

ISIS TARGETS EGYPT'S COPTS IN PALM SUNDAY MASSACRE

Islamic State readily claimed responsibility for bomb attacks on two Coptic churches during Palm Sunday celebrations. 30 Christians were killed at St. George Church in Tanta. Fifteen Christians and five policemen were killed in St. Mark's Cathedral in Alexandria where Pope Tawadros had just finished addressing the congregation. Though deeply shocked, he was unharmed. 120 people were seriously injured in the blasts, some critically.

The leaders of many nations and denominations have expressed their solidarity with Copts, once more grieving the loss of precious lives and the desecration of beautiful churches splattered with the blood of Christians who had gathered to worship in peace. Pope Francis has expressed his grief over the attacks, and will meet Pope Tawadros and other religious leaders during his visit to Cairo. The Anglican Bishop of Egypt asked for prayer that Christians would celebrate Jesus' resurrection on Easter Day without fear. Churches were well attended amidst tightened security, but the customary celebration was muted in respect for the victims of this tragedy. A spokesman declared, **"While these events have struck the Copts profoundly, our community is resilient. We will not be intimidated or paralysed by fear."**

President Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi announced a three-month, nationwide State of Emergency; the establishment of a Supreme Anti-Terrorism Council to root out ISIS and other terror networks associated with the Muslim Brotherhood. Amendments to the criminal code will expedite the trials of terror suspects. President Sisi attended funerals for the victims of the tragedy, and has also pledged to restore all churches destroyed or damaged.



Security personnel survey the carnage at St. George's Church

Violence against the Copts is escalating as the IS Caliphate collapses in Mosul, and Egyptian fighters return home to advance their campaign to trigger sectarian conflict and destabilise the government. A propaganda video vows to wipe out Egypt's Coptic Christians and "liberate Cairo". ISIS also claimed responsibility for the suicide bombing of St. Mark's Cathedral in Cairo in December, and the murder of Christians in the Sinai Peninsula in February. In spite of the State of Emergency, and the presence of security forces, radical Muslims burned three homes in Kom EL-Loufy on April 13, injuring eight Christians returning from a prayer service for which they had a permit.

The Copts remain strong amidst increasing violence which leaves some nominal Muslims repulsed and disillusioned, causing them to reject Islam. A priest told *Clarion Project*: **"ISIS is the evangelizer... I am merely a baptizer of their converts to Christianity"**. Elizabeth Kendal believes that "ISIS is the hammer smashing Islam's illusions, while in demonstrating divine, amazing grace, it is the Christians of

How Do Christians Respond to Persecution?



A recent report, *'Under Caesar's Sword'*, by the University of Notre Dame has found that Christian 'survival strategies' to protect their communities require great "creativity, determination and courage", and rarely include violence. Western nations engaged in Iraq share Christian roots, but their paralysis in confronting persecution contrasts with the sacrificial efforts of threatened Christians to care for one another. The Church itself became "its own guarantor for safety, as far as possible". Churches in Iraqi Kurdistan took care of tens of thousands of Christians fleeing genocide in IS-controlled areas. But in the absence of outside support, some Assyrians have taken up arms: "It's not acceptable to watch our lands taken by terrorist groups. ... It's our land and our people, so we have to be active".

In Pakistan Archbishop Shaw encouraged beleaguered Christians not to give up as they have made vital contributions to the country's history, and must not refrain from professing their faith in the midst of the current persecution. WWM

'Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God' (2 Corinthians 1:3-4)

CFF Advocacy in Action: DFAT – NGO Human Rights Forum 2017

Report by Elizabeth Kendal, CFF Director of Advocacy



L—R Mrs Elizabeth Kendal — Christian Faith and Freedom;
Mr Hermiz Shahen — Assyrian Universal Alliance;
Dr Reginald Zaharuddin — kidnapped by Taliban, Pakistan;
Mr David David — Assyrian Australian National Federation
Miss Marina William — Australian Coptic Movement.
CFF has encouraged representatives of persecuted Christians to contribute their knowledge to this important forum

On 9 February 2017, I had the honour of representing CFF at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's (DFAT's) annual Non-Government Organisations (NGO) Forum on Human Rights. The forum focused on *themes* rather than actual human rights abuses. This year the themes were Business and Human Rights, The Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and DFAT's Foreign Policy White Paper.

Rights of Indigenous Peoples – Opting to speak into this session, I opened my contribution by acknowledging that I was sharing a table with a representative from the Coptic community, the indigenous people of Egypt, the true descendants of the Pharaohs; and with two representatives from the Assyrian community, the indigenous people of Mesopotamia, in particular the Nineveh Plains, noting their shared plight as Christian peoples subjugated under Islam – indigenous peoples essentially without any rights at all.

Aware that the Copts and Assyrians would present their own cases, I focused on two situations in our region: the indigenous Melanesians of Indonesia's Papua Province, and the indigenous *Paharis* (hill tribes) of Bangladesh's Chittagong Hills Tracts (CHT), noting that the two situations essentially mirror each other. Both situations involve a foundational injustice: Papua's Melanesian Christians were betrayed by the UN and the West who handed Papua to Indonesia via the so called, "Act of Free Choice" (also known, contemptuously, as the "Act of No Choice"). Similarly, the Chittagong Hills Tracts (CHT) was "awarded" to Pakistan in the partition of British India, despite being only 3-5 percent Muslim, and despite the fact that the indigenous *Paharis* had far more in common with the Christians of India's Mizoram state and Burma's Chin state, and the Buddhists of Burma's Rakhine state – than with Bengali Muslims.

Papua and CHT have been radically transformed through the mass migration of ethnic-majority Muslims, orchestrated by the government (in Jakarta and Dhaka), encouraged in the mosques, and facilitated by the military. In both cases the military has significant economic interests in the resource-rich regions, and has an interest in perpetuating the conflict that guarantees their continued presence. Papua is the most militarised region of Indonesia, just as CHT is the most militarised region of Bangladesh.

The human rights abuses inflicted upon the indigenous peoples of Papua and CHT are indicative of intense racial-religious hatred. Rape, gang-rape, torture, killing, forced marriage, forced conversion to Islam, and child trafficking for the purpose of forced conversion are routine and well documented. The perpetrators – Javanese and Bengali Muslim settlers and military personnel – commit these crimes with impunity. The aim is to drive the indigenous peoples from their lands and replace them with ethnic-majority Muslims, so that government and military might have full control over the resource-rich regions. Meanwhile, fundamentalist Muslim clerics are actively engaged in advancing Islamisation.

In Papua and CHT, the mass migration and gross human rights abuses combine to affect slow "hidden genocides". Just as Javanese Muslims are today the majority in Papua, Bengali Muslims are today the majority in CHT. As the Muslim population increases, the process of genocide accelerates. The rapid demographic transformation of both Papua and CHT has occurred out of sight and out of mind as both regions are closed, with the indigenous peoples banned from speaking to outsiders.

On behalf of CFF, I asked DFAT if the Australian government, in promoting the rights of indigenous peoples, was talking to the governments of Indonesia and Bangladesh about these "hidden genocides". "Will the Australian government speak out *against* the orchestrated mass migrations (colonisations) and gross human rights abuses (racial-religious hatred-fuelled persecution) aimed at affecting genocide? Will the Australian government speak out *for* the rights of the indigenous peoples of Papua and CHT?"

While CFF will continue to lobby DFAT on this issue, Australian churches need to understand that the Australian government can do very little to help, as economic and geo-political forces are overwhelming. If Christians and Christianity are to survive in Papua and the CHT, then the Church had better get serious about the serious business of intercessory prayer. Please pray that God will bless all advocacy, provide all needs, and intervene to change the situation radically. Please pray for the indigenous peoples of Papua and CHT, who desperately need divine intervention.

Easter Celebrations in Northern Iraq Offer Hope of Return to Christian Exiles



Palm Sunday service in Karamles Chaldean church

This Easter could mark the beginning of the end of exile for some Iraqis, following military victories against Islamic State which have won back much of the territory seized three years ago. Some, like the inhabitants of Karamles, returned to celebrate in damaged churches. For the first time in three years, the congregation of Karamles' Chaldean church celebrated Palm Sunday in their own village, not in the refugee camps of Erbil in Kurdistan. When Karamles was liberated last October, Fr Thabet, a Chaldean Catholic priest, said he found his church "a mess, but . . .not beyond repair". 400 - 500 people returned to celebrate Mass. Holy Week previously involved the whole village in the six-hour Easter Vigil. "Every day and all the Stations [of the Cross] during Holy Week are important.

WWM

Karamles was a majority-Christian town until the arrival of Islamic State in 2014 which caused them and thousands of other non-Sunnis across the Nineveh plains to flee for their lives. Of those Christians who have not sought asylum in the West, some are afraid to return without large-scale security, but others are keen to salvage all they can, and may begin rebuilding houses after Easter.

The streets of Telskuf, now empty and quiet, show signs of war. Some houses are riddled with bullet holes, others show little damage. ISIS fighters were expelled quickly from this Christian town, unlike the neighbouring town of Batnaya which looks like a warzone. Ninety per cent of houses were destroyed during heavy fighting. Others have been ransacked, but are repairable. Returning from the Kurdish town of Dohuk to devastation in Telskuf, one exile said, "We had water and electricity there, but it was not home. This place doesn't have that, but it is home." ISIS demolished infrastructure in towns it occupied, so until power lines and water pipes are repaired, returnees depend on generators and trucks delivering fresh water. They also depend on emergency food parcels distributed by local partners of Open Doors. "That kept us alive and hopeful, and helped us to wait for better times".

"We belong here. By returning we also give hope to our children; we show the new generation that they have a future in Iraq." Though many are eager to stay in Telskuf, life is not easy. "There is no school for the children. But the good news is that life goes on. Every day is new. **We believe in Christ and He will help us through this period.**"

Chaldean Catholic Patriarch of Baghdad, Louis Sako, referred to the first mass at St George's Church for two-and-a-half years as "**the first spark of light shining in the cities of the Nineveh Plain since the darkness of ISIS**".

Sydney – An exhibition prepared for the Assyrian 6767 New Year Festival by the Assyrian Cultural and Social Youth Association showcased the extent of the destruction and desecration of 12 towns and villages in Nineveh, some of which have been land-mined and prohibit return. When Mosul and Nineveh were seized by ISIS, tens of thousands of Assyrians fled, most migrating eastward into Iraqi Kurdistan - into housing unfit for extreme weather. Atrocities against Assyrians have broad implications for Iraq's politics, history, culture and borders. As well as a loss of lives, homes, personal belongings, cultural artefacts and antiquities, there is an erosion of familial and social networks – a loss of community. **But the spirit of the Christians who have returned remains strong, and a slow recovery has begun.**



Uncertainty Looms Over Long-suffering Church in North Korea

North Korea will not willingly disarm as its weapons are a deterrent against foreign intervention. Tensions are reaching boiling point. Despite more than 100 years of severe persecution -- under Japanese occupation, Soviet occupation and the Kim family -- the Church is believed to number between 300,000 and 500,000. Christianity is prohibited with the threat of death for the believer and labour camp for the extended family. God alone sustains believers struggling to survive in labour camps or as secret believers. One day they will emerge as Korea's light, salt and healing. While we want to see the situation change, we do not want Korea's long-suffering Church engulfed in apocalyptic fire.

Elizabeth Kendal

Christians in China Remain Faithful Under Increasing Government Pressure

A new report by the US Commission on International Religious Freedom identifies China's deteriorating religious freedom violations, listing it among notorious abusers such as North Korea, Myanmar, and Vietnam.

Intimidation – A Chinese pastor, Paul Wang, was leading a Bible seminar entitled, "Reformation and Life Change", when Chinese officials intruded and filmed the event. They subsequently summoned Wang and forcibly registered the identity of everyone who was present.

Serious Injury – A Christian man and woman suffered spinal fractures and other injuries after they were thrown from a high wall while defending their church in Zhejiang province. As part of an official campaign to install surveillance equipment in local churches, allowing authorities to closely monitor religious activities, about 100 officials arrived at Banling Church on April 21 to forcibly set up cameras. Christians attempted to protect the church, and during the conflict, a man was thrown from a wall, sustaining injuries to his neck and spine. Though he was in excruciating pain and losing consciousness, he was initially refused admission to a hospital, though subsequently treated in another.

Officials also threw a Christian woman from the wall, causing spinal, neck and other injuries. In Wenzhou hospital, doctors neglected her until her family intervened. Several others were also hospitalized.

Disappearance—Zhang Lingmei, a young Christian woman, was taken into police custody following the same event and has not been heard of since.

Church destruction—Zhejiang authorities destroyed several churches between March 27-30.

Harsh imprisonment—A court in Xinjiang sentenced 5 Christians to 3-5 years in prison following a conviction for "illegal assembly and gathering a crowd to disturb public order" after a Christian event in a private home.

One defence attorney said, "The judges wrongfully determined the nature of the case, and the sentences were unreasonably harsh. How can private gatherings disrupt public order? The public security bureau exceeded its authority...." All the defendants pleaded innocent, and are planning to appeal.

China Watch

China is such a vast country that reports of Christian freedom and persecution are both true in some parts of China, and seem to depend on the attitude of local officials.

CFF Director's Report from China

On two recent visits to China, CFF Director, Dr Roy, was privileged to attend several church services open to the public where the gospel was freely proclaimed, and people were free to respond. "Wonderful testimonies were given by University students during the services, one of whom told the congregation that realising she was a sinner had had a huge impact on her life."

Dr Roy said he was really moved by this testimony, reflecting on the fact that this young student, like most students in China, has been brought up on atheism and Darwinism, yet she has come to recognise that she, like all of us, is a sinner and that Jesus Christ paid the price of those sins on the cross of Calvary.

The Apostle Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans (10:9): "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." There, in the church in China, a young student stood and did exactly as Paul had urged – she proclaimed to the whole congregation that Jesus is Lord, and told us of the belief in her heart. Surely, the angels of heaven were rejoicing!

Despite the freedom of worship in this situation, there are still many Christians around the country who do not experience such freedom. Millions continue to meet in underground cell churches. Let us continue to pray for, and advocate freedom to proclaim and practise, the Christian faith in China.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide Awarded UN Accreditation

The Board of Christian Faith and Freedom extends warm congratulations to Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) which has been granted official UN accreditation by the 54 members of the United Nations Economic and Social Council. Eight years of deferrals by the NGO Committee was followed by rejection in February. However, on April 19, member nations voted in favour of granting Consultative Status to CSW, giving the organization independent access to key UN human rights advocacy platforms, and the ability to organize independent side-events at fora such as the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) and UN General Assembly. The vote, requested by the Permanent Missions of China and Pakistan, is a just reward for CSW's persistence in overcoming resistance!

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said: "This is a significant day for CSW. UN accreditation will enable us to advance our work of promoting the right to freedom of religion or belief across the UN system. This vote is also a welcome acknowledgment of the importance of NGO contributions to the UN's work." The successful appeal, led by the Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the UK Mission to the UN in New York, comes after CSW's application was rejected in February. In his opening remarks, he criticised deferrals and rejection of the past, observing that "CSW is in full compatibility with the aims and purposes of the UN Charter, as well as the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and other United Nations human rights covenants."

Sharing the Gospel with Muslims

'How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent?' (Romans 10:17)

Asif Mall, Evangelist, International TV Host, and Mission-mobiliser prepares Christians to share the Gospel



This will be an exciting day of learning how to share the love & Gospel of Jesus; the beliefs and practices of Islam; how to disciple new Believers; how to explain the Trinity; how to answer difficult questions; the Biblical responses to questions concerning Islam

Saturday 6th May, 9am — 4pm

Registration: please phone the CFF Office — (02) 62853116

Canberra House of Prayer for All Nations
28 Guilfoyle Street, Yarralumla ACT

11.30—12.30pm can be viewed via webinar. To register: go to "zoom.us" click on "Join meeting". ID number: 516-447-447

Children's Witness Brings Parents to Christ

Many Muslims, displaced by ISIS, are embracing Christianity through the witness of their children. The director of a ministry working at a refugee camp in Northern Iraq told *the Gospel Herald* that recently 600 children heard the Gospel and received Bibles. 10-year-old Mahmood decided to put his faith in Christ.



"We asked the kids to share the story of Jesus. Mahmood's father came the next day, complaining about our influence, fearful of a Muslim community backlash after hearing his son say that he had become a follower of Christ." He had never heard about Jesus, but not long afterwards he accepted Christ and took Bibles for his wife and daughters. He now holds a Bible study every Friday - the Muslim prayer day!"

The ministry team recently traveled to a town in Iran with known ties to extremism. After a time of prayer, they went to religious leader, Kaka Shehab, and told him about Christ. His daughter was ill with asthma, so they prayed for her before giving him a Kurdish-language Bible. The next day he phoned and said, "My daughter has recovered, thanks to your prayers. Please come back and pray for everyone, and give Bibles to everyone."

God is at work amongst Muslims who have fled to other countries. A pastor said, "We see a lot of new faces being baptized. In the coming years, we will be the minority — believers from other backgrounds will be the majority. **These wonderful new believers will become preachers all over the Middle East. God is waking up a sleeping church; a nation of new believers is being born!**"

Miracle in a Dust Storm Brings Militants to Christ

The Gospel Herald reported that Islamic militants, intent on killing Christians holding a baptism service on the shore of the Arabian Sea, said a dust storm forced them to stop, as Jesus appeared and spoke to them with a "mighty voice". Their purpose had been to stop Christians sharing the Gospel with Muslims, but when they arrived at the baptism site, the Christians were on a bus returning to their church. With the militants firing at them, everyone on the bus expected to die. Then, 'within seconds' a dust storm blew up. One Christian said he felt as if Jesus himself appeared in the dust storm to block the road and protect them. They all praised God and safely made it back to the church.

What they didn't know was that Jesus appeared to the militants, too, who had stopped their vehicles because they couldn't see a thing. One of them, Haroon, said Jesus looked 'angry' and his eyes were like 'blazing fire'. "Why are you persecuting me?" he asked in a powerful voice — a strong wind that literally swept the militants off their feet and blew their guns away. Haroon said the whole thing was a "terrible experience." As they struggled to get up, they realized they couldn't talk. They were afraid, yet felt strangely at peace. Jesus told them that he "came to the world not to destroy anyone; but to save," and to "Go in peace." Then he disappeared, and the dust storm ceased.

Haroon did not put his faith in Christ until a deadly snake in the desert bit his sister, Hajira, who was rushed to hospital, not expected to live. While she slept, an angel appeared and told her about Jesus, 'the Saviour and the Healer'. When she awoke and shared her experience with Haroon, they prayed and asked Jesus to save them. They were surprised when Pastor Paul of *Bibles for Mideast*, who was among the Christians the militants wanted to kill, arrived and said an angel sent him. He even knew their names. Paul shared the Gospel with them; they confessed their sins, gave their lives to Christ and, after he prayed, Hajira was completely healed. When their father learned what happened, he also surrendered his life. Not only was Haroon's entire family saved, but so were 17 of the militants who are now all praying for the salvation of the remaining two!

Nigerian Government Cancels Day of Mourning for Slain Christians

JOS – After warning journalists and Christian leaders to stop speaking out about anti-Christian violence, the Nigerian government ordered the cancellation of a national day of prayer and mourning for thousands of Christians slain by Muslim Fulani herdsmen and other insurgents, claiming it would breach national security.

President of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Samson Ayokunle, said killings have continued despite curfews, the presence of police and other security agencies. On March 6 the Jubilee Campaign noted in Geneva, Switzerland, that rising Fulani militancy has overtaken Boko Haram as the foremost violent threat in Nigeria. Militants have launched systematic attacks on predominately Christian farming communities, killing villagers, razing homes, and destroying farmland before occupying the villages. The UN Human Rights Council has been informed that the alarming increase in militarization in north and central Nigeria resulted in the death of 4,000 people in the past three years.

Mark Jacob, former attorney general of Kaduna state, said Nigeria needed outside intervention because the government has proven unwilling to protect its citizens. Rev. Dr. Musa Asake, General Secretary of CAN said, “In the meantime, we are all urged to remain steadfast and resolute in the grace of God that Nigeria shall overcome the present distress and peace shall prevail.” (www.assistnews.net).

Medic from Burma Serving the Lord in Mosul

The Free Burma Rangers is a Christian ministry providing hope, help and love to internally displaced people in Burma, regardless of ethnicity or religion. Using a network of indigenous field teams, FBR reports on human rights abuses and casualties, and provides medical, spiritual and educational help for IDP communities as they struggle to survive Burmese military attacks. Their aim is to:

“Love each other, unite for freedom, justice and peace. Forgive and don't hate. Pray with faith, act with courage. Never surrender”.

CFF forged ties with the FBR when our former Director, James Scott, spent some time with them and their dedicated leader, David Eubank, in Burma.



Eliya treats a man shot by ISIS near Mosul



Eliya and David supervise the care of a badly wounded Iraqi soldier

Eliya, a Karen Christian, is FBR's Chief Medic. Described as fast, highly skilled and brave, he served in the Karen Army and is admired for his courage under fire, mature decisions, ability to handle complex situations, and for his lifesaving ability. He never gives up, prays with faith, and shares all he has. He was the first Free Burma Ranger and helps to train and lead the 100 part-time and 43 full-time teams bringing spiritual and material relief to the people of Burma. He believes they are all working, not only for the people in their care, but for God. “In life we do not have control over everything. We have to do the duty God sets before us.”

The humanitarian crisis created by ISIS was a clarion call to the FBR to demonstrate the love of Christ for those in greatest need, trusting that God would take care of their own families until they had done all they could for the people in front of them.. Their dedication is in marked contrast with prevailing values which favour Muslims over Christians. They pray it will have an enduring impact on the lives of those who had not heard the Gospel or seen it demonstrated.

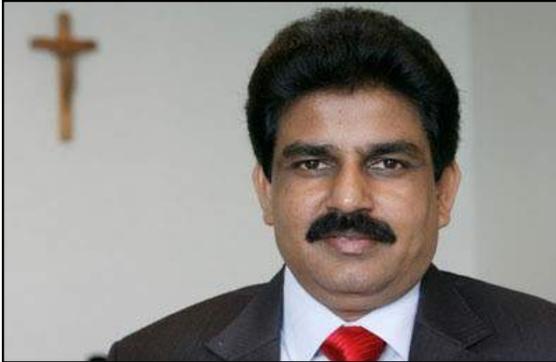


Eliya and cameraman with Iraqi children in Mosul

Torchbearers for Christ – Rising Above Persecution to Shine His Light in Dark Places

“Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in Heaven.” Matt 5:17

Shahbaz Bhatti – Unwavering Dedication to Freedom for Christians in Pakistan



Shabaz Bhatti, Pakistan’s former Federal Minister for Minorities, and the only Christian member of the Cabinet at that time, is still remembered as a great Christian – a courageous and inspirational defender of religious liberty and the rights of persecuted minorities.

He is remembered especially for his opposition to Pakistan’s notoriously unjust blasphemy laws. His opposition to their widespread misuse intensified when Christian mother of five, Asia Bibi, was charged with blasphemy on spurious evidence, and sentenced to death. His advocacy for clemency on her behalf drew violent threats from Islamic authorities. He died at the age of 42 in a hail of bullets in March, 2011 as he was leaving his home in Islamabad. Pamphlets scattered by his assassins described him as a “Christian infidel”, and signed: *Taliban al-Qaida Punjab*.

Shabaz predicted his own death

In a farewell statement recorded four months earlier, he referred to threats on his life from the Taliban and al-Qaida, but vowed to continue speaking up for marginalised Christians and other minorities. **“I will die to defend their rights,”** he said on the tape released to the BBC and al-Jazeera. **“These threats and warnings cannot change my opinions and principles.”**

Shahbaz himself experienced discrimination at college when a lecturer denied him a front row seat, telling him to go to the back of the room because he was a Christian. From then on, he studied the incidents and patterns of discrimination against Christians. In 1985, he founded the “Christian Liberation Front”, inviting Christians across Pakistan to respond to the call for equality. By the 1990s, he had won the hearts of millions. In 2002, he founded the All Pakistani Minorities Alliance (APMA) and waged an admirable struggle for minority rights.

In 2008, he was given the portfolio of the Federal Minister for Minorities, and continued to speak out against contentious blasphemy laws which incited death threats from militants.

Undeterred, he remained true to his people, and under his leadership, the APMA protected the lives of the families of many people accused of blasphemy.

Shabaz Bhatti’s compassion and concern for his fellow countrymen extended well beyond the responsibilities of his portfolio. When a devastating earthquake hit parts of Pakistan in 2005, he oversaw rescue initiatives: the provision of shelters and food kitchens, including the establishment of a school. During massive floods in 2010, he again participated in effective rescue and relief efforts, ensuring that food and other necessities were fairly distributed to people of all religions.

Addressing public rallies, Shabaz often referred to the 1947 declaration by Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, which promised religious freedom and equality to all citizens. Profoundly concerned over increasing religious and ethnic polarisation of Pakistani society, he emphasized the value of Christian service to the nation in the advancement of education and health, and the important role Christians played in building and unifying the country when it was founded in 1947. Many of Pakistan’s past and current leaders have come through the social institutions they helped to establish. (Former Prime Minister of Pakistan, Benazir Bhutto, who was also assassinated, attended a Christian missionary school.)

In recognition of his service to humanity, Shabaz received the International Awaz award in 1999; the International Liberty Award in 2004, and the USCIRF International Freedom of Religion Award in 2009.

Although his life was tragically cut short, Shabaz Bhatti remains an inspiration of courage and dedication for millions of suffering people. His bold defence of Christian values, justice and freedom still inspires others to stand up for the fundamental human rights enshrined in international conventions and Pakistan’s Constitution. ANS (www.assistnews.net).



Imprisoned Christian Lawyer Honoured



Nguyen Van Dai, prominent Vietnamese human rights lawyer, has received the German Association of Judges' 2017 award for 'outstanding merit in the defence of human rights'. This recognition of Mr Dai's courage and integrity comes fifteen months

after he was arrested in December 2015 on charges of "propagandising against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam". He remains in solitary confinement, denied access to lawyers, his wife and family.

Dai was arrested a week after he was waylaid and badly beaten by thugs believed to be operating under the auspices of police as he was returning to Hanoi after attending a training session on human rights. For involvement with the *Brotherhood for Democracy*, Dai was imprisoned for four years, placed under house arrest for a further four years, but resumed human rights advocacy after his release in early 2015. Western governments and international human rights organisations have called for his release, concluding that he is being held on trumped-up charges to silence his bold criticism of the government's record of human rights abuse. The award serves as a reminder to Vietnamese authorities that their crackdown on dissent, for which many are in prison, has not been forgotten by the international community.

Vu Minh Khanh, Dai's courageous wife, is equally dedicated to upholding Christian principles. Risking arrest on her return to Vietnam, she addressed authorities in Europe, the USA, Canada and Australia, seeking support for democracy and religious freedom in Vietnam; the release of her husband and other political prisoners.

During her visit to Australia, Mrs Khanh met MPs, human rights advocates and Elizabeth Kendal who included a strong protest against this injustice in the CFF submission to the Australia-Vietnam Human Rights Dialogue, drawing special attention to the Law on Belief and Religion in Vietnam which regards religion as a threat to national security.

Increased Violence Against Christians in the Congo

Islamic extremists have unleashed terror on Churches, terrorising nuns and bringing death and destruction in what Cardinal Monsengwo Pasinya believes is a deliberate effort to sabotage the church's Mission of Peace and Reconciliation to bring the Congo back from the brink of war.

Amid a wave of increased hostility targeting Christians, they burned the Malole seminary and "sowed terror among the Carmelite Sisters" in nearby Kananga. They also attacked the St. Dominic church in the town of Limete; "overturned the tabernacle, ransacked the altar, smashed some of the benches and attempted to set fire to the church," the Archbishop said. Late last year, at least 38 people were killed when the Islamist Allied Democratic Force (ADF) attacked the DRC town of Beni, according to Open Doors USA.... *Christian Today*

Iran - From Baptism to Detention

An Iranian mother and son have paid a heavy price for turning to Christ. Just months after their baptism in Istanbul, Revolutionary Guards raided their home in Urmia, northwest Iran, and discovered Christian books. Veronika and Augustine were arrested on February 20th and have not been heard of since. Anxious friends believe they are imprisoned in the intelligence building of the Revolutionary Guards, where information about detainees is never given. (MEC)

Please pray that guards and inmates will be moved by their witness and they will be released.

Blackmail of Christians Imprisoned in Pakistan

Youhanabad – 42 Christians have been imprisoned since March 2015, following bomb attacks on several churches in which dozens of Christians were killed or injured. Many believed that little was done to apprehend those responsible. After two Muslim men were found hanged, these 42 Christians were arrested.

Pakistan's Christian leaders have condemned a reported guarantee offered by Public Prosecutor, Syed Anees Shah, that the prisoners would be acquitted of murder charges if they converted to Islam, raising serious concerns over the fairness of proceedings, the justice of the investigation, and the prisoners' safety. They claim that some of the men suffering in jail are innocent, and have urged Pakistan's Chief Justice to intervene to ensure fair adjudication without religious bias. (ICC)

Rise of ISIS in the Philippines

Mindanao is home to the violent Moro National Liberation Front which for decades has aimed to create an independent, 'Bangsamoro' Islamic state. ISIS has been making inroads since the Abu Sayyafjihadists declared allegiance in 2015. A video of an ISIS training camp in a Filipino jungle later surfaced online, and a video of the beheading of a German hostage.

Last December, a bomb exploded outside a Catholic church, and another was found near the US Embassy.

Although the Philippines is 90% Christian, and President Rodrigo Duterte is determined to defeat IS, local Christians, especially converts, are increasingly vulnerable. There is a worrying movement of Islamic militants and arms across Southeast Asian borders.

For more information please contact us

P.O. Box 9465, Deakin, ACT 2600, Australia

Ph (02) 62853116

Email: admin@cffreedom.org

Web: www.christianfaithandfreedom.org