

OCT-DEC 2018

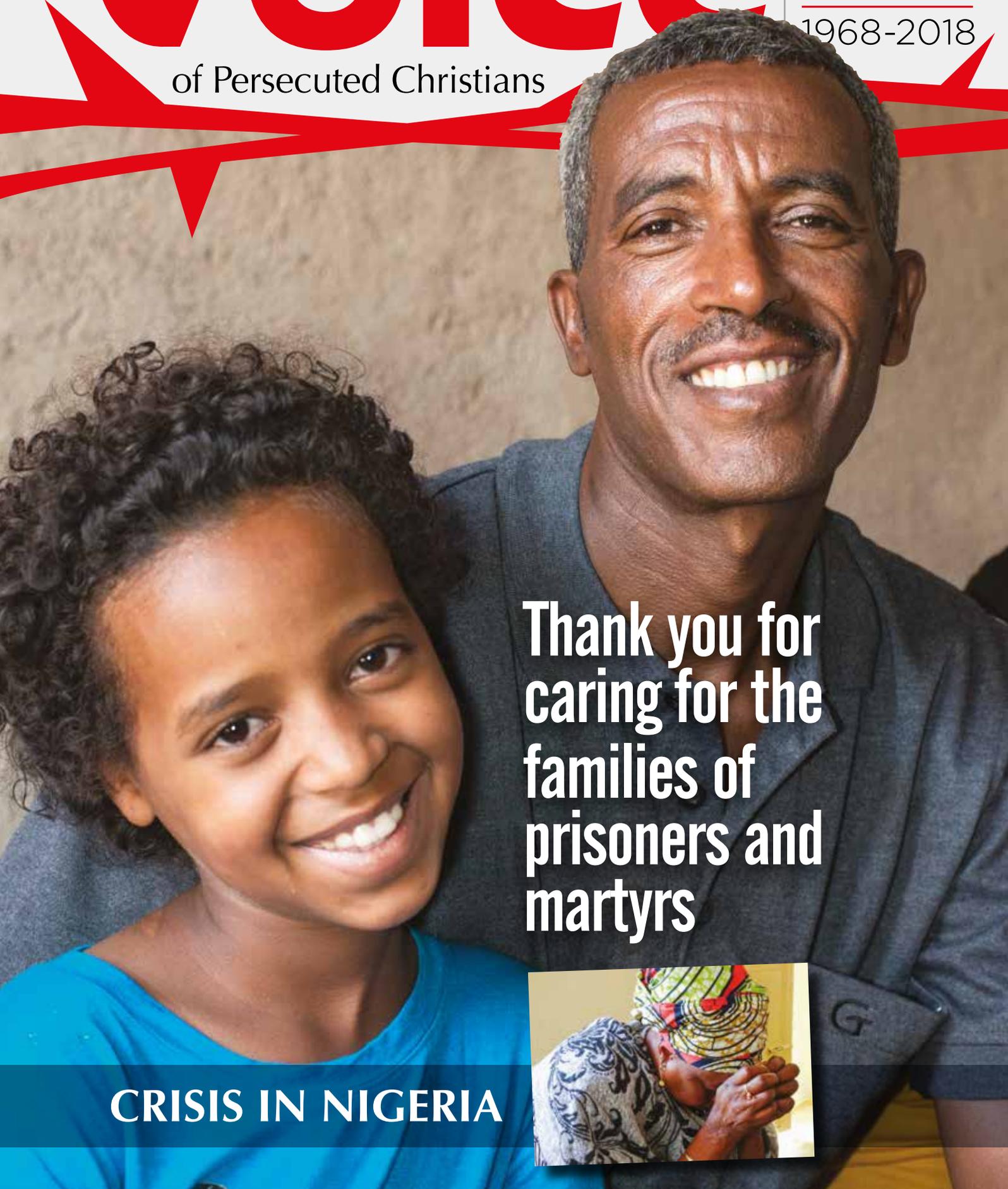
RELEASE INTERNATIONAL

voice

50
YEARS

1968-2018

of Persecuted Christians



Thank you for
caring for the
families of
prisoners and
martyrs

CRISIS IN NIGERIA





Welcome

by Paul Robinson, CEO

CARING
for those who suffer

In recent months we have been shocked by the reports of escalating violence by militants against Christians in central and northern Nigeria.

As you can read on page 11, continuing attacks by armed Fulani herdsmen are devastating rural Christian communities, forcing thousands of families to flee their homes.

As one of our partners told us: *'It is estimated that between January and June 2018, 6,000 people have been killed and close to 50,000 displaced. The escalation in the killing is very clear.'*

At this time of crisis, Christians in Nigeria need our prayers and practical support more than ever.

Please use the prayer points on page 14 and give as generously as you are able to provide emergency relief for those displaced and to help families suffering injury and trauma.

In this edition you can read on page 6 the moving testimonies of Christians who

escaped from persecution in repressive Eritrea and are now living in refugee camps in neighbouring Ethiopia.

Today hundreds of Christians still remain imprisoned in Eritrea in brutal conditions: many have been detained for 10 years or more.

Caring for prisoners and their families, and the families of martyrs, has been one of our core activities since 1968. Pastor Richard Wurmbrand, who inspired the founding of Release, himself suffered imprisonment and severe torture because of his faith.

His passionate concern was reflected in his plea – one of eight – to Christians living in the 'free world':

'When a Christian goes to prison – and often to torture or death – the suffering only begins. The family suffers endlessly. We can and must help them.'

We are so grateful for your faithful support that sustains this challenging but vital ministry.

CELEBRATING 50 YEARS

- **FREE** tickets are still available for our special **Service of Thanksgiving** in London on **October 4** (see p23).
- Don't miss the speaking tour by Nigerian partner **Rt Rev Dr Ben Kwashi** in **November** (see p23).
- Find out how you can show our new film **Tortured for Christ** in your church (see p18)



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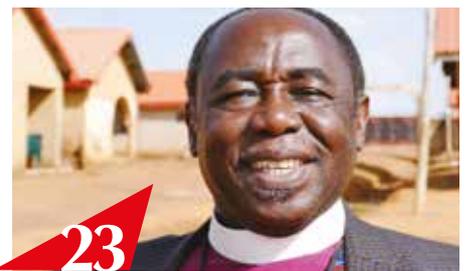
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Hear him speak in November

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL
Voice 50 YEARS
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Release helps Christians in the UK and Ireland to actively engage with their persecuted brothers and sisters around the world: praying with them, standing with them, helping them, and learning lessons of true Christian discipleship with them.

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FAITH UNDER FIRE



Rebecca Sharibu (right) holds a photo of her daughter Leah, 15, one of 110 girls who were abducted by Boko Haram terrorists in Nigeria in February. While most were released in March, Leah remains in captivity because of her refusal to convert to Islam. Pray for her release. Photo: Chika Oduah.

Nigerian Christians condemn killings

The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) has condemned the continuing violence against believers in central and northern states.

Gunmen, believed to be Fulani militants, attacked Nasara Baptist Church, near Rigasa, Kaduna, in August. Church leader Rev Hosea Akuchi was shot dead and his wife Talatu kidnapped. Her abductors demanded a ransom of five million Naira (£11,000) for her release.

The attack is likely to have been part of the wider campaign of violence against Christians that has seen 6,000 people killed and 50,000 displaced in the first six months of this year (see main feature on page 11).

'We call on the police and other security agencies to do whatever it takes to bring the culprits to book and rescue the widow of the late Rev Akuchi as soon as practicable,' said CAN.

'CAN also notes with pain and disappointment the state of insecurity in the country.'

• Pray for the grieving family, and for the release of Talatu.

Tajik police stop evangelism

Security police in Tajikistan arrested ten Christians in August.

The group had gone to the Pamir mountains to share the gospel and to hand out Christian literature in Russian, Tajik and other local languages.

According to our partner, the group were later released but were fined \$1,000 by a court.

• Pray for Christians in Tajikistan as they share God's love in a hostile environment.



Our new DVD about Central Asia, *Underground*, which includes interviews with Christian leaders, is available from our website (see page 10).

Militants target Indian believers

Christians in India suffered 150 attacks from January to June, reports our partner the All India Christian Council (AICC).

The attacks included threats, disruption of meetings, damage to property and physical violence. In June, for example:

- militant Hindus in Tamil Nadu beat three Christians for distributing gospel tracts
- a church in Andhra Pradesh was vandalised
- police stopped a church convention in Tamil Nadu, following complaints by militants
- police arrested three pastors during a prayer meeting in Madhya Pradesh

'In the light of the upcoming general election in April or May 2019, the church in India will likely face more atrocities,' said AICC.

• Pray for protection for all believers, especially in the run-up to next year's general election



'Sinicisation': this church in Luoyang, Henan province, has been forced to fly the Chinese national flag. Photo: China Aid.

Chinese churches forced to show allegiance to communism

Churches across China are facing increased pressure to openly display their allegiance to the Communist Party.

All churches in Xinyu County, Jiangxi province, have been ordered to display the national flag – as well as President Xi Jinping's picture and posters on communist values.

Children in the area have been forbidden from attending church, and the government has threatened to cancel the welfare of low-income residents should they do so.

Local government officials have also pulled down the cross of Jieken Evangelical Church.

Authorities in Leqing, Zhejiang province, have forced churches to pay homage to the Communist Party by singing patriotic songs and displaying the national flag. Consequently one local church held a concert during which many nationalistic songs were sung.

'This is "sinicisation" or "religion with Chinese characteristics",' said Release partner China Aid. 'Such actions arise from China's desire to ensure unwavering dedication to the government's ideals.'

• *Pray that church leaders will know God's wisdom as they respond to growing pressure.*



PRAY FOR GAO

Chinese Christian lawyer Gao Zhisheng (pictured), who has been repeatedly detained and tortured during the past decade, is still missing and has not been seen for the past 12 months. No official accusation has been made against him by the authorities and his family has not been notified of his whereabouts.

• *Pray that Gao is freed.*



RICHARD WURMBRAND'S PLEA 2

'Christians can help by protesting publicly.'

When Release began in 1968, Richard Wurmbrand challenged believers in the West with eight pleas, including campaigning on behalf of persecuted Christians.

Giving a voice to persecuted believers has been, and remains, a key part of our ministry. In response to the requests of partners, we regularly raise issues that are important to them, through petitions, letter-writing and meeting people of influence. We can only do this because of your support.

Sign our China petition



It's not too late to sign our petition to support persecuted Christians in China – and to ask others to add their signatures too.

The petition to Chinese President Xi Jinping urges him 'to rethink and repeal its new religious ordinance' introduced in February 2018 which is part of 'the growing and sustained campaign of repression being waged by government officials against the Christian church' (see report left).

This ordinance 'targets citizens who want nothing more than to live out their faith in peace, and lawyers who desire only to uphold the rule of law.'

You can sign the petition online at releaseinternational.org or ask for a paper copy by calling 01689 823491. Please return completed forms by October 31 at the latest.

TORTURED FOR BEING A CHRISTIAN

Your support is helping courageous Eritrean believer Yemane who was left crippled after repeated torture in prison.

Yemane gazed at the patch of sky visible through the opening in the ground some six feet above his head. His arms were bound behind him, and his throat was parched from hours without water. Although it was hard to gauge the time as he stared up at the light shining through the opening above, his previous detentions in the subterranean cell had ranged from 12 to 48 hours.

Once again, Yemane was in the hole because he could not keep his faith to himself.

At age 35, he had been drafted into the military during the two-and-a-half-year border war with Ethiopia. A dedicated Christian, Yemane faithfully shared the gospel with other soldiers, even though his supervisors opposed it.

On one occasion, an officer called him into his office and beat him with a stick, saying, *'This is because you are a Christian.'*

He had been sent to the hole five times for telling other soldiers about Jesus, but Yemane continued to share the gospel at every opportunity. After punishing him repeatedly for nearly nine years, his commanders finally gave up and sent him to prison in 2009.

Conditions were brutal in the Adi Nefas military prison, where Yemane spent the next three years. Most of the prisoners slept on newspapers, and none had a bed. The men in each cell shared a plastic bottle as a urinal, and they were limited to two bathroom breaks per day.

'We were given one roll of bread in

the morning, two rolls for lunch and two rolls in the evening. Sometimes we were given lentil soup – but you couldn't see any lentils in it,' he told Release.

'Whenever I preached the soldiers beat me'

Out of the 1,000 military prisoners in Adi Nefas, only ten were Christians. But Yemane had a small pocket Bible that he tore into four parts and hid from the guards, and the small group of believers managed to study the Bible together in secret.

'Every week the soldiers searched the Christians for Bibles.'

In addition, Yemane continued the very work for which he had been imprisoned, sharing the gospel with fellow inmates.

'I preached to all the prisoners, and some turned to Christ,' he said. *'But whenever I preached the soldiers beat me. I thought of Jesus on the cross and did not feel the pain.'*



Yemane sells items on the street to support himself.

was granted permission to travel outside the country for medical treatment. Today he lives in a refugee camp in northern Ethiopia, home to more than 30,000 Eritreans who fled their homeland, but he hopes to return to Eritrea one day.

To support himself, Yemane manages a small business from his wheelchair, selling nail clippers, scissors and combs on a small table set up along the pavement.

Though he doesn't have much, he gives away almost everything he earns and is known for looking after some of the local street children. He is also a committed member of a local church and is well-liked in the refugee camp.

Your support helps to pay for physical therapy to improve his ongoing health issues.

'Pray for my healing, so I can serve the Lord,' he told Release. 'Pray for the people of Eritrea, that they may be free. Please keep praying for Eritrea – God will hear your prayers.'

Thanks to your support, Release serves Christian prisoners of faith and their families around the world by providing practical help and pastoral care.

This vital ministry is part of the enduring vision of Richard Wurmbrand (see box right).

Prison authorities, further annoyed by his boldness, eventually locked Yemane in a small concrete room by himself.

After six months in solitary confinement, the intense heat and dehydration triggered a stroke.

'I collapsed in a coma,' Yemane said, 'and was unconscious for 14 days.'

The stroke left him disabled, so in July 2012 he was released because of poor health.

The authorities often release extremely ill prisoners because those who die in prison are sometimes viewed as heroic martyrs. Christian prisoners are also sometimes released when relatives can be persuaded to sign an agreement — with or without the prisoner's permission — stating that he or she will not share the gospel or meet with other Christians. Although a signed statement is often all that is required to purchase freedom, many Christians refuse to compromise their faith.

Two years after his release, Yemane



RICHARD WURMBRAND'S PLEA 7

'When a Christian goes to prison – and often to torture or death – the suffering only begins. The family suffers endlessly. We can and must help them.'

Richard Wurmbrand – who inspired the founding of Release in 1968 – was a prisoner for 14 years and was very aware that families of prisoners suffer unbearable anguish, discrimination and continued persecution.

That's why supporting Christian prisoners of faith and their families, and the families of martyrs, remains a core part of our ministry.

EMBRACE NEWSLETTER

Read about the overcoming faith of Eritrean Christian women in the November edition of *Embrace*, the newsletter of our Release Women ministry. To request your free copy:

- Complete the attached card
- Visit releaseinternational.org/release-women
- Call: 01689 823491



‘I FORGIVE MY WIFE’S KILLERS’

Afewerki is well aware that believers still die in Eritrean prisons. He is reminded of it every day as he raises his four children alone.

Afewerki’s wife, Fkadu, and their 17-year-old son were arrested in May 2017, in the middle of the night, after being accused of attending a nighttime prayer meeting. Two months later, Afewerki was also arrested.

Prison conditions were poor. There was little food, only muddy river water to drink and no relief from searing temperatures. In addition, prisoners were beaten regularly.

‘All the women were ill, especially my

wife,’ Afewerki told us. ‘She didn’t eat or drink for a week.’

‘I know that my wife was a hero Christian, that she died for Christ.’

No medical treatment was provided in the camp, and in August 2017 Fkadu collapsed. They took her from the camp in an ambulance, and Afewerki never saw her again. He learned of her death three months later when he was released.

‘At home, I cried and cried,’ he said. ‘But I know that my wife was a hero Christian, that she died for Christ.’

The authorities warned Afewerki not to attend prayer meetings, and although he agreed, he knew he could never obey.

Realising there was a strong chance he would be arrested again, Afewerki decided to leave the country.

To reach neighbouring Ethiopia, he and his children had to make it past two groups of Eritrean guards. If caught, he knew his older children would be forced into the military and the younger ones taken to a prison camp. In addition, they risked stepping on land mines or being attacked by hyenas in the desert.

They traveled by night, walking for four days with nothing to eat. On the third day, they slept in a cave.

Miraculously, the family of five crossed safely into Ethiopia, where they now live in a refugee camp like so many other Eritrean Christians.

'The Bible taught us that we should take up our cross,' Afewerki said. 'We have to lose our life for Christ, and it happened to my wife. This is the history of Christianity. It is not strange, it is not something new.'

He asks us to pray for Eritrea and especially for suffering Eritrean Christians. He also encourages us to pray for the Eritrean government rather than curse it for its hatred of Christians.

'I don't hate them because they tortured my wife,' he said. 'They didn't know what they were doing. I would like all Christians in the world to pray that our government will accept the gospel.'



'ONE GIANT PRISON'

In 2002 the Government of Eritrea closed down all unregistered evangelical and Pentecostal churches, beginning a systematic campaign of persecution that has resulted in thousands of Christians being detained and imprisoned in appalling conditions during the past 15 years.

About 3,000 Christians were in prison at the height of the government crackdown, but that number declined to around 170 believers in 2016.

Last year, however, there was another wave of arrests in which government authorities detained entire gatherings of Christians at once, including children and even infants. An estimated 300 to 400 Christians were arrested in 2017.

Eritrea remains today like one giant prison where hope has disappeared and where the majority of people are denied simple freedoms, basic human dignity and human rights.



SHOW YOUR LOVE TODAY



From our beginning in 1968, caring for prisoners of faith and their families – and the families of martyrs – has been a key part of Release's ministry.

When a Christian is imprisoned for their faith – or martyred – their whole family often struggles to survive without a breadwinner.

Your gift can help to provide a much-needed lifeline for suffering Christian families in Eritrea, in refugee camps in Ethiopia and in many other situations around the world.

Will you show your love for persecuted Christians today?

To make a gift please:

- Use the attached card
- Give online at releaseinternational.org
- Call: 01689 823491

Thank you for praying



Following our #Pray173 campaign last year to intercede for the release of Christians detained long-term inside Eritrea, we can report that 35 Christians were freed from jail in July. All prisoners (11 women and 24 men) were freed on bail from Mai-Sirwa.

Most of these are young people detained for the past five years – even though they had signed documents promising not to participate in Christian activities.

'We thank God for those released,' said our partner. 'However, there are hundreds of prisoners in at least ten prisons around the country, imprisoned for periods ranging from a few months to close to 20 years. We call for them all to be released.'



ERITREA

A Long Way From Home (9 min) features the moving testimonies of Eritrean Christians who are now living in refugee camps in Ethiopia.



INDIA

Standing Firm (12 min) reports on the rise of Hindu fundamentalism in India and how church leaders and their congregations are being targeted by extremists.



IRAN/TURKEY

Scattered (10 min) tells how Christian refugees from Iran have established a thriving church in Turkey and are reaching out to their community.



LAOS

Rejected for Christ (7 min) tells the moving stories of three converts in the Buddhist nation of Laos who are remaining strong in their faith, despite opposition.



GENERATE A WAVE OF PRAYER!

Our latest free resources can help you and your church take part in this year's International Day of Prayer (IDOP) for the persecuted church.

IDOP takes place in the UK and Ireland on Sunday, November 18 – although the organisers are calling on churches, if you can, to dedicate the whole of November to prayer for persecuted believers.

All of the films here are **free** to supporters and include brief, topical prayer points – ideal for an IDOP service or prayer meeting. Call 01689 823491 or email us at info@releaseinternational.org to request one today.

Check out all our DVDs on our website releaseinternational.org.

PRAY FOR NIGERIA NEW

- Our new PowerPoint includes a written prayer for Nigeria, and prayer points from partners: ideal for use in your IDOP prayer event
- Watch the short video interview with Nigerian partner Mark Lipdo of Stefanos Foundation

Find both at releaseinternational.org/idop.



CENTRAL ASIA NEW

Underground (12 min): church leaders Batyr and Anton explain why persecution continues in Central Asia – and how we can pray (see page 16).



NIGERIA

No Fear (6 min): Archbishop Ben Kwashi discusses the current situation in northern and central Nigeria with Release CEO Paul Robinson.

SUBSCRIBE TO OUR CHANNEL

Subscribe to our YouTube channel to receive news of our latest video clips.



[releaseinternational](http://releaseinternational.org)

ONE MONTH, ONE CHURCH, ONE PRAYER

To help you promote IDOP in your church, please use the short video *One Month, One Church, One Prayer* produced by the UK Religious Liberty Commission, of which Release is a member.

Find it at releaseinternational.org/idop.

Deborah prays for the release of her two adopted daughters who were abducted by militants.

CRISIS IN NIGERIA

How your support is helping Christians in central and northern Nigeria to keep going in the face of continuing devastating attacks by militants.

As Deborah chatted with a neighbour under a mango tree one day, five young men drove up, jumped out of their truck with machine guns and walked purposefully toward her home.

Her nieces, 9-year-old Palmata and 7-year-old Kumai, whom she had adopted as her own daughters, ate

their after-school snacks just outside the front door while Deborah's husband sat inside the house preparing for a Bible study that evening.

Deborah quickly followed them into her house, but one of the men stopped her in the hallway. 'You have to lie down!' he barked at her.

As she lay on her stomach, the armed man pressed his boot into her lower back.

Then she heard four shots in the room where her husband was studying. Overcome with terror, Deborah started praying. She believed that she would be next.

To her surprise, the killers left her cowering in the hallway. Once outside, however, they grabbed her young daughters and forced them, screaming, into their truck.

'Why are you taking us?' Palmata cried.

Deborah scrambled to her feet and ran after the truck, but she soon stumbled and fainted in the cloud of dust left in its trail.

When she woke up in hospital, the medical staff confirmed her fears – her husband had been killed and her girls had been kidnapped. She was immediately hit by the grief already shared by so many Nigerian women.

Deborah had five older sons, and after the attack she sent all but the youngest to live in a safer city, where they wouldn't be forced to join the Boko Haram terrorist group. She believed her youngest son, who was 12, would be safe with her.

But three months later, two men ambushed him as he walked home from school. *'He was shot in the head and the chest,'* Deborah said. After his funeral, Deborah packed her things and moved into her church.

She no longer felt safe in her own home.

Soon, however, rumours circulated that terrorists from Boko Haram were planning to attack the church. Deborah, her pastor and his family fled to the relative safety of a camp for internally displaced people. Deborah later learned that the extremists had stolen all of her belongings and burned her house.

In a matter of weeks, she had lost her husband, her two daughters, a son and her home.

Christians in Nigeria's central and northern states continue to suffer devastating attacks by Fulani militants (see opposite page) who are set on destroying the church.

'We have seen an escalation of attacks,' one partner told us. *'It is estimated that between January and June 2018, 6,000 people have been killed and close to 50,000 displaced. The escalation in the killing is very clear.'*

Stephanie, a 26-year-old mother from north central Nassarawa state, told another partner, Stefanos Foundation:

'One night I woke up to nurse my suckling child, and heard gunshots from my window. I turned off the light in the room and ran out to seek refuge. I was able to see some of the attackers in long black robes and heard them converse in the Fulani language, so I knew they were Fulani men – but I couldn't identify any of them.'

'They shot five people, of whom two died. When we returned to our village we found our home burgled and our valuables missing.'

Philip, 17, described how Fulani militants attacked his village: *'They macheted my hand and shot my mum,'* he said. *'Later they attacked a second time and burnt down our houses.'*

Thanks to the committed giving of Release supporters, Stefanos was quickly able to provide relief aid to 400 displaced Christian families in different areas earlier this year.

In Nassarawa state, for example, 100 families each received rice, beans, cassava flour, eating bowls and toiletries.

Agnes, a widow and mother of two who fled her home after hearing gunshots, said: *'We really appreciate these relief items.'*

Another said: *'We are really grateful and pray that God will help you in all your endeavours.'*

In central Benue state Stefanos provided food and clothing to another 200 Christian families



Deborah holds a photograph of her adopted daughters Palmata and Kumai who were abducted by militants.

displaced following attacks by armed Fulani militants.

Suzan, a mother of two, told our partner: *'We want to say thank you and God bless as this will go a long way in feeding and clothing us since we've lost virtually everything we had.'*



Another 100 Christian families were given emergency supplies of food and clothing in the Bassa area of Plateau state in Nigeria's Middle Belt.

'This further helped to encourage and strengthen the affected people, communities and local churches,' said Mark Lipdo of Stefanos. *'They know that they are not alone at this hard time.'*

One Christian woman, Shetu, shared how her father had been killed during an attack on their village.

'Things have been difficult for my mother since she is alone, but this relief will feed us through this period. May God bless you.'



Thanks to your support, our partner Stefanos has distributed food and clothes to 400 displaced Christian families this year.

UNDER ATTACK



'There is a deliberate plan to destroy and take over the predominantly Christian communities in the region,' he added.

In addition the terrorist group Boko Haram has targeted everything and everyone it views as being outside 'true Islam'. This includes not only Christians, whom the group has labeled 'infidels', but also secular schools and moderate Muslims.

Fulani militants have escalated their war of terror against Christians in northern and central Nigeria: attacking their communities and driving them from their homes.

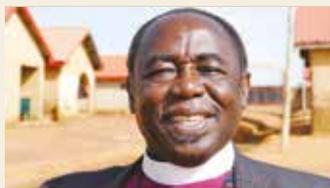
'Things have grown from bad to worse in the Middle Belt since the beginning of the attacks in Jos in 2010 when several communities were attacked by Fulani herdsmen,' said one of our Nigerian partners.

'Thousands of churches have been attacked and destroyed, some at least three times. Thousands of Christians have been killed in the conflict between Islam and Christianity in Nigeria since its independence in 1960. Pastors and their families have been specifically targeted.'

Young girls are particularly vulnerable. In April 2014, for example, Boko Haram kidnapped 276 girls from the city of Chibok, Borno state. While many have escaped or been released, 13 are presumed dead and 112 remain missing.

Attacks by Boko Haram have declined overall in the past two years, but the number of suicide bombings has dramatically increased.

'The campaign by Islamic Fulani cattle herdsmen and Boko Haram terrorists is a strategic scorch-earthed battle, a modern-day jihad against Christianity in the northern and Middle Belt regions of Nigeria,' said our partner.



SPEAKING TOUR

See page 23 for details of the 50th anniversary speaking tour by one of our Nigerian partners, Archbishop Ben Kwashi.

PRAY FOR NIGERIA



Please pray for the work of Release's partners in Nigeria, which includes providing relief aid to displaced Christian families, and trauma-healing workshops to help Christians who have suffered violence.

'Over the years we have received tremendous support from Release, but there are continuing needs,' said Mark Lipdo of Stefanos Foundation.

'I ask Christians in the UK and Ireland to continue to pray for us in Nigeria. We have a huge church, but we lack unity. So please pray for us.'

If we are united we can do more.

'Many individuals are currently struggling with trauma. Some may have seen their family slaughtered in front of them.'

'Pray for the families of the Christian girls who have been abducted. Some still remain in captivity.'

'Pray for an end to the violence against Christians in the central and northern states.'

'Pray for moderate Muslims in Nigeria. They are there, but they are



RICHARD WURMBRAND'S PLEA 1

'Give us the tools we need.'

Pastor Richard Wurmbbrand, who himself had experienced persecution in communist Romania, was passionately concerned about the growth of the church in persecuted environments.

His overriding message was for Christians in the 'free world' to give their persecuted family what they needed to continue to flourish in hostile and restricted countries.

frightened to say anything about what is happening.'

For details of a new PowerPoint giving prayer requests for Nigeria, and a new video featuring partner Mark Lipdo, see p10.

Will you bring hope and healing to persecuted Christians in Nigeria?



Your support can help Christians like Philip, 17, who was attacked by armed Fulani militants. His mother was shot and their home burnt down.

Christians in Nigeria are under attack by militants as never before – and need our urgent support to help them to survive the crisis.

Your gift of love can be used to provide:

- Emergency aid for displaced Christian families
- Trauma healing for the Christian victims of violence

Please support our persecuted family today. To make a gift:

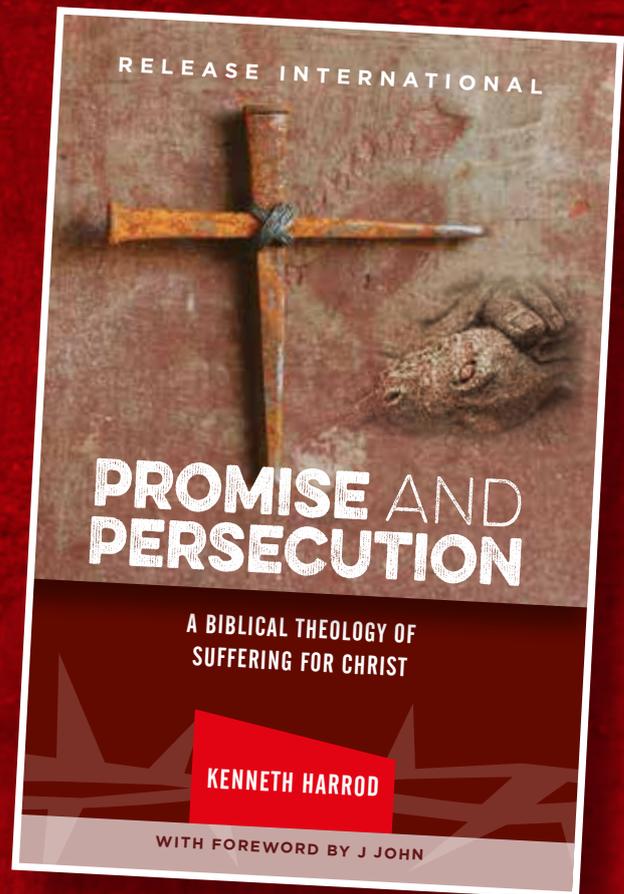
- Use the attached card
- Visit releaseinternational.org
- Call: 01689 823491

'A thoughtful and wise book on the biblical theology of persecution'

*Revd Canon J. John, Director,
Philo Trust*

In his new book, Release's Kenneth Harrod helps us understand the persecution of Christians in the context of God's bigger plan of salvation.

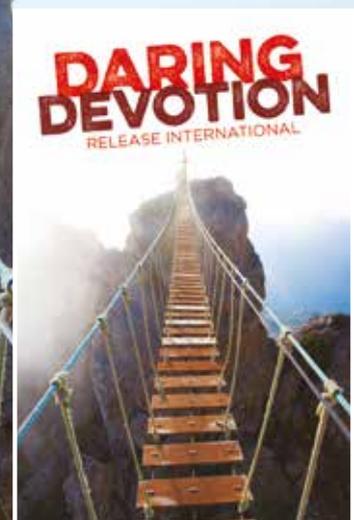
Use the attached card to order now for just £8 (including p&p) or call: 01689 823491



GET READY FOR DARING DEVOTION!

Our latest book explores key themes of discipleship through the eyes of persecuted Christians, inspiring us to love more and to trust God more. Ideal for small group discussion. £6 including P&P (or six copies for £30 inc P&P).

Order using the attached card, or call: 01689 823491



WHY PERSECUTION CONTINUES IN CENTRAL ASIA



After the Berlin Wall came down in 1989, the years Christians had suffered behind the Iron Curtain finally came to an end – and the world and the church breathed a sigh of relief. Yet today believers in Central Asia still face great hostility. Release’s Tom Hardie recently visited church leaders in the region to find out why.

Batyr – one of the very first people to come to faith in modern Turkmenistan – told me: *‘Currently people in our country aren’t being arrested and tortured, but the totalitarian control over all leaders and churches goes on. Freedom of movement and freedom to preach are not allowed.*

‘The reason is that Turkmenistan was under the rule of the Soviet Union, under communism, where the people were oppressed as Muslims. So when they gained independence they wanted to build their identity as a Muslim nation.’

Because Christianity is considered the religion of Russians, their former

masters, it has been rejected by the state, which espouses the notion that to be Turkmen is to be Muslim.

Batyr



However, says Batyr, *‘Society thinks differently to the state and is open for the gospel.’*

In fact Batyr was one of just seven new Christians in the 1990s who

spread the gospel throughout the country and who saw hundreds, even thousands, turn to Christ. Many churches were planted.

As a result Batyr was arrested and interrogated by the authorities in 2000, enduring severe physical torture. Eventually he had to escape the country.

The strongest persecution against Christians is directed against those who have converted from Islam.

‘So if a Muslim decides to follow Christ then he is a traitor: a traitor to our people, our culture and our nation. All former Muslims who believe in Christ are secret and underground and can never be officially recognised,’ continued Batyr.

‘It is a very family-oriented culture so people who become Christians are

forced out of society and have a lot of problems at work,' said Anton, a pastor from Tajikistan.

He told me about one Tajik who became a Christian in his teens: he was locked in his house and beaten by his family.

'They made him lie on a cold floor for months,' said Anton, 'but I praise the Lord that He gave him strength not to give up on Jesus. Eventually he managed to escape.'

'When you live in a country where everything, starting from government policy to general society to the judiciary system, is against you because you are a Christian, then you want to know that somebody is with you, at least outside the country,



since no one will stand up for you inside the country.'

He added: *'You are part of the living body of Christ. When one part is in pain then the whole body must sense this pain. If we feel the pain of our brothers and sisters, then we will always find the right ways to help them.'*

RELEASE'S MINISTRY

Release has been working in Central Asia for many years, encouraging national churches and supporting them with prayers, personal visits and involvement in their church ministry.

Your gifts enable pastors and evangelists to carry out their ministries in hostile environments. They operate discreetly to protect themselves and those they serve from the authorities and religious extremists – but because of the dangers they face they need our ongoing prayers and support.

- Pastors Batyr and Anton feature in our new FREE 12-min film *Underground* (see page 10).



RICHARD WURMBRAND'S PLEA 5

'Join hands with members of the underground church and give them the financial means to travel about with the Gospel.'

Richard Wurmbbrand, who made eight pleas to the church in the free world, was passionately concerned to help Christians withstand persecution.

Today Release continues his mission by helping church leaders to strengthen their communities and provide much-needed pastoral care. We also help pastors and evangelists to travel to spread the Gospel.

PRAY FOR CENTRAL ASIA



PRAY:

- that the gospel continues to bear much fruit (Colossians 1:6)
- for safety for Release-funded workers who take great risks to serve the underground church
- that Muslim-background believers will find support and strong relationships in the church family
- for an end to hostility against Christians

50TH
ANNIVERSARY

INSPIRE YOUR CHURCH

to respond to the challenges of persecution



TORTURED — for — CHRIST

THE FILM



This autumn Release is offering churches in the UK and Ireland the opportunity to show our inspiring new film based on Richard Wurmbrand's best-selling testimony *Tortured for Christ*.

Filmed entirely in Romania, and professionally produced by our sister mission Voice of the Martyrs USA, this 70-minute film is a powerful depiction of the man who inspired the ministry of Release in 1968.

Today, as we see a surge in persecution against Christians in Africa, Asia and the Middle and Far East, persecuted believers need our help more than ever.

Showing *Tortured for Christ* in your church is an ideal way of encouraging prayer and support for our persecuted family – and challenging us in our own walk with Christ.



ORDER YOUR FREE PACK TODAY

Our FREE pack will help you organise and promote your special *Tortured for Christ* film event in your church. It includes:

- NEW *Tortured for Christ* DVD
- Tips for showing the film
- A5 invitation cards & A5 flyers
- A4 poster to promote your event
- tickets
- collection envelopes
- Thank You cards
- 'I will not abandon them' pledge cards



Simply tell us how many guests you would like to invite – and we'll send you everything you need.

Order today

- use the attached card
- email: info@releaseinternational.org
- call: 01689 823491



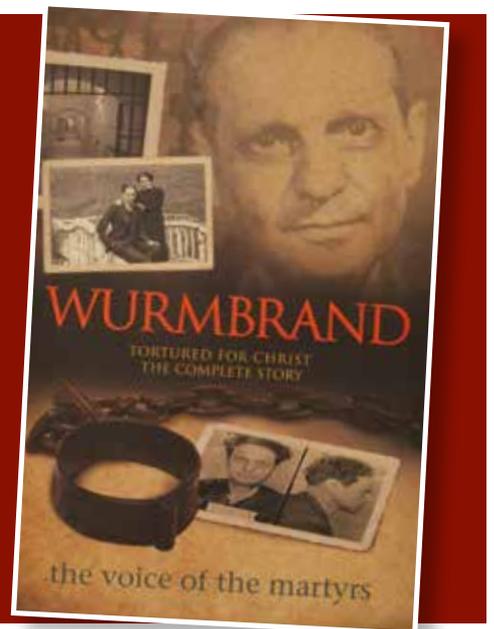
GET THE COMPLETE STORY!

As part of our 50th anniversary, we are delighted to publish *Tortured for Christ: the complete story*.

This new 381-page paperback is a factual account of the lives of Richard and Sabina Wurmbrand, in the style of a novel, drawing on material from *The Pastor's Wife*, *In God's Underground*, and *Tortured for Christ*.

'I thank God for this remarkable book and its timeless message' Christian author Joni Eareckson Tada

Order your copy today for just £10, including P&P, by using the attached card, or by calling 01689 823491



GOOD NEWS

'THIS COULD DESTROY THE NORTH KOREAN GOVERNMENT'

'Kiran' (not her real name) first became curious about the Bible after security officials in repressive North Korea warned her about this 'illegal and dangerous' book. *'This could be used to destroy the North Korean Government,'* they told her.

Later Kiran defected to neighbouring China and was overjoyed when a pastor presented her with her very own Bible!



Reaching South Korea, she joined our partner's discipleship school for defectors. Now recently graduated, she remains as hungry as ever for God's Word:

'I would like to know the Bible more deeply – so I can continue to mature in God,' she told us.



TURNING YOUR STAMPS TO CASH

Supporter Paul White is continuing his wonderful work of selling franked UK and foreign stamps to raise funds to help our persecuted family. Please send your used stamps to: Paul White, 5 Raasay Gardens, Newton Mearns, Glasgow G77 6TH, making sure that you use the correct postage. If you include your email address Paul will acknowledge safe receipt of your stamps.



GET READY FOR CHRISTMAS!

You'll find a great selection of Christmas cards, books and stocking fillers in our new Christmas catalogue, enclosed with this magazine. Every purchase helps to support persecuted Christians.

You can also order our cards online at charitycardshop.com/ releaseinternational.org.

50TH ANNIVERSARY FUNDRAISING

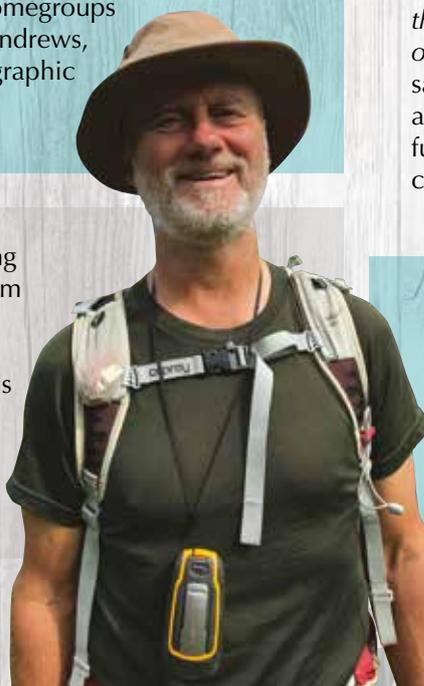
WELL DONE TO ALL OUR FANTASTIC SUPPORTERS WHO HAVE BEEN BUSY RAISING FUNDS FOR OUR PERSECUTED FAMILY.



Janet and Peter Jenkins of Pembrokeshire have supported Release since meeting Richard Wurmbbrand, the man who inspired Release, and his wife, Sabina, at the start of our ministry. When they recently celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary, they asked guests to give a gift to Release instead of buying them a present, raising £100. *'Thank you for inviting us to be part of your own 50-year celebration,'* they said.



Well done to the student homegroups of Cornerstone church, St Andrews, who produced a fun photographic calendar as a memento for students – raising £400.



Laurie Chancellor is stepping out on a sponsored walk from Aberdeen to Fort William, taking in the nine 4,000 ft hills in the UK, to raise funds for our Strength to Stand groups in Egypt. Sponsor him at justgiving.com/fundraising/laurie-chance.



Samuel, 14, took part in a fun run at the Belfast Marathon and raised a fantastic £200!



Simon Harris aims to complete five timed 10km runs to celebrate our 50th anniversary – and his 50th birthday! Sponsor him at justgiving.com/fundraising/running50at50.

Anna Carmel asked friends and family to celebrate her 18th birthday by supporting Release. *'I read Tortured for Christ this summer and my eyes were opened to the real suffering my brothers and sisters in Christ face across the world for the sake of the gospel,'* she said. Find out more at justgiving.com/fundraising/anna-carmel.



FUNDRAISING PACK



Our free pack gives you everything you need to plan your event or activity to raise funds for persecuted Christians. Request yours by using the attached card or call: 01689 823491.

THE WORD

‘Don’t abandon them’, urged Richard Wurmbrand at the conclusion of his inspirational book, *Tortured for Christ*. What might that mean for you, in practice? In a series of articles to mark Release’s 50th anniversary year, Kenneth Harrod offers some biblical answers.

ACTIVE REMEMBERING

Can you remember in which year Prince William got married? Where the last Olympic Games were held? Where you went on holiday three years ago?

Sometimes this is all we mean by remembering: the ability to regurgitate facts and figures.

But often the idea of remembering means more than that. Often it carries with it the idea of active involvement – something that will engage me and involve me, practically.

When people speak of remembering someone’s birthday, for example, they don’t simply mean they can recall the date! They mean they have marked it, or celebrated it, in some way. Or, again, to remember someone in your will is not just to dredge up names from our memory! It means you have decided to leave someone something from your life’s possessions.

It is this *active* sense of remembering that the writer of the book of Hebrews has in mind when he tells his readers: ‘Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated...’ (Hebrews 13:3; ESV).

We know that because of the context of these words. In the immediate context the writer says: ‘Let brotherly love continue’ (verse 1) and proceeds to give examples of what that will mean *in practice*. The call to remember those who suffer for their faith is one of those examples.

In the broader context, Hebrews is an exhortation to persevere. Moses’ generation had been saved out of Egypt, but were unfaithful in the wilderness, as they headed for the Promised Land. Those who have now been saved by Christ are called to be faithful, as they journey to the true Promised Land. In the past the readers *had* persevered in the midst of persecution – and had *stood* by others who had also suffered (see Hebrews 10:32-39 – an important passage for understanding Hebrews 13:3).

Remembering persecuted Christians – in the way Hebrews uses that word – is another key way in which we demonstrate that we will not abandon them.

In fact, we might say it sums up all the key responses we have been considering through this year.

Back in January we considered the call to **pray** for those who suffer for the gospel (and to pray for the spread of that gospel). In April we focused on the Apostle Paul’s strategic priority of **strengthening** those who are suffering. In July we focused on **loving** them – practically and financially. All of these responses are central to what it means to **remember** them.

These responses will continue to be important and necessary – beyond the end of Release’s 50th anniversary year. As Richard Wurmbrand put it (speaking for the persecuted): ‘Will you hear our message: **Remember** us, help us? Don’t abandon us!’

INSPIRING FAITH



‘I have delivered the message from the faithful, martyred church – from your brothers and sisters under attack across the world. Don’t abandon them.’

Pastor Richard Wurmbrand was imprisoned for 14 years in communist Romania in the 1950s and 1960s. In 1968 he inspired the founding of Release, which today continues his ministry to serve persecuted Christians around the world in the name of Jesus.



50th ANNIVERSARY TOUR BY ARCHBISHOP BEN KWASHI

This is a great opportunity to hear first-hand from one of our Nigerian partners, Rt Rev Dr Ben Kwashi, who has spoken out courageously against persecution in central Nigeria. This is a unique opportunity to hear his perspective on the current crisis (see page 11). As part of our 50th anniversary, he is speaking at the following venues in November:

Tues Nov 20	7.30pm for 8pm	West Croydon Baptist Church, Whitehouse Road, CROYDON, CR0 2JH
Wed Nov 21	7.30pm for 8pm	St Peter's Church, Gubbins Lane, Harold Wood, ROMFORD, RM3 0QA
Thur Nov 22	7.30pm for 8pm	St Botolph's Church, St Botolph's Road, Barton Seagrave, KETTERING, NN15 6SR
Fri Nov 23	7.30pm for 8pm	St Mary's Church, High Street, CHEADLE, SK8 1PX
Sun Nov 25	9.30am & 11.30am	Glenabbey Church, Ballycraigy Road, Glengormley, NEWTOWNABBEY, BT36 5ZZ
	6.30pm	St Patrick's Church of Ireland, Castle Street, BALLYMENA, BT43 7BT
Mon Nov 26	7.30pm	St Anne's Cathedral, Donegall Street, BELFAST, BT1 2HB

Check out the latest details at releaseinternational.org/events.

GET READY FOR UNDERGROUND CHURCH!

Today many Christians around the world are forced by persecution to meet in secret.

Underground Church is an experiential event, organised by Release Potential, that enables young adults to get a taste of what that's like.

This year's event is being held in Belfast on Saturday, November 17, and will include drama, live music, testimonies and a treasure hunt with a difference.

To find out how you can take part, contact Stephen on **028 9334 0014** or call Release Potential on **01689 823491**.



50th ANNIVERSARY THANKSGIVING SERVICE

7.30pm Thurs Oct 4 Emmanuel Centre, 9-23 Marsham Street, London SW1P 3DW.

Tickets are still available for our special 50th anniversary Service of Thanksgiving, with guest speaker George Verwer, founder of Operation Mobilisation.

Register for your FREE tickets at eventbrite.co.uk (search for Release International) or call: 01689 823491.

release & your church



Invite a Release speaker to your church

To request a speaker for your church or fellowship group, please contact these numbers:

Ireland

Stephen on
028 9334 0014

London

Imtiaz on
07957 677162

Midlands and North

Kenneth on
07375 516408

Scotland

James on
07434 894016

South

Kenneth on
07375 516408

Wales

Paul on
077747 535588

Release Women

Laura on
01689 823491

Or call 01689 823491



Will you leave a legacy of enduring faith and love?

A legacy gift to Release International can be a natural continuation of your commitment to sharing God's love and compassion with persecuted Christians around the world.

For 50 years, your generous gifts have enabled Christians to stand strong in their faith in the face of persecution. With your support, Release's partners are providing prayerful, pastoral and practical help to persecuted Christians in over 25 countries.

By including a gift to Release International in your will you can enable that support to continue.

To request a free legacy brochure please call us on
01689 823491 or email info@releaseinternational.org

#IWillNotAbandonThem

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL
Voice | 50
of Persecuted Christians | YEARS
1968-2018

PRAYERSHIELD

OCTOBER – DECEMBER 2018



An evangelist teaches young Christians in Laos biblical truths to help them withstand persecution.

OCTOBER 2018

Heavenly Father,

I praise you because my life is hidden in you with Christ (Colossians 3:2).

Lord, remind my persecuted family that you will never leave or forsake them.

Be with those who struggle to hear your voice and those who begin to doubt whether the cost of following you is worth it.

Remind them that they are seated with you in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 2:6), and that nothing can separate them from the love of Christ.

Amen

LAOS

MONDAY 1: Praise God for evangelists such as the man pictured who travelled for many hours to reach this Christian community and build firm biblical foundations in their lives.

TUESDAY 2: A 2017 decree restricts people's freedom to take part in religious groups and requires multiple permits for any activity, permits which are rarely granted. Pray for Christians in remote, rural areas who have been particularly badly affected.

WEDNESDAY 3: The 2017 decree (above) could restrict much of the work of church leaders, such as visiting believers, conducting funerals

and praying for the sick. Pray they will find ways around these restrictions.

THURSDAY 4: Lao families who convert to Christianity are often denied access to education and basic services such as water; some are even forced out of their village. Ask God to build His church in Laos.

FRIDAY 5: #Pray50 Pray that Lao officials responsible for policies that limit religious freedom will see that Christianity is not a threat to their society – but the answer to its problems.



Karen and her family continue to witness to Muslim neighbours despite persecution.

KENYA

SATURDAY 6: The church in parts of Kenya remains under intense pressure from Islamist extremists who seem determined to rid these areas of Christians. Pray that God's people in Kenya will keep their focus on Him.

SUNDAY 7: Thank God for the courageous witness of Karen Agagno (pictured) who continues to share the gospel despite years of persecution. She and her late husband built a church in their Muslim village 15 years ago.

MONDAY 8: Please pray for ten Christian women in Lamu County who lost their husbands to *Al Shabaab* extremist attacks in 2014 and last year. They struggle to provide for their families.

TUESDAY 9: #Pray50 The *Al Shabaab* militants who killed Christian men in Lamu (previous prayer) reportedly said they intended to force their widows to become Muslims. Pray instead that the extremists will turn to Christ.

PAKISTAN

WEDNESDAY 10: Three quarters of all 'blasphemy' cases in Pakistan take place in Punjab, according to recent research. Ask God to protect His people there from lies and deceit.

THURSDAY 11: Punjabi Christian Asia Bibi is on death row for 'blasphemy' and has been detained since 2009. Pray that her appeal will be heard soon and will succeed. Ask God to sustain her family.

FRIDAY 12: Imran Ghafur is serving a life sentence for 'blasphemy' after burnt pages of the Koran were found in his shop in 2009. Pray for his release. Ask God to comfort his family, including his mother who was recently widowed.

SATURDAY 13: Zafar Bhatti was falsely convicted of blasphemy over 'defamatory' text messages and is waiting for his appeal to be heard. Ask God to provide for his wife, Nawab Bibi, who is struggling financially.

SUNDAY 14: Pray for Farhan Aziz, who has been charged with 'blasphemy' in Gujranwala after his ex-girlfriend and her brother, a member of an Islamic extremist party, allegedly sent defamatory text messages from his phone and tried to frame him.

PRAYERSHIELD

MONDAY 15: #Pray50 Pray for Farhan's accuser (previous prayer), believed to be a member of *Tehreek-e-Labbaik*, the party set up in honour of Mumtaz Qadri who murdered Punjab governor Salmaan Taseer for opposing Pakistan's blasphemy laws.

TUESDAY 16: Ask God for justice for every Christian in Pakistan who has been persecuted through its notorious blasphemy laws. Pray that they will be set free from prison and the laws reformed.

WEDNESDAY 17: Many Christian families have fled Pakistan for Thailand and are being held in poor conditions in a detention centre in Bangkok. Thank God for recent cause for hope that the families will have their cases processed more quickly.

MALAYSIA

THURSDAY 18: Christians in Malaysia are under pressure because of stigma and, more recently, the threat of violence. Thank God for Release-funded ministries whose mission is to strengthen the Malay church.

FRIDAY 19: Continue to pray for the swift release of Pastor Raymond Koh, who disappeared in February 2017. Ask God to strengthen and provide for his wife, Susanna, and their children.

SATURDAY 20: Praise God that a new Christian with a

Muslim background from northern Malaysia has been baptised. A local pastor had refused to baptise her – probably for fear of reprisals.

SUNDAY 21: Pray for Christian university students in Malaysia, who often face discrimination and pressure to convert to Islam. Thank God for a ministry providing them with spiritual and practical support.

CHINA

MONDAY 22: Pray for members of Huaqiu Church in Guizhou whom officials have told to join the state-sanctioned Three-Self Church or face repercussions.

TUESDAY 23: Chinese-American Pastor John Cao was sentenced to seven years in jail in China in 2017 for 'illegal border crossings' – even though he had had official approval of his regular charity visits into Myanmar for years. Pray for his release.

WEDNESDAY 24: Praise God for the release of Pastor Yang Hua, leader of Huoshi Church in Guizhou. He spent two-and-a-half years in jail on false charges, and suffered torture and serious ill health.

THURSDAY 25: Pray that the Chinese Government will repeal or rework the new Regulations for Religious Affairs which came into force this year and which have been misused to limit church activities.

FRIDAY 26: Scores of house churches have been shut down in Henan province, central China, since February. Even state-registered churches have been ordered to remove crosses from their buildings.

SATURDAY 27: Pray for our family in Ningling County, Henan, where officials are reportedly posting guards at church gates to limit to five the number of those meeting without official permission.

SUNDAY 28: #Pray50 Ask God to speak to Henan officials charged with enforcing new regulations on religion. Pray that they will start to question the motivation behind such decrees – and want to learn more about Jesus.

MONDAY 29: Pray for wisdom for church leaders across China, that they will seek God's face and hear His voice clearly.

TUESDAY 30: Several Chinese lawyers detained during a crackdown on 'dissidents' have had their licences revoked, including Christian Li Heping who was also jailed for a time. Pray these licences will be reissued.

WEDNESDAY 31: Pray that God will protect Christian lawyer Jiang Tianyong, who is serving a two-year sentence for 'subversion'. His family fear he is being tortured and forced to take drugs to cause memory loss.

NOVEMBER 2018 NIGERIA

THURSDAY 1: #Pray50 Pray for Fulani Muslims who have launched large-scale attacks on Christian communities in central and northern Nigeria recently. Ask God to move among the Fulani and convict them of their sin.

FRIDAY 2: Attacks by Fulani herdsman claimed an estimated 6,000 lives between January and June. Close to 50,000 people were displaced in the same period. Pray for an end to the bloodshed.

SATURDAY 3: Pray for a church in Ayar-Mbalom village where Fulani gunmen launched a brutal attack during a service in April. Two church leaders and 17 congregants were shot dead.

SUNDAY 4: Thirty-five Christians were killed in Anyiin and Saghev villages in April, and several homes and businesses were destroyed. Ask God to help these communities get back on their feet.

MONDAY 5: More than 200 people in mainly Christian villages around Jos in Plateau state were killed in May when Fulani militants raided the area. Thousands of people in the Barkin Ladi district lost homes and crops.

TUESDAY 6: Praise God that a group of missionaries and the children at their school were not attacked when Fulani militants raided the

Jos area (previous prayer). They had sent urgent prayer requests via social media as they hid. 'We are alive today because we knew people were praying!' they said.

WEDNESDAY 7: #Pray50 Please pray that those responsible for the violence in Nigeria will be repulsed by the bloodshed and overcome with remorse, and that they will turn away from violence.

THURSDAY 8: Pray that moderate Muslims in Nigeria will speak out against the violence being perpetrated in the name of Islam.

FRIDAY 9: Pray for Isaac, beaten by his own brothers for turning to Christ. Release associate ministries have provided him with an audio Bible in his own language, Fulfulde, a Fulani language.

SATURDAY 10: Four-year-old Adamu and his family (pictured) live at a safe house for persecuted Christians

run by a Release associate ministry. The audio Bibles they have received are a much-treasured gift.

SUNDAY 11: Pray for Deborah whose husband was murdered by *Boko Haram* militants. Within a few weeks, they also kidnapped her adopted daughters, killed her son and destroyed her home.

MONDAY 12: Pray for ever-greater unity in Nigeria's church so that it can be a strong and organised voice against persecution and oppression.

SYRIA

TUESDAY 13: Of the 10,000 Assyrian Christians who lived in more than 30 villages in north-east Syria before 2011, only about 900 remain. Just one of more than two dozen churches that existed before now holds regular services. Pray that God will rebuild His church there.



PRAYERSHIELD

WEDNESDAY 14: Many Assyrian Christians were kidnapped by Islamic State (IS) fighters and their families forced to pay huge ransoms for their release. Pray that God will restore to them what was lost.

THURSDAY 15: Pray for reconciliation between Christians and moderate Muslims who are trying to piece their lives back together in Syria.

FRIDAY 16: The US Government has recently revised its estimate of how many IS militants remain in Syria – from 2,000 up to 6,000. Pray that this remnant will be disarmed and rehabilitated. And pray for justice for those who have suffered at the hands of IS.

SATURDAY 17: #Pray50 Pray that militants remaining in Syria will grow weary of bloodshed and discord... and instead choose life (Deuteronomy 30:15-20).

ERITREA

SUNDAY 18: Pray for Christians in Eritrea who continue to face the threat of arbitrary detentions and imprisonment without charge. Pray that they will trust in the Lord with all their heart (Proverbs 3:5).

MONDAY 19: Please pray for 35 Christians who were released from Mai-Sirwa prison in Eritrea in July. Most were from Asmara and were arrested five years ago.

TUESDAY 20: Thank God that Pastor Oqbamichel Haiminot has been freed from prison after 11 years. He was also jailed in 2003 and 2005. Please pray for his complete physical and spiritual healing.

WEDNESDAY 21: Hundreds of Christians remain imprisoned in Eritrea in brutal conditions – many held for ten years or more. Pray the Government will order their release this year.

THURSDAY 22: Continue to pray for the children and families of prisoners of faith being held inside Eritrea's notorious jails and prison camps. Ask God to comfort them and grant them His peace which transcends all understanding.

FRIDAY 23: #Pray50 Pray that Eritrean officials will reflect on the positive international response to the recent release of certain prisoners of faith – and be prompted to free more.

SATURDAY 24: Praise God for Yemane who refused to deny Christ, even though that decision prolonged his imprisonment in a military camp, and shared the gospel with his fellow inmates. Torture in jail has left him crippled.

SUNDAY 25: Thank God for the strong faith of Afewerki whose wife, Fkadu, died in a jail where conditions were appalling. Her 'crime' was attending a prayer meeting. Afewerki and his children now live in a refugee camp in Ethiopia.

SUDAN

MONDAY 26: Praise God that a Sudanese court has ruled against the Government in a long-standing dispute with the Sudanese Church of Christ over ownership of church property. The judge returned the properties to the church.

TUESDAY 27: Please pray for our Christian family in Sudan who pursue God and His righteousness even as their opponents pursue them for persecution. Pray that God will meet all their needs.

WEDNESDAY 28: Pastor Hassan Abduraheem was sentenced to 12 years in jail after helping Czech Christian Petr Jasek provide aid to an injured Sudanese Christian. After an international outcry, Hassan and Petr were freed last year. Pray for Hassan and his family, now seeking asylum in the US.

THURSDAY 29: Praise God for the way He has used the testimony of Petr, Hassan (above) and their fellow detainee, Pastor Kuwa Shamal, to encourage prayer for persecuted Christians.

FRIDAY 30: #Pray50 Please pray for President Omar al-Bashir and his Government as they seek to implement ever-stricter *Sharia* (Islamic law) and further limit religious freedoms.

DECEMBER 2018

INDIA

SATURDAY 1: Thank God that Christians in India such as those pictured are prepared to be bold witnesses for Christ by making public professions of their faith, despite the risk of attack.

SUNDAY 2: #Pray50 Pray that Hindu extremists in India, emboldened by the hostile tone of the ruling BJP, will turn from their violence and seek reconciliation.

MONDAY 3: Women, the elderly and children as young as seven were among those beaten by masked Hindu extremists during a recent attack on a church in Uttar Pradesh.

TUESDAY 4: Rishu, a partially blind girl, was severely beaten with sticks, and a ten-year-old boy needed stitches after the attack on the Uttar Pradesh church (previous prayer). Pray these children will know God's love and healing and become powerful witnesses for Christ.

WEDNESDAY 5: Many of the Christian families involved in the Uttar Pradesh church attack (above) have not returned home for fear of arrest. Their attackers threatened to kill them if they met for worship again.

THURSDAY 6: Pray for Christians in Gadchiroli district, Maharashtra state. Locals have announced a plan to force the closure of one church every week.

Since June, Christians' homes have been attacked and believers beaten.

FRIDAY 7: Christian villagers in Gadchiroli (above) have been threatened with death or expulsion unless they renounce Christ. Pray they will trust God.

SATURDAY 8: Three Christians – Kasiram, Sahiram and Vijender – were charged with forced conversions in Rajasthan, even though they were all hundreds of miles away at the time of the alleged incident. Praise God they witnessed to their fellow prison inmates before being released on bail.

SUNDAY 9: Praise God that the Chief Minister



This church in India worships outdoors despite mounting risks.

of Arunachal Pradesh has signalled his intent to repeal anti-conversion laws misused to persecute Christians – even though the state is governed by the Hindu nationalist BJP.

TAJIKISTAN

MONDAY 10: Pray for ten Christians arrested by security police in August for going to the Pamirs mountain area to share the gospel in local languages. They were later fined \$1,000.

TUESDAY 11: Opposition to Christianity has grown in areas of Tajikistan where people have come to faith. Pray for Christians sharing God's love in a hostile environment.

WEDNESDAY 12: Pray for Tajik Christians who are often forced to worship in secret for fear of persecution. Pray Psalm 31:20 over them: 'In the shelter of your presence you hide them from all human intrigues.'

THURSDAY 13: #Pray50 Pray for the security services who use subterfuge to track down those whom they consider dissidents. Pray that they will happen upon the Word of God – and be impacted by its truth.

FRIDAY 14: Pray for a Tajik Christian who turned to Christ in his teens: he was locked in his house and beaten by his family. They even took him to another country where he would not see other Christians – but he managed to escape.

ALGERIA

SATURDAY 15: Officials in Algeria are using 'legal technicalities' such as 'health and safety inspections' to close down churches. In the past year, at least ten churches have been closed or ordered to stop all activities.

SUNDAY 16: Several churches have been told they do not have permission to meet. Yet, not a single permit has been issued since legislation requiring them came into force in 2006. Pray for wisdom for Algerian pastors.

MONDAY 17: Praise God that two churches – in Ain Turk and Oran – that had been forcibly closed in November and February have been allowed to reopen, following international pressure.

TUESDAY 18: Sources say that the Algerian church is growing in faith and boldness. Ask God to add to their number daily as he did in Acts 2:47.

WEDNESDAY 19: #Pray50 Pray that the officials visiting churches will be moved by the powerful witness of our Algerian brothers and sisters and be touched by God's grace and love.

IRAN

THURSDAY 20: Ramil Bet Tamraz was recently given a four-month jail sentence for 'acting against national

security' because of his involvement in the house church movement. Pray that his appeal succeeds so he will not have to return to jail (having spent two months in custody after his arrest).

FRIDAY 21: Ramil's parents (above), Pastor Victor Bet Tamraz and Shamiram Isavi, are serving suspended sentences for their own church activities. It seems Ramil is being targeted to punish his family. Pray they will all stand firm in their faith.

SATURDAY 22: Pray for Naser Navard Gol-Tapeh who was detained almost two years ago at a party in Karaj. He had not been a Christian for very long before his arrest.

SUNDAY 23: #Pray50 Pray that more moderates will be placed in positions of power and authority in Iran and that they will start to question the wisdom of repressive policies which limit religious liberty.

PRAYERS FOR CHRISTMAS

CHRISTMAS EVE: Let's pray that our persecuted family in Iran, and worldwide, will be filled to overflowing today with the joy of the hope that we have in Christ Jesus.

CHRISTMAS DAY: As we celebrate the birth of our Saviour, please



Young adults in Vietnam wait to be baptised in a local river.

pray that His love and His peace will overwhelm those who are suffering for their faith. Pray that His resurrection power will touch the hearts of their persecutors!

BOXING DAY: Please pray for all those ministering in sacrificial ways to support our persecuted family, including Release partners who work tirelessly to sustain and encourage them.

Sources: China Aid; Christian Solidarity Worldwide; Middle East Concern; Mission Network News; Morning Star News; *New York Times*; Release partners and contacts; The 88 Project; UCA News; VOM Canada; VOM USA; World Watch Monitor.

Names in inverted commas have been changed to protect identities. While we do not provide financial support to every Christian mentioned in *Prayer Shield*, we believe in the power of prayer to change lives.

VIETNAM

THURSDAY 27: Praise God that young people in rural Vietnam (pictured) are queuing up to be baptised – even though they know they will face persecution.

FRIDAY 28: Pastor Nguyen Trung Ton recently lost his appeal against a 12-year sentence. He was convicted of aiming to ‘overthrow the Government’, for advocating for democracy and supporting prisoners.

SATURDAY 29: Please pray for Nguyen Thi Lanh, the wife of Pastor Nguyen (previous prayer), and their two children. Ask God to uphold and provide for them – and the families of all prisoners of faith in Vietnam.

SUNDAY 30: Christian lawyer Nguyen van Dai and colleague Le Thu Hua were unexpectedly released from jail early in June – on condition that they left the country: they and Nguyen’s wife are now in Germany. Pray God will give them all a fresh purpose.

MONDAY 31: #Pray50 Pray that key Vietnamese officials will have a revelation of God’s blueprint for life and for living, one that challenges all they have held dear to date.

Precious Jesus,

Thank you that we can stand before your throne.

We ask you, Lord, to make your presence real to those who are suffering for your name’s sake today.

Sustain them with your mighty right hand and lift their heads.

Remind them that this world is not our permanent home and that theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Amen

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