



OpenDoors®

Persecution Update

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EGYPT

Blast Kills 21 Outside Church in Alexandria Bomb explodes as Christians leave New Year's Eve Mass.

January 3 (Compass) – At least 21 people were killed and scores were wounded on Jan. 1 when a bomb exploded outside a church in Alexandria as congregants were leaving a New Year's Eve Mass.

The explosion ripped through the crowd shortly after midnight, killing instantly most of those who died, and leaving the entrance-way to the Church of the Two Saints, a Coptic Orthodox congregation, covered with blood and severed body parts.

The blast overturned at least one car, set several others on fire and shattered windows throughout the block on which the church is located.

Egyptian authorities reportedly said 20 of the victims have been identified. At least 90 other people were injured in the blast, 10 seriously.

Among the injured were eight Muslims. Many of the injured received treatment at St. Mark's Hospital.

Witnesses said a driver parked a car at the entrance of the church and then ran away seconds before it exploded. Government officials have claimed they found remnants of the bomb, filled with nails and other make-shift shrapnel, at the site.

ISLAMIC THREAT TARGETS CHRISTIANS

No one has claimed responsibility for the bombing, but the attack comes two months after an Islamic group known as the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) issued a threat stating that, "All Christian centers, organizations and institutions, leaders and followers are legitimate targets for the *muhajedeen* [Muslim fighters] wherever they can reach them."

Claiming they would open "rivers of blood" upon Christians, the group specifically threatened Egyptian Christians based on an unsubstantiated rumor that two Coptic women, both wives of Orthodox clergy, were being held against their will after converting to Islam. The statement came after ISI claimed responsibility for an attack on a Baghdad church during Mass in which 58 people were killed.

For weeks before the ISI issued its threat, Alexandria was the site of massive protests against the Orthodox Church and its spiritual leader, Pope Shenouda III.

ANTI-CHRISTIAN VIOLENCE IN IRAQ

Egypt wasn't the only place in the Middle East plagued with anti-Christian violence over the holiday season.

The day before the Alexandria church was bombed, an elderly Christian couple in Baghdad was killed when terrorists placed a bomb outside of their home, rang the doorbell and walked away. The bombing happened at the same time other Christian-owned homes and neighborhoods throughout Baghdad were being attacked.



An Islamic group claimed they would open "rivers of blood" upon Christians.



Survivors of New Year's Eve bombing near a church in Alexandria examine bodies of victims. Photo: Watani



An elderly Christian couple was killed on Dec. 31 in Iraq.

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ALGERIA

Christians to Appeal Conviction for Worshipping

December 15 (Compass) – Four Christian men of a small Protestant church will appeal a Dec. 12 court decision to hand them suspended prison sentences for worshipping without a permit. They say the verdict could have repercussions for all the country's churches, none of which have official permission to operate.

"If they close us, they can close all the churches that exist in Algeria," said the pastor.



ERITREA

Fifteen More Christians Arrested at a Sunday Meeting

December 2 – Eritrean security forces arrested 15 believers attending a Christian gathering on Nov. 28 in a small town close to the city of Keren. All 15 are men currently doing military service. Held at the military camp in Hagaz, they are enduring military punishment for their participation in an unregistered evangelical Christian gathering outside of the Orthodox, Catholic, Lutheran and Islamic faiths. Church leaders account for 970 prisoners of faith, although there may be as many as 600 prisoners of faith unknown to them.

EGYPT

Life on Hold for Christian Arrested for His Faith

December 16 (Compass) – An Egyptian who left Islam to become a Christian and consequently lost his wife, children and business is waiting to see if the government will now take away his freedom for "defaming" Islam. Ashraf Thabet was arrested and charged with defamation, but because his case hasn't been tried, he lives in limbo with death threats from people in his community in Port Said. If found guilty, Thabet would face up to five years in jail.



Christian families stand in front of their houses in Christian village in Central Egypt.

NIGERIA

Tensions High After Christians Killed in Bombings

December 28 (Compass) – In the Christian community in Maiduguri, Borno state, a Baptist pastor and five other Christians were killed on Christmas Eve in attacks on two churches by the outlawed Islamic Boko Haram sect. Many Christians have taken refuge to avoid further attacks as soldiers and police keep watch at churches and other strategic locations in the state. The Borno governor noted that the attack on the Christian community was an attempt by Boko Haram to create conflict between Christians and Muslims in the state.

SOMALIA

Teenage Girl Shot to Death for Embracing Christ

December 3 (Compass) – A 17-year-old girl who converted to Christianity from Islam was shot to death on Nov. 25 in an apparent "honor killing." Nurta Mohamed Farah fled her village after her parents had severely beaten her and regularly shackled her to a tree at their home since May 10, when her family found out that she had embraced Christianity.

Asia

BANGLADESH

Islamic Extremists Held for Church Blast

December 11 (Compass) – At least two Islamic extremists are believed responsible for the long-unresolved case of a bomb blast in a Catholic church building that killed 10 young Christians and maimed dozens of others in 2001. After a district court hearing on Dec. 7, the police inspector said, "Apparently, it seems that (two banned extremist groups) found Christians as their enemy for whatever they were doing against Islam."



A Bangladeshi woman worships in church.

BANGLADESH

Rebel Group Prevents Christmas Worship

December 27 (Compass) – One of the two main political parties of the indigenous people in the southeastern hill tracts prevented Christians from celebrating Christmas. Demanding that Christian converts return to Buddhism, the political party threatened tribal Christians of at least seven churches in Khagrachari district.

Asia

BURMA**Christians Fear Civilian Casualties**

December 8 (Compass) – Civilians in two ethnic minority states with large Christian populations fear their lives may be in danger as skirmishes between rebels and a Burmese junta bent on instilling Buddhist nationalism threaten to escalate into war, which could result in either ethnic cleansing or total subjugation of minorities.



Christians rebuild a church that was burned down by the Burmese army in Tha Dah Der village on July 23. photo: FBR

INDIA**Christians Suffer Spike in Assaults**

December 30 (Compass) – Christians faced a spike in attacks in the past decade, suffering more than 130 assaults a year since 2001. This year Christians suffered at least 149 violent attacks, with most of the incidents taking place in just four states: Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. Of India's 23 million Christians, 2.7 million live in these four states. In 2009 there were more than 152 attacks across India. Three of the four states with the most persecution of Christians are ruled by the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party.



A Christian girl suffered burns during 2008 violence in Orissa state.

INDONESIA**Islamists Raid House Churches in West Java**

December 17 (Compass) – About 200 demonstrators from hard-line Islamic organizations in West Java disrupted the worship of a church in Rancaekek district, Bandung, on Dec. 12. More than 100 worshippers were driven from the building. The protestors also disrupted the worship of six other churches meeting in homes the same day. Indonesian law requires places of worship to have at least 90 church members. They must also obtain the approval of the village head and at least 60 persons from the local community. "These terms are very difficult for us to fulfill," a pastor said.



The HKBP Bethania church met on Dec. 5, before Islamist demonstrators forcibly removed them on Dec. 12.

LAOS**Officials Destroy Rice Paddies, Expel More Christians**

December 29 (Compass) – Rice paddies farmed by 11 Christian families were destroyed by officials and residents of Katin village in Saravan Province on Dec. 26. The destruction followed the expulsion of seven Christian families on Dec. 23, who then sought shelter with the 11 families who were living at the edge of the jungle. These 11 families had been expelled from the village last January despite assurances from provincial and district officials that they had every right to remain in Katin village.

INDONESIA**Islamic Groups Demonstrate Against Worship in Mall**

December 2 (Compass) – After closing churches in West Java, South Sulawesi, Sumatra, and other provinces, Islamic organizations are now attempting to stop Christian worship in or near shopping malls. Dozens of people from Islamic organizations demonstrated in front of the Gandaria City Mall in south Jakarta on Nov. 19, protesting worship of an unnamed church at the shopping center. Churches are meeting in malls because obtaining permits is so difficult.



Rights advocates say Islamic groups have no legal basis for opposing worship in shopping malls.

INDONESIA**Theology Students Still Seek Facilities**

December 23 (Compass) – An Islamic attack on the Arastamar Evangelical Theological Seminary in July 2008 left hundreds of students without facilities, and they are still in temporary shelters. Because the government has not yet compensated the school for the loss of eight buildings, more than 100 students from the seminary demonstrated in front of Jakarta City Hall on Dec. 14. Compensation for their property was expected a year ago.



Seminary students are still in temporary shelters.

Asia

VIETNAM

Authorities Demolish Church Headquarters

December 16 (Compass) – Around 500 soldiers and police cordoned off the church headquarters and home of Rev. Nguyen Hong Quang on Dec. 14, and heavy equipment operators quickly demolished the two-story building. Mennonite church members said the government was using legal means as pretext for suppressing their church.



Rev. Nguyen Hong Quang

VIETNAM

Authorities Move to Stop Christmas Events

December 20 (Compass) – Hundreds of Christians from 10 northern provinces were locked out of the National Convention Center in Hanoi where a Christmas celebration was to take place on Dec. 19. When Christians began singing and praying in the square, police moved in, striking some Christians and arresting at least six people. Similar incidents occurred in four other places throughout the country. A key church leader revealed that a secret government document dated Oct. 15 ordered the crackdown on unregistered groups.

VIETNAM

Last-Minute Permit Given for Christmas Event

December 29 (Compass) – Granted government permission only five hours before a scheduled Christmas event, house church leaders turned an empty field into a rudimentary stadium and welcomed some 20,000 people for worship on Dec. 26.



Organizers estimated 2,000 people indicated a first-time decision to follow Christ. (Photo: Hoithanh.com)

Middle East/Muslim World

AFGHANISTAN

Jailed Christian Lacks Legal Representation

December 9 (Compass) – Said Musa, a Christian facing “apostasy” charges punishable by death, is still without legal representation after authorities blocked a foreign lawyer’s attempt to visit him in prison. Without prior notice, Musa was summoned to appear before a judge on Nov. 27. Another Afghan Christian, Shoib Assadullah, is in prison for his faith. He was arrested on Oct. 21 for giving a New Testament to a man who reportedly turned him in to authorities.

TURKEY

Progress Made Linking Murders and ‘Masterminds’

December 20 (Compass) – Attorneys prosecuting the murder of three Christians are making progress linking the knifemen who slayed them to the masterminds who put them up to it. Two witnesses – whose testimony the court previously blocked – will be allowed to testify about the plans behind the killings in Malatya. The latest court hearing was on Dec. 3.

IRAQ

Christian Families Exiting

December 3 – “A large exodus began after scores of Iraqi Christians were killed in a church in Baghdad as they attended Mass,” wrote an Iraqi Christian in Baghdad. “Churches in Baghdad are almost empty. ... Mosul, the other city with a large Christian minority, is so violent that one of the city’s archbishops declared that the city had become dangerous for



Christians to stay. Many churches have been abandoned.”

“The exodus of Iraqi Christians is continuing and 507 families have landed in Kurdistan. Many more families have fled directly abroad, mainly to Syria, Jordan and Turkey.”



Wilson Augustine had been distributing pamphlets and proclaiming Christ door-to-door among area Christian families.

PAKISTAN

Muslims Burn, Beat Evangelist Unconscious

December 13 (Compass) – Evangelist Wilson Augustine is still recovering from burns after six young Muslim men beat him with clubs and belts and set him on fire on Nov. 22 in a village in Punjab Province.



Although police filed a report for the attempted murder, they declined to name the suspects the victim identified.

Wilson’s father said police were bribed.