

local pastors in nearby cities and the capital, Tehran, from visiting Tabriz to hold worship services for the Assyrian evangelical community and some Armenian guests.

Historic Assyrian and Armenian Christian minorities who have their own languages, not spoken by the Muslim majority, are usually allowed to worship freely in those languages.

Ask that the Assyrian Christians in Iran will not be afraid or dismayed but will be upheld by the LORD's righteous right hand (Isaiah 41:10). Pray that the protest letters and those who are advocating for the Christians will succeed in persuading the Iranian authorities to reverse their actions. Ask that Assyrian and Armenian Christian minorities will continue to be allowed to worship freely in their own languages and in the Spirit and in truth (John 4:24).

Turkey – Christian boy tricked into becoming Muslim on live TV

A 13-year-old Armenian Christian boy called Arthur was tricked into reciting the Islamic creed on a live Turkish TV programme on 11 May. Many Muslims consider that saying the words of their creed, whether or not in earnest, makes

the person a Muslim. The boy has therefore effectively converted to Islam.

Now that he is a "Muslim" he will be considered an apostate from Islam if he re-affirms his Christian faith. According to the Hanafi school of Islamic law, which is dominant in Turkey, the punishment for a boy (child) apostate is to be imprisoned until he comes of age and then killed.

"My son did not convert to Islam. We are Armenians and Christians. If I had known [what would happen on the show], I would have been with my son," said Alia, the boy's furious mother.

This incident gained a lot of publicity in Turkey and Arthur's parents are suing the producers of the TV show, with the encouragement of Garo Paylan, a Turkish MP.

Pray that Arthur will not suffer any lasting spiritual or emotional harm from his ordeal. Ask that he will know God's protection now, and in the future. Ask that the legal action of the parents against the TV producers will be judged fairly and the outcome deter such incidents in the future. Pray that God will work all things together for good for those who love Him in Turkey so that this furore may lead to greater religious liberty in the country (Romans 8:28).

Erratum: We apologise for an error in *Prayer Focus* update, June 2019. In the final paragraph of the report on an Egyptian church, we said that the Law for Building and Restoring Churches was introduced in 2017. This law was actually introduced in September 2016.

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China – Prayers answered for wife of Pastor Wang Yi as she is released from jail

Jiang Rong, the wife of Pastor Wang Yi of Early Rain Covenant Church in Chengdu was released from detention in China on 10 June, after six months in jail. However, her husband remains in "secret detention" on charges of "inciting to subvert state power". Four other members of the church remain in detention.

The church said in a Facebook post on 11 June that Jiang Rong had been released on bail under surveillance to live at her brother's house and was reunited with her young son, Shuya.

Praise God for the release of Jiang Rong, detained for six long months on unwarranted charges in China. Ask that she will soon recover from her ordeal, and her son from his separation from his mother. Pray for the safety of Pastor

Wang Yi and the other Early Rain church members still held in detention by the authorities. Ask that He who sets the captives free (Luke 4:18) will bring about their release.

Escalating anti-Christian violence in Burkina Faso, Cameroon and Niger – Christians plead for prayer support

In Burkina Faso, Niger and the far north of Cameroon, Christian communities have recently been subject to increased attacks by Islamist militias attempting to establish an Islamic caliphate in the region.

Christians are fleeing for their lives in northern Burkina Faso after twin attacks by several dozen armed Islamist extremists on 9 and 10 June left 29 people dead. Nineteen people were

murdered in Arbinda district, Soum province on Sunday 9 June and a further ten slaughtered in nearby Namentenga province the next day.

“There is no Christian anymore in this town [Arbinda],” said a local Christian to Barnabas Fund, for the entire population of Christians had fled. “It’s proven that they were looking for Christians. Families who hide Christians are killed.”

Our local contacts said that in just one town there were at least 82 pastors and 1,145 Christians, from 151 households, who had fled there for safety from different locations in northern Burkina Faso.

The latest attacks make a total of six since 28 April. The four previous atrocities, which left 20 dead, were detailed in June’s *Prayer Focus* update. Our contact urges prayer, “I know you are praying for the nations in difficulties including Burkina Faso. And please continue to do so.”

Two church buildings were burnt out in a Boko Haram attack on the mainly-Christian village of Grossi in the far north of Cameroon on 11 May. Armed Boko Haram militants also damaged 67 houses and two shops, killed livestock, stole motorbikes and damaged grain stores.

A local pastor described how Cameroonian security forces attempted to intervene but were overwhelmed by the Islamist militants, with the soldiers barely managing to escape. “God help us,” said the pastor, who anticipates further attacks.

In south-eastern Niger on 11 June Christians were given this sinister warning from Boko Haram militants through a released Christian woman, “You have three days to go or you will be killed!” Several families fled to the city of Diffa.

On 13 May, armed Islamist militants forced their way into a church during a women’s meeting in Dolbel, about 50 km from Niger’s capital, Niamey. They shot the minister three times – in the chest, hip and foot – before they made off with his car loaded up with food and other looted items.

The minister was treated in an intensive care unit in a hospital in Niamey, but thankfully his injuries were not life threatening and he has now been released.

Intercede for persecuted Christians in Burkina Faso, Cameroon and Niger, asking that they will not fear but have peace in the knowledge of the LORD’s compassions which never fail, and His promise that they will not be consumed (Lamentations 3:21-22). Pray that God will comfort all who have lost family members and provide for those who fled their homes, and the land they subsisted on, and are now without livelihoods. Ask that the minister who was shot three times will heal fully from his injuries and be able to return to his ministry. Pray that God will be a fortress for His people as they face Islamist attacks with little hope of protection from overwhelmed security forces. Ask that the jihadists will turn from their violence and come to know and worship the LORD as their God and serve Him only (Luke 4:8). Pray that the aid sent by Barnabas Fund will quickly reach the neediest.

Algeria – Governor ignores court order and shuts down church

Mohamed Djemaâ, the recently installed governor of Tizi Ouzou province, Algeria, is continuing to take the hard line set by his predecessor against Boudjima Church. On 27 May, security agents sealed all the doors

of the building and shut down the place of worship, ignoring an earlier court order.

The church is the fourth that has been recently closed in Algeria. See also *Prayer Focus* update, March 2019.

Boudjima Church first opened its doors on 11 January 2019 after a court ruled against the province’s previous governor, Abdelhakim Chater, who wanted to stop its construction.

Despite this ruling, Tizi Ouzou’s head of security visited the church on 28 April with heavily-armed security forces and threatened to close it.

Boudjima Church has been embroiled in a long-running legal battle with the authorities since 2017 when it was targeted as part of an ongoing offensive against churches. Committees started visiting churches apparently to check safety in late 2017, but they also asked about permits to operate as churches obtained from the National Commission for Non-Muslim Worship. Despite numerous requests from some churches, the commission has never issued a permit according to the churches.

A presidential election set for 4 July was postponed on 2 June, after the constitutional council said only two candidates were prepared to stand and both were invalid. The postponement will likely extend the rule of interim President Abdelkader Bensalah beyond the 90-day period set for the caretaker presidency. Meanwhile, there is growing concern about Islamist extremists filling the political vacuum in the country.

Lift up in your prayers Algerian Christians who suffer injustice and oppression and ask that the LORD will work righteousness and justice for them (Psalm 103:6). Pray that the authorities

will reopen the closed church buildings in Boudjima, Azaghar and two others in the province of Bejaia, also that requested permits will be issued to allow churches to operate legally. Call on the Lord to raise up a just and tolerant president, in His own perfect timing, who will bring religious liberty for all in Algeria and great rejoicing to His people (Proverbs 29:2).

Iran – Pastor urges “strong wave of protest” after Assyrian church shut down and cross removed

Iranian security agents stormed into the 100-year-old Assyrian Evangelical Church of Tabriz and tore the cross from its tower on 9 May. They were accompanied by members of a state-owned “charitable” organisation that answers to the Supreme Leader of Iran, Ali Khamenei.

The security agents also changed the locks, installed monitoring equipment and “made it clear that the Assyrian people are no longer allowed to hold any worship service there,” wrote a pastor.

The pastor has called on Christians worldwide to send letters to Iranian embassies in a “strong wave of protest”. He urges that the protest letters should request “unconditional restoration of the Assyrian Evangelical Church of Tabriz ... and giving permission to worship in Assyrian language freely.”

Tabriz is a major city in the north-west of Iran. The evangelical church had been officially seized by a court order in 2011, but worshippers had been allowed to continue using the building.

Persecution began last Christmas when government agents prevented