

Barnabas Prayer Focus

HOPE AND AID FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

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“And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.”

— 1 Peter 5:10

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Nigeria – Kidnappers release 47 students at Christian boarding school in Kaduna State; Suspected Fulani militants kill more than 35 residents of Christian community in Plateau State

Kidnappers have released 47 more students abducted from a Christian boarding school in Kaduna State in Nigeria's Middle Belt. The hostages were set free in separate groups on 21 and 27 August.

The students were among 120 kidnapped from Bethel Baptist High School by gunmen in the early hours of 5 July. Twenty-eight hostages were freed on 25 July and others have escaped their captors. Thirty-one students are still being held captive.

Pastor John Hayab, the state Chairman of the Christian Association of Nigeria, called for continuing prayer for the remaining students and commented, "Those who were released came back home very sick and weak, suggesting that those not back may be in a more severe situation."

More than 35 residents of Yelwan Zangam, a Christian community in the Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State, have been killed in an attack by suspected Fulani militants.

Gunmen invaded the community around 8 p.m. on 24 August and destroyed a bridge to prevent the residents from escaping.

Survivors said that the raid lasted for hours, with numerous houses and vehicles set on fire. One resident said, "It's a coordinated attack on the Christians. This community is Christian-dominated ... We're still recovering bodies and sending them to the mortuary."

The following day, in desperation for protection and justice, angry youths staged a protest by dumping more than 20 corpses at the main gate of Plateau State Government House.

Plateau State Government re-imposed a 24-hour curfew in the area and announced the arrest of ten suspects.

Praise the Lord for the release of the Bethel Baptist High School students from their abductors, in response to your prayers. Pray for their physical, mental and spiritual well-being as they recover from their ordeal (Psalm 147:3). Continue to pray that the remaining students will be freed soon and that their health will not suffer long-term damage. Ask that those bereaved in the attacks in Plateau State will know God's comfort and that those seeking justice will trust in the Lord (Luke 18:7) and not resort to retribution.

Pakistan – Several injured as Muslims open fire on Christians in Lahore

Several Christians were injured in a shooting incident on 6 September in the Shera Kot district of Lahore. A group of six or seven Muslims opened fire on Christian residents' houses in the district at about 2.30 p.m.

Five Christian women, one of them pregnant, and one man were injured in the shooting. Three of the six are in a critical condition. The man, Asif Nawab, was returning home from work when an attacker opened fire, injuring him in both legs.

The attack apparently stems from a dispute between a Christian named Asghar and a Muslim, Dilshad Doggar, according to local church minister, Pastor Adnan, though details of the alleged dispute are not known.

That afternoon Dilshad Doggar, along with several armed young Muslims, fired at Asghar's house, and those of several other Christians and the church building.

Police issued charges of attempted murder and rioting with use of deadly weapons. Ten suspects were arrested and the two alleged main culprits remained in police custody as investigations continued.

Shera Kot is home to around 60 Christian families who live among a larger community of Muslims. After the incident Christians stayed in their homes under police protection.

Cry out to the Lord for His protection of the 60 Christian families in Shera Kot, and other such communities of believers in Pakistan. Give thanks for the police protection provided and ask that Christians will feel able to move freely within the district and not live in fear (Isaiah 41:10). Intercede especially for the three Christians who were critically injured that they will recover and for Asghar, who has not felt able to return home since the incident.

Syria – Christian village bombed by Turkish air force

The Turkish air force bombed an Assyrian Christian village in northern Syria on 30 August as part of a military campaign against Kurdish militants. Many homes were destroyed or damaged in Tel Tawil, near the town of Tel Tamer in al-Hasakah governorate.

There were no casualties among the villagers, who were able to escape before the attack.

Turkey has been active in northern Syria since 2018, claiming to be combatting militants linked to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), designated as a terrorist organisation by Turkey as well as by the United States and the European Union.

An Assyrian leader, however, drew comparisons between the Turkish offensive in Syria and the genocide of Christians under the Ottoman Empire in 1915 and again under Islamic State (IS – also known as ISIS, ISIL, Daesh) in 2015.

Elias Antar Elias, the head of the Assyrian People's Assembly in the Jazira region of north-east Syria, said,

“Those who attack our villages ... are no different from ISIS because they are displacing us and destroying our villages.”

Give thanks that the villagers were able to escape before their homes were bombed. Seek the Lord on behalf of Christians in Syria and Iraq displaced by the recent conflict. Pray that they will be able to maintain their relationship with Christ, find new homes, and rebuild their lives. Ask that our brothers and sisters will know security in God as their fortress in this time of turbulence and uncertainty (Psalm 62:2).

India – Two attacks on pastors by extremists in Chhattisgarh; Extremists disrupt prayer meeting in Karnataka; Pastor, 16, severely burned with acid for refusing to stop praying

Two attacks on Christian leaders have taken place in the state of Chhattisgarh.

In Polmi, Kabirdham district, over 100 radical Hindutva nationalists stormed into a Sunday morning service at the home of 25-year-old Pastor Kawalsingh Paraste on 29 August, violently attacking him and damaging Bibles.

Extremists accused the pastor of involvement in conversion activities. According to a police statement, they “allegedly beat up Paraste and manhandled his family members, including women, and then escaped”.

In Raipur, Chhattisgarh’s capital, a pastor and two other Christians were attacked inside a police station on 5 September by radical Hindutva nationalists. Pastor Harish Sahu was summoned to answer complaints that he was carrying out forced religious conversions.

Police confirmed that the three Christians were “manhandled and abused” by the extremists who followed them onto the premises. Several people were charged with

rioting, obscene acts and songs, and voluntarily causing hurt and criminal intimidation.

Radical Hindutva nationalists disrupted a church prayer meeting in Karkala, Udupi district, Karnataka state, on 10 September, alleging that Pastor Benedict had gathered 35 Hindus together in order to convert them unlawfully to Christianity.

Around 20 men, reportedly members of the Hindu Jagarana Vedike extremist group, attacked a woman and threatened other congregation members.

President of the Indian Christian Federation Prashanth Jathana countered the allegation. "Nobody at the venue was converted," he said. "They were at the prayer meeting of their own volition."

Chhattisgarh and Karnataka are among nine Indian states with anti-conversion laws that criminalise attempts to gain converts through force, fraud or allurement. Christians are often falsely accused of using such methods in their evangelism.

In eastern India, a 16-year-old Christian pastor suffered burns over at least 60 per cent of his body from an acid attack. He was assaulted early one morning in late August 2021 shortly after leaving his house to sell vegetables in the village market.

The pastor conducted daily prayer meetings in his house but was warned to stop by extremists. His refusal led to the acid attack.

In India, it is not unusual for someone to serve as a pastor at such a young age. Given the lack of Christian workers, a situation aggravated by the death of at least 2,000 Christian leaders through the Covid-19 pandemic, a leader begins his ministry as soon as he is trained.

Uphold Christians in India, especially leaders, as they daily face the minefield of anti-conversion laws and spurious accusations of seeking conversion through force. Pray that God will guide pastors Paraste, Harish

and Benedict, and others to minister with wisdom and gentleness when confronted (Proverbs 15:1). Praise God for the faithfulness and courage of the 16-year-old pastor and ask that he will know complete healing, comfort and strength, and that he will be able to resume his calling. Pray that these leaders' ministries will go from strength to strength and that the deceiver's attempts to spread lies and darkness will be exposed by the light of the Gospel (Ephesians 5:13).

China – More Chinese cities offer cash rewards for reporting “illegal religious activities”

Qiqihar, the second largest city in Heilongjiang province, on 9 August joined an increasing number of cities, districts and county governments to offer cash rewards to anyone who reports to the authorities on “illegal religious activities”.

Whistle-blowers could pocket up to 1,000 yuan (£112, \$154, €132) for informing on private house gatherings, preaching, the distribution of printed religious works, audio-visual products outside churches, unqualified religious personnel and illicit foreign infiltration.

It is claimed that the measures aim to “strengthen the control of illegal religious activities in the district and prevent any Covid-19 cluster resulting from religious gatherings”, according to a statement from the Meilisi Daur District United Front Work Department of Qiqihar.

Similar reward systems were introduced in Zibo and Weihai cities in Shandong at about the same time.

The measure is part of the ongoing crackdown by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) on Christians. In July 2021 pastors in the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, the official Protestant Church of China, were ordered to deliver

sermons on a speech by President Xi Jinping to mark the 100-year anniversary of the CCP.

Stand with Chinese Christians in praying that they will remain faithful in placing their loyalty to God before obedience to the state (Acts 5:29). Ask that they will continue to gather to worship undaunted by the enemy's schemes (2 Corinthians 2:11). Pray that would-be whistleblowers will not be tempted by cash incentives and instead be drawn to the riches of the Good News whenever they encounter God's people.

Barnabas Fund provides practical aid for persecuted 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@barnabasfund.org

UK

9 Priory Row, Coventry CV1 5EX

Telephone 024 7623 1923

Fax 024 7683 4718 From outside the

UK: **Telephone** +44 24 7623 1923 **Fax**

+44 24 7683 4718

Email info@barnabasfund.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@barnabasfund.org

Published by Barnabas Aid

1934 Old Gallows Road Suite 350, Vienna, VA 22182

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