

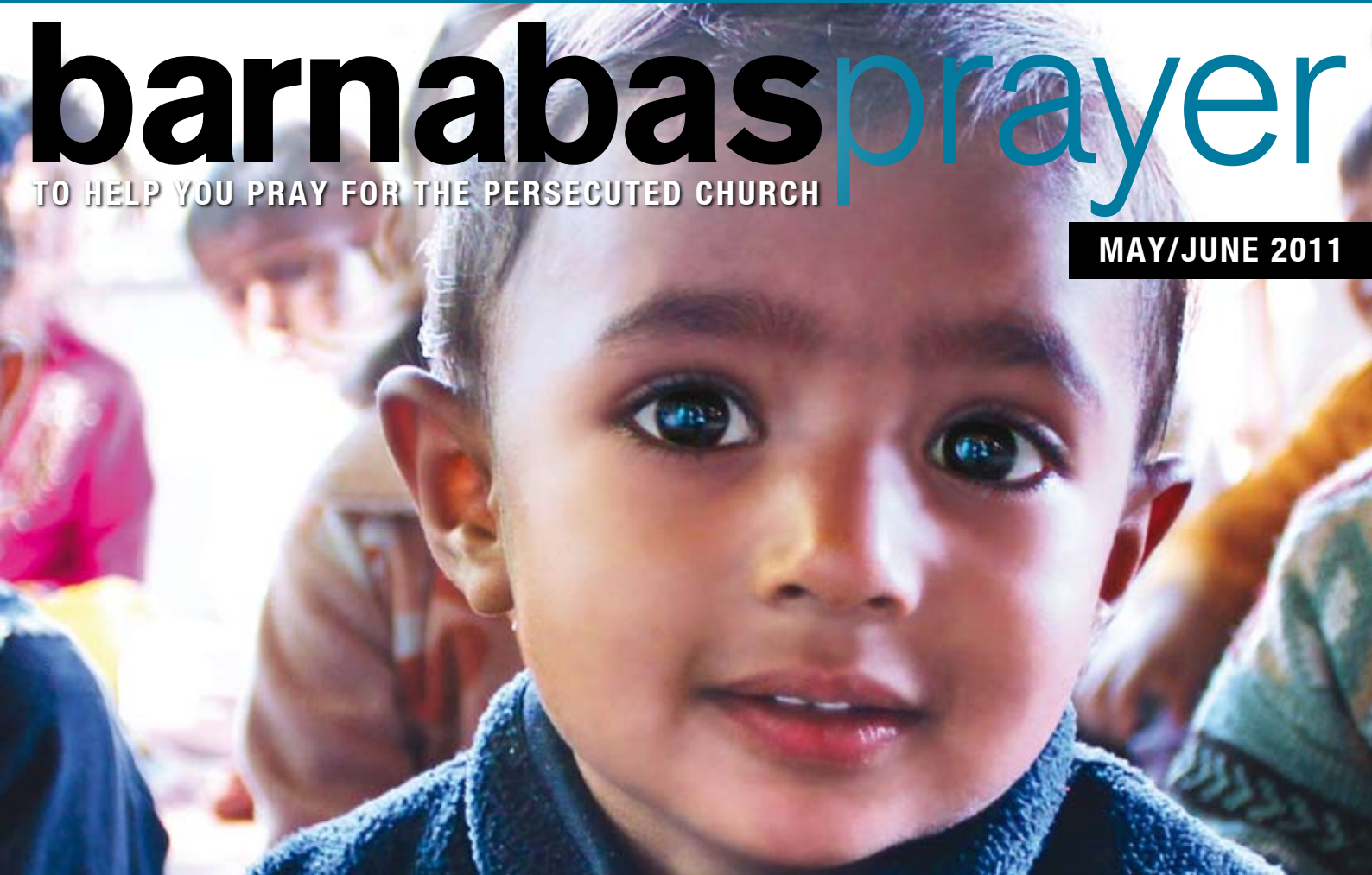
HOPE AND AID FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

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TO HELP YOU PRAY FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

MAY/JUNE 2011



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.

May

Sunday 1 Following the uprising that toppled President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, Christians came under a series of attacks by Islamists and the authorities. On 22 February, church leader Dawoud Botrous was found stabbed to death at his home near Assiut. That same week, Egyptian armed forces stormed ancient Christian centres, firing live ammunition at the Christians, wounding some, and demolishing fences they had erected to protect themselves. In Minya the province's governor ordered the demolition of a church-run welfare centre for disabled children and young people. Pray for peace and hope for Egypt's Christians as they face greater insecurity and a very uncertain future. Pray too for positive political change in Egypt.

Monday 2 As Egypt looks ahead to democratic elections following the overthrow of President Mubarak, the country's beleaguered Christian community are concerned for their future if the Muslim Brotherhood, an Islamist organisation, gains power. Many Egyptian Muslims support parts of the Brotherhood's agenda, and 95 per

cent say it is good that Islam plays a large role in politics. An Islamist regime would be dangerous for Christians, who are already the target of violent attacks as well as being treated as second-class citizens in the Muslim-majority country. Pray that the Muslim Brotherhood will not gain a political foothold in Egypt and that the new government will improve the status of Christians.

Tuesday 3 Violent clashes broke out in Cairo on 8 March when a Muslim mob attacked Christians who were protesting against the burning down of a church by Islamists; 13 people were killed and 140 wounded. Thousands of Christians had taken to the streets of the capital after the destruction of the church and attacks on Christian homes by nearly 4,000 Muslims in the village of Soul on 5 March. This was an act of "collective retribution" by the Muslims, who were seeking revenge against all the Christians in the village because of a personal dispute involving one Christian and a Muslim family. Tensions between Christians and Muslims in Egypt appear to be getting worse following the recent revolution. Pray that the Lord will protect His people at this uncertain and unstable time.

Wednesday 4 Praise God that Afghan convert to Christianity Said Musa has been released from prison, where he was tortured and abused and faced execution for apostasy. He had been detained since his arrest last May. The father-of-six was set free towards the end of February following an international campaign involving Barnabas Fund. But another Afghan convert, Shoab Assadullah (23), remains in prison and has been threatened with the death penalty. He was arrested last

October for giving a New Testament in the national Dari language to another Afghan, who later reported him to the authorities. Pray that Said's release will lead to the same outcome for Shoaib and that the Lord will uphold Shoaib while he remains in prison.



Said Musa, who has been released from prison in Afghanistan

Thursday 5 Please pray for six Afghan converts from Islam to Christianity whose lives are at risk after they were refused refugee status by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) in India. If they are returned to Afghanistan, they face arrest and possible execution for apostasy under the country's sharia-based law. Barnabas Fund is supporting their appeal against the UNHCR's decision to close their applications. The Afghan authorities launched a crackdown on converts to Christianity last May after images of Christian baptisms were shown on national TV; 26 Christians were detained, while many more were forced to flee the country. Pray that the UNHCR will re-open the cases of these six brothers and sisters and then grant them refugee status, recognising the dangers faced by converts in Afghanistan.

Friday 6 Please pray for Joseph Francis, national director of the Centre for Legal Aid, Assistance and Settlement in Pakistan, who has received death threats for speaking out on behalf of persecuted Christians. Like the murdered minister Shahbaz Bhatti (see 5 June), he has spoken publicly about the misuse of the "blasphemy laws".

He has said, "Even though I am getting threats for my life, as a soldier of Christ I am willing to stand up for the rights of those persecuted and pressed down by these unjust laws, even if the ultimate goal demands my blood too." Thank the Lord for the courage and commitment of Mr Francis, and pray for his safety.

Saturday 7 A 24-year-old Christian man was allegedly killed by his Muslim employers in Gujranwala district, Punjab Province, Pakistan, on 6 February. The incident prompted hundreds of local Christians to take to the streets in protest after police refused his father's request to register the case. The young man is said to have been tortured and killed by his Muslim employers after returning to work from a day's sickness absence. The man's father was told that he had committed suicide. Following the protest, which blocked traffic for several hours, the police did register a murder case against three Muslim men. Pakistani Christians are often denied justice, especially if the accused is a Muslim. Please pray that justice will be done and seen to be done in this case, and for the man's family in their bereavement.

Sunday 8 A devastating trio of disasters left the highly developed country of Japan struggling to cope with the after-effects of a massive 9.0-magnitude earthquake on 11 March, and a subsequent tsunami and nuclear crisis. Thousands of people are dead or missing and hundreds of thousands were left homeless. Christian congregations in the affected area suffered the loss of pastors and church members, and church buildings have been destroyed. Pray that all those who lost loved ones will be comforted in their grief. Pray that the Christians can

stand firm in their faith in Christ and be distinctively Christ-like in the way they help and care for the suffering, that they will be salt and light in this situation.

Monday 9 Christians in Turkish-occupied northern Cyprus suffer serious intimidation at the hands of the authorities. Since the Turkish invasion of 1974 their numbers have drastically declined as thousands of Greek Cypriots have fled from the north. Hundreds of churches have been looted and many turned into mosques or put to secular use. Numerous items of church property have been stolen and sold. More than 99% of the population of the north are Muslims. Pray for the small Christian community, that the Lord will give them strength and patience in the face of harassment and injustice.

Tuesday 10 In the end-of-year report for 2010 from the European Court of Human Rights, Turkey was said to be the worst violator among all the signatories of the European Convention. The report showed that the country was weakest regarding the right to a fair trial and in ensuring that legal proceedings were completed in a reasonable time. For two Christians who were charged in 2006 with “insulting Turkishness” and defamation of Islam, it took four years to be acquitted of the charges. The climate in Turkey is also becoming more anti-Christian, with more reports of Christians being attacked: in one recent incident a young convert from Islam had his hand badly damaged by his own father with a knife. Pray for our brothers and sisters in these difficult conditions, that they will have grace to stand for the Lord, and that the government and Muslim majority will stop seeing them as a threat.

Wednesday 11 At least four people in a predominantly Christian village near Jos, Nigeria, were reported killed after a pre-dawn attack by young Muslims on 28 February. The dead included a mother and her children, who had been shot. Several more were also reported wounded in the village of Dabwak, located near Jos, which is the capital of Plateau state. The attack was the latest in an area that has seen over 200 deaths since December. Pray for the Christians of Jos, who are being targeted because of their faith, that the Lord will rescue them from evildoers and protect them from the violent (Psalm 140:4).

Thursday 12 Thousands of Christian women dressed in black brought the city of Jos, Nigeria, to a standstill on 1 February as they marched through the streets to protest against the ongoing violence in Plateau State. The march took place after a series of attacks on Christian villages. In one such incident, on 27 January, five people died after a group of Muslims attacked six villages overnight. Pray for all those who mourn the loss of family and friends in the recent attacks (including the one on 28 February, see 11 May), that they will know the Lord’s comfort in their grief. Give thanks for the courage of the women; pray that their protest will have an effect on the local government and that the authorities will work to restore peace and order to this troubled land.

Friday 13 In a referendum in January the mainly Christian South Sudan voted overwhelmingly in favour of independence from the largely Muslim North. But President Omar Bashir has said that

he will respond to the new country's creation by modifying the constitution of the North to make sharia the only law of the land and Arabic the only language. Pray for the Christians in the North, whose freedom and safety will be threatened by its increased Islamisation. Pray too that Christians in the South will now be able to rebuild their shattered land after the decades of civil war, and that the new country will enjoy peace, good government and religious liberty.

Saturday 14

“The rearing of these animals is going to transform the lives of each and every pastor.”

This is what one of 40 Sierra Leonean pastors said when they each received a flock of 40 goats or sheep and also

seeds and tools for raising various crops. They were also trained in crop cultivation and animal rearing. Give thanks that these new sources of food and income are giving the pastors the means to continue living in Muslim-dominated rural areas, and pray that the pastors will receive wisdom and discernment as they minister to their congregations and reach out to their Muslim neighbours with the Gospel message of hope and salvation.



These pastors in Sierra Leone received training and animals from Barnabas

Sunday 15 Give thanks that a Vietnamese church leader, aged 64, has been released from prison on medical grounds. Nguyen Van Ly has already spent more than 15 years in prison, including time in solitary confinement, for defending religious freedom and human rights. He was serving his latest sentence of eight years in jail, to be followed by five under house arrest, when he suffered two serious strokes that left him paralysed. After a temporary release for medical treatment he was threatened with a return to prison, but in March he was handed over to the care of fellow Christians. Praise the Lord for his lifetime of brave service, and pray that the authorities may now leave him unmolested.

Monday 16 Christian families who were previously driven from their Laos village at gunpoint for refusing to give up their faith are facing starvation after local authorities destroyed their crops and blocked food from reaching the group. The 18 families – around 65 people – have been living in a temporary camp outside Katin village, Ta-Oyl district, Saravan province, since they were forced out in two separate incidents last year. They have lacked adequate shelter, food and water since their expulsion, but their state is now even more desperate: families from surrounding villages have been instructed not to help or provide food for the group, and an area that was being farmed around the camp has been destroyed. Please pray that the Lord will provide for their needs and that the authorities will stop persecuting them.

Tuesday 17 As Sunemia, a Christian girl in Orissa State, India, was returning home after attending classes in a nearby town, she was stopped and kidnapped by two young men with the help of local Hindu extremists. Her father, who is a pastor, immediately went to the police station and filed a missing person complaint. The following day, the pastor heard from local villagers that the young men had taken her to a temple of the Hindu goddess Kali and one of them had forcibly married her there. He then took her away, and her present whereabouts are unknown. Please pray for Sunemia, that she will receive strength from God to endure this ordeal and be able to return to her family.

Wednesday 18 The early months of 2011 saw revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, a violent rebellion in Libya, and smaller-scale unrest elsewhere in North Africa and the Middle East. But although many hope that these events will bring positive change, there is no sign that political leaders in any of the countries affected are prepared to grant religious freedom to Christians. Islamist groups are also well placed to influence unfolding events in their favour: they are well funded and organised, and aim to play a leading role in government. Pray for the future of the churches in these countries, that the Lord of all the nations will enable them not merely to survive but even to grow. “But God will never forget the needy; the hope of the afflicted will never perish” (Psalm 9:18).

Thursday 19 In January the militant Islamist group Hizbollah mounted a political coup in Lebanon, installing its own candidate as prime

minister against the wishes of the Sunni Muslim majority. Lebanese Christians were also divided between those who supported the new prime minister and those who favoured his predecessor. Angry protests against the new appointment raised fears that the country might be plunged back into civil war, with Christians lining up against each other. Pray that their unity in Christ will prove stronger than any political differences. The success of Hizbollah points to the growing influence of Islamism in the region; pray that this will be reversed.

Friday 20 The Gulf States have sizeable expatriate churches, and these are mostly allowed to practise their faith quite freely. But sharing the Gospel with Muslims is not allowed, and the indigenous Christian communities are very small and have to operate mostly in secret. Bahrain gives greater freedom to Christians than most of the other states, but there have been serious anti-government protests in the country this year, which the security forces are trying to put down. Pray for the safety of our brothers and sisters at this time of instability and uncertainty, and that they will not be subjected to greater restrictions as a result.

Saturday 21 At the time of writing Libya is mired in an armed struggle between the country’s long-time dictator, Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, and those who want to overthrow him. The violence and political instability further threatens the very small and vulnerable Libyan church. While the expatriate community has been free to worship largely without harassment under Gaddafi, evangelism among Muslims is forbidden, and the few converts

from Islam usually suffer intense pressure from their families and communities. Pray for their safety in this dangerous time. Pray too that Islamist groups will not exploit the chaos to seize power, and that the outcome will benefit the country's Christians.

Sunday 22 Pray for Christians in Tunisia, where a revolution in January brought down the authoritarian President Ben Ali and introduced a period of social and political uncertainty. Under the old regime the country was one of the most secular of Muslim states, but already its Islamists are emerging as a powerful force. Thousands of people thronged Tunis airport to greet the returning Islamist leader, Rachid Ghannouchi. There are only a few hundred indigenous Christians in Tunisia, many of them isolated or secret believers, and they will be very vulnerable under a more Islamic regime. Pray for their protection, and that the current changes will bring them greater freedom and security.

Monday 23 Hundreds of thousands of Sri Lankans were forced to leave their homes when extensive flooding swamped parts of the country in January. They had no sooner returned when a fresh deluge hit in



Christians in Sri Lanka find shelter after the recent terrible flooding

early February. Thousands of Christian families were affected by the double crisis, and Barnabas Fund sent immediate funds for food and other relief needs. The floods destroyed vital rice and vegetable crops, as well as the mud houses in which many families live. Please pray that all those affected by this disaster will receive the help and resources they need to rebuild their lives. Pray especially for the Christians, who are also having to contend with increasing discrimination, harassment and violence.

Tuesday 24 A church in Norachcholai, in the Puttalam District of Sri Lanka, was being rebuilt after having been burned down for a third time. The congregation had obtained permission for the work from the local authorities and the Ministry of Religious Affairs, but on 18 January a mob arrived at the church shouting threats and demanding that construction be stopped. A government agent then instructed the pastor to stop the work at once. Pray for the church, that it may be able to reconstruct its building and to worship the Lord there in peace. Christian buildings are among the main targets of Buddhist extremists in Sri Lanka.

Wednesday 25 Our brothers and sisters in India are in danger from an extreme form of Hindu nationalism known as Hindutva. This movement wants to make India a religiously “pure” Hindu nation and is very hostile to non-Hindu religions, especially Christianity. Through its political party, the BJP, it now holds or shares power in ten states, and it also wields great influence in the police and the legal system, where it promotes discrimination against Christians and

others. Violent attacks on individuals and churches are widespread, and whole Christian communities have sometimes been targeted. Give thanks for the boldness of Indian Christians in sharing their faith despite these threats to their safety, and pray for protection for them.

Thursday 26 Christians in India suffer various forms of discrimination. The majority are Dalits, whose status in society is so low that they are outside the Hindu caste system altogether, and many of them are very poor and do menial jobs. Corruption is rife: Christian candidates for the police force may pass the entrance examinations but then be denied places because they refuse to pay a bribe, and it is hard for Christians to obtain justice in the courts. Many offences against Christians are not investigated, and all too often no-one is prosecuted or convicted. Pray for the Indian authorities, that they will work to ensure equal rights for all the minorities. Pray too that the Christians may bear up under the pain of unjust suffering (1 Peter 2:19).

Friday 27 “I hate the Parliament in Canberra. I want to go straight for the jugular vein and advise the parliament that they have no right to legislate. They should immediately step down and let the Muslims take over.” These are the words of Ibrahim Siddiq-Conlon, an Australian convert to Islam and leader of a group called “Sharia4Australia”, which is pressing for the introduction of sharia courts as a first step towards imposing Islamic law on Australia. He predicts a “struggle for Islam” and says it is inevitable that the country will one day live under sharia. Pray for the Australian government and others in the West, that they will have wisdom and courage to reject the demands of militant Islamists.

Saturday 28 Many Muslims in the West are pressing for aspects of sharia law to be taken into national law, and some Islamist groups would like it to become the law of the land. In Britain it has already found a place in the legal system, the public sector, and the food and finance industries. Earlier this year a radical cleric based in the UK was planning a rally in Washington calling for Muslims to rise up and establish the Islamic state in America. Pray for the authorities in Western states to be alert to the creeping Islamisation of society and to resist demands for the imposition of sharia on non-Muslims.

Sunday 29 In 2010, Barnabas Fund supported 342 projects to provide physical aid and spiritual nourishment for thousands of Christians in 62 countries. Praise the Lord for all that we were able to achieve under God’s mighty hand last year, and give thanks for those who give so generously to support our work. Pray that supporters will continue to uphold our ministry in prayer and through donations so that we can continue to provide hope and aid to our Christian brothers and sisters living in contexts of discrimination and persecution.

Monday 30 Many Christian congregations in the Muslim world face serious restrictions on their use of church buildings, and some see their property destroyed. This can be a problem even in supposedly moderate Muslim countries. Recently the Kuwaiti government declined a request to build a church, without giving an explanation, and at Christmas 2010 an Indonesian church was forced to worship in a parking lot for lack of a building, at the same time as Muslims

were burning down two others. In Egypt, which is notorious for its obstruction of Christian building projects, the security forces stormed a partly constructed church and stopped the work. Pray that the authorities will allow Christians to have adequate places to meet for worship and ministry.



Security forces surround a partly built church in Egypt

Tuesday 31 Pray for Christians in Central Asia, who continue to endure many restrictions on their freedom. Churches face complex registration procedures and increased scrutiny; unregistered churches are liable to be raided and their members arrested. Ministers are called to account by the police and the courts for performing simple tasks such as praying for the sick. In some places the printing and importing of Christian literature is prohibited. Pray for the churches as they seek to worship and witness in this oppressive environment. Give thanks that despite their difficulties many Christians are courageously sharing the Gospel, and pray that they may see much fruit from their labours.

June

Wednesday 1 The family, friends and supporters of David (Dmitri) Shestakov, a pastor in Uzbekistan, were greatly relieved when he was released from prison on 21 January after serving a four-year term for his Christian activities. But soon after his release he was placed under “administrative supervision”, which severely restricts his freedom. It includes a curfew and a ban on visiting certain public places; he cannot leave his home city of Andijan without prior police permission, and must report to the regional police at least three times a month. Local Christians say that this is being done “to crush Shestakov and his church”. Please pray that the Lord will encourage David and his congregation, and help them to face this latest harassment with grace and fortitude.

Thursday 2 Three Christians in Tashkent, Uzbekistan were sentenced to 15 days in prison on 12 February for holding an illegal religious meeting. Ten other church members were fined 50 times the minimum monthly wage. Short-term prison sentences are a common punishment for Christians who conduct activities that the government dislikes, and even those churches that register with the authorities are not immune to arrest and conviction. Pray for the believers as they recover from their ordeal, and for greater religious freedom in Uzbekistan.

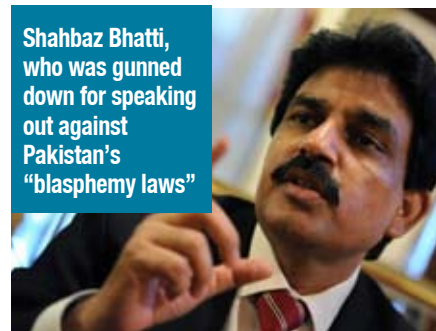
Friday 3 On 12 January 2010 the Bible Society of Uzbekistan was fined over the importing of nearly 15,000 copies of the Bible and told

to return them to Russia at their own cost. Ministry officials said, “There is no need to import Bibles into Uzbekistan since there’s an electronic version on the internet.” The hearing took place even though the Director was away and no one was able to represent the Christian organisation. Please pray that the costs associated with the sentence are not prohibitive. Pray that the authorities will cease harassing Christians in Uzbekistan so that they can worship and witness freely in Jesus’ Name.

Saturday 4 Pakistan’s “blasphemy laws” have been described as the “root cause of persecution against Christians and other religious minorities” in the country by a Christian legal organisation, supported by Barnabas Fund, that provides legal help for persecuted Christians in Pakistan. Under section 295-C of the Pakistan Penal Code, “defiling the name of Muhammad” has carried a mandatory death sentence since 1991. Christian mother-of-five Aasia Bibi is in prison awaiting execution, while attempts to free her and change the law have led to a hostile Muslim backlash. As a result, the government has repeatedly stated it has no plans to amend the law. Please pray that the government will do more to protect Pakistani Christians and have the courage to stand up to extremists.

Sunday 5 “I am ready to die and sacrifice my life for the principles I believe”. These bold words were spoken by Pakistani Minorities Minister Shahbaz Bhatti just two weeks before he was shot dead in his car on 2 March. He had previously received multiple death threats because of his opposition to the country’s “blasphemy

law” and support of Christian mother-of-five Aasia Bibi, who was sentenced to death under it. The Pakistani Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack and said that all those who speak out against the law would share Mr Bhatti’s fate. Thank God for his courageous life, and pray that his sacrifice will bring about a change in the law and prompt the government to take firmer action against violent extremism.



Monday 6 At a time when Pakistan’s Christians are facing a rising tide of violent extremism, a new film has been released about an Islamist assassin who achieves hero status through murder. The story-line is said to resemble the killing of Punjab Governor Salman Taseer, who was gunned down by one of his own bodyguards in January because of his opposition to Pakistan’s “blasphemy law”. The film’s tagline, “Punishment for Blasphemers: Decapitation”, echoes the statement of Taseer’s murderer, “Salman Taseer is a blasphemer and this is the punishment for a blasphemer.” The film’s expected commercial appeal in Pakistan points to the growing acceptability of murder in the name of Islam. Pray that it will not enflame passions and put Christians in even greater danger.

Tuesday 7 Please pray for imprisoned Christians in Iran. Scores, perhaps hundreds, have been arrested in the past year, and although many were released quickly, others remain in jail. The raids have targeted Christians in the unregistered “house churches”, who are mainly converts from Islam, and whom the authorities believe to be a threat to the Islamic state. The governor of the capital, Tehran, has described these Christians as “hard-line” missionaries who “have inserted themselves into Islam like a parasite”, and suggested that they are supported by the West. Ask the God who “breaks down gates of bronze and cuts through bars of iron” (Psalm 107:16) to deliver His people from their oppressors.

Wednesday 8 Praise the Lord for some rare good news from Iraq! The authorities in Erbil, in the north of the country, have said that they will donate two pieces of land for a Christian-run university and hospital. These institutions will provide job opportunities for the thousands of highly skilled Christians who have fled from anti-Christian violence in other parts of the country. A local church leader said that they were intended as “symbols of hope”. Pray that these exciting new ventures will help many displaced Iraqi Christians to rebuild their lives, and that the Lord will turn their darkness into light (Psalm 18:28).

Thursday 9 Youssif Isho, a 70-year-old Iraqi Christian, was added to the country’s ever-growing list of martyrs when he was killed by Islamists at his Baghdad home. A group of armed men stormed the house, where he lived alone, and stabbed the elderly man to death. Nothing was stolen from the property, indicating that this was a targeted killing rather than a robbery. The murder came at a time when Iraq,

like several Middle Eastern countries, was rocked by anti-government protests. Iraqi Christians, who are already extremely vulnerable to attack, fear that growing unrest could deepen the danger they face. Pray that the Lord will comfort and protect His suffering people in Iraq.

Friday 10 There has been little media coverage of the Iraqi refugee crisis in the Western world, and many in the West are unaware of how desperate their circumstances are. The majority of the Iraqi Christians who have fled from the violence in their homeland have gone to Syria, a country with a remarkable history of welcoming Christian refugees. But even though the Christians are grateful for their welcome, they are living in overcrowded conditions and are not allowed to work legally, and their savings are soon depleted. Barnabas is supporting them in their desperate need through feeding programmes, medical care and provision of other basic needs. Pray that the Iraqi refugees will be blessed by the food and care they receive through Barnabas and that they will experience God’s hand on their lives even during these times of hardship.

Saturday 11 There are growing concerns that laws against incitement to hatred and violence in many European states are limiting the freedom of Christians and others to criticise Islam. In the past year prominent public figures in Denmark, Austria and the Netherlands have been put on trial for their critical comments about Islam, charged with such offences as racism, hate speech and inciting religious hatred. In one case the defendant was convicted not because his statements were proved false, but only because some people were offended by them. In another, comments attributed

to the defendant turned out to be direct quotes from the Quran. Pray that European governments will defend the right to freedom of speech, and that the Lord will inspire His people to speak about Islam truthfully, boldly and wisely.

Sunday 12 Thank the Lord that EU foreign ministers have condemned violence against Christians and upheld the right for everyone to practise their religion and worship freely “without fear of intolerance and attacks.” The EU began a debate about religious violence after the Christmas and New Year period, which saw a string of attacks against Christians in the Middle East, Africa and Asia. At first they could not agree to specify Christians as victims of religiously-motivated violence, but eventually they decided to do so. Pray that the statement will not turn out to be mere empty words but that the EU will follow through on it with determined action on behalf of persecuted Christians throughout the world.

Monday 13 Islam is the fastest-growing religion in Europe, and the number of Muslims has tripled in the last 30 years. A powerful Muslim lobby has become skilled in pressurising European policy-makers into implementing pro-Islamic policies. For example, the European Union recently dropped a measure to require the labelling of meat from unstunned animals, including Islamic *halal* meat, under pressure from Muslims who believed that it discriminated against them. The absence of such labelling makes it harder for non-Muslims who do not want to eat *halal* food to avoid it. Pray that this policy will be reinstated, and that the leaders of the EU will have discernment and boldness to resist unreasonable demands from Muslim pressure groups.

Tuesday 14 An estimated 10,000 Christians fled their homes in western Ethiopia when Muslim extremists rampaged through Asendabo, Jimma Zone, on 2 March, torching at least 55 churches and dozens of homes. Three Christians died and many more were injured in the violence, which started when Muslims accused a Christian of desecrating a copy of the Quran. Pray for those who were bereaved

or injured in the attacks, that the Lord will comfort, heal and provide for them. Pray that the authorities will take swift and decisive action to re-establish peace and bring the offenders to justice. Barnabas sent aid to the victims.

Wednesday 15 Christians in Ethiopia have expressed concern about what appears to be a campaign to “clear Christianity from the land by (the) sword”. Many fear that the violence in Asendabo on 2 March (see 14 June) was part of this campaign to Islamise the Christian-majority nation and thus gain control of the entire Horn of Africa for Islam. Pray for our brothers and sisters in Ethiopia as they



Ethiopian Christians displaced by violence

face religious intolerance in their country. Pray that the increase in the influence of extremist Islamic ideologies will be stopped and that the Church will have strength and wisdom to counter growing Islamisation. Pray that the Christians will be able to show Christ's love to their Muslim neighbours.

Thursday 16 Continue to pray for the Christians of Eritrea. The recent political changes and instability in the Arab world have prompted a renewed crackdown by the authorities against groups that they see as a threat to their position – including the unregistered churches. A recent US embassy cable confirmed that torture and inhuman treatment of prisoners remain rampant in Eritrea's jails. Pray for the hundreds, perhaps thousands, of our Eritrean brothers and sisters who are now in prison for their faith, that their courage and endurance may be a powerful witness to their oppressors, and pray that they may soon be set free.

Friday 17 Christians are described as the main target of the worst religious extremism in Indonesia in decades, in a recent report by the World Evangelical Alliance Religious Liberty Commission's (WEA-RLC). It cites at least 75 incidents involving violations of religious freedom against the Christian community in 2010, and criticises Indonesian police, media and politicians for their inaction. Pray that the Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono will take heed of WEA-RLC's warning that "his non-confrontational approach towards the extremists is only disrupting peace instead of establishing it", and that his government will take action to prevent further attacks on Indonesian Christians.

Saturday 18 When Antonius Richmond Bawengan (58), a Christian in Indonesia, was convicted of blaspheming Islam on 8 February, many Muslims considered the sentence too lenient, and a large-scale Muslim riot broke out in protest. Antonius, who was found guilty of distributing books and leaflets that allegedly "spread hatred about Islam", was given a five-year jail term – the maximum sentence – but Islamic hardliners wanted him to receive the death penalty. The mob stormed the courthouse in Temanggung, Central Java, and the violence then spread to the surrounding neighbourhoods, where two churches were set ablaze and a third was damaged. Pray for Antonius as he begins his prison sentence and that this whole episode will highlight the urgent need for greater religious tolerance in Indonesia.

Sunday 19 A recent study from the Centre for Migration Studies at the University of Swansea has suggested that the number of converts to Islam in Britain may have risen to 100,000, an increase of around 40,000 in less than ten years. A significant number of converts are white women, and the average age of conversion is 27. A similar trend of conversion to Islam is noticeable in many Western states. Pray for the Church, that it may effectively counter this trend by proclaiming Christ and demonstrating His love and power, and pray for many Muslims and others to become Christians.

Monday 20 Islamic finance and banking have expanded dramatically in the last 20 years. Their growth has been driven by Islamist claims that Western financial products are inconsistent with sharia because they involve the charging of interest (even though

many Muslim scholars do not believe that this is wrong). The links between this “sharia finance” and radical Islamist groups has raised security concerns; recently leaked documents show that the last US administration feared that the Islamic banks could be used to channel funds to terrorists. Pray that the authorities will be alert to the dangers of Islamic finance and ensure that the sector is properly regulated.

Tuesday 21 A senior church leader has branded the UK’s foreign policy “anti-Christian”. Speaking in March, he specifically criticised plans to increase aid to Pakistan without any commitment on religious freedom for Christians. His call came as a church agency reported that 75% of religious persecution around the world was directed against Christians, affecting 100 million people. Pray that the British and other Western governments will take other countries’ treatment of Christians into account when allocating the aid budget and put pressure on them to provide greater freedom and protection.

Wednesday 22 In 2007 and 2008, over 90 Christians died when Christian villages in Orissa State were directly targeted. Hindu extremists set fire to thousands of buildings, including homes, churches and schools, leaving thousands of Christian families homeless. Some have been unable to return to their villages because their extremist Hindu neighbours make it clear that their lives will continue to be in danger unless they convert to Hinduism. Sporadic violence has continued since then, and in December

2010, the extremists attacked again, destroying homes, raiding church meetings and physically attacking Christians. Pray for all those who were targeted in the recent violence; pray that they will be able to forgive their attackers. Pray too that the Lord Jesus will change the hearts of the Hindu extremists and guide them to repentance and faith in Him.

Thursday 23 Thousands of Christians from Orissa State in India are still homeless and displaced after the targeted anti-Christian violence that took place in 2007-8. This is why Barnabas Fund is helping to build simple brick and concrete one-room houses for Christian families whose homes were destroyed. Pray that many families who have been homeless for nearly three years will soon have a solid roof over their heads.

Friday 24 Dalits form the lowest rung of Indian society and are usually given very few opportunities in daily life. Barnabas Fund is helping provide education in a Christian environment for 330 impoverished Christian Dalit children in three different locations throughout India. Seventeen-year-old Mili joined one of the educational programmes two years ago as a very average student. She received a uniform, textbooks, notebooks and pens, and thanks to the tuition and school feeding she made such remarkable progress that she now has hopes of being admitted to a law college nearby. Give thanks for the difference that Christian education is making in the life of Mili and many others, and pray that the love and acceptance they receive will inspire them to become all that God has created them to be.

Saturday 25 A Muslim imam in the Jamalpur district of Bangladesh read about Jesus in the Bible and learned that salvation was available through Him. His wife was very angry about his new faith in Jesus, and he is expecting persecution by local Muslims as a result of it. “I knew their religious stubbornness and blindness that will result to kill me or burn me,” he said. He has helped to distribute blankets supplied by Barnabas Fund to persecuted Christian converts in the area. Give thanks for his love for the Lord and His people, and pray for his protection and growth in faith.

Sunday 26 “After all we have gone through in the past months we can now see a beacon of light. We have hope that life will be back to normal again in one or two years from now.” These are the words of Younis, a 60-year-old Christian in Pakistan whose house was completely demolished by the flood last year. Barnabas has been supporting his family with monthly food packages, along with another 859 Christian families who were affected by the floods. At the moment the entire family is still living in a church hall, but soon



Younis, a Pakistani Christian whose house is being rebuilt with help from Barnabas

they will move into a new house, also built with funds from Barnabas. Give thanks that Younas’ family and many more are being enabled to restart their lives, and pray that God will bless them during this time of rebuilding.

Monday 27 On 24 January 36 people died in a suicide bomb attack at Moscow’s busiest airport. Responsibility was claimed by the leader of the militant Islamist insurgents in the North Caucasus. This major incident demonstrates the growing power of radical Islam in that volatile part of the country, a development that puts its Christian communities in grave danger. Already they suffer discrimination and persecution at the hands of the Muslim majority, and last year a pastor active in evangelism to Muslims was murdered. Pray that Islamists will not tighten their grip on the region, and that local Christians will not be intimidated by increasing violence.

Tuesday 28 The government of Tajikistan seems intent on restricting religious activity in the country, especially among its children. A new Religion Law passed in 2009, among its various repressive measures, restricted the teaching of religion to children. Now a new law on parental responsibility is being discussed, and the draft version contains an article forbidding parents from involving their own children (up to 18 years old) in any religious acts, even if the parents themselves are present. Pray that the authorities in Tajikistan will honour their country’s constitutional commitment to religious freedom, and that the country’s Christians will be able to pass on their faith to their children without fear of punishment.

Wednesday 29 Praise God for signs of spiritual awakening in Kyrgyzstan, where Christians face various restrictions on their worship and witness. A pastor who has been ministering in the country for four years told us that during the first three years he gave away only six items of Christian literature, of which four were returned. But since the fighting last year he has given away nearly 10,000 pieces of literature, none of which has been returned. There is also an enormous interest in Christian DVDs, especially the film *The Miracle Maker*. During the clashes that broke out between ethnic Krygыз and ethnic Uzbeks in the country last year the Christians showed love and care to both sides, even when they found themselves targeted as a result. Pray that many Krygыз Muslims will choose to dedicate their lives to the Lord Jesus.

Thursday 30 Barnabas Fund supports a Bible college in a Central Asian republic, which is committed to training and equipping new Christian leaders and encouraging their spiritual growth. The churches have seen a significant number of conversions from Islam, and good leaders are needed to help the new believers lay a strong foundation for their faith. The college also provides training for ministry among women and children. Last year the college had 63 students, including some from far-flung regions of the country. Praise God for its dedicated work, and pray that the students will become effective ministers of the Gospel in their challenging environment. Christians comprise only about five per cent of the population.



UK

9 Priory Row, Coventry CV1 5EX
Telephone 024 7623 1923
Fax 024 7683 4718

From outside the UK

Telephone +44 24 7623 1923
Fax +44 24 7683 4718
Email info@barnabasfund.org

Australia

Postal Suite 107, 236 Hyperdome
Loganholme QLD 4129
Telephone (07) 3806 1076 or
1300 365 799
Fax (07) 3806 4076
Email bfaustralia@barnabasfund.org

Jersey

Le Jardin, La Rue A Don, Grouville,
Jersey, Channel Islands JE3 9GB
Telephone 700600 **Fax** 700601
Email bfjersey@barnabasfund.org

New Zealand

PO Box 27 6018,
Manukau City, Auckland, 2241
Telephone (09) 280 4385 or 0800 008 805
Email office@barnabasfund.org.nz

USA

6731 Curran Street, McLean VA 22101
Telephone (703) 288-1681
or toll-free 1-866-936-2525
Fax (703) 288-1682
Email usa@barnabasaid.org

International Headquarters

The Old Rectory, River Street, Pewsey,
Wiltshire SN9 5DB, UK
Telephone 01672 564938
Fax 01672 565030

From outside the UK

Telephone +44 1672 564938
Fax +44 1672 565030
Email info@barnabasfund.org

www.barnabasfund.org

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Cover: A young boy sits with his classmates at a Christian school in Pakistan