



Myanmar – Army document instructs soldiers to shoot, “punish and breakdown” civilians

A chilling Myanmar Army document has been discovered instructing soldiers to “punish and breakdown” ethnic-minority Christians and other civilians deemed to be against the military regime. The discovery came in the same week that mass protests took place in Myanmar (Burma) over the recent military coup, with a ramping up of armed patrols in Karen and Kachin States reported. There are many Christians amongst both the Karen and the Kachin ethnic groups.

The official document lists a sequence of actions that military personnel should take including 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.

The directives include special instructions to round up any dissenting civilian doctors and nurses and to report on any local leaders who are not fully cooperating with the military.

Christian leaders in the region requested prayer for the people of Myanmar and for a “change of heart” of army and coup leaders. “Please pray for the Karen people in hiding in the jungle,” they asked.

Thousands of Christian villagers fled military bombardment in Karen State to take refuge in remote jungle on 1 February, the same day as the Myanmar leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, and her democratically elected government were ousted in the

military coup. Since December 2020, the military have increased ceasefire violations in Karen State, shelling villages in order to clear land for new roads and military installations.

For decades, the military-controlled government of Myanmar brutally oppressed mainly-Christian ethnic people groups including Karen, Kachin and Chin, as well as the mainly-Muslim Rohingya people which includes a small minority of Christians. Even during the transition to civilian democratic rule, a process which began in 2011, violence against the ethnic minorities continued.

Pray for the protection of all Christians and other civilians at risk in Myanmar. Ask that persecuted Christian families taking refuge in the jungle will be kept safe in the shelter of the Most High (Psalm 91:1) and that their practical needs will be met. Call on the LORD to incline the hearts of army and coup leaders towards compassion and lead them to a personal encounter with the Prince of Peace.

Somaliland – Couple with new-born baby among five Christians arrested

Prosecutors in Muslim-majority Somaliland were granted extra time on 10 February to detain in custody a Christian couple and their new-born baby and two other Christian women on suspicion of “spreading Christianity”. The time extension allows prosecutors up to 45 days from the date of the arrests in January to file charges.

On 21 January, police from the capital Hargeisa arrested and detained Mohamed and Hamdi with their baby, as well as Aster, an Ethiopian woman. The following day, police searched the couple’s home and arrested another woman who was living with them.

Their lawyer said that on his initial visit they all appeared in good health and were being well treated, but since then he has been denied access.

The small Christian community in Somaliland is feeling “very vulnerable” following the latest arrests. Many believers are reported to have fled abroad after the arrest in September 2020 of a Christian couple detained for being “apostates and evangelists spreading Christianity”. The couple, who have three children, were unexpectedly released and deported two months later after European government representatives raised the case with the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

Remembering God’s mighty power seen in answered prayers that resulted in the release of a Somaliland Christian couple in September, lift up in your prayers Mohamed, Hamdi and their baby, as well as Aster and our unnamed Christian sister. Ask for their protection, especially that the mother and baby will remain in good health, and that they will remain strong in the LORD, knowing He will never forsake them (Deuteronomy 31:8-9). Pray that their lawyer will be granted access to see them. Ask that Somaliland’s small Christian community will find refuge in God as their ever-present help in these times of increasing pressure (Psalm 46:1).

Eritrea – Seventy Christian prisoners released in Eritrea

Seventy Christians were released from three prisons in Eritrea in late January and early February, many having been incarcerated without charge.

Among the 27 female and 43 male prisoners released were six Christian women arrested in September 2020 for worshipping in public. They were freed from a prison near Dekemhare on 27 January.

The other prisoners, who each served between two and twelve years, were released from Mai Serwa and Adi Abeito prisons, both close to the capital Asmara, on 1 February.

In September 2020, the Eritrean government released 69 Christian prisoners, many of whom had been in long-term detention for their faith, in atrocious conditions, for up to 16 years without trial. At the time of writing, several hundred Christians are thought to remain in captivity.

Thanks be to God, who hears and answers prayer (1 John 5:15), for the release from jail of 70 of His faithful servants. Pray for their recovery from the physical, spiritual and emotional trauma of their incarceration and ask that all their needs will be met, especially for long-term prisoners who may have no living family members or friends to help them. Intercede for all Christians still incarcerated in in Eritrea and pray to the LORD who proclaims liberty to the captives (Isaiah 61:1) for their safe release in His perfect timing.

Algeria – Christian given five year prison sentence for blasphemy

A Christian man (43) from a Muslim background was convicted of blasphemy in Arzew, near Oran, north-west Algeria, and sentenced to the maximum punishment of five years in prison. He was summoned for investigation by police on 20 January, and tried the next day, after being accused of “insulting the prophet of Islam”. The conviction follows an incident in 2018 when a cartoon image of Muhammad was shared with him on his Facebook account. The man, who is

married with four young children, had converted to Christianity in 2001.

Pray for our brother jailed in Algeria, and others convicted on similar charges including two Muslim-background Christians in Kabylie region who received sentences of six months and three years, as well as fines. Ask that they will not fear, but hold fast in a spirit of power and love (2 Timothy 1:7). Give thanks for the growing Christian population in Algeria and pray that they will continue to rejoice in the Lord (Philippians 4:4-7) and know His protection.

India – Government says it has no plans for national anti-conversion law as Madhya Pradesh tightens its state legislation; two pastors beaten in separate attacks by Hindu extremists

The Indian government has no plans to implement a nationwide anti-conversion law, Home Affairs Minister G Kishan Reddy informed Parliament in New Delhi on 2 February.

The minister was responding to a question raised by five MPs following the introduction of a new freedom of religion law in Uttar Pradesh and tightened legislation in Madhya Pradesh, both Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) governed states. His reply allayed concerns that federal anti-conversion legislation may be planned.

Anti-conversion laws are in place in nine of India's 29 states, which prohibit conversions using force, allurement or fraud. The existence of these laws makes Christians actively sharing their faith vulnerable to false accusation and there are many recent examples of this.

Hindu extremists viciously beat an Indian pastor and his congregation, including women and children, during Sunday worship on 31 January, as a mob of around 30 waited outside to prevent them escaping the church in Karnataka State.

Up to eight radicals burst into the church meeting room in Harohalli, about 60 km from Bangalore, and demanded the worshippers repeat a Hindu chant.

When they refused, the gang assaulted Pastor Subhash Hanok and

around 28 other Christians, including the pastor's 13-year-old daughter, Sara.

The attackers have not been charged. However, police have brought charges against Pastor Subhash, including for “conversion”.

In a separate incident, Pastor Chandra Mouli was assaulted and injured on 28 January by two BJP workers in BJP-governed Telangana State. They accused him of carrying out religious conversions, despite the fact that the state has no anti-conversion law.

They attacked the pastor while he visited a sick relative of a church member in Hyderabad district.

Local police intervened to rescue the pastor and the men, both also reportedly members of a hard-line group called the Hindu Dharma Protectors, were arrested.

Spurious accusations of “unlawful” conversion made against Christians and other forms of attack are becoming increasingly frequent in India. An Indian Christian leader commented, “I think there is an increase in hostility to public Christian activity by calling even regular worship as ‘conversion’ activities. This is new in my view and is a dangerous trend.”

Freedom of Religion laws have not been applied to the mass conversion campaigns of Hindu radical groups, known as Ghar Wapsi (“homecoming”), in which Christians are pressured into converting to Hinduism.

Praise the Lord that the Indian government says it has no plans to implement a nationwide anti-conversion law and pray that it will continue to hold this position. Pray that the hearts of the authorities in individual states will soften seeing the love of Christ's followers, and their eyes will open to His love and power. Ask that pastors Subhash and Chandra, and Pastor Subhash's congregation, will heal from their injuries and trauma and find new hope as they persevere through their suffering (Romans 5:3-4). Remember in prayer all Indian Christians living under an increasing threat of violent persecution, that Christ's power will be made perfect in their weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9).

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” John 10:10

UK 9 Priory Row, Coventry CV1 5EX Telephone 024 7623 1923 Email info@barnabasfund.org

Australia PO Box 3527, Loganholme, QLD 4129 Email bfaustralia@barnabasfund.org

New Zealand PO Box 276018, Manukau City, Auckland 2241 Email office@barnabasfund.org.nz

Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland Office 113, Russell Business Centre, 40-42 Lisburn Road, Belfast BT9 6AA Telephone 02891455246 Email ireland@barnabasfund.org

South Africa Office 301, 3rd Floor, Eikestad Mall, 43 Andringa Street, Stellenbosch 7599 Email bfsa@barnabasfund.org


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