



Pakistan – Churches burned and Christians terrorised after “blasphemy” accusation in Punjab

Christians in Pakistan need our prayers after anti-Christian riots left churches and homes devastated in the city of Jaranwala, Punjab.

On 16 August, armed mobs, reportedly incited by local mosque leaders, attacked the Christian community after torn pages of the Quran were allegedly discovered nearby.

At least 22 church buildings were attacked, with five of them set ablaze, in riots lasting several hours. Dozens of houses of Christians were ransacked and set on fire. A Christian cemetery was also desecrated.

“This mob have ruined not only our lives but also looted everything... what bad have we done? Where is justice? O God, have mercy on us,” said Fayaz Masih, a Christian resident of Jaranwala to the Barnabas team on the ground out there.

Hundreds of Christian families fled for safety to nearby villages or to Faisalabad city about 40km away. The following day, some started to return. They came home to the still-burning remains of churches, and to discover the little they had has been taken or destroyed.

Numerous Bibles, hymnbooks and other Christian materials were burned in the riots. Another victim of the riots pointedly remarked, “My house is in ashes now. If the mob had so much anger, why did they burn houses and steal our belongings? Is burning the Bible not blasphemous?”

Two Christian brothers were accused of desecrating the pages of the Quran. They were presented before the judicial magistrate and charged under sections 295C and 295B of the Pakistan Penal Code for allegedly committing blasphemy.

On 19 August another Christian, Ehsan, uploaded a video on his TikTok account showing solidarity with the Christian community in Jaranwala. Ehsan, from Sahiwal, 100km to the south, was accused of uploading a “blasphemous” message in the video that was hurtful to Muslims’ feelings and dishonouring to Islam. He and his family were forced into hiding once the complaint was registered with the police.

Meanwhile, Supreme Court judge Justice Qazi Faez Isa visited Jaranwala to express solidarity with the Christian community. He assured Christians that they had equal rights to practise their religion as everyone else.

“If anyone attacks churches, it is the responsibility of Muslims [to catch] the attackers,” he said, adding that Christians have as much right to build churches as Muslims have to build mosques.

Separately, Pakistan Ulema Council Chairman Hafiz Tahir Mahmood Ashrafi also visited the area and addressed a press conference with senior Christian leaders. The council was established with the aim of ending sectarian violence and inter-faith confrontation.

Mr Ashrafi denounced the violence and said he had never seen such horror. “Pakistan is not only for Muslims but also for minorities,” he said during the press conference.

Outdoor church services were held with extra police protection next to the torched church buildings on Sunday, 20 August.

Lift up Christians in Jaranwala, and elsewhere in Pakistan, to the Lord. Pray that our brothers and sisters will receive aid to rebuild their lives and be protected from further mob violence (Psalm 140:4). Give thanks for the support for Christians shown by influential Muslims and pray that the message of equal rights will be understood and implemented. Pray that the allegations against the two Christian

brothers and Ehsan will be properly and fairly investigated. Ask that any spurious claims of “blasphemy” against Pakistan’s Christians will be thrown out.

Nigeria – Twenty-one killed in attack on Plateau State Christian communities

Twenty-one people were killed in two Christian villages in the Barkin Ladi Local Government Area of Plateau State, Nigeria, in the early hours of 9 August.

Large numbers of Fulani Islamist extremists attacked Batin village at around 1.30am, killing 17. The gunmen went on to murder another four people in nearby Rayogot community.

Twelve of the dead were internally displaced people who had fled to the area to escape previous extremist violence. This demonstrates the ever-present threat that anti-Christian violence poses to our Nigerian brothers and sisters.

Local Christians say they had warned security services that the latest attacks were planned but claim the authorities failed to take action to halt the gunmen.

Ask the Lord to comfort the bereaved with the assurance that their loved ones are “at home with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8). Pray for an end to the persistent anti-Christian violence that afflicts Middle Belt Nigeria and other areas of sub-Saharan Africa.

Iran – Arrested Christians forced to attend Islamic re-education classes

Thank you for your prayers on behalf of Christians in Iran who were arrested by the authorities in the first three weeks of July (*Prayer Focus Update*, August 2023).

It has been confirmed that at least 69 believers were arrested, with – at the time of writing – at least 10 still imprisoned. Almost all of those taken

into custody were converts from Islam.

Those who have been released say they were forced to sign commitments not to undertake any Christian activities, or ordered to undergo Islamic re-education classes.

Worship in Iran's majority language of Farsi (Persian) is forbidden, as is any Christian evangelism. Farsi-speaking Christians are typically charged with "acting against national security" for their activities in unofficial "house churches".

Intercede for our brothers and sisters now forced to refrain from meeting with other Christians or to attend Islamic classes, asking that the LORD will be their strength and shield (Psalm 28:7). Pray especially for Farsi-speaking Christian converts who are the focus for anti-Christian persecution.

Myanmar – Three church deacons feared dead after arrest

Three Christian deacons arrested by Myanmar military (Tatmadaw) troops on 16 July are feared dead.

Chai Kay, Hon Chway and Hon Kay were abducted from a church compound in the town of Mindat in predominantly Christian Chin State in western Myanmar. They were arrested on allegations of supporting an armed resistance group.

Htang Kay On, a pastor arrested with the deacons, managed to escape and received treatment for his injuries at a safe location. A local residents' spokesman said that after the troops interrogated and tortured the pastor, causing him to pass out, they threw him into a nearby ditch, assuming him to be dead. On regaining consciousness, Htang Kay On made his escape.

When church and civic leaders visited the military base they were told that the three deacons were no longer held there. At time of writing the military has not released any information about the pastor or the three deacons.

The Chin Human Rights Organization refuted allegations that the church leaders belonged to any resistance group, describing them as "peaceful religious leaders who were helping war-torn refugees in the church designated for

them by the military council".

Also in Chin State, two churches were attacked in military airstrikes. In the village of Ramthlo a church was destroyed on 12 August with seven people injured. Another church was among four buildings destroyed by Tatmadaw bombardment of Khuafu village on 14 August. In Christian-majority Kayah State a church was also damaged in an airstrike on 12 August.

Pray that information concerning the three deacons will be made available swiftly. Ask that if they are still alive they will be released, and that if not their families and friends will be comforted by knowing that they are with the Lord. Pray that Pastor Htang will know the Lord's comforting presence and strength as he recovers from his ordeal (Isaiah 41:10). Pray for Christian communities affected by the airstrikes in Chin and Kayah states, asking the Lord to provide for those made homeless and to intervene to prevent further devastation.

Haiti – Christian charity worker and daughter released by kidnappers

A Christian charity worker and her young daughter were released by kidnappers in Haiti after 13 days in captivity.

Alix Dorsainvil, a nurse from New Hampshire, United States, is a staff member at a Haitian Christian humanitarian organisation and married to the charity's founder and director Sandro.

She and her daughter were abducted from the organisation's headquarters near Port-au-Prince on 27 July. They were released healthy and unharmed on 8 August.

In a statement released on 9 August the charity announced, "It is with a heart of gratitude and immense joy that we at El Roi Haiti confirm the safe release of our staff member and friend, Alix Dorsainvil and her child," adding, "Today we are praising God for answered prayer!"

Haiti has the worst global record for kidnapping. Almost 300 cases of abductions of women and children were reported in the first six months of 2023,

nearly as many as the total registered for the whole of 2022, according to figures from UNICEF.

Praise God for answered prayer with the release of Alix and her daughter. Give thanks that Alix was able to testify that God was "so very present in the fire" with them (Isaiah 43:2). Pray that they will both recover spiritually and psychologically from the ordeal and that Alix will be able to resume her ministry. Ask the Lord to protect Christian ministries in Haiti and cause them to be fruitful as they share Christ's love in a country dominated by gang violence (1 John 3:16-18).

Ukraine – More than 700 Christians affected by dam collapse helped by Barnabas

Give thanks that over 700 Christians affected by the collapse of the Kakhovka Dam in Ukraine have been helped with Barnabas-funded aid.

Thanks to the swift and generous response of our supporters, Barnabas was able to provide believers displaced from their homes with urgent necessities. The aid included drinking water, bread, clothes, sleeping bags and toiletries.

The dam, in the Kherson region of conflict-affected Ukraine, collapsed on 6 June 2023. Surging waters hit hundreds of towns and villages in the region, destroying homes and displacing thousands of people.

This emergency response is just the latest of Barnabas Aid's practical help for Ukrainian Christians – both those still in the country and those forced to escape into neighbouring countries – including food, medical supplies, clothes, blankets, stoves for use during the winter, electricity generators, and other necessities.

Give thanks for the swift provision, dispatch and arrival of aid to Christians made homeless by the collapse of the Kakhovka Dam. Pray that those affected by the flooding will receive guidance and courage to be able to rebuild their lives (Psalm 71:20-21). Continue to pray for the successful delivery of aid to our brothers and sisters in Ukraine.

"He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets prisoners free."

– Psalm 146:7

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