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BARNABAS FUND - AID AGENCY FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH
BRINGING HOPE TO SUFFERING CHRISTIANS

To help you
pray for the
persecuted
Church

MARCH/
APRIL 2021

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Thank you for your prayers for our persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ, which make such a difference to them. We sometimes have to change or omit their names for security reasons, and we have only limited space to share their stories. But the Lord knows the people and places we are praying about. Please do not feel limited by the specific prayer requests, but pray as you feel led. On each Sunday we have provided a set prayer; please feel free to use these in their current form, to adapt them as you prefer, or to use the information they contain to frame your own prayers.

March

MONDAY 1 Recent years have seen periodic violent attacks on Christians and mainly-Christian ethnic groups in Ethiopia. Ask the Lord to give Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, who is a Christian from a Muslim background, wisdom, insight and strength as he seeks to lead Ethiopia from division to unity. Pray for an end to the anti-Christian violence, comfort for the grieving, healing for the wounded, and food and shelter for the displaced.

TUESDAY 2 Many villagers are turning to Christ in a certain area of Chhattisgarh state, India, but others are reacting strongly against this and threatening the Christians that they must abandon their new faith or else leave the area. This would mean losing their homes and the land on which they depend for their livelihoods. Pastors from outside the area are being banned from coming to visit the new believers to teach and encourage them. The pressure on the Christians is getting worse. Pray

that those who are stirring up this opposition will cease their activities, and that God's Kingdom will continue to spread and grow.

WEDNESDAY 3 Four Christians were killed by Islamist militants in a remote Christian community on the island of Sulawesi, Indonesia, on 27 November. One victim was beheaded, one had their throat slit, one had their neck broken and one was burnt to death. They were all adults from the same extended family. The ten attackers also razed the church building and set light to six homes in the village. Pray that the Lord will be a wall of fire around this Christian community to protect them, as well as its glory within. (Zechariah 2:5)

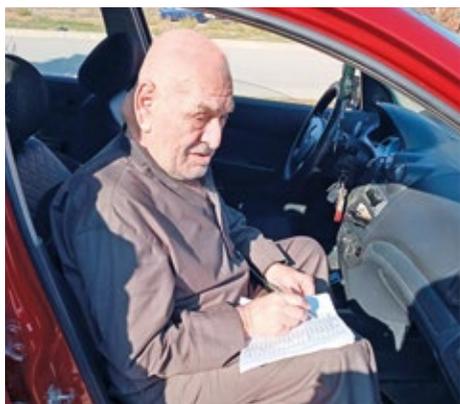


Indonesian Christians mourn the four martyrs

THURSDAY 4 Iranian Christians Sam and Maryam are still hoping and praying for a breakthrough in their efforts to have their toddler Lydia restored to them. At the time of writing Lydia is back in the state orphanage from which Sam and Maryam adopted her when she was three months old. Last year a court ruled that she should be taken away from her parents because they are converts from Islam and had been convicted of various "crimes"

relating to possessing evangelistic literature. An open letter signed by 120 Iranian lawyers and activists, has been sent to Iran's head of judiciary, asking him to overturn the court's decision. Ask the God of hope to continue to fill Sam and Maryam with all joy and peace as they trust in Him (Romans 15:13). Pray for the safety of Lydia (now nearly 2½) who has serious health problems, and that the court's decision will be reversed.

FRIDAY 5 Ask the Lord to protect and strengthen Iraqi Christians who feel unsafe in their own homeland. Pray that God will guide those displaced by Islamist militants as to where they should settle down and make their future lives. Ask that the promise of peace and stability made through the prophet Micah long ago will be fulfilled for them. "Everyone will sit under their own vine and under their own figtree, and no one will make them afraid, for the LORD Almighty has spoken. All the nations may walk in the name of their gods, but we will walk in the name of the LORD our God for ever and ever." (Micah 4:4-5)



An Iraqi Christian signs to confirm receipt of aid from Barnabas

SATURDAY 6 Pray that the Church in Kazakhstan will be given courage to continue to spread the Gospel, despite the fact it is illegal, and wisdom to know how best to do it. Ask that they will remain steadfast when suffering persecution, whether from the authorities or from the Muslim majority community. Pray that the many legal restrictions on religious freedom will be removed, if this is the Lord's will.

SUNDAY 7 Heavenly Father, we lift to you all Christian refugees and Christians displaced within their own country. We ask that You will be their refuge and strong tower. Please watch over and care for all who have lost their homes, possessions, farmland or livelihoods. Fill them with your comfort and peace, a peace that transcends human understanding. Remind them that they and all Your people are only pilgrims passing through this world, that their true citizenship is in heaven, where You have prepared a city for them. We pray this in the Name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. (Hebrews 11:16)

MONDAY 8 Rejoice with Christians in Kyrgyzstan for answered prayer concerning a key meeting in November 2020 about a new constitution being created by the new government (installed after a brief "revolution" the previous month). The new Director of the State Commission for Religious Affairs had proposed to remove the secular status of Kyrgyzstan and make it a Muslim or Islamic state. The meeting took place in a friendly atmosphere, and representatives of all religions, scholars and government officials spoke. It was agreed that Kyrgyzstan should remain a secular state, with no single religion

having dominance. Thank the Lord for this. Christian speakers at the meeting described the problems Christians face and the authorities promised to help. Pray that real change for the better may come.

TUESDAY 9 Two Christian families in Laos were evicted because they refused to renounce their Christian faith. Their homes were then demolished on the orders of the village chief. After about a month living rough in the nearby forest, depending on gifts of food from other Christians, they were allowed to return to the village but not to rebuild their houses. A law passed in December 2019 is supposed to ensure freedom to worship for evangelical Christians, but in rural situations it is as if the law did not exist. Pray that the Lao authorities will ensure this law is put into practice.

WEDNESDAY 10 The Christian presence in Libya is mainly foreign migrant workers and refugees, but there are also a very small number of indigenous Libyan converts from Islam. Islamists target Christians for killing, kidnap, forced conversion and sale in “modern-day slave markets”. Violence against Christian refugees in detention centres is commonplace. Pray that our weak and vulnerable brothers and sisters in Libya may know the truth of God’s promise: “Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,” says the LORD Almighty. (Zechariah 4:6)

THURSDAY 11 Islamist violence is on the rise in Mali and the small Christian minority is especially likely to be targeted. Pray that the president, Bah Ndaw, a retired officer in the Malian Air Force with a reputation for honesty, will be able to bring an end to the violence.

He was appointed interim president in September 2020, after a coup, for an 18-month period. Ask that Christians will not be fearful but will be filled with peace, knowing God’s presence is with them.

FRIDAY 12 Ask the Lord God Almighty to restore peace and stability in northern Mozambique, where relationships between the Muslim majority and the Christian minority used to be good. Ask Him to touch the hearts of the Islamist militants who have killed over 1,000 people since the violence began three-and-a-half years ago. Pray that their efforts to teach their violent and extremist ideology to the local Muslims will fail. Thank the Lord that many Mozambican Muslims still reject violence in the name of Islam, and pray that these peace-loving Muslims may come to know the Prince of Peace.

SATURDAY 13 Lift up to the Lord the Chin, Karen and Kachin Christians and other persecuted ethnic minorities in Myanmar (Burma) including the Rohingya people, who are mainly Muslims. Pray that they will be given strength to endure hardship as they live in camps for displaced people, and that all who have lost loved ones will be comforted. Ask that military perpetrators, and government leaders who have been complicit, will turn in horror from their atrocities. Pray especially for Rohingya Christians, a very small minority amongst the Rohingya people, asking for the protection of those living as refugees in Bangladesh and vulnerable to attack by Rohingya Muslim extremists in the camps.

SUNDAY 14 **O Jesus, our Good Shepherd, we thank You for pastors, church-planters and evangelists who serve You diligently**

in contexts of opposition and violence. Please provide for their practical needs, even as the Holy Spirit equips and empowers them for ministry. Guard and protect them from violent attack, and, if it is Your will, save them from harassment by the authorities and unjust punishment because of their obedient service to You. We ask that their work will bear much fruit for Your Kingdom as more people put their trust in You and believers are strengthened to face persecution with courage and perseverance.

MONDAY 15 Thank the Lord for rapid Church growth in Nepal in a Hindu-majority context of mixed opposition and support for Christians. Pray that pastors and other believers will have wisdom and boldness in sharing God's Word, as it is now a criminal offence to try to convert a Hindu or Buddhist to another religion. Pray that Nepali Christians may stand firm in their faith, knowing that the Lord is an ever-present help in times of trouble (Psalm 46:1).

TUESDAY 16 Give thanks that the government of Niger (a country that is 98% Muslim) has a history of supporting religious freedom, which was re-affirmed in the first article of a 2019 law. However, Boko Haram Islamist militants have reached even into Niger, threatening especially the tiny Christian minority (less than 0.4%). Pray for their protection and ask that the Lord who makes wars cease to the ends of the earth will bring peace in this troubled region. (Psalm 46:9)

WEDNESDAY 17 At least 24 people were killed, over 20 abducted and a church burnt by jihadi militants during two anti-Christian attacks in north-east

Nigeria on Christmas Eve. One attack targeted a Christian village. In the other attack, Christian individuals were singled out, and five lined up. "Celebrate your Christmas with the present of the heads of these Christians," said one of the militants and the five were then shot dead. Nigeria's President Buhari had said in a Christmas message, "For me, providing security for all residents in the country remains an article of faith." Pray that he will make this pledge a reality and bring an end to the long-running slaughter of Christians in parts of Nigeria.

THURSDAY 18 "She was a light that came and warmed me when I was drowning in my sorrow ... I would have killed myself if it were not for her." A former prisoner in one of North Korea's horrific "re-education camps" explained how a fellow-prisoner, who was a Christian, encouraged and supported her even though being caught doing this would result in a severe beating. So many died on the virtual starvation regime, said one camp survivor, that corpses were burned every few days and their ashes scattered on the fields to make the crops grow better. Thank the Lord for the courage and fortitude of Christian prisoners and their willingness to keep serving Him and helping others.

FRIDAY 19 Farah Shaheen, a 12-year-old Christian girl, was abducted in Pakistan by a 45-year-old Muslim man who forced her to convert to Islam and marry him. For about three months, the police refused even to register the case, despite her father's repeated pleas. Instead, the police insulted and threatened him whenever he came to the local police station to ask them to

rescue his daughter. After another two months, Farah was found by police in a locked room with injuries to her feet, apparently due to torture though she was too traumatised to say what had happened. She is now back with her family where she has been the main caregiver to her younger siblings since their mother died five years ago. Pray that she will recover from her ordeal.



Farah Shaheen

SATURDAY 20 Pray that Christians in Russia will be filled with grace and peace as they seek to live for the Lord and be salt and light in their society. The situation varies across this huge country, the largest in the world by area and stretching across eleven time zones, but many believers and churches face harassment from the authorities. Pray that our brothers and sisters will be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves in the way they respond. (Matthew 5:13-16; 10:16)

SUNDAY 21 Our loving Lord, we lift up to you Christian women and girls living in contexts of marginalisation and persecution, where they are often doubly despised – for being women and for being Christians. Please provide for all their needs and protect them from those who plan to harm them. We

pray especially for vulnerable Christian widows and their children, without a human defender, and we praise You that You are a father to the fatherless and a defender of widows. We pray in the Name of Jesus Christ. (Psalm 68:5)

MONDAY 22 Pray for the protection of Christians in Saudi Arabia, whether migrant workers or Saudi converts from Islam. Anyone can be punished if they show their Christian faith in public in any way, and potentially even if caught praying with other Christians in private. Converts also face the possibility of execution as apostates from Islam, although this is not known to have happened in recent times. Give thanks for some small moves towards a more lenient interpretation of Islam in Saudi Arabia and pray that this will be expanded to allow Muslims to choose to follow another religion without being punished for their choice.

TUESDAY 23 Somali Christians face the strong possibility of violent attack, even death, for their faith in the Lord Jesus. Pray that they will find protection under the shadow of the Almighty (Psalm 91:1). The Somali Islamist militant group Al-Shabaab controls much of southern and central Somalia and raises as much revenue as the Somali government. One of their aims is to kill Somali converts from Islam. Pray that these men of violence may have a personal encounter with Jesus and give their lives to Him.

WEDNESDAY 24 Christians in Sri Lanka come from Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim backgrounds as well as from families who have been Christian for generations. Many are desperately poor

and all are vulnerable to harassment and sometimes violent attack. Pray that such persecution may cease, if it is the Lord's will. Pray also for unity amongst the Christian community, which spans the Sinhalese majority and the Tamil minority, so that the love of Christians for each other will be a witness for Christ. (John 13:35)

THURSDAY 25 Give thanks for the dramatic changes in Sudan over the last two years, as it moved from one of the strictest Islamic governments in the modern world to a secular state that guarantees freedom of belief, worship and religious practice to all and forbids discrimination on the basis of religion. Pray that Christians will make wise and godly use of this freedom after 30 years of harsh persecution. Pray also for the protection of the moderate Muslims in government who have brought these changes to pass, thus making themselves a target for violence by extreme Muslims.

FRIDAY 26 At the time of writing, Syria is in a terrible predicament, ravaged by Covid-19 and cut off from outside help by American sanctions. This follows their bitter civil war, which included violent anti-Christian persecution in a country where Christians had previously enjoyed respect and equality with the Muslim majority. Give thanks that the faith of Christians has emerged stronger from the furnace of affliction. Pray that the Lord will continue to provide for them as they rebuild their lives, and ask Him to have mercy on the whole country.

SATURDAY 27 Ask the Lord to uphold Christians in Tajikistan, facing increasingly restrictive laws. Pray that

the authorities will relent from their harassment of Christians and will not use the data from the October 2020 census to track down Christians and persecute them. Ask the Lord to provide for the practical needs of Christians, who are mostly very poor, especially converts from Islam who often lose their jobs when they decide to follow Christ. Christian children are banned from attending church; pray that their parents will be enabled to bring them up in the way of the Lord.

SUNDAY 28 **O Jesus, our Lord and Saviour, we thank you for every new convert from another religious background who willingly takes up their cross to follow You, enduring loss and suffering for Your sake, knowing that they may even have to lay down their life for You. Please strengthen, encourage and protect them. Equip them with all they need to grow in the knowledge and love of You. Be very close to those who have been rejected by relatives, friends and community and assure them that their place in Your family can never be taken from them.**

MONDAY 29 Pray for Muslim-background Christians in Tunisia that they will have opportunity and courage to meet with each other, whether in person or online, to worship You and build up their faith. Thank the Lord that churches for local Tunisian Christians are not prevented from functioning, even though they have no legal status. Pray that they may be given the same legal standing as the churches of expatriate Christians.

TUESDAY 30 In its final hours, the Trump administration in the US signed a Memorandum of Understanding

with Turkey about cultural property. This appears to have granted the Turkish state legal rights to claim the vast religious-cultural heritage of its minority populations including Kurds, Jews and many Christian communities such as Armenians, Greeks, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Syriacs, Arameans and Maronites. The shocking agreement responded to a request made by the Turkish government more than a year earlier. Turkey has a long track record of “destroying minorities, desecrating their holy sites, and erasing even their memory from the landscape of their ancient, indigenous homelands,” said an Armenian leader, Aram Hamparian. Dr Elizabeth Prodromou, formerly of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, commented that the agreement has “put the United States in the position of enabler to Turkey’s weaponization of cultural heritage policy, used for a century as a cudgel to erase the country’s vulnerable religious minorities.” Pray that the new American administration will act to protect the minorities of Turkey and their heritage.

WEDNESDAY 31 The authorities in Turkmenistan may not yet admit there is Covid-19 in their country but they have introduced a strict lockdown. People used to be fined for wearing face-masks but now masks are mandatory. The few churches that exist are closed. But believers continued to gather in small groups in homes for worship, Bible study and preaching the Gospel. A Turkmen pastor told Barnabas Fund that the Christians are full of joy because the Church has an unshakeable foundation in Jesus Christ. They are very thankful to God

for His protection in 2020 and believe that by His grace they will be kept safe in 2021.

April

THURSDAY 1 Praise God that the Church in Uzbekistan is growing and that persecution is decreasing. Thank Him for the faith and courage of our brothers and sisters who still live daily with many risks and restrictions and – for converts from Islam – the pain of rejection by friends and family. A new rule requires all church leaders to receive theological training. Pray that God will use this to be a blessing to His people in Uzbekistan, and that their leaders will be enabled to study for acceptable qualifications that will also equip them with all they need to strengthen believers in their faith.

GOOD FRIDAY As we remember today, with thankfulness beyond words, the death on the cross of Jesus our redeemer, praise Him for the perseverance of His martyred followers, especially those who have died in the last year, who did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death (Revelation 12:11). Pray that their sacrifice will embolden others to endure persecution and to be a powerful witness to their killers. Ask that the Lord will comfort their grieving loved ones, giving them His peace that passes all understanding.

SATURDAY 3 In some parts of Vietnam, Christians are treated well, while in other parts they suffer arbitrary arrest, brutal police treatment and jail. Pray that the good treatment will spread

throughout this communist state and that the 2018 law which requires authorities to protect religious freedom will be implemented whole-heartedly, without efforts to ban Christian activity on pretexts of harming social order or national unity.

EASTER SUNDAY Christ is risen! Alleluia! Thank you, Lord Jesus, for Your victory over death, which gives us, who trust and love You, the sure and certain hope of heaven. We pray for our brothers and sisters who face harassment, discrimination, violence and persecution in their daily lives, who may have lost homes, possessions and livelihoods just because they follow You. We ask that they will stand firm in the assurance of this living hope and of their heavenly inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. May they be sustained by the comfort of Your Holy Spirit and Your resurrection power. (1 Peter 1:3-4)

MONDAY 5 Egyptian Christian brothers, Ramsis and Adel Hermina, each ran a small shop in Alexandria. On 10 December Ramsis (47) heard a commotion as two Muslim brothers, well known locally for their hatred and harassment of Christians, approached carrying knives, clubs and a sword. Ramsis hastily began to bring in the goods displayed outside his shop, but the Muslim men grabbed him and stabbed him in the abdomen and neck. Adel (60), coming from his shop next door, and Tareq Shenouda, another Christian shop owner, arrived on the scene to help Ramsis but each got stabbed. Ramsis died later in hospital. Senators and MPs attended his funeral, showing solidarity with the shocked Christian community. Pray for the two Muslim brothers, whose

mother had died that morning, that they may find peace, love and wholeness in Jesus Christ.



Ramsis outside his shop, which sold plastic goods and household items (Source: Watani International)

TUESDAY 6 Praise God for the brave and kind Muslim neighbours who protected a Christian family in Egypt from an angry Muslim mob on 25 November. The mob, who attacked Christian homes and a church building in al-Barsha village, Minya governorate, were enraged by an allegation that a Christian called Girgis Sameeh had made a Facebook comment that insulted Muhammad. Girgis said his account had been hacked. The Christians defended their homes and church from the stones and Molotov cocktails that the mob threw, and the only person seriously injured was an elderly Christian woman whose face was burnt when a Molotov cocktail hit her bedroom. Four days later the extremist Muslims set fire to farm huts where Christians kept the feed for their cattle. They also called for a boycott of Christian-owned businesses. Pray for an end to this persecution of our brothers and sisters.

WEDNESDAY 7 Christians in Egypt were outraged in December 2020 when an appeal court acquitted three Muslim

men who had been charged with stripping naked an elderly Christian woman, Suad Thabet, and dragging her through the streets of al-Karm village in Minya province during mob violence in May 2016. Afterwards President Sisi apologised on behalf of the shocked nation and ordered that the five Christian homes set on fire by the rioting Muslims be repaired. Many moderate Muslims expressed outrage at the acquittal and a Muslim actress posted online photos of a life-size sculpture she had made of Mrs Thabet, while studying Fine Arts at Minya University. It had been her graduation project and the theme set was “a sculpture of a public figure in Minya”. Praise God for this affirmation of Egyptian Christians by Egyptian Muslims and pray that it will spread to the whole Egyptian population.

THURSDAY 8 Extremists conducted a *pooja* (Hindu religious ceremony) in the grounds of a Christian church in Goa, India, on 30 December. The Christians called the police, who asked the extremists to move elsewhere but did not file a report of the incident. Similar incidents have occurred at churches in other states across India and also at the famous Muslim tomb, the Taj Mahal. Pray that Christian and Muslim places of worship in India will be treated with respect by the majority community.

FRIDAY 9 The lockdown in India last year has led to great blessing in some village Christian communities. Instead of meeting just once a week in a big Sunday service, the Christians began to meet in small groups, each with its own leader – mostly new young leaders who had had no active role in the large-scale Sunday worship. The small meetings

enabled believers to draw close to the Lord in more authentic ways; the result was spiritual growth for the Christians and effective witness to non-Christians, with many giving their lives to Christ. Give thanks to our God, who in all things works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28)

SATURDAY 10 Police in Shahjahanpur district, Uttar Pradesh state, India, have been instructed to keep a watch on Christian prayer meetings to see if there are any unlawful efforts to convert people to Christianity. A new anti-conversion law came into effect in this state in November 2020 prohibiting conversion by “force, misrepresentation, undue influence, and allurement, or fraud, or marriage”. There are now nine Indian states with legislation of this kind in force, making it very easy for Christians engaged in genuine evangelism to be falsely accused of using wrong methods. Pray that Indian Christians will have courage to obey God rather than human beings and keep sharing the Gospel. (Acts 5:28-29)

SUNDAY 11 **O Prince of Peace, we pray for the Christian town of Mozogo in the far north of Cameroon, attacked in January by militants, armed with guns and machetes, and a girl suicide bomber. Please comfort those who mourn for the twelve dead, five of them children, even as young as three years old. We ask for Your healing touch on the injured, including six children seriously wounded. We long to see the increase of Your government and of peace, and Your just and righteous rule, as promised in Your Word. Please hasten this day and glorify Your Name. (Isaiah 9:6-7)**

MONDAY 12 Boko Haram militants attacked the mainly Christian village of Gabass in Far North Cameroon in the early hours of 26 November, killing at least three people and abducting another. On the same night, Boko Haram also attacked Guidi village, also in the Far North, setting fire to five homes. Rural Christian communities in this part of Cameroon are frequent targets of Boko Haram, whose aim is to establish an Islamic Caliphate in West Africa. Pray, in the words of David, for our Cameroonian brothers and sisters, that the LORD will protect them from violent men who devise evil plans in their hearts and stir up war. (Psalm 140:1-2)

TUESDAY 13 At least 30 Christians were killed, 14 seriously injured and ten young women and girls raped, in a string of jihadi attacks on five villages in the north-east of the Democratic Republic of Congo between 20 November and 3 December. According to reports, the militants tried to force some of the Christians to convert to Islam and killed them when they refused. Our heavenly Father knows all the details – ask Him to comfort and care for the survivors.

WEDNESDAY 14 Six Christians died in an attack on the Christian village of Ungwan Bido in Kaduna State, Nigeria, on Sunday 29 November. Pray for those who mourn for Silas, Malaki, Geofree, Anna, Sunday and Fidelis. Pray too that Barnabas Fund's campaign to have the deteriorating situation for Christians in North and Middle Belt Nigeria put on the agenda of the biennial Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting,

expected to be held in late June, will be successful. (Sign our Open Letter at savenigerianchristians.org)

THURSDAY 15 Joseph Swanta (20), a member of his church choir, heard gunfire in his village in Plateau State, Nigeria, on 1 December. When it stopped, he went out to see if he could help the victims, despite the pleas of his mother, Ruth. Ruth heard the gunfire resume and very soon heard her son's scream as the Fulani militant attackers shot him first in the hand and then in the chest, killing him. Two other Christians died in this attack. A woman called Adegoke, who had been lying on her bed reading the Bible, was abducted. Pray that the LORD, the maker of heaven and earth, will keep His people in Nigeria from all harm, watching over their lives and their coming and going. (Psalm 121:7-8)



Joseph Swanta

FRIDAY 16 North Korea punishes all religious believers, but often the harshest punishments are given to Christians. This is the conclusion of a London-based research group, based on interviews with more than 100 North Koreans who had survived and escaped their country. From their

harrowing testimonies, the research group identified 215 Christian victims of persecution, some of them children, who had suffered in the period 1990-2019. Arrest, interrogation, hideous torture and the terrible “re-education camps” were the repeated theme of these testimonies. Praise God for the faithfulness of our North Korean brothers and sisters, as they suffer for Christ.

SATURDAY 17 Some North Korean Christians manage to escape over the border to China but sometimes the Chinese authorities forcibly return them to North Korea. Engaging in religious activities while in China is a crime in North Korea, along with religious practice, possessing religious items, contact with religious persons, attending places of worship, and sharing religious beliefs. These are typically what North Korean Christians are punished for. Remembering that nothing is too hard for the LORD (Genesis 18:14) pray that He will bring relief to suffering Christians in and from North Korea.

SUNDAY 18 **O God of justice, we lift to You three of our Christian brothers in Pakistan, who have been falsely accused of “blasphemy” without any evidence against them. We pray for Azeem, who was arrested on Christmas Day, and for Saleem and Abbas, from the same village, who were advised to surrender themselves to the police so that their whole Christian community would not be attacked by an angry mob. LORD, may their innocence be proved. We ask this in the Name of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who was Himself falsely accused. (Isaiah 30:18)**

MONDAY 19 Praise God that Imran Ghafur, a Pakistani Christian, has been acquitted after more than eleven years in prison on a charge of “blasphemy”. He received a life sentence after being accused of burning a portion of the Quran while cleaning his bookshop in Faisalabad. Pray that our brother Imran may be fully restored to hope and peace after his long ordeal of injustice and suffering (Joel 2:25-26). There are still more than 20 Pakistani Christians in prison on charges of blasphemy, of whom seven have been sentenced to death. Pray for them to be acquitted.

TUESDAY 20 When three Muslim men held up a rickshaw in Pakistan on 28 December in order to rob the passengers, they found that the travellers were a group of Christians including two teenage girls, whom they decided to rape. Normally they just robbed and did not rape, and said afterwards, “We only raped because they were Christian.” The older girl (aged 16) begged the men to leave her 14-year-old sister alone, which they did, but gang-raped the older sister. Please pray for our loving Lord’s peace for both girls, especially the 16-year-old.

WEDNESDAY 21 Sonia Bibi, a 24-year-old Christian woman living in Rawalpindi, Pakistan, was shot in the head on 30 November and died on her way to hospital. A Muslim man had wanted to marry her, but Sonia and her parents declined the offer, knowing that marrying a Muslim would mean converting to Islam. Her suitor then threatened to kill her. “We are Christians from generations,” said her father, “and Sonia was a true Christian and strong in her faith and she has

been killed for following her Christian faith.” Sonia, a domestic servant, was an important breadwinner for the family, as her father is a low-paid sanitary worker and her mother has a disability which means she has had to give up work. Pray that the Lord will protect, comfort and provide for Sonia’s family.



Sonia Bibi

THURSDAY 22 At the time of writing there are known to be around 150 Armenian soldiers held by Azerbaijan as prisoners-of-war and still alive. But the fate of 1,300 other Armenians is still unknown, after the short and bloody war in September-October 2020 when Muslim-majority Azerbaijan seized territory in the Armenian-populated enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh. Christianity is a vital part of Armenian identity. At least 11 Armenian prisoners-of-war have been killed by the Azerbaijanis and videos show the beheadings of two elderly civilians by men dressed in the uniform of the Azerbaijani armed forces. Pray that the God of all comfort will console those

who mourn and those who still do not know whether their loved ones are alive or dead. (2 Corinthians 1:3)

FRIDAY 23 “A new war with Armenia is now inevitable ... This time the war will go to the territory of Armenia.” This tweet from Ahmad Shahidov, head of the Azerbaijan Institute for Democracy and Human Rights, is one of a number of Azerbaijani threats to the country of Armenia, which have been made since Muslim-majority Azerbaijan, supported by Turkey, attacked the enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh in September 2020, and successfully seized control of much of its territory. This part of Azerbaijan is inhabited by Armenians, who are Christian. Pray that Armenia, the first Christian nation in the world, will not be conquered by the Muslim armies of Azerbaijan and its allies.

SATURDAY 24 Today is the annual commemoration of the terrible genocide of Armenian, Assyrian, Syriac and Greek Christians, in which an estimated 3.75 million people died in the Turkish Ottoman Empire over a period of time, the worst year being 1915. Many countries have not yet officially recognised these terrible mass murders of men, women and children as a genocide. Pray that the international petition and campaign, which Barnabas Fund and others are running at present, will persuade more governments to acknowledge this as genocide and act to protect Armenians from being targeted for destruction again. (barnabasfund.org/armenian-genocide)

SUNDAY 25 O God, we rejoice that You know us fully and one day we shall see You face to face. Please help Your children in China. As surveillance in

their country increases, and facial recognition cameras tell the police exactly who went to church, who spoke to whom and what the sermon was about, let our brothers and sisters not become fearful. Though earthly life is very hard for Chinese Christians, fill them with confident hope that one day You will wipe every tear from their eyes, Your Name will be on their foreheads, and they will see Your face. We pray this in Christ's Name. (1 Corinthians 13:12; Revelation 21:4; 22:4)

MONDAY 26 Five Christians in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, China have been prosecuted for selling audio Bible players (small electronic devices that play pre-loaded digital audio files). They were found guilty of “illegal business operations”. Some who bought the Bible players, which are very popular with Chinese Christians, have been warned by police that they were potentially breaking the law by purchasing them. This is apparently part of the atheist Chinese authorities’ increasingly strict control of Bibles in their vast country. Praise God that no earthly authority can prevent the Word that goes out from God’s mouth accomplishing what He desires (Isaiah 55:11).

TUESDAY 27 When missionaries brought the Gospel to the Pacific Islands, it was welcomed eagerly in many places, though violently opposed in some. Eventually this part of the world became strongly Christian. But in the 21st century, Islam is beginning to advance. One attraction seems to be practical help, and many children from Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu have had a free education at Islamic schools in Malaysia, Yemen, Fiji and

Saudi Arabia. Another attraction is the way in which Islam does not separate religion from state, which fits with local people’s preference for religion to be central in their daily lives. Pray that Christians will love the Lord so strongly that they will not convert to Islam despite these attractions.

WEDNESDAY 28 From small beginnings in the 1970s, when Muslim labourers and diplomats arrived, Islam has been growing in Papua New Guinea. An Islamic Society was established in the early 1980s, the first mosque was opened in 2001 (with an imam from Saudi Arabia, later replaced by a Wahhabi Muslim from Nigeria), and the first Islamic school in 2004. The number of Papuan Muslim converts increased by 1,000% in the first twelve years of this century. The Christian majority began reacting strongly, and sometimes violently, against the Muslims. Some Christians wanted legal solutions to ensure the continued primacy of Christianity. Pray that the Lord will lead Papuan Christians in a loving, just and righteous response to this challenge. Ask that they will be filled with peace-loving wisdom from heaven. (James 3:17)

THURSDAY 29 The Muslim minority in the Solomon Islands is divided between two extremes of the Islamic spectrum. This is the result of two separate Muslim missionary efforts in the late 20th century: Ahmadiyyas (regarded as heretics by most Muslims) and the Tablighi Jamaat (a strict and very conservative Sunni group). From twelve Muslims in 1998, the number of Muslims could now be in the thousands. Many of the new converts to Islam



A church in Vanuatu (Source: Luganville Baptist Church)

blame Christianity for destroying their traditional customs, including retribution, gender segregation and polygamy. They like Islam's external codes of behaviour, which they feel hopeful of adhering to, rather than the impossibly high Christian goal of perfect inner holiness, which they say leads to immorality in society. Pray that church leaders in this country, which is approximately 90% Christian, will teach believers clearly about salvation by faith not works, and Jesus's redeeming death once for all.

FRIDAY 30 Islam is said to have come to the Melanesian nation of Vanuatu when a local Christian went to India to train as a Bible translator and converted to Islam before returning home in 1978. Scores of his relatives

became Muslims, all living in the same village on a tiny island and worshipping on the beach. Later Islam spread to other parts of Vanuatu. By 2007, mosques were already appearing on several islands even though there were estimated to be only 100-200 Muslim converts. The constitution of Vanuatu guarantees freedom of religion but also states that Vanuatu is founded on "traditional Melanesian values, faith in God, and Christian principles". In 2017 the president of Vanuatu declared, "We have only one religion in Vanuatu and that is Christianity. We have declared this nation in Yahweh's name and no other God." Pray that Christianity will continue to flourish in Vanuatu, and for wisdom and justice in responding to the growth of Islam.



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