

## Monday 15th February

### Recent background to Tunisia

Tunisia is a small country of just 11.9 million people, with a rich Christian heritage but which is today 99% Muslim. Following independence from France in 1956, President Bourguiba realised that underdevelopment was the country's main problem, so strongly encouraged education and gave women greater rights than in any other Arab country. He advocated a moderate form of Islam. In 1987 he was replaced by his Prime Minister, Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali, in a bloodless coup. After



initially giving more rights to Islamic groups, Ben Ali then took tighter control of the country, largely continuing his predecessor's policies of education, development and moderate Islam. In general, this mix of policies made Tunisia a stable country, and with its cheap and well-trained workforce and quality Mediterranean hotels and beaches, the Tunisian economy grew well and people were generally happy.

However, following the 2008 worldwide financial crisis and with a growing level of corruption from some of Ben Ali's family, foreign investment started to drop and unemployment to rise, leading to the 2011 uprising which began the so-called Arab Spring. Huge crowds demonstrated around the country for a better future. Ben Ali fled and the country transitioned into a time of greater freedom. People felt more able to voice their opinions and laws changed giving more freedom in worship and marriage. However, the instability that followed due to political uncertainty and the drop in the general level of security, led to even less foreign investment and also to a number of terrorist attacks on tourists in 2015. These devastated the tourism industry. When president Kais Saied was elected in October 2019, he was popular with young people whom he said had led his election campaign. They saw him as being against corruption and representing their interests. Saied said he wanted to build a new Tunisia.

Today, unemployment is worse than in 2011 and hope has disappeared. Read more tomorrow on the latest difficulties facing the Tunisian people.

- Pray for the current president, Kais Saied, and for the Prime Minister, Hichem Mechichi, that they would work to bring unity and hope to this country and its people.
- Pray for God's Spirit to breakthrough, bringing light and hope to Tunisians' lives and circumstances.
- Pray for the country's economy, suffering from a dramatic decrease in tourism, social security and employment opportunities. Pray for a new Tunisia to grow, bringing change and hope for everyone.

## Tuesday 16th February

### The struggles in Tunisia today

At the time of writing, a four-day lockdown had taken place from 14th – 20th January to curb the spread of coronavirus. This coincided with the 10th anniversary of the Arab Spring and the day Ben

Ali fled from power on 14 January 2011. During that uprising, more than 600 people were arrested during consecutive nights of disturbances in the capital and other cities as young people clashed with security forces.

The number of Covid cases is increasingly rapidly. Some are worried about the coronavirus while others don't believe it exists and are angry that the lockdown is preventing them from earning a living. For months cafes have closed early under a night-time curfew, shops have been closed and the tourism industry which is so important to Tunisia has been greatly impacted. There had been political unrest and strikes leading up to this lockdown as people struggle to survive.

GDP shrank by 9% last year, consumer prices spiralled and one third of young people became unemployed. The health crisis and ensuing economic misery have pushed growing numbers of Tunisians to seek to leave the country. People are also frustrated over poor public services. You can read more at: <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20210118-rioters-in-tunisia-clash-with-security-forces-for-third-night>

- Pray for those affected by Covid or unemployment that they will seek help from Almighty God and find He is their refuge and strength, provider and hope.
- Tunisia is one of the more stable nations in North Africa. Pray for stability in the county and that it does not become more extreme or chaotic.
- Many are secular and reject the old traditions of Islam while still identifying as Muslims. Pray they will find the good news and hunger for a different way of living as sons and daughters of the King of Kings.

### **Wednesday 17th February**

#### **Kingdom advance in Tunisia**

*"Ask me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession."* Ps 2:8

Tunisia desperately needs a breakthrough and to see movements of people to Christ. Believers all agree this will only happen through prayer. In 1999, workers felt led to organise a year of prayer and ministry. The impact was dramatic as hundreds of new believers came to faith and were bold in sharing with their friends. Some believers have since gathered in conferences to be further equipped to live for Christ on top of their commitment to their local churches.

A recent Tunisian documentary investigated the state of Christianity in the country. Many national believers shared openly about their faith when interviewed. This was a landmark programme. It opened many viewers' eyes to the reality that it is possible to be both Tunisian and Christian. Other Tunisians are finding the truth of the gospel as they interact with believers on social media sites such as Facebook and search Christian websites. Social media are widely used by Tunisians and are powerful tools for outreach.

Last December, Christian broadcaster SAT-7 announced the first TV programmes it had made in this country. A small but active Tunisian Church of believers from non-Christian backgrounds were eager to be part of the programmes and communicate with their fellow Tunisians.

However, it's still somewhat dangerous to be Tunisian and be openly Christian. According to Open Doors, there are 23,100 Christians in Tunisia, making them a tiny minority among the country's 11.9

million people who are predominantly Muslim. Tunisia has risen 8 places in their World Watch List to number 26. This is largely due to a reported increase in violence against believers and property owned by them.

- Pray that through the powerful tool of media, Tunisians will have access to the good news and the freedom to share it within their networks.
- Pray for those people working on media applications that they will find new ways of sharing the good news which people can connect with.
- Praise God for what He is doing in this country. Pray for continued protection and empowering as Christians boldly witness for Christ.

Sources: <https://www.sat7uk.org/sat-7-launches-first-programmes-by-new-production-team-in-tunisia/> and <https://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/world-watch-list/tunisia/>

## Thursday 18th February

### Workers blessing the local community

A vital source of reaching people with the good news is through field workers who go and serve overseas. Frontiers workers in Tunisia have shared their story of working with local farmers who farm olive trees:

Tunisia is one of the top ten countries in the world for the quantity and quality of its olives and olive oil, both of which it exports, making olive trees vital to the local economy. They are often grown by



Olive farming in Tunisia (Kurt Johnson, Flickr Commons)

small-scale farmers who want to get the best return from their crops. They use agricultural practices from other parts of Europe that don't work well in Tunisia. In this very dry country, the chemicals stay in the soil and the soil becomes unproductive. Olive wood can be sold for a good price to Spain, so trees are often over-pruned and unproductive. Farmers need to decide what their priorities are – do they want wood or olives from their trees?

With so many struggling economically, Frontiers workers come alongside local farmers to encourage and teach them to farm in a way that makes their trees more productive and their livelihoods more sustainable. They learn to plant crops together that put goodness back into the soil in ways that fit the local environment. .

Working together provides opportunities to reflect on God's design in creation where different plants and animals work together to build a nutritious soil that bears fruit. They encourage farmers to see that following God's ways produces better fruit both physically and spiritually.

- Pray for good relationships and trust to be built between Frontiers field workers and farmers.
- Pray that as farmers go about their daily work and try to understand their soils and trees, they would ponder God’s design in creation and connect with their Creator.
- Pray for anointing on the words and actions of field workers, that point farmers to God as the source of all blessing and fruitfulness.
- Pray for Frontiers field workers as they labour far from home, to clearly understand God’s plan for themselves and their work and to know God’s blessing, favour and wisdom on their lives.

*Thought for today: when you eat an olive, pray for Tunisia!*

## Friday 19th February

### Sfax and Tunisian Arabs

*“I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them.” Isa 42:16*

One of Frontiers’ 100 Priority Places is Sfax, a key city on the Mediterranean Sea in central Tunisia.

On January 8th on Frontiers’ Priority 100 Prayer app it read: “Give me Sfax, Tunisia, or I die!” They altered the famous John Knox quote to pray for this city and country.



This industrialised and modern city is a gateway to Tunisia’s central and southern regions. It has been an important port for centuries, built on Roman ruins, fought over by Barbary pirates, Arab nomads and European colonisers. Olive oil and almonds come from nearby growing regions and are exported widely. As the largest fishing port in Tunisia, fish is caught and packaged in canneries for sale in Tunisia and abroad. Although not as leisurely as other cities, men and women meet in tea rooms to gossip and mix business with pleasure.

Sfaxians are proud to be the industrial heart of Tunisia with a more robust economy that is not dependent on tourism. They are hardworking and think that everything Sfaxian is better, from the

university to the goods and produce! They are masters, whether crafting tiny pastry delights or buildings. Scattered around the country for work, Sfaxians maintain a uniquely strong identity and a loyalty to their regional traditions.

Sfax attracts Tunisian workers from all over the country so if movements to Christ started there, they would have the potential to spread and have a real impact. A community of Catholic clergy have lived and prayed in this city for a long time.

- Let's thank God for the believers and church in Sfax. Pray for courage and strength as they live out their faith to draw others to Christ.
- Pray for more people in this city to follow Jesus.
- Let's call out to God to bless this city and to see movements to Christ start there and ripple out to the rest of the country.

## **Saturday 20th February**

### **Southern Berbers**

There are between 9 and 12 unreached People Groups in Tunisia, accounting for 92% of the population, according to the Joshua Project and Pray4Tunisia. Few, if any, are actively working to reach them. Of these groups, half are Berbers. They call themselves the Amazigh, which means 'free men'. Centuries ago, many of them were Christian.

Agencies and field workers tend to go the larger cities such as Sfax and the capital Tunis. Rural communities, particularly in the south of Tunisia are those that are largely unreached. Creative ways and a desire for workers to go to them are needed.

Muslims who do make the decision to follow Jesus are vulnerable to persecution, often from their own family and community, and this is especially true in the country's conservative southern regions.

Many Muslim background believers choose to hide their faith, because of the hostility and pressure they face. Men can face intimidation, ostracism, beatings and even death threats, whilst women are at risk of sexual harassment, domestic violence, expulsion from family, and forced marriage.

Violent Islamic extremists are active in the border areas to the south. They will target any believers, whether foreign or national, if the opportunity arises.

Southern Tunisia is a challenging area for field workers to live and serve and for Muslims who decide to become Christ followers. Let's pray for them.

- Pray for more workers to be called to southern Tunisia and for effective ways to be found to connect with people and share the good news.
- Pray for workers to discern people of peace – those 'connectors' through whom the good news will continue to spread.
- Let's ask for a breakthrough and for movements to Christ to grow and spread in southern Tunisia.

Source of some content: <https://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/world-watch-list/tunisia/>