Market Drayton Churches Together: Prayer for Persecuted Christians - 17 Apr. 2019 SRI LANKA

May 9 - Sri Lankan Christians grapple with aftermath of Easter bombings amid fears of fresh attacks - World Watch Monitor

world watch monitor. or g/2019/05/sri-lank an-christians-grapple-with-after math-of-easter-bombings-amid-fears-of-fresh-attacks

Sri Lankan Arasaratnam Verl is deep in mourning.

His son Jackson (13) and sister Verlini (36) were killed instantly when a bomb exploded in the evangelical Zion Church in the eastern city of Batticaloa on Easter Sunday morning, 21 April. Verlini's husband Ranjith (39), an engineer and Blackbelt in karate, died a week later of kidney failure: he also had 3rd degree burns.

On her sixth birthday, Ranjith and Verlini's orphan Eliza (6) was due to be transferred from Batticaloa ICU to a hospital in Colombo the next day: her womb had to be removed due to shrapnel injury. She was also blinded in one eye, the doctors were trying to save the other.

Also orphaned was her 8 year old brother Rufus Isaac. "My son Jackson and my sister died on the spot," said Verl. "Jackson was captain of his basketball team. He used to compete in many places like Jaffna, Colombo. He's the best in everything. He's my only son.

"Jesus died on Good Friday, and on Easter Sunday, He was raised back to life. My son, sister, and brother-in-law died, but they were raised to new life with Jesus on that day."

As a Sunday School teacher, Verlini had read the Bible cover to cover 27 times, Verl shared. "On Easter Sunday, she'd ensured the children [understood why Christ had died on the Cross], they'd confessed their sins and accepted Jesus. After that, she and the children went down for breakfast [in the church portico] and the explosion went off."

"Losing someone hurts. They are special people. They were not killed. They were sown like seeds. And the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church".

Despite the heartache, Verl shows no sign of losing his trust in God. "God is good. God is great. My foundation is Jesus Christ. I'm zero. Jesus is everything. My son was mine for 13 years, but he is His forever."

Verl is but one of the hundreds whose lives have changed forever. Several families, like Verl's, lost more than one member – and all in one nuclear family were killed. Assistant Pastor Kumaran, who lost his 14-year-old son Malkiya, pondered tearfully "I'm not asking God why, I'm only asking how I can pass through this, and for how long."

At least 29 worshippers, including 14 children, were killed and 100 others were wounded in the suicide attack on the church, minutes after suicide bombers also rocked two Catholic churches: St. Anthony's Church in the Kochchikade district in the capital of Colombo, killing over 50 congregants; and St. Sebastian's Church in Negombo near Colombo, killing more than 100.

A field worker with Open Doors, which supports persecuted Christians, wrote of her visit:

"Places of worship are now heavily guarded: Catholic, Protestant, mosques – all entrances are punctuated by army men, and the entrance to the community center where Zion Church is temporarily holding its services was no exception on Sunday (5 May). "Snipers decked the roof of the center – two men with rifles at the front, three more at the back. A military truck was parked outside. The original church, nearby, was still cordoned off. "Prior to entry, one church member told us to leave everything but our Bibles and IDs. No photos and videos, he said. Especially, no bags.

"When we stepped inside the church, it was a disarming sight – hundreds of worshippers filled the hall, their hands thrown to the sky, shouting 'Amen! Hallelujah!'

"Rev. Roshan Mahesan stood in front and honored the dead. "They are martyrs. Now they are home with Jesus." He also read the names of the injured, stopping after every couple of names to give people time to pray. Five are in hospital in Colombo, some in another in Kandy while four remain in Batticaloa Intensive Care Unit.

"The shrapnel had taken life and limb, but the believers knelt, stood, and sang. They banged heaven's gates, asking God for healing and to help them to love and forgive. It was a kind of wailing I have never heard before".

As Sri Lanka continued on high alert due to threats of fresh attacks and some churches remained closed for a second week since the Easter bombings killed at least 257 people, including 45 children, and injured around 500 others, the island nation's Evangelical Alliance was gearing up to help affected Christians cope with the community's worst tragedy.

The National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka (NCEASL), which represents over 200 churches and Christian organisations, is preparing to meet short-term needs of survivors, including treatment of the injured, counselling those suffering from post-traumatic stress and providing financial needs to those who have lost earning members of their families, as Yamini Ravindran, NCEASL's Legal and Advocacy Head, told Vishal Arora in this 6' 30" video report.

Of the 257 dead, about 180 were at the church sites. The others were killed in blasts at the Shangri-La, Kingsbury and Cinnamon Grand hotels in Colombo. The three hotels had advertised their Easter brunches. Hours later on Easter Sunday, two more explosions followed during police raids.

"It was something like what we experienced during the (civil) war or tsunami (2004) ... all kinds of mixed emotions," recalled NCEASL's Executive Director Godfrey Yogarajah.

The suicide bombers were members of a local Islamist extremist group, called National Thowheed Jamath (NTJ), which allegedly has links with the Islamic State terror group, according to the Sri Lankan government. ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi appeared in a video claiming that the Easter attacks were carried out to avenge the outfit's defeat in the Syrian city of Baghouz, its only remaining territory in the region.

"You can't say the threat is over," Health Minister and government spokesman Rajitha Senaratne told media on Saturday (May 4), and the Sri Lankan military issued a statement the same day, saying, "Extensive cordon and search operations of the army and sister services across the country with assistance of the police are continuing in search of terrorists, hideouts, explosives, weapons and other war-like items... with the deployment of more and more troops as required."

Christians had been experiencing persecution in this Buddhistmajority country, but this is the first time they were targeted by Islamist terror groups. The Bodu Bala Sena (Buddhist Power Force, or BBS) had been attacking Christians and Muslims over the last decade.

In 2018, NCEASL recorded at least 86 incidents of discrimination, threats and violence against Christians, and it had reported 26 such incidents this year until March 25. More than 70 percent of Sri Lanka's population follows Theravada Buddhism. Muslims make up about 10 percent of the population, and Christians less than eight percent, the majority of whom are Roman Catholic.

26 Apr - Asylum seekers attacked in Negombo in wake of Church bomb attacks - BPCA

britishpakistanichristians.org/blog/asylum-seekers-attacked-in-negombo-in-wake-of-church-bomb-attacks

Several migrant groups in Sri Lanka have been seeking protection in the police stations of Negombo after a series of attacks. Afghan and Pakistani asylum seekers have complained about threats to their lives from the local community after the series of bomb attacks.

We spoke to one of the frightened asylum seekers, he described events of the past few days and explained how dangerous the situation is, he said:

"For the last 4 days large groups of local Sri Lankans have been threatening to kill us if we stay in our homes.

"Some homes have been attacked in Sea Street, and Peter Mendes Road and in the area of Daluputhoa.

"My family and I were attacked in Dalupothoa when my home was broken into and rioters came in and vandalised the property I rented while we were forced to watch - they began to beat us." We were told the violence enacted upon us was in retaliation

for the series of recent bomb attacks."
"I begged them to stop beating us and explained that we were innocent and that there were children in my home. The men said our Christian children have been killed why should we save yours.

"The men beating us until other Sri Lankan local residents came to my rescue and explained I was a Christian - even then the gang wanted me out of the area as they said I was a Pakistani first and then Christian.

"I had called 119 for the police when the men first started beating on our door - but no police came.

"My Landlord then called me and told me to return his house key as I was being evicted because he had received threats that my building will be burnt down if I stay home.

"We have taken shelter in local police stations after being advised by local Christian leaders, but now we are too fearful to leave their forecourts.

"We believe the threats are real and that we will be killed if we dare to exit outside the station - these people mean us real harm."

By the time our informant arrived at the police station other Pakistani Christians, Ahmadis and Afghans asylum seekers had already gathered there. Though Police could not provide anywhere inside the station the use of the station forecourt as a temporary residence was permitted to the beleaguered and newly homeless people, who had all been evicted by their landlords. Now over 60 Pak-Christians are present at Negombo Police Station from a total of around 100.

There is no means for food and no-one has any form of income after being removed from their work de to the growing animosity towards foreigners in Sri Lanka.

Though relatively inactive in helping these families the police have been providing food packages to the newly homeless migrant community.

Attempts were made to move the asylum community to another area by some of the local church groups last night. It was felt that the foyer of the police station would not be safe from a large scale attack which some groups were trying to foment. However, after moving many of the Pak-Christian community they found that a local band of Bhuddist monks attempted to attack the asylum seekers in the temporary home provided, until local police intervened.

It is not known if Christians are involved in the attacks but Negombo has an extremely high percentage of Catholics and St Sebastians Church in Negombo - which once famously protected Pakistani Christians - suffered the worst of the several bomb attacks.

See also: 25 April - Muslims flee, Christians grieve in Sri Lankan town torn by violence - Reuters

reuters. com/article/us-sri-lanka-blasts-muslim-refugees/muslims-flee-christians-grieve-in-sri-lankan-town-torn-by-violence-idUSKCN1S108P

Other reports from Sir Lanka

Including pages with videos shown at 15 May P4PC session

22 Apr - Unprecedented Suicide Bombing Attacks Shock Christians in Sri Lanka - Morningstar News

morningstarnews.org/2019/04/unprecedented-suicide-bombing-attacks-shock-christians-in-sri-lanka

24 Apr - Sri Lanka: The worshipper who blocked a bomber - BBC News

bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-48034689

24 Apr - Sri Lanka: the worshipper who blocked bomber prevented further bloodshed | World news | The Guardian

theguardian.com/world/2019/apr/24/sri-lanka-tributes-paid-to-worshipper-ramesh-raju-who-confronted-bomber

24 Apr - Sri Lanka attacks: Bomber 'studied in UK and Australia' - BBC News

bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-48035043

27 Apr - Sri Lanka Pastor Forgives Bombers - BosNewsLife bosnewslife.com/2019/04/27/sri-lanka-pastor-forgives-bombers

29 Apr - Sri Lanka Pastor Forgives Bombers - Pakistan Christian Post

www.pakistanchristianpost.com/head-line-news-details/7095

29 Apr - "Most people are afraid": The latest from Sri Lanka - Open Doors USA

opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/stories/most-people-are-afraid-the-latest-from-sri-lanka

2 May - Sri Lanka: Courageous faith rising from the ashes - Open Doors UK

opendoorsuk.org/news/stories/sri-lanka-190502

5 May - One Sri Lankan suicide bomber tried to target a church but the Easter mass had already finished - Daily Mail Online

dailymail.co.uk/news/article-6994475/One-Sri-Lankan-suicide-bomber-tried-target-church-Easter-mass-finished.html

10 May - Sri Lankan Christians grapple with aftermath of Easter bombings amid fears of fresh attacks - World Watch Monitor worldwatchmonitor.org/2019/05/sri-lankan-christians-grapple-with-aftermath-of-easter-bombings-amid-fears-of-fresh-attacks

13 May - Sri Lanka imposes curfew after mobs target mosques | World news - The Guardian

theguardian.com/world/2019/may/13/sri-lanka-imposes-curfew-after-mobs-target-mosques

Other Countries

BURKINA FASO

7 May - They Refused to Denounce Jesus - Pastor, 5 Others Shot After Church Service in Burkina Faso - Open Doors USA

open doors us a. org/christian-persecution/stories/they-refused-to-denounce-jesus-pastor-5-others-shot-after-church-service-in-burkina-faso

Last Sunday seemed like any Sunday for 80-year-old Pastor Pierre Oult, who has spent 40 years serving his church and Sirgadji village community in the northeastern Soum province of Burkina Faso. On April 28, he gathered for worship with his congregation in the West African country. And like every Sunday, he preached the Word of God with the wisdom that seasoned years of life and ministry bring.

But shortly after the service, an ordinary Sunday suddenly turned deadly and a church building where worshippers had just gathered became a crime scene.

Killed for Following Jesus

At about 1 pm, while Pastor Pierre was still talking with several congregants in the churchyard, a dozen men on motorbikes stormed the area.

A local leader who wished to remain anonymous told World Watch Monitor: "The assailants asked the Christians to convert to Islam, but the pastor and the others refused."

Reportedly, the attackers gathered Pastor Pierre and the five other congregants under a tree and then confiscated their Bibles and cell phones.

"Then they called them, one after the other, behind the church building where they shot them dead," the leader said.

In addition to Pastor Pierre, the attackers killed his son, Wend-Kuni, and his brother-in-law (a church deacon), Zoéyandé Sawadogo, as well as believers Sayouba and Arouna Sawadogo, and a primary school teacher, Elie Boena. Another was seriously injured and taken to a nearby hospital.

The men then set the church building and two motorbikes on fire. Before they left, they stole sheep and a bag of rice from Pastor Pierre's home.

Cont/...

2 May - Burkina Faso church leader killed by Islamists: 'I'd rather die than leave my community' - World Watch Monitor

world watch monitor. or g/2019/05/burkina-faso-church-leader-killed-by-islamists-id-rather-die-than-leave-my-community

SYRIA

'I lost a million dollars - but gained Jesus Christ.' - Release International

releaseinternational.org/i-lost-a-million-dollars

...says Syrian refugee John, now living in Lebanon.

John was a nominal Christian, a wealthy agriculturalist who lost everything in the civil war. And when IS moved in they made him pay jizya tax - a fine in gold for being a Christian

They came to his farm to steal his animals and shot him in the leg. But astonishingly, John says it was worth it all.

'I lost a million dollars,' he says, 'but I gained Jesus Christ.' As well as IS, he had Syrian militia to contend with. 'They were kidnapping Christians, so I was afraid for my daughters. I sent my family to Lebanon.'

Later, friends helped him escape. But it wasn't plain sailing for John in Lebanon.

'For the first six months I was depressed. I thought if Jesus wanted to save me, He would have saved my property. I lost everything in the war and I was bitter.'

Cont/...

INDIA

8 May - Fire at Historic Church Building on Easter Stuns, but Does Not Stop, Worshipers in India - Morningstar News morningstarnews.org/2019/05/fire-at-historic-church-building-on-easter-stuns-but-does-not-stop-worshipers-in-india

It was a different kind of Easter celebration this year for Pastor Anil Juit of Maranatha Full Gospel Church in eastern India. Opening the door of the historic church building in Arrah, in Bihar state's Bhojpur District, on Easter Sunday (April 21), he found a gaping hole in the back wall, and everything inside had been gathered up and burned in a heap, he said.

The mats the congregation usually sat on for services were charred in the ash heap. Pastor Juit and the 70 members of the congregation were shocked but remained for Easter worship. As he made his way out at the end of the service, Pastor Juit noticed that someone had written "Jai Sri Ram [Hail, lord Ram]" on the outside wall of the church building.

"It is evident from the slogan that this is the work of some Hindu radicals," he told Morning Star News, adding that he suspected the damage was done the previous night. Cont/...

14 May - Persecution Indian Police Intervene to Lift Social Boycott Against Five Christian Families | Persecution persecution.org/2019/05/14/indian-police-intervene-lift-social-boycott-five-christian-families

Police in India's eastern Jharkhand state have intervened in a village conflict that left five Christian families suffering the effects of a social boycott. The boycott was leveled against the Christian families after they refused to "reconvert" to the local Sarna religion by fellow villagers.

The conflict started in on April 10 when village leaders from Tetratola village demanded the five Christian families "reconvert" to the Sarna religion, a local religion characterized by nature worship. When the Christians refused, a social boycott was instituted against them by the entire village. As part of this social boycott, local villagers were ordered not to socialize with the Christians or they would be fined 1,000 rupees. In addition, the Christian families were ban from receiving government benefits, denied access to the village's well, and had their agricultural lands seized.

On Monday, May 13, Mohan Pandey, the officer-in-charge at the Chandwa police station, met with village residents in an effort to lift the social boycott. According to Officer Pandey, the villagers agreed to lift much of the social boycott against the Christian families. However, without a constant police presence in the village, it is possible that the social boycott could be reintroduced.

Across India, social boycotts are used to persecute Christians in village settings. In many cases, the social boycotts are used to pressure Christians into renouncing their faith and converting to the majority religion of the village.

UGANDA

13 May - Large Family in Eastern Uganda Becomes Big Target for Muslim Extremists - Morningstar News

morningstarnews.org/2019/05/large-family-in-eastern-uganda-becomes-big-target-for-muslim-extremists

Yusuf Tulo and his sizeable family were worshipping in their home in eastern Uganda on April 28 when they heard their neighbors shouting, "Fire!"

Tulo, 35, had left Islam to put his faith in Christ last October. He still had three wives and 14 children dependent on him

living on a homestead with more than one house in Bugwere village, and the house they used for worship was on fire. When they went outside, however, something was not right; among neighbors standing around the house looking at the smoke, one said, "Please remain indoors – your lives are in danger."

Tulo had been receiving threatening messages from Muslims for months, but faced with the danger of smoke coming from the house, he chose to remain outside. An hour later, the roof collapsed in flames and the house was charred.

Cont/...

IRAN

10 May - 'When They Come to Take Mom Away'— Preparing My Daughter for Persecution in Iran - Open Doors USA

opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/stories/when-they-come-to-take-mom-away-preparing-my-daughter-for-persecution-in-iran

'How could I live not knowing how my daughter was doing?' Being incarcerated for your faith is one thing. But what would happen to your child if you were taken away? A mother in Iran (No. 9 on the World Watch List) shares how she prepared her daughter for the day persecution arrived at their door. I knew the day would come ... the day they would ring my

doorbell and take me and my husband to prison. Although everyone around me thought I was a housewife, I was, in fact, involved in full-time ministry. The authorities were bound to find out.

We started preparing our daughter Lily* for persecution when she was still in primary school: "When they come and take mom and dad away, don't worry," we told her. "The Bible tells us it is normal to be persecuted as believers. They will take us to prison, ask us some questions, and hit us. Then we will come back."

The Day it Happened: Persecution in Iran

It was an early winter morning when the authorities came to our house. Lily was 12 at the time and had already left for school. They searched everything. Then they ordered my husband and me to come with them.

On the way to prison, I thought about Lily and how she would know what to do when my sister picked her up from school and told her—Lily would pray for us. And when she was afraid, she would pray more.

In prison, my husband and I were split up. I was allowed to call Lily four times a week. I was interrogated daily; soon, they found my weak point. My little girl.

I told them everything they wanted to know about myself, but I refused to give the names of others. "Okay," they told me, "as long as you won't give names, you can't call your daughter."

Placing my Lily in His Hands

"I was devastated. Back in my cell, I couldn't stop crying. I knew that I did the right thing. Yet how could I live without knowing how my daughter was doing? How could she be comforted without hearing my voice?

While I was praying, suddenly I felt a warm wind stroking my cheeks.

"Take it in," I heard the Lord saying.

With every breath of warm air I took, I felt my body being filled with joy. In fact, I couldn't sit anymore. I had to dance for joy and praise God. It lasted all night. All night, I was dancing for the Lord, until the next morning God was giving me the strength to put my beloved daughter in His hands.

Not long after, I was released, as was my husband ... through tears, I saw my Lily's face again. She told me that she had been

praying a lot for us. Spending these times in prayer and trusting the Lord in everything was a completely new experience for her. In hindsight, Lily says that she never grew more in her faith than during that time we were in prison. I prepared my Lily for what would happen when her parents were taken away. And I learned to put my Lily in the hands of the Lord, and He took care of her in miraculous ways."

*representative name and photo used for security reasons.

ALGERIA

2 May - No retreat, no surrender: Living courageously for Jesus in Algeria - Open Doors UK

opendoorsuk.org/news/stories/algeria-190502

Fight or flight? What's your natural response when you face opposition? If your faith came under fire, would you stand your ground?

For Muslih*, a secret believer in Algeria, following Jesus is a daily battle, but retreating is not an option. "When you are in a war, when you run, you turn your back on the enemy and they shoot you," he says. "We're in a battle and it's better to keep the weapons and go to the front, maybe we can reach our goal. For sure we will have less chances when we retreat."

'The Prayers of Christians Are Heard'

Muslih, who used to belong to a political movement that campaigned for greater cultural and political freedom for Berbers, came to faith after God answered the prayers of some Christians who prayed for his broken car to start.

"Something happened in my heart," he says. "Thoughts like, 'the prayers of Christians are heard' and 'their God answers prayers' came to mind. Six months later I became a believer." But Muslih's choice to follow Jesus was not without consequences. "My brother was very opposed to my conversion, also my cousins. I was the first Christian in my village. It was something new for everyone, and there were a lot of Muslim extremists in that place."

Muslih's village used threats of expulsion from the community and isolation to intimidate him – threats that did not stop him from sharing the gospel and planting a house church.

"I brought some gospels to my village and we started with a group of five or six converts in small, secret gatherings in our village. We used all kinds of locations – sometimes in a house, under olive trees; even once in a grave yard. As soon as we were discovered, we moved to another location. Again and again we were chased out of our meeting place. Normally we could use a place for one or two months before we had to move on."

Cont/...

BRITAIN

3 May - ENOUGH IS ENOUGH: Our response to the government's report on Christian persecution - Open Doors IIK

opendoorsuk.org/news/stories/uk-190503

Bishop of Truro's Independent Review for the Foreign Secretary of FCO Support for Persecuted Christians | Christian Persecution Review

christianpersecutionreview.org.uk/interim-report

9 May - A hushed-up genocide - Catholic Herald catholicherald.co.uk/magazine/a-hushed-up-genocide

10 May - Open Doors calls on the Home Secretary to stop the deportation of Pakistani Christian Azeem Wazir opendoorsuk.org/news/stories/pakistan-190510