

In the news this past week (5 September 2019):

1. Wave of looting and violence in Johannesburg believed to be xenophobic

On Tuesday the 3rd of September, South African president Cyril Ramaphosa condemned the wave of looting and violence that was centred in Johannesburg and believed to be xenophobic in nature. The unrest had started on Sunday the 1st and involved urban rioting, looting and setting cars and buildings alight. Foreign-owned businesses were reportedly targeted. There has also been a wave of protests in the transport industry, as locals have objected to the employment of foreign drivers. South Africa is a favourite destination for economic migrants from other African countries, but leaders of African governments as well as the African Union have condemned the recent unrest and warned foreigners in South Africa to be careful.

From a Christian perspective, it is much more easily said than done when it comes to responding to xenophobia, but if the Church does not step in with a message of reconciliation, who will? Politicians and law enforcement might be involved, but their priorities are different to those of Christ. No church is immune to getting caught up in a bubble and avoiding the outsider, but the story of the Good Samaritan carried a clear instruction to reach out beyond cultural and community barriers. The challenge now for all believers in South Africa is to ask what each one is called to do in and beyond personal spheres of influence.

Pray with us for the following:

- For an end to the violence, unrest and animosity
- For political and community leaders to be guided in making wise decisions for the good of all in the nation
- For the South African Church to be instrumental in bringing about peace and reconciliation

2. Colombian rebel leader issues new call to arms three years after peace deal

On Wednesday the 28th of August, two former commanders from the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (known as FARC) said in a video that they were embarking on a new offensive, threatening to resume five decades of armed conflict against the government. More than 260,000 people were killed and millions displaced during the conflict between the government and rebel groups. A peace accord signed by FARC and the Colombian government three years ago has come under pressure on various fronts, but a former FARC commander said that most ex-fighters remain committed to peace. The Colombian president announced a reward for information leading to the capture of each of the people who appeared in the video.

From a Christian perspective, making and maintaining peace between warring groups is never an easy thing. But peace is a Godly and Biblical principal worth striving for. Jesus said in His 'Sermon on the Mount': "Blessed are the peacemakers". In contrast, Satan comes to "rob, kill and destroy". We clearly see this struggle in Colombia where the enemy does not want the peace accord to succeed. It is a spiritual battle which is evident in the earthly realm, and concerted and committed intercession is needed for peace to prevail.

Pray with us for the following:

- For the Colombian government and former FARC members to earnestly pursue the peace process
 - For those who seek to derail the peace process to meet Jesus, the Prince of Peace
 - For believers to remain committed to interceding for the nation of Colombia
-

3. Greece sees first mass arrival of migrant boats in three years

On Thursday the 29th of August, over a dozen migrant boats landed on Greece's Lesbos island in the first mass arrival from neighbouring Turkey in three years. The Greek government announced emergency measures to deal with this new influx of asylum seekers and bolstered sea patrols to apprehend people traffickers. It is suspected that a crackdown on migrants in Turkey, which is hosting more than 3.6 million displaced Syrians, and intensified battles in neighbouring Idlib, could have encouraged this new flow, though the majority seem to be Afghans. Most of the new arrivals will be taken to the Moria camp, Europe's largest migrant reception centre, that is holding about four times more people than it was designed for. Overcrowding is a problem in every camp on the island and Greece is looking to its neighbours to assist in the resettlement of the most vulnerable.

From a Christian perspective, the desperate plight of refugees, asylum seekers and impoverished migrants continues to be the unresolved story of our time. And in such contexts, there are tremendous opportunities for believers to display Christ's love for these many displaced people. It might have seemed like the door of opportunity among the displaced was closing as the war in Syria draws to an end, but these recent developments indicate that opportunities to serve remain plentiful and the harvest continues to be ripe. The labourers, however, are still few, and there is need for the Church to respond now rather than later.

Pray with us for the following:

- For the Church not to miss this vital opportunity to reach out to the lost with the Gospel
- For more labourers to be willing to go and serve in the harvest field
- For believers to serve with compassion and generosity of spirit

4. Baptist minister in Myanmar faces lawsuit for speaking against military

A Baptist minister in Myanmar who met with US president Donald Trump in the White House in July is facing a lawsuit for his criticism of the military. Hkalam Samson, who is also president of the Kachin Baptist Convention in Myanmar, told Mr Trump that ethnic groups are being oppressed and tortured by the military government. A live video broadcast of the meeting in the White House was posted on Facebook. In the past three years, Myanmar's military has filed dozens of defamation complaints against critics, and many have been jailed as a result. Myanmar, which is home to a Buddhist majority, is mostly known for its oppression of the Muslim Rohingya minority group, but Christians also face multiple challenges in the country.

From a Christian perspective, persecution of minority believers around the globe is nothing new, and persecution can be carried out in a wide range of ways. This particular incident, however, could have the opposite effect to what the authorities intended, as it has focused the international spotlight on the heavy-handed tactics of the military. Once again, the Lord can take something that the enemy intended for evil and use it for good in His Kingdom plans.

Pray with us for the following:

- For the Church in Myanmar to be bold and courageous in the face of opposition
- For minority believers in Myanmar to reach out with the Gospel to others who are also marginalised
- For the Lord to soften the hearts of the leaders of Myanmar so that they can recognise Him as the way, the truth and the life

5. Millions in Assam state in India fear deportation or detention

On Saturday the 31st of August, 1.9 million people in the Indian state of Assam were excluded from the updated National Register of Citizens published by the government. This has resulted in widespread fears of deportation or detention. Assam borders the Muslim-majority nation of Bangladesh, and the Indian government says it is necessary to identify illegal Bangladeshi migrants. Only those who can prove they or their families were in India before the 1971 Bangladeshi war of independence will be counted as Indian citizens. Those left off the register were given 120 days to prove their citizenship at special courts. Assam is one of India's most multi-ethnic states, and one-third of the population is Muslim. Analysts have connected these recent moves with the Hindu nationalist agenda of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

From a Christian perspective, whenever people are thrown into turmoil, there are opportunities for ministry and the sharing of the Gospel. People who face uncertainties, and especially those who are feeling unwanted, are often more responsive to hearing about a God who knows them by name, who loves them and who cares

about their needs. This is a prime opportunity for the Indian Church and for foreign Christians working in India to offer comfort and speak of the hope that is to be found in Christ Jesus. God often moves and unsettles people for His Kingdom plans, and the Church can respond by being a part of what He is doing.

Pray with us for the following:

- For the Lord to stir believers in India to reach out to the unregistered people of Assam
- For the Lord to open the hearts of all those seeking hope and a future
- For the Indian Church to be known for its welcome and inclusiveness