be increased amid the economic crisis afflicting the nation. Praise God for the tireless industry of local churches in giving even when experiencing poverty (2 Corinthians 8:1-5), in distribution and in hosting refugees. Pray that the Christian community in Jordan will continue to be built up in faith as they are sustained by the provision of aid, remembering especially the refugees from Yemen, Syria and Iraq, who have been uprooted from their homelands and struggle to find ways to support themselves in Jordan. Pray especially for the new Yemeni Christian converts that the Lord will protect and encourage them and that they will grow in knowledge and love of Him. Pray for the safe arrival and successful distribution of aid to Zimbabwe, and the upcoming container shipments from the US and UK to Jordan.

# **Barnabas Aid provides practical aid for suffering Christians in over 60 different countries.**

## **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@barnabasaid.org](mailto:info@barnabasaid.org)

## **United Kingdom**

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

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