

# Barnabas Prayer Focus

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HOPE AND AID FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH **Prayer Focus** | Update Number 256 | February 2018

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*Yet, Lord my God, give attention  
to your servant's prayer and his  
plea for mercy.*

*Hear the cry and the prayer that  
your servant is praying in your  
presence.*

(2 Chronicles 6:19)

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

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## Kenya - church attacked by Muslim youths after arrest of cleric

A church in Marsabit, northern Kenya, was attacked by Muslim youths on Saturday 13 January after police arrested a local cleric who is accused of recruiting young people to join the Somali-based terror group Al Shabaab. Muslim youths, believed to be the cleric's students, attacked the premises of a bank and then targeted a church, smashing windows and destroying furniture. The church guard was also assaulted. Police posted armed officers outside churches in Marsabit on the Sunday following the attack, while many businesses and shops remained closed.

Historically, Kenyan Muslims, who make up 10 per cent of the population and live mostly in the north-east and coastal parts of the country, have lived peaceably with the Christian majority. However, multiple terror attacks mounted by the Islamist group Al Shabaab in recent years have increased tensions. Al Shabaab has deliberately targeted Christians in raids on villages in northern Kenya; in one attack in September 2017, nine Christians were beheaded.

**Pray** for the Christian community in Marsabit, that they will be on their guard and stand firm in the faith (1 Corinthians 16:13) in the face of Islamist violence. Ask also that the Lord will bless the region with good rains and a plentiful harvest in 2018 – Marsabit was particularly badly hit by the recent drought in East Africa; Barnabas Fund provided food aid to thousands of starving Christians there through Project Joseph.

## **Austria – Christian asylum seekers asked “absurdly difficult” questions to “prove” their conversion**

Christian convert refugees seeking asylum in Austria are being asked “absurdly difficult” questions on theology and Church doctrine by authorities in order to “prove” their conversion, say Austrian church leaders.

Converts have been asked complex questions about the Trinity, and been asked to name the date on which the first woman was ordained in Austria. Converts who failed to answer the questions often face their claims for asylum being turned down.

A total of 859 asylum-seekers converted to Christianity in Austria in 2017. Church leaders claim they are among a move of God which is reinvigorating church congregations across Europe.

**Intercede** for these new, convert believers being unfairly challenged by authorities, who ignore the dangers converts face if their asylum claims are rejected and they are deported. Pray that the converts will be strong and courageous and will not be afraid, holding firm to the truth that wherever they go, the Lord God will never leave or forsake them (Deuteronomy 31:6).

## **Egypt - El Arish Christian gunned down by masked men**

Bassem Shehata Haraz, a 27-year-old Christian from El Arish, was gunned down on 13 January after returning to his hometown. He had originally fled in February 2017 (along with the entire Christian community) following the murders of multiple Christians by Islamic State militants. Unable to find work in Cairo, he returned to re-open his shop six months ago.

In the early evening of 13 January, he and his brother, along with a Muslim friend, were stopped in the street by three armed, masked men. On seeing that Bassem was displaying a cross they asked if he was a Christian. When Bassem answered that he was, the masked men immediately shot him. They then ordered Bassem's brother and a Muslim friend to leave the scene. Bassem is the second Christian from El-Arish who has been murdered after returning to the town. In May 2017, a 40-year-old Christian barber was similarly gunned down by masked men, while working in his barber shop.

**Call on the Lord** to comfort Bassem's family, who had returned with him to El Arish; pray that in the midst of their grief they will know the presence of their Heavenly Father who is close to the broken-hearted (Psalm 31:18).

## Iran - Wife and son of imprisoned Christian leader to be jailed

The wife of an Iranian pastor imprisoned for ten years has herself been given a five-year jail sentence. Shamiram Isavi Khabizeh was sentenced to five years in prison on 6 January for “acting against national security and against the regime by organising small groups, attending a seminary abroad and training church leaders and pastors to act as spies.” Her husband, Pastor Victor Bet Tamraz, was previously sentenced to ten years imprisonment on 4 July 2017, also for acting against national security, and their son now faces similar charges.

Since last year, Iran’s government has escalated its crackdown on Farsi-speaking Christians – who are converts from Islam – with many arrested on various charges. Accusations like those made against this couple are often made against Christians who are simply engaged in ministry. Four Iranian converts to Christianity in the city of Karaj, Alborz province, were arrested less than two weeks before Christmas. Two others were forced to sign blank confession papers during their time in prison.

**Lift up** in prayer Shamiram Khabizeh and her husband, Pastor Victor Bet Tamraz, as they endure incarceration in Iran’s notorious prison system, that they will be strong and take heart because of their hope in the Lord (Psalm 31:24) and that their bold witness to Christ will draw those they meet in prison to faith in Him.

## Egypt – Nine Christians killed in church attack

Nine Christians were gunned down in an Islamic State (IS) attack on a church in Helwan, south of Cairo on 29 December. The attackers were prevented by policemen from getting inside the church, where a service was taking place, otherwise the death toll would have been far higher.

One of the nine Christians murdered was a Nermin Sadik, who was walking her two daughters (aged 11 and 7) to Sunday School at the church. When she encountered one of the attackers, the 32-year-old nurse was shot dead, but managed to shield her daughters from the gunfire. Police captured one attacker while the second, who was wearing a suicide vest, was killed in a shootout in which one policeman also died.

The attack in Cairo took place a fortnight after IS reiterated previous calls for the targeting of Egyptian Christians, who endured multiple, organised terror attacks in 2017, including the Palm Sunday suicide bombings in which nearly 50 people died.

**Seek the Lord** on behalf of Egypt's embattled Christian community who have been the targets of multiple deadly attacks in recent months. Give thanks that police were able to prevent the suicide bomber from reaching the church service and for President al-Sisi's statement of support days after the attack – he attended a church service and told the congregation "you are our family. You are part of us."

# **Barnabas Fund provides practical aid for persecuted Christians in over 60 different countries.**

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## **United Kingdom**

9 Priory Row, Coventry, CV1 5EX, UK

Tel: 024 7623 1923 • Fax: 024 7683 4718

From outside the UK: Tel: +44 24 7623 1923 • Fax: +44 24 7683 4718

Email [info@barnabasfund.org](mailto:info@barnabasfund.org)

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## **Australia**

PO BOX 3527

Loganholme, QLD 4129

Tel: 07 3806 1076 or 1300 365 799

Fax: 07 3806 4076

Email [bfaustralia@barnabasfund.org](mailto:bfaustralia@barnabasfund.org)

## **USA**

6731 Curran Street, McLean

VA 22106

Tel: (703) 288 1681

or toll-free 1-866-936-2525

Fax: (703) 288-1682

Email [usa@barnabasaid.org](mailto:usa@barnabasaid.org)

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## **New Zealand**

PO Box 27 6018, Manukau City,  
Auckland, 2241

Tel: 09 280 4385 or 0800 008 805

Email [office@barnabasfund.org.nz](mailto:office@barnabasfund.org.nz)

## **Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland**

PO Box 354, Bangor, BT20 9EQ

Telephone 028 91 455 246

or 07867 854604

Email [ireland@barnabasfund.org](mailto:ireland@barnabasfund.org)

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