**News update March 2021**

In March 2012 The International Criminal Court began investigating war crimes alleged to have been committed by Palestinians and Israelis in the **Occupied Palestinian Territories** since 2014. The move was welcomed by human rights groups and Hamas but angrily denounced as anti-Semitic by leaders in Israel, who fear that it will place many of its soldiers and senior politicians at risk of prosecution. Neither the USA, which also criticised the decision, nor Israel is a member of the ICC.

The body of a priest, Fr Rodrigue Sanon, abducted in January 2021 in **Burkina** **Faso**, was found in a remote forest later that month. Burkina Faso has witnessed a spate of mostly Jihadist-related kidnappings and deadly attacks on villages and places of worship. The armed violence has resulted in the deaths of 1100 persons while more than one million people are now internally displaced since the crisis began.

Over 200 girls abducted in late February 2021 from their boarding school in **Nigeria** by a group of armed men were later released. This was the second time in a week that gunmen had returned kidnapped schoolchildren in Nigeria. The government denied paying ransoms and it is unclear how the release was secured. Mass kidnappings of children at boarding schools in northwestern Nigeria have increased, partly because abduction has become a growth industry during the country’s economic crisis. The victims are often schoolchildren — not just the rich, powerful or famous.

Christian leaders in the UK and India have called for the release of **Fr Stan Swamy**, an 83-year old Jesuit priest who has been in prison since October 2020 on spurious charges of terrorism. He urgently needs medical attention, suffers from Parkinson’s disease, requires assistance with eating and dressing, and is danger of contracting COVID in an over-crowded prison in Mumbai. He is accused of complicity in violent terrorism and working with a Maoist group to undermine the state. The real reason for his detention is his five decade-long ministry working for the human rights of poor tribal people (the Adivasi) and impoverished minorities in Jharkhand and elsewhere.