

After Mubarak – what next for Egypt's Christians?

The world has looked on as political turmoil has gripped Egypt. Hundreds of thousands of people protested in Tahrir Square in Cairo for almost three weeks leading to President Mubarak's resignation and the transfer of power to the Egyptian Army.



Egypt's Christians wonder what the future holds for them and that uncertainty is likely to remain for some time until it becomes clear who is going to rule Egypt and what policies they will follow. Although the leadership of the Coptic Church initially advised Christians not to get involved in the protests, many young Egyptian Christians have been taking part and the protesters have displayed a unity of purpose transcending religious divisions. Muslim and Christian prayers have been offered in Tahrir Square and repeated chants have been heard: *"Muslims and Christians are all Egyptians"*.

On Sunday 30 January militant Muslims exploited the chaos in Egypt to slaughter eleven Coptic Christians from two families in the village of Sharona, in al Minya Province, about 200km south of Cairo. Men, women and children were killed by militants who acted with help from neighbours.

Ramez Atallah, General Secretary of the Bible Society of Egypt, which has had to suspend many of its activities, has asked for people to pray in the following terms:

PRAY... for wisdom for the political and army leaders to know how to control the situation without resorting to brutal means.

PRAY... that Christians in Egypt (both locals and expats) will not "run away" when things get hard.

PRAY... for the future leadership of Egypt. The door will be open to all political and religious ideologies, extremists and fundamentalists included.



Postcard campaign launched for Asia Bibi

Church in Chains has launched a postcard campaign in support of **Asia Bibi**, the Christian mother of five sentenced to death under the blasphemy law in Pakistan. Although lawyers are confident that she will be cleared by an appeal court, Asia continues to live in fear in prison where she is being held in solitary confinement for her own protection. **Asia has an Urdu Bible in prison**, given to her by supporters. She is not a fluent reader, according to local pastor Obed Robert, who visits her and supports her family, but she has taken particular comfort from John 14v1, *"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me."*

Church in Chains is hoping that hundreds of cards will be sent to the Pakistani Ambassador to Ireland to underline the great concern of Irish Christians about the case. Postcards and a leaflet about the blasphemy law may be ordered (free of charge) from the **Church in Chains** office.

PRAY... for the safety of Asia Bibi and her family (husband, two children and three step-children are living in hiding) and for her release.



Said Musa faces death in Afghanistan

The plight of **Said Musa**, an Afghan Christian facing apostasy charges punishable by death, received worldwide attention early in February when his case was reported by BBC, the *Sunday Times* and the *New York Times*. The media reports claimed that Said faced imminent execution and that Hamid Karzai, President of Afghanistan, had resisted pressure from allies including the USA and Britain to intervene in the case.

Said has been in prison since his arrest in May 2010 after Afghan television broadcast video footage of Christians worshipping in Afghanistan. Said has been a Christian for eight years. He is an amputee with a prosthetic leg (he stepped on a landmine while in the Afghan Army). Said is married with six young children.

PRAY... that Said will continue to know God's presence with him in prison and that he will be delivered from execution.

Iran continues to hold 26 Christians in prison

Persecution of Christians has intensified in Iran, and at least 26 Christians remain in prison out of over 100 who were arrested over Christmas. Amongst them are **Vahik and Sonia Abrahamian** (pictured) who have been in prison for nearly four months.

Vahik and Sonia, who are in their 40s, had been working with drug addicts and helping the needy and disadvantaged. Sonia was pregnant at the time of their arrest and is reported to have lost her baby while in prison. There is great concern about Sonia, who is in poor health. (*Elam Ministries*)



There is no further news about Youcef Nadarkhani who remains in prison as he awaits the result of his appeal to Iran's Supreme Court against the death sentence passed on him for apostasy.

PRAY... that the Lord will give comfort and strength to Vahik and Sonia and all other Christians in prison in Iran. Pray also that Youcef Nadarkhani will be delivered from death.



Photo: Open Doors

Dmitry Shestakov – released but not free

Pastor **Dmitry Shestakov** (pictured with his daughters) was released from prison in Uzbekistan on 21 January, at the end of a four-year sentence for "religious activities". Since release, Dmitry is under the severe restrictions of "administrative supervision" which include regular reporting to police and a nightly curfew between 9pm and 6am.

(Forum 18)

Around The World in Prayer – Saturday 16 April

Church in Chains invites you to its second annual Spring Prayer Day, **Around The World in Prayer**. Visit the colourful prayer stations around the hall, learn about the needs of the church in different countries and join others in united prayer for persecuted Christians around the world.

Around The World in Prayer will be held at Crinken Church Hall, Shankill, Co. Dublin on Saturday 16 April. More details to follow.



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