

A WORLD IN MOTION

ISSUE 191 | 29 MARCH 2018

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Cries for peace and hope this Easter rise from flashpoints around the globe, beckoning believers to be Christ's 'hands and feet' to a hurting world.

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The bitter diplomatic battle between the UK and Russia continues to broaden as other countries respond to the spy-poisoning case.

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CRYING FOR HOPE AND PEACE THIS EASTER



Compiled by Donnelly McClelland

A South Sudanese ecumenical delegation, including Catholics, Anglicans, Presbyterians, and others, met with Pope Francis on 23 March. "We came as Christians to show that the body of Christ is bleeding," explained Bishop Paride Tabani. "The people need hope, they need healing, they are crying for peace, which cannot be brought by arms, but by love, by a sense of compassion, a spirit of love and forgiveness which God has shown to us, especially now. We would like that this Easter would also be a resurrection of people from their suffering." (*CNA*)

Not an isolated "cry"

South Sudan and its approximate 2 million refugees in neighbouring countries, is not alone in its cry for hope and peace this Easter. A tormented cry rises from numerous flashpoints across the globe: Afrin, Eastern Ghouta, Kashmir, the DRC, Somalia, Yemen and beyond.

FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

The Lord does not distance Himself from pain and suffering. Isaiah 53:3 reminds us that the Lord was, "A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." In Psalm 34:18 we read, "The Lord is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." This He most often does through His body, the Church. He appeals to His children to be His ambassadors in this world:

bearers of His peace, of His hope and of the opportunity of reconciliation with Him.

The Immigrant Apostle's Creed

[Written by Rev. Jose Luis Casal, the director of Presbyterian World Mission. He is an immigrant to the USA from Cuba.]

I believe in Almighty God, who guided the people in exile and in exodus, the God of Joseph in Egypt and Daniel in Babylon, the God of foreigners and immigrants.

I believe in Jesus Christ, a displaced Galilean, who was born away from his people and his home, who fled his country with his parents when his life was in danger, and returning to his own country suffered the oppression of the tyrant Pontius Pilate, the servant of a foreign power, who then was persecuted, beaten, and finally tortured, accused and condemned to death unjustly. But on the third day, this scorned Jesus rose from the dead, not as a foreigner but to offer us citizenship in heaven.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the eternal immigrant from God's kingdom among us, who speaks all languages, lives in all countries, and reunites all races.

I believe that the church is the secure home for the foreigner and for all believers who constitute it, who speak the same language and have the same purpose.

I believe that the communion of the saints begins when we accept the diversity of the saints.

I believe in the forgiveness of sin, which makes us all equal, and in reconciliation, which identifies us more than does race, language, or nationality.

I believe that in the resurrection God will unite us as one people in which all are distinct and all are alike at the same time. Beyond this world, I

THE NUMBERS:

GLOBAL FLASHPOINTS



1,000 +

The estimated number of Syrian children killed in the first months of 2018



\$504 million

The UNHCR fund appeal for Congolese refugees



1,000,000+

The estimated number of South Sudanese refugees in Uganda



26.03.2015

The date the war began in Yemen, claiming thousands of lives and displacing millions

NEWS HEADLINES



Hundreds of thousands of protesters took to the streets across the **US** to call for tighter gun control. The March For Our Lives movement arose after 17 deaths in a school shooting in Parkland, Florida, last month. Student leader and Parkland survivor Emma Gonzalez gave a powerful speech at the main Washington DC event. More than 800 sister protests took place nationwide and abroad, with solidarity events taking place in Edinburgh, London, Geneva, Sydney and Tokyo.



Israel admitted for the first time that it bombed a suspected Syrian nuclear reactor in 2007 and said the strike should be a warning to Iran that it would not be allowed to develop nuclear weapons. The military released previously classified cockpit footage, photographs and intelligence documents about its 6 Sept 2007 air strike on the Al-Kubar facility near Deir al-Zor in eastern Syria, said to be near completion.



In a major victory for Ankara's two-month operation against the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) in northern **Syria**, Turkish-led forces pushed into Afrin apparently unopposed. The advance came as Syria's civil war entered its eighth year this week with heavy fighting on two fronts — around Afrin and in the rebel enclave of Eastern Ghouta near Damascus.

believe in life eternal in which no one will be an immigrant but all will be citizens of God's kingdom, which will never end.

Amen.

PRAY > For world leaders who are in the position to impact the various crises in a meaningful way > For brothers and sisters in Christ who are currently facing persecution of various kinds > For believers to be impactful in their communities

UK-RUSSIAN RELATIONS SOUR OVER SPY-POISONING



By *Donnelly McClelland*

Britain's prime minister, Theresa May, won greater than expected support from the European Union on Friday [23 March] over her escalating diplomatic battle with Russia, a significant victory for a leader who has often found herself isolated in Brussels as her country prepares to quit the bloc. After hours of discussion, European leaders issued a relatively tough statement effectively blaming Moscow for the nerve agent attack on a former Russian spy, Sergei Skripal, and his daughter, Yulia, on British soil. "We consider this attack as a serious challenge to our security and European sovereignty, so it calls for a coordinated and determined response from the European Union and its member states," French president Emmanuel Macron said at a joint news conference with the German chancellor, Angela Merkel. (*NY Times*)

What is known

On 4 March, Sergei Skripal (66) and his 33-year-old daughter, Yulia, were found unconscious on a park bench in Salisbury, England. To date, both remain critically ill and in intensive care after exposure to an "unknown substance". The police officer who fell seriously ill after attending to the Skripals, Detective Sgt Nick Bailey, was discharged from hospital after more than two weeks of treatment, while other officers and paramedics who had responded reported itching eyes and breathing difficulties. British scientists at the UK's military research base, Porton Down, identified the substance used in the attack as belonging to a group of military-grade nerve agents known as Novichok, developed by Russia. The international chemical warfare watchdog, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, has begun testing the blood samples of the victims to independently verify the UK's conclusion.

Sergei Skripal was a former officer from Russia's GRU military intelligence agency, who

in 1995 began secretly working for Britain's MI6. He was arrested in Russia in 2004, convicted of treason and sent to a penal colony. In 2010, Skripal was released to the UK, less than halfway through his 13-year sentence, in a prisoner swap.

Not the first time

Russia is suspected of possibly organising the killings of at least 14 other people on British soil over the past two decades. The most prominent case was Alexander Litvinenko, an outspoken critic of President Putin who died an agonising death in 2006, three weeks after drinking tea laced with a radioactive substance (most likely polonium). A 2016 British public inquiry found that Mr Putin "probably" ordered this killing of the former KGB operative. The two men accused of the attack, Andrey Lugovoy and Dmitry Kovtun, denied involvement in the killing and suggested that Britain was trying to stir up opposition to the government in Moscow ahead of elections.

UK (and the West's) reaction

On 12 March, Prime Minister Theresa May told Parliament: "Either this was a direct action by the Russian state against our country, or the Russian government lost control of its potentially catastrophically damaging nerve agent and allowed it to get into the hands of others." Two days later, after Russia ignored a midnight deadline to explain how the nerve agent was used to target the Skripals, Ms May gave 23 Russian diplomats a week to leave Britain and said Britain would cancel all high-level bilateral contacts with Moscow. It is the single biggest expulsion since the Cold War.

In a joint statement, the leaders of France, Germany, the United States and the UK said the poisoning was the first "offensive" use of a nerve agent in Europe since World War II and called on Russia "to address all questions related to the attack." They also call on Moscow to provide a complete disclosure of the Novichok programme to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.

Russian denials and reactions

Mr Putin's government subsequently retaliated to Britain's actions, ousting 23 British diplomats. Moscow has denied any involvement in the attack, saying the country is the victim of "unfounded accusations." Russia claimed that the poisoning was a pre-planned action designed to harm Russia.

NEWS HEADLINES



US president Donald Trump threatened to impose tariffs of up to 25% on \$60bn of Chinese industrial exports, in retaliation for China allegedly “forcing” foreign companies to transfer technology and other intellectual property in mandated joint ventures. Beijing subsequently outlined its response to Mr Trump’s earlier threat to impose tariffs on \$3bn of Chinese steel exports. The counter-move was intended as a warning that Beijing would respond in kind if Mr Trump proceeded with the much larger action against industrial exports.



The Houthi movement that controls northern **Yemen** vowed to fire more missiles into Saudi Arabia unless it stops bombing the country, after one of its missiles caused casualties in the Saudi capital for the first time. The incident threatens to sharply escalate a war that has already unleashed what the UN considers the world’s most urgent humanitarian crisis.



The last rebel group fighting in **Syria**’s eastern Ghouta said it was still trying to negotiate an end to the army’s assault, dismissing a Russian report that it was ready to leave the stronghold near Damascus. All other insurgent groups there have agreed to surrender their territory in deals mediated by the government’s ally Moscow, bringing President Bashar al-Assad to the cusp of his biggest victory over the rebels in more than a year.

The biggest question about Skripal’s mysterious poisoning is the timing, which does cast some doubts about Russian motives. Skripal spent several years in a Russian jail and had presumably been thoroughly debriefed. If the Russian security services had wanted him to have an “accident” during those years, it would have been very easy to organise.

FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

Some observers of Russia have noted that the Putin regime has aligned itself more closely to the Russian Orthodox Church in recent years. The Russian Orthodox Church has a very long history, and some believe that Mr Putin’s move towards the Orthodox Church is more to do with a quest for a strong national identity than with any genuine spiritual awakening on his part. A report by the religious-freedom advocacy group Forum 18 last year referred to dozens of incidents of state harassment and persecution directed at Baptists and other smaller Christian organisations, which, it said, had increased since Mr Putin retook the presidency in 2012.

It is important to note that many protestant/evangelical believers are perceived by the

Russian government as colluding with ‘Western forces’, since they are ‘not of Russian origin’ like the Orthodox Church. So the worsening relations between Russia and the West will most likely have a negative impact on protestants and evangelicals. William Yoder, spokesman for the Russian Evangelical Alliance (REA), explains: “Religious freedom for the evangelical minorities is very much dependent on the course of East-West relations. If they get worse, so will relations between evangelicals and the state. The state will be less willing to tolerate diversity, especially with groups deemed to be sponsored by the West. They would increasingly be seen as a fifth column of the West. Evangelicals still meet outside of church property almost everywhere; evangelisation on a low-key level is still very much possible. But that could change if East-West conditions continue their downward slide.”

PRAY > For wisdom for the various leaders involved in this diplomatic crisis > For believers in Russia to not suffer unnecessarily as a result of the current crisis > For believers in Russia to persevere in the face of stiffer governmental opposition and for the Church to grow despite the pressure

DEEPENING CONFLICT IN NIGERIA’S MIDDLE BELT



By *Donnelly McClelland*

Fulani herdsmen [recently] killed 32 people in communities in Dekina and Omala Local Government Areas of Kogi State, [Nigeria]. The assailants arrived by boat on Wednesday [14 March], opened fire on the people and burnt down homes. An eyewitness said they wore military fatigues and wielded AK-47 assault rifles. Many of the residents who fled for their lives remain unaccounted for. (*The Guardian - Nigeria*)

Ethnoreligious crisis in Nigeria’s Middle Belt

Often obscured by headlines focusing on Boko Haram (the Islamic terror group), violence has also raged further south, in Nigeria’s Middle Belt: a less reported, years-long campaign which experts now believe has been responsible for more deaths than Boko Haram. Militants among the ethnic Fulani, a predominantly Muslim and nomadic population of cattle herders, are suspected of targeting the

indigenous (mainly Christian) population, mostly farmers.

The increasing violence in Nigeria’s Middle Belt points towards a complex issue that goes beyond land-use. While climate and geographic factors have clearly influenced the movement of Fulani nomadic pastoralists, it would appear that there are those who are using these natural factors to stoke divisions. Why target churches (an estimated 60 in Benue State alone over the past few weeks) otherwise? Fulani cattle herders, forced out by the ever-encroaching desert, migrate south in search of food and water for their livestock. These Fulani herdsmen are then exploited by jihadists and other Islamists – possibly including those in the military and in the government – who use them as proxies in an Islamic jihad to expand Muslim territory at the cost of Christians.

Local and international analysts see the current crisis emulating the jihad of Usman dan Fodio of the early 1800s. Usman dan Fodio assembled a Fulani army which he led in jihad against the Hausa kingdoms of northern Nigeria. The war resulted in the creation of the Sokoto Caliphate, headed by Usman dan Fodio, which became one of the largest states in Africa in the 19th century. His success inspired similar jihads in West Africa. The current escalating violence in middle and northern Nigeria is seen by many as a continuation of this earlier religious military campaign.

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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Professor Yusufu Turaki (Director of the Centre for the Study of Religion, Church and Society at Jos ECWA Theological Seminary in Nigeria) is of the conviction that the current violence is rooted in the revivalist atmosphere of Islam and the rise of militant Islam worldwide. He explains in the World Watch Monitor: "What has happened in the last six or seven years is that, while they used to live in peace with their hosts, the indigenous ethnic groups, the Fulani have armed themselves with sophisticated weapons. They have started to invade indigenous areas that do not belong to them historically, attacking and destroying villages, killing and chasing people off their ancestral lands and settling there themselves. And they do so with impunity. There is no government authority that has stopped them going around killing people. Nobody has arrested them."

Role of government

The federal government has blamed the passage of anti-open grazing laws in some states as the cause of the recent killings. Benue, Taraba and Ekiti are some of the states where the anti-open grazing law has taken effect. These laws have been enacted in an attempt to curb the incursion of nomadic herdsman on agricultural land.

Various accusations, meanwhile, have been levelled at the Nigerian federal government for exacerbating the conflict, either directly or indirectly. Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari has not escaped these accusations, coming under fire for his lacklustre response to the crisis. His detractors have highlighted his shared ethnicity with the Fulani herdsman, and his patronage of the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN), a trade group of mostly Fulani herdsman.

At least 35 deaths were attributed to the Nigerian Air Force following its bombardment of six Christian communities in north-eastern Adamawa State three months ago. Osai Ojigho, Amnesty International's country director for Nigeria, said: "Launching air raids is not a legitimate law

enforcement method by anyone's standard. Such reckless use of deadly force is unlawful, outrageous and lays bare the Nigerian military's shocking disregard for the lives of those it supposedly exists to protect."

There are deep concerns that if left unchecked, this crisis has the potential to redefine Nigeria in its entirety.

FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

Nigerian pastor Isa El-Buba, of Evangelical Bible Outreach Ministries International, has challenged the Buhari government, quoting Scripture (Proverbs 14:34): "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin brings reproach". He holds the current government responsible for the ongoing violence and insists the killings must stop. He implored all Nigerians to "wake up from your sleep and decide your fate," but made it clear that they are to reject violence and obey the law. There is a constant temptation for Christian communities (who feel abandoned) to utilise their own militias to protect themselves, but this often results in reprisal attacks, where Fulani-linked communities are similarly targeted. Such tit-for-tat tactics will not result in peace for this region.

In 2017, there was a gathering of 400 Fulani Christian converts (according to Vanguard) who were tasked to preach the gospel of peace to their kinsmen to reduce the prevailing crises in the country. Rev Hassan Mohammed, who spoke on behalf of the converts, expressed gratitude to God for giving them a new lease of life as Christians. He went on to say that they were doing their best to enlighten their brothers and sisters about Christianity.

Nigeria is in desperate need of prayer if it is not to be ripped apart along the 'fault line' between the predominantly Muslim north and Christian south.

PRAY > For Nigeria's leaders to make just and wise decisions that will defuse the crisis > For all pastors and Christian leaders as they seek to lead God's people through these extremely challenging times

KNOWLEDGE TO ACTION



PROJECT RESTORATION

Providing trauma counselling and trauma counselling training for South Sudanese refugees

Thanks to your support, the first round of training (in August 2017) was a huge success and we thank each and every one of our supporters who contributed towards this project. After the training, we realised that this cannot be a once-off initiative – the next trauma counselling training will be in August 2018, and again we ask you to please consider supporting this project.

To make a financial contribution, please make use of the INcontext bank account details and use REST and your email address (or part of it) as your reference.

For more information on this project, please contact our project department: gustav@incontextministries.org or visit our website [HERE](http://www.incontextinternational.org).