

A WORLD IN MOTION



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President Erdogan declared victory in a referendum on 16 April, granting him sweeping powers in the biggest overhaul of modern Turkish politics.

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Nearly a million Christians from all over South Africa came together on a farm near Bloemfontein to pray for the nation.

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The US military dropped its largest ever conventional bomb on suspected Islamic State fighters in eastern Afghanistan.

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Business as Mission (BAM) one-day seminars are being held in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Port Elizabeth in May.



THE NUMBERS: TURKISH REFERENDUM



49,799,163

The number of votes cast



85%

The voter turnout, which was considered very high



2,8%

The margin of victory for the 'yes' vote—approximately 1,124,091 votes



18

The number of proposed amendments to the constitution

NARROW 'YES' VICTORY IN TURKISH REFERENDUM



By Andrew Richards

President Tayyip Erdogan declared victory in a referendum on Sunday (16 April) to grant him sweeping powers in the biggest overhaul of modern Turkish politics. Erdogan said 25 million people had supported the proposal, which will replace Turkey's parliamentary system with an all-powerful presidency and abolish the office of prime minister, giving the "Yes" camp 51.5 percent of the vote. "For the first time in the history of the Republic, we are changing our ruling system through civil politics," Erdogan said, referring to the military coups which marred Turkish politics for decades. "That is why it is very significant." (*Reuters*)

Sweeping powers

Although Mr Erdogan's victory is seen as a positive move forward for at least half of all Turks, the fact that he has now accumulated all executive powers to himself is a cause for concern for his Western allies within NATO. Mr Erdogan won the referendum vote by 51%-49%, a result that clearly shows the divide within Turkey, with almost half the population fearing an Erdogan dictatorship. This division becomes more marked along demographic lines, with voters in the major cities tending to oppose the changes while those in rural areas, who are usually more religious and conservative, voting in favour of them.

Turkey remains a key player when it comes to the ongoing refugee crisis facing Europe, with most refugees having used Turkey as gateway to freedom in Europe. In its bid to gain European Union membership, Turkey has promised to stop the wave of refugees before they can cross over into Europe. Yet even with this incentive for Turkish

membership, the EU remains reluctant because of Turkey's human rights violations track record.

Mr Erdogan's sweeping new powers will allow him to change the constitution and undermine the rule of law – something the EU is not willing to go to bed with.

FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

INcontext asked Brother Marko, director of Egeiro Ministries and former Turkish convert from Islam, for his perspective on how the referendum results could impact the region and what it means for the Church:

"Based on the ideology and long-term plans Mr Erdogan has for the Middle East and Europe, the referendum results are very concerning. With Mr Erdogan emerging victorious from the referendum, he has successfully side-lined all the secular voices in Turkey, especially those from the education and judicial institutions. Anyone (journalists included) who opposes his Islamist agenda has been silenced, and will continue to be silenced now that he has all the power.

Mr Erdogan is much the same as the Ayatollah in Iran. What Mr Erdogan has just done through the referendum was what the Iranian Revolution did in 1979 when it toppled the secular government there, and then proceeded to convert Iran into an Islamic Republic. This is Mr Erdogan's objective: to turn secular Turkey into an observant Islamic republic.

He also wants to unite the old Ottoman Empire. He wants to Islamise every inch of land that once belonged to the Ottoman Empire, in much the same way as Russia's Vladimir Putin wants to unite the old Soviet Union – minus the communism.

To understand Mr Erdogan, you need to understand the history of Islamisation and the Ottoman Empire. Mr Erdogan is living with the mindset of a defeated Muslim. For staunch Turkish Muslims, the fall of the Ottoman Empire is a shame that every generation carries with it, and the only way that shame can be removed is to conquer the region

NEWS HEADLINES



Jakarta's incumbent Christian governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama has conceded defeat in the race to become the city's new governor after unofficial results showed a former Indonesian education minister taking the polls. Quick counts by 10 research companies showed Anies Baswedan, a former cabinet minister, winning 58% of votes in the head-to-head vote, with 100 percent of ballots counted. Official results will be announced in early May.



Centrist Emmanuel Macron has gone through to the second round of the French election, where he will face far-right leader Marine Le Pen. Mr Macron, a former banker, is seen as a political outsider, having never run an election campaign before. After topping the 23 April vote, he is now favourite to win the runoff on 7 May. It is the first time in six decades that neither of France's main left-wing or right-wing parties has had a candidate in the second round.



The use of children as suicide bombers by the insurgents of **Boko Haram** has soared in 2017, UNICEF said. In the countries fighting Boko Haram in the Lake Chad region - Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon and Chad - 27 children have been used in suicide attacks in the first three months of 2017, UNICEF said. There were nine cases in the same period last year, and 30 children used for bombings in all of 2016. Most were girls.

again with Islam (some would argue that the Middle East region is already Muslim, but what Mr Erdogan is after is a Turkish Caliphate, not an Arab one).

It's important to understand that Mr Erdogan has only one objective, and that is to revive the Ottoman Empire – nothing else, and nothing less. He does not live by the values and principles of secular Europe, but by the values and principles of Islam. Therefore, he has no real regard for any European leadership, and no regard for the human rights regulations that the European Union wants to place on Turkey as conditions for joining it.

However, there is one thing that Mr Erdogan fails to understand, which is that Islam has never been in a bigger crisis than it is in today. For the first time in the history of Islam, Muslims in great numbers are doubting Islam. They are turning against Islam. They are criticising Islam. Muslims are questioning the ideology and theology of Islam, and they are turning away from Islam.

Mr Erdogan is banking on the idea that there are millions upon millions of Muslims in the world that will unite behind him when he says, 'We go in the

name of Allah, let's go and invade Europe'. Mr Erdogan is banking on these millions of followers just like the Ottomans did during the expansion of the Ottoman Empire. However, in the days of the Ottoman Empire, the Ottomans could count on the people to do what they wanted them to do, by forcing their subjects into submission. Today, Islam is in a crisis, and if the Arab Spring is any indication as to how Muslims are revolting against authoritarian rule, then Mr Erdogan will not last very long."

Mr Erdogan's referendum victory and illusion of a united 'Islamic (Ottoman) empire' is challenged by almost half of all Turks, a divide that could bring Mr Erdogan to his knees. "If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand, and if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand" (Mark 3:24-25).

PRAY > For unity of purpose for Turkey and their re-constructed government, after this deeply divided referendum > For believers to be active agents of reconciliation > For non-believers, questioning their faith, to find truth in Jesus

MASSES GATHER TO PRAY FOR SOUTH AFRICA



By *Cherolyn Amery*

Nearly a million Christians from all over South Africa and neighbouring countries descended on Wilde Als farm, on the outskirts of Bloemfontein, to worship the Lord. The crowd gathered on Saturday (22 April) to pray for justice, peace and hope in South Africa at a national prayer service themed: "It's Time". The initiative, which is a brainchild of internationally acclaimed evangelist Angus Buchan, trended on social media. According to the organisers, their posts on social media platforms that marketed the campaign reached millions of people throughout the world. (IOL)

A significant event

While no attention was given to the event on international media, it was a big deal for South Africa and the South African Church. According to Buchan, the idea for the mass prayer gathering was born after a video appeal circulated on WhatsApp, calling for a South African leader to organise such an event. Buchan responded with a video of his own, which drew 1.8 million responses in hours.

Much has been made of the fact that the event was organised within six weeks, that all of the equipment and labour was donated (no entrance

fee was charged and no collection was taken), and that people travelled from all over the country to be at the two-hour prayer meeting. Police officials reportedly commented on the way in which everything happened in a very peaceful and unchaotic manner, which was unusual for such a big crowd. Beyond the actual meeting in the Free State, many were praying together at their home churches around the country at the same time, as well as many South African expats around the world. Comparisons were drawn between this meeting and the many prayer events before the historic 1994 elections, when the country underwent dramatic changes in a miraculously peaceful manner.

A sense of need

Ahead of the meeting, Reverend Helgard Janse van Rensburg, Moderator of the Dutch Reformed Church in the Free State, spoke of the need for such an event and for individual reflection: "I am positive about [the event], because it's not going well with the country. But a magical wand will not set everything right. [I believe] that people must first humble themselves before God... they must examine themselves and try to determine what God wants to tell them. Does God not want to say something to people through South Africa's drought, the economy and political situation? And shouldn't I as a person perhaps change?"

Eben Theron, who travelled approximately 600km to be at the meeting, shared his expectations ahead of the event: "I'm excited about a spiritual awakening that I expect. There is a deep concern and a great sense of need in the country. It's a spiritual need, although I do not think people have lost hope. However, the crisis will not change before people turn to the Lord. The Lord uses this opportunity to force South Africa to its knees. It all begins with prayer and humility."

NEWS HEADLINES



America's Vice President made an unannounced visit to the world's most heavily militarised border in Korea and told North Korea "the era of strategic patience is over". At the beginning of a 10-day visit to Asia, he delivered remarks that were the latest suggestion the US would do anything to force Pyongyang to end its nuclear weapons programme. He said : "President Trump has made it clear that the patience of the United States and our allies in this region has run out and we want to see change."



Iraqi forces launched a new attack on the Islamic State in Mosul's Old City on 16 April, trying to break the stalemate in attempts to seize the militants' last stronghold. The advance has hardly moved for more than a month, though, as the militants are holding out in the densely populated Old City in western Mosul, where tanks and heavy vehicles are not able to operate because of its narrow streets.



According to official figures, each year 12 to 15 thousand children, boys and girls are trafficked from **Nepal** destined mainly for India to be sexually exploited. Countries most hit by this crime are those suffering because of situations of war, natural disasters, and chronic poverty.

Mmusi Maimane, leader of South Africa's opposition party (the Democratic Alliance), attended the event and said that something always happens when a nation stands together in prayer. "Something must change... I really believe today was the start of that and much more will follow."

Highlights of the meeting

At the meeting, Buchan called for prayer for the government and its leaders, but did not target any particular person directly. He did, however, pray for a God-fearing government and for stability in the country. There were prayers asking for forgiveness and a recommitment to God, for individuals who were sick, and for South Africa as a country. For many who attended, the five minutes spent on their knees in silent prayer was a highlight, and many said that they could feel the Holy Spirit moving.

Buchan also called for prayer to continue beyond the meeting. "We should stop complaining and begin praying. Whenever someone says to you there is no hope, that the country is finished, that there is no hope for racial harmony, you answer with 'but God'," he said. He said that Christians should talk more openly about Jesus Christ, and that it is time for believers to stand up and be heard, because South Africa is a Christian nation.

Ruan Bruwer, of *Network24*, summed up the event as follows: "Everyone was there to worship the same God, everyone wanted to see a change for good, and everyone sacrificed in one way or another to be there. Everyone longs for a country with less hate, envy and viciousness and more love, prosperity, harmony and compassion."

FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

While such an inter-denominational, inter-racial, inter-cultural and inter-generational meeting was highly significant for South Africa – especially at a time when believers are surrounded by so much negativity – questions are being asked about what happens next. Many believe that the 'It's Time' prayer meeting was the start of a new spiritual battle, not the battle itself.

One Christian blogger, SJ Wiggett, expressed his thoughts after the meeting: "One thing that 'It's Time' got right was getting everyone to think again. What is important to us... what am I convinced of and what I feel strongly about. Whether or not you were at [the event] is not important – what is important is that everyone realises that 'It's Time' for each of us to realise that we have a role to play and to begin playing it. 22 April 2017 was an important day, but 21 April 2018 is much more important – the way in which every one of us is salt in this tasteless earth and light in this dark South Africa (and world) for the next 365 days is of utmost importance."

Dalene Reyburn expressed a complementary opinion: "A prayer meeting doesn't make a nation. Day after day after day of love, integrity, wisdom, courage, justice, generosity, selflessness and togetherness makes a nation. But... I think praying for a day is a fantastic way to start."

PRAY > For South African believers to demonstrate Christ in their day-to-day lives > For the Lord to do a deep work in the hearts of South Africans, bringing about lasting reconciliation

US DROPS THE 'MOTHER OF ALL BOMBS'



By **Donnelly McClelland**

Eight days after the US military dropped its largest ever conventional bomb on suspected Islamic State fighters in eastern Afghanistan, Taliban militants breached an army base in the north of the country and killed scores of local soldiers. "The biggest threat to the security and stability of this country is the Taliban insurgents, not Daesh forces," said Mirwais Yasini, an influential Afghan member of parliament from Nangarhar province [where the bomb was dropped], using an Arabic term for Islamic State. "You drop your biggest bomb on Daesh, but what about the Taliban who kill dozens of our people every day?" (*Reuters*)

Dropping the 'mother of all bombs'

The bomb, a Massive Ordnance Air Blast (MOAB, GBU-43) – also dubbed the 'Mother of All Bombs' – was dropped over eastern Afghanistan on 13 April, as part of an ongoing US-Afghan joint operation

against the Islamic State of Khorasan (IS-K). According to the US military and Afghan officials, the aim of the attack was to destroy a network of caves and tunnels used by IS-K, a branch of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq (IS) that has pledged allegiance to IS founder Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi.

ABC News described the bomb as follows: "The MOAB is a large-yield conventional (non-nuclear) GPS-guided munition weapon first designed in 2002 for the US military. It weighs roughly 10,000 kilograms, is 10 metres long and one metre wide and packs 8,000 kilograms of explosives – in comparison, the average weight of most deployed conventional bombs is roughly 250 kilograms. It is what is termed a thermobaric weapon, a type of explosive that uses oxygen from surrounding air to generate an intense, high-temperature blast wave that packs an incredible amount of energy into a small, localised location. It is this quality that allows the MOAB's intensive blast wave to travel through underground, oxygen-filled networks, like underground tunnels and caves."

General John Nicholson, the commander of American and NATO forces in Afghanistan, said at a news conference in Kabul: "It was the right time to use [the Mother of All Bombs] tactically against the right target on the battlefield, and it has enabled us to resume our offensive operations."

FOR FURTHER REFERENCE

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www.incontextinternational.org

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If you have any questions or comments relating to the articles in this publication or on the website, please feel free to contact us at any time.

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Mixed response

However, the deployment of the bomb at this time and in this particular war has elicited a mixed response across the globe. Former Afghan President Hamid Karzai condemned the US military's use of its largest non-nuclear bomb. Zabiullah Zmarai, secretary of the provincial council in Nangarhar, told Foreign Policy: "The attack was successful, and we all are happy, since there were no civilian casualties."

There are those who question the military necessity of such a weapon, concluding (according to Inverse): "The MOAB strike was sheer shock, awe, and terror, to send a message of strength both at home and abroad." Pictures recently released by Reuters of the site have presented an ambiguous sense of the bomb's power with some trees scorched while others are not, and some tunnels appearing relatively intact. It begs the question: What did its deployment achieve in the great scheme of things?

Possible motivation

It is virtually impossible to ascertain the extent of damage and casualties from the MOAB strike, since neither the US nor Afghan forces are likely to expend valuable resources in unearthing the dead beneath the rubble of the collapsed tunnel system. Afghan officials have claimed that nearly 100 militants and no civilians were killed by the blast, but these claims have not been independently verified.

The timing of the strike – less than a week after the US fired 59 Tomahawk missiles at a Syrian air force base in retaliation for an apparent chemical weapon attack – hints at the possibility that it was in fact a show of force, with the Syrian air base strike a demonstration perhaps that the US is willing to respond militarily, and that their involvement in the Middle East goes beyond the fight against IS.

There is a clear comparison between former US President Obama speaking of a 'red line' (which, if crossed, would result in a US military response) and there not being a response to apparent further atrocities by the Assad regime, and the Trump administration demonstrating a decisive response when the 'red line' is crossed. Nikki Haley, the United States Ambassador to the UN, alluded to

this new, more decisive role when she spoke of there being "a new sheriff in town" earlier this month in an address about the UN's anti-Israel bias.

The very visible display of US military might in the Middle East in the form of these two strikes also comes at a time when tensions on the Korean peninsula appear to be escalating, with another nuclear weapon test an increasing possibility. The Trump administration has pointed to its use of the enormous bomb as a sign of its determination during a tense and ongoing standoff with North Korea.

FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

The dropping of this formidable weapon may be effective in demonstrating a change in US foreign policy, but does it indicate a definitive strategy in ending the 'forever war' in Afghanistan? Afghanistan has been at war for almost four decades, and the dropping of the 'mother of all bombs' does not appear to address a resurgent Taliban that has control of, or is contesting control over, at least one-third of Afghanistan and has continued to steadily gain territory and inflict record casualties on civilians and troops since most NATO troops withdrew from the country in 2014.

The foreign military presence in Afghanistan since 2001 has, in many ways, made it easier for cross-cultural mission and aid workers to operate within the country and to build into the lives of the small community of local believers. However, the Taliban resurgence makes it increasingly difficult for this to continue, and has already resulted in direct attacks on Christian aid workers (such as Werner Groenewald and his two children in November 2014) and local believers. There is a desperate need to strengthen the body of underground believers as they face these challenges. A decisive US response towards terrorists such as IS may encourage them, and should the US approve of further troop deployments (as is being currently requested by US and NATO commander, General Nicholson) to the beleaguered nation, and possible strikes against the Taliban, this may further embolden them in the face of a determined enemy.

PRAY > For Afghanistan's government to make meaningful advances against radical elements of society > For the small group of Afghani believers to be encouraged and strengthened to persevere

UPCOMING EVENTS



BUSINESS AS MISSION (BAM)

"Business as mission is not 'business as normal'. Neither is it 'missions as normal'." (Larry Sharp)

Christians working in the business sector are invited to come hear more about God's heart to integrate business and mission in these one-day seminars. INcontext will be hosting two international speakers working fulltime in the Business as Mission field.

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PORT ELIZABETH
Friday 12 May

Registration – R300 pp

Closing date for registration — Friday 28 April 2017

If you have any questions about these seminars, please contact Gustav (gustav@incontextministries.org). To register, please [CLICK HERE](#).