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BARNABAS FUND – AID AGENCY FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

To help you
pray for the
persecuted
Church

SEPTEMBER/
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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.

September

SATURDAY 1 Almost 100 house churches (i.e. unregistered congregations) were shut down at the end of May in China's central Henan province. It is reported that gatherings of more than five people are no longer allowed and that the Henan authorities have ordered all the registered churches to remove the crosses from their buildings. A Christian called Li told how officials come to Christian homes and ask for any Christian symbols or decorations to be covered or removed. Porcelain tiles saying "Jesus loves you" have been torn from walls. Pray for the Christians of Henan province, that they may continue to abide in Jesus, whatever the authorities do to stop them meeting together. Pray that His words of love will be firmly embedded in their hearts, even if they are ripped from walls. (John 15:7-9)

SUNDAY 2 Lord God, we thank and praise you that Your Church

in China is growing and that Christians are continuing faithfully despite growing persecution and restrictions, especially for those in the unregistered "house churches". We pray that You, who are the Alpha and the Omega, will give wisdom to Your people in China and guide their efforts to improve relations with the government without compromising their faith. Help them to remember that there is no authority except from You, and those which exist are established by You. We ask this in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 13:1-2)

MONDAY 3 Armed police, accompanied by officials from the local Religious Affairs Department, stormed a church service in Lanzhou, in China's northern Gansu province on 27 May. Seven leaders were taken to the police station and questioned. The offering box, some furnishings and numerous works of calligraphy were seized. Pray that this congregation may grow in faith and maturity as a result of these testing events. (James 1:2-4)

TUESDAY 4 "It will be worked on. Christians. Yes, we brought it up." This was the response of US President Donald Trump when asked if he had discussed religious freedom at his historic meeting with North Korea's leader Kim Jong-un in Singapore on 12 June. Certainly the need is great: Christians are very severely persecuted and people have been executed simply for bringing religious materials into North Korea. Pray for our North Korean brothers and sisters, suffering so greatly for their faithfulness to Christ, that they may have strength,

endurance and hope. Pray also that President Trump, his colleagues and advisers will have wisdom from above in all their efforts to promote religious liberty for Christians in various countries around the world.

WEDNESDAY 5 The South Korean government has clamped down on Christian ministries sending Bibles and Scriptural materials into North Korea. The ban was introduced just before the summit meeting between North Korea's Kim Jong-Un and US President Trump in June in an effort not to upset the talks on denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula. Pray that the materials already in North Korea will continue to be circulated and read, bringing many to faith in Jesus Christ. Ask also for the Lord to open up other ways to proclaim the Good News of salvation to North Korea.

THURSDAY 6 North Koreans regard their country's political leader, Kim Jong-un, almost as a god, and he works hard to encourage this, for example unveiling a major monument to himself on top of the sacred Mount Paektu. The cult focused on him has been described as "a bizarre mixture of Stalinism, animism, Confucian tradition and Juche [the national ideology of self-reliance]." Remembering that we pray to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, ask that the heart of Kim Jong-un may be changed by an encounter with the living God. (Ephesians 3:20)

FRIDAY 7 Christians in the Egyptian town of Zefta celebrated the surprise

return of a young woman who had been kidnapped on 24 May. Amany Magdi (20) disappeared on her way to take an exam at Benha University. The police would not let Amany's parents see her and told them that she had converted to Islam. But on 24 June Amany phoned her family saying she was on her way home. Praise God for this good news. Many Egyptian Christian young women and girls are kidnapped, forcibly converted to Islam and married to their captors; few of them ever manage to come home to their families again.



Amany is carried through the streets on her father's shoulders after her return (Source: Watani International)

SATURDAY 8 "Never a church in our midst," chanted Egyptian Muslim villagers in demonstrations on Friday 6 July and Friday 13 July after midday prayers at the mosque. Christian villagers locked themselves indoors for safety. The angry protests followed the granting of legal status to the church building in the village of Sultan Basha, about 150 miles south of Cairo. Police assured demonstrators that no church would be permitted in the village. Pray that God will change the hearts of

Muslim Egyptians who are so strongly opposed to letting Christians have places of worship.

SUNDAY 9 O God, our Lord and Creator, we lift up to You today the loved ones of Christians who have paid the ultimate price for their faith in Your Son Jesus Christ. We think of the families of the 20 Egyptian martyrs (and one Ghanaian) who died in 2015, whose bodies were returned this year to their homeland. May their grieving families know the peace that transcends all understanding. We lift up to You also the survivors and relatives of those who died in many other violent attacks on Christians around the world. Heal them, O God, and wipe away every tear from their eyes. (Philippians 4:7; Revelation 7:17)

MONDAY 10 Christians in Algeria feel they are being used as pawns in political power games. There are periods of repression and periods of greater freedom. In recent months things have been difficult, with several churches closed down by the authorities, and when the Evangelical Protestant Association applied to renew their registration they received no answer. Christians are also frustrated that it is so hard to get visas for theological trainers to come into the country and teach the believers. Pray that the Algerian authorities will allow Christians the buildings, resources and trainers that they long for and for the repeal of laws that make life so difficult for them.

TUESDAY 11 Praise God for answered prayer regarding churches sealed by the Algerian authorities some months

ago, so that their congregations could not get inside. Two in Oran and one in Ain Turk received permission to re-open and had the seals removed by the security services on Sunday 10 June. Algerian Christians ask for continued prayer about churches which have been similarly closed in Bejaia (where yet another church was closed by the authorities on 11 July) and Tizi Ouzou. They quote Revelation 3:8. “See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut.”

WEDNESDAY 12 More than 100,000 Kachin people, mainly Christians, are living in internally displaced people’s camps or sheltering in church buildings. Some have been displaced more than once during 40 years of terrible violence against mainly Christian ethnic minorities by the army of Myanmar (Burma). Pray that the Holy Spirit will be at work in the hearts of their persecutors to convict them about their brutal treatment of their fellow citizens. Pray that He may also bring peace, hope and joy to the Kachin believers, enabling them to love and forgive their enemies.



Distribution of aid from Barnabas Fund to displaced Kachin Christians

THURSDAY 13 Malaysian pastor Raymond Koh has not been seen since he was kidnapped from his car in broad daylight on 13 February 2017. He was very active in helping marginalised groups in society but had received opposition from the authorities and then a bullet in the post. Christians in Malaysia have been very active in protesting on his behalf but to no avail. Please pray that, whoever has him, Pastor Raymond will soon be released safe and unharmed.

FRIDAY 14 Local Muslims in Banjarmasin city in Kalimantan (the Indonesian portion of the island of Borneo) have forced the closure of a church building. They claimed that the permission given by the local authorities to the church was not valid, which has left the congregation of around 100 with nowhere to meet since 22 May. Pray that the Christian minority in Kalimantan will not be harassed by the Muslim majority and that the authorities will exert themselves to enable Christians to have sufficient places to worship.

SATURDAY 15 By the time you are reading this, President Duterte of the Philippines will have signed the Bangsamoro Basic Law, thus creating a fully autonomous Muslim-dominated region in the southern Philippines, which will have elements of sharia (Islamic law) in its justice system. This effectively creates an Islamic sub-state within a secular, pluralistic and mainly Christian country. When this proposal was made ten years ago, the Supreme Court ruled that it was unconstitutional, and Muslim

armed groups responded with violence against Christians, killing some and displacing any others. Pray for the many non-Muslims living in the Bangsamoro area who are likely to be severely impacted by the new situation. Pray also for Muslim women in Bangsamoro, who will be discriminated when sharia is operational.

SUNDAY 16 Lord Jesus, we pray today for our Christian brothers and sisters who live in places where they must risk arrest, imprisonment, beatings and even torture if they teach or preach about You, Your saving death and mighty resurrection. If it is Your will, we ask that You deliver them from such persecution. But if You allow them to be persecuted as You Yourself were, please give them strength to endure suffering, and love to forgive their persecutors. May they rejoice, like the apostles, because they have been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for Your Name. (Acts 5:41)

MONDAY 17 The “House of the Gospel” church in Naberezhnye Chelny, Tatarstan, Russia, was started in 1991 and has grown to about 1,000 members. Since 2016 four court cases have been brought against them, as a form of persecution. This has included 10 court hearings on issues such as land ownership, signage outside their building, and most recently a safety certificate. The premises were sealed on 10 May on the pretext of this safety issue, preventing the congregation from gathering there to worship. The church belongs to the Union of Churches of the Republic of Tatarstan and this organisation

has simultaneously faced six court cases and eleven court hearings, was liquidated and then laboriously unliquidated. Pray for strength and perseverance for the Christians involved in handling all these legal issues, and ask that God will grant them favour in the eyes of the courts.

TUESDAY 18 Religions considered to be traditional in Russia (the Russian Orthodox Church, Judaism and Buddhism) have been largely unaffected by the severe Religion Law introduced in July 2016. But Protestant Christians and Muslims are the often targeted. By the end of 2017, 312 people/organisations had been punished for illegal missionary activity with their fines totalling over four million roubles (£49,000; US\$63,000; €55,000). Pray for the individuals who have power to enforce or not enforce this law that they may realise that they are fighting against God and cannot stop the Gospel going out. (Acts 5:39) Pray also for Christians that they will know how to use the laws of Russia to defend themselves effectively.

WEDNESDAY 19 Two young men from a Central Asian country left Islam to follow Christ three years ago, and soon wanted to go out and share the Gospel with other Muslims. They enrolled as students in a neighbouring country and used their two years at college to make Christ known. While sitting their final exams in June, they were arrested and then appeared three times in court on various charges. In the end they were only found guilty of illegal humanitarian work, because they, as foreigners, had given aid to the poor. Pray that they

may continue to speak God's Word with great boldness. (Acts 4:29) Many of those they were evangelising have asked the pair to come back and tell them more about the Gospel so they plan to return to that country this autumn.

THURSDAY 20 In the first court hearing of two young Central Asian missionaries (see above) the prosecutor presented, as evidence against them, 16 books that had been confiscated from their flat. The judge picked up one, which "happened" to be a Bible, and began reading it to himself. "It is a very good book," he commented and then asked if the Christians would donate their books to the city library. Of course they agreed. The judge found them not guilty of the illegal religious activity they had been charged with. Praise God for His wonderful ways and pray that those Scriptures and other Christian books, now in the public library, may be widely read by the public and change many lives.

FRIDAY 21 "I knew that our God would not let us stay hungry or thirsty," declared Lida joyfully, when she heard that practical help was coming from Barnabas Fund for her and other very needy Christians in Armenia. Lida and her husband were living on small retirement pensions and the money they had saved for winter fuel was stolen. They did not know how they could survive the coming winter, as temperatures often drop to -30C. Like so many Armenians, Lida had suffered for Christ. She had fled from Azerbaijan with 18,000 other Armenians back in 1988 when

the Christian Armenians were being attacked and killed by the Muslim Azeri people. Pray that Armenian believers will find hope and strength in Christ, no matter what poverty or persecution they are called to endure.



Lida knew that God would provide

SATURDAY 22 The Iranian government has imposed a ruling to restrict which lawyers can represent people accused of political offences. (Christians

are often accused of vague offences against national security and therefore fall into this category.) So accused Christians can no longer choose who will represent them in court, adding to their difficulties in a country which does not have an independent judiciary. Pray to our righteous God, who judges the peoples, that he will bring an end to the violence of the wicked and make the righteous secure. (Psalm 7:7-8)

SUNDAY 23 Our loving God and Father, we pray for Iranian Christian Ramiel Bet Tamraz, his parents and friend, who are facing the trial of imprisonment for owning Your Name. Strengthen them in mind and body to endure hardship, even solitary confinement, in the notorious Evin prison. May they know Your close presence as their merciful Lord who binds up the broken hearted and proclaims liberty to the captives. As bound with them, we pray that forthcoming appeals will bring about their early release. (Isaiah 61:1; Hebrews 13:3).



Afzal and his wife Robina feel a sense of confidence and joy since their debt was paid by Barnabas Fund, setting them free from being bonded labourers

MONDAY 24 “I never believed this would be possible. My eyes filled with tears when I heard my loan is going to be paid off.” Afzal, a Pakistani Christian brick-kiln worker had got into debt when he had to borrow money from his employer to get medical treatment for his asthma. That made him a bonded labourer, unable to leave his low-paid back-breaking job. When his wife had an accident she could no longer make bricks, so their daughter (now 13) started working alongside her father. The family, who often did not have enough food to eat, had no hope of paying off their debt and expected to continue as bonded labourers (almost like slaves) for ever. Praise God for the generosity of Barnabas Fund supporters which enabled their debt to be paid, setting them free. Around 300 other families have also been freed in this way. Pray that their lives will be shining witnesses for the Lord and Saviour they love.

TUESDAY 25 On 29 May police in Punjab province, Pakistan, beat to death a 24-year-old Christian called Waqas Masih. Waqas had confronted officers who had falsely accused his family of dealing in drugs and were now trying to extort money from them. The police officers involved were eventually arrested, after the Christian community announced that they planned to protest, but at the time of writing it looks unlikely that they will be prosecuted for the murder. Pray that the Lord will comfort the grieving relatives of Waqas and give them justice. Christians in Pakistan, despised and mostly poor, are extremely vulnerable to injustice and abuse.

WEDNESDAY 26 Christians in Muzaffarabad, northern Pakistan, got permission to build a church but local Muslims started a social media campaign against the church building. The result was that the construction materials were stolen and the water supply was cut off. Church elders reported this to the police, who (at the time of writing) have done nothing. Ask our heavenly Father to protect His people in Muzaffarabad and keep them from discouragement. May their Christ-like lives draw others to Him.



Djien in front of his new one-room house

THURSDAY 27 The 22-year-old son of pastor Albert Badol was arrested in Gouripur, northern Bangladesh, on 1 June after it was falsely alleged he had been involved in a murder in the town. When the news got out, a Muslim mob

burned down the pastor's house, which was also functioning as a meeting place for his congregation of about 35 Christians. Ask God that this family may be delivered from their enemies and protected from those who rise up against them with lies and violence. (Psalm 59)

FRIDAY 28 By the grace of God, Djien Tadu survived being shot in the chest as he fled the flames and bullets during an attack on a community of Santal people in Bangladesh in November 2016. But, like 5,500 other Christians, he was left homeless, as the wooden shack in which he lived was burnt down. Now Barnabas supporters are funding the construction of simple brick houses on church-owned land for the Santal believers. "Every day when work was progressing I came to see. I prayed and waited ... I saw a small light that is from Jesus Christ that I will get a place to live," said Djien. Pray that bricks, mortar and metal sheeting may bring not only physical blessing to the long-suffering Santal Christians, but also spiritual encouragement as they see their heavenly Father's care for them.

SATURDAY 29 Allan Coote, a Christian bus-driver from London, likes to stand on the steps of St Paul's Cathedral and read aloud from the Bible. But the cathedral authorities strongly oppose this. Earlier this year, he was reading the words of the Lord Jesus from the "Sermon on the Mount", including "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me" (Matthew 5:11), when he was arrested by police,

who had been called by cathedral staff. Pray that Allan may truly know the blessing ("blissful happiness" in the original text) of being persecuted for Christ's sake. Pray too for the leadership at St Paul's Cathedral that they will allow the Word of God to be freely proclaimed.

SUNDAY 30 Lord Jesus Christ, across the world many of Your people face increasing restrictions, persecution and pressure. We think of our brothers and sisters in regions where they are a disadvantaged minority, despised by the majority religion, in countries where they are displaced by conflict and war and in Western contexts where intolerance is growing. We ask for them and for us grace to obey Your command to love our enemies and to pray for those who persecute us. Help us to walk in Your ways and glorify Your peerless Name, blessing those that curse us and repaying good for evil. (Matthew 5:44; Luke 6:27)

October

MONDAY 1 Please pray for Barnabas Fund's *Our Religious Freedom* campaign. Pray especially for the petitions in various Western countries to protect religious liberties that appear in danger of being eroded. Pray that God will use these petitions to prompt legislators and others in powerful positions to act quickly to protect freedom of speech and related freedoms which are now at risk.

TUESDAY 2 British Prime Minister Theresa May stated in Parliament on 18 July that the UK government

stands with persecuted Christians “all over the world”. Two weeks earlier Lord Ahmad had been appointed the UK’s first Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief, his task being to “promote the UK’s firm stance on religious tolerance abroad, helping to tackle discrimination in countries where minority faith groups face persecution”. Thank the Lord for these pledges of action against religious persecution and pray that they will result in real change for the better.

WEDNESDAY 3 The UK agreed to accept 1,112 Syrian refugees in the first quarter of 2018, but none of them were Christians. The Home Office selected the 1,112 from a list of 1,358 (including four Christians) provided by the UN High Commission for Refugees. This is even worse than 2017, when 7,060 Syrian refugees were accepted for resettlement in the UK including 25 Christians. There appears to be a marked bias against Christians, given that they comprised 10% of the Syrian population before the war, were targeted by jihadi rebels, and continue to be at risk. Pray the British Home Office will act with justice to persecuted Syrian Christians.

THURSDAY 4 There are believed to be 38 Iraqi Christian women still held captive by the Islamic State (IS) militant group. They were kidnapped from the mainly Christian town of Qaraqosh in August 2014. Seven others kidnapped at the same time have managed to get back to their families. Rita says she was bought and sold four times in IS sex-slave markets, finally ending up in Syria. She was reunited with her father

earlier this year but the rest of her family had been murdered when IS overran Qaraqosh. Rita said that the women were raped (even girls as young as nine) and beaten. Many Yazidi women and girls were also captured by IS and sold as slaves. Ask the Lord Jesus, who was sent to proclaim freedom for the captives, to cause all the remaining women and girls to be set free. (Luke 4:18)

FRIDAY 5 Christian business owners in Iraqi Kurdistan are being charged an extra tax that Muslims do not have to pay, following a decree in July by the Kurdish Regional Government. Shops and businesses in Ankawa, a Christian neighbourhood of the capital Erbil, and in the Christian-majority town Simele, must now pay an extra fee when they renew their licences. This has been compared with *jizya*, the traditional tax imposed on subjugated Jews and Christians by an Islamic state, according to classical Islam. Pray the Kurdish authorities, who have welcomed in many Christians fleeing from Islamic State, will ensure that followers of all religions are treated the same under the law.

SATURDAY 6 “This is our country. This is why we want to stay ... I might be a second-class citizen here, but I’m not a stranger,” said Saliha, a Christian woman from the town of Shaqlawa in Iraqi Kurdistan. Saliha was referring to what classical Islam calls *dhimmi*, the subjugated second-class status of Christians and Jews in an Islamic state. Until the 1960s, Shaqlawa was a Christian majority town but now there are only an estimated 200 Christian families amongst 10,000

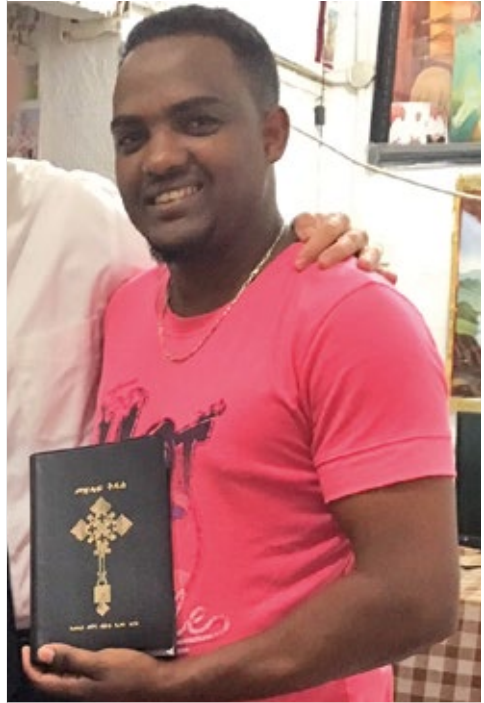
Muslim families. While some Muslims are friendly to Christians, others are hostile and there have been many incidents of anti-Christian violence over the last decades. Pray that Christians in Iraqi Kurdistan will be treated as equal citizens with the Kurdish Muslim majority.

SUNDAY 7 Loving Lord Jesus, bless and keep Your followers in Saudi Arabia, who cannot gather to worship You today except in secret. 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. But human laws cannot stop Your Spirit, who blows where He pleases. May He be their Comforter and Counsellor, guiding them into all truth, making Your teaching known to them even if they have no other way to learn about You, and assuring them of Your presence and love. (John 3:8; 16:13-15)

MONDAY 8 Abdu Adel Ayad (aged 40), a Christian from the Egyptian village of Menbal, posted a link on Facebook comparing Islam with other religions. He was arrested on 6 July for “disdaining Islam”. Three days later a Muslim mob rioted in Menbal, stoning Christian homes and shouting “Allahu Akbar [God is great].” Ninety Muslims were arrested. Pray that the charges against Abdu will be dropped. If found guilty, he faces up to five years in prison.

TUESDAY 9 Lift up to our gracious Lord the Palestinian Christians in Gaza who face daily harassment and discrimination in the Hamas-controlled territory. Pray for peace

and calm in the whole region. We ask that Christians to be kept safe and for resources and medical aid to reach those in need, so that a Christian witness may continue in this part of the Holy Land. Ask that the Lord will strengthen them. help them and uphold them with His righteous right hand. (Isaiah 41:10)



Barnabas Fund has provided Bibles in Tigrinya for Eritrean Christian refugees in Israel

WEDNESDAY 10 Please continue to pray for almost 30,000 Eritrean Christians who fled persecution in their homeland and are now living in Israel in dire poverty due to the Israeli government's policies. Praise God for the kindness of ordinary Israeli people to the Eritrean refugees. Ask that God in His grace will convict the consciences of powerful decision-

makers in the Israeli government that they may have mercy on these helpless and vulnerable believers in Jesus Christ. Pray likewise for governments of other suitable countries that they will decide to take in some of the Eritreans currently in Israel.

THURSDAY 11 Eritrean Christian refugees in Israel have asked for Bibles in their language, Tigrinya, which Barnabas Fund has provided. Pray that they may delight in God's Word in the midst of their trouble and distress (Psalm 119:143). Ask that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ will speak through the printed pages by His Spirit, giving comfort, hope, guidance and peace.

FRIDAY 12 Peace was declared between Ethiopia and Eritrea in July 2018, bringing to an end a conflict that had begun 20 years earlier. That conflict had been preceded by 30 years of war as Eritrea fought to gain independence from Ethiopia. Pray that the peace may last and that Ethiopia, with its long and strong Christian heritage, may become a refuge for persecuted believers from Eritrea. Lift up Abiy Ahmed, a convert from Islam to Christianity, who became prime minister of Ethiopia on 2 April, asking that the Lord will guide and use Him for His purposes. The south-east of the country is still in food crisis, but there has been some recent rain in the north, west and central areas.

SATURDAY 13 War has raged in the Darfur area of Sudan since 2003, based on political, economic and ethnic issues. Hundreds of thousands have died and hundreds of thousands are displaced. Some Christians are

struggling to survive in the camps, and others struggling to earn a living in the towns. The most vulnerable are those who have left Islam to follow Christ, a decision which probably means they lose their job, are evicted from their home and can no longer educate their children. It is easier for such believers to meet together for fellowship in the camps for internally displaced people than in the towns. Pray for God's protection for our brothers and sisters and that they may grow in Him.

SUNDAY 14 **Heavenly Father, we lift up to You all those Nigerian Christians – men, women and children – currently in the hands of the Boko Haram Islamist militants who kidnapped them. We pray that the You will remain their refuge and fortress and their trust in You will not falter despite all efforts to make them deny their love for Your Son. By Your grace, we ask that the chains binding up their minds will fall away and they will be strengthened in their Christian faith moment by moment of their long ordeal. We ask in Jesus' Name that they will soon be released back to their families. (Psalm 91:1-2; Acts 12:7)**

MONDAY 15 Continue in prayer for the Christians of northern Nigeria, facing barbaric violence from ethnic Fulani Muslim herders. "They make sadistic butchering an art form," said Pastor Emmanuel Atsue of Taraba state. "They intend to inspire the fullest possible terror by the horror of their atrocities. That is why they mutilate corpses even after death." As Nigerian Christians face "terror on every side", pray that they may trust in the Lord,

knowing that their times are in His hands and that He can deliver them from their enemies, from those who pursue them (Psalm 31:13-15).

TUESDAY 16 According to Baroness Cox, the Fulani militants (see above) are now so well armed that some people believe they may be fighting a proxy war for Boko Haram, the Islamist militant group which wants to drive out Christians from northern Nigeria. Fulani herders killed more people in 2015, 2016 and 2017 than did Boko Haram. They killed more than 1,500 people in the first half of 2018 and, since 2011, have destroyed over 500 church buildings in Benue state alone. Pray that the Prince of Peace will wonderfully enable His people in Nigeria to respond to this persecution with love not hate, that His Name may be glorified.

WEDNESDAY 17 Thank the Lord for the courage of a Nigerian Muslim imam who hid 262 Christians fleeing a murderous attack by Muslim Fulani herdsmen in Barkin, Plateau State. He took the men to the mosque and put the women and children in his own home. Scores of other Christians died in the attack on 24 June as the herdsmen shot at Christians and set fire to their homes and the village church. The Fulanis, suspecting where the Christians were hiding, threatened to burn down the imam's house and the mosque but he and other villagers pleaded with them until they left.

THURSDAY 18 The "Chibok girls" still held by Boko Haram will not be returning home, said a senior

Boko Haram commander in July. There are still about 100 girls held by Boko Haram out of the group of 276 kidnapped in April 2014 from their school in Chibok, north-east Nigeria. The rest have escaped, been rescued or released. Girls report having been whipped by their captors to force them into marriage with jihadi fighters, and violently coerced to convert to Islam. Ask that the remaining Chibok girls will be set free.

FRIDAY 19 Four church buildings were attacked in Nepal in May, one bombed and three set on fire. Praise God that no one was injured. One church had been hosting a youth conference just hours before the attack took place. Pray that Nepali Christians, as children of their heavenly Father, may have grace to love their enemies and pray for those who persecute them. (Matthew 5:44-45)

SATURDAY 20 A new law came into force in Nepal last month, making it a crime for anyone to try to convert a Hindu or Buddhist. The penalty is up to five years in prison and a fine of 50,000 rupees (£345; \$480; €390). Pray for courage, protection and wisdom for church leaders in Nepal, who are likely to be the prime targets of the new law, and who had already been receiving death threats from various extremists.

SUNDAY 21 **O God, who sets up kings and rulers and deposes them, we pray for those in positions of earthly power who use that power to persecute Your faithful followers. Please reveal Yourself to them through your Son Jesus, who is the**

King of kings and Lord of lords. Soften their hearts. May they bow their knee willingly to You, receive from You wisdom, knowledge and discernment and learn to follow in Your ways of love and peace. Give us faith to believe that no human dictator or persecutor is too hard for You to change. In Jesus' Name we ask this. (Daniel 2:21)

MONDAY 22 Recent years in Vietnam have seen definite improvements in human rights and civil liberties. The exception to this is religious liberty, where progress has been “at a snail’s pace” in the last decade, even though a constitutional update in 2013 guaranteed religious freedom. Much of the violence and discrimination against religious groups is at a provincial or local level, but the national government is also active in persecution. The targets include Christians and breakaway Buddhist groups. Ask our Father to send the Holy Spirit to work in the hearts of the persecutors that they may use their positions of power for good and not for evil, promoting justice and peace.

TUESDAY 23 Small Christian groups in remote highland areas of Vietnam are being forced to join larger state-registered denominations in towns. “This is not only impractical – the churches are based in the large towns – but local Christians also object that state-registered churches have compromised on religious practices in order to obtain registration,” commented the Vietnam Committee on Human Rights. As persecutors find ever more ingenious ways to hinder

Christians in their walk with the Lord, pray that He will pour out His wisdom, grace and power on all His children in Vietnam.

WEDNESDAY 24 Laos’s new Decree of Associations is all about non-profit organisations, including religious groups, having to get approval from many different offices in order to carry out their activities. These approvals are seldom granted, which means that churches and Christian groups (the main targets of the law) find they are operating illegally, and therefore the believers could be arrested and punished. Pray for church leaders in Laos that they may hear clearly the Lord’s guidance in each situation that they face.

THURSDAY 25 The Decree on Associations enacted in Laos in December 2017 (see above) has been making life much harder for Laotian Christians. The decree is supposed to apply to all four recognised religions – Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and Bahai – but in practice Christians (especially those in rural areas) have been the main target and Buddhists have been exempted. The vagueness of the wording of certain clauses of the decree makes it easy for local officials to use the decree against groups they wish to target. Pray that God will touch the hearts of these officials and teach them to rule with kindness, justice and righteousness as He does. (Jeremiah 9:24)

FRIDAY 26 Many Christians in China serve prison sentences and can be in a terrible state of physical and mental health when they are released. We may

not know their names, we may never meet them in this life, but the Lord knows each one. Ask Him to be their refuge and their strength, their hope and their comfort.

SATURDAY 27 In the Chinese capital, Beijing, 34 “house churches” (unregistered congregations) issued a statement calling on the Chinese authorities to respect freedom of religion. They pointed out that the new religious regulations that came into force across China on 1 February have “violated and obstructed” the spiritual lives of believers. Pray that Chinese citizens, from the highest to the lowest, will recognise Christian believers as helpful members of society, bringing harmony and help to all.

SUNDAY 28 Lord Jesus, who said, “Let the children come to me and do not hinder them”, we ask Your blessing on Christian children living in places where the law bans them from going to church or learning about You. May these little ones in Tajikistan, parts of China and elsewhere learn to love and trust You. May they grow in faith, grace and knowledge. Grant wisdom to their parents and church leaders to know how to teach, guide and inspire them to walk closely with You and to endure the harassment and persecution they may face at school. (Matthew 19:14)

MONDAY 29 New official guidance in the UK will allow Christians to wear cross necklaces at work, unless they interfere with the employee’s ability to do their job. Issued in July, the guidance referred to religious

symbols in general. This welcome news comes after British Airways check-in clerk, Nadia Eweida, fought a seven-year legal battle (2006-2013) to be allowed to wear a small cross necklace at work. Her colleagues of other religions had no difficulty getting permission to wear their religious symbols. Thank the Lord for this development.

TUESDAY 30 A driver delivering a take-away curry to a home in north London ripped a Palm Sunday cross from the wall by the front door and scattered the fragments on the door mat. Moments later, the door was answered by a teenage boy, who took the curry and gave the smiling driver a generous tip. The cross had hung by the door for years. The family reported the incident to the police as a hate crime. The restaurant apologised and the police interviewed the driver. Pray for Christians living in areas where they could be subject to persecution that their freedom of religion will be fully protected, not only in the UK but also in other Western countries.

WEDNESDAY 31 Pray for Christians who are seeking to work for justice, righteousness and mercy within organisations where these qualities are rare. Ask for divine protection and wisdom for these brave people as they may have to challenge colleagues, even their seniors, in their efforts to save innocent people from harassment or persecution. They put their reputations, jobs, careers, and sometimes lives at risk by helping vulnerable Christians whom others would harm.



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Front Cover: Christian schoolchildren in Pakistan