

THE AID AGENCY FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH  
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# barnabas prayer

TO HELP YOU PRAY FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH



MARCH/APRIL 2012

**Thank you for your prayers for our persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ, which make such a difference to them. We sometimes have to change or omit their names for security reasons, and we have only limited space to share their stories. But the Lord knows the people and places we are praying about. Thank you for your understanding.**

## March

**Thursday 1** As widely predicted, the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party emerged from Egypt's first parliamentary elections since the revolution with the largest share of the vote (around 40%). The success of the more hard line Salafist al-Nur Party, which achieved around 25%, took commentators by surprise, as did the weak support for the secular, liberal voices that had hailed the revolution. The election results are an indication of the strength of Islamic fervency in Egypt and do not bode well for the country's sizeable Christian minority, who have come under increasing attack since the fall of President Mubarak. Pray that the new Egyptian order will protect all of its citizens and promote genuine freedom and equality.

**Friday 2** Between August 11 and December 24, 2011 eleven Christian children were seized in a series of kidnappings in Nag Hammadi, Egypt. The captors demanded ransom payments – as high as 630,000 Egyptian pounds (US\$104,000) – for the return of the hostages; some families were forced to hand over all they had to the assailants. A failed attempt was made by the security forces to arrest the ringleader and his gang, after which he allegedly threatened to carry out a massacre in Nag Hammadi. Pray for all the families who have been affected by this distressing spate of

kidnappings, that the Lord will comfort them and help them to rebuild their lives.

**Saturday 3** Eritrea is ranked among the world's worst persecutors of Christians. Only four Christian groups are officially recognized, and members of non-registered groups are relentlessly harassed. All their churches have been closed; some of their leaders and members have been imprisoned for more than eight years; and they lose their jobs or are prevented from leaving the country. Even the recognized churches are subject to extensive control. The government sees Christians as a threat to national unity because they give their ultimate allegiance to God. Pray for brave Eritrean Christians who serve the Lord at the risk of their liberty. Ask Him to strengthen those who are imprisoned in appalling conditions, and that they may soon be released.

**Sunday 4** **The Iranian authorities raided a Christmas service at a church in Ahwaz on December 23, 2011 detaining everyone in the building, including the children. The youngsters were severely distressed by the incident, during which the security agents had their faces covered. The majority of the congregation were interrogated and threatened; they were eventually released once their personal details had been recorded. Four – the senior pastor and his wife, and two other church leaders – were held in custody. The pastor's wife was subsequently released, but, at the time of writing, the whereabouts and condition of the other three was unknown. Pray that the children will recover fully from this frightening**

**experience, and that the church leaders will be released without charge.**

**Monday 5** A mob of more than 500 Muslim students and police officials torched a church in the village of Qoto Baloso in the Silte province of Ethiopia on November 29, 2011. The students were shouting "Allahu Akbar" ("god is great") and "jihad". Four days earlier, police had destroyed the roof of the building after a court ruled that it had been built without proper authorization. An Ethiopian Christian told Barnabas Aid that the Christians did have a permit to build the church, but the judge who made the order and the police chief who enforced it are known for their anti-Christian bias. One local Christian said, "The Islamic religion has become the state religion in our region." Pray for the safety and freedom of Christians in Muslim-majority areas of Ethiopia.

**Tuesday 6** "You have put a lot of smiles on the needy, vulnerable widows and orphans in this ministry." Barnabas received this joyful expression of thanks from a group of Christians in Kenya, who are feeding 31 orphans and providing for their healthcare and school fees with our help. They are also creating opportunities for Christian widows to generate their own income; with our latest grant they bought and installed a maize mill for the widows' use. They are working in a



**Christian widows in Kenya rejoice over their new mill, funded by Barnabas**

rural area where Islam is growing rapidly, and they feel called to provide hope and practical help "to [God's] children who suffer the discrimination that results from their faith in Him". Give thanks for how the lives of these vulnerable Christians are being transformed, and pray that God will continue to prosper this work (James 1:27).

**Wednesday 7** On Christmas Day 2011 a group of Christians in Karnataka State, India, were enjoying their Christmas meal when a group of around 20 Hindu extremists carrying stones and clubs forced their way into the house. They beat up the Christians, including the women and children, and seriously injured some of them. Elsewhere in Karnataka a prayer hall was damaged, while in Kandhamal, Orissa State, the home of a young Christian couple was burned down while they were at a Christmas celebration at their village church. These two states have become notorious for anti-Christian violence in recent years. Pray for the Christians affected as they recover from their ordeal, and that the authorities will work to prevent violence from Hindu militants.

**Thursday 8** "Tolerance is non-negotiable." Indonesian President's Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's condemnation of religious intimidation came as an Islamist group was demanding the demolition of five churches in Central Java. Speaking on December 4, at an event staged by the largest Protestant denomination in Indonesia, the president said that the nation's diversity was "a strength, a gift from God". But this view is not worked out in practice for the country's Christians, who in many places face restrictions from the authorities and violent opposition from radical Islamists. Give thanks for the president's expressed commitment to tolerance and diversity, and pray that these will increasingly be experienced by the country's

Christians.

**Friday 9** Continue to lift up to the Lord Iranian house church leader Noorollah Qabitzade, a convert from Islam to Christianity, who has been in prison since December 24, 2010. He has resisted pressure to renounce his faith, despite being offered his freedom if he did so, and instead tried to share the Gospel with other prisoners. This angered the guards, who consequently transferred Noorollah to another prison, in Ahwaz, over 100 miles away. Thank God for our brother's faithfulness under pressure, and pray that he will be protected from all harm.

**Saturday 10** On December 2, Islamists went on the rampage in the autonomous region of Iraqi Kurdistan, setting fire to shops and businesses owned by Christians and Yezidis, another minority group. The mob was apparently incited by an imam's vitriolic sermon. At least 30 people were injured, and several million dollars' worth of damage was caused in the city of Zakho as various properties were set ablaze. Three days later, leaflets were put on the walls of the burned shops threatening the owners with death if they reopened them. Christians have generally been welcomed and safe in Iraqi Kurdistan; many have moved there to escape anti-Christian violence elsewhere in Iraq. Pray that attacks against Christians in Iraqi Kurdistan do not become commonplace.

**Sunday 11 Pastor Umar Mulinde, a church leader in Uganda, had acid thrown in his face outside his church in the capital, Kampala, on Christmas Eve 2011. The substance burned the right side of his face and his neck and arms and damaged his right eye. Pastor Umar, a convert from Islam and former sheikh, had**



**Pastor Umar Mulinde. Barnabas helped to pay for his surgery. (Source: Vision Group / New Vision Printing and Publishing Company)**

**been receiving threats for some time. It is believed that he was targeted because of his conversion and his strong critique of Islam. He had also been a key opponent of Muslim plans to introduce Kadhi courts**

**(sharia courts) in Uganda. Pray for his healing from his injuries and shock, and pray that he will be protected from further attacks. Barnabas has helped with the cost of his surgery.**

**Monday 12** The authorities in Kazakhstan continue to clamp down ruthlessly on the practice of Christianity. Under the terms of restrictive new religion laws that came into force in 2011, churches in prisons have now been closed and Christian literature confiscated from prisoners. A government aide said that the churches had been built illegally, despite their having been authorized by the prison authorities. There have also been reports of ministers being denied access to prisons to conduct services, and of the closure of a prayer room used by Christians in a home for disabled people in Almaty. Pray for Christian prisoners in Kazakhstan, that they will be able to find fellowship and encouragement in their faith. Pray too that the oppressive laws will soon be repealed.

**Tuesday 13** As the authorities in Kazakhstan continued their crackdown on religious freedom,

a 17-year-old girl was knocked unconscious by a policeman in a raid on a church meeting in Atyrau. The church was registered with the state, but the Christians had been blocked by the authorities from using their regular and legal address. So they were meeting elsewhere, which is not allowed under the new religion law. Baptist churches, which refuse to register on principle, have reported increased harassment and pressure from officials, who interrupt their services and issue threats. Pray that the churches will persevere in their worship and witness despite intimidation and harsh treatment from the government.

**Wednesday 14** "Today in Azerbaijan various religious sects and movements are increasing their propaganda. It is necessary to strengthen the measures being adopted to put a halt to this." This was the explanation of Azerbaijani member of parliament Ganira Pashaeva as to why further restrictions on religious freedom were being introduced in the country. Amendments to the Criminal and Administrative Codes that create new penalties or increase the severity of existing punishments for a range of religious activities came into force on December 12. These include a prison term of up to five years for those who produce or distribute religious literature that has not been vetted by the state. Pray that the tide of ever-tightening restrictions in Azerbaijan will turn.

**Thursday 15** "If you want to live in our village, you must cease all beliefs and practices in the Christian faith." The Christians in Natoo village in Savannakhet province, Laos were ordered on December 21 to leave the village unless they gave up their faith in Christ and stopped all Sunday worship meetings. They were given until only the next day to comply or move out. The ultimatum recalls the ill-treatment of the villagers of Katin in Saravan province, who were evicted

from their homes at gunpoint and told they could return only if they abandoned their faith. Pray for our brothers and sisters in Laos facing such hostility from their local communities, that the Lord will give them grace to respond with love and forgiveness, and that the hearts of their persecutors may be changed.

**Friday 16** "The Islamists didn't go out with us on January 14<sup>th</sup> but then they took the revolution for themselves." With these words a Tunisian demonstrator who took to the streets in early 2011 to call for a more secular, liberal state expressed her frustration and concern at the aftermath of the so-called "Arab Spring". Despite the introduction of democracy in various North African countries, the growing influence and electoral success of Islamism threatens a worsening of conditions for the churches, which have already endured decades of discrimination and persecution under the old regimes. Pray for their protection, and that the process of political change will eventually bring them greater freedom and security.

**Saturday 17** Sixteen days with their legs in wooden stocks was the punishment for seven church leaders arrested in December 2011 in Boukham village in Laos, because they had held a Christmas party attended by over 200 people. The village authorities said that this violated the traditional spirit cult of the village. The seven had also each been ordered to pay a fine of US\$125 and a cow (worth US\$600) but this was later reduced to just US\$125 each. The seven were released on January 12 after provincial and central authorities intervened. Pray that they may now be left alone to continue their ministry in peace. "Despite these challenges, the believers remain undaunted and fervent for the Lord," reported a visitor who met three of the seven soon after their release.

**Sunday 18** “Aasia started crying and praying to God for His mercy and freedom so that she could stay with her family with peace and love.” Aasia Bibi, the Christian mother still imprisoned in Pakistan following her conviction on false charges of “blasphemy”, had an emotional reunion with her family in December 2011. But because she is able to see her children only twice a year, their joy turned to sorrow when it was time to say goodbye. Continue to pray for Aasia, who is awaiting an appeal against her death sentence. Pray too for her family: her husband is unable to go out to work because he may be targeted by Islamic extremists. Barnabas Aid provides the family with a monthly food parcel and support for other needs.

**Monday 19** When unrest broke out in Morocco during the “Arab Spring” of 2011, it was quietened by the king’s promise of reform and the issuing of a new constitution. But no concessions were made to Christians (or other minorities), and their very limited and insecure freedom seems unlikely to be increased in the near future. In the first elections under the new system, an Islamist group, the Justice and Development Party, won the most seats, and its leader was appointed prime minister. Pray that this alarming development will not lead to further repression of the country’s indigenous Christians, who are already forbidden from sharing their faith with Muslims, and who, as converts, can face pressure from their communities and local authorities. Pray that Morocco’s constitutional commitment to freedom of religion will be extended to Christian converts from Islam.

**Tuesday 20** On November 22, 2011 a bomb was detonated beside the office of the United Mission to Nepal in the capital, Kathmandu. Thank the Lord that there was little damage and no-one was hurt. Responsibility was claimed by the Nepal Defence Army, an extremist group that wants to reinstate the country’s Hindu monarchy. They demanded that the country become a Hindu state and that all churches in the capital be closed within 50 days. Another bomb nearby was defused, and five days later a third was discovered outside a church. Christians feel increasingly under threat in Nepal, both from extremist violence and from proposed new legislation that would outlaw converting to another religion or inciting someone to do so. Pray that the government will protect religious freedom and bring those responsible for anti-Christian violence to justice.

**Wednesday 21** Over 40 people were killed in a coordinated series of bomb and gun attacks on churches and the security services in five Nigerian states on Christmas Day. The majority of the fatalities occurred at a church in Madalla, near the capital, Abuja; around 35 worshippers were killed when explosives were hurled at the congregation as they left the service. Militant Islamist group Boko Haram claimed responsibility for the attacks. It is the second consecutive year that the group has staged anti-Christian violence at Christmas. Pray for all those who have lost loved ones as a result of Boko Haram’s terrorist campaign, that they will know the Lord Jesus as their Wonderful Counsellor and Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6).

**Thursday 22** On December 17, 2011 the long-time president of North Korea, Kim Jong-il, died, and he was soon succeeded by his son Kim Jong-un. The country tops many lists of the world’s worst persecutors of Christians, and as power passes to a third generation of the ruling

family there is no sign of any relief for our suffering brothers and sisters. They live under constant threat of torture, imprisonment or execution, and their whole families may be placed in the country's brutal labor camps. They also share in the crippling poverty of the entire population. Pray that at this time of transition the international community will bring pressure to bear on the new regime to grant religious freedom to Christians and others, and that the whole nation will be set free from oppression and scarcity.

**Friday 23** Khurram Masih (25), a Christian from Lahore in Pakistan, was arrested in December 2011, after being falsely accused of "blasphemy". An angry mob of 1,000 Muslims had blocked a road in Shahdara for three hours demanding his arrest for allegedly burning pages from the Quran. Khurram said that he was badly beaten by the police, given nothing to eat for three days and compelled to confess to the crime; he added that he has since been tortured and beaten in prison. Section 295B of the Pakistan Penal Code punishes desecration of the Quran with life imprisonment, and thousands of innocent people, including many Christians, have been falsely accused under this and other sections of the notorious "blasphemy laws". Pray for Khurram's safe release and that he will be cleared of the charge.

**Saturday 24** Pray for 200 Christian families in north-west Armenia as they struggle to stay warm during the freezing winter months. Ever since an earthquake destroyed many of their houses in 1988, they have been living in badly insulated shacks made out of scrap metal. These were meant to be only temporary homes, but because the Christians are so poor, they cannot afford new houses. Winters are extremely harsh from November to late May, and temperatures can drop as low as minus 35-40°C. Give thanks

that Barnabas was able to supply stocks of wood for fuel, and small grants to pay the bills of the few who have gas and electricity. Pray that the Christians may survive the harsh conditions and that the Lord will provide for all their needs.



Christians in Armenia who received help from Barnabas to stay warm in their freezing winter

**Sunday 25** Many converts from Islam to Christianity live in mortal danger. All schools of Islamic sharia prescribe the death penalty for an adult male Muslim who chooses to leave his faith; some require the same sentence for women converts too. Although Muslim governments rarely carry out the death sentence, they may imprison or torture converts, who may also have to go into hiding to escape violence from their relatives or zealous Muslims. Pray that persecuted converts will be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power (Ephesians 6:10). Pray too that the Islamic law of apostasy will soon be repealed, and that converts from Islam will be free to practice their Christian faith in peace.

**Monday 26** In a message to more than 2.5 million Hajj pilgrims in Saudi Arabia on November 5, Iran's supreme leader called on the world's

Muslim-majority nations to form an “international Islamic power-bloc”, laying down an ominous challenge to Western powers. Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei said that Islamic countries should “make the most of [the] opportunity” created by the Arab Spring, as well as the anti-capitalist movement across the world. Heralding a global power shift, he said that “the West, the United States and Zionism are weaker than ever before”. An “Islamic power-bloc” would be a dangerous prospect for Christians in the region, who already suffer severe discrimination and persecution. Pray that the Ayatollah’s rhetoric does not become reality.

**Tuesday 27** “As we distributed the seed packs, we were struck by how many vulnerable people were being reached. A blind woman was led by a small girl, some disabled folk were helped by friends and many old or poor folk thanked us profusely.” Give thanks that Barnabas Aid was able to help about 3,000 highly vulnerable Ugandan Christians affected by the East Africa drought by providing them with seed for harvesting their own crops. Each household received three bags with seed of sorghum, rice and soy bean, quick-growing plants that are ready for harvesting within 90 days. The Christians also received instructions on how best to plant the seeds, and advice on the growing. Pray that this practical help will protect them from the worst effects of the drought. Pray too that they may be encouraged in their faith by the support of their Christian family.

**Wednesday 28** Pressure is growing on the vulnerable churches of Sri Lanka. Buddhist nationalists have recently renewed their calls for laws against “forced” conversions, which if passed may be used to prohibit legitimate forms of Christian evangelism. In September 2011 the Ministry of Religious Affairs declared

that its approval was required for building or maintaining places of worship. Some churches have had their applications to register with the state routinely rejected, and Christian individuals and organizations have had planning permission refused even for non-church buildings. Pray that the Christians will stand firm in their faith in the face of these restrictions, and that they may have the same freedoms as other citizens of Sri Lanka.

**Thursday 29** Pray for the new and fragile nation of South Sudan as it faces continuing unrest and insecurity. In 2011 the mainly Christian country celebrated its independence from the predominantly Muslim North, whose attempts to Islamize and Arabize it had provoked a long and devastating civil war. But since then the (North) Sudanese military has attacked disputed border regions, damaging churches and torturing pastors; and around 100,000 people have been displaced by tribal violence and bloodshed within the South. Pray for the Christians of South Sudan who long to rebuild their shattered country in peace, and that the new government will succeed in bringing order and stability throughout its territory.

**Friday 30** Many Christians have been killed in the anti-government unrest in Syria, at the hands of both rebels and government forces. In one tragic incident a young Christian boy was killed by the rebels, who filmed the murder, while another Christian was seized and asked how he wanted to die. Many Christians have fled from one city where the violence has brought normal life to a halt, and they are now struggling to feed their families. Others are afraid to leave their homes to go to work. Barnabas Aid has sent aid to Christians in desperate need of humanitarian assistance. Pray that the Lord will meet their needs and keep them safe in the midst of political turmoil.

**Saturday 31** "I believed in Jesus two years ago and after that my wife came to Jesus too. We are from a very difficult region for sharing the Gospel. This seminar encouraged us in our ministry and helped us to be strong in faith. I had many questions when I read the Bible and I have received answers to my questions." This



"Salman" and his wife attended a church leaders' seminar supported by Barnabas Aid in Tajikistan

testimony comes from "Salman", one of 40 church leaders in Tajikistan who attended a three-day study programme supported by Barnabas Aid. All of the leaders are converts from Islam. Pray for them as they seek to proclaim Christ and build up their churches in the face of tight government controls and hostility from Muslims.

## April

**Sunday 1** **Elderly members of a church in China were beaten to the ground when they tried to stop the destruction of their building. Developers had won government approval to demolish the church in Tai'an, Shandong province, even though the congregation belongs to one of the denominations approved by the authorities. Even the status of the buildings as protected,**

**national, historical landmarks has been insufficient to save them from ruin. The unregistered "house churches" of China face the severest persecution from the government, but this incident demonstrates that even the rights of the official churches can be wantonly disregarded. Pray that God will comfort and strengthen the congregation in their distress; in their appeal to the government they said, "[We] have full confidence in the God whom we believe and in his words".**

**Monday 2** An unofficial "committee for the promotion of virtue and the prevention of vice" has been launched in Tunisia. The new organization is not recognized by the government, but no action has been taken to stop its activities. Its members have taken upon themselves to see that Islamic virtues are upheld in public life: they are aggressive towards women who do not abide by their dress code, and they are trying to impose imams with Islamist views on mosques and Quranic schools. Since the Islamist Ennahda party won the largest vote in the elections in October 2011, concerns have been raised that the country will move in an increasingly Islamist direction. Pray that this will not happen, and that the small Christian community in Tunisia will not come under even greater pressure.

**Tuesday 3** In December 2011 a Turkish newspaper reported a large-scale plot by al-Qaeda to bomb churches in the capital, Ankara, as well as other targets. It said that an official indictment had been issued against at least eleven alleged militants, which outlined their strategy to bring jihad to Turkey. Their materials reportedly included lists of the names and home addresses of church leaders and other Christian

workers. Although Christians in Turkey have suffered only occasional incidents of violence in recent years, six have been killed, and the authorities have made several mass arrests of suspected al-Qaeda members and sympathizers. Pray that God will be the refuge and strength of His people in Turkey and will protect them from harm (Psalm 46:1).

**Wednesday 4** Christians in Turkmenistan live out their faith under the watchful and hostile eye of a repressive state. Converts from Islam among the ethnic Turkmen people try to stay out of sight, as the authorities sometimes break up their church meetings by violence, subject them to beatings or confiscate their Christian literature. Even Russian-speaking Christians (not converts from Islam) find their activities regulated; the security services closed a summer camp for children and told the Christians that they have informers in their church. Pray that our brothers and sisters in Turkmenistan will be given relief from the harsh restrictions that they face, and that the government will allow them to practice their faith without harassment.

**Thursday 5** Uzbekistan has the worst record of human rights abuses against Christians and other religious minorities of all the nations of Central Asia. Among the many restrictions faced by the churches, the printing, storage and distribution of religious literature can lead to prosecution. Church leaders have been charged with this "offense", and recently a young girl was given a large fine just for reading a Gospel to herself on a bus. Some Christians are bringing their literature to the churches in case the police search their homes and find it. Pray for protection for them, and ask that despite the arrests and harsh penalties the Gospel will continue to bear fruit and grow in Uzbekistan (Colossians 1:6).

**Friday 6** Pray for the two sons and wider family of Christian couple Adnan Elia Jakmakji (34) and Raghad al Tawil (25), who were shot dead in Mosul, northern Iraq, on December 13. The couple's sons were with them in the car when the family was ambushed by an armed group. The boys were wounded as the gunmen sprayed the vehicle with bullets, but survived the attack. Pray that they will recover physically, emotionally and psychologically from this traumatic experience and will grow up knowing that the Lord is "a father to the fatherless" (Psalm 68:5) who provides for all their needs.

**Saturday 7** A pastor in Vietnam was beaten unconscious and twelve people injured when a gang violently attacked an unregistered house church in the capital, Hanoi. The pastor was left with severe chest, stomach and head pain, and the gang threatened to kill him if he continued to organize house church meetings. One of the women was unable to walk afterwards, owing to her injuries. The raid followed two gang attacks on a house church in Quang Nam province that belongs to a registered denomination. It is thought that the Vietnamese authorities sometimes employ gangs to carry out attacks on churches; those responsible are rarely prosecuted. Pray for our brothers and sisters in Vietnam as they face such hostility, that they will find God to be their "refuge, a strong tower against the foe" (Psalm 61:3).

**Sunday 8** **As we celebrate the resurrection of the Lord Jesus on this Easter Day, let us give thanks to God for how He brings life out of death and joy out of suffering. Nagina Gullam, a Christian child in Pakistan, was raped by a Muslim gang in 1997 when she was only seven years old.**

**With the help of a Christian legal aid agency, she was given hospital treatment after her ordeal and also help to relocate. Since then she has been living at a refuge for Christian girls, which was built by Barnabas Aid; we continue to assist with its running costs. She has received an education and learned sewing skills, and in January 2012 she got married to a Christian man of her choice. Pray that the Lord will continue to bless Nagina richly, and give thanks for His wonderful love to her and all His children (Romans 8:38-39).**

**Monday 9** In August 2011 an inspection team from the Beijing Culture Bureau in China swooped on a bookshop in the city and confiscated 40 copies of a Christian film. The shop was fined around US\$618 for selling "illegal" goods. Then in November a leading representative of the company that produced and distributed the film was seized from her home by agents of the Domestic Security Department, and the company itself was raided and the products confiscated. The film is the work of a Chinese Christian filmmaker, now based in the US, and tells the inspirational stories of Chinese people whose lives were transformed when they found Christ.



Jiang Yaxi was detained in China for producing and distributing a Christian film. (Source: [www.chinaaid.org](http://www.chinaaid.org))

Pray that the Chinese authorities will relax their tight control over Christian activities, and that the Gospel will be proclaimed without hindrance.

**Tuesday 10** Pray for Gao Zhisheng, a Chinese Christian lawyer who has been sentenced to a further three years in jail. Gao was given a five-year probationary sentence for subversion in 2006 after he took on a series of cases in which he defended China's unregistered churches ("house churches"). After his conviction he disappeared several times and was detained and tortured. He was last seen in April 2010, and his family feared that he had been killed by the authorities. He is now imprisoned in a remote region of far western China. Pray that the Lord will be his strength during his ordeal and that he will soon be released.

**Wednesday 11** Christmas 2011 brought renewed harassment for China's beleaguered churches. An unofficial Christmas Day service staged in a public square in Langzhong city, China, was broken up by around 20-30 police officers who fired tear gas at worshippers and detained three of them. In Beijing more than 30 members of Shouwang Church, which has been staging outdoor services since April, were arrested for taking part in a public Christmas gathering. And a meeting of around 50 members of various unregistered churches in Dongyang to plan their Christmas gathering was raided and the pastor and his son were beaten. Pray that Chinese Christians will stand firm in their faith in the face of this unrelenting pressure, and ask that the authorities will look more favorably on them.

**Thursday 12** "From the moment we got out of the prison gates we never felt safe, actually quite the opposite. We feared attack by Islamic vigilantes and agents of the Islamic Regime. All venues of work and employment were closed to

us and we were constantly under surveillance; so we decided to leave the country for our own safety and seek refuge elsewhere." Arash Kermanjani (29) and his wife Arezo Teymouri (26), an Iranian Christian couple who were imprisoned for eight months without charge, were attacked on their release on April 30, 2011. At the time of writing, they were awaiting relocation by the United Nations refugee agency, UNHCR. Pray for them as they attempt to rebuild their lives.

**Friday 13** Please pray for the "Proclaim Freedom" campaign that Barnabas Aid has launched, which seeks to raise the profile of the persecuted Church around the world. It will encourage Western governments to promote human rights in other countries for all minorities, but especially to press for religious freedom for the approximately 200 million Christians living in the shadow of persecution, discrimination and poverty. It will also ask governments to call for those who incite hatred or engage in anti-Christian violence to be held accountable. Pray that it may bring the plight of Christ's suffering family to the attention of those in authority, and that determined action will be taken to relieve their distress.

**Saturday 14** Over 300 religious groups – including several Christian denominations – have lost official recognition in Hungary under the country's controversial new constitution. The code, which came into effect on January 1, introduces a new law on religion that had been deemed unconstitutional by the country's Constitutional Court. It grants state recognition to 14 religious groups and decertifies the rest. Those that have lost their official status include Episcopalians, Methodists and all but one of the evangelical churches, as well as many small Roman Catholic orders. Pray that the activities of these groups will not be impaired and that the Hungarian government will re-think this law.

**Sunday 15** **The progress of Islamization continues in Australia, according to a local human rights group. It reports that one university has Muslim-only toilets, while a Western Australia hospital is facing demands for Muslim-only prayer rooms on the grounds that a shared room might involve Muslims in idolatry. Some state schools are recommending that swimming lessons for the Muslim students should be female-only, or even Muslim-only, and some serve only *halal* food in their cafeterias. Demands and concessions such as these are also being made in other Western countries. Pray that governments and others in authority will have wisdom to prevent the development of a separate Islamic society in the West, or the imposing of Muslim values and practices on Christians and others.**

**Monday 16** Pray for "Debbie", a convert from Islam from a Muslim-majority country. After she became a Christian while studying in the UK, she was disowned by her family and Muslim friends, and she was even kidnapped and threatened with death if she did not return to her home country as a Muslim. Later she married, and she and her husband served the Lord and preached the Gospel in their home country for eight years and started a number of churches, but they were eventually forced to flee to the West. Praise God



**"Debbie", a Christian convert from Islam**

for converts such as Debbie who endure the loss of family or are driven from their homelands by persecution, and pray for them as they continue their lives and ministries elsewhere.

**Tuesday 17** “Our Savior God has protected us and now he has sent people with food.” Pastor Roghu Nath Sarker ministers to 50 Christian families in a large village in Bangladesh that was under water for a month during disastrous floods in 2011. They were among 935 families who received emergency relief from Barnabas Aid. Pastor Sarker said, “We believe that the Lord himself has sent this relief through Barnabas Aid, even though we do not know them and they are far away from Bangladesh.” Give thanks for the generosity of our supporters that allowed us to help our suffering brothers and sisters, and pray for all the Christians affected by the floods in Bangladesh, that they will be able to rebuild their lives and communities.

**Wednesday 18** An Indian pastor was arrested and his church raided after a sharia court called him to account for baptizing converts from Islam. The Rev. Chander Mani Khanna was called before the court in Kashmir on November 8 to explain alleged “forced conversions” of young Muslims, after a video of baptisms appeared on *YouTube*. Muslims responded angrily to the footage, threatening to burn Mr. Khanna to death. He was arrested on charges of fomenting communal strife, later being released on bail. India has a secular constitution, and Christian leaders have said that the authorities should not allow a sharia court to enforce its laws on Christians. Pray for Mr. Khanna’s safety, and that the Indian government will uphold religious freedom for Christians.

**Thursday 19** Christian activist Rabindra Parichha was found murdered in the Kandhamal

district of Orissa State, India on December 16, 2011. In response, the President of the Global Council of Indian Christians, Sajan George, declared that the killing was “a strategic move by extremists to create a climate of fear among Christians”. Around the same time a Hindu group in Kandhamal called for strikes and protests to coincide with the Christmas period. A similar call in 2007 precipitated brutal anti-Christian violence, and Christians in Kandhamal have celebrated Christmas only in private since then. Give thanks to the Lord that these horrific scenes were not repeated in 2011, and pray for courage for Christians in Kandhamal in the face of intimidation by Hindu extremists.

**Friday 20** In November 2011 it was reported that the Pakistan Telecommunications Authority (PTA) had banned “Jesus Christ” from use in text messages, among a list of terms deemed “false, fabricated, indecent or obscene”. The PTA wrote to mobile phone companies ordering them to start blocking messages containing these words, and stated that free speech can be restricted “in the interest of the glory of Islam”. This was the latest insult to Pakistani Christians, who suffer severe discrimination because of their faith. Give thanks that the blocking was deferred in the face of widespread derision, and that a spokesman for the PTA suggested that “Jesus Christ” would not be included in the final list. Pray that the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in Pakistan (2 Thessalonians 1:12).

**Saturday 21** A Christian leader in Pakistan, married with five children, was gunned down in Karachi on November 16, 2011 in a suspected Islamist attack. Jameel Sawan spent much time pastoring Christians and sharing the Gospel with Muslims, and he was also a close aide to the chairman of the Standing Committee of Minorities Affairs in the provincial assembly.

He had previously received death threats from Muslim extremists because of his championing of minority rights. Please pray for his family in their tragic loss, and pray for protection for Christians and others who campaign for equality and human rights in Pakistan.

**Sunday 22 Following the Christmas Day attacks (see March 21), Boko Haram issued an ultimatum on New Year's Day, giving Christians three days to leave Northern Nigeria. Given the group's track record of violence, the threat raised the prospect of religious cleansing and possibly even civil war. Nigeria is deeply divided along religious lines with a predominantly Muslim North, a mainly Christian South and a mixed Middle Belt. Boko Haram is fighting to create an Islamic state and impose sharia law across the whole country; its bloody and violent campaign, which targets Christians, Muslim critics, members of the security services and politicians, claimed more than 500 lives in 2011. Pray that peace will be established in Nigeria and that the authorities will be able to restrain Boko Haram's destabilising activities.**

**Monday 23** "I was leading the congregation in prayers. Our eyes were closed when some gunmen stormed the church and opened fire on the congregation." Nigerian pastor Johnson Jauro described the horrifying scene as his flock came under attack during a prayer meeting on January 5. His wife was one of at least eight Christians who were killed at the church in Gombe. The following day, around 20 Christians were gunned down in Mubi, Adamawa state, as they gathered

to mourn the death of another Christian who had been killed the night before. The attacks came shortly after the expiry of Boko Haram's three-day ultimatum for Christians to leave Northern Nigeria. Further anti-Christian attacks followed. Pray for Pastor Johnson and others affected by the violence.

**Tuesday 24** Please continue to pray for Christians caught up in famine and lawlessness in East Africa. One of our project partners prepared some Christmas celebrations for Christians in one of the refugee camps, but while these were going on, a grenade was detonated inside the perimeter. Only the day before a land-mine had also exploded, killing two people. Following these incidents another relief agency withdrew its staff from the camp, but with funding from Barnabas our partners have continued to provide food for Christian families in desperate need. Give thanks for their courage and dedication, and pray that the refugees may soon be able to return home and escape from the violence.



Some of the children in the refugee camp in East Africa where a Barnabas partner distributes food

**Wednesday 25** Give thanks to the Lord that on December 9, 2011 the House of Lords in the UK held an almost five-hour debate on the plight of Christians in the Middle East in light of the "Arab

Spring". The Archbishop of Canterbury warned that their position was "more vulnerable than it has been for centuries", and that the eventual outcome of recent political changes could be their emigration or retreat into ghettos. Lord Patten added, "We are facing religious cleansing in parts of the Middle East." Lord Howell, a Foreign Office minister, said that the UK government would do all it could to help new regimes to preserve Christians' rights. Pray that political leaders will follow through on this promise and extend effective protection to Christians facing persecution.

**Thursday 26** Please continue to pray for GKI Yasmin Church in Indonesia as the mayor of Bogor deploys further strategies to prevent the congregation from meeting at its site in the city. On November 13, 2011 he carried out his threat to block all access roads to the church building, forcing the congregation to meet in one of the member's homes. The congregation had been holding services on the street in front of its half-constructed building since the site was illegally sealed off by city chiefs in 2008. Mayor Diani Budiarto has refused to comply with a Supreme Court order issued in December 2010 that the church be reopened. Pray that he will relent and stop his campaign against this long-suffering church.

**Friday 27** In addition to the pressure from the mayor, GKI Church (see April 26) has been facing continual harassment from militant Islamists. At the end of November, members of hard-line groups staged two protests against the church. Meanwhile a video on one of the Islamist organizations' websites showed the group's leaders telling the public that GKI did not have a building permit, and that Christianization would follow if they allowed the church to be built in the area. A bumper sticker on a church member's car that said, "We need a friendly Islam, not an

angry Islam" provoked another Muslim onslaught that forced the congregation's New Year's Eve gathering to disband. Pray that GKI will not lose heart in the face of this unrelenting opposition.

**Saturday 28** "The troubles will escalate. There is no real future for us in Iraq", said a 26-year-old Christian who lives in Iraqi Kurdistan. US troops completed their withdrawal from Iraq on December 18 amid concerns that, in their absence, the country could descend into greater instability and violence. Since the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, scores of Christians have been killed and more than 50 churches bombed in anti-Christian attacks. Hundreds of thousands of Christians have fled their homes, either to the more stable north or to neighboring countries such as Syria and Jordan. Many Iraqi Christians and other minority groups fear that their precarious position in the country will now only deteriorate. Pray that the Lord will give Iraqi Christians peace and hope for the future.

**Sunday 29** **Just over a week after the arson attacks on Christian property in Iraqi Kurdistan (see March 10), Sermat Patros, a 29-year-old Christian man, was kidnapped from his family's home furnishings store in the autonomous region. He was held for three days, during which his captors demanded a \$500,000 ransom. Sermat, who was blindfolded and tied down during his ordeal, was rescued on December 15 to the great relief of his 21-year-old wife Amal and the local Christian community. Pray for Sermat and Amal as they recover from their ordeal, and pray that Christians in Kurdistan will be protected from attempts to harm them.**

**Monday 30** "Look at what happened to the Christians of Iraq after the war began there... A great number of them had no choice but to leave the country forever, and those who stayed remain marginalized to this day. Not to forget that many of them were persecuted and their churches bombed." This statement by a Syrian church leader expresses the concern of many Christians that the current political instability will

lead to a repeat of the events in Iraq after the US-led invasion of 2003. Many of the Iraqi Christian refugees fled to Syria, but if Syria itself were to collapse the Christians there might have nowhere to go. Pray that our sovereign God will overrule current events for good. "God reigns over the nations; God is seated on his holy throne" (Psalm 47:8).

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