

***"But the Lord was with Joseph  
and showed him steadfast love  
and gave him favour in the sight  
of the keeper of the prison."  
~ Genesis 39:21 ESV***

## MYANMAR: Military Destroys Churches

Sources: World Evangelical Alliance, UCA News, The Globe and Mail, The Irrawaddy, Vatican News

As Myanmar's military increasingly launches deadly airstrikes in an effort to crush rebel resistance, those residing in predominantly Christian regions are subjected to indiscriminate attacks. In many cases of similar attacks during recent years, Christians were especially affected, for churches and other religious institutions seem to have been specifically targeted.

On January 12th, two fighter jets attacked the Karen village of Lay Wah, destroying two churches. Five people were killed, including a mother and her young child, a Catholic catechist/teacher and a Baptist pastor. Numerous others were injured. This latest airstrike is only one of a series of attacks that have destroyed more than a hundred religious sites within the past two years.

On January 15th, military forces set fire to a century-old Catholic church and a nearby convent, as part of a raid on the village of Chan Thar in the Sagaing Region. More than 3,000 villagers were forced to flee their village which was left in rubble. A priest from Chan Thar expressed disappointment that the country's military no longer consists of professional soldiers defending the nation. "They have become armed groups without control, committing all kinds of crimes, abuses and misdeeds." For more on the difficulties encountered by believers in Myanmar, go to our [country report](#).



A Bible training class in Myanmar.  
Photo: VOMC

***May God's peace and comfort rest upon all those who are mourning the loss of loved ones due to the ongoing violence in Myanmar. Pray for the safety of the country's surviving citizens and their need for practical humanitarian relief, along with the resources required to rebuild their destroyed churches and homes. Additionally, ask the Lord to bless the ongoing ministry efforts of our Christian brothers and sisters in Myanmar, giving each one of them greatly needed strength, wisdom and encouragement as they diligently serve others amid this turbulent time. May there be a cessation of the violence experienced in this country, ultimately resulting in a peaceful resolution to this lengthy conflict.***

## TÜRKIYE: Asylum Seekers Face Deportation

Sources: Article18, CTV News, VOMC Contacts

In the wake of the recent devastating earthquake, the focus of the world lately has been on Türkiye and northern Syria where, at the time of composing this *Persecution & Prayer Alert* report, more than 20,000 people have died as a result of the catastrophe. In addition, tens of thousands of survivors have been left homeless amid the cold of winter. Reports from Christians in an affected area reveal the extensive suffering taking place due to the loss of loved ones and the tremendous need for surviving victims to receive blankets, food and other important necessities required to sustain life.

The nations of the world have been coming together to offer whatever aid is possible. However, political turmoil in the region has hindered the provision of greatly needed relief for many of those in need. The Syrian government continues to battle with Kurdish rebels, who control much of the area affected by the



Pastor Ninous Italiaee's family before his detainment.  
Photo: Article18

destruction. As a result, aid workers systematically encounter roadblocks from the Syrian government while trying to bring needed help to those who are suffering. Likewise, in Türkiye, the Kurdish people form a significant percentage of those in the affected area. However, the ongoing conflict between Kurdish separatist groups and the Turkish government, which has been occurring for many years now, further compounds the situation.

Before this latest crisis struck the region, the government of Türkiye, led by President Erdogan, has caused numerous problems for Christian ministries. Governing leaders have emphasized that the country is Muslim, despite the consistent presence of Christianity for 2,000 years. In their attempts to cope with turmoil in the Middle East, Christian refugees have frequently fled to Türkiye, believing it to be a safe location. However, once there, these believers have often faced horrific conditions and the threat of deportation to dangerous areas. For further information on the challenges facing Christians in Türkiye, go to our [country report](#).

A recently sourced report features the testimonies of five Christian families who fled to Türkiye from Iran to escape persecution. The families, totalling 17 people, have recently been arrested and taken to "removal centres" to be deported. These detained believers presently have no access to hot water and are receiving very limited resources. Food is often withheld, and the few meals they do receive are infested with insects and worms. Individual members of these families have also been separated from one other. Over the years, detained Christians were often subjected to increased pressure because of their faith and at risk of near-certain punishment or death if forced to return to Iran.

***Please pray for the people of Türkiye and Syria who must now cope with the exponential loss and resulting suffering in the aftermath of this major earthquake. Pray that urgently needed aid will reach all those needing it and that political controversies will be set aside in order to help these victims. As the government of Türkiye contends with yet another national crisis, and takes into consideration that political elections are scheduled to take place in May, pray that the authorities will cease their oppressive actions against Christians living in the nation, as well as refugees who are currently facing deportation. In addition, please pray that God's provision, peace and protection will sustain the five detained Christian families during their time of need.***

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## CHINA: Imprisoned Pastor Highly Respected

Source: ChinaAid

In August 2022, Pastor Geng Zejun was sentenced to 15 months in prison for "organizing illegal gatherings." Despite opposition from Chinese Communist Party officials, the church led by Pastor Geng refused to join the government-controlled Three-Self Patriotic Movement and was therefore deemed illegal.

In the months following his sentencing, Pastor Geng has experienced health problems and his family was banned from visiting him. However, recent reports indicate that fellow inmates, and even prison guards, are treating the pastor with utmost respect. In the prison, those issued a red vest are required to work the night shift. However, Pastor Geng alone has been given a green vest, exempting him from conducting any night work. People in the prison have come to refer to the revered Christian man as "Pastor" and frequently approach him for discussions and to get his advice.

The pastor's family members continue to seek permission to visit him, even though they have been banned from doing so since his initial arrest on December 5th, 2021. At first, pandemic restrictions were used as an excuse to keep them away, but the authorities have since simply cited "rules and laws" as their reason. For additional reports on Chinese Christians who are being detained because of their faith, and to learn how you can specifically pray for them, go to our [country report](#).

***Pray for strength on behalf of Pastor Geng as he continues to faithfully endure this time of incarceration. Praise God that, like Joseph in the Bible, the Lord "showed him steadfast love and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison" (Genesis 39:21). Please pray that this dedicated servant of the Lord will continue to receive divinely appointed opportunities to reach fellow inmates, as well as prison guards, with the powerful message of Jesus Christ. Additionally, may Pastor Geng's family and church members be able to rest in the assurance of God's abiding presence with them as they await his hopeful soon release.***



Pastor Geng Zejun  
Photo: ChinaAid