



"Suffering can refine us rather than destroy us because God Himself walks with us in the fire."
~ Timothy Keller

NIGERIA: Worshippers Slain in Church Attacks; Others Kidnapped

Sources: Morning Star News, Barnabas Fund, Punch Nigeria

The village of Bakinpah-Maró in Kaduna State, Nigeria, has been experiencing repeated attacks from Islamic militants. In order to provide greater protection to residents of the community, village leaders recently raised funds to build a security post that would help draw more law enforcement personnel to the area. However, on the morning of Sunday, September 15th, the village was again attacked by militants – believed to be Fulani herdsmen – who specifically targeted two churches in the community.

A Catholic church, as well as an Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) congregation, had been assailed while the Christians conducted their worship services. By the end of the raids, three people were killed and 30 others kidnapped, including Pastor Bernard Gajere who led the ECWA congregation.

An eyewitness of the incident described the situation as "horrendous." "We were helpless as we watched the bandits wreak havoc," recounted the anonymous resident. Villagers are calling on the government to intensify security efforts and do everything possible to rescue the kidnapped hostages.

The members of such vulnerable communities across Nigeria are constantly being subjected to fear and uncertainty, aware that the militants could suddenly attack their villages at any moment, posing them to the risk of further fatalities, looting and kidnapping. In many cases, Christians are particularly targeted by groups adhering to militant Islamic beliefs. For more information on the travails facing Nigeria's Christians, go to our [country report](#).

Please remember the recently kidnapped Christians in your prayers, asking that they would not only receive God's divine protection while in captivity, but also the strength and peace that comes from the abiding presence of His Holy Spirit. May the Lord also pour out His unfailing love and comfort upon the families who are seeking the rapid release of their abducted loved ones. For those who have tragically lost family members and/or friends in these recent attacks, pray that they would likewise experience His comforting presence and healing in the midst of their mourning.



REPORT UPDATES

PAKISTAN: Christian Woman Convicted of Blasphemy

Sources: International Christian Concern, CLAAS-UK, USCIRF, Morning Star News

In July 2021, Shagufta Kiran was arrested after she forwarded a message in a WhatsApp group chat. The Christian woman was charged with intentionally offending religious feelings and insulting the Islamic prophet Muhammad. While awaiting the court process, the accused believer has remained in custody since the time of her arrest. Following the allegations, Shagufta's family received constant threats. As a result, her husband Rafique and their children have been forced to relocate multiple times in search of safety. For previously published reports on this believer's case, see [this page](#).

In a verdict announced on September 18th, court officials convicted Shagufta of blasphemy, a crime that carries a mandatory death sentence. This ruling is not surprising, since 99 percent of all blasphemy cases in Pakistan result in a guilty verdict due to external pressures on the courts. The Christian woman's



attorney, Rana Abdul Hameed, intends to appeal the decision. He states that Shagufta remained steadfast throughout the trial and is "very hopeful" that the higher courts will reverse the decision.

Human rights advocates continue to raise concerns about the ways in which religious rights are being violated in Pakistan. The country's blasphemy laws are particularly problematic, as they frequently lead to mob violence, protests and extrajudicial killings. In two separate incidents that took place this month, police officers allegedly assassinated individuals who were accused of blasphemy. According to one study, more than 550 other accused citizens are presently being detained in jails within Punjab Province alone. Additionally, at least 103 individuals were charged with blasphemy in Pakistan during the first six months of 2024. To learn more about the persecution of Christians in this South Asian nation, go to our [country report](#).

Pray that the appeal of Shagufta's case will be heard soon and that it would be successful, allowing this believer to be freed of all charges and safely reunited with her husband and children. While prayerfully upholding Shagufta and her family, please remember to intercede on behalf of the many other Christians throughout Pakistan who remain unjustly imprisoned because of their religious beliefs, asking that each one of these mistreated followers of Jesus will be filled with His sustaining peace, strength and comfort. May the Lord work mightily in the lives of the court officials, governing leaders of Pakistan, as well as the citizens of the country's general populous, transforming hearts and helping them to change their perception of Christianity – resulting in a greater understanding of Christ's tremendous love for them.

SRI LANKA: Church Services Restricted to Pastor's Family

Source: NCEASL

In July, a complaint against the Jesus Jeewamanai Revival Church in Polgahawela was issued by some villagers and Buddhist leaders who opposed the worship services that were taking place at the pastor's home. In response, police requested that the church restrict the number of people attending the gatherings, particularly by limiting participants who were visiting from outside of the community, until guidance was received from the authorities on how to handle the situation. For more information about this incident, go to [this report](#).

On August 16th, the local Divisional Secretary received a letter from the Department of Christian Religious Affairs. The correspondence stated that the department does not register clergy or churches, nor does it have the legal authority to deal with such situations. The letter further advised that any action relating to such concerns from the community would need to be addressed based on local laws pertaining to public nuisance.

One week later, on August 23rd, the church's pastor received a letter from the local Divisional Secretary. This letter stated that, according to the previously made agreement on July 15th, worshippers must be limited to include only the immediate members of the pastor's family. The pastor denies that any such agreement was reached, stating that he only consented to reduce the number of outside visitors. The Divisional Secretary's letter further twisted the statement received from the Department of Christian Religious Affairs by claiming that the pastor had not been granted permission to hold worship services. It concluded with a statement that any further action would be determined by the Department of Buddhist Affairs, and that in the interim the pastor is not permitted to gather for worship with anyone except those residing within his home.

While Christians in Sri Lanka are generally free to worship, local authorities frequently succumb to opposition from those opposed to Christianity, particularly when instigated by Buddhist religious leaders. For further details addressing the challenges experienced by followers of Jesus in this South Asian island nation, see our [country report](#).

Please pray for wisdom on behalf of this pastor as he navigates how to best deal with the ongoing conflict caused by those who have rallied against his church. Also prayerfully uphold the other affected believers of this village who are now unable to meet together, asking God to minister greatly needed encouragement to each one of them and provide a way for their spiritual needs to be met. Continue to remember the many other Christians throughout the country – particularly those residing in rural areas – who are frequently subjected to hostility from local Buddhist leaders and other opposing community members.



Photo: VOMC

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