

Barnabas Prayer Focus

HOPE AND AID FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH **Prayer Focus** | Update Number 255 | **January 2018**

*“I call on you, my God, for you
will answer me; turn your ear to
me and hear my prayer”*

(Psalm 17:6)

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

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hope and aid for the persecuted church

Pakistan – Pre-Christmas attack on Quetta church kills nine Christians, injures over 50

Two Islamist terrorists attacked the Sunday morning service at Bethel Memorial Methodist Church in Quetta on 17 December. At least nine Christians, including women and children, died at the church or in hospital from their injuries.

Among the extra large congregation at the pre-Christmas service were some of the poor and needy families who receive monthly food parcels from Barnabas Fund. At least three of the feeding programme families have sustained serious loss: two fathers, on duty at the main gates of the church compound, died during the attack, and a widow remains in hospital at the time of writing.

Many lives were saved by two courageous men who held back the attackers at the church gates. Realising they were about to be attacked, Sultan Masih (aged 36) quickly locked the gates and warned others to get into the church building. He was joined in facing the terrorists by another man, 63-year-old George Masih (not related to Sultan).

Lift up the families and loved ones of those who have lost their lives. **Ask** that the Lord will be their Comforter in the midst of sorrow (Jeremiah 8:18). **Give thanks** for the great bravery of Sultan and George who laid down their own lives for their friends and fellow believers. **Pray** that the powerful statement of faith that Pakistani Christians make each week by courageously meeting together Sunday after Sunday, knowing they might be targeted and killed, will draw their Muslim neighbours to come to know the true living God.

Indonesia – Islamists tell Muslims to only vote for Muslim politicians to “defend Islam”

Islamist leaders have called for Indonesians to vote only for Muslim politicians “who can defend Islam”; this was a direct criticism of the Christian former governor of Jakarta jailed for “blasphemy” earlier this year.

Speaking at a rally held on 2 December 2017 to commemorate the demonstrations in December 2016, which led to the conviction for “blasphemy of “Ahok” Tjahaja Purnama, the Christian who was then governor of Jakarta, one of the leaders of the Islamic Defenders Front claimed Indonesian Muslims should consult clerics before voting. “Now Indonesia is in need of more Islamic leaders from national to regional levels, who can defend Islam and make sure that Islamic teachings are applied,” said Ahmad Sobri Lubis, the Front’s chairman, adding, “We don’t want people like Ahok to lead.”

Call on the Lord to empower and encourage Indonesian Christians involved in politics; pray that they will be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power (Ephesians 6:10) despite the injustice handed down to Ahok – who remains in jail even though his accuser has been convicted of hate speech. Continue to pray for Ahok, that the joy of the Lord will be his strength each day.

Iraq – Christians cannot return home without international protection

Christians who have trickled back into the recently liberated Bahzani town – their livelihoods and homes in ruins, their sense of safety and security shattered – are once again desperate to leave. Only 130 Christian families live in the town from a pre-Islamic State (IS) number of 400. “The village is dirty and there is no electricity. No water coming, no markets,” said a pastor.

The Iraqi government has now officially declared military victory over IS, but Christians have been caught in the power struggle between Iran-backed Shia militia fighting for the Iraqi government and Kurdish forces. The pastor in Bahzani explained, “We expect more attacks. It is like staring into the darkness ... The reality is we cannot stay without the U.S. or the U.N. helping to protect Nineveh [the historically Christian region] directly.”

Pray for a lasting peace in Iraq, in which Christian communities will be protected from Islamist violence, so they can rebuild their lives. **Give thanks** for the assistance Barnabas Fund has been able to provide to Iraqi believers who have been displaced; pray that Western governments of so-called “Christian” nations will stand up for Iraq’s vulnerable Christians – those within Iraq and also the many thousands who now live as refugees in other countries.

Libya – Christian African migrants sold as slaves in Libyan slave markets

Captured African migrants heading to Europe are being sold into slavery in modern-day slave markets in Libya, a special investigation has discovered. Among these refugees are Christians, including many Eritreans, fleeing religious persecution in their home countries. One migrant described Libya as a “hell,” where he lived in “permanent fear of being ... picked up by a militia group and sold off as a slave.”

The country has been in turmoil since the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, with competing factions vying for control. Islamist militant groups have filled the power vacuum, deliberately targeting vulnerable Christian refugees and migrant workers.

Intercede for believers who have fled persecution, only to find themselves kidnapped and sold as slaves. **Ask** the Lord to be present with them through the Holy Spirit, so that they will stand firm and not be afraid (Job 11:15) despite the terrible circumstances they find themselves in.

Kazakhstan – Restrictions on Christians set to become tighter

Kazakhstan's secular constitution guarantees freedom of religion, but the government places tight restrictions on Christian groups via a 2010 law to prevent terrorism and extremism. Church congregations must be registered, for which they have to have a minimum of 50 adult members.

An amendment proposed in 2017 would require churches to re-register and limit their meetings only to registered "religious" buildings. Sharing one's faith will be made harder, and it will be tougher for parents to take their children to Christian services. The amendment is likely to become law in the New Year.

Seek the Lord on behalf Kazakh Christians. **Pray** that plans to tighten religious restrictions will be dropped and that the trajectory of reducing religious freedoms in the name of anti-extremism will be reversed. **Pray** especially for parents, who face the prospect of not being able to legally encourage their children in their faith by taking them to church, that they will have wisdom and take comfort in the knowledge that the Lord watches over His little ones (Matthew 18:10).

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

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