

Barnabas Prayer Focus

HOPE AND AID FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH **Prayer Focus** | Update Number 269 | **March 2019**

*The righteous cry out, and the
Lord hears them; He delivers them
from all their troubles.*

Psalm 34:17

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

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hope and aid for the persecuted church

Iran – Elderly Christian convert from Islam endures ten days of interrogation in Iran

An elderly Iranian Christian woman endured ten days of intensive interrogation by intelligence officers and was forced to go to an Islamic religious leader to be “instructed” and “offered the opportunity to return to Islam”.

Ruhsari Kamberi, 65, was one of five women converts from Islam arrested from different church groups in Karaj, close to Tehran. The whereabouts of the others is not known.

Three intelligence officers searched Ruhsari’s home early one morning before Christmas 2018, seizing mobile phones, Bibles and other Christian material before detaining her on charges of “acting against national security”. A local source said, “Ruhsari was interrogated from morning until evening for ten consecutive days.” The wife and mother was finally released when bail was paid.

Ruhsari is extremely distressed and her friends requested that fellow Christians pray for her and the four other women arrested.

Cry out to the Lord for Ruhsari asking that she will trust in the LORD with all her heart and lean not on her own understanding (Proverbs 3:5) when she is “instructed” by an Islamic religious leader. Pray that God will shield and protect the other four women delivering them safely home to their families. Ask that all five women converts will receive the justice God promises to bring about for His chosen ones, who cry out to Him day and night (Luke 18:7-8).

Algeria – Algerian Christians banned from worshipping even in a tent, after church building sealed

Christians in Algeria were forced out of a tent they were worshipping in by police on 28 January. The tent, set up in the grounds of Azaghar Church, had enabled the 300-strong congregation to continue worshipping following the forced closure of their church building for “health and safety” reasons.

The church in the village of Azaghar lost the use of its building in October 2018, despite the congregation responding to requests to install fire exits and fire extinguishers.

The officially recognised church had been open for five years and has a powerful ministry to local Muslims. Azaghar is reportedly the fourth Christian place of worship closed down in Algeria in the past year.

Many Algerian Christians remember how 15-20 years ago they could not meet in church buildings at all, but had to worship secretly, either singing quietly in basements or travelling out to remote rural areas where no one could see or hear them.

Intercede for Algerian Christians, especially the congregation who worship at Azaghar Church, asking that they will trust in the LORD in seasons of loss and hardship (Job 1:21) and continue in their faithful worship, even without a simple tent for shelter. Pray that the authorities will have a change of heart and reopen the church building. Ask that the LORD will use the church’s powerful ministry to local Muslims to increase mightily His people in Algeria (Deuteronomy 6:3). Pray that there will not be a return to the days of severe persecution against the churches in Algeria.

Pakistan – Pakistan’s Supreme Court summarily dismisses petition against acquittal of Aasia Bibi

On 29 January, amid tight security, the Supreme Court of Pakistan dismissed a petition seeking to review its decision to acquit Aasia Bibi, the Christian woman who spent almost eight years on death row falsely accused of “blasphemy”.

The judges stated that no flaw could be found in the court’s original verdict announced on 31 October 2018 acquitting Aasia. The Supreme Court had originally dismissed the accusations against her as a “concoction” and described her accusers as untrustworthy.

Chief Justice of Pakistan Asif Saeed Khosa, chair of the three-member bench, said, “We will not hear the case again. We are hearing [the petition] for the satisfaction of those who gave fatwas [on the verdict] without reading it.”

The Chief Justice refused the Muslim cleric petitioner’s request for Islamic scholars to be added to the bench saying, “How is this a matter of religion? Has the verdict not been given on merit?”

Praise the Almighty, whose purposes cannot be thwarted (Job 42:2), that the acquittal of Aasia Bibi has been upheld in the Supreme Court. Pray that Aasia Bibi and her family will now be able to enjoy fully her rightful freedom and, in God’s perfect timing, will find a safe haven to live together in security and peace. Pray for God’s protection over the Supreme Court judges, Aasia’s lawyer and Christians in Pakistan. Ask that the government will be wise and that tensions will ease, ensuring that peace and order will prevail in Pakistan.

Philippines – Twenty killed in Philippines in bomb attack on cathedral after district rejects Muslim autonomous region

Officials in the Philippines have pledged to seek out those responsible for the bombing of a cathedral on the island of Jolo, the capital of Sulu province, that killed 20 people and injured at least 100 on Sunday 27 January.

The first explosion went off inside the cathedral as worshippers gathered for a Sunday service, and was followed by a second blast outside, detonating as worshippers fled and security forces arrived.

The attack came six days after a referendum overwhelmingly approved the creation of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in the mainly-Muslim Mindanao island group, but which was rejected by Sulu voters.

No one has claimed responsibility for the attack, but police suspect it was the work of Abu Sayyaf, an Islamic State-linked militant group active in the area for decades.

The 2018 Memorandum of Agreement for the autonomous region and the introduction of Bangsamoro Basic Law, including elements of *sharia* (Islamic law), was an attempt by the government to find a political solution to end decades of fighting between Muslim jihadi groups and the army in the majority-Christian country. The agreement effectively created an Islamic sub-state within a secular, pluralistic and mainly-Christian country.

Ask that God will uphold the Christian community in Sulu province, Philippines and comfort those who mourn the loss of loved ones. Pray that He will wipe away all the tears from their eyes and remind them of the place where there will be no more death, sorrow, crying or pain (Revelation 21:4). Pray that Islamist extremism will not take hold of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Mindanao. Pray that those who witnessed this horrific attack will also witness

the redeeming love of Lord Jesus. May the perpetrators be moved to seek forgiveness for their murderous actions and find the peace that only He can give.

Cameroon – Militants ransack two Christian villages in Cameroon, damaging churches and razing 190 homes

Large numbers of suspected Boko Haram militants attacked the predominantly Christian villages of Gochi and Toufou in north Cameroon, in the middle of the night on 24 January, overwhelming the soldiers on guard and forcing them to flee. This was the fourth attack by militants in a two-week period.

Barnabas Fund contacts report appalling damage – 190 houses destroyed, four churches ransacked, livestock killed, a Christian hospital set on fire, motorbikes destroyed and essential household items vandalised or looted.

The militants were not intent on killing people this time, although they have done so in previous attacks. Their aim appeared to be the looting of clothing and food to panic the local population and economically ruin them – forcing families to flee the area.

The prefect for the area has promised additional security, but no emergency relief for the victims has been offered at this time.

Pray that the LORD will build up again our brothers and sisters in northern Cameroon, rebuilding their villages, planting their fields and enabling them once again to go out to dance with the joyful (Jeremiah 31:4-5). Ask that they will have courage and perseverance to remain in their villages knowing that God will meet all their needs according to the riches of His glory in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:19). Pray that the prefect for the area will provide the promised security for the villages and that emergency relief and supplies will reach the victims.

Tajikistan – Tajikistan authorities burn calendars sent to churches because of Bible verses

Five thousand calendars sent to Christians in Tajikistan in December 2018 for distribution to registered evangelical churches were seized and burned by the authorities because they contained Bible verses in the Tajik language.

Customs officials impounded the calendars when they saw the Bible verses and referred the issue to the Central Committee on Religion. Authorities gave the order for the destruction of the literature. The official response was that “the importation of calendars with text from the Bible is not desirable”. On 16 January church members were “invited” to watch the calendars being burned and they were also fined.

A church leader explained that the authorities had stated that the number of calendars was much higher than the number of Christians that the authorities believed to be in the country. It is estimated that there are about 3,000 Tajik-speaking Christians in Tajikistan, most of them are converts from Islam.

The church leader said that the churches were continuing to pray for the officials behind the order, adding, “We know that God rules everything!”

Pray for all who saw the Bible verses, or heard about the burning, that they will be curious to discover what is in the Bible and find one to read for themselves. Give thanks that any time God’s Word goes out it will not return to Him empty, but it will accomplish the purpose for which it was sent (Isaiah 55:11). Despite the efforts of the authorities to quash His Word, pray that God’s glory and wonders will continue to be declared (Psalm 96:3) through printed Scriptural materials in Tajikistan.

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

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