

## Pressures from Hindu nationalists in India

Since the Hindu nationalist BJP gained control of India's government, the persecution of Christians has intensified. The number of recorded incidents of violence against Christians increases constantly. Although India's constitution upholds the rights of religious minorities, Hindu extremists seem to be able to attack churches and Christians with impunity. In many cases, law-enforcement authorities either cannot or will not intervene to protect Christians. Laws to safeguard Indian traditions, culture and customs are used by Hindu extremists to ban non-Hindu practices and prevent Christians from building churches.

Many of India's Christians are Dalits, who are at the bottom of the Indian caste structure and therefore traditionally discriminated against. A quota system now ensures that Dalits get access to jobs and education, but this only applies to Dalits who belong to 'religions that originated in India.' Christians are thereby excluded.

## Nepal's non-conversion laws

Under a clause introduced into Nepal's constitution in 2015, it is illegal to attempt to convert someone to another religion. Nepal, previously a Hindu kingdom, was declared a secular republic in 2008, but the country is majority Hindu and extremist groups are violently campaigning for the country to officially become a Hindu nation again.

Although the church in Nepal has grown rapidly since the 1950s, Christians are still a small minority. Many are poor and marginalised, often suffering discrimination and violence. The government no longer recognises Christmas as a legitimate festival, though it recognises 80 festivities for Hinduism and other faiths. Internet restrictions have been used by authorities to block some Christian websites.

*Persecuted Christians*

## Jordan's church keeps positive

While the country of Jordan is surrounded by instability and flooded with refugees, the church meets the challenges not just through ministry to refugees but also through continuing to move out with the gospel. Camp Gilead, which found it necessary to take new security measures for its own protection, is currently running camps for 600 young people, half of whom have never been to a Christian camp before. This will be their first encounter with the Word of God, their first experience of hearing the gospel.

*Manara*

## Jesus' disciples in Costa Rica

In the Central American country of Costa Rica, the strong evangelical surge that began fifty years ago is not as evident as it once was. Many churches lose almost as many as they gain, partly because of their emphasis on 'soul-winning' without an accompanying commitment to making disciples of Jesus Christ. In places there is a serious deficiency in godly lifestyles and biblical knowledge, despite the good work done nationally through Bible colleges, correspondence courses and radio programs. The Bible Society reports an encouraging demand for the Scriptures.

*Operation World*

## *Just keep reading!*

**From Burundi:** "Books like yours have been for me a great help to my teachings in different places. They have opened my eyes to scriptural understanding and I thank God for changing the mentality of our people regarding books. There is more interest in reading books, so I urge young people to read much, and I'm happy to tell you that this field is getting more interest. Pray for it to increase."

**From Zimbabwe:** "These books are smart and hit straight to the point. That's why I opt to use them and give them to others. But I don't just give them out easily. I want to satisfy myself the people who get them will always read them."

**From Malawi:** "I have been reading the Bible six hours daily and have so many questions which I asked some pastors but they did not give me convincing answer. Some said write questions which they will go through, and others just said keep reading the Bible and answers will come. Then I read the Bible with your books and many of the questions got answered. I got real teaching and explanation and in a way that is easy to understand. Wonderful, please keep it up."

*Bridgeway*

## Central African Republic

The de facto partition of the Central African Republic between the official 'Christian' rule in the south and the self-appointed Muslim rule in the north has brought a fragile cease-fire between the two main warring groups.

However, Islamic militias, largely Fulani herdsmen but with other ethnic groups in the mix, are now fighting each other for control of roads, grazing land, water and diamond mines. The non-Muslim 'anti-balaka' (meaning 'anti-machete') call themselves Christian but are a violent group whom the Christians disown. To complicate matters further, the anti-balaka militias have now allied with non-Fulani Islamic militias against the Muslim Fulani. In retaliation, the Fulani are escalating their attacks on Christians! In May, at least 20 Christians were killed, more than 40 wounded and 20,000 displaced. The UN peacekeepers have tried to intervene but admit they do not know who is fighting whom. *Religious Liberty*

## Relief for Vietnamese Christians?

There are signs of an easing of official persecution of Christians in Vietnam. A law has been passed (though not to be implemented till the first day of 2018) that will improve the rights of individual believers and religious organisations, even though not bringing the situation fully up to international standards. While the national government wants to improve religious liberty, local governments are entrenched in old fashioned hard-line attitudes and resent the imposition of liberal laws in regions of their jurisdiction. Many Christians report an improvement in the way they are treated, but fear being caught in a power conflict between local and national authorities. *Barnabas Fund*

## Maintaining 'peace'

*Pray for security forces around the world working to prevent violence and destruction, that our Lord will lead and guide them in their work, even though they may not know Him. As national leaders seek ways to enable people to live together harmoniously, and as they strive to de-radicalise those who have been indoctrinated with hatred and intolerance, pray that our omniscient and omnipotent Lord will work through them all to bring peace, stability and justice (1 Timothy 2:1-2).*

*Barnabas Fund*

## Hope in Lithuania

Catholicism was dominant in Lithuania until Soviet occupation, when all faiths were repressed. Religious freedom in the post-Soviet era has seen many dynamic Christian groups emerge, injecting new life into the nation's spirituality. Fellowship between different Christian groups and denominations is good, which is in contrast to some other former Soviet states. But the entrenched notion that 'proper' churches are state-sanctioned means that these newer Christian groups are often seen as breakaway sects. *Operation World*

## Pacific Island outreach

*Churches and Bible training institutions in Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Fiji and Vanuatu are increasingly sending out missionaries to evangelise other nations in the region, not least the larger, once missionary-sending nations of Australia and New Zealand. They work among both the white majorities and the indigenous minorities.*

## New Bible in Cameroon

Despite the insecurity caused by deadly Boko Haram attacks, about 5,000 believers from the Muslim-majority Musgum region of Cameroon made hazardous journeys for the launch of the first complete Bible in their native language. The 20,000 Musgum Christians had waited many decades for this day, having received the New Testament in 1964. *Sower*

## Bulgaria's Turkish community

The city of Kardzhali is the centre of the Turkish community in Bulgaria and has the largest mosque in the country. As the influence of Islam grows, the mayor of Kardzhali has refused all requests from church leaders to mark Christian holy days, though he allows all Muslim religious festivals to be celebrated. Turkish Christians from a Muslim background face harassment or persecution, some losing their jobs and others refused service by shopkeepers.

## Crackdown in Iran

Iranian Christians report a steep rise in organised, government-sponsored anti-Christian campaigns on radio and television, as well as defamation of well-known Christians. There has also been a crackdown on Farsi-speaking (Muslim-background) churches, resulting in some closures, along with interrogation and imprisonment of prominent members. Yet the church in Iran continues to grow. *Barnabas Fund*