

IS also claimed responsibility for the “beheading of several Christians” in raids across Nangade, Cabo Delgado Province, to the north of Nampula.

Cabo Delgado has been termed “the Land of Fear” owing to brutal violence meted out against both Christians and moderate Muslims.

Cry out to God for protection for Christians in Nampula and Cabo Delgado provinces. Pray that Christians draw on the Lord’s comfort amid the atrocities committed and experience His clear direction as they suffer the trauma of displacement. Ask that His people will know Him as their shield around them (Psalm 3:3) who will use them to create peace and stability in the region.

Vietnam – Christian families forced from their homes

Four Christian families (32 people) were forced out of their home village in Vietnam for refusing to re-convert to a local animist religion.

The families suffered persecution at the hands of local authorities, including confiscation of livestock and cutting off electricity for a week. One of the children was even denied a birth

certificate, without which no child can access healthcare or attend school. The authorities voted to expel them from the village on 4 June.

Some of the believers have been Christians since 2017 when they found Christ through hearing evangelistic radio broadcasts.

The families initially sought refuge elsewhere in the country. When their plight attracted publicity, they were allowed to return home, but by then they had missed the rice-planting season, a situation which has left them short of food. Since returning to their village they have been under surveillance, with even their phone calls being listened to by the secret police. They have also been told that they are not allowed to leave.

Intercede for these families who have suffered so much for following Christ. Give thanks for their faithfulness in continuing to honour the Lord and their resistance to pressure. Pray that the harsh, suffocating restrictions will be lifted and that the families will experience restoration and strength as they seek to rebuild their lives (1 Peter 5:10). Ask that all Vietnam’s Christians will shine like stars in the sky as they hold firmly to the word of life (Philippians 2:15-16).

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Nigeria – Christians killed in further attacks in Kaduna State; Two women kidnapped from Chibok school found after eight years

Three worshippers were killed in separate attacks on two churches in Kajuru Local Government Area (LGA), Kaduna State, on Sunday 19 June.

Peter Madaki, Ali Zamani and Elisha Ezekiel died after gunmen on motorcycles opened fire indiscriminately on the churches in Rubu village. Two other Christians were injured and around 30 abducted.

The community’s decision to start church services at 7am because of constant attacks did not deter the attackers who struck shortly after the services began.

Such attacks are sadly occurring regularly. Two weeks earlier, on Sunday 5 June, 32 people were killed when suspected Fulani militants armed

with AK-47s raided four villages in Kajuru LGA.

Meanwhile, two missing “Chibok girls” have been found. Hauwa Joseph, who was nine when she was abducted in 2014, was discovered on 12 June. She had recently been forced into marriage, and was holding a 14-month baby when she was found.

Mary Dauda, who was 18 when the girls were kidnapped, was found two days later. She had also been forced into marriage and was also carrying a baby in her arms.

Boko Haram abducted 276 girls, mostly Christian, in April 2014 from a secondary school in Chibok, north-east Nigeria. Around 160 girls have subsequently escaped, been rescued or released. Mary told the authorities that she knew of around 20 Chibok girls who were still in the terrorists’ enclave from which she escaped.

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Praise God that Hauwa and Mary have been found safe years after their abduction. Pray that, as they readjust to normal life, they will receive understanding for the traumas endured, and help in bringing up their children. Pray for those grieving in Kajuru, especially the families of Peter, Ali and Elisha. Ask the Lord that our brothers and sisters will not succumb to despair but resolve to praise Him again (1 John 3:3).

Iran – Convert fined and deprived of social rights

Farsi (Persian)-speaking convert Rahmat Rostamipour, 49, was fined 6 million toman (£155; \$185; €184), around one month's wages in Iran, for engaging in "propaganda" by "teaching the religion of Christianity". He was arrested by agents of the Ministry of Intelligence in April at his home in Bandar Anzali, Gilan province.

They refrained from arresting Rahmat's wife Azar after the raid brought a panic attack upon the couple's daughter. Azar was interrogated for several hours the following day but released without being charged.

The verdict announced on 21 May decreed that Rahmat will be fined a further 18 million toman if he re-offends during the next two years. He is also "deprived of social rights" for five years, which will severely limit his employment opportunities.

Pray for Rahmat and his family, asking that they will draw comfort from the Lord's presence even if they are denied fellowship with other believers. Ask that they will not become fearful as they suffer for what is right (1 Peter 3:14). Pray also for a change of heart from the Iranian authorities, that they will allow Farsi-speaking believers to worship freely.

Egypt – Muslim extremists attack newly licensed church

A Muslim extremist mob attacked a church and Christians' homes in Luxor, Egypt on 23 June, after the church was granted an official licence.

The church in al-Halla village was among 239 church premises registered in April by a government committee.

On the morning of the attack the Interior Ministry stationed guards outside the church, a standard government security procedure at licensed churches across the country.

The licensing of the church and the appearance of the guards enraged Muslim extremists. A large crowd gathered, including Muslims from outside the village, shouting anti-Christian slogans.

The mob attacked the building, threw stones at Christians' homes and set several vehicles owned by Christians on fire.

Fortunately, there were no casualties as Christians stayed at home during the unrest. Police cordoned off the church and closed streets leading to where the Christians lived.

Give thanks for the continuing progress of the church licensing process, as more Christians are able to meet legally in a place of worship. Pray for our brothers and sisters at al-Halla village and other locations for protection against extremists antagonised by churches being legalised. Ask the Lord that church buildings will be beacons of light, as Christians don the armour of light (Romans 13:12).

Turkey – Historic church service marred by attack on Christian family; Ancient Christian cemetery desecrated

A Christian family were attacked in Mardin province, south-eastern Turkey, shortly before a church service on Sunday 5 June.

The service in Brahîmîye village was the first held in the building in almost 100 years, after renovation work which began in 2015.

Around 50 Muslims attacked the home of the Yilmaz family, the only Assyrian family living in the village, with stones, sticks and other weapons. They were led by a family with whom the Yilmaz family have had a long-standing dispute over land.

The mob set fire to wheat being grown by the Yilmaz family. The fire was extinguished after witnesses alerted the police and some members of the Muslim family were arrested.

"They threatened us," said Cengiz Yilmaz, "saying that they would not let us live in the village ... But we are not afraid. We will continue to stay here."

In Midyat, also in Mardin, a Christian cemetery has been desecrated. The destruction of tombs more than 1,000 years old was discovered by Christians entering the cemetery in Yemişli district on 29 June for the first time in almost three years after the lifting of pandemic restrictions.

Pray for the Yilmaz family to be encouraged as they maintain a Christian presence in Brahîmîye. Praise God for the reopening of the historic church in the village. Ask that Christians in the area see opposition as a sign that the Lord is working. Pray that their good works will be so exemplary that the enemies will have nothing to say against them (Titus 2:7-8). Ask that Christians in Yemişli will turn shock into prayer and see the Lord bring good out of this sacrilegious act (Romans 8:28).

Pakistan – Christian sentenced to death for "blasphemy"; Death sentence of two brothers upheld

The Court of Session in Lahore on 4 July sentenced a Pakistani Christian to death for

"blasphemy" after he reportedly described Jesus Christ as the only true prophet.

Ashfaq Masih, 34, a motorcycle repair mechanic, was accused of "blasphemy" in June 2017 by a Muslim customer who refused to pay for the repair of his motorbike on the grounds of his Muslim faith.

In a separate case, the death sentence of two brothers, both Christians, for alleged "blasphemy" was upheld on 8 June by the Lahore High Court.

Qasir and Amoon Ayub were imprisoned in 2014, accused of posting "disrespectful" material online, but there is no evidence linking them to the material in question.

The brothers' lawyers announced their intention to file a further appeal with the Supreme Court of Pakistan in Islamabad.

The "blasphemy" laws in Pakistan are often misused to make false accusations in order to settle personal grudges. Section 295-C of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) relates to "defiling the name" of Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, and carries a mandatory death penalty.

Seek the Lord for Ashfaq's verdict to be overturned. Pray that justice will flow (Amos 5:24) and his lawyers will know Divine wisdom in lodging an appeal to the High Court. Pray for the success of appeal to the Supreme Court on behalf of Qasir and Amoon. Ask for an end to false accusations of "blasphemy".

Mozambique – Christians beheaded by Islamic State

Islamist militants raided a Christian village in Memba, Nampula Province, northern Mozambique on 17 June, beheading one resident.

The raid by terrorists linked to Islamic State (IS – also known as ISIS, ISIL, Daesh) is the first in recent years in Nampula.