



Action by Christians Against Torture

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Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. St Matthew 5:10

Bangladesh

Despite the efforts of the Bangladeshi government to combat religious extremism, attacks by Muslim extremists on religious and other minorities have increased in recent years. The **Barnabas Fund** has highlighted the plight of Christians in Bangladesh but Hindus, Buddhists and atheists are also among those threatened. Furthermore a new law of 2018 risks limiting the scope of freedom of expression and introduces further criminalisation of “blasphemy”. For this reason the UN High commissioner for Human Rights has urged the Bangladeshi government to revise the law to ensure that it is in line with international human rights law.

Britain

The Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Bill has been very controversial although it passed its second reading in the House of Commons in September. It was designed to discourage vexatious accusations about the conduct of British troops abroad. However there is concern about some of its contents, such as a presumption against the prosecution of current or former military personnel for offences committed over five

years ago. There are fears that it could create immunity for British soldiers accused of committing torture and, to quote Field Marshal Lord Guthrie, “this would be a stain on Britain’s standing in the world”.

Critics of the Bill maintain that there are already processes in place which should ensure that vexatious prosecutions are not permitted. The bill itself is now in the committee stage and the committee is expected to report to the House of Commons by Thursday October 22.

Belarus

In August this year the people of Belarus went to the polls and, yet again, Alexander Lukashenko was elected president, winning, allegedly, 80.8% of the vote. He has been in power since 1994 but this time thousands of the citizens of Belarus refused to accept that the election had been free and fair and there have been constant demonstrations against the result. Despite this Lukashenko has been inaugurated as president.

Meanwhile demonstrators have been arrested and tortured by the police and there has been judicial harassment of human rights lawyers. These include our prayer case for October, **Marfa Rabkova**. In September UN human rights experts called on Belarus to stop torturing detainees and to bring to justice police officers who had reportedly beaten and

humiliated protesters in custody but there is evidence that torture has continued.

Various countries have imposed sanctions on members of Lukashenko's regime but as long as he has the support of President Putin it is difficult to foresee an outcome that would satisfy the protesters. It appears that very recently Lukashenko met the resistance leaders in prison but police violence continues against street protests.

Bahrain

Bahrain is a useful ally in the Persian Gulf for the UK and the US but its history abounds in of human rights abuses, most recently following the Arab Spring in 2011 when thousands of Bahrainis called for democratic reform. Many were imprisoned and sometimes condemned to death as a result of evidence provided by torture. An additional complication is that the majority of Bahrain's population is Shia but the royal family is Sunni and tends to regard Shias as hostile.

The imprisonment of a prominent human rights activist, **Nabeel Rajaf**, our prayer case for May 2018, attracted widespread international criticism. His crime had been to criticise the government particularly for its use of torture. He was released in June this year but others remain in prison. In February this year a UN Special Rapporteur expressed grave concern about Bahrain's treatment of political prisoners and international demands for their release continue. Two, in particular, have been the focus of recent attention, Mohamed Ramadan and Hussein Moosa. They had confessed, allegedly under torture, to the murder of a policeman but later withdrew their confessions. Although UK trained torture investigators recommended that their death sentences be reconsidered their death sentences were confirmed in July.

Burundi

Burundi has a long history of political turmoil not helped by tensions between the Tutsi minority and the Hutu majority. In 2005 Pierre Nkurunziza became president and his determination to hang onto power led to protests and bitter government repression. Thousands fled the country while others were killed, imprisoned and tortured. A UN human rights officer called Burundi "one of the most prolific slaughterhouses of humans in recent times".

In 2017 the Treasurer of ACAT-Burundi, **Germain Rukuki**, who had campaigned for human rights in Burundi, was charged with rebellion and damaging the internal security of the state. He was our prayer case for February 2018, the year in which he was sentenced to 32 years imprisonment. His appeal against the sentence was upheld in 2019. However this year Burundi's Supreme Court has ruled that his appeal should be heard again as he was not present in court for the original appeal hearing. No date has been set for the new appeal and Rukuki is still in prison.

Meanwhile, Pierre Nkurunziza died in June, and some commentators hope that the new president, Evariste Ndayishimiye, wants to show the world that Burundi is changing. However last month the UN Human Rights Council reported that serious violations of human rights continue under the new government.

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