

Prayer Focus Update

HOPE AND AID FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH **Prayer Focus** | Update Number 334 | **August 2024**

***“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and
where the Spirit of the Lord is,
there is freedom.”***
– 2 Corinthians 3:17

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

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Nigeria – Two Church Leaders Released from Captivity

Prayers have been answered as two Nigerian church ministers abducted by armed militants in June at opposite ends of the country have been released.

Mikah Suleiman in the north-western Zamfara State was kidnapped when gunmen stormed his home in the city of Gusau at around 3am on June 22. His captors subsequently released a video in which he urgently pleaded for assistance.

Mikah's release was announced in a statement issued on Sunday, July 7. Church spokesman Pascal Salifu said, "We extend our heartfelt gratitude to God for His protection and to everyone who offered prayers and support during this challenging time."

Adding that Mikah was receiving the necessary care and support after his ordeal, Salifu encouraged people to "continue to keep him in your prayers as he begins his recovery."

In a subsequent video Mikah himself declared that he was in good health, saying, "I want to thank you for your prayers and your support towards my rescue. By the grace of God, I am out of the hands of the bandits. Thank you very much."

Christian Ike was abducted on Sunday, June 16 after a church service in Ajalli, Orumba North Local Government Area of Anambra State in southeastern Nigeria.

Church spokesman Lawrence Nwankwo announced that Christian, along with another believer, Mazi Ogbonnaya Aneke, had been set free in a statement issued on July 13. In thanking believers for their support in prayer, he asked for continued prayer for healing of the two released captives, adding, "May we also pray for the many others still in captivity and for greater security of life in our part of the world."

At the time of writing, Pastor Paul Musa and his wife, Ruth, who were abducted by Islamist terrorists Boko Haram in Borno State in March 2023, remain in captivity (see *Prayer Focus Update*, June 2024).

Give thanks for the release of Mikah, Christian and Mazi, and pray that each will make a full recovery from his ordeal. Pray that they will be comforted in remembering that what men have planned for evil God has planned for good (Genesis 50:20). Ask the Lord to enable them to communicate the assurance of His light shining through even in the darkest of times (Micah 7:8). Continue to pray for Paul Musa and Ruth to be released, along with any other church leaders still held captive by militants in Nigeria.

Uganda – Pastor Killed in Attack when Returning from Church

Ugandan pastor Richard Malinga was attacked and killed on the evening of June 17 while travelling home from church.

The 36-year-old had been conducting prayer sessions with his congregants in Pallisa District, around 130 miles north-east of the capital Kampala, when he was attacked as he rode home by motorbike.

The pastor suffered multiple head injuries and his body was found on the road the next morning. His motorbike had been stolen.

Authorities say that this is not the first incident of its kind: a few months earlier, a teacher was killed in a similar ambush. The police investigation is ongoing at the time of writing.

Lift up to the Lord the family and congregation of Richard Malinga and pray that God will comfort them in their loss. Pray that, especially in the anguish of the loss of their under-shepherd, they will know the powerful but gentle assurance of the Good Shepherd's presence and guidance (Psalm 23:4). Ask that violence

in Uganda will cease and for protection for God's people whose duties compel them to travel the roads at night.

Kyrgyzstan – Christian Family Grieving after 13-Year-Old Boy is Killed by Muslim Teenagers

A Christian family is grieving for a 13-year-old boy who was beaten and killed by a group of Muslim teenagers in a Kyrgyzstan village, a Barnabas contact reports.

The attackers threw the boy's body into a river to make it appear that he had taken his own life. The authorities have so far declined to investigate the incident.

This murder comes after a campaign of persecution waged against the small community of Christian converts from Islam in the village, instigated by a Muslim leader who declared that there should be no Christians in the area.

Kyrgyzstan's constitution guarantees freedom of conscience and religion, but the population is around 86% Muslim and Christians in rural areas often experience persecution from the Muslim majority. Converts from Islam are particularly vulnerable. Muslims often refuse to employ them and as converts are cut off from any support from their Muslim families, they face the prospect of desperate poverty.

Pray that the grieving family will know the LORD at their right hand in their distress (Psalm 16:8). Ask that God's perfect love will drive out fear in the Christian community (1 John 4:18) and He will fill the leaders of this congregation with resolve and wisdom. Pray that the authorities will be convicted of the need to investigate this death thoroughly and justly. Pray for God's protection for Kyrgyzstan's Christians, especially converts and those in remote rural areas.

Russian Federation – Church Minister Among more than 20 Killed in Terror Attacks in Dagestan Region

Christians in the Russian Republic of Dagestan need our prayers after a 66-year-old church minister was among more than 20 people killed in terror attacks carried out in two cities of the region on Sunday, June 23.

Nikolai Kotelnikov, the minister of a church in the city of Derbent, died after his throat was slit by the attackers. A guard at the same church was shot dead.

A church in Makhachkala, Dagestan's largest city, was also attacked, as were synagogues in both cities along with a police checkpoint in Makhachkala.

At least 15 police and National Guard officers were killed along with several civilians. It has not been confirmed who was responsible for the attacks.

Dagestan is a semi-autonomous republic in the North Caucasus region of the Russian Federation.

Pray for all those affected by these terror attacks, and especially our brothers and sisters. Pray that Christians in Dagestan will trust in the LORD to deliver them from all their fears (Psalm 34:4) and experience His strength and help at this testing time (Isaiah 41:10). Ask that all people in Dagestan and the wider region will be protected from any further violence.

food.gives – Aid Reaches Ukraine and Jordan

Please remember to pray for our food.gives deliveries. Give thanks that a 40ft container that was headed to Ukraine from the United Kingdom has arrived and its contents have been distributed. A similar container has reached Jordan from the US and distribution is underway. Please pray for the safe delivery of food to our brothers and sisters in need, and for successful arrival of further shipments to various countries that are being prepared.

Pakistan – Christian Father of Four Shot Dead after Muslim Neighbors Break into Home

Please pray for the family of a Pakistani Christian man who was killed after his home in Lahore, Punjab, was broken into by Muslim neighbors.

Marshall, 28 years old, was shot 15 times the early hours of July 10 after at least four men broke into his home. He was rushed to hospital but succumbed to his injuries.

Yaqoob Masih, Marshall's father, identified two of the attackers as "two Muslim boys, our neighbors Shani and Azam."

Marshall was a father to four children and the family's sole breadwinner. He ran a small grocery store from their home. He leaves a wife, Mehdi, their one son, and three daughters.

The attack stemmed from a complaint Marshall raised with police about his neighbor Shani and others firing weapons into the air at night near to Marshall's house.

While being arrested, Shani threatened to kill Marshall in revenge. "He could not bear the thought of how a Christian could bring police against him," said a Barnabas Aid contact.

"Being a Christian, Marshall was a soft target," he added.

One of the gunmen also hit Marshall's wife on the forehead with his pistol during the attack.

Six individuals were wanted for questioning concerning Marshall's death. At the time of writing, Punjab Police have arrested four of the alleged assailants.

Call on the Lord to comfort Marshall's widow and children as they grieve for their husband and father. Pray that their hearts will be healed (Psalm 147:3) as they take refuge in the Lord, and that they will experience His hand providing for them in the years ahead. Give thanks for the arrests made and pray that the perpetrators will all be brought to justice, and for genuine repentance. Ask the Lord to protect His people in Lahore from further violence.

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

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Published by Barnabas Aid

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