



Nigeria – At Least 26 Killed in Attacks on Christian Community in Plateau State

At least 26 people were killed in Mangu Local Government Area (LGA), Plateau State – a Christian-majority area of Nigeria – in separate attacks by suspected Islamists less than a month apart.

Fourteen people died on the evening of June 13. Among them were 11 residents of Chisu village, who were burned to death when the gunmen set fire to the community leader's house in which they were taking shelter.

Another three were killed in the neighboring village of Bwai, where the attackers also burned down a church building as well as other houses and vehicles.

On the evening of July 8, at least 12 people were killed in night-time attacks on two other communities in Mangu LGA. Islamist militants are suspected of carrying out the assaults on Farinkasa Kerana and Sabon Gari in which homes were set on fire, causing residents to flee.

National President of Mwaghavul Development Association, Joseph Gwankat, alleged that since April 2023, Islamist terrorists had attacked 53 communities and killed 204 persons in Mangu LGA, where the state governor Caleb Mutfwang grew up.

On the following day, Sunday July 9, Mutfwang, in consultation with the State Security Council, imposed a 24-hour curfew on the entire local government area to restore law and order.

Pray for Christians in Mangu LGA as they process their losses and seek to rebuild their lives. Ask especially that

the Lord will comfort the bereaved and sustain the faith of His people in the face of this violence. Pray that our brothers and sisters will know His presence close to the broken-hearted and strengthening their hearts (Psalm 73:26). Ask for Divine protection of Christian communities and intervention to end the ongoing violence in the region. Pray for wisdom for Caleb Mutfwang and other state governors in northern and Middle Belt Nigeria to respond decisively but sensitively in word and action to this wave of killings.

Pakistan – “Blasphemy” Equated with Terrorism in Disturbing Strengthening of Controversial Laws

The ever-present threat to Pakistan's Christians has grown even more severe with a strengthening of the country's controversial “blasphemy” laws.

Pakistan's coalition government has reached an agreement with an Islamist opposition party that includes classifying “blasphemy” against Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, as a terrorist offense.

The agreement, signed on June 17 by Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah with the Tehreek-e-Labbaik (TLP), states that anybody charged under Section 295-C of Pakistan's Penal Code with making “derogatory” remarks about Muhammad will also be charged with having committed an act of terrorism.

While the penalty for “blasphemy” against Muhammad is already death, this has never yet been carried out. There are concerns that the addition of terrorism charges will make it more likely that those convicted of “blasphemy” under Section 295-C will be executed.

The government has additionally promised to speed up trials of “blasphemy” cases, which can take years to complete, as well as creating a new Counter Blasphemy Department.

Christian rights activists have been swift to condemn the move. Joseph Jansen, Chairman of the rights group Voice for Justice, said that these changes will encourage arbitrary detentions and make the victims more vulnerable. “It puts the prospect of a fair trial in question, thus violating our international treaties,” he stated.

The TLP had launched a 25-day-long march from Karachi to Islamabad on May 22 to call for stricter punishment and speedier trials for those accused of “blasphemy”. The TLP ended its protest when the government signed the agreement.

“Blasphemy” laws have existed since 1927, when Pakistan was part of British-ruled India, and were incorporated into Pakistan's Penal Code at the country's founding in 1947. The laws were strengthened under the military government of General Zia-ul-Haq (in office 1978-88), including the addition of mandatory life imprisonment for desecration of the Quran (1982) and the option of a death sentence for defiling the name of Muhammad (1986). A subsequent decision by Pakistan's constitutional court making the death sentence for “blasphemy” against Muhammad mandatory came into effect in 1991.

The laws are often used to make false accusations in order to settle personal grudges. Christians and other non-Muslims are especially vulnerable, as

simply stating certain Christian beliefs can be construed as “blasphemy” and lower courts usually favor the testimony of Muslims, in accordance with sharia (Islamic law).

Cry out to the Lord on behalf of Pakistan’s Christian community, and other religious minorities, as their situation becomes even more precarious with the signing of this agreement. Ask the Lord to protect His people as these changes lead to greater likelihood of false convictions and mob violence. Pray that the government will give heed to the perspective of Christians and other minorities in the shaping of laws concerning “blasphemy”. Ask that plans devised against God’s people will come to naught as He proves their refuge in distress and that the voice of the ruthless will be silenced (Isaiah 25:4-5).

Sri Lanka – Three Christians Assaulted by Extremists

Prayers are requested for three Christians left injured after separate attacks by extremists in Sri Lanka.

The three believers from the same church in Thamankaduwa, North Central Province, were beaten and threatened in two incidents.

In the first, on June 16, one Christian – a trainee pastor and church volunteer – suffered scratches on his neck after being beaten by two men. The men also threatened to attack the church building.

Three days later, two other believers, on their way home after a Bible study, were attacked by three or four men armed with iron bars and pushed into a stream. One suffered injuries to his head and the other injuries to his hand.

These attacks follow a report from the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka (NCEASL) that documented ten anti-Christian incidents in the first quarter of 2023.

The incidents include threats and intimidation directed towards church leaders and other believers by local officials or extremists. In one case,

a Christian worker received death threats. In another, around 50 villagers surrounded the home of a pastor to try to force him to stop conducting worship services.

The NCEASL report also recounted that a Hindu nationalist group in the far north-west of the country had distributed flyers accusing Christians (and Muslims) of seeking converts fraudulently. In 2021, the government of Buddhist-majority Sri Lanka began drafting an anti-conversion law, but as yet no such legislation has been passed.

Pray for the recovery of the injured, that they will be healed both physically and psychologically from their affliction (Jeremiah 30:17). Ask that the Lord will sustain the faith of those beaten, threatened and intimidated because of their faithful service of Christ. Ask that Christians will be free to practice their faith in Sri Lanka, and that church buildings and congregations will be kept safe.

Iran – More Than 50 Christian Converts Arrested Across Five Cities

More than 50 Christian converts were arrested by security forces across five cities in north-western Iran in the period July 11-18.

The believers were arrested at their homes or venues for “house churches” in Tehran, Karaj, Rasht, Orumiyeh and Aligoudarz. At time of writing the charges against them are unknown and they remain in detention.

Worship in Iran’s majority language Farsi (Persian) is forbidden, as is any Christian evangelism. Farsi-speaking Christians are typically charged with “acting against national security” for their activities in unofficial “house churches”.

Pray for an end to this wave of arrests. Ask that the authorities will release all those arrested unharmed, and that Christian converts will be able to live and practice their faith in peace. Pray that the Lord will fill our brothers

and sisters with His peace and drive away any fears (John 14:27).

.gives – Shipments Heading for Ukraine, South Sudan and Fiji

Thank you for your prayers for the safe delivery of a 40-foot food.gives container that was on its way from the United States to Jordan (see *Prayer Focus Update*, July 2023).

The container, stocked with tomato paste, pasta and other food items, has now arrived in the Middle Eastern country and the contents distributed to our grateful brothers and sisters.

The work of Barnabas Aid’s food.gives project continues as we seek to bring relief to our brothers and sisters in many parts of the world.

Your prayers are earnestly sought for two 40-foot containers that are being prepared in Germany to be transported overland to Ukraine. They contain dried food, hygiene items, clothing and sleeping bags.

Prayers are also needed for the safe passage of a 20-foot container being dispatched from the UK to South Sudan. The contents include food.gives boxes for Christian refugees fleeing the unrest over the border in Sudan.

Two containers of the same size are on their way from Australia to provide food aid for impoverished believers, particularly widows, in Fiji. Christian-majority Fiji has suffered a notable economic downturn owing to loss of tourism during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Give thanks for the successful distribution of aid in Jordan. Pray for the safe arrival of shipments to South Sudan, Ukraine and Fiji, especially that conflict will not prevent or delay delivery. Ask that the Lord will protect drivers making hazardous journeys across war-torn terrain in Ukraine and richly bless Christians with hope and encouragement as they receive vital aid. Pray that Christian refugees fleeing Sudan will be directed to safe havens and access essential supplies.

“I keep my eyes always on the LORD. With him at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.” – Psalm 16:8