

Afghan Authorities Block Lawyer from Visiting Jailed Christian

A Christian in Afghanistan facing apostasy charges punishable by death is still without legal representation after authorities blocked a foreign lawyer's attempt to visit him in prison, sources said. A Christian lawyer traveled to Kabul on behalf of Christian legal rights organization Advocates International to represent 45-year-old Said Musa. But the lawyer was denied access to Musa and to his indictment file. He observed, "It is the greatest shame on a family, clan, and the nation, that someone would consider to leave Islam. . . . Therefore there are no 'rights' Christians can claim."

In 2010, the deputy secretary of the Afghan Parliament called for the execution of converts from Islam. Many converts to Christianity left the country, according to sources, and many were arrested, though the exact number is unknown. In his latest letters from prison, Musa asked Christians to continue to pray for him and Afghanistan and "not give up." An amputee with a prosthetic leg, Musa worked for the International Committee of the Red Cross/Red Crescent for 15 years, fitting patients for prosthetic limbs. Musa, a married father of six young children, has been a Christian for eight years.

This Month You Can . . . Get Involved With the Joshua Project

Do you want to better understand what it will take to fulfill the Great Commission? Joshua Project is a research initiative seeking to highlight the ethnic people groups of the world with the fewest followers of Christ. Accurate, regularly updated ethnic people group information is critical to understanding and completing the Great Commission. Jesus said in Matthew 24:14, "The Good News about the Kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, so that all nations will hear it; and then the end will come." Jesus directly links his return to the fulfillment of the Great Commission. While no one knows the date or time of his return, we do know that this Good News about the Kingdom must be preached to all the nations first. Revelation 5:9 and 7:9-10 show that there will be some from every tribe, tongue, nation, and people before the throne.

Joshua Project seeks to answer the questions that result from the Great Commission's call to make disciples among every nation or people group:

- Who are the ethnic people groups of the world?
- Which people groups still need an initial church-planting movement in their midst?
- What ministry resources are available to help outreach among the least reached?

Joshua Project gathers, integrates, and shares people group information to encourage pioneer church-planting movements among every ethnic group and to facilitate effective coordination of mission agency efforts. Joshua Project compiles the work of numerous missions researchers to develop a list of all ethnic peoples that is as complete as possible.

Visit www.joshuaproject.net to better equip your church to pray for those who have never heard the name of Jesus.

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CHURCH AROUND THE WORLD

NEWS OF SIGNIFICANCE TO CHRISTIANS

Some news that's encouraging—some disturbing. Please read with discernment. Watch and pray.

Focus on . . . *Afghanistan*

When the Taliban was in power, the freedom to choose and openly practice one's own religion did not exist in Afghanistan. In the years prior to the Taliban rule, the country was characterized by a prolonged series of wars and the absence of a constitution, and the extent of religious freedom depended on what faction controlled a particular area. In 1999, the Taliban wrote a constitution under which atheism and apostasy (converting from Islam to another faith such as Christianity) were both punishable by death. The current constitution, written in 2004, provides for the freedom of non-Muslim religious groups to exercise their faith, including proselytizing. However, the constitution does not extend explicit protections of those freedoms to individual Muslims. In September 2008, the Afghan Parliament passed a law prohibiting works and materials that are contrary to the principles of Islam, as well as the propagation of religions other than Islam. Besides the handful of Christian relief agency workers in the country, there may be fewer than 3,000 Afghani Christians in a nation of 30 million people.

Pray for

- the safety of all Christian workers now in Afghanistan
- the small Christian community in Afghanistan to remain strong despite persecution

- the more than 70 unreached people groups in Afghanistan
- peace to finally come to the country



U.S. Hunger Remains at Historic High

Despite the economic downturn, the number of Americans struggling with hunger remained stable in 2009—but was still at the highest recorded level. The U.S. Department of Agriculture released statistics that indicated one in seven U.S. households could not buy adequate food due to a lack of money and other resources. The number of people suffering from "food insecurity" barely increased from 2008, but that number was more than four percentage points higher than it was 10 years earlier—and the highest since 1995. Hunger was more prevalent in large cities than in rural areas and was substantially higher in black and Hispanic families.

The LORD is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayers of the righteous.

PROVERBS 15:29

More Christians Flee Iraq after Violence

A wave of Iraqi Christians has fled to northern Iraq or abroad amid a campaign of violence against them and a growing fear that the country's security forces are unable—or, more ominously, unwilling—to protect them. “Their faith in God is strong,” said one observer. “It is their faith in the government that has weakened.” Iraq's leaders, including Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, have pledged to tighten security and appealed for tolerance for minority faiths in what is an overwhelmingly Muslim country.

The flight—involving thousands of residents from Baghdad and Mosul, in particular—followed a 2010 siege that killed 51 worshipers and 2 priests, and subsequent bombings and assassinations singling out Christians. The Islamic State of Iraq, an insurgent group, claimed responsibility for the suicidal siege and said its fighters would kill Christians “wherever they can reach them.”

This new exodus highlights the continuing displacement of Iraqis despite

improved security overall and the near resolution of the political impasse that gripped the country after elections last year. The exodus threatens to reduce further what Archdeacon Emanuel Youkhana of the Assyrian Church of the East called “a community whose roots were in Iraq even before Christ.” More than half of Iraq's Christian community, estimated to number 800,000 to 1.4 million before the American-led invasion in 2003, have already left the country.

There have been previous exoduses, especially from Mosul. In October 2008, more than 12,000 Christians left after a wave of assassinations killed 14 Christians. Last winter, more than 4,000 fled to the Kurdish-controlled region in Nineveh or to Syria after 10 Christians were killed. When violence ebbed after each exodus, many returned to their homes and jobs, but not all, leaving fewer and fewer Christians. By one estimate, only 5,000 of the 100,000 Christians who once lived in Mosul remain.

Survey: 1 in 20 Christians Find Accountability in Church

There is very little accountability among Christians in the United States, a new survey found. Only 5 percent of Christian adults indicated that their church does anything to hold them accountable for integrating biblical beliefs and principles into their lives, according to the Barna Group. George Barna said, “With a large majority of Christian churches proclaiming that people should know, trust, and obey all of the behavioral principles taught in the Bible, overlooking a principle as foundational as accountability breeds even more



public confusion about scriptural authority and faith-based community, as well as personal behavioral responsibility.”

Twenty-one percent of those surveyed said their churches limit or revoke membership for those who do not meet specific standards. Nineteen percent said they are being held accountable to individuals they're acquainted with in their congregation, and 16 percent said leaders follow up with them on activities assigned to them.

Gay Ministers Live in Parish Parsonages

According to a new ruling, gay and lesbian Lutheran ministers in the conservative German state of Bavaria may live with their partners in parish parsonages, but only if they enter into a state-sanctioned civil union. Though the move may seem bold for what is generally considered one of Germany's most traditional states, Bishop Johannes

Friedrich of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria said it was no great departure from existing policies. He noted that the church had already welcomed openly gay members and same-sex unions. According to church officials, six Bavarian ministers already live in same-sex civil unions.

Despite Concerns, Mosque Will Neighbor Church

A California pastor is warning about a “frontal assault” against Christianity in the wake of a planning commission's overwhelming approval of a proposed mosque.

The 25,000-square-foot mosque to be built in Temecula Valley has gained unanimous support from the local planning commission, despite concerns from citizens and critics who say the facility may be a safe haven for terrorists. William Rench, pastor of neighboring Calvary Baptist Church in Temecula Valley, feels his



congregation's attempts to voice their opposition to the planning commission were futile. Although the mosque's imam has denied violence, the Baptist pastor explains that his public stance against the project has led some Muslims to label him as “hateful.” But Rench says the church body “remains concerned about the close proximity of a mosque to a facility like ours,” and church members plan to continue voicing their concerns.

Islamic Extremists Held for Church Blast in Bangladesh

Police in Bangladesh said they believe at least two Islamic extremists are responsible for a 2001 bomb blast in a Catholic church that killed 10 young Christians and maimed dozens of others. A total of 14 extremists are suspected in the bombing, all from militant Islamic groups. The blast took place as about 70 Christians attended Sunday mass in the village of Baniarchar. Initial police reports suggested that the blast might have been the result of a dispute between two Christian groups in the area.

The initial investigation faltered under the Bangladesh Nationalist Party-led Islamic alliance, in power

from 2001 to 2006, but was revived after a landslide victory of the Awami League-led Grand Alliance government in December 2008. The chief priest of Baniarchar Catholic Church, the Reverend Jacob Gobbi, had urged the new administration to revisit the case.

Christians account for less than 1 percent of Bangladesh's 164.4 million people, according to *Operation World*, but Baniarchar has a large number of Christian residents. Muslims make up nearly 90 percent of Bangladesh's population, with Hinduism the second largest religious affiliation at 9.2 percent.