



Pakistan – Pastor shot dead near Peshawar

Please join Barnabas Fund in mourning the loss of William Siraj on Sunday 30 January. Not only had William been a faithful follower of the Lord Jesus all his life but also his death came in the midst of serving his beloved Lord and, furthermore, he was singled out for death because of that service.

William was the eldest brother of Wilson Saraj, Barnabas Fund's Regional Coordinator for Pakistan and several other South Asian countries.

On the day of his martyrdom William, a lay pastor, had been preaching at a church in Gulbahar district, near Peshawar. William had gone to this church every Sunday since its founding more than ten years ago, amongst a community of poor, uneducated Christians, mostly doing low-paid, dirty jobs. At first he led services single-handed, and then, as the congregation grew, in collaboration with Pastor Patrick Naeem.

The two pastors were driving home together after the service when gunmen on a motorcycle fired through the car window at them. William was killed, but Patrick was unharmed, a bullet passing through his clothes.

Patrick described his thankfulness for his miraculous deliverance from harm.

William had always been passionate in Christian ministry, taking every opportunity to share God's Word. His wife Shamim had asked him not to go to church on 30 January as he was not fully well, but he insisted on preaching the sermon he had prepared. William was not the first martyr from

that congregation, for seven of their members (including William's son-in-law) died in a suicide bombing at their mother church, All Saints, Peshawar that killed over 120 people on 22 September 2013.

William's daughter, widowed by the 2013 attack at All Saints Church, said, "I praise God and am so proud that I am the daughter of a martyr and the wife of a martyr too."

Wilson, who has now lost five relatives through Islamist violence, said: "I am very humbled and I praise and thank God that I belong to a family of martyrs."

Please pray for William's widow Shamim, his two children, four grandchildren and all his other relatives and church members, and the many other people whose lives were touched through his decades of loving Christian service. Ask that the God of all comfort will fill their hearts with peace, hope and joy, and the realisation of how precious is our brother's death in His service (Psalm 116:15).

Nigeria – 22 Christians killed in two states

Boko Haram militants abducted at least 24 Christians – 22 women and girls along with two men – and killed four men in three separate attacks in Chibok Local Government Area (LGA), Borno State.

The Islamist extremists attacked different villages on 30 December, 14 January and 21 January.

Four church buildings, 73 houses and 33 shops were burned, as well as several vehicles. Four girls have been released by their abductors.

It was from Chibok that Boko Haram extremists abducted 276 girls, mostly Christian, from a boarding school on 14 April 2014. Around 160 girls have escaped, been rescued or released. Girls reported being whipped by their captors to force them into marriage, and experiencing a mock execution for refusing to convert to Islam.

In Plateau State, 17 people aged 5 to 80 and a 3-month-old baby were killed when Fulani militants attacked the predominantly Christian Irigwe village of Ancha in Bassa LGA on 12 January.

Praise God that in Kaduna State, church minister Joseph Danjuma Shekari was released by gunmen on 6 February after less than 24 hours in captivity. He was kidnapped in an attack on his home during which his cook Sati Musa was killed.

Pray for the safe release of those abducted, comfort for those bereaved and wisdom for the authorities in protecting Christians in Chibok and Bassa LGAs from harm. Give thanks for Pastor Joseph's release and ask the Lord to comfort Sati Musa's family. Pray also for the release of the remaining more than a hundred "Chibok girls" – now grown into young women – still held captive and ask that they will be strong in their Christian faith, despite all the pressures they have lived under for nearly eight years. Ask for an end to the wave of violence against the Irigwe community and that calls for urgent government action will be heeded. Pray that those displaced by the violence will know lasting security in trusting the Lord for refuge (Psalm 61:3).

China – Government imposes clampdown on online religious activities

The Chinese government's new measures to restrict online religious activities will take effect on 1 March.

It will no longer be possible to conduct religious activities online without government authorisation.

Organisations and individuals wishing to provide religious information online must apply to their local Department of Religious Affairs office. Sermons, worship services and training activities run by religious groups, churches and individuals may be broadcast online only after obtaining a special licence. Further restrictions apply to content aimed at young people.

Foreign organisations will not be allowed to operate online religious information services within China.

The clampdown comes after further restrictions on access to Bibles (both digital and printed) and on accessing Christian material on social media.

Uphold our brothers and sisters in China in prayer as they seek the Lord's wisdom in adapting to the tightened restrictions. Thank the Lord that His Word is never in chains and pray that He will reveal ways in which His Word can be transmitted in China, whatever limitations human authorities impose (2 Timothy 2:9, 2 Corinthians 2:12). Pray that Christians will not be seen as unpatriotic by being faithful to God, and that He will move powerfully to enable applications for licences for online Christian broadcasting to succeed.

Egypt – Christian named as president of Egyptian Supreme Constitutional Court

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi has appointed a Christian, Judge Boulos Fahmy Eskandar, as president of the country's Supreme Constitutional Court (SCC).

Judge Boulos, 65, is the first ever Christian to be appointed to the position, which effectively makes him

Egypt's highest judge.

The appointment of a Christian to such a high position of authority is rare in a Muslim-majority country, and demonstrates the courage of President al-Sisi's support for religious equality and freedom.

In Islamic contexts it is not expected that Christians will rise to such positions of political or legal authority.

The SCC is Egypt's highest court, and is independent of both the Egyptian president and parliament. The court has the role of interpreting Egypt's laws and regulations and deciding whether they are constitutional. Judges appointed to the SCC serve until their mandatory retirement age of 70.

Christians, who make up 10% of the population of Egypt, say that their situation in the Muslim-majority country is now better than it has been in living memory.

Lift up Judge Boulos before the Lord that He will assist and protect him in his new role and make him a blessing to the government and the people of Egypt. Ask that God continue to grant him wisdom in the making of legal decisions. Give thanks for the improving situation of Egyptian Christians under President al-Sisi and ask for his protection following this courageous appointment. Ask that God's justice and righteousness will shine not just from Judge Boulos but from all Christians in Egypt as they seek to serve their country in whatever role He assigns to each individual (Psalm 37:6).

Iran – Acquitted Iranian converts summoned to attend Islamic classes

Christians in Iran rejoiced when eight Iranian converts from Islam were acquitted of propaganda charges in November 2021. The judge even stated that – while apostasy from Islam was punishable under Islamic law (sharia) – “and in the hereafter” – it was “not criminalised in the laws of Iran”.

But the eight are now being forced to attend Islamic classes. The ten classes, taught by Muslim clerics, are intended to turn them back to Islam.

Intercede for Esmail, Mohammad, Masood, Alireza, Hojat, Mohammad, Mohsen and Alireza as well as two other Christians forced to attend the classes. Pray that they will stand firm in their faith despite the attempts to turn them away from the Lord (Ephesians 6:13). Ask that the purity and beauty of their testimony will carry such conviction that no Islamic cleric will be able to resist or contradict (Luke 21:15). Pray that the Holy Spirit will enable Christian converts from Islam to testify with confidence when brought before the Iranian authorities. Pray that their acquittal and words of the judge in November 2021 will become a precedent followed in other legal cases against converts from Islam in Iran.

Algeria – Church threatened with closure

A church in the province of Tizi Ouzo, Algeria, is being threatened with closure. A case was filed against the pastor of the church and his father – who owns the land where the church building stands – by the governor of the province.

The church has more than 90 members.

The case is based on a 2006 ordinance stipulating that permission must be obtained before a building is used for non-Muslim worship. The licensing commission established at that time has yet to grant a single licence, and several churches have been closed.

At the time of writing no date has been scheduled for the court hearing.

Pray that the leaders of church will be granted wisdom in dealing with this court case. Ask that the church will avoid closure, that all churches closed by the government campaign will reopen soon, and that the government will begin to grant licences allowing Christians in Algeria to worship freely.

“The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective” - James 5:16

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