

Christians in Sudan

For the past 17 months, a devastating conflict between rival military factions has been threatening Christianity in Sudan. Millions of people are suffering from displacement, disease, economic freefall, and now famine.

How Christianity in Sudan is under siege

Christians are suffering terribly. There is a figure that 165 churches have been destroyed so far. The stories of deprivation and violence are heart-breaking. Mainly this is because the paramilitary group known as the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) specifically uses churches as their headquarters.

They take over church buildings, kill pastors, and then the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) on the other side bombard the church because they know rebels are in there. When the army or the RSF enters an area, they look for large buildings with good walls to house the fighters. That's invariably a church or another type of religious structure. Then they sweep the area killing Christian civilians.

A Christian pastor in the Darfur region said, *"We just pray the world will notice, and insist on humanitarian corridors so that the dying and the starving can be stopped. We are solely focused on survival right now, as everyone is."*

He also added, *"Please tell the leaders of the churches and anyone with a Christian conscience to put pressure on the governments, and even on those who keep supplying them with arms and bombs. Try sanctions. Try something. Anything. Just stop the dying."* Another Christian leader from the north described the brutal conflict's impact on Christianity in Sudan: *"We are being devoured by both sides. There is genocide—of any group that stands in their way. There is no moral context anymore."*

This is an unusual civil war for Africa, because it's not primarily about religion or tribal differences. It's a fight between two factions who want to make themselves even richer by expanding their exploitative rackets. And unfortunately Christianity in Sudan has become a secondary target since the warring parties like to take over church buildings for military purposes, with absolutely no regard for the lives and well-being of the believers in the area.

Killed for being a Christian in Afghanistan

After becoming a Christian, Aasif had a dream to return to his birthplace to share the gospel with others. He and his family went, and over two years more than 30 people gave their lives to Jesus through Aasif's witness.

But his father grew suspicious. "Aasif's father was a respected figure in the community and, when we returned home, he could see changes in his son's behaviour," says Shaziz, Aasif's wife. "The way he was living raised questions. He repeatedly asked Aasif why he no longer prayed or attended the mosque.

"I knew my father-in-law had killed my husband..."

SHAZIZ (AASIF'S WIFE)

"His father started monitoring him for a month, trying to discover who he was meeting with and why his behaviour had changed. One night, when Aasif returned home from one of his groups, his father discovered that he had a book and took it from him. After reading it, he learnt that his son had become a Christian. That night he declared him an infidel and deserving of Islamic punishment."

A month later, Aasif's father decided to kill him. "One day, he suggested the two of them go swimming, but instead of spending time together, Aasif's father drowned him in the water," recalls Shaziz. "He returned home alone."

Shaziz pressed his father-in-law over Aasif's whereabouts, but he insisted the two of them never went swimming after all. The following day, Aasif's body was discovered.

"I knew my father-in-law had killed my husband, but I was too afraid to share the story with anyone," continues Shaziz. "I feared my father-in-law's retribution; if I revealed the truth, I might be the next target."

"Forty days after his death, I decided to move back to where we used to live. We have three daughters and three sons. My father-in-law did not provide any support, and there was no one to help me take care of my children or provide for their basic needs. We are now living in a rented house."

Despite the immense grief and financial struggles, Shazia has not given up hope. She wants to set up her own bakery so she can take care of her family.

ISIS establishment of a 'Caliphate' where Christians weren't welcome

When ISIS began to control territory in 2014 and establish its so-called caliphate, Christian homes and businesses were marked with the nuun symbol, the Arabic-letter-N for “Nazarene” that signified followers of Jesus.

Traditional Christians were offered the choice to flee and forfeit their homes or pay a jizya subjugation tax and remain in the caliphate. Former Muslim converts to Christianity were also given two choices: return to Islam immediately or be killed. Tens of thousands of Christians fled their homes in Iraq and Syria, moving to camps within their nation or in surrounding nations. Many of those are still trying to recover and put their lives back together.

At the height of the ISIS onslaught, an Iraqi pastor stated: “Pray that God will call Christians to stay here.” There were so many good and logical reasons to flee. Many of his church members had left for Europe or North America. But he was asking us to pray that some Christians would feel called to stay and to continue Gospel outreach in their nation.

Hindu nationalism's rise to power in India

When Narendra Modi was elected Prime Minister in India, he presented himself as the can-do, pro-business leader who'd brought electricity to thousands of citizens in his home state of Gujarat.

What he didn't talk about as much, but was well-known by India's voters, was his background in the Hindu-nationalist RSS movement that aims to make every Indian citizen a Hindu and make non-Hindus feel as unwelcome as possible.

After his initial election in 2014, Modi was re-elected in 2019 with an even stronger majority, and he's keeping campaign promises to his RSS supporters.

Indian Christians received a clear message as they watched Modi's government take action: you aren't welcome, and you won't be protected. Hindu nationalists also received a message: attacks on Christians or other religious minorities will be tolerated and even encouraged by Modi and his RSS-backed government.

Changes in China

The past 10 years have seen an alarming increase of persecution of Christians (and Muslims) in China, spearheaded by Communist Party Chairman Xi Jinping. New laws on religion took affect at the beginning of 2018 and have led to marked increases in church demolitions, arrests of church leaders and control over all religious activities in China. Concurrently, China has created a surveillance state that tracks every Chinese citizen everywhere in China, making underground Christian work significantly more difficult.

Numerous unregistered churches have been closed down, and several well-known Chinese pastors are in prison. In addition to persecuting Christian citizens, China has attempted to force out foreign Christians, with numerous foreigners finding that their visas have been revoked or won't be renewed.

Asia Bibi's blasphemy case in Pakistan. Arrested for being a Christian.

Asia Bibi's persecution saga spanned almost all of the decade as she was arrested in 2009, then sentenced to death by a lower court. Her appeal process took years before the Supreme Court of Pakistan finally ruled in October 2018 that there was no basis for the blasphemy charges against her and ordered her release.

But even after their order, it took more than six months before she was allowed to leave Pakistan for an undisclosed new home where her protection can be better insured.

Christian girls kidnapped in Nigeria, just one chapter in the story of the rise of Boko Haram and Islamist jihadists within the Fulani tribe

The rise of social media in this decade placed this 2014 story of 276 kidnapped girls in front of millions of people, as thousands — including former first lady Michelle Obama — tweeted the hashtag #bringbackourgirls.

Five years later, too many of those girls are **still missing**, and the problem of Islamist jihad attacks not only continues in Northern Nigeria but has spread to Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso and other nearby nations.