

Prayer Focus Update

BRINGING HOPE FOR SUFFERING CHRISTIANS

Prayer Focus Update | Number 326 | December 2023

“Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”
– Philippians 1:6

A monthly resource for individuals and prayer groups
produced by Barnabas Aid

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Turkey – Historic inauguration of new church building in Istanbul; Elderly Christian murdered

“Look at this crowd! These are my brothers and sisters, and at last we have a place where we can all come together!” These words are from a Turkish Christian attending the inaugural service of a church building in Yeşilköy, Istanbul on Sunday 8 October.

The opening is believed to mark the first church building built with government backing in Turkey’s 100-year history as a post-Ottoman state.

This is a remarkable step, given the Turkish state’s record of unjustly expropriating churches and other church properties, adding greatly to the difficulties of the Christian communities in Turkey since the formation of the Turkish Republic in 1923.

The country’s president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, joined church leaders to take part in the inauguration ceremony of the building in Istanbul.

Construction of the church began in 2019, and Erdogan laid the first stone. The inauguration was postponed following the February earthquake that struck both Turkey and Syria. The church, which has capacity for 750 worshippers, was filled for the inauguration ceremony.

Erdogan is open about his ambitions to spread Turkish Islamic influence, as if to re-establish the Ottoman empire. He has been criticised during his two decades as the country’s leader for converting ancient churches into mosques. Most notably, his decision to convert Istanbul’s Hagia Sophia, once the world’s largest cathedral, from a museum into a mosque in 2020, caused an international outcry.

Meanwhile, concerns of Turkey’s Christian minority were heightened with the murder of a 91-year-old Christian in the south-eastern province of Mardin on 6 November.

Gevriye Ego was ambushed in front of his house in the Christian village of Enhil and shot multiple times. He died in hospital.

Christians have lived in south-east Turkey for many centuries but are now a small minority.

George Aslan, a Christian MP, made the assertion in the Turkish parliament that Gevriye's killing was "part of a systematic campaign against our community to drive us away from our lands". Many Christians were forcefully displaced in the 1990s but some, including Gevriye, have returned to their ancestral villages in recent years.

Give thanks for the inauguration of the church in Istanbul. Pray that this unprecedented event will be the start of a new and more positive attitude by the Turkish authorities to their country's Christian minorities. Ask that the Christian community in the city will thrive as a beacon of light and grow in strength as they trust in the Lord (Isaiah 40:31). Pray for comfort and protection for believers throughout Turkey, especially in Mardin province. Lift up Gevriye's family and friends as they grieve his passing (Psalm 34:18).

Myanmar – Eight children among 11 civilians killed in military air strike in Chin State

Eleven civilians, including eight children, were killed in an air strike by the Myanmar military (Tatmadaw) in Christian-majority Chin State on 15 November.

Tatmadaw fighter jets bombed the village of Wai Luu in Matupi township at 7.30 pm, killing six boys and two girls aged between 5 and 12. A teacher and two other adults were also killed, and four others were injured.

The Matupi township administration condemned the attack as targeting civilians. "There are no camps of resistance forces [there]. The attack deliberately targeted the people," asserted a local representative.

It was in Matupi township that the bodies of ten civilians were found after eleven people were detained by the Tatmadaw in January 2022.

The Chin population of Myanmar is about 90% Christian. The Tatmadaw has for many years persecuted the Christian-majority

Chin, Kachin and Karen ethnic groups, as well as other groups with significant Christian minorities.

Pray for all minorities suffering violence at the hands of the Myanmar government. Remember especially the Christians in Chin State and elsewhere, as they experience indiscriminate and unpredictable air strikes. Pray that they will know that they have a secure foundation in the cornerstone of their faith, the Lord Jesus Christ (Isaiah 28:16). Ask the Lord to comfort mightily those bereaved and that the faith of communities affected by anti-Christian violence in Myanmar will not waver but instead grow as they depend on the One who is our peace (Ephesians 2:14).

Nigeria – Last Bethel Baptist pupil freed after two years in captivity; Nine killed in militant attacks in Benue

Many prayers of thanksgiving have been offered as the final Bethel Baptist High School pupil held captive by gunmen was released on 2 November after more than 800 days in captivity.

Treasure Ayuba was 12 years old when he was abducted along with 120 others in the early hours of 5 July 2021 from the Christian boarding school in Chikun Local Government Area, Kaduna State.

“Thanks be to our unfailing God. Thank you also very much for your prayers and numerous support,” Rev Dr Israel Akanji, President of the Nigeria Baptist Convention, said in a statement confirming Treasure’s release.

Treasure received therapy in the care of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) as he recovered from his ordeal and has been reunited with his family. Pastor John Joseph Hayab, Chairman of the Kaduna branch of CAN, described Treasure’s captivity as “an infinite time of agonising pain until God intervened”.

The kidnappers freed the students in batches, the last of which occurred in January 2022 (see *Prayer Focus Update*, February 2022), leaving Treasure as the sole captive for more than 18 months.

Further south, in Christian-majority Benue State, Hyacinth Alia – a church leader and the state’s governor – condemned a violent attack on three Benue villages on 17 October in which nine people were killed. He also called on security forces to act against the armed militants.

Praise the Lord for Treasure’s release after this long and traumatic ordeal. Pray that the Holy Spirit will comfort him and help him to readjust to normal life. Ask that he will know that all things work together for good for those who love Him, even when His ways seem beyond understanding (Romans 8:28). Ask that God’s protection and improved security will defeat any militants’ plans to abduct further Christian pupils in Nigeria. Pray that violence will not spread further in Christian-majority areas as you lift up families in Benue State mourning the loss of loved ones.

DR Congo – At least 26 killed in Islamist attack

Suspected Islamist militants killed at least 26 residents in a Christian area of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in an attack on 24 October. The dead included 12 children. Four others were wounded and taken to hospital.

Extremists attacked residents around 11 pm in the town of Oicha in Beni territory in North Kivu province in eastern DRC with machetes. A local army spokesman said that the attackers carried out the assault with machetes rather than guns, to avoid alerting nearby troops with the sound of gunfire.

An estimated 5,500 have lost their lives in anti-Christian violence in DRC since October 2017. Islamist violence is most severe in North Kivu and the neighbouring province of Ituri. Both provinces have been in an official state of emergency since May 2021. However, President Felix Tshisekedi declared “a gradual and progressive easing” of the emergency measures in the two provinces, including a transition back to civilian governance, in a televised address to the nation on 12 October.

Pray that God's people in Oicha will be assured that the Lord understands the pain of loss of loved ones taken in this assault, and that their deaths are precious in His sight (Psalm 116:15). Pray for an end to violence targeting Christians in DRC. Ask that any easing of restrictions in North Kivu and Ituri provinces will be timely and proportionate and not leave Christian communities vulnerable to further attacks.

Laos – Eight Christian families expelled from village; Local authorities order church to stop meeting

Prayers are needed for eight Christian families (about 60 people) who have been expelled from their village in Savannakhet province because they left the traditional spirit cults of their fellow villagers and decided to follow Jesus Christ.

District authorities issued the expulsion order on 4 October and gave the families 30 days to find themselves new homes outside the village. They began by trying to build temporary houses, using materials they found in the forest.

Elsewhere in Savannakhet province, a deputy village chief ordered a church of 18 Christians to cease meeting. On Sunday 1 October the authorities interrupted a worship service and threatened the believers with arrest and heavy fines if they did not comply. The warning applied also to two Christians who were attending the service from a neighbouring village. An additional threat of a large fine was issued to the church in the event of any village residents falling ill or dying.

These orders contradict Article 30 of the Lao Constitution, which explicitly states that Lao citizens have the right and freedom “to believe or not to believe in religions”. Whilst this principle is largely followed in urban areas, there is more hostility in rural areas towards what is perceived as a Western faith.

Intercede for Christians in rural areas of Laos as they face such pressure from the village authorities. Pray that the eight

families expelled from their village will be allowed to return to their homes. Ask that they will know that God honours them for their faithfulness in honouring Him despite the hostility encountered (1 Samuel 2:30). Pray that the ban on the church meeting will be removed and that the villagers will view Christians as a positive influence in the community. Ask that the Lord will enable believers to find ways to maintain fellowship even if gathering formally is forbidden.

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