

***“Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love,
for they have been from of old.”***

(Ps 25:6)

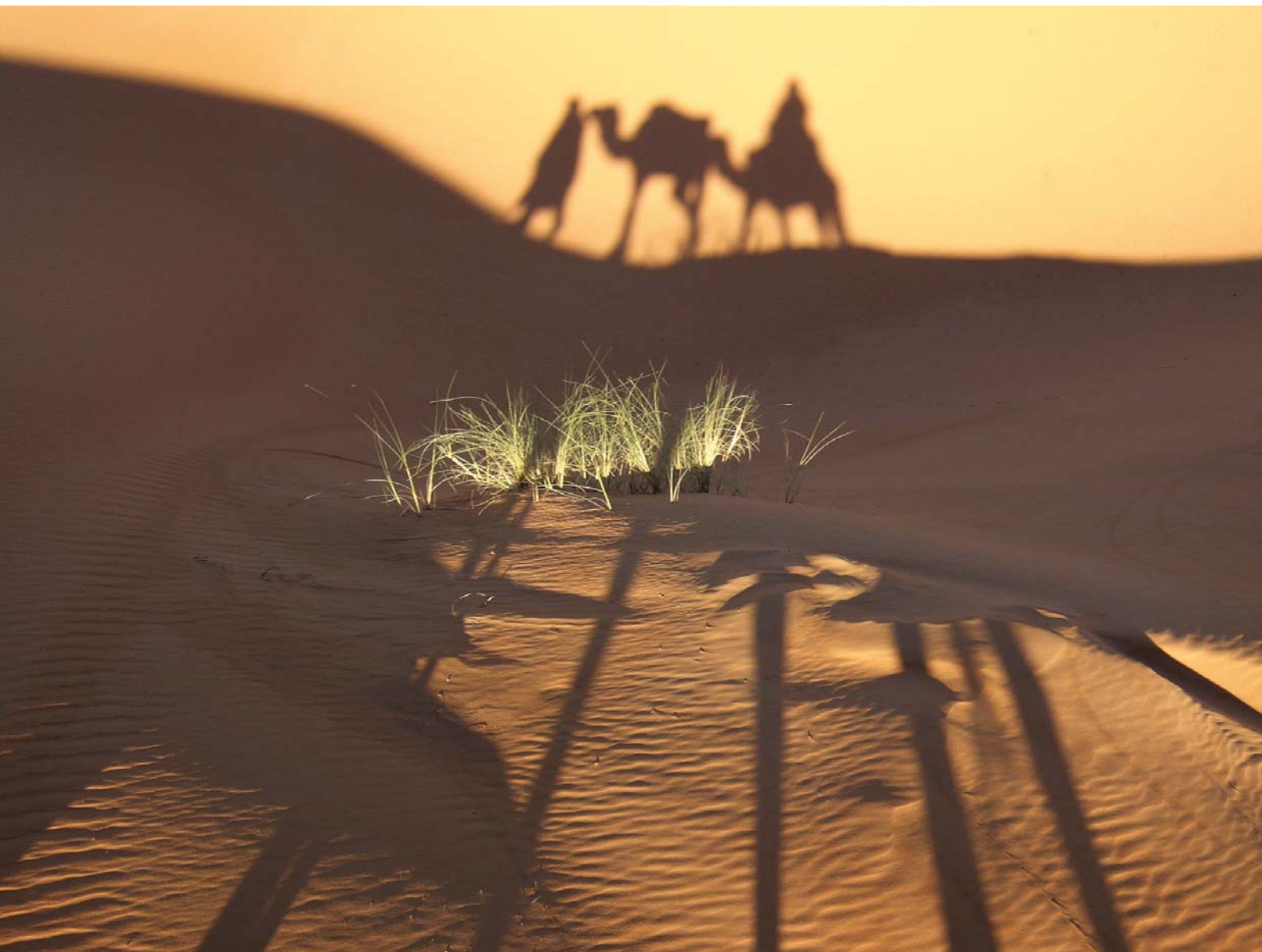
Intercessory prayers for
Reminiscere 2012



Evangelische Kirche
in Deutschland

Focus: North African Countries (Maghreb)

Algeria – Morocco – Tunisia





Greeting from the Council Chair, Evangelical Church in Germany

We are offering intercessions for oppressed and persecuted Christians in 2012 for the third time. Once again, all Protestant church congregations in Germany are invited to focus on our brothers and sisters in faith in the crisis regions of the world. The recommended day is the second Sunday of Lent. The governing bodies of the Evangelical Church in Germany chose this date carefully, since the theme for Reminiscere Sunday is remembrance.

“Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love, for they have been from of old.” This poignant appeal from Psalm 25 might come from the mouth of a Christian woman who has experienced exclusion and discrimination personally, or in her own family. There are repeated reports of arbitrary detentions and questionable court cases. This also affects members of Christian minorities in countries in which the rule of law is not always respected.

Violence against Christians is not always due to their faith in Jesus Christ. Yet even though there are many factors contributing to the violent acts, the suffering of Christians must not be explained away. The photos of the bloody attacks in Nigeria last Christmas are a sad illustration of the issue.

Besides our political support and human rights commitment to religious freedom, these brothers and sisters in faith most need our solidarity as expressed in intercessory prayers to God. After all, faith is a special – and the most important – way in which we Christians take our responsibility for the world. We place our concerns, our prayers and our intercessions for our fellow Christians before God, trusting that they will be heard.

In the upheavals of the Arab spring, many – frequently also Christian – minorities are facing a return of winter regarding their human rights. That is why, in 2012, we want to focus our intercessions on the situation of Christians in northern Africa, and particularly in the core countries of the Maghreb region. Let us pray for them.

Nikolaus Schneider
Rev. Dr. h.c. Nikolaus Schneider



Last stop in the
Maghreb desert

Why pray for oppressed and persecuted Christians?

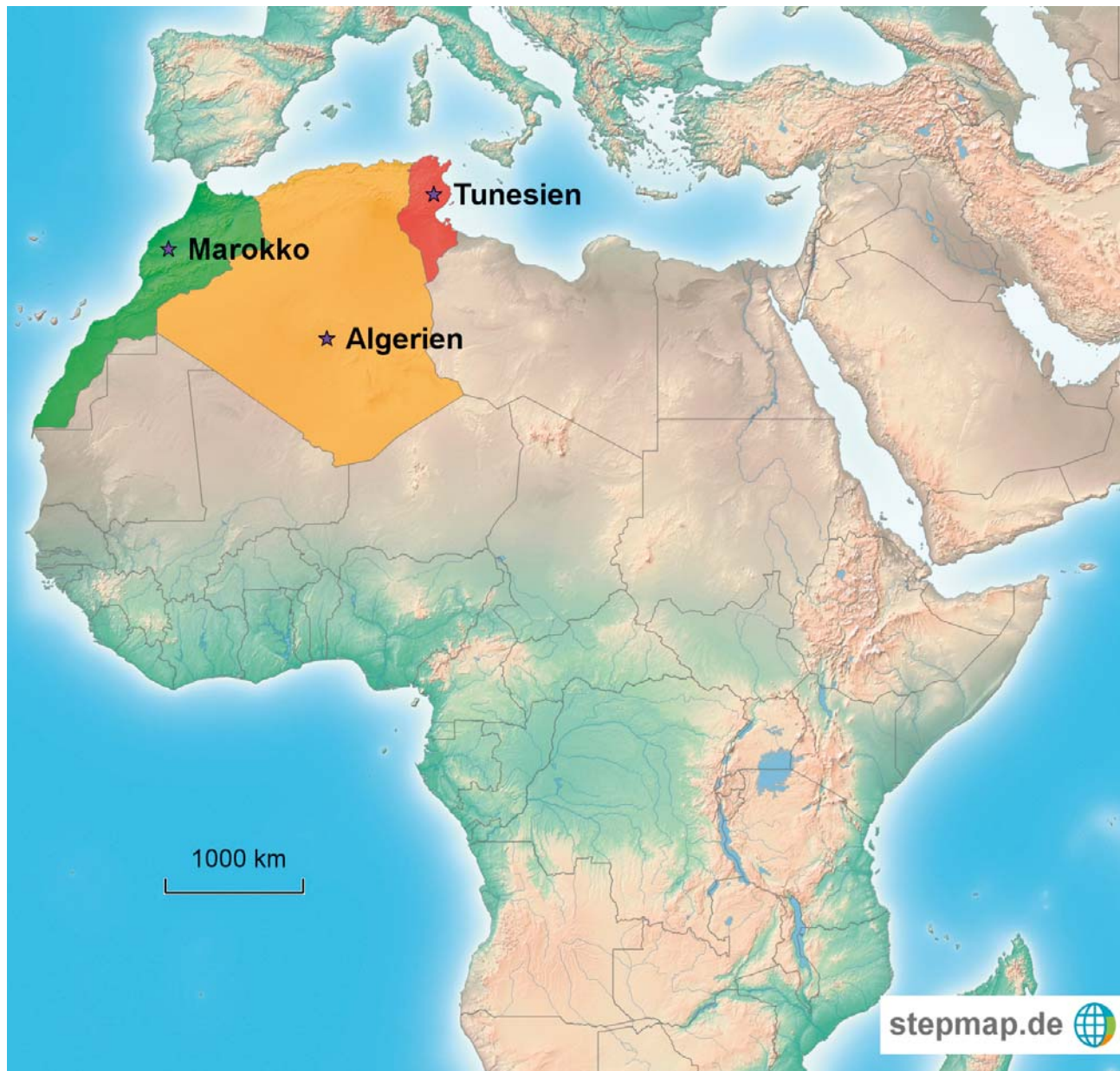
In different parts of the world churches, Christian communities and individual believers are being persecuted or oppressed. The repressions extend from the systematic limitation of fundamental rights, particularly religious freedom, discrimination and uncertainty regarding law enforcement, to urgent threats to their possessions and even to life and limb. The very fact that changing your religion is in many places a punishable offence is, in our view, a particularly grave violation of the human right to religious freedom.

However, the situation in many countries is extremely complex. While the threat is often the result of explicit hostility towards Christians, not every conflict involving harm for Christians is on religious grounds and not every case of brutal violence against Christians is directed at their faith in Jesus Christ. Discrimination against religious minorities is often for other motives, which may be political, economic or social. It is therefore necessary to be careful about using the concept of 'persecuted Christians'. 'Persecution', as defined by international law, designates a clearly defined threat that does not apply to all violent attacks on Christians. Frequently the conflicts stem from differing ethnic, political, social, cultural, economic or

geostrategic causes. Of course, this kind of differentiation must not lead us to play down genuine suffering and tribulation.

The Apostle Paul writes: "So then, when we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith" (Gal 6:10). In this spirit, the Christian churches in Germany share in the suffering of the brothers and sisters in situations of persecution and conflict regions. Both in public campaigns and through confidential political talks, we speak out for oppressed and persecuted Christians. Further, we work to improve the human rights situation in the countries concerned. These are concerns we lay before God in prayer.

When standing up for oppressed and persecuted Christians we cross the boundaries of denomination and church policy, and strive to coordinate the activities of different churches and communities. In following Jesus Christ we are convinced that every person is made in the image of God. The right to religious freedom is a universal human right, which is another reason why we advocate for oppressed and persecuted Christians.



The Maghreb:
an overview

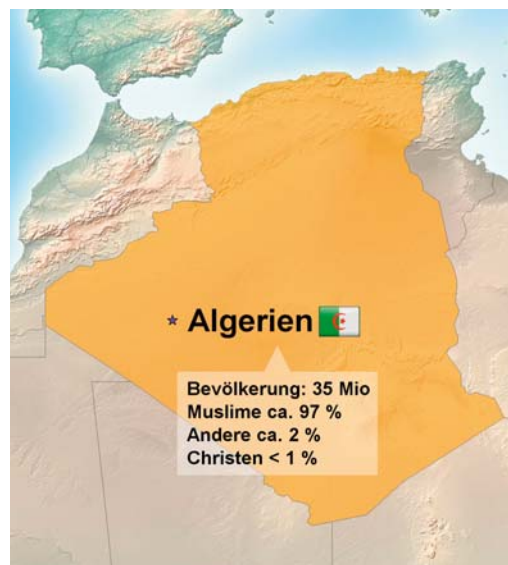
The situation in the Maghreb

The Maghreb comprises the North African countries of Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco. These countries form a coherent region in that, linguistically and culturally, they were extensively shaped by the Arab-Islamic conquest of the 7th century. In the first half of the 20th century, they underwent the influence of France as a colonial power. So besides Arabic, the official language in the three countries, French has continued to play an important role in education and trade and generally as the lingua franca.

The French colonial administration upheld the separation of religions. Islam was respected as the religion of the majority of the population and protected from missionary activities by Christian churches.

The fact that Islam is regarded as the religion of state is a defining factor for the present situation of the Christian minorities. Accordingly, converting Muslims is a punishable offence. The members of Christian churches in the Maghreb are thus mainly foreign nationals working there, e.g. for international companies.

During the colonial period, the core of the Christian minority was mainly made up of Europeans, notably French Roman Catholics who had



settled in areas under French rule. Over time, the Roman Catholic Church has set up a clear structure with dioceses and bishops in all three countries, which continue to operate and are recognised by the respective governments.

The Protestant churches emerging from the French Reformed Church subsist as [mainly] French-speaking ministries for foreign residents. They maintain their own church buildings and are also officially recognized. Today, those joining the small Protestant congregations are mostly Africans.

While the government often perceives Roman Catholic bishops and archbishops as representatives of all Christians and keeps up formal contacts, the churches play no particular role in the public life of the three countries. They are involved in the social sphere, however, alongside their pastoral activity. Notable examples are their diaconal facilities for refugees and disabled children.

Evangelical or charismatic churches have recently arisen from the activities of North American missionaries. They run into difficulties, however, when – despite the ban on conversion in the three countries – they expressly focus their programmes on local Muslims.

Algeria

Of the three francophone Maghreb countries Algeria was under French rule for the longest period – from 1830 to 1962. The constitution grants religious freedom in principle, but this is limited by the fact that the very attempt to

convert a Muslim to another religion is a punishable offence and religious meetings may only be conducted in state-approved premises. The Evangelical Church of Algeria (EPA) enjoys official status, like the four Roman Catholic dioceses. By contrast, evangelical and Pentecostal congregations have to put up with repeated closures of their places of worship, and other police action, as they are suspected of converting Muslims. Yet the number of Christian converts among the Berber people is increasing in Kabylei, a town to the east of Algiers. The number of Christians can only be estimated, but it is probably no more than 30,000 (including about 4000 Catholics).

Tunisia

Up until the Arab spring, Tunisia was regarded as the most secular of the Maghreb countries, although Islam is constitutionally the state religion and converting Muslims was prohibited. The Republic of Tunisia guaranteed the inviolability of the person and protected freedom of religious practice, yet only on condition “that it does not disturb public order” (Article 5 of the constitution). Wearing the hijab (head scarf) was restricted and founding political parties based on religion was banned. This has now changed since the rise of Islamist currents at the first free elections in 2011.

The Roman Catholic Church has been officially recognised since 1964. The archdiocese of Tunis has about 20,000 members. The originally French Evangelical Reformed Church of Tunis



Tunis Cathedral

In all three Maghreb countries Islam has the status of a state religion. Muslims are not permitted to convert to Christianity. Therefore most members of a Christian church in Maghreb are foreigners.

(ERT) is today a small international and multi-lingual congregation. Christians from different African countries make up the majority of those attending services. Local Christians meeting for worship in Arabic in the ERT building have hitherto suffered no impediment. Their numbers can only be surmised.

Morocco

The Kingdom of Morocco was under French rule for a relatively short time, from 1904. Before that it had seen decades of struggle for power and bloodshed between Spain, France and Germany. During the French protectorate Muslims were forbidden to enter a church and foreigners to enter a mosque. This rule applies to this day and even the new constitution of 2011 initiated by the King following the Arab spring prohibits any

attempt to cause a Muslim to apostatize (fall away). Islam is still the state religion. According to Article 3, Islam does, however, guarantee “freedom of religious practice to all”. Back in 1962, then King Hassan II declared that the Jewish and Christian religions could be practised in perfect freedom. However, he immediately added that adherents of Islam did not have the right to switch their religion. Furthermore, only Jews and Muslims could acquire full Moroccan citizenship.

From centuries, Christians from other countries have been able to practise their faith and gather undisturbed for worship, although the status of the recognized churches still remains dependent on the pleasure of the royal household. The Roman Catholic archdioceses of Rabat and Tangier number approximately 25,000 Cath-

The mass protests against the established regimes in northern Africa that began in December 2010 in Tunis have also spread to the whole Maghreb region. It is hard to predict what consequences the recent developments will have for the Christian and other non-Muslim minorities.

Abandoned palm tree plant near Djerba/Tunisia



olics, including numerous members of religious orders. The Roman Catholic Church officially only caters for foreign nationals.

The Evangelical Church in Morocco (EEAM) has about 2000 members. It sprang from the Evangelical Reformed Church of Morocco, founded in 1907, and is organised as an association. In 2010 about 160 Christians were expelled from the country without warning, most of them having lived there for over ten years. They were accused of spreading the gospel and thus undermining the country's religious values.

Among the expelled were some employees of a Christian children's home, to which the EEAM is not linked in any way and whose activities had not been criticised by the authorities. Following the expulsions isolated attacks by Moroccan

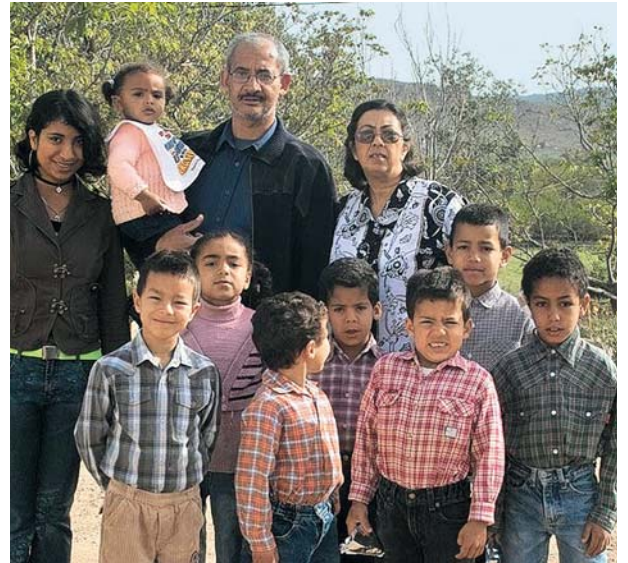
authorities on Christians were reported; they were beaten up and interrogated.

All these events made the Protestant congregations very uneasy.

Independently of the EEAM, there are various missionary movements with an evangelical background working in the country. Going beyond pastoral care for foreigners, they also engage in vigorous missionary work. The few local Christians that exist in the country, despite all restrictions, can really only practise their faith underground, as they are not just harassed by the state but also ostracised by their families and neighbours.



**School house of the Christian Children's home
"Village of Hope" in Ain Leuh**



Foster family Muller with their children

Looking to the future

In all three Maghreb countries Muslims are not permitted to convert to Christianity. Yet conversions have been increasing in the last few years, and particularly the numbers joining evangelical or charismatic groups. In some cases there have been expulsions of foreign "missionaries" and people have been convicted for not observing the regulations for conducting services. The essential condition for any church presence is official registration, which tends to be an arbitrary matter, lacking transparency.

A further area in which members of the Christian minority are discriminated against is family law according to the Sharīa. While marriage between a non-Muslim and a Muslim is possible in all three countries, when a Muslim woman marries a non-Muslim the family first demand that the husband convert to Islam. The children from inter-religious marriages are all regarded as Muslims.

The mass protests against the established regimes in northern Africa that began in December 2010 in Tunisia have also spread to the Maghreb. In Morocco the unrest led to the adoption of a new constitution while political reforms were initiated in Algeria. Muslim parties have come to the fore in the wake of the Arab spring and gained majorities at the parliamentary elections in Tunisia and Morocco. It is hard to predict what consequences the recent developments will have for the Christian and other non-Muslim minorities. The situation for them remains tense and dependent on the goodwill of the authorities.



**Carthage
Cathedral**

However, for many Christians in other parts of the world it is dangerous to pray so openly together, to sing and to hear the Word of God.

Liturgical modules

Introduction to the Sunday service

A service on Sunday morning is a matter of course for Christians in Germany. However, for many Christians in other parts of the world it is dangerous to pray so openly together, to sing and to hear the Word of God. They are threatened by hostilities in the neighbourhood or suffer repeated discrimination in public life. On behalf of them all, we will today remember in prayer our brothers and sisters in faith in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. Even if Christian churches have been present in the Maghreb Region for many years, their existence depends on the goodwill of the authorities and tolerance by the state. The Arab spring brought forth new freedoms in these countries. It is not yet clear whether Christians will be able to enjoy their human right to religious freedom. That is why we want to pray for them today with many other Protestant church congregations in Germany.

“Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord”

Psalm 25 (selected verses)

“Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord”

O my God, in you I trust; do not let me be put to shame;
do not let my enemies exult over me.

Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame; let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.

Make me know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths.

Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation;
for you I wait all day long.

Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love,
for they have been from of old. Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions;
according to your steadfast love remember me, for your goodness' sake, O Lord!

Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in the way.

All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness,
for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.

The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him, and he makes his covenant known to them.

My eyes are ever toward the Lord, for he will pluck my feet out of the net.

Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted.

Relieve the troubles of my heart, and bring me out of my distress.

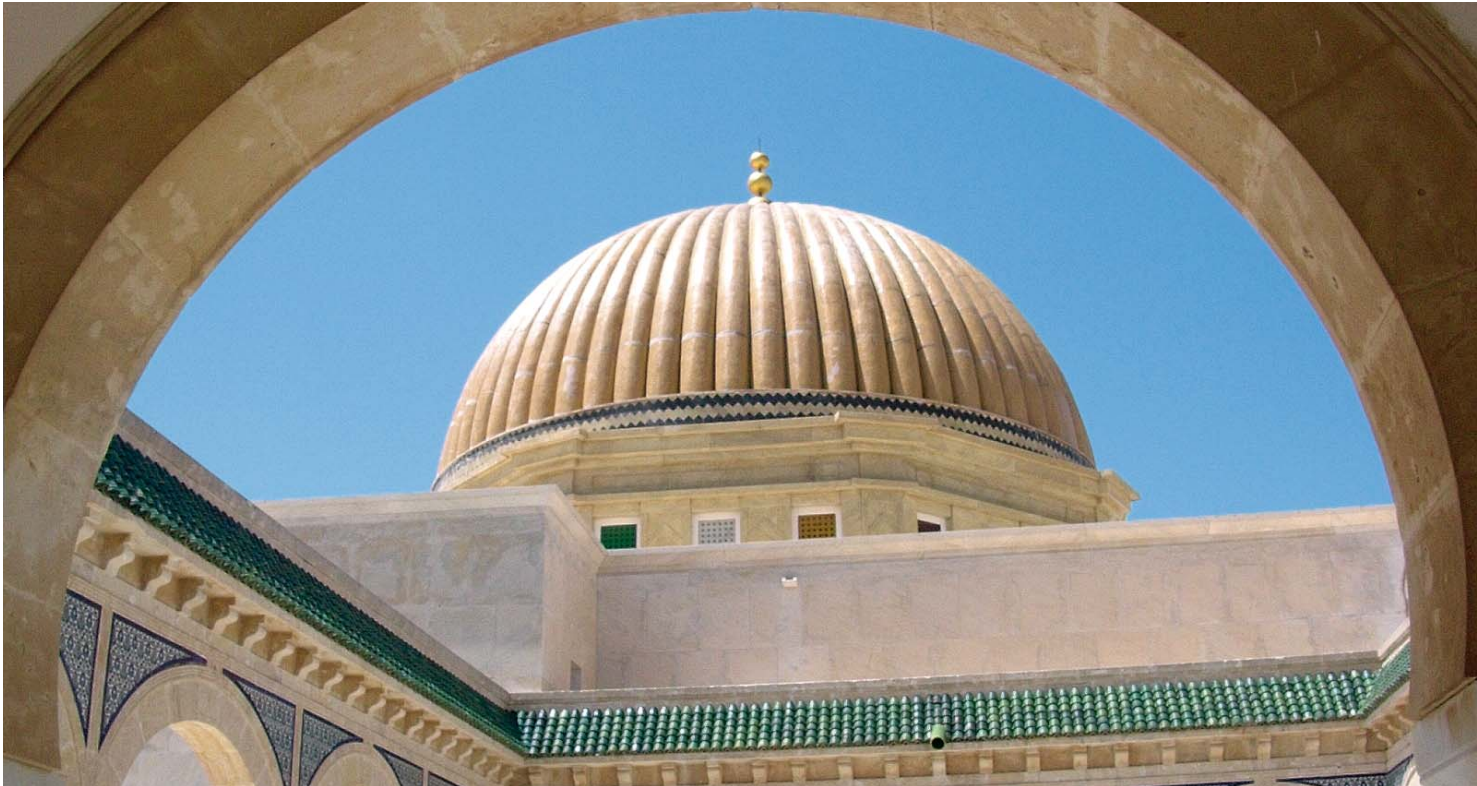
Consider how many are my foes, and with what violent hatred they hate me.

O guard my life, and deliver me; do not let me be put to shame, for I take refuge in you.

May integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait for you.

Possible music

- *Yarabba ssalami* (God of Peace, in your wisdom, give us the will to seek peace. God of Peace, in your wisdom, fill with your peace every heart). English by Fred Kaan. The melody line and Arabic original are in e.g. Thumamina, International Ecumenical Hymnbook, 160. This two-line Palestinian hymn is also suitable for singing antiphonally between each intercession.
- *Senzeni Na* (What have we done?), a lament from South Africa (in: World Council of Churches, Singing Peace, 78)
- *By the rivers of Babylon*, Jamaica (Singing Peace, 9)
- *Da wohnt ein Sehnen tief in uns* (Lebensweisen 19)
- *Holz auf Jesu Schulter* (Evangelisches Gesangbuch 97)
- *Ich steh vor dir mit leeren Händen, Herr* (Evangelisches Gesangbuch 382)



Prayer

Merciful God,

We bring before you our heartfelt concern and dismay at the harassment, violence and persecution to which Christians and other religious minorities are exposed in the North African countries.

- We pray for those who oppress others:

Open their hearts, through the spirit of love.

May people of different backgrounds be able to live together, through the spirit of mutual respect.

Pave the way for a change of heart and a change of ways, through the spirit of forgiveness.

- We pray for those with power and influence:

Give them courage to stand up fearlessly for justice and what is right.

Strengthen honesty and incorruptibility.

Awaken responsibility to protect the weak.

- We pray for our Christian brothers and sisters in Northern Africa:

Preserve them in a firm faith in your Son Jesus Christ.

Be their refuge in times of need, their hope in times of trouble,
their consolation in fear and mourning.

May Jesus Christ remain their model in his love and suffering.

- We pray for all who are persecuted for the sake of their faith:

Preserve them from traumatic experiences.

Send people who open to them their hearts and homes.

Ease suffering, give freedom, save life.

- We pray for ourselves:

Show us how we can live our bonds with Christians in the Northern African countries.

Open up opportunities to help, even from far away.

Strengthen our prayer for oppressed fellow Christians throughout the world.

We trust in your mercy and praise your goodness through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.



**The Children of the
“Village of Hope” in
Ain Leuh/Morocco**

Collection

Your donation will support the work of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) in order to offer non-bureaucratic help for oppressed and persecuted churches partner in protecting their rights to freedom of religion. This includes grants for the construction of church buildings as well as the funding of legal assistance to individuals or communities that are exposed to bureaucratic arbitrariness.

Please make your donation to:

Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland
Account Nr. 660000
Sort Code 52060410 (EKK Hannover)
Purpose: “52.5410.29 – Hilfe für verfolgte Christen”

A background film

“Of Gods and Men” (117 minutes, France 2010)

The feature film “Of Gods and Men” is particularly suited to exploring the issue. “Of course, the nine Catholic monks, who have lived for many years in a remote monastery in the Atlas Mountains in Algeria, take part in the Muslim festivals of the people living in the nearby village. And of course the latter also seek out Brother Luke, who gives medical care to those in the region and is their counsellor for personal problems. Islamist terrorists test the harmonious life of the Christians and Muslims. They attack it on Christmas Eve, the monks survive, but the threat to those of other faith cannot be ignored from this point on. Should they stay because it is God’s will and the village people need them? Or should they follow the advice of the politicians and leave the country for their own safety? At first, they have different opinions. But eventually they reach a common decision: they will stay.” (Translation of Vision Kino review)



**Bazar in
Fes/Morocco**

Further information

Initiative „Solidarität mit verfolgten und bedrängten Christen in unserer Zeit“ der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz:
www.dbk.de/verfolgte-bedaengte-christen/home-vbc/

Gebetstag für verfolgte Christen der Weltweiten Evangelischen Allianz:
<http://www.ead.de/gebet/gebetstag-fuer-verfolgte-christen/editorial.html>

Aktuelle Fürbittgebete der VELKD für Sonn- und Feiertage:
<http://www.velkd.de/aktueller-sonntag.php>

Bedrohung der Religionsfreiheit. Erfahrungen von Christen in verschiedenen Ländern. Eine Arbeitshilfe (EKD-Texte 78), hg. vom Kirchenamt der EKD, Hannover 2003:
http://www.ekd.de/download/ekd_texte_78.pdf

Solidarisieren und Handeln. Diskriminierte und bedrohte Christen in der Welt (SEK Impuls 7), hg. v. Schweizerischen Evangelischen Kirchenbund, Bern 2009:
http://www.sek-feps.ch/onlineshop/frontend/documents/shop/products/impuls7_de_web.pdf

Länderinformationen des Auswärtigen Amtes zu Algerien:
http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/DE/Aussenpolitik/Laender/Laenderinfos/01-Nodes_Uebersichtsseiten/Algerien_node.html

Länderinformationen des Auswärtigen Amtes zu Marokko:
http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/sid_2C47F9490F1AA72086FD6AC1FCD1BB4D/DE/Aussenpolitik/Laender/Laenderinfos/01-Nodes_Uebersichtsseiten/Marokko_node.html

Länderinformationen des Auswärtigen Amtes zu Tunesien:
http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/DE/Aussenpolitik/Laender/Laenderinfos/01-Nodes_Uebersichtsseiten/Tunesien_node.html



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