

***"Satan will never stop attacking Christians. Do not let this become a stumbling block in our relationship with God."***

~ Ali Kalkandeen  
A church leader in Türkiye

## **TÜRKIYE (Turkey): Gunmen Attack Worship Service**

Sources: Middle East Concern, Christianity Today, Morning Star News, CNN

On the morning of January 28th, two gunmen entered the Santa Maria Catholic Church in Istanbul, Türkiye. Wearing masks, the men walked into the church, shot into the air, and then killed one person. Security footage shows the gun apparently jamming just before the men left.

The victim has been identified as Tuncer Murat Cihan, a Muslim man who had been attending services for the past several weeks. The priest described him as "a good person." It is uncertain if he was specifically targeted by the attackers.

Authorities quickly detained two men: one from Tajikistan and the other from Russia. They are known to be affiliated with ISIS, a militant Islamic group that has since claimed responsibility for the attack. The perpetrators of the incident appear to have acted in response to a call from ISIS leaders to target Jews and Christians.



Santa Maria Catholic Church

In response to the attack, church leaders in Türkiye are advising Christians to not succumb to fear. Ali Kalkandeen, who serves as president for the Association of Protestant Churches in Türkiye, reminded Turkish believers that *"God has not given us a spirit of fear"* (2 Timothy 1:7). He further encouraged them by saying: "Satan will never stop attacking Christians. Do not let this become a stumbling block in our relationship with God." For other reports on the persecution of Christians in Türkiye, go to our [country report](#).

***Pray that God will encourage Christians in Türkiye to stand firm in the midst of ongoing oppression, providing them with His divine protection, as well as the wisdom, courage and strength they need to continue leading lives of resilient faith. Pray also that many other people living in this Middle Eastern country will be drawn to the message of the Gospel through the testimonies of His people.***

## **ERITREA: At Least 30 Arrested at a Birthday Gathering**

Sources: Open Doors, Church in Chains

On January 20th, 30 Christian adults, plus an unknown number of children, were arrested in Eritrea when police raided a party that was held in celebration of an infant's first birthday. The incident took place in the capital city of Asmara at the home of a Christian couple who was hosting a gathering of family and friends to celebrate the birthday of their firstborn child.

Police specifically targeted evangelical Christians at the event. Although authorities sent home those who were not, all adult male evangelicals had immediately been taken into custody. The evangelical women, many of whom happened to be mothers, were told to appear at the police station two days later. When these women arrived, they had also been taken into custody, along with some children who needed to accompany their mothers.



Dr. Berhane Asmelash, who presently serves as the director of Release Eritrea, states that there are now more Christians in Eritrea than ever before in the country's history. "Twenty years ago, the number of evangelicals was very small, but now it has multiplied several times because the Gospel can never be in chains," he explains. "Christians cannot stop worshipping because their hearts will not allow them to stop. They meet for Bible study and prayer despite the risk of arrest because

they are in love with their Lord." To learn more about the country of Eritrea, and/or read additional reports addressing the suffering of Christians in this East African nation, go to our [country report](#).

***Please prayerfully uphold the Eritrean Christians who were recently arrested at the birthday gathering because of their faith in Christ, asking the Lord to mediate on their behalf. While waiting for their hopeful soon release from custody, may these believers – including their accompanying children – experience His perfect peace, as well as greatly needed comfort and strength. Specifically pray that as the children grow to maturity, they will acquire a full understanding of the spiritual freedom that's available to all who trust in Jesus. Also continue to remember the many other believers throughout Eritrea who are currently being held without charge, asking that they too will receive needed courage, hope and endurance from the abiding presence of our loving Heavenly Father who promises to never leave them nor forsake them (Deuteronomy 31:6)***

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## **PAKISTAN: Two Christian Brothers Forcibly Converted**

Sources: Morning Star News, Anglican Ink, Pakistan Christian Post, LICAS

Two Christian brothers, Azam and Nadeem George Masih, were reportedly kidnapped on January 22nd before being beaten and forced to recite an Islamic conversion creed. The assailants recorded a video statement in which the brothers were forced to state that they had converted to Islam of their own free will.

Azam had been working at his tailor shop in the Sialkot District of Punjab when he was taken by gunpoint to the home of one of the suspects and subsequently beaten. The attackers later abducted his younger brother Nadeem, whom they also tortured before forcing both Christians to recite the fundamental beliefs of Islam as statements of their conversions. After stealing the victims' mobile phones and other belongings, then threatening to kill them if they disclosed the incident to anyone, the perpetrators released the two Christians. The victimized brothers have since received medical treatment for their injuries.



While such incidents of persecution are frequently overlooked by the authorities, police are investigating the attack and have taken two suspects, Qaseem Shah and Sunny Shah, into custody. Both perpetrators possessed previous criminal backgrounds and were also known for inciting hatred against Christians.

Despite pleas from governmental leaders for peace, tensions remain high for Christians in the area. Azam and Nadeem have reportedly gone into hiding and cut off all communication due to fear of retribution from militant Muslim community members. Additional prayer alert reports on the persecution of Christians in Pakistan, including videotaped podcasts/segments, are available at our [country report](#).

***Pray for God to minister needed physical, spiritual and emotional healing to Azam and Nadeem, as they now seek refuge and safety in the aftermath of the attacks. May truth and justice prevail in each of their cases, and may those responsible for the attacks against these Christian brothers be held accountable for their violent actions. Furthermore, pray that the Lord will work deeply within the hearts and minds of Pakistan's governing officials – and, as a result, change the wrongful mindsets of others in the country who want to inflict harm on followers of Jesus, so that incidents of persecution would not be tolerated in the future.***

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