

THEY ARE PERSECUTED - THEY ARE OUR BRETHREN

Help us keep the flame of Faith alive

The number of Christians who suffer persecution because of their Faith continues to rise in our time. The latest edition of "Religious Freedom in the World Report" by Aid to the Church in Need found out that 1 in 4 Christians live in countries where their religious freedom is not respected.

They live in countries governed by laws that marginalise Christians and limit their freedom of expression. They cannot apply for certain jobs or receive basic education, which leaves them forever mired in abject poverty.

Many of them are physically and psychologically abused with no one to defend them. Many are forced to flee with their families, either to other regions within their own country or to another country, starting life from scratch.

These events may be happening thousands of miles away from us, but Pope Francis encourages us to think of those who are suffering from persecution, and to be close to them with our affection, our prayers and also our solidarity.

"Let us express our closeness to these brothers and sisters. We are one body in Christ and these Christians are the bleeding limbs of the body of Christ, who is the Church", says Pope Francis.

Together, we can offer them hope, refuge and vital help to protect them and give them comfort in their suffering. ✚



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Aid to the
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ACN MALTA



MOZAMBIQUE: “WE NEED HELP”

At the IDP camp in Metuge district (a district of Cabo Delgado Province in northern Mozambique)



A mother and her little baby displaced after attacks in Cabo Delgado province

The northern region of Mozambique has been under violent attack by jihadist groups claiming to belong to ISIS, the fearsome Islamic State terrorist group. The violence began in 2017. In recent weeks it has taken on a new dimension, to the despair of thousands of people. Once again, these people had to flee after seeing their villages destroyed, and the barbaric deaths of their family and friends.

In the midst of all this, the Church has once again become a target for the terrorists. In all the villages that were attacked and reduced to ashes, “all the Christian chapels were destroyed,” says Bishop António Juliasso of Pemba in Mozambique in a message to ACN.

“The churches were burnt, as were the homes of the faithful,” said a missionary who cannot be named for security reasons.

The Catholic Mission of Our Lady of Africa in Mazeze, which provided a lot of social support to the faithful was completely destroyed by the terrorists, as well as the local health centre and the school.

The attack on the Catholic Mission led Fr Kwiriwi Fonseca to launch “a cry for

help” so that the world does not forget the humanitarian drama that is being experienced in this country.

In a message sent to ACN, the priest says that “the people are suffering” with this new wave of violence that, in a way, took everyone by surprise. “Last year, it seemed that things were improving, but this year we were surprised by a new serious, terrible and cruel wave of attacks.”

The toll is tragic. Since the attacks began in October 2017, it is estimated that more than 5,000 people have died and more than 1 million have been forced to flee the violence of the men in black, the jihadists.

“This is not the time to remain silent, or complacent, it is the time to shout loudly that we need help in Cabo Delgado. We want immediate help to resolve this problem”, he said.

Bishop Juliasso also speaks of the

astonished, sad faces of people in despair. “The biggest risk is that their faces will be forgotten due to other wars in the world.

“Right now, the people need food, the people need blankets, the people need shelter. Now, fear is growing, the people are desperate and do not know where to hide.

“So, while we pray for the conversion of the terrorists, we also pray for the benefactors to open their hearts and support the innocent, the people who are suffering.

“I would like to thank ACN, who has given special support to the Diocese of Pemba, in Cabo Delgado. Please do not abandon us! The Diocese of Pemba needs your further support. Intensify your work and channel all the necessary help to restore the dignity of the people of Cabo Delgado. Thank you, God bless you!” ✝



PAKISTAN:

COUNTING ON YOUR COMPASSION

Our Christian brothers and sisters in Pakistan have remained true to the Faith despite heightened persecution

Pakistan is a tough place to live for Christians, especially women and girls. Almost every week, Christian teenage girls in Pakistan are being kidnapped, raped, forced to convert and marry.

Oppression is indeed a daily reality for Christians there. Many of them are denied access to healthcare, education and have limited job prospects. In the largely Islamic country, our Christian brothers and sisters are often put under pressure to abandon the Faith.

Recently, hundreds of Christian families lost everything when anti-Christian riots took place in Jaranwala, in the district of Punjab, Pakistan. This extremist attack has been described by our project partners as the worst act of persecution against Christians, Pakistan has ever witnessed.

Hundreds of families had to flee and lost all their possessions and their livelihoods, being forced to stay with relatives or even out in the surrounding fields. The diocese has identified over 400 families that are in more desperate need and has asked for our support to help them rebuild their lives.

In response to the appeal of Bishop Indrias Rehmat, ACN is funding a relief project, to help the Christian community,



Hundreds of Christian families are in need of daily food and other emergency provisions

and these affected families in particular, to get back on their feet.

The families are in need of basic relief items such as clothes, kitchen appliances, bedding and mattresses, stationary for school children and rickshaws and motorcycles for drivers and delivery boys whose vehicles were destroyed in the attacks.

Other ongoing projects in aid of our persecuted brothers and sisters in Pakistan include: the Help and Protect programme which provides legal aid, awareness campaign and pastoral

support to teenage girls. These girls are at risk of kidnapping, forced marriages and conversion. ACN, in collaboration with the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) in Pakistan, also provides legal aid for Christians on death row and others accused of crimes they did not commit.

Our brothers and sisters in Pakistan are counting on our compassion. Please give today, to enable ACN continue these life-saving projects for the Christians who look up to us for help and hope. ✝





IRAQ:

REBUILDING FROM ASHES

The first family to return to Batnaya in June 2019

Christians in Iraq are like olive trees. Despite challenging conditions, they still bear fruit

Your kind generosity is working miracles in Iraq. When ISIS extremists committed genocide, there were fears it could spell the end of almost 2,000 years of continuous Christian presence in Iraq.

By supporting ACN and enabling us to fund emergency aid projects in Iraq, you helped the faithful survive one of the darkest periods of persecution. Now, they are back home, rebuilding out of the ashes of destruction.

Archbishop Bashar Warda of Erbil told ACN that around 9,000 Christian families have now returned to their homes in the Nineveh Plains after fleeing a decade ago when ISIS seized the region.

“Words cannot describe what we experienced 10 years ago, ISIS tried to eradicate us, but they failed”, said Mgr Nizar Semaan, the Syriac Catholic Archbishop of Adiabene, in Northern Iraq.

“The people here are like olive trees. You can cut them, burn them, but after 10 or 20 years they will continue to give fruit. They tried everything, but we remain, and as a Church we do everything to give a sign of hope”, continued Mgr Nizar Semaan.

Archbishop Warda has appealed to ACN to keep on supporting our brothers and sisters in Iraq, stressing that this Christian community needs all the help they can get to “keep the flame of the Christian Faith shining” in Iraq’s historic Christian heartland.

Young people who are the hope of this Christian heritage are leaving due to poverty and unemployment. We need to help them stay to secure the future of Christianity in this country.

ACN is now prioritising education and development projects in Iraq, providing scholarship support for young Iraqi Christians who are unable to afford education and supporting local Catholic schools to continue the important education of young children.

Archbishop Warda says, “we pray for you and for all our benefactors. We pray that whatever you give, we multiply it in a way that will help serve the needs of the people”. ✝

