



## **Pakistan – Two Christian nurses accused of “blasphemy” rescued from angry mob; young Christian charged with blasphemy granted bail, but will still face trial**

Two Pakistani Christian nurses were rescued by police from an angry mob on 9 April after they were accused of “blasphemy” by staff at the Civil Hospital, Faisalabad.

Staff Nurse Maryam Lal was injured with a knife before police arrived to take her and nursing student Newsh Arooj away for their protection.

The women were subsequently charged with “blasphemy” under section 295-B of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC), which relates to the deliberate damage, defilement or desecration of the Quran and carries a mandatory sentence of life imprisonment.

Muslim colleagues accused the women of committing “blasphemy” by removing a sticker bearing a Quranic text. Staff were joined by religious activists in a demonstration demanding legal action.

Maryam informed police that she removed the sticker while cleaning a cupboard and gave it to the head nurse before finishing her night shift with Newsh. The head nurse accused her of desecration.

Pakistan’s “blasphemy” laws are often used to make false accusations to settle personal grudges. Christians are especially vulnerable, as simply stating their beliefs can be construed as “blasphemy” and the lower courts usually favour the testimony of Muslims, in accordance with sharia (Islamic law).

A young Pakistani Christian who has spent over four years in prison after being accused of “blasphemy” was granted bail by the Lahore High Court on 1 March but must still face trial.

Nabeel Masih’s lawyer, Naseeb Anjum, said, “I will continue this legal

fight for his acquittal.”

Nabeel, who has always maintained his innocence, was accused in 2016 after allegedly posting an offensive image on Facebook. Then aged 16, he was the youngest person to be charged with this offence. He is liable to up to ten years imprisonment if found guilty.

**Ask that** God, our refuge and strength, our ever present help in time of trouble, will comfort our sisters Maryam and Newsh (Psalm 46:1) as they await trial. Ask that, together with our brother Nabeel, they will receive the justice God promises to bring about for His chosen ones, who cry out to Him day and night (Luke 18:7-8). Praise God for the release of Nabeel on bail and pray that Maryam and Newsh will also be freed. Pray for the protection of Nabeel from zealous Muslims who might seek to kill him, sincerely believing that this would be pleasing to Allah. Continue to pray for the amendment of Pakistan’s blasphemy laws so that they cannot be misused against innocent people, or for their total repeal.

## **Somaliland – Six Christian converts charged with offences against Islam**

Six Somaliland Christian converts from Islam were charged on 4 April with offences against the state religion (Islam) and inciting others to disobey laws relating to public order. Their first hearing took place in the capital Hargeisa on 19 April with various international observers present. The hearing will continue on 27 April.

Among the Christians accused were Mohamed and Hamdi, a couple arrested with their new-born baby in January 2021. Together with another Christian, they were additionally charged with apostasy (from Islam) as well as spreading and teaching Christianity.

On 17 April Aster, an Ethiopian

Christian woman arrested with Mohamed and Hamdi, and a Somali Christian woman who lived with the couple were released from detention and deported along with an Ethiopian man.

Islam is the official religion of Somaliland, which declared independence from Somalia in 1991. Its constitution states that individuals have the right to freedom of belief but also prohibits Muslims from converting to another religion, bars the propagation of any religion except Islam and stipulates all laws must comply with the general principles of sharia (Islamic law).

**Pray that** the six Christians remain strong and courageous as their trial continues, knowing that the LORD will be with them always (Joshua 1:9). Ask that their needs are met and that Mohamed and Hamdi’s baby continues to be well cared for. Give thanks for answered prayers for the release of the three Christians. Pray that others will be inspired by the steadfast faith of the tiny Christian community in Somaliland so that the Word of the Lord is spread through the whole region (Acts 13:49).

## **Indonesia – Nineteen injured in suicide bomb attack on church**

Nineteen people were injured when two suicide bombers blew themselves up outside a church on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi on Palm Sunday, 28 March.

Two bombers arrived at a side entrance of the church in Makassar by motorcycle but were stopped from entering by a security guard. Both bombers died at the scene.

The following day, Indonesian police arrested 13 people and seized explosives after raids in Makassar, Greater Jakarta and West Nusa Tenggara province.

Police said the bombers were

a married couple belonging to Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD), a group linked to the Islamic State (IS, ISIS, ISIL, Daesh) terrorist group. JAD is suspected of carrying out suicide attacks on three churches in Surabaya, Java, in 2018, killing 13 people and wounding 40 others.

Indonesian President Joko Widodo condemned the latest attack as his government ordered a nationwide tightening of security at places of worship.

Gomar Gultom, head of the Indonesian Council of Churches, urged people to remain calm and trust the authorities.

The Republic of Indonesia is the world's largest Muslim-majority state where hard-line Islamic ideology has increased in recent years.

**Praise the Lord** that no lives were lost in the church bombing (except those of the bombers themselves) and give thanks that this seems to have been one of very few attacks against Christian minorities around the world over the Easter period, a time when violence against Christians often increases. Lift up Christians in Indonesia and ask the Lord to strengthen them with His Spirit and fill their hearts with faith (Ephesians 3:16-17). Pray against the advance of Islamic extremism in this country, where Christians and Muslims lived peacefully together as equals only a generation ago. Pray that the Indonesian government will be effective in their efforts to control the extremists. Ask the Lord to cause the terrorists to repent of their thoughts and actions.

### **Nigeria – Your prayers answered as kidnapped students from Kaduna college released, but four Christians killed and 20 injured in new attacks on two churches**

Five out of 39 Nigerian students, mainly Christian, kidnapped from the Federal College of Forestry Mechanisation in Mando, Kaduna State, in March have been released, the State government announced on 5 April.

The 39 students (23 female and 16 male) were abducted by an armed gang in a raid on the college on 11 March.

The five students are undergoing medical checks in a military facility.

Videos released by the kidnappers showed the students being threatened, beaten and whipped.

A church minister and three worshippers were killed by gunmen in an attack on a church in Benue State in Nigeria's Middle Belt.

The men entered a church building in Aye-Tuwar village on 30 March, just as an early-morning service was closing. They shot dead the minister – Ferdinand Fanen Ngugban – and three others, Mfave Tumachihi, Mbangohor Tsebo and Orlukaa Ulu.

The attackers also set fire to houses in the village, according to a local government official's statement.

Three pastors were among at least 20 Christians injured when a Muslim mob attacked a church in Ilorin, Kwara State on 18 March. Christians were protesting peacefully against a state government directive that Christian schools allow female Muslim pupils to wear a hijab, and the temporary closure of ten schools in Ilorin, the state capital, for refusing to comply. A crowd of Muslims threw stones for over an hour and threatened to burn down the church building.

Reuben Idowu Ibitoye, secretary-general of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), said that allowing Islamic dress would aid terrorists engaged in school abductions to quickly identify Christian children.

**Give thanks** to God for answered prayer that five of the students have been reunited with their families. Pray for Maryam Danladi, Obadiah Habakkuk, Francis Paul, Abubakar Yakubu and Amina Yusuf as they recover from their ordeal. Continue to pray for the release of the 21 female students and 13 male students still in captivity and ask that they will be strong and take heart as they continue to hope in the LORD (Psalm 31:24). Pray for the bereaved families in Benue that the Lord will wipe every tear from their eyes and they will be comforted knowing that one day they will join their loved ones in the Lord's presence (Revelation 21:4). Ask for healing for the injured in Kwara and pray that the perpetrators of these attacks will

be moved to seek forgiveness for their actions and receive the peace that only Christ can give. Pray for a wise, just and peaceful solution to the issue which sparked the violence in Kwara.

### **Myanmar – Tatmadaw raid Kachin church buildings; Army fighter jets bomb Karen villages, killing three and injuring eight**

The Myanmar Army – the Tatmadaw – raided church buildings in Kachin State on 3 April.

Soldiers from the Northern Command searched three churches in Mohnyin Township to investigate allegations that Christians were sheltering protest leaders and that church ministers were involved in anti-coup activism.

“It was not a random search. They were thorough, climbed over fences and went into every building in the compound,” said Pastor Awng Send.

The raids come amidst ongoing tensions in Buddhist-majority Myanmar since the army seized power in a military coup on 1 February, the same day as thousands of Karen villagers were forced to flee military bombardment.

The Tatmadaw has for many years persecuted the majority-Christian Karen, Kachin and Chin people, as well the majority-Muslim Rohingya.

Myanmar Army fighter jets launched air strikes on a Karen village on 27 March, killing at least three and injuring eight.

Bombs were dropped on Day Pu No village in the Papun district of Karen state, an area with a large Christian population.

A second bombing raid on Sunday 28 March against villages and a displacement camp in the Mutraw district of Karen forced 3,000 to flee across the border into Thailand.

**Cry out** to God for His beloved children in Myanmar. Ask that they know the LORD is with them always, even as they pass through the rivers and walk through the fire (Isaiah 43:2). Pray that the needs of those who mourn or flee the ongoing violence are met. Ask the LORD to frustrate and bring to nothing the plans of these destructive men of violence (Psalm 112:10).

**Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the LORD. Psalm 31:24**

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