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BARNABAS AID – HOPE AND RELIEF AGENCY FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

To help you
pray for the
persecuted
Church

NOVEMBER/
DECEMBER 2017

barnabasaid.org

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. 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.

November

WEDNESDAY 1 Joseph Reda Helmy (22) had just joined the Egyptian military to do his national service, when he was beaten to death at an army camp near Cairo on July 20. The family lawyer believes Joseph was targeted for his Christian faith. Military police detained three non-commissioned officers who said that an officer had ordered them to beat up Joseph, who had been well liked in his village by both Christians and Muslims. Pray for all those grieving for him, especially his fiancée; they had planned to marry last month.

THURSDAY 2 A small house in a Christian part of Al-Furn village, in Egypt's Minya Province, was used for worship services for about four years until Sunday, August 20 when the Christians woke to find their neighborhood surrounded by police and their church cordoned off. Banned from entering the building, the Christians gathered in the streets

instead, chanting "Lord, have mercy," until the police forcibly dispersed them. According to police, Muslims from the village had complained that the Christians did not have official permission to use the building as a church; hence its closure. Church leaders, however, said the problem was not the local Muslims but the security authorities, pointing out that Muslims did nothing on August 22 when the Christians held their formal worship in the street. Pray that all in Egypt will acknowledge the right of Christians to meet together freely for worship.

FRIDAY 3 In July a much loved Christian doctor, Albert Fikry, famous for his courtesy and willingness to help people, was found in his clinic in the Egyptian town of Tala, in the Nile Delta region, with his throat slit. Another Christian doctor was murdered by Islamic extremists in Arish province, north-east of Cairo, a few months earlier. Islamic fatwas have been circulating in villages of the Delta and Upper Egypt, banning Muslim women from going to Christian doctors especially gynaecologists. Pray that the Islamist hostility to Christians, even doctors, will cease.

SATURDAY 4 On August 8 the parliament of Nepal approved a new bill restricting religious conversion and criminalizing "hurting religious sentiment." It was signed into law by the president on September 20. Anyone convicted of encouraging someone to change their religion can now be sentenced to up to five years in prison. This is harsher than a similar clause in the 2015 constitution and could in effect make all Christian

evangelism illegal. The vaguely worded crime of “hurting religious sentiment” is punishable by a fine and two years in prison. Pray that the small but growing Church in Nepal will be wise, faithful and bold in these new conditions.

SUNDAY 5 God of justice, look upon Your hurting people. In their shame, hear their cry. Save them from injustice and false accusation. From cruel lies deliver them and grant them vindication. For You, O Lord Jesus, were reviled, You were abused and falsely accused. You lived in poverty, dependent on others for Your daily bread. You, a refugee and wanderer, had nowhere to lay Your head. You fell into the hands of violent men. So feed Your people with the manna from above. Give them to drink from your life-giving streams. Deliver them from all evil and guide them to their heavenly home.



Relief from Barnabas Aid encouraged sick, hungry, persecuted believers in South-East Asia because they knew that Christians around the world were praying for them and helping them

MONDAY 6 Barnabas provided rice, noodles, cooking oil, sugar, and medical support for 155 persecuted Christian families in South-East Asia, who were also hungry and sick because drought had led to crop

failure. “They don’t feel lonely as they face difficulties because they know that there are many Christian brothers and sisters around the world praying for them and helping them,” wrote our project partner. He also said, “When the non-Christians in the community see that we love and care for one another in the Body of Christ then they become attracted to Him.” Praise God that such simple practical aid has had such a profound spiritual effect.

TUESDAY 7 The world’s attention has focused in recent months on the appalling sufferings of the Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar (Burma). Little press attention has been given to the fact that mainly Christian ethnic minorities like the Chin, Kachin, Karen, and Naga are similarly targeted by the Myanmar military and by ultra-nationalist Buddhist monks. Al Qaeda has called on jihadists in other countries to go to Myanmar to fight in defence of the Rohingyas. This raises the very real possibility of those jihadists also attacking Christians, especially the Chin whose state borders Rakhine state where the Rohingya live. Pray for all vulnerable minorities in Myanmar that they will be given justice and protection.

WEDNESDAY 8 On July 6 a Buddhist monk summoned to the village monastery four new Christian converts in Teetaw, Sagaing Region, Myanmar. There they were told to re-convert to Buddhism or be banished from the village. The four refused to re-convert so an official complaint was sent to the nearby town, asking for them to be banished. Officials from the town refused to do so, stating

that “freedom of religion is ensured in Myanmar.” The monk and village leaders then organized villagers to attack a group of Christians at worship in a private home the following evening, by pelting them with rocks for four hours. Police arrived at midnight and managed with difficulty to disperse the mob, some of whom were now calling for the house to burn down. Several Christians were injured and two had to be hospitalized. Pray that like Stephen, the first martyr, the Christians may forgive those who stoned them and sought to kill them and that this attitude will soften the hearts of their enemies.

THURSDAY 9 Chinese authorities in several provinces have banned children from attending state-registered churches. In August, over 100 churches in Zhejiang province were notified that minors were not permitted to participate in religious activities, including Sunday school and summer camps, even if accompanying their parents. There are also many unregistered churches (“house churches”) in China, all of whose activities are illegal because of lacking registration. Pray that the Holy Spirit will show Chinese Christians how to bring their children up in the training and instruction of the Lord, even when the authorities are determined to prevent this. (Ephesians 6:4)

FRIDAY 10 Since 2010 it has been illegal for any Christian activities to be held outside of a registered church building in Kazakhstan. This includes theological education. A number of Christians have already served time in jail for breaking this law and many Christians are intimidated and

do not feel able to evangelize their communities any more. Pray that words will be given to them so that they will fearlessly make known the mystery of the Gospel, even if they are in chains (Ephesians 6:19).

SATURDAY 11 There are 61 draft amendments proposed for Kazakhstan’s Religion Law, many of which would be very detrimental for Christians and Christian witness if passed into law. Christians were invited to contribute to the drafting commission, but none of their suggestions were used. Church leaders have asked all Christians to pray diligently, and have organized nationwide days of prayer and fasting. Please join them in prayer that God will overrule in this situation.

SUNDAY 12 Lord Jesus Christ, we thank You for calling us to be Your followers. May we never be ashamed to bear Your Name, to be Your witnesses, or – if need be – to suffer for You and for the Gospel. May our lives bring You glory, so that You will never be ashamed of us. May we be ready to meet You face to face, whenever that Day comes, with a confidence based on You alone, as we entrust to You our work, our lives, our souls and our salvation.



Egyptian Christian child

MONDAY 13 In a strict city in a strict country of Central Asia, the authorities wanted to demolish a church building so that they could reconstruct the downtown area. The mayor asked his colleagues to look for reasons to deprive the congregation of its registration and then close it so that the building could be pulled down. One of them paid a visit to the church to tell the pastor, but when he saw the beautiful and modern building (renovated and extended with help from Barnabas Aid) he changed his mind. He persuaded the mayor to spare the church building and instead alter the plans for the downtown reconstruction. Praise God for intervening to enable His people in this city (mostly converts from Islam) to continue safely meeting together to worship Him.

TUESDAY 14 In Kyrgyzstan there are 315 registered churches and about 2,500 registered mosques. Any Christian activity outside the walls of a registered church building is illegal, and soon the minimum number of church members required to register is likely to be raised from 250 to 500. Much ministry and evangelism is therefore taking place illegally in homes – pray for protection of all involved. Kyrgyz Christians are very prayerful, but do not focus so much on reading the Bible. Pray that they will seek the Lord in His Word. (Psalm 119:57-58)

WEDNESDAY 15 Most persecution of Christians in Kyrgyzstan comes from Muslim family members. At the time of writing, one new believer, who has taken the name “Martha,” is detained in a psychiatric hospital because her family cannot believe that any sane

person would leave Islam to follow Christ. Pray that the Lord will be very close to Martha through every hour of the day and night (Psalm 119:61-62) and that she will soon be released. Pray also for others being pressured – whether mentally, emotionally, or physically – to deny Christ, asking that they will have grace to stand firm. The Lord knows each one by name.

THURSDAY 16 There is a lack of spiritually mature church leaders in Kyrgyzstan and therefore a lack of discipleship in the churches. Many leaders who have received training have then left the country. Ask that the Counselor, the Spirit of Truth (John 14:15-17) will live in all believers in Kyrgyzstan especially those thrust unexpectedly into a position of leadership because others have gone, guiding them in all that they do. Pray that church leaders may have true pastor’s hearts for those that God has given them to care for, and will be willing to stay and suffer alongside their flocks.

FRIDAY 17 Christians in Muslim-majority Turkmenistan are seen as dangerous extremists, especially those engaged in evangelism. The situation is especially difficult for rural Christians. “We are under a lot of pressure,” said one church leader, “but we feel this helps us get closer to God.” Pray that Christians in this closed country of the former Soviet Union will truly be blessed by the fellowship of sharing in Christ’s sufferings (Philippians 3:10).

SATURDAY 18 Christians in Turkmenistan request prayer that the laws about registration of churches will be relaxed. Registration is

required to be able to function legally but it is very difficult to get and even those who have obtained registration now have to re-register. One church was given registration and then had it removed by the authorities who said it had been granted by mistake. The pastor protested the church's legal rights with regard to freedom of religion. Reportedly the officials replied to the effect, "This is a Muslim country and we spit on the law."

SUNDAY 19 Lord Jesus, who walked on water and commanded the winds and waves, we lift to you the countless thousands who have suffered through flooding in South Asia and West Africa and hurricanes in the Caribbean. Have mercy on them and provide for them. We ask also for East Africa and southern Africa that You will send rains at this season in the right places and the right amounts, that crops will grow and flourish and the years of hunger come to an end. May Your children affected by these disasters be sources of hope, peace and comfort to all around who do not yet know You for themselves.

MONDAY 20 Hundreds of thousands of South Sudanese Christians are fleeing the drought, famine and conflict in their homeland. Some have gone north to Sudan, a strictly Islamic country, where reports say that they are refused government aid unless they will recite the Islamic creed (*shahada*). Repeating these words is considered by Muslims to be conversion to Islam. Churches in Sudan have been forbidden to help the refugees from South Sudan. So the Christians are left with a choice of denying Christ or starving to death. Pray that God will glorify His Name and that His people will be faithful,

affirming Paul's words, "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain." (Philippians 1:21)

TUESDAY 21 "Amos" lost his parents as the family tried to make their way to Uganda to escape the hunger and the killing fields of South Sudan. The twelve-year-old continued alone through the bush. He came across a group of refugees making the arduous trek to the border, and they agreed to let Amos travel with them. Before long the group walked into an ambush. As the shooting started, everyone scattered. Amos found himself on his own again. He hid in the bush for two days, until he saw another group passing, who let him join them. This time Amos was so weak with hunger that he could scarcely walk. Eventually two of the men took turns to carry him on their backs until they reached Uganda. Amos is one of 90,000 South Sudanese Christians whom Barnabas Aid is helping to feed in Uganda through Project Joseph. Ask our Heavenly Father to provide for them physically, emotionally and spiritually.

WEDNESDAY 22 Over 30 Boko Haram fighters attacked the Christian-majority village of Moskota in Cameroon at 1:00 a.m. one night in August. A church elder was killed and all his children (three sons and three daughters) were kidnapped. Some cattle were shot and property set on fire. Many families left the village to go and sleep in the mountains, preferring cold, rain and possible snake-bites to being a sitting target in their homes. "We send out this cry of alarm so that you may still raise your hands and

your voices to Almighty God in Jesus Christ,” wrote a church leader. Pray that these brothers and sisters will be kept safe from further attack.

THURSDAY 23 Zimbabwean pastor Evan Mawarire was arrested by police as he stepped down from his pulpit on Sunday, September 24. He has incurred the wrath of the authorities by a social media campaign that criticizes the Zimbabwean government’s handling of the economy and its failure to pay workers. In court the following day, Pastor Mawarire denied charges of subverting the government (up to 20 years in prison) and inciting public violence (up to ten years in prison). Pray that he will be acquitted of all charges.

FRIDAY 24 “We never knew the thing



New bore well brings joy

we were fighting could be a blessing to our village today.” These were the astonished words of a non-Christian village leader in Guinea, West Africa. The thing they were fighting was Christianity, and the blessing was a newly-dug bore well in a church compound, funded mainly by Barnabas, whose water was available to all villagers, whether Christian, Muslim

or followers of traditional African religions. Previously, the Christian minority, declaring that God was their protector, had refused to join the other villagers in offering sacrifices to set up supernatural bullet-proof protection. The villagers then boycotted the Christians for a year, neither speaking nor trading with them. Even after the boycott was lifted, they would not let the Christians use the village water source. Praise God that the generous and forgiving attitude of the Christians led to this change of heart in their persecutors.

SATURDAY 25 An anguished message in August from a Christian leader in the Central African Republic (CAR) described the efforts of so-called “peace-keeper” forces who seemed to be trying their best to keep the conflict going. “It appears that now almost 80% of UN troops in the CAR are Muslim, and it is not possible to see how they can be whole-hearted in defending non-Muslims.” He gave an example of how Moroccan peace-keeping troops arrived in the town of Gambo and found everything quiet. So they drove 12 miles to another village and brought back some ethnic Fulani Muslims from there to Gambo. The Fulanis, armed with knives and poisoned arrows, killed more than 80 people. Pray to the Lord, who makes wars cease to the ends of the earth, that He will bring peace and stability in this Christian-majority country, where hideous religious violence now reigns. (Psalm 46:9)

SUNDAY 26 Heavenly Father, we pray for Christians in Iraq, who have endured so much hostility, conflict and

violence in recent years. Give them Your peace in the midst of turmoil and uncertainty, especially for those displaced from their homes and facing such an uncertain future, especially in the light of the Kurdish independence referendum in September. Make clear to each one where they should go, and help them to remember daily that their true home and citizenship is in heaven. We ask this in Jesus' Name.

MONDAY 27 On September 21, the UN Security Council agreed unanimously to set up an investigation of genocide by the Islamic state militant group in Iraq. Thank the Lord for this long overdue decision and pray that the investigation will be thorough and fair, looking at the situation of Yazidis, Christians and others who have suffered so greatly at the hands of Islamic State. The aim is to bring the perpetrators to justice before an Iraqi court but under international law.

TUESDAY 28 Eight churches in Baghdad have been permanently closed, following years of declining attendance, as congregation members leave the Iraqi capital because of anti-Christian violence. The Christians live with daily insecurity and the threat of violence. Christians have been deliberately targeted for kidnapping and some Christian shopkeepers have been forced to pay “protection money” to militias. The Christians realize that the message to them is: “Go away.” There have been Christians in Iraq since the first century; pray that there will still be Christian presence and witness in years to come.

WEDNESDAY 29 Raqqa has been the

capital city of Islamic State (IS) in Syria since 2014. At the time of writing it appears about to be liberated. A few of the Christian minority in Raqqa did not manage to flee when IS took over. When seven of these Christians were rescued from by Kurdish-led forces in August they told how they had been humiliated, insulted and made to pay *jizya*, the classic Islamic tax on non-Muslim minorities. Mrs Karabidian explained how she and the other Christian women had been forced to wear a headscarf but to leave their faces uncovered, so they could be distinguished from Muslim women and insulted. Pray that IS will not only be defeated militarily but also that their extremist ideology will lose its popularity. Pray for healing for all those traumatized by their experience of IS.

THURSDAY 30 The little mountainside town of Maaloula in Syria was famous before the war as a place where Christians, within living memory, had still spoken as their mother-tongue a type of Aramaic similar to the language of Jesus. Being a town with a Christian identity, it was targeted by Islamist rebel groups who looted everything of any value in the church buildings and also set fire to some of them. Maaloula was later liberated by Syrian government forces and its Christian inhabitants have been working hard to restore and re-furnish the churches, where Christian worship has now begun again. They are also trying to rebuild the trust that used to exist between them and their Muslim neighbors; pray that the Lord will bless these efforts. (Matthew 5:9)

December

FRIDAY 1 Six Christian youth leaders in Madhya Pradesh state, India, were finally granted bail after 95 days in detention. They still face charges of “forced conversion” in connection with taking Christian children away for a summer camp. The authorities argue that the children’s parents had not done the proper paperwork when they converted from Hinduism to Christianity and therefore their children are still officially Hindu. Thank the Lord for answered prayer regarding the bail and pray that the charges will be dropped.

SATURDAY 2 Jharkand state in India has put forward a draft “freedom of religion bill.” If passed, it would mean that anyone changing their religion must get permission from a magistrate and could potentially make Christians liable to prosecution for sharing their faith. The law would ostensibly ban conversions by fraud, force or allurement but, as has been seen in five other Indian states which already have such laws in force, it could be misused against Christians engaged in genuine evangelism. Pray that this bill will not become law.

SUNDAY 3 **Our Father in heaven, we thank You for the growing Church in India and ask Your protection over our Indian brothers and sisters meeting to worship You today. So often their gatherings are attacked by Hindu extremists. Please send Your angels to be a guard around each church or home where two or three or more are gathered to pray in the Name of Your Son. Cover them with His blood and grant that their praise, prayers and**

preaching may be completed in peace and safety. We pray this in the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior.



Sharoon, beaten to death

MONDAY 4 Sharoon Masih, a Pakistani Christian school-boy aged 17, was beaten to death by Muslim classmates on August 30. Reportedly, teachers stood by and watched. Please pray for Sharoon’s grieving family, that the Lord will comfort them and give them grace to forgive his killers and to forgive those who could have saved their son but did not. His mother says he was bullied and insulted from his first day at the school and some had tried to force him to convert to Islam.

TUESDAY 5 Please pray for God’s blessing, guidance and protection on Barnabas Aid’s new program to free Christian bonded laborers in Pakistan’s brick kilns. The families are legally tied to their Muslim employer because of old debts, which were incurred long ago, sometimes by earlier generations. Money is deducted from their meager wages to pay it back. Because they are illiterate, the Christians cannot keep track of the repayments and the employer always tells them they still owe him money. Working

discreetly through local churches, Barnabas is repaying the debts and getting the official legal freedom for selected families. Through feeding and schools projects, also funded by Barnabas, these families are in a better economic position than before so will not need to borrow money again.

WEDNESDAY 6 A Pakistani Christian has been sentenced to death because of a WhatsApp message he sent. Nadeem James, a tailor, was accused by a Muslim friend of ridiculing Muhammad in a message Nadeem sent in July 2016. He was sentenced by a court in Gujrat on September 14, 2017 having been found guilty under Pakistan's notorious "blasphemy laws." Please pray that this decision will be overturned when he appeals in the High Court.

THURSDAY 7 The Islamabad High Court has suggested that Pakistan's National Assembly should amend the "blasphemy law" by fixing a punishment for false accusation which is the same as the punishment for the alleged crime. At the moment there is a mandatory sentence of life imprisonment or death for different kinds of "blasphemy" and a trivially light penalty for false accusation elsewhere in the Pakistan Penal Code. Therefore the law is easily misused as a weapon by anyone with a grudge. Non-Muslims are particularly vulnerable to false accusation. Pray that this suggestion will be implemented. The High Court's statement was issued on 11 August and just nine days later a 16-year-old Christian rubbish-collector was accused by a Muslim of burning a Quran (for which he would receive

life imprisonment). The boy's father says the accuser was a rival rubbish collector. This is a typical example of the kind of misuse which the Islamabad High Court wants to prevent.

FRIDAY 8 Aideen Strandsson is a well known Iranian actress. She decided to leave Islam to follow Christ while watching a video in Iran of a woman being stoned to death (the Islamic punishment for adultery.) She kept her faith secret until she came to Sweden on a work permit, when she asked for public baptism. At the time of writing the Swedish authorities are planning to deport her back to Iran saying that her decision to become a Christian is "her problem" i.e. not their problem. This will be extremely dangerous for her; she could even be executed by the state for the crime of apostasy from Islam. Pray that she will be kept safe.

SATURDAY 9 An Iranian ayatollah in Qom has warned that more and more young Iranian Muslims are converting to Christianity. Sometimes Islamic leaders make statements like this to incite violence against converts. But, whatever his motives, his statement is true. Those who choose to follow Christ in Iran put themselves in grave danger from the authorities and many spend time in prison on various pretexts. Praise God for His sovereign work of salvation amongst Iranians in Iran and around the world and pray that each one will continue strong in the Lord no matter what persecution they face.

SUNDAY 10 Lord Jesus, we lift to you the Christians of Uzbekistan, who live daily with fierce persecution. We pray

that you will guide them how they can reach out effectively with the Gospel, despite all the legal restrictions that hinder them. Give them a strong faith and unwavering courage, and keep their hearts on fire for You. May they stand firm in one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the Gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose them (Philippians 1:27-28).

MONDAY 11 Rejoice with Christians in Uzbekistan for the first Bible in the Uzbek language, released with official permission in July. Just 3,000 copies were allowed to be distributed. Please join our brothers and sisters in praying for permission to print and distribute more copies.

TUESDAY 12 Economic pressure is forcing many Christians to leave Uzbekistan, including church leaders and others in Christian ministry. Pastors are discouraged, struggling just to enable their churches to survive. Last year the pastor and 40 members of one congregation all left the country. Like the apostle Paul, these Christians are suffering hardships in Asia, and may feel under such great pressure that they doubt their ability to endure. Let us help them with our prayers (2 Corinthians 1:8-11).

WEDNESDAY 13 Ukraine is a country with a long Christian heritage; the president passed a decree that all Christian organizations should celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation this year. Ukraine has been wracked by war and conflict since 2014, with an estimated 1.5 million people displaced from their homes. In eastern Ukraine



Natalia from Ukraine wrote to Barnabas Aid: "Dear brothers and sisters in the Lord. I thank God very much and you for this help in the most difficult moment of my life."

it is primarily the elderly, sick and disabled who remain. Pastors are concerned as to how such vulnerable people will make it through the four coldest months (November to February) when temperatures can fall to -4°F. Their meager state pensions are enough for either bread and water, or fuel to keep warm, but not both. Barnabas has sent funds for winter relief.

THURSDAY 14 Eighteen Christian denominations have joined together in Ukraine to serve as one voice on human rights issues. Pray that they will courageously "speak truth to power" and that what they say will be heard and heeded. Church leaders ask prayer that the Church will lead the fight against corruption and that the Church will influence society and not the other way round. Church leaders are particularly concerned about the effects of secular humanism and post-modernism,

especially on young people, and ask prayer for this.

FRIDAY 15 Christian leaders in Azerbaijan, an oil-rich, Shia Muslim country, are thankful that the government enforces tolerance for the small Christian minority and ask for prayer that this will continue. But a new law designed to restrict Islamic extremism will also restrict Christian activities. For example, a pastor was arrested earlier this year and given a prison sentence because he had gathered a small group of Christians in a house and distributed Christian materials to them. At the time of writing, a legal appeal is being mounted for his release – pray that it will be successful.

SATURDAY 16 Praise God that many Christians in Azerbaijan are very active in church-planting among the various ethnic groups. Evangelistic events are discreet, and generally consist of inviting some families and neighbors to come and drink tea. It helps that the Bible is available in the Azeri language because “this shows it is not a Russian God” that the Christians are preaching. People are amazed that you can hear and read about the Most High God in this book. There is an acute need for more copies of the Azeri Bible to be available; please pray about this as well as continuing fruit from outreach.

SUNDAY 17 **O God, creator and sustainer of the world, we live in a time of great danger, as powerful world leaders, armed with deadly weapons, posture and threaten. Many around us are fearful, but we ask that You**

will increase our faith as we look to You, remembering that these leaders have power only because You have allowed it. We pray for Kim Jong-Un, the leader of North Korea, whose people face hunger and hardship while he intimidates other nations. Touch his heart and change him. Our North Korean Christian brothers and sisters suffer terrible persecution under his rule. Strengthen them to endure. Build Your Church in that hardest of countries. We pray in Jesus' Name.

MONDAY 18 Because of the dire economic situation in Tajikistan, many people are emigrating to look for work, including many Christians. The three largest churches are in danger of closing down because they have lost so many members like this. Many pastors are amongst those who have left the country. “Please pray that they will return,” plead the remaining church leaders, “or that new and committed leaders will be raised up.”

TUESDAY 19 The National Christian Elders Forum of Nigeria issued a statement on September 6 denouncing a “stealth jihad” by the Nigerian government against Christians. They criticized the fact that so many senior government positions, especially in national security, are held by Muslims, although Islam and Christianity are present in roughly equal numbers in the country as a whole. They also cited a 154-page research report affirming that 13,000 church buildings had been destroyed by militants in northern Nigeria by December 2014, and rejected the comments by some leaders who

denied that Boko Haram violence was religiously motivated. Pray that the Nigerian authorities will exert themselves to provide effective protection and representation for Christians.

WEDNESDAY 20 “We frown at the growing trend of conspiracy and blackmail against churches, Christian organizations and Christian ministers in our society today. The social media is awash with stories and news that seem obviously crafted, exaggerated or twisted to frame up, indict, malign, vilify, and denigrate the reputation of revered ministers of God and the Church. Painfully, many gullible persons, including some Christians, quickly rush to share and make negative comments without investigating or verifying these stories. While there is so much effort to harass and intimidate the Church, the evil activities of those committing heinous crimes by destroying lives and property in the name of their religion are hardly mentioned. This is obviously one of the weapons that Satan and the enemies of our faith are using to attack the Church of God.” This strongly worded statement from Ughelli Diocese, Nigeria, went on to warn people to “desist from such, repent and find better things to do.” Pray that Christians will support and affirm their brothers and sisters, especially those living daily with anti-Christian violence, and use their online skills to build each other up and not to destroy. (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

THURSDAY 21 Over 100 mainly Christian “Chibok girls” have finally been allowed to return to their families. They had been kidnapped from their school in Nigeria by Boko

Haram in April 2014 and released in two groups in 2016 and 2017. During their captivity the girls had been forcibly converted to Islam and married to Islamist militants, so the Nigerian government gave them a lengthy program of psychological help before sending them home. Last Christmas the freed girls spent a couple of days with their families, but now they are back home permanently and have resumed their interrupted studies. Pray that the Holy Spirit will continue to heal them from their terrible ordeal. Pray also for approximately 113 Chibok girls still held by Boko Haram at the time of writing, and for many other people kidnapped by Boko Haram who have not had the international publicity that these girls have had.

FRIDAY 22 Eritrean refugees in Israel (who are mostly Christians) rejoiced when the Israeli Supreme Court amended a law giving an indefinite prison term to any Eritrean who refused to be deported to Uganda or Rwanda; the court ruled that instead there should be a maximum sentence of two months. “Arbitrary imprisonment is so common for the Eritrean people that another two months is not enough to break our spirits,” wrote an Eritrean Christian to Barnabas Aid. But within a few days the Israeli government announced that Eritreans who refused to be deported would be banned from taking any kind of paid work. This, said the Eritrean, was imposing “starvation and homelessness as a punishment for our simply being in Israel.” Pray that the Israeli government will change its harsh policy towards Eritrean and Sudanese refugees.

SATURDAY 23 The Australian state of Queensland sent directives to primary school principals telling them to take action against children who talked about Jesus or gave out Christmas cards referring to the birth of Jesus. Making Christmas tree decorations was also banned. When challenged on this, the state Education Minister sought to step back from these decisions but the current position is unclear. Pray that these ludicrously extreme rulings will alert Australians to prevent any future attempts to undermine the freedom of religions of Christians in Australia.

SUNDAY 24 **Loving Lord Jesus, bless Your followers in Saudi Arabia, who cannot gather to worship You today except in secret, who are forbidden by law from even having Christmas decorations. Many have left behind homes and families in Asia and Africa to earn a living in this land where no public sign of faith in You is permitted. Sustain them by Your Spirit, who blows wherever He pleases, even in Saudi Arabia. Be especially close to Saudi citizens who have risked death by making You their Lord and Savior, and have never been able to celebrate Your birth with other believers. Give them Your joy and peace today. (John 3:8)**

MONDAY 25 As we give thanks today for the birth of the Prince of Peace, pray for millions of Christians today who live with daily discrimination, injustice and the threat of violence. Pray that, as they celebrate the coming of the One born to reign with justice and righteousness, they may have peace, hope and joy in abundance, whatever their earthly circumstances (Isaiah 9:6-7). Ask too for God's special comfort for those marking Christmas

for the first time since loved ones have been killed.

TUESDAY 26 Angilika's parents were killed in a suicide bomb attack on Christ Church, Youhanabad, Lahore, Pakistan on March 15, 2015. They spotted the terrorist as he entered and ran towards him to embrace him, thus saving many other lives. Angilika's mother was pregnant with a baby boy. Angilika now lives with her aunts and attends a school funded by Barnabas, where the teachers find her hardworking, punctual and obedient. But when she hears an ambulance siren or sees a policeman she gets very frightened and starts shouting, as it brings back to her mind the day her parents died. Staff at the school are trying to help her through this trauma. Please pray for Angilika and for many other Pakistani Christian children who have lost their parents in terrorist attacks in recent years.



Young pupils at a Christian school in Pakistan, supported by Barnabas Aid

WEDNESDAY 27 Angilika's school (see above) is one of 101 Christian schools in Pakistan supported by Barnabas Aid, where Christian children from poor families are educated by Christian teachers in a loving Christian environment. Some of these children would otherwise go

to Muslim-dominated schools where they would face much harassment because of their faith, perhaps marked down in their exams or even facing violence. Others might not go to school at all, because their parents could not afford it. Pray for each child, each teacher and every other member of staff that all would know the Lord's presence with them day by day and grow in Christ-likeness and maturity.

THURSDAY 28 Freedom of religion in Romania seems to have brought with it apathy and a loss of the passion that Romanian believers had during the long years of Communist rule. Christian leaders are concerned both about the rise of secularism and the attraction of Westernized lifestyles and about the rise of Islam. Muslims, though only about 100,000 in number, are very active in politics, education and business. A Muslim woman was nominated to be prime minister but the president rejected this and she is therefore deputy prime minister. Pray that the Romanian Church will rediscover her zeal for the Lord and also learn how to be active in the public arena.

FRIDAY 29 Bulgaria feels itself to be in the sights of President Erdogan of Turkey, who is apparently aiming to re-create the old Ottoman Empire. Currently the Muslim minority, who are mostly Turkish or Roma, seem fairly ignorant of the teachings of Islam, as do some of their clerics at present, but there is a lot of funding from Saudi Arabia and Turkey coming in to support Islamic institutions and many Saudi Muslims coming to teach at them. The Bulgarian government is alert to what is going on and trying to pass new legislation to prevent such

financial support from outside the country. It looks as if the funding of Christian organizations will also be hindered by any new law. Bulgarian Christians ask for prayer that the Lord will show the way forward on this and for greater Christian unity in the face of these challenges.

SATURDAY 30 There are signs in Russia that the freedom which Christians have enjoyed for a generation may be coming to an end. Pray that the churches will be ready for persecution if it comes again. A pastor in Siberia mobilized his congregation to write to President Putin to protest about the 2016 Religion Law, which is being used against Protestant Christians and certain others. Such protests are extremely rare in post-Communist Russia and, although the young people were enthusiastic, some older members of the congregation criticized him. Shortly afterwards he was visited by the FSB (formerly called the KGB). Pray that Christians will defend their freedoms boldly and wisely and not become fearful.

SUNDAY 31 *O Lord, as we reflect back on the old year and commit ourselves afresh to You for the new year, we think also of our Christian brothers and sisters living as minorities in parts of the world where the Western New Year is seen as a reason to harass and attack them more than usual. O Lord, who neither slumbers nor sleeps, please watch over them at this time, by day and by night, keeping them from all harm. Watch over their coming and their going, and their whole lives, now and for evermore, in Jesus' Name. (Psalm 121:5-8)*

USA

6731 Curran St, McLean, VA 22101

Telephone (703) 288-1681

or toll-free 1-866-936-2525

Fax (703) 288-1682

Email usa@barnabasaid.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

Registered charity number 1092935

Company registered in England
number 4029536

For a list of all trustees, please
contact Barnabas Fund UK at the
Coventry address above.

Australia

PO BOX 3527,

LOGANHOLME, QLD 4129

Telephone (07) 3806 1076

or 1300 365 799

Fax (07) 3806 4076

Email bfaustralia@barnabasfund.org

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New Zealand

PO Box 27 6018, Manukau City,
Auckland, 2241

Telephone (09) 280 4385

or 0800 008 805

Email office@barnabasfund.org.nz

Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland

PO Box 354, Bangor, BT20 9EQ

Telephone 028 91 455 246

or 07875 539003

Email ireland@barnabasfund.org

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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

