



## Persecution & Prayer Alert

The Voice of the Martyrs Canada  
www.vomcanada.com

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*"Prayer is a strong wall  
and fortress of the church; it is  
a goodly Christian weapon."  
~ Martin Luther*

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### **NIGERIA: Attacks Against Christians Persist**

Sources: International Christian Concern, Morning Star News

The violence against Christian communities in Nigeria continues unabated, resulting in dozens of deaths this February and March. As authorities seek how to effectively deal with the attacks, a West African court has ruled that, at least in one instance during 2016, Nigeria failed in its duty to protect citizens.

Danger comes from multiple directions. The Boko Haram terrorist group continues to oppress, though the number of incidents seems to be on the decline due to concerted pressure from various countries throughout West Africa. On March 14th, insurgents attacked the village of Ngurhlavu in Borno State. While most villagers safely escaped into the bush, six homes and a church were destroyed. One church member, Avi Lassa, was killed after stepping on an improvised explosive device the perpetrators had left behind. Two sisters, Stella and Plungwa Ibrahim, were also abducted.

The most devastating violence in recent months has been from the Fulani herdsmen. While some of their opposition comes from what they perceive as government imposition against their nomadic lifestyle, much of the resulting violence is targeted against Christians.

Kaduna State has been the centre for much of the recent opposition. In mid-February, more than 130 were killed. Since then, over 100 additional deaths were reported to have taken place within the state and hundreds of homes have been burned.

March 4th also brought an attack in Benue State, where more than 20 people were killed by gun or machete. Those who survived have been scattered while seeking safety. Back in 2016, Benue

State was the setting of a horrific attack which has since resulted in international condemnation against the Nigerian authorities for their lack of response. The court of the Economic Community of West African States ruled this January that the Nigerian government failed to provide necessary protection for their citizens against attacks in Agatu by Fulani herdsmen. The previous surge of attacks, which began late February 2016, resulted in as many as 500 fatalities.

*Prayerfully lift up the people of rural Nigeria who are facing this ongoing violence. Pray that the governing officials and police presiding over these areas will take necessary action to stop the violence and resolve the grievances of the Fulani. Pray for the many Nigerians who are now grieving the loss of loved ones, as well as those facing financial devastation due to their homes having been destroyed. Also remember the abducted victims presently in captivity, such as the two mentioned sisters, as well as Leah Sharibu, in addition to the more than 100 students still missing after the 2014 attack on the Chibok school.*

### **PAKISTAN: Disabled Person Accused of Blasphemy**

Sources: Morning Star News, CLAAS, Barnabas Fund, Release International, VOMC Sources

Stephen, a Christian man suffering from mental impairment, has been arrested under the country's blasphemy laws after a neighbour overheard a family argument. On March 11th, the accused got into a heated discussion with his brother-in-law over fasting and prayer during Lent and ended up losing his temper, shouting loudly -- a common symptom of his disability. A neighbour overheard the argument, barged into the home, and began beating Stephen. When the family attempted to intervene, the neighbour claimed that Stephen had committed blasphemy.

As a result of the accusation, a mob formed, and Stephen -- along with his family -- was beaten. Police eventually intervened and took Stephen away, alleging it was for his safety. However, charges have now been laid and his family members are denied permission to see him. Since no official diagnosis was previously made, they are concerned that his disability may not be recognized by the court. The Centre for Legal Aid Assistance and Settlement (CLAAS) has taken on this case and is calling for an assessment to officially determine the extent of his condition.

Pakistan's blasphemy laws were brought to the forefront of international attention with the recent case of Asia Bibi. Unfortunately, many conflicting reports have spread since she was acquitted in October. We can assuredly state that Asia is not in Canada at this present time but rather under government protection in Pakistan. Despite recent news reports, her health is apparently sound. Asia's daughter Eisham is publicly appealing for Pakistan's prime minister to allow her mother permission to leave the country. Eisham is residing at an undisclosed location in Canada with her sister.

*Pray for Stephen, along with many other believers who are imprisoned under charges for blasphemy. Remember this mentally challenged man's family and those advocating for his special needs. Also uphold Asia Bibi and her family, praying that this long-suffering mother will be permitted to leave the country now that she has been acquitted of all charges.*

## PRAISE REPORT

### **IRAN: Cleric Warns Against Rapidly Growing Church**

Source: International Christian Concern

Islamic cleric, Hujjat al-Islam Naser Rafiei, delivered a speech in Qom, warning against the spread of Christianity throughout the country. He specifically named house churches and evangelical networks as an attraction for Iranian youth.

It has now been 40 years since the Islamic Revolution in Iran, which led to an oppressive Islamic theocracy. Today, many young people are becoming disillusioned with Islam and the harsh restrictions they face. As a result, the Gospel has been spreading rapidly, sweeping the country through satellite TV and the Internet, together with the ministry of house churches in communities.

*Praise God for the work of His Holy Spirit in the lives of so many spiritually seeking Iranians! Pray for the continued outreach of the Gospel throughout the country -- whether via modern-day technology or personal evangelism -- despite the opposition facing His people.*

*If you would like to post a prayer of praise or petition on behalf of our persecuted family around the globe, visit VOMC's prayer wall at [www.vomcanada.com/prayerwall.htm](http://www.vomcanada.com/prayerwall.htm).*

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The Voice of the Martyrs Canada, P.O. Box 608, Streetsville, Ontario, L5M 2C1  
Tel. (905) 670-9721 Website: [www.vomcanada.com](http://www.vomcanada.com)

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If you would like to encourage someone to read or receive this weekly prayer alert, please use our online form at [www.vomcanada.com/pnpforward.htm](http://www.vomcanada.com/pnpforward.htm) and help spread the message of the persecuted church around the world.

For information on additional ways to support members of the persecuted church overseas, review the list of options at [www.vomcanada.com/take-action.htm](http://www.vomcanada.com/take-action.htm).