

# Barnabas Prayer Focus

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## **Afghanistan – Christians in grave danger following Taliban takeover**

Please pray for Christians in Afghanistan who, as converts from Islam, are in even greater danger following the takeover of the country by the Taliban, which has publicly announced that Christians must convert, leave or be killed. Barnabas Fund is working in great secrecy and danger to support our brothers and sisters in the country.

**Bring before** the Lord His beloved children in Afghanistan, praying that they will be comforted in the knowledge that whoever believes in Jesus Christ will live even though they die (John 11:25-26). Ask that they know the LORD is with them always, even as they pass through the rivers and walk through the fire (Isaiah 43:2). Pray that the Lord will protect them and keep them from harm and also for protection and wisdom for those trying to help them.

## **Somaliland – Christians released after offences-against-Islam charges dismissed**

A group of Christians in the self-declared Republic of Somaliland has been released from detention after charges against them relating to offences against the state religion of Islam were dismissed.

Among them were Mohamed and Hamdi, a couple who were arrested with their new-born baby in January 2021.

In April, six Christian converts from Islam were charged with apostasy, teaching and spreading Christianity, as well as inciting others to commit public-order offences.

In a hearing at a regional court in Hargeisa, the capital city, on 5 August the court dismissed all charges. Mohamed, Hamdi and others were released immediately.

**Praise the** almighty Lord for answering prayers for the release of our brothers and sisters in Somaliland

(Luke 11:10). Thank Him for revealing the emptiness of the authorities' case against them (Psalms 146:7). Ask for peace and strength for Mohamed and Hamdi freed at last together with their baby, the Christians who endured beside them in jail and the tiny Christian minority in Somaliland. Pray they weep no more (Isaiah 30:18-19).

## **Nigeria – Abducted Chibok and Bethel students reunited with parents; pastor's son killed; seven die in Plateau State attacks**

Another girl abducted by Boko Haram from the Nigerian town of Chibok seven years ago has been reunited with her parents, raising hopes that others still being held will be found, the governor of Borno State announced on 7 August.

On 14 April 2014 Islamist extremists 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.

There were emotional scenes on Sunday 25 July when 28 students kidnapped by gunmen almost three weeks earlier from Bethel Baptist High School, Kaduna State, were reunited with their families. "God has answered our prayers," said the school's proprietor, Pastor Ishaya Jangado.

Four more students have since escaped, which leaves a total of 83 Bethel students still being held in captivity.

In Borno State, local authorities demolished a church building in the Maduganari area of Maiduguri, leading to the death of Ezekiel Bitrus, the son of a pastor.

The Borno Geographic Information System (BOGIS) conducted the demolition on 5 August as church members gathered to protest. The Civilian Joint Taskforce (CJTF) accompanying the BOGIS demolition group opened fire on the protesters,

killing 29-year-old Bitrus and injuring five others.

Williams Naga, chairman of the Borno branch of the Christian Association of Nigeria, said, "It appears BOGIS is out to ensure no church is allowed to exist in the state."

On the Sunday following the demolition church members held their regular worship service in the ruined building, "singing and dancing and praising God, and also in defiance of the attempt to take the Christians out of the area", a contact told Barnabas Fund.

Anti-Christian violence has continued elsewhere in Nigeria. Seven people were killed as gunmen suspected to be Fulani militants attacked small villages in Miango, Irigwe chieftdom in Bassa Local Government Area of Plateau State.

Several persons were injured in the assault in which 275 buildings were burned down by the invaders in a predominantly Christian area between 7 pm on 31 July and the early hours of Sunday 1 August.

Pastor Adamu Musa, who was shot during the attack, called on Christians to respond by uniting in prayer, saying, "We should know the world has reached the point that Christians are being hunted and killed because they say we are infidels, we should unite and call on God. He will answer us."

**Give thanks** to almighty God for answering prayers for the safe return of Ruth and the Bethel students. Pray that the Lord will help them to fully recover from their ordeal. Ask that the Chibok and Bethel students still enduring captivity will take heart as they continue to hope in the LORD (Psalm 31:24). Pray for comfort for the family of Ezekiel and others who mourn, knowing their loved ones are at home with the Lord. Implore God to be a shield of protection for Christians who face severe danger every day (Psalm 91:4) and ask that their persecutors repent of their thoughts and actions.

## Luhansk – Christian books officially labelled as extremist material

The government of the Luhansk People's Republic, which declared itself independent from Ukraine in 2014, has added four Christian books to an official list of banned Extremist Materials.

A court in Luhansk ruled in May 2021 that the books seized from the Council of Baptist Churches in the city of Sverdlovsk were "extremist" and in July they were added to the list by the Luhansk Justice Ministry in order to "secure the safety of the Republic".

The latest addition means that there are 18 Christian works on the list of Extremist Materials, including a Russian version of the Gospel of John, a book by Billy Graham and a book by C.H. Spurgeon.

**Beseech our** Lord to soften the hearts of the authorities in Luhansk, enabling them to receive His glorious Word. Pray that Christians living in this Russian-speaking region will not be crushed by the court ruling, and will never feel abandoned (2 Corinthians 4:8-9).

## Indonesia – Christians urge government to settle church buildings dispute

Christians in Aceh, a semi-autonomous province of Muslim-majority Indonesia and the only Indonesian province governed by sharia (Islamic law), have called upon the central government in Jakarta to take action in a dispute over the demolition of church buildings.

Local authorities in the Singkil district of Aceh demolished nine of the district's ten church buildings in 2015, leaving many Christians without a permanent place in which to worship.

The Singkil authorities claimed that an agreement had been made between Muslims and Christians in 1980 that only one church would be built.

The matter is now being considered by Religious Affairs Minister Yaquut Cholil Quoamas.

**Lift up** our brothers and sisters in Aceh and ask the Lord to strengthen them with His Spirit and fill their hearts with faith (Ephesians 3:16-17). Pray that he will equip them with wisdom and courage as they take their case to the government, and ask that Yaquut Cholil Quoamas will respond positively to the Christians' appeal

## Bangladesh – Christians flee attacks by Buddhist extremists

The inhabitants of Suandrapara, a Christian village in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh, were forced to flee after suffering threats and attacks from Buddhist radicals.

The villagers, who converted from Buddhism 16 years ago, were attacked after they refused to demolish their church building and re-convert.

The Buddhists attacked members of the church and their building, breaking a cross and tearing down part of a wall. The assistant pastor, Tubel Chakma Poran Adetion, explained, "The radicals told us to destroy the church, but we will not. If we have to sacrifice our lives, we will. They threaten us to return to our old religion, but we will not return. Jesus Christ is our Saviour. We will die for Him."

**Praise God** for the courage of the Suandrapara Christians and ask that all their practical needs are met. Pray that others will be inspired by their steadfast faith so that the Word of the Lord is spread throughout the region (Acts 13:49). Ask that their tormentors will have a personal and life-changing encounter with the Prince of Peace.

## China – Christian businessmen jailed for selling audio Bibles; crosses removed from fishing boats

Four Christian businessmen in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, China have been given prison sentences for selling audio Bibles.

The four, from Life Tree Culture

Communication, were tried in December 2020 and then convicted in July 2021 of "conducting illegal business operations".

Fu Xuanjuan, the company's legal representative, was sentenced to six years' imprisonment and a fine of 200,000 yuan (£22,200; \$30,900; €26,300).

Deng Tianyong, in charge of managing the audio Bible content, was given a three-year prison sentence and 50,000 yuan fine; Feng Qunhao, a technician, a two-and-a-half year sentence and 30,000 yuan fine; and Han Li, responsible for logistics, a 15-month sentence and 10,000 yuan fine.

Elsewhere in China, in Zhejiang Province, officials from Qushan County removed crosses from the masts of fishing boats and the word "Emmanuel" painted on their vessels.

The fishermen were warned that they would be blocked from obtaining fishing permits if they did not allow the removal of Christian symbols, although officials were not able to show any legal authorisation for their actions.

"We have the right to put crosses on our boats," a fisherman lamented. "Religious freedom is written in the constitution."

In China persecution is often instigated at the level of a province or city rather than nationally, but in the knowledge that the national Communist Party authorities will approve.

**Lift up** God's people in China who proclaim the Good News of our heavenly Father, despite the relentless efforts of the authorities to keep His glory suppressed. Pray that His faithful servants Fu Xuanjuan, Deng Tianyong, Feng Qunhao and Han Li will fix their thoughts on Jesus and hold on to the courage and hope with which they started as they endure prison (Hebrews 3:1,6). May the joy of the Lord bring strength to them and the brave fishermen of Qushan in these days of trial, in the sure and certain knowledge that God's Word cannot be chained (2 Timothy 2:9).

"I can do all this through him who gives me strength" – Philippians 4:13

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