



Nagorno-Karabakh – Thousands of Armenian Christians flee enclave

The situation for Armenian Christians who have fled Nagorno-Karabakh remains critical in the aftermath of Azerbaijan’s invasion of the region on 19 September (see *Prayer Focus Update*, October 2023).

Almost the entire population of Nagorno-Karabakh – which is 120,000 people – left the Armenian Christian region in the weeks following the military offensive, in which Azerbaijan seized control of the enclave.

An estimated 30,000 Christian children are among the refugees who have sought safety in Armenia itself from what church leaders have described as “a scene of war crimes”.

Bishop Hovakim Manukyan, Primate of the Armenian Church of the UK and Ireland, said, “There are reports of mass killings, raping and torturing of people. A scene of war crimes is unfolding.” David J. Scheffer, a Senior Fellow at the US-based Council of Foreign Relations, described it as “ethnic cleansing at warp speed”. The invasion followed Azerbaijan’s nine-month siege of Nagorno-Karabakh, which began on 12 December 2022.

Karabakh has been an Armenian land for more than 2,000 years, and since the acceptance of Christianity by the Armenian people in 301 AD, it stood as a witness to Jesus Christ for 1,700 years.

Under Soviet rule the region was governed as an independent oblast within the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic, and was incorporated into the Republic of Azerbaijan at the dissolution of the USSR.

Azerbaijan and Armenia have gone to war twice over Nagorno-Karabakh, most recently in 2020. During that six-week conflict Azerbaijan recaptured territory surrounding Karabakh that had been held by Armenia since 1994.

Several thousand Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians were among the 3.75 million Armenian, Assyrian, Syriac and Greek

Christians who were systematically exterminated in a 30-year campaign waged by the Turkic rulers of the Ottoman Empire from 1893 to 1923.

Lift up to the Lord His traumatised people who have lost their homes and land in Nagorno-Karabakh. Give thanks for the aid that He enabled Barnabas to get through during the months of the blockade, and pray that the aid sent by Barnabas Aid will help those who have been forced to leave everything behind (Philippians 4:19). Ask the Lord to direct and encourage Christians in Armenia supporting their displaced brothers and sisters, and for protection from any further military aggression. Pray also that the multitude of church buildings and Christian monuments left in the abandoned region will be a powerful witness of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Algeria – Senior church leader to appeal against two-year sentence

The Church in Algeria faces a critical moment on 19 November when a senior church leader’s appeal against a sentence of two years’ imprisonment is scheduled to be heard.

Pastor Youssef Ourahmane, Vice President of the Protestant Church of Algeria (EPA), an association of 45 churches, was also fined £605 (\$725; €665) for allegedly holding a religious meeting without authorisation.

The allegations stem from March 2023, when Pastor Youssef supervised a number of Christian families who stayed at a church compound during the school holidays. The compound includes a chapel that has been sealed by the authorities. The sentence was announced in mid-September.

At least 49 Algerian churches have been forcibly closed, leaving only seven open.

Committees of officials started regularly visiting churches in late 2017, with the declared aim of checking safety, but they also required churches to seek permits from the National Commission for Non-Muslim Worship in order to operate. However, despite numerous requests from churches, no permits have been issued.

Call on the Lord for the success of Pastor Youssef’s appeal against his sentence. Pray that he will be acquitted of all charges against him. Ask that he will not be prevented from carrying out his important pastoral duties and that the vulnerable Algerian Church will not be deprived of his care and guidance. Ask that Pastor Youssef and his family will strongly experience their heavenly Father’s comfort at this difficult time. Pray that the Lord will sustain all pastors and church members experiencing persecution, and that they will know the Holy Spirit’s wisdom (1 Corinthians 2:12-14) in responding to the ongoing campaign of restrictions against Christians.

Pakistan – Twenty-five-year prison term for murderer of Sonia Bibi; Ex-minority minister escapes assassination attempt

After nearly three years justice has been administered in the case of a Christian woman who was murdered after refusing to marry a Muslim man and convert to Islam (see *Prayer Focus Update*, January 2021).

On 30 September the Islamabad Sessions Court sentenced Muhammad Shahzad to 25 years’ imprisonment (considered a life term under the Pakistan Penal Code) for the murder of Sonia Allah Rakha (Bibi). Sonia died on 30 November 2020 after being shot by Shahzad on an Islamabad street.

“She had been killed not for any wrongdoing but simply for refusing to marry a Muslim man,” said Allah Rakha, her father, adding that the

murder had exerted a huge “emotional toil” on the family.

Meanwhile in Lahore, Punjab, a Christian politician and former Minister for Minority Affairs and Human Rights in the Punjabi provincial government escaped unhurt when gunmen targeted him in an attack on 11 October.

The assailants, on motorbikes, opened fire on the car in which Ejaz Alam Augustine and his 24-year-old nephew were travelling at around 8pm.

Ejaz is a member of the Provincial Assembly of the Punjab. In September, he was part of a delegation of church leaders and politicians who met Pakistan’s caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar to voice concerns over the safety of religious minorities.

Give thanks for this just verdict and ask the Lord to minister His peace to Sonia’s parents, both suffering health issues, and her five siblings. Pray that the sentence will serve as a deterrent against attempts at forced marriage and conversion of Christian girls and young women in Pakistan. Thank the Lord also that Ejaz and his nephew were preserved from harm (Psalm 121:7-8). Pray for the protection of Christians in a country that witnessed a sharp increase in extremist attacks in September.

Nigeria – Fulani militants kill six in Christian community, Kaduna State; Pastors targeted in Delta

A Christian community in Kaduna State is reeling from a deadly assault by suspected Fulani Islamists. Gunmen killed six residents from two families in Takanai Gora in Zangon Kataf Local Government Area, on 26 September. The community is part of the Christian-majority Atyp Chiefdom.

Those killed were named as Sarah Adamu, Rejoice Adamu, Enoch Adamu, Juan Aminu, Salomi Aminu and Meshak Aminu. They were buried the following day. Six others were injured. The assailants dispersed when the military eventually arrived on the scene.

While anti-Christian violence is sadly common in northern and Middle Belt Nigeria, attacks also happen in the southern part of the country. Two such attacks have taken

place in the Ughelli North Local Government Area of Delta State.

Pastor Nicholas Omoroka was able to escape after gunmen shot at his house near Oviri-Ogor. However, his son Christopher, in his 20s, was shot dead.

Some 20 miles to the south, Pastor Agbadamashi Emmanuel, his wife and children were abducted by gunmen near Ewvreni junction on 6 October.

Pray that those bereaved in these attacks and others will be aware of the Lord surrounding them with His unfailing love (Psalm 33:22). Ask that He will administer His healing to the injured and the entire community in shock (Psalm 147:3). Pray for Pastor Nicholas and his family to receive His comfort as they grieve for Christopher, and for the release of Pastor Agbadamashi and his family safe and unharmed. Pray for tightening of security measures in Nigeria to protect Christians against such attacks.

Myanmar – Military kills 29 in bombing IDP camp in Christian-majority state

Christians in Myanmar are mourning heavy losses after the Tatmadaw (Myanmar military) bombed a camp for internally displaced people (IDPs) in Christian-majority Kachin State.

Twenty-nine people were killed and 57 wounded in the strike, which happened close to midnight on 9 October. Among the dead were 11 children, the youngest of whom was 18 months old.

The victims had already fled from another IDP camp after first being forced from their homes. A resident confirmed that the rest of the IDPs dispersed as the whole camp was wiped out by the attack. “The bomb left a lake-sized hole in the earth,” he said, adding that the strike had also damaged a church, a preschool building and the village school.

A pastor from the Kachin Baptist Church led a funeral service for the victims, while prayer meetings were held in other parts of the state.

Cry out to the Lord for our brothers and sisters in Myanmar, for the healing of those wounded and the comfort of those bereaved. Pray that Christians forced yet again to move location,

weighed down and weary with sorrow, will be strengthened according to God’s Word (Psalm 119:28). Persist in praying for an end to anti-Christian violence and for peace for all people in Myanmar.

Iran – Pastor summoned to begin 10-year sentence

Prayers are needed for an Iranian-Armenian pastor facing a ten-year jail sentence. Anooshavan Avedian, 61, reported to prison in Tehran, on 18 September to begin the sentence imposed for engaging in “propaganda contrary to and disturbing to the holy religion of Islam”.

Anooshavan was sentenced in April 2022 but did not receive the official summons to start serving his sentence until September 2023.

Officers from the Ministry of Intelligence Service (MOIS) visited Anooshavan on 13 September to issue the summons. That same day, another Iranian-Armenian pastor, Joseph Shahbazian, was released from Evin Prison (see *Prayer Focus Update*, October 2023).

At the conclusion of his prison term, Anooshavan faces a further 10 years’ “deprivation of social rights”. This prohibition means that he will not be allowed to join any political or social groups, including meeting other Christians, and that the employment options he will be able to exercise upon his release will be restricted.

Anooshavan was first arrested on 21 August 2020 when MOIS agents raided a private gathering of Christians at his home in Tehran, confiscating Bibles and mobile phones. Two converts received non-custodial punishments.

Ask that Pastor Anooshavan will experience God’s sustaining power as he begins this long sentence. Pray that he will stay strong in spirit despite the psychological pressures exerted on him, knowing that he has the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16). Ask that he will know repeatedly that his faith in Christ is the victory that has overcome the world (1 John 5:4). Pray that his family and congregation will be built up in faith by relying on their secure Cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20), whatever the arbitrary nature of human judiciary systems.

“Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.” – Hebrews 10:23

UK Unit 23, Ash Industrial Estate, Kembrey Park, Swindon SN2 8UN Telephone 01793 744557 Email info@barnabasaid.org

Australia GPO Box 612, Adelaide SA 5001 Telephone (08) 8117 8079 or 1300 365 799 Email bfaustralia@barnabasaid.org

New Zealand PO Box 276018, Manukau City, Auckland 2241 Telephone (09) 280 4385 or 0800 008 805 Email office@barnabasaid.org.nz

South Africa Appletree House No 6 Paul Kruger Street Stellenbosch 7600 Telephone +27 21 137 6495 Email bfsa@barnabasaid.org

Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland Office 101, Russell Business Centre, 40-42 Lisburn Road, Belfast BT9 6AA

Please send post to our UK office address. Telephone 02891 455246 Email ireland@barnabasaid.org

For more information visit barnabasaid.org