

Nigeria – Christians declare day of prayer as conflict heightens ahead of presidential election

The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) declared a national day of prayer on 10 January in the run up to the presidential election, which is set to be held on 16 February, amid a recent spate of attacks by Islamic militants. Christian leaders called for a “free, fair and credible election” that is “violence-free and without any bloodshed”.

The CAN statement also asked Christians to pray for freedom for Nigerians held captive by Islamist terrorists, including the remaining

“Chibok girls” kidnapped in April 2014, and teenager Leah Sharibu, held captive by Boko Haram since 19 February 2018 for refusing to renounce her Christian faith.

Join with our Christian brothers and sisters in Nigeria as they pray for a fair and violence-free election on 16 February, remembering that Jesus said, “Everything is possible for one who believes” (Mark 9:23). Pray that the Lord will frustrate the plots of those who would seek to use violence and fraud to claim power for themselves. Lift up Nigerian believers under daily threat of Islamist terror attacks, asking that God will both go before them and be their rear guard (Isaiah 52:12).

Barnabas Prayer Focus

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Laos – Christians detained for holding “illegal” church service

Seven Christians in Laos spent five days behind bars after police raided their Christmas church service on 29 December 2018. They were charged with holding an “illegal” church service without permission.

Nine police officers swooped on the church in Nakanong village in the southern province of Savannakhet, arresting three church leaders in the middle of the worship, and returning later that evening to arrest another four Christians. They came back a third time to demolish the stage, cut off the power line, destroy the sound system and seize three mobile phones. The seven were later freed on 2 January.

In a statement, Human Rights Watch for Lao Religious Freedom (HRWLRFF) called on the communist government of Laos to respect the religious freedom of its citizens, as protected by the country’s own constitution and the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which was ratified by Laos in 2009.

Pray that Christians in Laos will be strong and courageous as they gather for worship and none would be able to stand against them (Joshua 1:5). Ask that the government will respect the rights of its citizens to freedom of religion. Pray that local officials, seeing that God is with the Christians and will never leave nor forsake them, may have their eyes opened to the love and power of God.

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China – Church told to remove the First Commandment

A government-approved Three-Self church in Dongcun village, Henan province, China was ordered to erase the First Commandment during an inspection by 30 government officials on 1 November 2018.

One official is reported to have ordered that the First Commandment, “You shall have no other gods before me”, be removed from the Ten Commandments displayed in the front of the pulpit, saying it was “national policy”. Other officials then wiped off the words. Later the church took down all the Commandments from display under pressure from the authorities.

In 2018, the Chinese communist government’s White Paper on religion announced new policies of “sinicisation” (i.e. making Chinese) with the intention of selectively reinterpreting Christianity and Scripture.

Ask that pastors in China will have courage to persevere in their duty to preach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27) and not be intimidated by the Henan officials’ attempt to censor Scripture. Praise the LORD that His Word endures forever (Psalm 117:2) and cannot be removed. Pray that Chinese Christians will know God’s blessing as they diligently read and study the Bible.

Myanmar, Pakistan and Egypt – Prayers answered as the Lord protects His people at Christmas

Prayers were answered for Christians in many Muslim-majority countries during Christmas 2018, when there was no anti-Christian violence. Furthermore, the authorities in both Egypt and Iraq actively affirmed Christmas. Attempted attacks on churches were foiled in Egypt and Pakistan. In Myanmar, a small Christian community bravely celebrated the birth of Christ for the first time in their Buddhist-majority village, despite disruption from a local mob led by Buddhist monks.

In Egypt, where a police officer lost his life, two other policemen and an onlooker were injured when one of two devices found detonated on a rooftop near a church in a suburb of Cairo. It is likely the death toll would have been much higher had the bomb exploded as Christians attended Christmas services. Security patrols were stepped up outside churches and other places of worship ahead of Christmas celebrations.

In Pakistan, arms and ammunition were seized from five suspected terrorists taken into custody in Mobina Town after a police intervention prevented their bid to violently disrupt Christmas celebrations. Hours later General Qamar Javed Bajwa, Chief of Army Staff, joined the Christian community in Rawalpindi, Punjab at a Christmas Day service celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ. The General acknowledged the Christian

community’s contribution towards the creation of Pakistan, in the fields of education, health and defence.

Two Myanmar Christians were injured when their Christmas preparations were mobbed by locals led by Buddhist monks. The clash happened on 24 December as twelve Christian Chin families set up a tent to celebrate Christmas Day for the first time in the rural village of Sappie, a predominantly Buddhist community in south Rakhine state.

Give thanks to God for His refuge and protection over His children in Pakistan and Egypt as they celebrated the birth of their Saviour. Ask that the Lord will be a stronghold for His children in Myanmar and protect them from attacks incited by ultra-nationalist monks and that the two injured Christians will recover. Pray that God will comfort the family of the Egyptian policeman who was killed. Ask that the hearts of those who plotted these attacks will be softened and they will turn from their intent to kill and destroy, and understand that they themselves will not be able to escape if they ignore so great a salvation (Hebrews 2:3).

China – Government crackdown continues as 30 more arrests made at Early Rain Church

Police in China have arrested 130 Christians from Early Rain Covenant Church, an unofficial “house church”

in Chengdu, Sichuan province. In the first of a spate of raids, 100 arrests were made including the church’s pastor Wang Yi and his wife Jiang Rong. Both remain in jail where they have been held since 9 December on charges of “inciting subversion”. Another 20 of the congregation are also still in detention.

A further 30 students, gathered in a restaurant for a Bible class, were arrested in the first week of January. Their mobile phones were seized and they were interrogated for several hours, before being released.

The pastor has released a “Letter from a Chengdu Jail” in which he makes clear that he does not seek to overthrow the state but to worship freely. He writes, “Separate me from my wife and children, ruin my reputation, destroy my life and family – the authorities are capable of doing all these things. However, no one in this world can force me to renounce my faith.”

Cry out to God for Pastor Wang Yi, his wife Jiang Rong and the 20 Christians from the Early Rain Covenant Church in jail. Pray that our God who judges in righteousness will bring justice to His afflicted ones (Psalm 72:2). Ask that the courageous faith and steadfastness of the Christians in the face of persecution will bring about a change of heart in the Chinese authorities, leading to their release.

See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and He rules with a mighty arm. See, His reward is with Him, and His recompense accompanies Him.

Isaiah 40:10