

Barnabas Prayer Focus

HOPE AND RELIEF FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH **Prayer Focus** | Update Number 286 | August 2020

***“May your unfailing love
be with us, LORD, even as
we put our hope in you.”***

Psalm 33:22

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

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India – Christian missionary who shared Gospel despite threats found murdered and Christian father and son tortured to death in police custody

Church leaders in India have called for a full investigation into the deaths of a Christian missionary found murdered in July and a Christian father and son who were tortured to death in police custody in June.

Missionary Munshi Dev Tado was martyred on July 10 by suspected Maoist Naxalite attackers who had previously threatened him for sharing the Gospel in western Maharashtra State.

The 28-year-old was taken to a forest near his home in Gadchiroli district and shot. He leaves a wife, three young daughters and a son.

Munshi was a former member of the militant communist Naxalite group and participated in the persecution of Christian families in the area. He converted to Christianity, left the Naxalites and began Christian ministry, opening a church on his own land. He had twice been ordered to stop his missionary work by Naxalites.

Christian P Jeyaraj, 59, and his 31-year-old son Emmanuel Benicks were tortured to death in police custody in Tamil Nadu State. They were arrested on June 19 on a charge of breaking Covid-19 lockdown regulations by keeping their mobile phone store open outside permitted hours.

The pair were savagely beaten by police and Hindu extremists, and were covered in blood when they were taken before a magistrate on June 20. Ignoring their injuries, he remanded them back into police custody. Emmanuel died in hospital on June 21, and his father died the next morning.

The police claimed that the father and son had injured themselves prior to their arrest, but CCTV footage showed that all the shops in the locality were open at the time and that neither father nor son appeared to have any injuries before their arrest. After the story became public, five police officers were arrested.

Indian police are often accused of either refusing to record, or being reluctant to investigate, violence and hate crimes against Christians, both of which rose in 2019. The Evangelical Fellowship of India recorded 366 incidents of violence and hate crimes last year, compared to 325 incidents in 2018. Tamil Nadu was the second worse state for anti-Christian violence in 2019, recording 60 incidents, behind only Uttar Pradesh, which had 86.

Pray for the wife and young children of missionary Munshi left without a husband, provider and father, and for the doubly-bereaved family of P Jeyaraj and his son Emmanuel. Ask that the Lord will wipe every tear from their eyes (Revelation 21:4) and provide for their needs. Remember in prayer all Indian Christians who live under increasing threat of violence or attack, asking that Christ's power will be made perfect in their weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Nigeria – At least 22 Christians murdered, 2,000 displaced in three-days of Fulani militant violence

At least 22 Christians were killed and more than 2,000 displaced during three days of attacks by Fulani militants on villages in the predominantly-Christian Gora ward of Kaduna state, Nigeria, from July 10 to 12.

The first of the murderous raids began in the early hours of July 10, when the militants invaded the Chibob farming community, killing nine villagers, mostly women and children.

Neighboring Kigudu village was attacked the following day, and ten women, a baby and an elderly man were burnt to death in a house where they had taken refuge. On Sunday July 12, the entire village of Anguwan Audu was razed when Fulani militants attacked, killing one person and injuring three others.

The attacks were described as “barbaric” by the Southern Kaduna People’s Union, which estimates that around 2,000 people fled the area as a result, taking refuge in IDP (internally displaced people) camps.

Widowed Christian, Bilkisu James, was shot during the attack on Chibob, in which seven people in her household, including two of her children, died.

“The Fulani came in and were shooting. They killed two of my children,” said Bilkisu, as she described how the militants hacked another five of her relatives to death with machetes, including a mother and her baby daughter and a mother and her two sons.

“Before I was shot, I saw the Fulani man who is my neighbor, he even identified me. I surrendered to him on my knees,” Bilkisu explained. Her assailants then shot at her chest and back.

Pastor Joel Billi, president of the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria (EYN), called on July 2 for increased government action to halt the relentless violence in northern Nigeria by Boko Haram Muslim radicals and Fulani militants.

He said that more than 700,000 EYN members had been displaced, over 8,370 church members and eight pastors had been killed and countless abducted during the Boko Haram insurgency, “with the numbers increasing on a daily basis”.

The pastor described as “misleading” a statement by Nigeria’s President Buhari on June 12 in which the politician claimed that “all local governments” taken over by Boko Haram insurgents “have long been recovered” and their people returned to their ancestral homes. Pastor Joel said more than 25,000 EYN members were still taking refuge in Cameroon.

The government should “live up to its constitutional responsibility by putting a stop to the continuous killings, abductions, rape and all forms of criminality across the country,” he added.

Beseech the Lord to protect our brothers and sisters in Nigeria. Pray for comfort and peace for Bilkisu and the many other Christian mothers who mourn the loss of their children during these relentless and merciless attacks (Matthew 5:4). Pray that the thousands of families who have fled the violence find safe refuge and their needs for food and medicine are met. Ask that the Christian community will remain steadfast in the strong tower of the LORD, and that the plans of the destructive men of violence will be brought to nothing (Psalm 112:7-10).

Sudan – Christians rejoice at the abolition of the Islamic apostasy law

The abolition of Sudan's apostasy law, which carried a death penalty for leaving Islam, has finally been enacted. This has been a cause for rejoicing among Sudanese Christians, especially converts from Islam.

The Miscellaneous Amendments Act, which was passed without objection by the Sovereign Council in April, also grants previously forbidden liberties. These include the freedom of women to travel abroad with their children without producing the written consent of their husband or male family member and the criminalization of female genital mutilation (FGM).

The act ended long-standing restrictions introduced under the 30-year regime of former dictator Omar al-Bashir, ousted in April 2019. While apostasy had already been criminalized under Sudan's previous criminal code, al-Bashir's regime brought the country's legal system closer to an ultraconservative interpretation of sharia (Islamic law).

Islamists in Sudan have called for the government to be overthrown in an angry backlash against the penal code reforms. Ultra-conservative Islamist cleric Abdel-Hay Youssef, now self-exiled in Turkey, described the reforms as a "war against virtues" and called on the army to step in to "defend the law of God".

Sudan is one of the few countries in the world where people have been officially executed for apostasy in modern times.

The amendments include an article banning *takfir* – the action of accusing another Muslim of being an apostate, thereby rendering it legal to kill them. "The *takfir* of others became a threat to the security and safety of society," said a government minister.

Praise the Lord that the apostasy law has been repealed in Sudan and for the encouragement this brings to the Christian community. Give thanks for their steadfast faith under the yoke of al-Bashir's dictatorship, where Christians were forced to live with second class status under sharia (Islamic) law, and glory in their perseverance (Romans 5:3-4). Pray that voices raised against the reforms will be ignored and that the harsh Islamic fundamentalism of the former regime will continue to be eased, bringing greater religious freedom.

Iran – Thirteen Christians arrested in raids across three cities

At least 13 Christians, mainly converts from Islam, were arrested by intelligence agents from Iran's Revolutionary Guards in coordinated operation across three Iranian cities on June 30.

An informant, who gained the Christians' trust and infiltrated their meetings, is understood to have led agents to the Tehran home of a recent Christian convert, where about 30 believers had gathered.

Five Christian converts were handcuffed, blindfolded and taken to their homes, which were searched. Other Christian converts were arrested in the cities of Karaj and Malayer.

The director of a theological college for Farsi-speaking Christians saluted the "fidelity and faithfulness" and "unwavering devotion" to God of four students who were among those arrested.

"So though I weep when they suffer and pray for their freedom, I delight in their astounding witness," he said.

On June 21, three married couples were among seven Iranian Christian converts punished with sentences ranging from prison and exile to work restrictions and fines.

They were each convicted of “propaganda against the state” by the revolutionary court of Bushehr, south-west Iran.

The longest sentences of one year’s imprisonment followed by two years of exile were given to brothers Sam and Sasan Khosravi.

Give thanks for the unwavering devotion of Christian converts in Iran. Ask that they will hold God’s Spirit close (2 Timothy 1:7) as they endure detention, imprisonment and punishment. Pray that the authorities, seeing that God will never leave or forsake His people, will have their eyes opened to His love and power.

Eritrea – Thirty Christians arrested at wedding ceremony

Eritrean authorities arrested 30 Christians as they attended a wedding ceremony in the capital, Asmara, in the last week of June. Local sources reported that the Christians were taken to a police station, known locally as Kalai Medeber.

Fifteen Christians were arrested in April while attending a worship service, in the Mai Chehot area of Asmara, and taken to a prison camp in Mai Serwa.

Eritrea remains one of the worst countries in the world for Christian persecution, where believers of certain denominations are subject to arbitrary arrest and detention without trial. Since the introduction of religious registration policies in 2002, only three Christian denominations are legally permitted – Eritrean Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Lutheran – as well as Sunni Islam.

Give thanks for the endurance of the Eritrean Christian community in the face of severe persecution (Romans 12:12). Pray that those arrested will be given strength to sustain them during detention (Exodus 18:23) and that they will be freed soon. Ask that the Christian community will continue to rejoice in the Lord (Philippians 4:4-7) and know His protection.

Barnabas Aid provides practical aid for persecuted Christians in over 60 different countries.

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