

Prayer Focus Update

BRINGING HOPE FOR SUFFERING CHRISTIANS

Prayer Focus Update | Number 333 | July 2024

***“If we live, we live for the Lord;
and if we die, we die for the Lord.
So, whether we live or die,
we belong to the Lord.”***
– Romans 14:83

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Haiti – Three Christian aid workers killed by gangs

Please pray for the families of three Christian aid workers who were killed by a gang in Haiti on 23 May.

Davy and Natalie Lloyd, aged 23 and 21 respectively, were a missionary couple from the US. They were in Haiti working for the Christian organisation Missions in Haiti, founded by Davy's parents in 2000. Their primary focus was improving the lives of impoverished Haitian children and teaching them about Christ.

The couple were shot dead alongside Jude Montis, a Haitian national who had worked for the missionary organisation for 20 years.

The Christians were leaving a church with a group of children when a gang ambushed them. The missionaries fled to a house connected with their mission to take cover, as more gang members arrived and started shooting. The gang members shot at the house until all three missionaries had been killed.

Haiti has suffered greatly from political instability and violence in recent years, with more than 1,500 people having been killed by gang violence in the first three months of 2024.

Christians in Haiti desperately need your prayers; please call on the Lord to protect them in this time of fear and insecurity.

Ask God to comfort the children who were involved and likely traumatised by this attack, and all those affected by similar acts of violence. Ask the Lord to bring comfort and peace to the families of Davy, Natalie and Jude (Psalm 116:15), and that He gives this missionary organisation strength to continue its important work in Haiti.

Eritrea – Three pastors endure 20 years in custody; another pastor dies in prison

Your prayers are needed for Christians in Eritrea who have been imprisoned for their faith in Jesus. Please especially pray for three pastors who have now been in prison for 20 years. None of the three have ever been charged or faced trial.

Pastors Haile Nayzgi and Dr Kiflu Gebremeskel were arrested on 23 May 2004. Pastor Meron Gebreselasie was arrested a month later.

These pastors are among more than 500 Christians in Eritrea who endure long-term imprisonment in harsh conditions, often suffering violence and abuse.

Some of these Christians never get to leave prison after their arrest. For example, a pastor named Ghirmay Araya died recently, after being imprisoned for almost three years. Ghirmay was arrested alongside another pastor named Samuel Okbamichael in July 2021. Both were in their mid-70s at the time of arrest.

In Eritrea, the Marxist government legally permits only three Christian denominations: Eritrean Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Lutheran. Christians from prohibited denominations are subject to arrest and imprisonment, often without charge or trial. Even the legally permitted denominations are sometimes subject to intimidation and harassment.

Pray that Christians who are unjustly imprisoned in Eritrea will be released or, if it is the Lord's will that they remain in prison, that He will comfort and sustain them (Psalm 69:33). Please also remember in your prayers the families of those in prison, that God will strengthen their faith and give them peace.

Iran – Two Christians given prison sentences

Lift up to the Lord two Christian men, who were given sentences of five and ten years respectively, in separate cases in Iran.

Iranian Christian convert Esmaeil Narimanpour was sentenced on 28 May to five years in prison for “acting against national security”.

Esmaeil was arrested on 24 December 2023 when his home was raided in a search without a warrant, and his Christian books were confiscated (see *Prayer Focus Update*, June 2024). He was detained for four months and released on 30 April, on a

bail of more than £8,000 (\$10,000; €9,300). He now awaits the summons to begin his sentence.

Esmail was among nearly 50 Christians who were arrested over the Christmas period in 2023.

Esmail was previously arrested on an accusation of “propaganda activities in favour of anti-regime groups” in April 2021. He was found not guilty, and the judge ruled that conversion to a different religion was not punishable under the laws of Iran. However, he was still forced to attend Islamic religious classes in January 2022.

In another case, Hakop Gochumyan – an Armenian citizen – was given a ten-year prison sentence in Iran for supposed “proselytising”, a charge for which there is no significant evidence.

Hakop and his wife Elisa were arrested by intelligence agents during their holiday in Iran in August 2023. Elisa was eventually released on bail in October, but Hakop remained in custody until his sentencing in February 2024. An appeal against this sentence was dismissed in June.

Hakop was charged with “engaging in deviant proselytising activity that contradicts the sacred law of Islam” through “a network of evangelical Christianity”. This appears to stem from his possession of seven Farsi-language New Testaments, visits to Armenian churches and a visit to a Farsi-speaking “house church” during his holiday.

Farsi-speaking Christians such as Esmail are converts from Islam – that is, apostates. They are therefore forbidden to worship, while it is also illegal to evangelise Farsi speakers as Hakop is alleged to have done.

Pray that Esmail, Hakop and other Christians unfairly sentenced in Iran will be released from prison, and that they remain firm in their faith in the Lord during their sentence. Ask God to protect Iranian believers, especially converts, from unjust sentences (Matthew 5:11). Pray that Iranian Christians will come to be appreciated as members of society.

D. R. Congo – Suspected jihadists kill more than 80 people in wave of attacks

Pray for the families of 82 people who were killed in a wave of attacks between 31 May and 9 June in the North Kivu province of the Christian-majority Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

Suspected members of the Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP, also known as the Allied Democratic Forces) attacked seven villages in North Kivu with guns and machetes during several days of violence. At least 41 people were killed in just one day.

Lift up to the Lord the survivors of these attacks, and the families of those who were killed. Pray that God will comfort them in their fear and loss (Psalm 34:18). Ask that Christians in DRC are protected from those who wish to harm them, and that the violence there will cease.

Pakistan – Elderly Christian killed by Muslim extremist mob; vulnerable Christian woman arrested for “blasphemy”

Intercede for Christians in the Mujahid Colony of Sargodha city in Pakistan, following an attack by a Muslim extremist mob, which led to the death of an elderly believer.

The Christian man, who was in his 70s, died of his injuries on 3 June, nine days after he was beaten and stoned following unsubstantiated allegations that he had desecrated a Quran.

The mob attacked the man outside his house on 25 May. They also set fire to his house and his family’s shoe shop, and attacked and damaged the homes of other Christians in the community. Even while the police were rescuing the victim, the mob continued to stone him.

Police say they have made more than 100 arrests, and registered terrorism cases against 44 suspects. They have since tightened security around local churches and deployed

personnel to protect them. They had, however, raised a “blasphemy” charge against the victim – despite the claims that he had desecrated the Quran being both unsubstantiated and vehemently denied by family members.

In a separate case, police have arrested a vulnerable Christian woman on “blasphemy” charges due to an accusation by a shopkeeper on 4 June that she had made derogatory remarks against Muhammad, the prophet of Islam.

Eyewitnesses and neighbours stated that there were no blasphemous remarks made by the woman; however, she was arrested after a mob gathered and demanded that police take action against her. Jamila Jacob, who has mental health problems, was charged with “blasphemy” under section 295-C of the Pakistan Penal Code, which carries a mandatory death sentence.

Ask the Lord to protect and bring peace to the Christians in Pakistan. Pray for the family of the elderly man who died from the injuries sustained in the mob attack. Ask that God will comfort them and that their needs will be met following the burning of their shoe shop (Psalm 23:4). Pray also for Jamila, who is in custody at the time of writing. Ask that she is comforted in the knowledge that God is always with her (Matthew 28:20), and that she will be kept from harm.

Barnabas Aid provides practical aid for suffering Christians in over 60 different countries.

International Headquarters

The Old Rectory, River Street, Pewsey, Wiltshire SN9 5DB, UK

Telephone 01672 564938 **Email** info@barnabasaid.org **Fax** 01672 565030

United Kingdom

Unit 23, Ash Industrial Estate,
Kembrey Park, Swindon SN2 8UN

Telephone 01793 744557

Email info@barnabasaid.org

Nothern Ireland

123c, Front Road, Drumbo,
Lisburn BT27 5JY Please send
post to our UK office address.

Telephone 02891 455246

Email ireland@barnabasaid.org

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1934 Old Gallows Road Suite 350, Vienna, VA 22182

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