



Egypt – Approval granted to 125 churches

Give thanks for continued answers to prayer in Egypt as the government licensed a further 125 churches and church-affiliated buildings in November 2022.

It is the 24th batch of approvals made since the government committee overseeing the licensing process started work in 2017. This decision follows the approval of 239 churches at the committee's previous meeting in April 2022 (see *Prayer Focus Update*, June 2022).

Since the Law for Building and Restoring Churches abolished Ottoman-era restrictions on church buildings in 2016, a total of 2,526 out of the 3,730 churches that applied for registration have now been granted licences.

Praise God that the government has continued the licensing process following the tragic death of 41 people, including as many as 18 children, in a church fire at Giza, near Cairo, in August 2022. The government committee has offered help and encouragement for churches to improve safety standards and facilities.

Christians are permitted to worship in unregistered buildings pending the completion of the licensing process.

Thank the Lord for the ongoing work of the licensing committee and the favour shown to Christians by the Egyptian government, and pray that this process will continue. Pray that churches that have received their licences will receive Divine guidance to use the opportunity wisely to build up the body of Christ in their localities (Ephesians 4:12).

food.gives – Aid on its way to needy Christian communities

We praise God that the work of Barnabas Aid's food.gives programme in distributing dried foodstuff and other

aid to needy Christian communities is continuing. At the time of writing the most recent to arrive is a container of dried food from the United States which has reached Romania, and will shortly be distributed to Christians in Ukraine.

Since its launch in June 2021 more than 1,200 tonnes of food and other aid has been distributed to Christians around the world via food.gives.

Give thanks for what has been achieved so far, and pray that the Lord will bless the work so that we can meet even more needs. Pray for the safe transport of a food.gives container that has just left the UK, on its way to Christian refugees from Syria, Iraq and Yemen in Jordan, as well as Jordanian believers. Pray that it arrives safe despite winter storms at sea. Two containers of food and mixed aid – one from New Zealand for Ukraine, the other an earlier container from the UK for Jordan – have arrived at their destination ports and are with customs officials. Pray that they will soon be released so that their contents can be distributed by our project partners to needy Christians.

Mozambique – Islamic State demands Christians pay *jizya* tax

Further concerns for the Christian community in Mozambique are raised by a demand by Islamic State Mozambique (ISM) terrorists for Christians and Jews to pay a *jizya* tax to signal their submission to an Islamic Caliphate in Cabo Delgado Province.

ISM pledges to kill all Christians and Jews unless they convert to Islam or pay the tax. The message also threatens with death moderate Muslims who do not support ISM's cause. These demands were also issued in IS's weekly newspaper, published on 10 November.

Classical Islam and sharia (Islamic law) teach that non-Muslim "People of the Book" – that is, Jews and Christians

– who do not convert to Islam are permitted to live so long as they accept a second-class *dhimmi* status. They must then abide by various restrictions, including the payment of *jizya* to their Muslim conquerors, as a sign of their subjugation.

These practices are no longer officially enforced by the government of any Muslim-majority country.

Meanwhile, Islamist attacks on Christian villages in the northern provinces have continued with many pastors killed and churches burned down. Islamic State recognises Mozambique as one of its hubs and is concentrating its assault on the region (see *Prayer Focus Update*, December 2022).

Cry out to the Lord for our brothers and sisters in northern Mozambique threatened by Islamist terror. Pray for the comfort of those who mourn loved ones killed in numerous attacks. Ask the Lord that, whatever tactics are employed by the terrorists, His people will stand firm in renewing their trust in Him (Hebrews 10:23), and not be intimidated by His enemies (Philippians 1:28).

Laos – Pastor found dead at roadside

Christians in Laos who are mourning the loss of a pastor and evangelist believe he was murdered for his faith.

Pastor Sy Seng Manee's badly beaten body was discovered on Sunday 23 October alongside his motorcycle, at a roadside near the village of Donkeo in Nakai district, Khammouane province.

"His death was due to his belief in Christianity," claimed one resident, who alleged that Pastor Sy had been arrested and killed by the Nakai district authorities. At time of writing police were still investigating the death.

Other observers believe it was Pastor Sy's bold evangelism that led to his

martyrdom. Pastor Sy had previously been arrested in August 2018, while he was conducting weekly meetings in his house. He received a three-day jail sentence and a fine. He had recently resumed preaching.

Lao Christians have the right to conduct services and preach throughout the country. However, they are often subjected to harassment and violence by local authorities and from extremists within communities, especially in rural areas.

Lift up Christians in Laos as they mourn the loss of Pastor Sy. Give thanks for his faithfulness in resuming his ministry despite threats. Pray especially for God's comfort and protection for his family. Ask that those who heard him preach the Gospel will reflect on his testimony and put their trust in the risen Lord (Acts 16:31) who loved and sustained Pastor Sy amid much opposition (Hebrews 12:3).

Myanmar – Children among dead after military attacks Christian areas

Your prayers are again needed after two children were among those killed in attacks by the Tatmadaw (Myanmar military) in different regions of the country.

A five-year-old girl was killed as the Tatmadaw shelled a kindergarten in a Christian-majority area of Kayah State.

She had been sheltering at the kindergarten in Demoso township with her family after they were forced to flee their home village, also owing to heavy shelling.

A seven-year-old child was killed when the Tatmadaw launched a joint land and air attack on Mon Hla, a historic Christian village in Khin-U township, Sagaing Region. A 40-year-old woman and a 30-year-old man also died in the assault.

Over 200 buildings, including a church and a Christian school, were destroyed by fires started by the soldiers.

Pray for the families of those who have lost loved ones in recent attacks in Myanmar. Ask that God will be a shield about them (Psalm 3:3) and that He will

lead them to safe havens as they face the harsh trials of displacement. Pray that Christians will experience God's light on their path (Psalm 119:105) as they seek to rebuild their lives and that they will receive practical and spiritual help to meet their needs.

Nigeria – Church minister abducted in Enugu State; Christian couple and daughter murdered by suspected Fulani militants in Benue State

Pray earnestly for the safe return of a church minister, Victor Ishiwu, abducted while conducting a worship service in Enugu State.

Meanwhile in Benue State, Islamist Fulani militants are suspected of carrying out the murders of a Christian couple and their 17-year-old daughter.

Clement and Christiana Ukertor were killed on their farm. The following day the body of their daughter Dooyum was found in the bush.

The couple's older daughter Blessing, 20, suffered multiple machete wounds and, at the time of writing, was in a serious condition in hospital.

Intercede for Victor that he will be released unharmed. Pray that his faith, though tested by fire, will grow stronger and that his church will know a strengthening through God's Spirit in their inner being (Ephesians 3:16) as they cry out to the Lord on his behalf. Give thanks for the lives of Clement, Christiana and Dooyum and pray that Blessing will experience complete healing from her horrific wounds and be restored to full health. Ask that she will know the abundant healing love of her Christian family as she comes to terms with her loss.

Mali – Two arrested after suspected kidnapping of German church minister

Concerns are mounting following the disappearance of a German church minister in Mali.

Hans-Joachim Lohre, who has lived in Mali for around 30 years, failed to appear for a service he was scheduled

to conduct on Sunday 20 November in the capital, Bamako. Police have since reported the arrests of two people.

Islamist extremists are suspected to have abducted the minister. Since 2012, jihadists have been waging a war to occupy north and central Mali with the declared aim of establishing sharia throughout the country.

Pray that Hans-Joachim will know the Lord drawing close to him in the ordeal he faces (James 4:8). Pray for a successful conclusion to the police investigation and a safe and swift end to his captivity. Ask that the Church in Mali will flourish and Islamists' plans to take over the country will be emphatically defeated.

Iraq – Christians were victims of Islamic State war crimes, investigators confirm

The horrific experience of many Christians in Iraq during occupation by Islamic State (IS – also known as ISIS, ISIL, Daesh) has been the subject of a UN investigation, which has concluded that believers were victims of war crimes and crimes against humanity at the hands of IS.

After IS took control of around a third of the country in 2014, they seized Christian-owned properties, looted and destroyed churches and subjected believers to sexual violence, forced conversions and enslavement.

The report follows the welcome restoration to their rightful owners, in February 2022, of some property previously seized from Christians (see *Prayer Focus Update*, April 2022).

An estimated 75% of Iraq's Christians have left the country in the last 30 years because of anti-Christian hostility and violence.

Give thanks for the work of the investigators in revealing the Islamic State's terrible crimes. Pray that all Christians, and other minorities that suffered such persecution, will recover from the physical and emotional trauma they endured. Ask that God's people will be encouraged by a renewed sense of the justice of an all-seeing Creator (Isaiah 1:17, Proverbs 15:3).

"Your faithfulness continues through all generations; you established the earth, and it endures."

– Psalm 119:90

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