

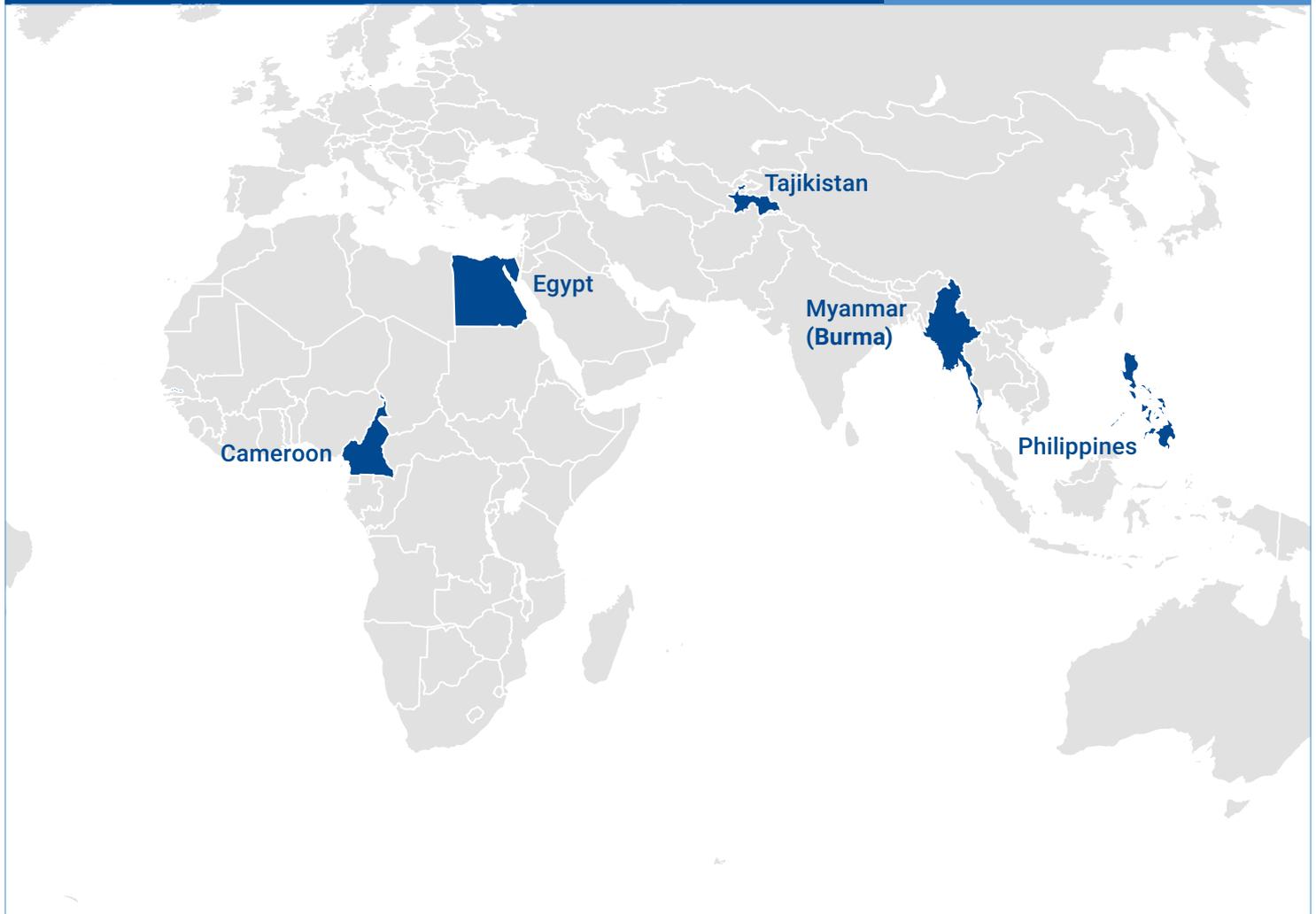
Barnabas Prayer Focus

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hope and aid for the persecuted church

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Tajikistan – Pastor jailed for three years after “subversive” hymnbooks seized

Following his trial, Pastor Bakhrom Kholmatov (see August 2017 PFU) has been jailed for three years for allegedly “inciting national, racial, local or religious hatred or dissension.” The full details of his case are still not known, but it is understood that police charged the 42-year-old father of three after confiscating church hymnbooks. Police claimed that the songs in the hymnbooks, which include “God’s army is marching” and “Our fight is not against flesh and blood,” were “extremist and call on people to overthrow the government.” (Source Forum 18)

Continue to lift up Pastor Bakhrom, remembering him in prison as if we, as fellow believers, were suffering with him (Hebrews 13:3). **Pray** that his heart and mind will be guarded by the peace of God, which passes all understanding (Philippians 4:7) and that his family, particularly his

children, will know the comfort of their Heavenly Father.

Cameroon – Boko Haram attacks reduce, but refugees now face starvation

The situation for Christians in northern Cameroon has improved since this time last year. Attacks from Boko Haram are now sporadic and isolated, but our project partner still reports the “theft of domestic animals, kidnapping of children, and killings ... suicide bombers and bombs in markets and public places.” It is currently the rainy season, when many roads are impassable, which restricts the mobility of security forces and therefore benefits Boko Haram “who can easily follow the trails on foot to go to mount their attacks.”

The greatest danger is now starvation for the many Nigerian Christian refugees who had fled to Cameroon to try and escape Boko Haram as well as internally displaced Cameroonians. “Many lack

food,” our partner says, “the price of cereals in the markets is very expensive for these people ... Another thing is that some schools and hospitals are still closed in many villages. People who stay living in these areas are paying a high price, because their children do not have access to education and health care.”

Many Christian refugees had fled to Cameroon, which is around 70% Christian, to escape from Boko Haram, only to find that the group expanded its operations and began attacking communities in northern Cameroon. Some displaced Christians have faced further violence from Muslim cattle herders for attempting to grow crops in the bush.

Give thanks that, in answer to prayer, security has improved for Christians in Cameroon in the last year. **Pray** for a permanent end to the violence of Boko Haram – that the Lord will protect His people and overthrow the forces that would seek to destroy them (Haggai 2:22).

Myanmar (Burma) – Christians injured and their properties destroyed in Buddhist mob attack

Four Christians were injured – two so badly they required hospital treatment – when a local Buddhist mob attacked and destroyed their homes in the Sanaing region on 7 July. The day before, the four believers, all new converts, had been summoned to the Teetaw village monastery by the abbot, where they were given the option of returning to Buddhism or being banished from the village. All four refused to deny Christ. Earlier in July, the house of a church pastor from a different region was destroyed by a Buddhist mob, leaving him and his family living on the roadside.

Myanmar is 87% Buddhist and as a result of a law introduced in 2015, anyone wishing to change religion is required to obtain official approval. Conversion to Buddhism is actively promoted, particularly among children, who are offered free food and education at Na Ta La Buddhist schools. Christian literature is strictly controlled, meaning many believers do not have access to a Bible. Although Christians have secured political positions in Aung San Suu Kyi's elected government, ethnic minorities, still face repression, particularly from the military, which retains considerable autonomy. Most of Myanmar's Christians come from ethnic minorities.

Pray for the four new believers whose homes have been torched and who have been beaten. **Give thanks** for their courage and pray that they will be encouraged by Hebrews 10 – that they have better and lasting possessions and a rich reward for not forsaking His Name. **Pray** that Christians in Aung San Suu Kyi's government will, like the

prophet Daniel, have the wisdom to know when to stand up for their fellow believers and that the oppression of Christians will be reduced in Myanmar.

Egypt – Egyptian authorities bow to extremist pressure and close church

A church in Egypt's Minya province has been closed for the last month by the local authorities after Muslim extremists threatened to riot if it was not shut down. At least 15 other churches in Minya province remain closed after the government voiced similar "security concerns" in recent years. Islamists have repeatedly tried to either close down or destroy churches in Minya - after President Morsi's government was ousted in 2013, more than 1,000 Muslim Brotherhood supporters attacked and set fire to churches there. In 2015, after 21 Christians were beheaded by Islamic State in Libya, Islamists attacked and set fire to the church to which 13 of those martyred belonged.

President al-Sisi has been vocal in support of Egypt's Christian minority and, in August 2016, the Egyptian parliament passed a new law, which replaced Ottoman-era legislation that had made it extremely difficult to construct churches. However, at a local level, Christians still face opposition from Islamists and authorities for trying to meet to pray and worship.

Pray for the body of believers in Minya that they will still be able to build up one another in the faith, despite not being able to meet together for worship. **Pray** that, like the Apostle Paul, they will proclaim the Kingdom of God with boldness and without hindrance despite the threat

of violence (Acts 28:31). **Pray** that the change in the law on church buildings enacted by President al-Sisi will be fully implemented at a local level, so that Christians can meet freely and openly.

Philippines – Muslim children see jihadis as heroes

Authorities in the Philippines have expressed concern that Muslim children are glorifying Islamist fighters. The leader of a government-backed sports programme for children displaced by the violence in Marawi said, "when we had our children's games for peace [coaches reported] that some, if not many of these Marawi ... children, considered ISIS as their heroes." He also added that Muslim children thought they "could not trust" Christians and some said they wanted to be Islamic State fighters when they grew up.

At the time of writing, government forces are closing in on the last areas controlled by Islamists in Marawi, on the island of Mindanao, which was seized in May. Troops had to clear explosives from a cathedral in the city when it was retaken by soldiers on 25 August. When the city was overrun, militants desecrated churches, Christians were taken hostage and there were reports that at least eight believers were shot dead for refusing to convert to Islam.

Pray especially for the families of Christians murdered by Islamists in Marawi, that the Lord will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow (Jeremiah 31:13). Pray that the minds of Muslim children will not be affected by the violent ideology of Islamism and that they will grow up learning how to live peacefully with their Christian neighbours.

Hear from heaven your dwelling place their prayer and their pleas, and maintain their cause

- 2 Chronicles 6:39

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