

**Ask** that the Lord will restore the food and livelihoods that the locusts have devoured (Joel 2:25) to sustain His people, and the many others suffering from food shortages, across East Africa and Asia. Pray that governments' efforts to contain the infestation will be successful in limiting the pests and preventing an even larger plague this summer.

## Bangladesh – “O Lord, please forgive our persecutors,” say Rohingya Christians after they are brutally attacked in Muslim Rohingya backlash

The tiny community of Rohingya Christians living in the Cox's Bazar refugee camp, Bangladesh, have endured multiple attacks by Rohingya Muslim mobs. The latest attack on 27 January left one Christian missing presumed dead, and twelve seriously injured, including several children.

A Rohingya Christian leader posted a prayer for the attackers on Facebook. “O Lord, please forgive our persecutors,” he said and recalled the stoning of Stephen: “While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’ Then he fell on his knees and cried out, ‘Lord, do not hold this sin against them.’” (Acts 7:59-60).

The attacks were thought to be a backlash in the wake of UN Special Rapporteur Yanghee Lee's statement on 23 January, after her fact-finding mission raised specific concerns over anti-

Christian persecution in the camp by a small number of Rohingya Muslims.

The Christian families fled their homes, taking refuge at administrative offices in the camp, when the gangs of at least 100 extremists rampaged through the vulnerable Christian community on 27 January, four days after the expert's report was released.

A Christian man suffered a head injury as the extremists pelted stones at a church roof. Knife attacks; the use of acid and attempted arson were also reported. The mob ransacked the church, removed Bibles and destroyed homes, making at least 20 families homeless.

Camp security forces reportedly turned on the Christians, rather than protecting them, and beat several, leaving one man unconscious. They also confiscated mobile phones containing evidence of the attacks.

Extremist Islamist group the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA, formerly called Harakah al-Yaqin), which is active in the camps, has been implicated in this surge of anti-Christian violence.

**Praise** the Lord for the perseverance and courage of this tiny Christian community in the face of severe persecution (Romans 12:12). Thank Him for their obedience in following Jesus' command to forgive those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44). Praise God that most of the Rohingya Muslims are not involved in the violence, but entreat the Lord to soften the hearts of ARSA members and the camp security forces so that they cease their persecution of the Christians.

# Barnabas Prayer Focus

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## Democratic Republic of Congo – Islamist militants murder pastor and 30 other people

On 29 January, an Islamist militant group, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), murdered 60-year-old Pastor Ngulongo Year Batsemire, the Archdeacon of Eringeti, in north-eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

Pastor Ngulongo was walking to his fields with his wife when members of the ADF surrounded them. The militants demanded the pastor tell them where they could find other pastors and attempted to force him to convert to Islam.

When the courageous Christian father-of-ten refused to renounce the Lord Jesus Christ, the jihadists martyred him. Thankfully, his wife's life was spared. She told of how the militants uttered a local phrase known to be used when they are looking to kill Christians, but spare Muslims.

The ADF have been active in the north-east region of the DRC for more than two decades and repeatedly target Christians.

Earlier on the same day, ADF militants murdered at least 30 people in a series of raids on four villages in the Beni region. There has been a surge of violent attacks in the DRC since October 2019, when the army launched a large-scale offensive against the ADF rebels.

The rise in violence by the militants has caused many Christians in the region to flee their homes and some congregations fear they may no longer be able to hold services because their pastors have been forced to flee. Local church leaders are crying out for prayer and “request peace for the country and province”.

**Beseech** the Lord to protect our brothers and sisters and bring peace to the DRC. Pray that the God of all comfort will be with Pastor Ngulongo's wife and ten children as well as the families of others who have been murdered. Give thanks that the pastor was faithful unto death, and pray that this may bring consolation to his grieving family and church members. Ask that Christians in this violent land find peace in the truth that the Lord will never leave or forsake them (Hebrews 13:5).

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## Burkina Faso – jihadists claim at least another 30 Christian lives in latest spate of atrocities

At least 221 Christians have been killed by jihadi militants in Burkina Faso since an upsurge in attacks began in April 2019, including at least 48 since the beginning of 2020.

On 16 February, Islamist extremist gunmen killed 10 Christians when they stormed a Sunday morning worship service in a church in Pansi village, Burkina Faso. The terrorists also abducted the pastor and killed him later that day along with 14 others, raising the death toll to 24. A number of Christians were reported injured and others were abducted in the attacks. Children are thought to be among the injured and missing. Many villagers have fled to nearby Sebba for safety.

On 13 February, kidnapped Pastor Tindano Omar, his son and two nephews were murdered by their captors, but thankfully two of the pastor's daughters were released unharmed. On 10 February, the night of the kidnapping, Lankoande Banilibilé, a church deacon was also murdered.

In an attack on the night of 1 February, a week after a jihadi ultimatum demanding the community leave the area, 18 people, including a Christian senior nurse, Robert Milogo, were murdered by militant gunmen in Lamdamol village. A local church leader reported that the victims were selectively killed. "This is not the first attack where civilians were killed for a reason or another including their [Christian] faith," he told Barnabas.

Robert had travelled to help those suffering in the terror-afflicted zone, despite the known risks from Islamist

militant activity that already had caused many to flee.

On 25 January, jihadists claiming to be killing "in the name of Allah" returned to Silgadji, the scene of a previous atrocity, and murdered at least ten Christian men in the village market place. Some estimates put the death toll as high as 50. One witness said, "The terrorists surrounded the people at the village market, before separating them into two groups. The men were killed and the women were ordered to leave the village."

**Implore** the LORD to be a shield of protection for Christians in Burkina Faso who face severe danger on a daily basis (Psalm 91:4). Intercede for the bereaved families of Pastor Tindano, Lankoande Banilibilé, Robert Milogo, and the many others. Ask that the Lord will surround them with His peace that is beyond all understanding (Philippians 4:7).

## Algeria – courts order the closure of two more churches

Two more church buildings were ordered to be sealed by the courts in Muslim-majority Algeria in January under the country's controversial licensing regulations, which have led to the closure of at least eleven churches since the beginning of 2018.

A church in the port city of Oran was ordered to shut on 12 January and a closure order against the House of Hope Church in Ain Turk, near Oran, was issued on 20 January.

The courts took action against both churches under the country's 2006 ordinance, which gave the National Commission for Non-Muslim Worship the task of granting permits for churches but, so far, no permits have been issued,

despite repeated requests by Christian leaders. This leaves churches legally vulnerable to closure.

The provincial governor of Oran first issued a closure order against the Oran city church in February 2018, but it was allowed to reopen again four months later. The governor also ordered the House of Hope Church to be sealed in October 2017, but it was allowed to reopen in June 2018. The governor later filed court cases against both churches saying they were illegal because they were not licensed.

**Pray** that Algerian Christians remain steadfast in their faith despite the closure and restrictions imposed on them by authorities. Ask that the authorities begin issuing permits to churches so that they may be legally recognised. Praise the Lord for the faith of Algerian Christians and ask that they persevere in their trial, exulting in the hope of the Lord (Romans 5:1-6).

## Africa and Asia – plague of locusts is devastating crops in East Africa and south-west Asia

Thousands of already marginalised and persecuted Christians are amongst those facing acute food shortages as vast swarms of locusts cause catastrophic loss to spring crops in Pakistan and East Africa. Considered to be the most destructive migratory pest on earth, the desert locust breeds across the Sahel and North African desert zone. The swarms, believed to have originated in the deserts of Oman, are migrating at alarming speeds, invading sub-Saharan East Africa to the south and circulating northward into south-west Asia.

East Africa is on the verge of a food crisis due to the locusts devouring crops, according to the UN. Somalia, Eritrea and Djibouti are experiencing the worst locust plague for decades. This has serious economic consequences for Christians who are already persecuted in these countries. In Kenya, the locust infestation is widespread, moving down from the Muslim-majority north-east into the central counties. At least one swarm has been sighted in the tea producing south-west. Locust swarms have also spread into Uganda and Tanzania and recent reports say they have entered South Sudan.

Most countries affected have limited resources to implement aerial spraying and are struggling to control the infestation, which could multiply by as much as 500% by the summer months if not contained.

Millions of desert locusts entered into Pakistan's agricultural belt, via Iran in November 2019, at a scale almost unheard of, ravaging around 30,000 acres of land. Local farmers say at least 50% of wheat, rice, tomatoes, sugar cane and other crops have been destroyed. The important cash crop of cotton has also been devastated.

Traditional methods of control have been useless against the sheer scale of the infestation. Prime Minister Imran Khan has declared a national emergency and the government is aiming to contain the locusts with aerial spraying, so that crops can be planted safely for the next growing season. Thousands of Pakistani Christian families are now living on only one basic meal a day and malnutrition is on the rise, especially in children and nursing mothers.

**"So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."**

*Isaiah 41:10*