

Prayer Focus Update

HOPE AND AID FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH **Prayer Focus** | Update Number 336 | **October 2024**

***“And so I will show my greatness
and my holiness, and I will make
myself known in the sight of
many nations. Then they will
know that I am the LORD.”
– Ezekiel 38:23***

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Iran – Christian Convert Detained by Ministry of Intelligence

Please pray for Mojdeh Falahi, a Christian convert from Islam who was arrested on September 9 and, at the time of writing, was still being held in a detention center run by Iran’s Ministry of Intelligence in the southern city of Shiraz.

Mojdeh, 36, was arrested at the prosecutor’s office in Shiraz. She is understood to be detained in the Pelak-e 100 detention center, which is under the jurisdiction of the intelligence ministry.

Mojdeh, a hairdresser, had visited the prosecutor’s office to provide a Christian friend with documents required for his release following his own arrest the previous day. However, she was herself immediately detained on charges of “Christianity” and “illegal Christian activities.”

Mojdeh’s family visited the prosecutor’s office repeatedly in the week following her arrest and requested to see her, but, as of the time of writing, they had been refused permission and Mojdeh had yet to be granted access to a lawyer.

The family are no strangers to harassment from the authorities for their Christian faith. Mojdeh’s older sisters, Maryam and Marjan, were among a group of eight Christian converts arrested in Bushehr, 200 miles west of Shiraz, in July, 2019. Both sisters received heavy fines for their Christian activities in 2020. Maryam, a nurse, was banned for life from working for any national institution, including the hospital where she had worked for 20 years.

In a separate court case in 2020, a judge ruled that Maryam and her husband, Sam Khosravi, could no longer maintain custody of their adopted daughter, Lydia, because they were Christians and Lydia, of unknown parentage, was considered a Muslim.

Unlike the historic Armenian- and Assyrian-speaking Christian communities of Iran, Farsi-speaking Christians such as Mojdeh and her family are converts from Islam – that is, apostates – and

therefore punishable according to Islamic law for practicing the Christian faith.

Pray that Mojdeh will receive proper legal representation and that the charges against her will be dropped. Ask that she will know the depths of God's love and comfort in her ordeal and that she will soon be restored to her family. Pray that the encouragement of the Scriptures will give her renewed hope in this trying time (Romans 15:4). Ask that the family that has suffered so much for following the Lord will not waver in hope as they support Mojdeh, trusting in His faithfulness (Hebrews 10:23). Continue to lift up all Christians imprisoned in Iran to the Lord and ask that they remain faithful under trial.

Burkina Faso – Islamists Kill 26 Christian Men in Attack on Church

The Islamist insurgency in Burkina Faso shows no sign of abating and has claimed the lives of 26 Christian men in an armed attack on a church in Banwa province in the west of the country, near the border with Mali.

The attack took place during a morning service in the small village of Kounla on Sunday, August 25. On entering the church the militants ordered the women and children to leave. They detained 26 men before killing each one.

The Islamists belonged to Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), a West African terror group affiliated to Al Qaeda.

The attackers then set fire to houses and stole livestock before leaving the village. Two of the militants were reportedly killed after accidentally triggering an improvised explosive device they had planted earlier.

The surviving villagers took refuge in the nearby town of Sanaba. Islamists (including JNIM and Islamic State Sahel Province) have been waging a nine-year campaign of violence in Burkina Faso, which has included targeting Christians and churches.

An attack on a church in Oudalan province in February, 2024, left 15 worshippers dead (see *Prayer Focus Update*, April 2024).

More than two million people have been driven from their homes and thousands have been killed during the insurgency, which started when Islamist extremists in Mali and Niger began moving into the north of Burkina Faso in 2015.

Jihadists now control more than 40% of the nation's territory.

Ask the Lord to protect Burkina Faso's citizens from such attacks, especially our brothers and sisters in Christ. Pray that the widows and children made fatherless by this attack will know the protection of their heavenly Father's arms as they grieve and seek to rebuild their lives (Psalm 91:4). Pray for an end to the current insecurity and violence, and for peace to be restored throughout the land.

Kyrgyzstan – New Version of Stringent Religion Law Proposed

The Church in Kyrgyzstan faces the prospect of severe restrictions as the country's National Security Committee (NSC) and State Commission for Religious Affairs (SCRA) officials have prepared a new version of a Religion Law to submit to the Kyrgyz parliament.

An earlier bill drawn up in October, 2023, was rejected by parliament in June, 2024.

Amongst proposed changes, the amended version not only requires all religious communities to apply for state registration (as is currently required) but also demands re-registration every five years.

Under the new law, religious communities must provide evidence of at least 200 adult founder members living in a single district. National organizations must be represented with at least 2,000 adult citizen founders from communities with at least 300 adult citizens in each of the country's nine Regions.

The draft law insists on SCRA permission before an individual can conduct "preaching activity" and bans religious education (whether of children or adults) without SCRA authorization.

One Christian leader commented, "I am afraid that if these changes are adopted, and if the authorities continue their past strategies, many churches will be closed down."

Pray that this restrictive proposed law will not reach the statute books. Ask that the prohibitive demands on sizes of congregations will be dismissed and that the Kyrgyz parliament will assess the rights of Christians fairly and proportionately. Give thanks to the Lord that nothing is impossible to Him (Matthew 19:26) and pray that He will use even the deliberations of politicians to build His Church throughout Kyrgyzstan.

Nigeria – Thirty Worshipers Abducted, Three Killed in Attack on Churches in Kaduna State

Christians in Kaduna State in Nigeria's Middle Belt are once again in need of our prayers. Three people were killed and 30 abducted when Islamist gunmen attacked two churches on Sunday, September 15.

The armed assault was launched at around 10am on the churches in Bakinpah-Marou community, Kajuru Local Government Area (LGA).

Bernard Gajera, pastor of one of the churches, was one of those taken by the attackers.

“The community is in shock, and we urge the authorities to take immediate action to rescue the kidnapped victims,” said Cafra Caino, the former Chairman of Kajuru LGA.

An eyewitness said, “When the bandits arrived in large numbers, many worshippers fled the church. It was a horrendous sight. We were helpless as we watched the bandits wreak havoc.”

As recently as August, 2024, the Maro community raised funds to build a security post for law enforcement agencies to address ongoing security issues after repeated attacks kept farmers from their fields.

The attack happened almost exactly two years after gunmen abducted 43 residents, including many worshippers from a church service, in a raid on another community in Kajuru LGA on September 13, 2022 (see *Prayer Focus Update*, November 2022).

Intercede for Pastor Bernard and the other Christians abducted and ask that they are released from captivity unharmed. Pray that improved security in Kaduna State will prevent further attacks. Pray for Christian communities experiencing weariness at the cycle of violence affecting them in regions of Nigeria. Ask the Lord to instill in our brothers and sisters hope instead of despair, and a perfect love for God, the Church and even her persecutors that conquers fear (1 John 4:18).

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Pakistan – Christian Twin Brothers Charged with “Blasphemy”

Yet another “blasphemy” accusation against Christians in Pakistan challenges us to redouble our prayers.

The latest to suffer are twin brothers, both Christians, who were arrested and charged with “blasphemy” in Punjab province on August 27.

The 18-year-old brothers, Kalu (also known as Yeshua) and Tabish, from the village of Kale Wala in Kasur District, are accused of desecrating the Quran at an annual festival the previous evening.

As part of the festival, the crowd threw torn pieces of paper into the air. It is alleged that the papers thrown by Kalu and Tabish contained verses from the Quran.

A local Muslim farmer complained to the police, claiming that several villagers witnessed the twins' actions, collected the scattered pieces, and discovered the verses.

The incident report was registered under Section 295-B of the Pakistan Penal Code, which relates to the "willful defilement, damage or desecration of the Quran" and carries a potential punishment of life imprisonment.

Sources close to the family contend that Kalu and Tabish are illiterate, and did not know that the paper they tore and threw was anything other than waste paper.

The arrest of the two brothers caused local Christians to fear for their safety. Several Christian families reportedly fled their homes, fearing violence from Islamist extremists.

Accusations of "blasphemy" against Christians or other religious minorities in Pakistan can quickly turn into mob violence and riots. Entire communities of Christians are vulnerable to attack.

The incident follows the arrest of two sisters, both Christians, also in Punjab, because of an unsubstantiated allegation of "blasphemy" (see *Prayer Focus Update*, September 2024).

Cry out to the Lord for Kalu and Tabish, asking that they will be released from imprisonment and charges against them will be dismissed. Pray that their family and the wider Christian community in Kale Wala will not suffer from violence that often accompanies "blasphemy" allegations. Ask that Christians in Pakistan will demonstrate by their lives, lovingly and boldly, the character of God whose holiness allows for mercy and justice (Isaiah 30:18). Pray that their witness will impact the wider community and point to the Savior.

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