

International Body of Christ Bands Together to Pray for Sri Lanka

Devastation rocked Sri Lanka Easter weekend as bombs detonated around the country, killing nearly 300 people. The latest figures report around 500 people injured in the blasts.

Terrorists targeted multiple churches and tourist destinations. According to NBC News, blasts occurred at St. Anthony's Shrine in Colombo; St. Sebastian's Church in Negombo, a Catholic majority town north of Colombo; and a church in the eastern town of Batticaloa.

"These coordinated attacks against churches in Sri Lanka were planned on Easter to strike fear in the hearts of Christians," says David Curry, CEO of Open Doors USA. "But this sort of tactic will not prevail this Easter. I call on all Christians to unite in their suffering and in their testimony of how Jesus triumphs over death. We stand against this attack fiercely believing that all people should have the right to worship freely."

The Sri Lankan government was reportedly warned churches would be attacked ahead of the bombs.

According to *The New York Times*:

The confidential security memo laid it all out: names, addresses, phone numbers, even the times in the middle of the night that one suspect would visit his wife.

In the days leading up to the devastating suicide attacks that killed nearly 300 people in Sri Lanka on Easter Sunday, the country's security agencies had been closely watching a secretive cell of the National Thowheeth Jama'ath, a little-

known radical Islamist organization that security officials in Sri Lanka now say carried out the attacks.

The security agencies had even been given specific intelligence that the group, also known by the spelling National Thowheed Jama'ath, was planning to bomb Catholic churches. And within hours of when three churches and three hotels were bombed, Sri Lankan security services seized at least 24 suspects, implying that they knew exactly where this group was operating and were quickly able to locate their safe houses.

Why the security agencies failed to act before the bombings—and why some top officials, including the country's own prime minister, didn't even know about the intelligence that the agencies possessed—are enormous questions that have created a crisis in the Sri Lankan government.

On Monday, several ministers lashed out at President Maithripala Sirisena, who controls the security services, for not acting on the detailed warnings before the attacks.

"We are ashamed of what has happened," said Rauff Hakeem, the justice minister. "If the names of the persons involved were already known, why were they not arrested?"

In spite of the devastation, the terrorist acts inspired people to come together in prayer and intercession.

"Ironically, people threatened the early church on the first Easter as well, but persecutors did not prevail in squelching the message of Christ, nor will the attackers prevail in Sri Lanka," says Michael Wood, senior vice president of Open Doors USA. "Time and time again, the world sees that suffering unites the church and strengthens the resolve to worship and witness for Christ."

Other Christian leaders and faith-based organizations also

opened their hearts to prayer.

Here's what they are saying:

Jentezen Franklin, pastor of Free Chapel

This Easter we were filled with hope as we once again celebrated our gift of eternal life and the conquered grave. Yet we grieved the senseless and cowardly attacks our brothers and sisters experienced in Sri Lanka. An attack on any church is an attack on the whole church.

In fact, an attack on any faith is an attack on every faith. I urge every individual across the world who understands the essential right to worship freely and without fear of hostility will offer their prayers and will do everything they can to put an end to ideologies of hate and acts of evil in places of worship. Whatever your faith, whatever your politics, wherever you live—this should be a part of your creed.

Jack Graham, pastor of Prestonwood Baptist Church

Today we are mourning with the families of the Christians who were killed in the terrorist attacks in Sri Lanka on Easter Sunday. Nobody should have to go to church—especially on the holiest day of the year—wondering whether they and their families will live through the service. But the cold truth is antagonism and persecution against Christians are growing around the world. Millions of Christians across the globe suffer violence, harassment and imprisonment simply because they profess to follow Jesus. Churches in America cannot remain passive while our brothers and sisters suffer. As 1 Corinthians 12:26 says, 'If one part [of the body of Christ] suffers, every part suffers with it.' We must pray for the families of the victims and survivors of these terrible attacks, and we must find ways to meet their needs in this time of hardship.

Frank Gaffney, Save the Persecuted Christians and Center for Security Policy:

Suicide bombers in Sri Lanka took nearly 300 lives and wounded many more in coordinated attacks on churches conducting Easter Sunday services and hotels. A local and heretofore-unknown jihadist group is being blamed. But such a cell would likely have needed help from other Sharia-supremacists to pull off such a complex operation.

The carnage among Christians worshiping on that holy day was particularly horrific—and, therefore, impossible for the international press to ignore. Yet, followers of Jesus worldwide are being killed and otherwise terribly persecuted every day. All too often, their losses go unremarked.

“Worse yet, those responsible for such oppression are generally able to engage in it with impunity. In January, we started Save the Persecuted Christians as a grassroots movement to raise awareness about these crimes against humanity and hold the persecutors accountable. Learn how you can help at .

Other faith leaders responded on social media.

Lord, our hearts are heavy for those weeping because of the Sri Lanka bombings. We grieve with them. Be near and help them, Lord. And keep reminding us that it may be dark for a season but in the end, evil does not win. Light overcomes darkness. Jesus is risen. #PrayForSriLanka

– Lysa TerKeurst (@LysaTerKeurst) April 22, 2019

Resurrection Sunday is about more than Easter eggs & all-you-can-eat buffets.

The slaughtering of Christians in Sri Lanka today is a reminder that the forces of hell still rage against the

church.

But even “the gates of hell will not prevail” against us!#PrayforSriLanka

– Sean Feucht (@seanfeucht) April 22, 2019

Hundreds killed because of their faith today in Sri Lanka pray and speak up for your Christian brothers and sisters! 8 bombings on Easter Sunday carried out on the Sri Lankan people. 3 hotels, 5 churches. God help us on your holy day. #srilanka #prayforsrilanka

– Kaya Jones (@KayaJones) April 21, 2019

The Jakarta Legal Aid Institute sends our deepest condolences to the victims of Sri Lanka bombings, along with our Christian brothers and sisters in the country. All kinds of persecution & terrorism imposed upon any religion is inhumane and therefore condemned. #PrayforSriLanka

– LBH JAKARTA (@LBH_Jakarta) April 22, 2019

This is so heartbreaking.

Pray for the families of those who died and for the Church in Sri Lanka!

– Greg Laurie (@greglaurie) April 21, 2019

My prayers are with victims & their families after multiple Easter Sunday bombings in Sri Lanka. At least 140 people are dead & hundreds more are injured & suffering. No group has claimed responsibility yet—it seems they just wanted to destroy life.

– Franklin Graham (@Franklin_Graham) April 21, 2019

Join us in prayer for #SriLanka—at least 150 people were killed and hundreds more injured after multiple bombings at churches and hotels this morning.

– BGEA (@BGEA) April 21, 2019

My heart hurts this morning as I read 207 of my brothers & sisters went to worship this morning & were killed simply because of whom they worship. Heaven is richer this morning. Praying for their families & the country of Sri Lanka. May the love and peace of God be felt.

– Tony Suarez-NHCLC VP (@revtonysuarez) April 21, 2019

Pray for Sri Lanka as more than 200 people were killed in a wave of coordinated bombings in churches and hotels on this Easter Sunday. Hundreds more were injured and are being rushed to hospitals to receive care. #prayforSriLanka

– World Help (@world_help) April 21, 2019

Christians now awaken each Easter & ask

“WHERE will be killed this year?”

Not, “IF”

MY PRAYER:

*“You will be secure under a government that is just & fair.
Your enemies will stay far away.*

*You will live in peace,
& terror will not come near.”*

Isaiah 54:14#SriLankaAttacks

– Johnnie Moore ☐ (@JohnnieM) April 21, 2019

There is no act more evil than killing someone at worship.

May the God of peace comfort the children who lost their parents, the parents who lost their children, the spouses who lost their love, and those who lost almost everyone. #SriLankaAttacks

– Johnnie Moore □ (@JohnnieM) April 21, 2019

We pray for our brothers and sisters in Sri Lanka. We lament & mourn this tragedy. We pray for the victims families as they grieve. We pray for boldness & courage for Christ-followers & churches. We pray for peace. Lord help the church to arise & not be in fear. #prayforSRILANKA

– Alliance for the Peace of Jerusalem (@Jeru_Alliance) April 22, 2019

Today, too, let us join in prayer with the Christian community of Sri Lanka, which was struck by terrible violence on Easter Sunday. We entrust to the risen Lord the victims, the wounded and all the suffering. #PrayForSriLanka

– Pope Francis (@Pontifex) April 22, 2019

Open Doors is calling for believers to stand with our Christian family in Sri Lanka through prayer today, and use the hashtag #PrayForSriLanka to encourage our brothers and sisters, and let them know they are not alone.