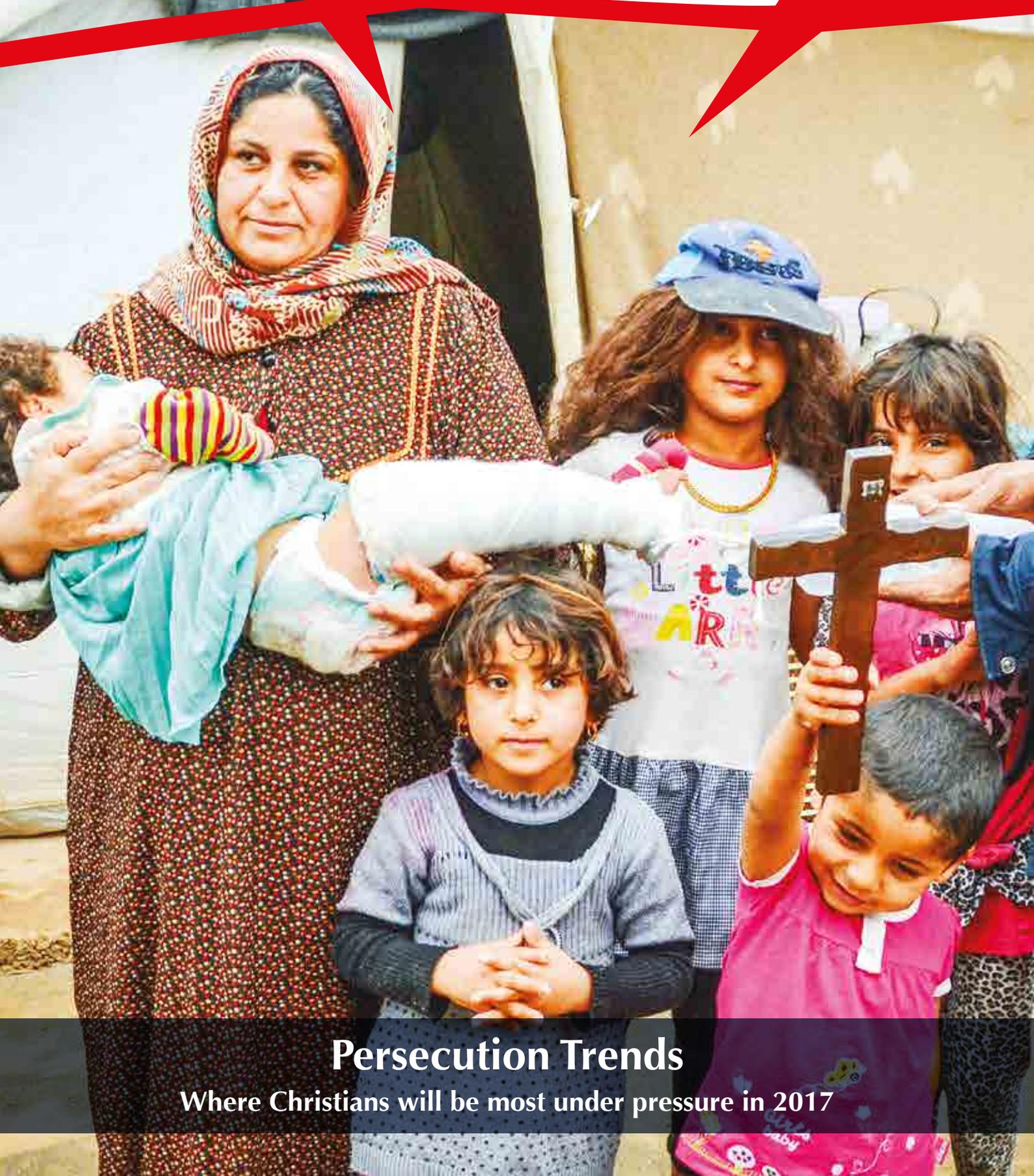


jan feb 2017

voice of persecuted christians

release



Persecution Trends

Where Christians will be most under pressure in 2017



Welcome

by Paul Robinson, CEO

**Three little
words to
change the
world**

If we're honest some words of Jesus have become so familiar to us that we overlook the context and the impact they would have had on their first audience – and ultimately what they really mean for us today.

Take 'Love your enemies' (Matt 5:44). How radical was Jesus really being?

Some might think that He was replacing a command to 'hate your enemies' in the Old Testament with a new instruction to 'love your enemies', but there was no instruction to 'hate' enemies in the Old Testament. The reverse is true. In Exodus 23: 4-5 and Proverbs 24:17 and 25:21 God tells His people to help their enemies, to feed them when they are hungry and not to be glad when they fall.

For Jesus' first century audience, who would have been familiar with the religious leaders telling them to 'hate their enemies', it would have been a sober reminder of God's truth. No more justifying hatred towards others. No more giving in to one's baser instincts. No more distorting God's word for one's own political ends.

They would have had no problem 'hating their enemies' (such as the occupying Romans) but Jesus was having none of it. He was taking them back to the true way, one that directly clashed with the teaching of the day.

Today Christians face the same response for telling the truth either in word or deed, pointing people back

to the Scripture and against the prevailing thinking. We can see it in our own country, but even more so around the world where the persecution of Christians is rife.

In this edition, Bishop Wallace Benn reflects on this truly counter-cultural message (page 18), while on other pages you can see how Christians loving their enemies has had an impact on their communities around the world.

Throughout this year we will be looking at Scripture verses that teach us how to overcome hatred with love. We see it in effect with our persecuted brothers and sisters but it also applies to our own lives. If we loved our enemies how would that impact our communities?

Imagine someone you consider an 'enemy', perhaps someone at your work or in your street, handing you an envelope. Inside is a card telling you how much they appreciate you along with a £20 note for you to spend on a little treat for yourself. How would you feel? Would you still consider that person an enemy? I expect not.

By them putting into practice the command to 'love their enemies' they would have turned an enemy into a friend, and there would be a little less hatred in the world.

Three little words spoken by Jesus two thousand years ago can still change the world today.

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'LOVE YOUR ENEMIES'

Bishop Wallace Benn reflects on the radical words of Jesus

release
INTERNATIONAL
voice of persecuted christians

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



Tohar Haydarov

Uzbek prisoner released early

We thank God for the unexpected release of Uzbek prisoner of faith Tohar Haydarov in November, who was freed early because of good behaviour. He had served nearly seven years of his ten-year prison sentence.

Tohar was imprisoned in 2010 for allegedly selling large quantities of drugs, although fellow church members say the charges were falsified, and he was accused because of his Christian faith.

'We want to thank everyone who prayed for Tohar, or who wrote letters of encouragement to him,' said our Prisoners of Faith Manager. 'This is wonderful news.'

Please pray that Tohar is quickly able to adjust to life outside prison.



Crackdown on unregistered churches

Chinese officials continue to clamp down hard on unregistered ('illegal') churches across their nation.

Our partner China Aid reports that 'dozens' of Christians were detained or arrested across remote, north-western Xinjiang province at the end of 2016, for holding church gatherings.

Meanwhile, in coastal Zhejiang province, Pastor Zhang Chongzhu has been stripped of his licence to be a minister and removed from his post – in an apparent attempt to stop him ministering in the house church movement.

Pastor Zhang had previously been imprisoned in an illegal detention centre in 2015 for crimes 'against national security', after protesting

over cross removals and church demolitions in the area.

Meanwhile revised draft Regulations on Religious Affairs indicate how the authorities are wanting to severely restrict unregistered churches in the future. The proposed articles would ban all religious activities outside those approved by the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA).

'These amendments to the administration of religion in China by SARA would in effect leave no space for the house or unregistered church in China,' said one contact.

Pray for wisdom for the leaders of China's unregistered churches as they face increasing persecution by the authorities.

Pray for Prisoners of Faith

Keep in touch with the latest news of Christians who have been imprisoned for their faith by requesting our free monthly Prisoners of Faith email alert. Call: 01689 823491 or use the attached card.





Members of Dongcheng church, Zhejiang province, protest against the demolition of church crosses by the authorities. Photo: China Aid.

Pastor beaten as brother murdered

A Christian pastor was beaten up and his brother murdered in an Indian village — because of the impact of the gospel.



Pastor Shuduru (pictured) faced repeated threats from family and villagers in Mandara,

Chhattisgarh state, where the local church met in his home. He was told to give up his gospel ministry, but refused to do so.

After one worship service a member of his family took him to the centre

of the village where about 400 Hindu activists had gathered. 'You belong to an Indian family – yet due to you all the people are becoming Christians!' they said. They beat him up and vandalised his home, before physically throwing him out of the village.

He later learned that on the same evening his elder brother Lachhu — who had become a Christian — was murdered. His killers have never been discovered.

Shuduru told Release: 'I will never leave this place, even though I am still being threatened.'

Pray that God will bring healing to the family of Pastor Shuduru and his congregation.



Pastor Roshan

Sign our petition to help persecuted Christians in Sri Lanka

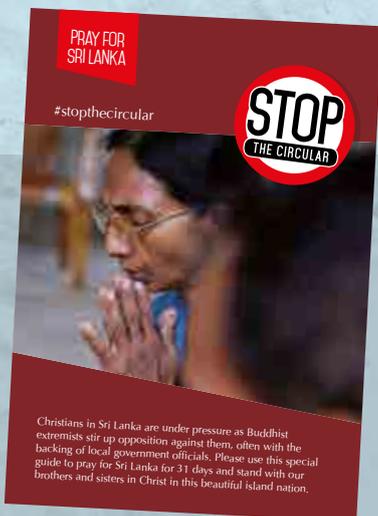
Pastor 'Roshan' (not his real name) knows the cost of following Jesus in Sri Lanka.

Buddhist extremists have tried to close his church, while the police have warned that he and his family are under serious threat.

'We know that persecution is part of our lives, but God has called me to serve here,' he says.

Christians in Sri Lanka also face pressure from the authorities who are using a directive called Circular 2008 to put pressure on churches to close.

You can help our persecuted family by signing our petition which calls on the Sri Lankan Government to cancel Circular 2008. Please ask your friends and contacts to sign as well.



New prayer guide

Please use our new 31-day prayer guide for Sri Lanka, enclosed with this magazine, to support persecuted Christians who are under attack by Buddhist extremists.



Petition forms can be downloaded from releaseinternational.org. You can also sign online at lovekillshate.org/sri-lanka-petition.

INDIA



Indian Christians protest against attacks on churches. Photo: AP/Manish Swarup.

'I WILL NEVER QUIT THE GOSPEL'

Despite being beaten by Hindu militants, Pastor Albis tells Release's Kenneth Harrod that he won't stop sharing the love of Jesus.

Pastor Albis and the small congregation that meets in his home were reading from the Psalms at the end of a worship service when a group of Hindu nationalists burst in.

'What are you doing? Stop it! Come outside!' they yelled at the pastor. They told him they were taking him to the police station, but on the way dragged him into the jungle and beat him.

When they got to the police station he was beaten again — and detained in a cell for three days on various charges related to converting people. Yet he remains undaunted by his experience.

'It was good to go to jail, as I was able to share the gospel with other people there,' he said. 'I will never quit the gospel.'

As I discovered on my recent visit to Chhattisgarh state in central India, Christians are continuing to face attacks from Hindu militants as well as increasing pressure as a result of the state's anti-conversion laws. Yet despite these restrictions, the gospel is changing lives.

'Churches are growing,' said Pastor Satish, who works alongside Release's partner in Chhattisgarh. 'Younger people are coming to faith with a "do-or-die for God" belief. This has been particularly true among smaller, house-based fellowships.'

Chhattisgarh inherited anti-conversion laws when it separated from Madhya Pradesh state in 2000. Those laws were then amended and tightened in 2007.

'The amended law has categorically redefined conversion,' our Indian partner Madhu told me. 'Any



Pastor Albis shared the gospel while in jail.

person converting to Hinduism from another religion is not construed as converting. It is only considered conversion if someone leaves Hinduism and goes to another religion.'

The law requires anyone who wants to convert to submit an affidavit beforehand. A local government official would then open an investigation and instruct a police officer to follow this up. This would

'In spite of all this persecution, churches are growing.'

include determining why a person was converting, and how – for example, where a baptism would take place and the name of the church and its pastor.

Punishments for contravening the law can be up to three years in prison and 20,000 rupees (£240) in fines. However, no pastor has been found guilty yet. Why?

'People are not applying [to become Christians],' said Pastor Satish. *'Baptisms now take place "underground". People are taking the decision to preach the gospel in their own homes. We cannot do anything publicly, so we have to go underground. But, in spite of all this persecution, churches are growing.'*

Persecution is real in India, and is increasing year by year. Please pray that our Indian brothers and sisters will be able to stand strong in their Lord.

BEATEN FOR HANDING OUT GOSPEL TRACTS

Umesh is a young man who gave out gospel tracts to fellow students on the computer course he was taking in Chhattisgarh state. However, one student was a member of the Hindu nationalist group Bajrang Dal. He informed his friends and later a group of about 50 attacked Umesh before taking him to the police station where he was charged under one of the sections of the anti-conversion laws.

Our partner managed to get him released, but later, he, his parents and his pastor were beaten up by the same group.



Umesh



Pastors in India are under attack

Will you help Indian Christians to stand strong in the face of persecution?

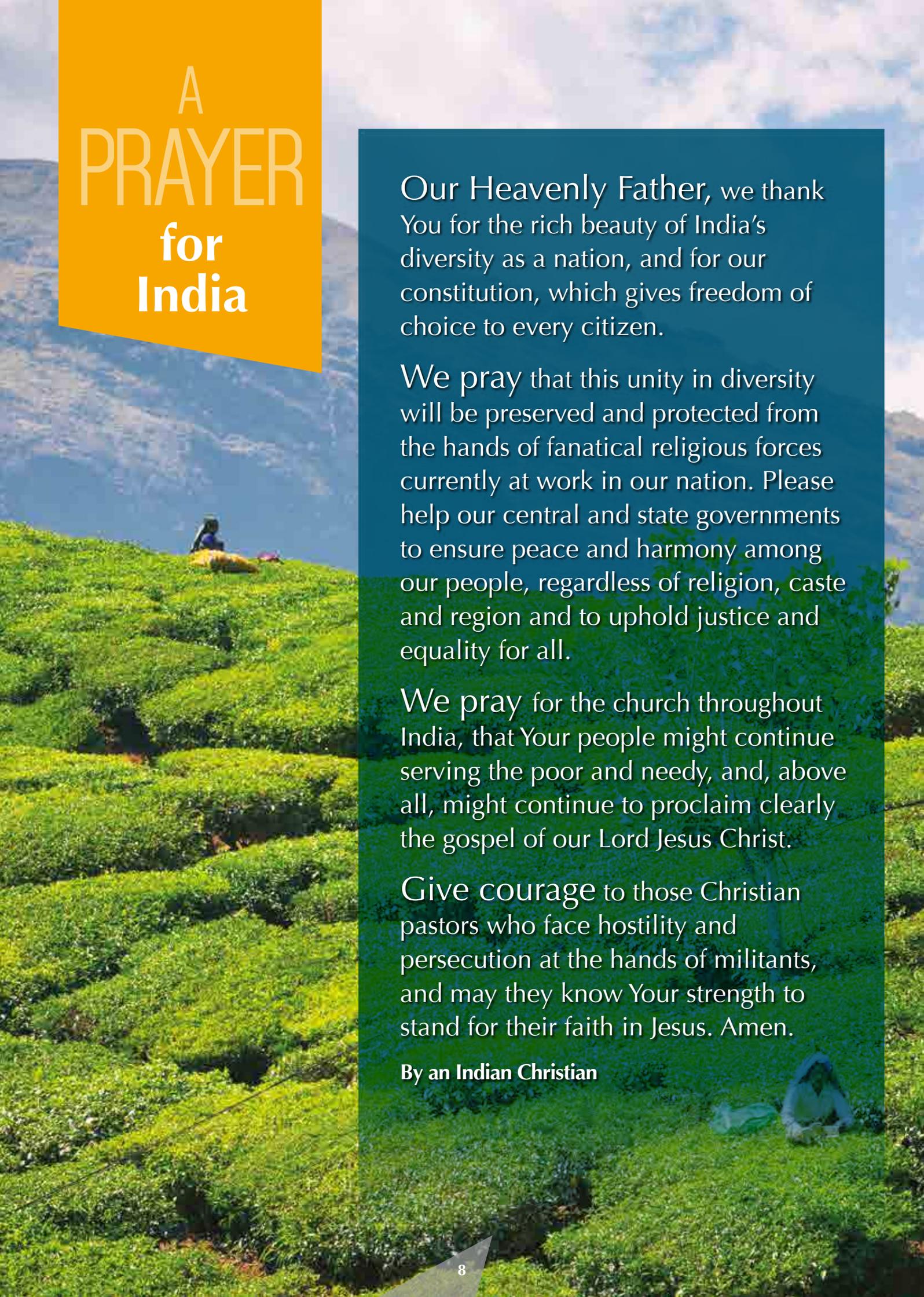
By sending a gift to Release today you can enable persecuted Christians to continue to share the gospel – despite the growing risks of both physical attacks and prosecution under the anti-conversion laws.

Your generosity will enable our partner in India to provide:

- Legal advice and support
- Spiritual encouragement through conferences
- Bibles for evangelism and discipleship

Please send a gift today using the attached card or by calling 01689 823491.

Together we can help Indian believers to overcome hatred with love.

The background of the page is a photograph of a lush green tea plantation on a hillside. In the distance, there are mountains under a blue sky with some clouds. A person is visible sitting on the tea bushes in the middle ground. The title is overlaid on a yellow banner in the top left corner.

A PRAYER for India

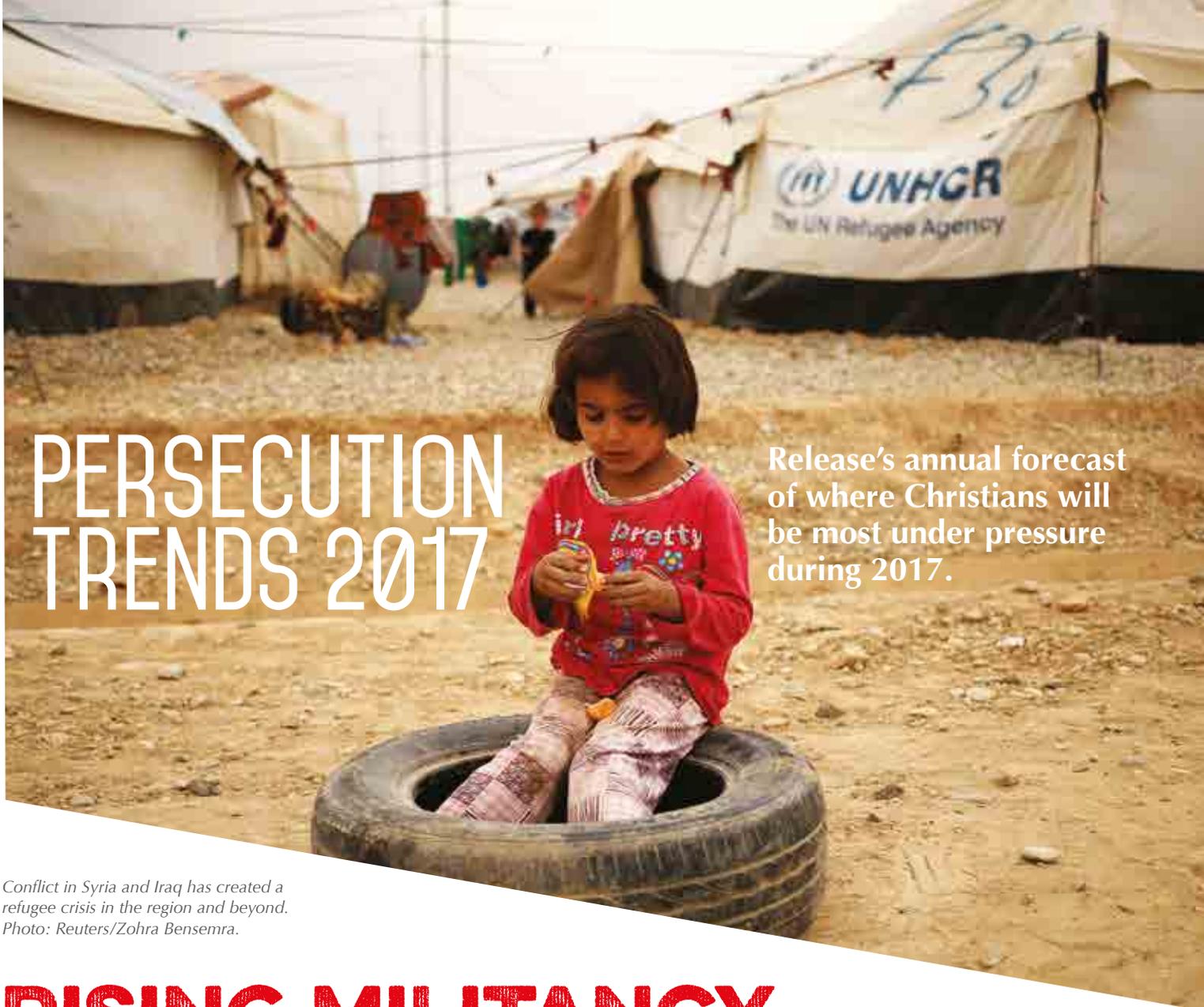
Our Heavenly Father, we thank You for the rich beauty of India's diversity as a nation, and for our constitution, which gives freedom of choice to every citizen.

We pray that this unity in diversity will be preserved and protected from the hands of fanatical religious forces currently at work in our nation. Please help our central and state governments to ensure peace and harmony among our people, regardless of religion, caste and region and to uphold justice and equality for all.

We pray for the church throughout India, that Your people might continue serving the poor and needy, and, above all, might continue to proclaim clearly the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Give courage to those Christian pastors who face hostility and persecution at the hands of militants, and may they know Your strength to stand for their faith in Jesus. Amen.

By an Indian Christian



PERSECUTION TRENDS 2017

Release's annual forecast of where Christians will be most under pressure during 2017.

*Conflict in Syria and Iraq has created a refugee crisis in the region and beyond.
Photo: Reuters/Zohra Bensemra.*

RISING MILITANCY AGAINST CHRISTIANS



Around the world Christians face an increasing array of violent persecutors, whether the brutal Islamic State in the Middle East, Boko Haram terrorists in Nigeria or Hindu extremists in India.

Jesus warned His followers that 'If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also' (John 15:20).

Our report on the likely trends of persecution in 2017 is a wake-up call to take our prayers and support for our persecuted family to a new level. **J**

Paul Robinson Chief Executive

ISLAMIC WORLD MIDDLE EAST

Conflict in **Syria** and **Iraq** continues to force many tens of thousands, including Christians, to flee their homes. The historic churches, which have maintained a faithful witness for nearly 2,000 years, now face the loss of up to half their members.

In 2017 the refugee crisis in neighbouring regions is likely to continue, including **Kurdistan** in northern Iraq, now home to nearly two million internally displaced people.

Despite losing ground in both Syria and Iraq during 2016, **Islamic State**

Continued on page 12...



PERSECUTED

WHERE CHRISTIANS FACE

MIDDLE EAST

Continuing conflict and persecution are forcing hundreds of thousands of Christians to flee for their lives. Iraqi Christians escaping from brutal Islamic State (IS) have described how those unwilling to renounce their faith have been tortured, sexually abused and even crucified.



War-damaged Aleppo, Syria



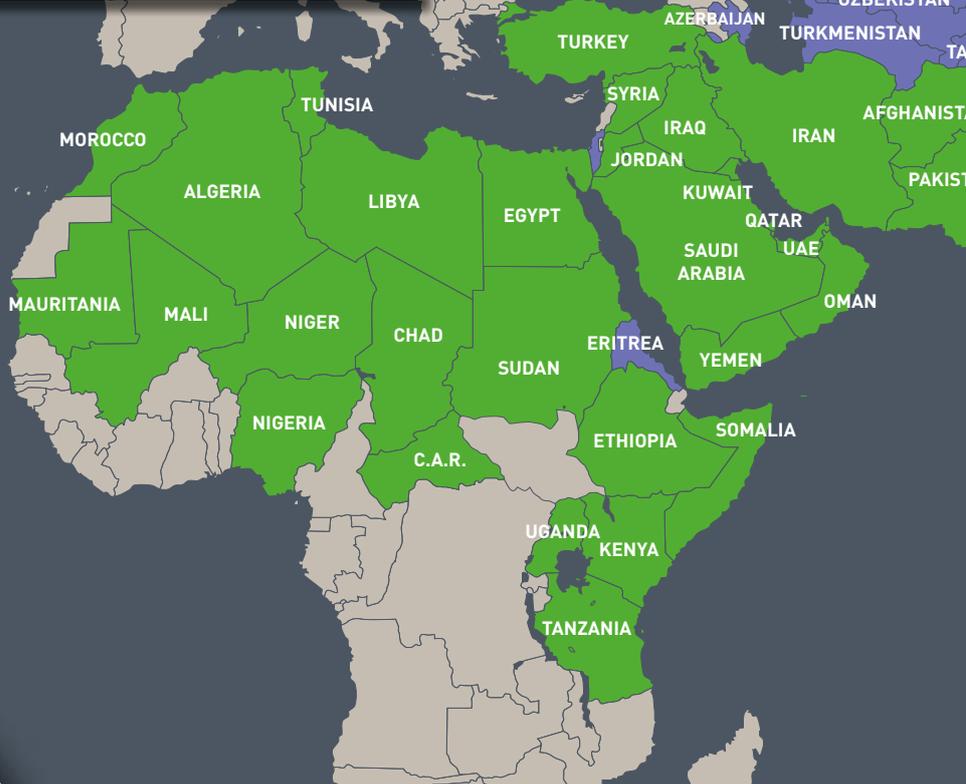
BELARUS



Iranian prison

IRAN

The authorities are clamping down on underground churches, in particular targeting leaders, who face arrest, imprisonment and torture.



CUBA

MEXICO

COLOMBIA

NIGERIA

Attacks by Islamist terrorists Boko Haram and Fulani militants are likely to bring untold suffering to thousands of Christians. Two million people remain displaced.

PAKISTAN

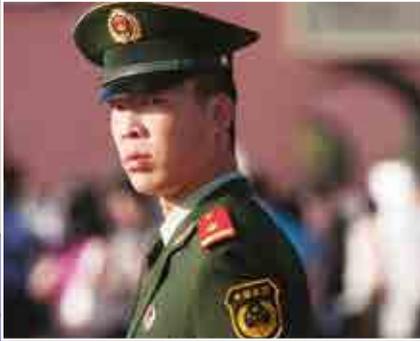
'Christians in Pakistan are considered third-class citizens,' said a Release partner. 'In 2017 we will face more discrimination, forced conversions and forced marriages.'



RELIGION TRENDS

FACE THE GREATEST THREATS

LOVE
KILLS
HATE



CHINA

New draft Regulations on Religious Affairs, if implemented, will lead to a significant clampdown on the activities of unregistered ('illegal') churches in 2017.



NORTH KOREA

This isolated state remains the most repressive nation on earth. An unknown number of Christians endure the most brutal treatment in labour camps and prisons.



KEY

- BUDDHIST WORLD
- COMMUNIST WORLD
- HINDU WORLD
- ISLAMIC WORLD
- OTHER

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voice of persecuted christians

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INDIA

'Christians are facing physical, symbolic and structural violence' from Hindu extremists, says one Christian leader. Attacks are likely to rise in 2017.

Please use this map to remember persecuted Christians in your prayers

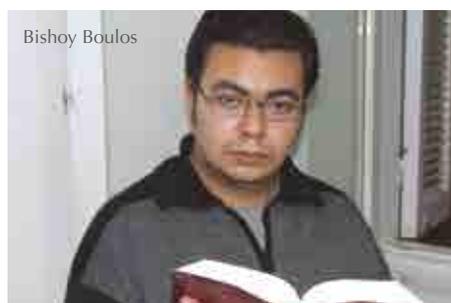


PERSECUTION TRENDS

(IS) and its supporters will continue to target Christian communities in 2017. Christians escaping from IS have described how those unwilling to renounce their faith have been tortured, sexually abused and even crucified.

In **Egypt** Christians remain vulnerable to attacks by militants, especially outside the capital Cairo. Despite welcome changes to the constitution, many Christians will continue to face discrimination in education, at work and in law.

Bishoy Boulos, a Christian convert who had suffered imprisonment and torture during his long battle to win the right to change his official religious status, publicly announced his return to Islam in 2016 — indicating the continuing pressure on Muslim-background believers.



In **Iran** the state is likely to continue its campaign to clamp down on underground churches, in particular by targeting leaders, who face arrest, imprisonment and torture.

To avoid jail terms Christians are being forced to pay large bonds: 'These can

'Persecution in Iran is increasing'

be for \$10,000,' said our partner, 'but increasingly the figure can be over ten times that amount.'

He added: 'Persecution in Iran is increasing. The state identifies Christianity, and in particular its manifestation in the house churches, as a threat to the Islamic Republic.'



YOUR OPPORTUNITY TO HELP DISPLACED CHRISTIANS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Your gift today could help Christian families in the Middle East who have fled to escape conflict or persecution by Islamic State.

One of our partners, 'Majed' (not his real name), shares God's love with displaced families in northern Iraq. 'I have a heart for refugees and Muslim-background believers,' he says.

'I want to help persecuted Christians because I was once persecuted. The refugees have many needs and I hope you will join me in helping them.'

- £10 could provide a Bible and Christian literature for a displaced family
- £20 could provide clothes, blankets and heating supplies for the cold winter
- £50 could provide food packages for two families

Please make a donation today by using the attached card, by calling 01689 823491 or at releaseinternational.org/donate.

AFGHANISTAN

'Afghanistan remains anti-Christian, and it continues to be illegal for an Afghan to be a Christian in the country,' says one partner. 'Ethnic Christians and believers from a Muslim background are likely to experience continuing persecution in 2017.'

EAST AFRICA

Islamist militants al-Shabaab, based in **Somalia**, are likely to continue sporadic terrorist attacks in neighbouring **Kenya**, where they have previously targeted Christians. In October 2016, for example, six Christians were killed during a grenade and gun attack on the northern border town of Mandera.

NIGERIA

Since 2011 the Islamist terrorist group Boko Haram has killed as many as 15,000 people — including many Christians — as part of their armed rebellion against the Nigerian Government. More than two million have been displaced by the conflict.

Where security is weak, a Boko Haram tactic is to kidnap Christian girls, often to be sold into slavery or forced into 'marriages' with jihadists.

In addition, Christian communities in central Nigeria are likely to suffer continuing attacks in 2017 as part of a battle for land and power by Fulani militants.

PAKISTAN

A succession of bomb attacks by militants in recent years has resulted in the death or injury of hundreds of Christians. The Easter 2016 bombing of a recreational park in Lahore was one of the worst: leaving 75 people dead and more than 300 injured. Attacks are likely to continue in 2017.

Christians continue to face widespread discrimination in the legal system: the blasphemy laws remain open to widespread abuse.

PERSECUTION TRENDS



In October 2016 the appeal by blasphemy-accused Asia Bibi, who has been on death row for the past six years, was postponed after 150 Muslim clerics issued a fatwa warning the courts not to release her.

'Christians in Pakistan are considered third-class citizens,' said a Release partner.

'In 2017 we will face more discrimination, forced conversions and forced marriages.'

SUDAN

In 2017 we expect the Sudanese authorities to continue to strengthen Sharia (Islamic law) and to target Christians by arresting leaders and seizing or destroying church property, as they have done throughout 2016.

COMMUNIST WORLD

NORTH KOREA

The so-called 'hermit kingdom' of 25 million people will remain the most repressive nation on earth. An unknown number of Christians endure the most brutal treatment in labour camps and prisons as part of the Government's strategy to stamp out all forms of Christianity.

However, defectors, including Christians, will continue to escape, mainly through neighbouring China, in the hope of reaching South Korea or other countries in the region.

CHINA

The Government's 2016 draft Regulations on Religious Affairs, if implemented, will result in a significant increase in pressure on unregistered ('illegal') churches in 2017. 'The restrictions are meant to hinder house churches and reduce contact with organisations outside of the government-controlled Chinese churches,' says our partner China Aid.

'The [Communist] Party wants to take charge of religion,' said one pastor. 'The Government wants to control everything, even the smallest aspects.'

HINDU WORLD

INDIA

'Christians are facing physical, symbolic and structural violence' from Hindu extremists across India, according to one Christian leader.

A recent report from the Religious Liberty Commission of the Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI) recorded 134 attacks on Christians or their churches in the first half of 2016 – almost as many as the annual totals for both 2014 and 2015. We anticipate that attacks on Christians will continue to rise in 2017.

BUDDHIST WORLD

SRI LANKA

Buddhist extremists are likely to continue to attack Christians, especially in rural areas. Release's new campaign highlights how Circular 2008 is being used to pressurise churches to close (see page 5).

OTHER

CENTRAL ASIA

Growing legal restrictions are curtailing religious freedoms throughout the region. In Kazakhstan, for example, President Nazarbayev has ordered harsher religious restrictions. 'Exercise of the right to freedom of religion or belief seems set to be punished even more widely,' says our partner.

ERITREA

At any one time around 300 evangelical Christians are incarcerated in poor conditions by the totalitarian regime of Isaias Afewerki. Some 173 have been in jail long-term.



THANK YOU FOR MAKING A SHINING STAR!

'Thanks to your support, Christian brick kiln worker Parveen has done something radical with her life,' reports the Manager of our **Release Women** programme.

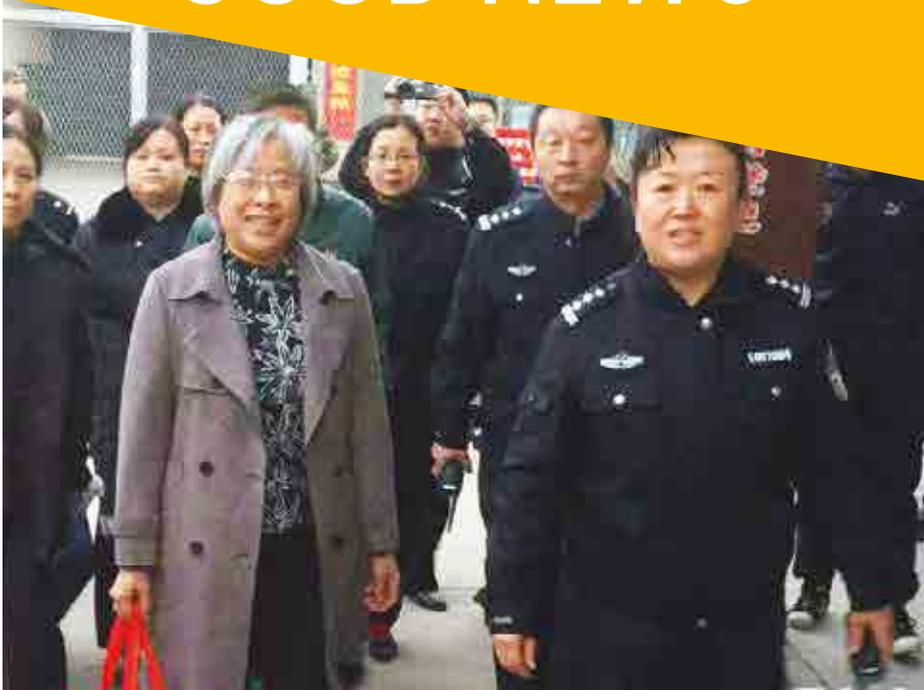
'Parveen has stopped making up to 700 bricks a day — and started sewing. Her Strength to Stand community group (supported by Release), who call themselves "Shining Stars", lent her the money to mend her sewing machine so she could start her own small business.

'She is no longer at risk of abuse and harassment from the brick kiln owners, and has found a new way to pay back her debts. She has become a shining star to her community.'

Follow Release Women at  facebook.com/ReleaseWomen

GOOD NEWS

Photo: China Aid.



FREEDOM FOR JAILED PASTOR

Chinese pastor Yang Rongli (pictured) was released in October, having served a seven-year sentence for allegedly 'gathering a mob to disturb public order'.

She was arrested in 2009 for holding a prayer rally after more than 500 security officers and other officials broke into churches and a Christian shoe factory in Linfen, Shanxi province. The authorities used bulldozers and excavators to destroy buildings and church property.

Pastor Yang suffered poor health while in prison, yet according to our partner China Aid is 'in good spirits regarding her freedom, and has no complaints or resentment'.



PEDAL POWER!

Energetic Robert de Berry plans to celebrate his 75th birthday next year by undertaking a 750-mile sponsored bike ride from Cape Wrath in the north of Scotland to Peacehaven, East Sussex, on the south coast.

The ride will take place May 16 to June 16 and Robert is looking for riders to join him for some or all of the way to raise funds for Release and Christian Solidarity Worldwide.

Churches along the route have offered accommodation for participants, as well as opportunities to pray for persecuted Christians. To find out more contact Robert on robertdeberry42@gmail.com.



A GREAT RUN: Alison Bowie (pictured with her husband) raised a terrific £200 for Release by completing the 13.1 mile Great North Run from Newcastle to South Shields in September. The event attracted 57,000 runners, making it the world's largest half marathon. 'The charity is very dear to my heart,' she told us.

USED STAMPS WANTED



Supporter Paul White is continuing his marvellous work of selling franked UK and foreign stamps to help persecuted Christians. 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.

CHANGING LIVES

Change Maker Jessie recently visited Sri Lanka with Release Potential – helping at a special camp for children who've suffered persecution. Here she continues her report from our last edition.



What was your personal highlight?

On the last day of the Kids' Camp there was a final worship celebration. We had the honour of praying with some of the children. There was no language barrier: the only tongue spoken in that place was love.

This was truly the most beautiful thing of the whole trip.

We'd seen elephants and fields of tea, miles upon miles of landscape and beautiful sunsets over the sea, but right then my heart was captivated by these amazing children.

Why should other young people think of becoming Change Makers?

Meeting your family in Christ overseas will teach you about who you are, and more about who God is. The programme also equips you better to change the world around you. Go for it!

FOLLOW US

 Twitter  Facebook

 YouTube

 releasepotential.org

BLOWN AWAY IN BOURNEMOUTH



Our newest Change Maker Amy, the first from Northern Ireland, has hit the ground running!

Already she's worked with our social media team, helped on a Release exhibition stand at Queen's University Christian Union in Belfast — and raised money for us. And she took part in our fantastic Change Maker weekend hosted by Downton Baptist Church in Bournemouth. She said:

“We were involved in doing a number of sessions for children and young people on modern-day persecution, courage and prayer. Being part of this weekend at Downton was such an encouragement and challenge to me!

They were a great group who were honest about how hard it is to be courageous.

Please pray that these young people will develop into godly men and women who want to see change in their community for God's glory.”



GET YOUR YOUTH GROUP TO UNCOVER PERSECUTION

Raise awareness with young people and students in your church by using our *Persecution Uncovered* resource pack, filled with inspiring activities.

- Price: £10 including p&p
- Order today at releasepotential.org
- Or call: 01689 823491



BE THE CHANGE!

Are you aged between 17 and 23? Do you want to stand up for persecuted Christians and speak out for justice and peace? Do you want to be equipped to share your faith at home and around the world? Then become a Release Potential Change Maker and join our one-year mentoring programme. Check out releasepotential.org/change-makers and apply now!

For details of our youth resources visit releasepotential.org or contact potential@releaseinternational.org.

INDIA



Barry helps distribute Bibles to persecuted Christians in India.

‘MEETING PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS IN INDIA REALLY CHANGED MY LIFE!’

Barry, a Release supporter, saw first-hand how Christians in India are facing extreme pressure.

Having never been to India I wasn't sure what to expect, but I'm so glad I went, because meeting these people has changed my life and the way I feel about our brothers and sisters in Christ.

We all follow the same Lord, but these people have been killed, beaten and turned away from their own villages because of their faith and witness. At times I was worried that we were being watched or filmed or having our pictures taken, perhaps by people who didn't want us to know what was going on.

I was amazed to hear how badly some Christians had been treated and was shocked to see what had happened: church buildings torn down to their

‘The love and kindness I saw was second to none’

foundations because Christianity is considered by militants to be a foreign religion and people refused a proper burial just because they believe in the Father. It's so wrong.

Meeting the people who take care of persecuted Christians legally and

financially was great, too. The love and kindness I saw, given freely, was second to none. Release's partner plays a vital helping role.

When I returned to the UK I told many people about what I had seen and heard. I feel that more should be done to help Christians in India. I hope that one day I get to return. My own church family was very shocked to hear of what goes on. I'm so glad to have helped spread the word about the extreme challenges facing our persecuted family in India.



WILL YOU BECOME A CHURCH REPRESENTATIVE FOR RELEASE?

A vital way of supporting our persecuted family is to keep churches in the UK and Ireland informed about their needs for prayer, petitions and support.

You can make a real difference by volunteering as a Church Representative — and can tailor your contribution according to your opportunities, time and energy.

Church Representatives perform a vital role by:

- sharing copies of *Release* magazine
- circulating our email alerts to promote prayer
- asking people to sign our petitions
- praying for persecuted Christians

If you believe that God is leading you to serve persecuted Christians in this way, please contact us at volunteer@releaseinternational.org or by calling 01689 823491. We'd love to hear from you!

release & your Church

'I've gained so much'



says Church Representative Peter from Orpington Baptist Church. And so could you!

Why did you become a Church Representative?

I've always been concerned for justice issues and human rights, so when I became a Christian it was a natural step to want to do something to help persecuted Christians.

I started writing letters to encourage prisoners, and sometimes to raise issues with governments, using the information from Release. When I found out that it was possible to be a Church Representative, this seemed a great way of rallying others to support persecuted Christians.

What do you do in your church?

Mainly raising awareness by sharing information. I share news with my church, from *Release* magazine and other sources, and sometimes write an item for our church newsletter.

Sometimes I'll show a clip from a DVD, or encourage letter-writing. I've just set up a small display about Sri Lanka, and we plan to highlight the petition in due course.

Last May we held an open-air meeting (in our car park) to support the Great Outdoors Church Service.

What response do you get?

Many people are not really aware of how Christians in other countries can suffer for their faith, and can be horrified to hear what is happening. So raising awareness is really important.

Would you encourage others to volunteer in this way?

Yes! You learn so much about the church worldwide. I've gained so much from hearing the testimonies of persecuted believers in countries such as China, Nigeria and North Korea. Their suffering can be distressing, but their testimonies are inspiring. It's not just a one-way process: it's deepened my faith.

See opposite for how to become a Release Church Representative.

Invite a Release speaker to your church

To request a speaker for your church or fellowship group, please contact your nearest Development Manager:

Ben

North of England
Tel 07969 361557

Geoff

Central England & Wales
Tel 01234 271855

Kenneth

South of England
Tel 07540 530153

Stephen

Ireland
Tel 028 9334 0014

James

Scotland
Tel 07977 936554

THE WORD

Bishop Wallace Benn reflects on the counter-cultural command of Jesus:



His grace, we are to show that same love to even our enemies too! In that Christ is our supreme example.

Jesus goes on to say, if we simply love those it is easy to love, we are no better than a tax collector (notoriously dishonest traitors and collaborators in Jesus' day), or a pagan (Matthew 5:46-47).

Let me quote some words of the Bible scholar D.A. Carson: 'The disciple of Jesus will stand out in the world because of the divine quality of his love. Indeed, elsewhere Jesus even elevates love among Christians to the characteristic or mark that indicates they belong to Him' (see John 13:34).

Find that hard to do? Yes, but God can help us.

The first step is to pray – those whom we pray for we learn to care about, as we bring them to the Lord. It's not surprising that Jesus links love and prayer together when He says: 'Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you' (Matthew 5:44).

This kind of living is truly counter-cultural and makes a huge impact.

May God give us grace to show something of the joyful standards of our King and His Kingdom to a lost and needy world. And may He have all the glory!

Bishop Wallace Benn is a member of Release's Council of Reference.

'LOVE YOUR ENEMIES'

I am writing this on Remembrance Day and I cannot help remembering the profound example of the Irish Senator Gordon Wilson.

At a Remembrance Day service in 1987 at the war memorial in Enniskillen, his beloved daughter was killed by an IRA bomb. Though broken-hearted he was able subsequently to bring himself to say that he bore 'no ill will, no grudge' and that he could love and forgive those who performed this atrocity.

His example as a Christian had a profound effect, and perhaps did more to break the cycle of violence and show a better way than any other

'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing'

single action. The ultimate peace process in Northern Ireland owed a great deal to his powerful example of forgiveness.

This is just one example of a great many the world over where followers of Jesus have obeyed His command, in His strength, to show the world the counter-cultural standards of their Lord and His Kingdom.

These standards were supremely exemplified by the Lord Himself when on the cross he cried: 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing' (Luke 23:34).

This was followed by Stephen in his martyrdom when he cried out: 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them' (Acts 7:60); and also by Paul when he tells Timothy: 'At my first defence no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them!' (2 Timothy 4:16). Even though Paul was greatly disappointed, he was not resentful.

What is the motivation to behave in this radically counter-cultural way?

Matthew tells us what Jesus said: 'so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven' (Matthew 5:45). That is, we are to show the family DNA! After all, God 'causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous' (Matthew 5:45).

While we were still enemies and rebels in God's world, He sent his Son to live among us and supremely die for us in our place. We have experienced the undeserved love of God, bringing forgiveness and new life. As those who are beneficiaries of

LOVE
KILLS
HATE

WILL YOU HELP SHARE GOD'S WORD IN TOUGH PLACES?



Central Asian believers meet in secret to pray and study God's Word.

'I help national churches in Central Asia to develop their ministry of preaching and teaching the Gospel.

The Lord called me to serve Him from the Bible and He equipped me to serve persecuted Christians through my own experience of persecution.'

Release partner 'Pavel', Central Asia

'Pavel' (not his real name) leads a team of more than 20 evangelists and church-planters in Central Asia, where Christian mission is strictly forbidden by law.

His team has planted and nurtured dozens of churches and has seen hundreds turn to Christ.

Pavel knows first-hand the cost of following Jesus: at one time being jailed for his Christian activities.

Yet he told us: 'Don't pray that the persecution will stop; pray that the Lord will strengthen us.'

By sending a gift of £10 or more today you can help Pavel and his team share God's Word — even in the most difficult circumstances.

GIVE
using the attached card

CALL:
01689 823491 to give
over the phone

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

LOVE
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SEND A GIFT OF LOVE TODAY!

Touch a persecuted Christian's life

Help **feed** the family of a Christian prisoner of faith whose children would otherwise go hungry. Support a worker who is **putting Bibles** into the hands of new believers. **Rescue** a Christian girl who was sexually abused and **needs a safe place** to live. Give a Christian mother **a chance to break free from poverty**.

Send a cheque | Give at: lovekillshate.org | Call: 01689 823491



PRAYERSHIELD

JANUARY / FEBRUARY 2017



*The joy of the Lord is
Yesu Rajyam's strength,
amid persecution
(see January 6).*

JANUARY 2017

Heavenly Father,
I thank and praise you
because you are everything I
need, in all circumstances. You
alone know what lies ahead –
so I need not be afraid.

Father, I pray that my
persecuted family will know
that you are with them and
will meet all their needs.

May they know you delight in
them and rejoice over them
with singing (Zephaniah 3:17).
Give them your joy, Lord,
so they can face today with
strength and courage.

Amen.

INDIA

SUNDAY 1: At the start of
a new year, let's pray that
God will strengthen our
resolve to stand in prayer and
solidarity with our persecuted
church family, in India and
worldwide. And let's pray we
will be open to learn from
their overcoming faith.

MONDAY 2: Pastor John
Mariya was brutally murdered
by a group of communists
(known locally as Naxalites).
His ministry threatened their
recruitment. Please pray for
John's widow, his children
and their church.

TUESDAY 3: Elia Kannaiah,
the brother of Pastor John
(previous prayer), continues to
spread the gospel in the area
where communists recruit for
their cause. 'We are standing
strong for Christ,' he says.
Thank God for his courage.

WEDNESDAY 4: Pastor Yesu
Das has suffered persistent
opposition from Hindu
extremists. His church has
been vandalised and he has
been threatened. Ask God to
keep him strong in his faith.

THURSDAY 5: Pastor Paul became a Christian while in prison. He has faced hostility for setting up a church. On one occasion, he was beaten for two hours. Pray that the Lord will provide for his fledgling congregation.

FRIDAY 6: Yesu Rajyam (pictured on page 1) and her husband were beaten for sharing the gospel, yet she was the one jailed for six months, after being falsely accused of being the aggressor. Thank God for her joy and perseverance in serving Christ.

SATURDAY 7: Raju Sahu, who is in his early 20s, was beaten by a gang of about 50 Hindu extremists. They accused him of fraudulent conversion: he spent three days in police cells. Yet, he says, 'Pray that I will win many more souls for Jesus.'

SUNDAY 8: Pastor Shuduru Kashyap was beaten up and thrown out of his village. His brother was murdered for his faith. Pray that Shuduru and his congregation will continue to witness for Christ.

MONDAY 9: The church in Chhattisgarh is growing, despite the state's anti-conversion laws. Pray that these laws, which exist in several states, will not be extended across the whole nation.

TUESDAY 10: Pastor Ankush has been beaten up several times and Hindu extremists have intimidated

his congregation. Ask God to sustain Ankush and his church.

WEDNESDAY 11: Release's partner reports that some form of persecution happens in India every 40 hours, on average. Pray that God will strengthen and encourage His church, and continue to bring people to know Jesus as Lord.

CHINA

THURSDAY 12: Chinese officials appear to be stepping up the pressure on house churches, with harassment reported recently in Guangdong, Zhejiang, Anhui, Sichuan, Xinjiang and Henan provinces.

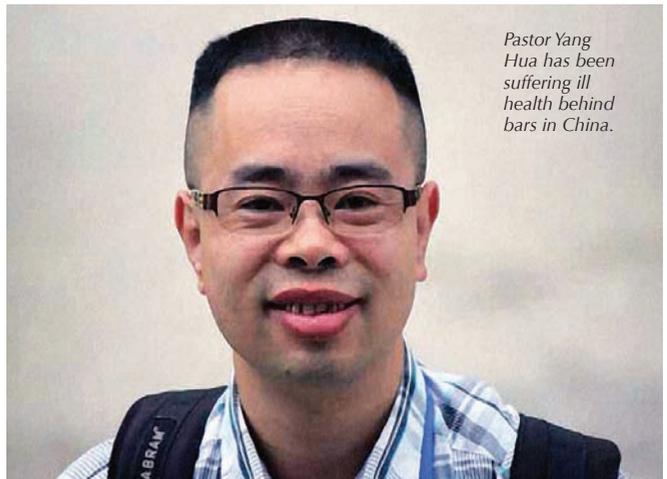
FRIDAY 13: Pray that God will pour out His Holy Spirit on congregations across China as they face fresh harassment. Pray that the joy of the Lord will be their strength (Nehemiah 8:10).

SATURDAY 14: Pray for wisdom for key Christian leaders in the house church movement, such as Pastor Zhang Mingxuan, also known as Pastor 'Bike', who is president of the Chinese House Church Alliance.

SUNDAY 15: A house church in Jiuzhaigou town, Sichuan, was recently ordered to stop holding meetings and hosting unregistered preachers and foreign pastors.

MONDAY 16: Pray that God will touch the hearts of Chinese officials: pray that they will be stirred by the church's strong witness to His goodness and grace.

TUESDAY 17: Pastor Yang Hua (pictured) of Huoshi Church in Guiyang city has serious health issues after more than a year in custody. Pray for his immediate release, and that of other prisoners of faith.



Pastor Yang Hua has been suffering ill health behind bars in China.

CENTRAL ASIA

WEDNESDAY 18: Many churches are forced to meet in secret, and run the risk of being caught and fined for 'illegal activities'. Pray that God will confound officials' efforts to find them.

THURSDAY 19: Thank God for a number of baptisms that have taken place in secret in the region this year. Pray that all those who have been baptised will grow in faith.

FRIDAY 20: Pray for congregations banned from meeting in their own buildings. Some have been told they are 'unregistered' but have then found it impossible to register.

SATURDAY 21: Ask God to bless Bible translation and distribution projects in the region, and pray for protection for those involved. Pray that people who have never even heard of Jesus will come to know Him.

SUNDAY 22: Ask God to bless and protect missionaries and their families working in the region. One family is facing false criminal charges.

MONDAY 23: Pray for those who oppose the spread of the gospel in Central Asia. Pray that God will move powerfully among communities that have persecuted Christians.

TUESDAY 24: Our partners say there's a real need for mature spiritual leaders to help the church grow in Central Asia. Pray that God will raise them up and provide for their ministries.

WEDNESDAY 25: Praise God that Christians from parts of Central Asia which suffer persecution are spreading the gospel in other nations, including China. Likewise, pray that migrant workers from Central Asia will meet Christ in their host nations.

THURSDAY 26: Thank God that pastors who attended a secret conference recently testify that they have grown closer in fellowship and gained a sense of inner peace and courage.

FRIDAY 27: Thank God for some amazing testimonies of divine healing in the region. Pray that friends and relatives of those who received healing will recognise it as proof of God's power and want to know Him for themselves.

SUDAN

SATURDAY 28: Pray for the church in Sudan, as the Government continues its crackdown on non-Muslims and non-Arab ethnic groups such as the Nuba. Thank God for the determination of those trying to support persecuted communities, such as those in the Nuba Mountains.



Distributing Bibles in Sudan requires determination, due to persecution and poor infrastructure

SUNDAY 29: Pray for the acquittal of Sudanese pastors Kowa Shamaal and Hassan Abduraheem, Czech believer Petr Jašek, and Abdulmonem Abdumawla, who are on trial for crimes that carry the death penalty. They are falsely accused of supporting rebel movements.

MONDAY 30: Thank God that an appeal court reversed an order by government officials that a Christian school in Madani be shut and its property seized. The school has reopened, with its existing staff.

TUESDAY 31: Pray for wisdom for Rev Samuel Anglo, headmaster at the church-run school in Madani (above). Staff are ethnic Nuba from South Kordofan state, an area where the Government is targeting suspected rebels.

FEBRUARY 2017

KENYA

WEDNESDAY 1: Pray for the church in north and east Kenya as it faces mounting persecution. Pray that young people such as Timothy will grow up to have a strong, overcoming faith, and not be cowed by extremists' threats.

THURSDAY 2: Islamist militants *al-Shabaab* killed six Christians in a recent attack in the northern town of Mandera, as part of their campaign to force Christians out of this border area.

FRIDAY 3: Thank God that many lives were saved in the *al-Shabaab* attack on Mandera because of the swift response by police reservists stationed nearby. Pray that the Kenyan Government, military and police will have firm resolve to tackle extremism.

SATURDAY 4: Praise God that Muslims in Kenya's north-east are reportedly starting to see *al-Shabaab* as a threat to their own interests, and are seeking to improve relations with local Christians.

SUNDAY 5: Thank God that there is a fresh hunger to know God among Somalis living in Kenya, according to our partner, who supports Somali Christians there. Pray that many will meet Jesus in dreams and visions (Joel 2:28).

MONDAY 6: Pray for safety and protection for our partner as he travels across Kenya to meet with Somali believers. Pray that these meetings will be times of huge encouragement and blessing.

TUESDAY 7: Pastor 'Jeremiah' believes his life is in real danger, for serving the Somali church in Kenya. Islamist extremists have made

new attempts to kill him and his family.

WEDNESDAY 8: Pray that God will strengthen the faith of Somali Christians in Kenya. Pray that they will put their trust in God and receive His peace, amid mounting persecution.

UGANDA

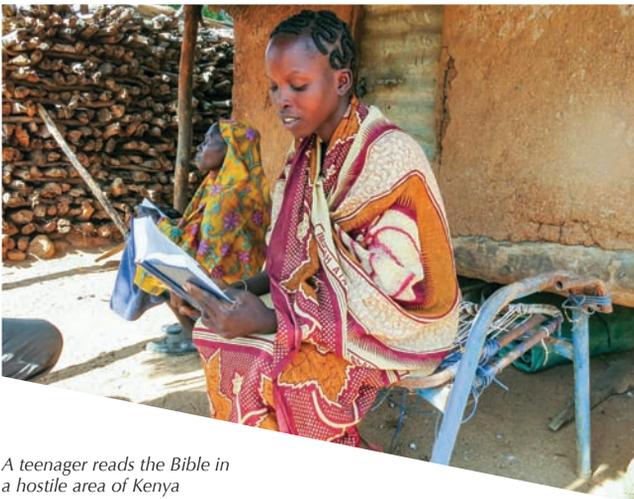
THURSDAY 9: Two Christian teenagers were forced to flee their home in Kibuku after Muslim relatives threatened to kill them for leaving Islam. An angry mob then rounded on the family who took the boys in, setting fire to their home.

FRIDAY 10: Extremists injured 27 Christians, many seriously, in a mainly Muslim area of Pallisa district. They appear to have been targeted because people have come to Christ through their community rice-growing project.

SATURDAY 11: Thank God that He is at work in Pallisa, through the community food project (above). Pray for wisdom, boldness and protection for Christians across eastern Uganda as they share God's love.

SUNDAY 12: Pray for Angel, still grieving the loss of her baby. She believes Muslim relatives in Luuka district poisoned her daughter because Angel did not observe Muslim rituals.

MONDAY 13: Pray for the friends and family of



A teenager reads the Bible in a hostile area of Kenya

Christian widow, Efranse, who was murdered after resisting pressure to donate land for a new mosque in Luuka district.

NIGERIA

TUESDAY 14: Six-year-old Weng (pictured) was left with badly mutilated feet when extremists set fire to his home. His entire family were

killed. Pray that God will continue to heal and restore him, with support from a Release associate ministry.

WEDNESDAY 15: Habiba, 15, was reportedly snatched from her school in Katsina, forcibly converted to Islam and then made to marry a Muslim. Some claim that her new 'husband' is the state's Emir. Pray that officials will intervene to free Habiba.

Weng was three weeks old when extremists killed his entire family. His feet were badly burnt.



THURSDAY 16: Fulani herdsmen killed more than 40 people in Godogodo town, Kaduna, and burned down many homes. Thousands fled the area. Pray that God will comfort and provide for survivors.

FRIDAY 17: Islamist extremists *Boko Haram* took over three villages near Chibok town in Borno state, killing at least eight people. Pray for an end to their terror campaign.

SATURDAY 18: Pray for the safe return of all the girls whom *Boko Haram* abducted from Chibok in April 2014. Twenty-one girls were released in October.

SUNDAY 19: Pray for wisdom for President Buhari and the Nigerian Government as they work to end violence in their nation. Pray that God will give them courage and determination to tackle these huge challenges.

PAKISTAN

MONDAY 20: An eight-year-old boy in Punjab was accused of blasphemy after a copy of the Koran was allegedly set alight. Thank God that the charge against him has been dropped.

TUESDAY 21: A Christian MP intervened to secure a child's release from police custody when he was accused of blasphemy (above). Thank God for this MP's courage: pray that more people in positions of authority will contend for minorities' religious rights.



Asia Bibi continues to wait for her final appeal against a death sentence to be heard in Pakistan.

WEDNESDAY 22: Pray for wisdom and courage for Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and his Government in the face of mounting religious intolerance and extremism.

THURSDAY 23: Continue to pray for the repeal of Pakistan's blasphemy laws that are so often used to persecute minorities and settle petty scores. Pray that the Pakistan Government will heed our recent petition calling it to repeal these laws.

FRIDAY 24: Continue to pray for Asia Bibi (pictured), who is awaiting a new date for the Supreme Court to hear her final appeal

against a death sentence for 'blasphemy'. Pray that judges will come forward who will resist extremists' attempts to intimidate them.

IRAN

SATURDAY 25: An estimated 200 people are behind bars in Iran because of their faith. Please pray for a change of heart on the part of officials who see Christians as a threat to national security.

SUNDAY 26: Pastor Behnam Irani was released from jail in October, after six years behind bars for leading a house church. Pray for him and his family as they start a new life in Turkey.

MONDAY 27: Christians Mohammed Roghangir and Massoud Rezai have lost their recent appeal for early release from jail for good behaviour – because it was apparently blocked by Iranian intelligence. They were arrested in Shiraz in 2012.

TUESDAY 28: House church members Yaser Mosibzadeh, Saheb Fadayeey and Mohammed Reza Omidi have been sentenced to 80 lashes each for drinking communion wine. They have also been charged with 'action against national security'.

Lord Jesus,

Thank you that you are a faithful friend who sticks closer than a brother (Proverbs 18:24).

Remind my brothers and sisters who suffer in your name that you are near. May they know your peace and your grace today, Lord.

Help me to obey your call to 'watch and pray', to stay close to you, when persecution comes.

Amen.

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Names in inverted commas have been changed to protect identities.

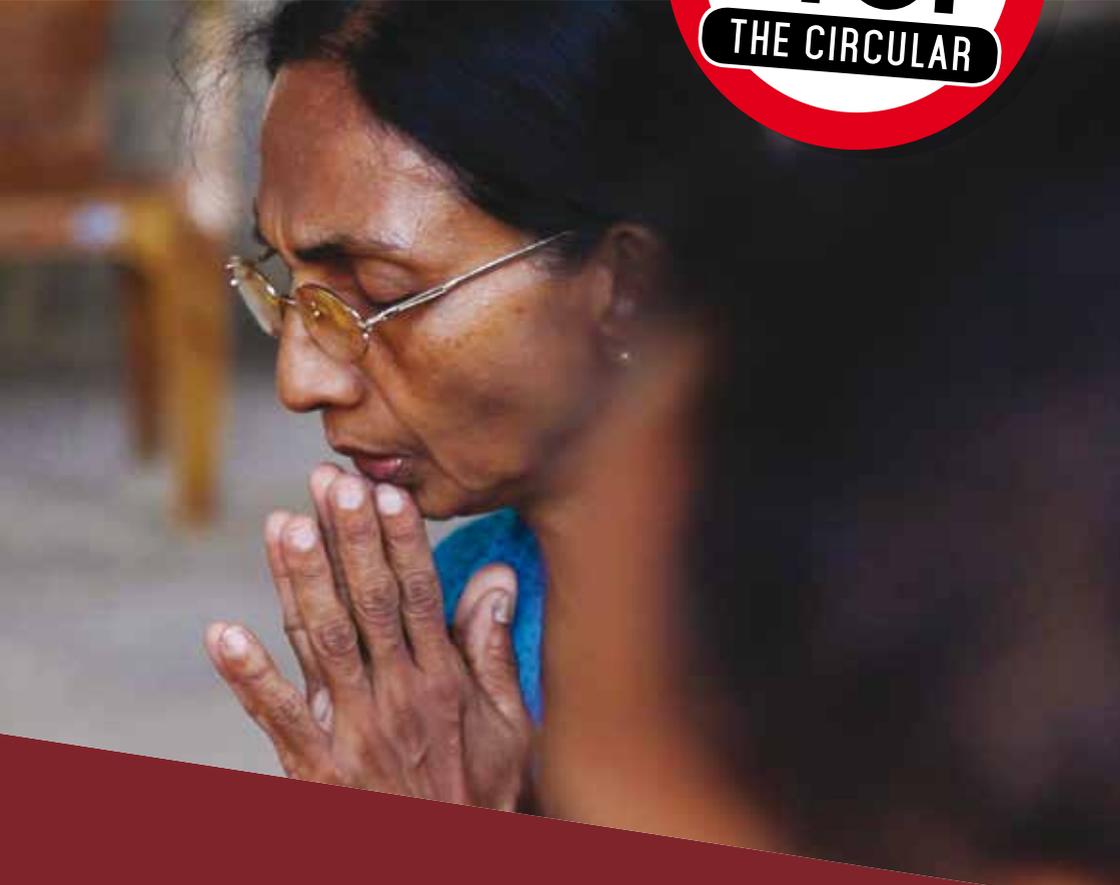
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Registered Charity 280577

release
INTERNATIONAL
voice of persecuted christians

PRAY FOR
SRI LANKA

#stopthecircular



Christians in Sri Lanka are under pressure as Buddhist extremists stir up opposition against them, often with the backing of local government officials. Please use this special guide to pray for Sri Lanka for 31 days and stand with our brothers and sisters in Christ in this beautiful island nation.

SRI LANKA PROFILE

The growth of evangelical Christianity in Sri Lanka since 1980 has met with violent opposition from Buddhist extremists. Persecution has intensified since 2012, coinciding with a rise in Buddhist nationalism.

There have been attacks on churches and Christians, some serious. In many cases, Buddhist monks have led violent mobs. Christians say local government officials and police do little to prevent attacks – and are sometimes complicit in them.

Anti-Christian violence has abated somewhat since 2015, when President Maithripala Sirisena came to power, pledging to uphold religious freedoms guaranteed in the constitution. Yet, there has been an increase in legal restrictions on church activity.

Local officials are still misusing a 2008 government circular to limit religious freedom and intimidate pastors. The directive requires places of worship to be 'registered', despite there being no legal means to do so. Many 'unregistered' churches have been forced to close.

Thanks to our supporters, Release is able to fund conferences to encourage persecuted churches and a safe house for Christians in danger, as well as providing support for pastors' children.

- Religions in Sri Lanka: Buddhist 70%; Hindu 12.8%; Muslim 8.5%; Christian 8.3%; other 0.4% (Source: *Operation World* 2010)

This church is being rebuilt after two previous buildings were burnt down.



UNDER THREAT

Christians in Sri Lanka suffer discrimination, threats and sometimes violence. Often, persecution is insidious, as opponents conspire to force churches to close.

DAY 1: Christians in Sri Lanka are under pressure: threats are rife. Pastors in particular are a target and are often falsely accused of 'forcible conversion'. Pray that God will lift the heads of His people in Sri Lanka (Psalm 3:3) and help them focus on Him.

DAY 2: In Puttalam district, complaints from neighbours about a church 'creating a disturbance' quickly escalated into claims that it was 'unauthorised' and should be closed. The church is seeking legal advice. Many other churches face a similar threat.

DAY 3: A pastor in Puttalam district was targeted by a drunken mob, who insulted him and stole church documents from him. An official and Buddhist monks have since told the pastor to close his church, which he has refused to do.

DAY 4: A 500-strong mob surrounded a Christian family's home in Galle district and threatened violence if they refused to stop using their home for church prayer meetings. The house was later damaged in a suspected arson attack.

DAY 5: A pastor from Gampaha district was abducted and suffered partial strangulation as he responded to a fake call to pray for a sick neighbour. His attackers threatened to destroy his church if he did not stop the worship there.

DAY 6: A mob led by Buddhist monks raided a church service in Kurunegala district and threatened the pastor. Local police have refused to provide protection. Many pastors have told Release they fear for their families' safety.

DAY 7: Thank God for the overcoming faith of Pastor 'Ron': his faith remains strong despite constant pressure from Buddhist extremists. They had him detained briefly as a 'terrorist', and have driven him from his home twice.

DAY 8: Pastor 'Paul' is still coming to terms with an assault by nationalists two years ago, which left him with spinal injuries. He has had to stop all activities in his home church; pray for God's wisdom as Paul considers how to continue his outreach.

POWER AND AUTHORITY

Sri Lanka's national Government has taken steps to uphold religious rights in the past year – but pro-Buddhist local government officials often support persecution of Christians at community level.

DAY 9: Increasingly, instances of persecution are being instigated or carried out by local government officials. Pray that all those in authority will commit to upholding religious freedom for all citizens, regardless of their own faith.

DAY 10: Please pray that the local authorities will take their legal duties more seriously and fulfil them to the best of their ability. Apathy and inaction allow religious intolerance to grow.

DAY 11: Some local officials are misusing a 2008 government circular which requires churches to 'register' officially, despite there being no legal process by which to do so. Some 'unregistered churches' have been closed down. Pray this circular will be withdrawn.

DAY 12: Pray for the Buddhist monks who instigate many of the attacks on Christians and whose standing in the community helps stir up opposition. Pray that they will examine their hearts. Pray

that moderate Buddhists will begin to stand up for minority Christians' rights.

DAY 13: Buddhist monks have sometimes refused to allow Christians to bury their dead in public cemeteries. Some pastors have been prevented from conducting weddings. Pray state officials will intervene to protect religious rights.

DAY 14: Thank God that Sri Lanka's President Maithripala Sirisena has pledged to safeguard religious freedom. Pray that he will resist pressure from Buddhist nationalists and champion the rights of minorities.

DAY 15: Pray for Sri Lanka's Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, who has spoken up for equal rights for all citizens. Thank God for his boldness; pray that his words will translate into firm action.

DAY 16: Pray that the Universal Periodic Review on Sri Lanka by the United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (OHCHR) in 2017 will result in greater religious freedom in the nation.

TAKE ACTION

Please sign Release's [#stopthecircular](https://www.releaseinternational.org) petition calling on the Sri Lankan Government to withdraw the 2008 circular and uphold religious freedom. Go to www.releaseinternational.org or ring 01689 823491 if you'd like us to send you a copy. Please return your completed forms to us ASAP and definitely by the end of April.

STRENGTHENING THE CHURCH

Just as Aaron and Hur held up Moses' arms in battle (Exodus 17:12), Christians around the world are called to strengthen Sri Lankan believers who are being persecuted.

DAY 17: Thank God for Release's partner in Sri Lanka as its legal team defends the rights of persecuted Christians and seeks to be a voice for an oppressed minority. Pray that God will grant them His authority and protection, grace and wisdom.

DAY 18: Pray for the success of Release's petition calling for the withdrawal of the circular by the Government in Colombo (see Take Action). Pray that the President himself will hear this call and instruct officials to scrap the directive.

DAY 19: Pray that even the most remote local churches will know they are not forgotten by their global church family. Pray that more and more Christian workers will be able to attend and be encouraged by our partner's Shalom Camps.

DAY 20: Praise God for the faithfulness and generosity of those offering refuge to persecuted Christians. Pray that both they and those they host will experience God's peace and presence.

DAY 21: Our partner runs a camp each year for children whose parents are pastors or Christian workers experiencing persecution. Pray that God will provide so that this camp can continue, so many more children can be encouraged.

DAY 22: One Release partner in Sri Lanka is working hard to educate lawyers about persecution, trying to build up a network of advocates who will defend Christians' religious rights.

DAY 23: Release supports children's education by providing, for example, school uniform, books, medicine or food for persecuted families. Pray that these gifts will help keep children's hope and joy alive. Many children of evangelical Christians suffer discrimination at school and come under pressure to take part in Buddhist rituals.

UNITED IN JESUS' NAME

The church in Sri Lanka is growing. It must unite in love, so that it can help promote tolerance in society.

DAY 24: Pray for unity among all denominations: pray that churches will unite as one body in the name of Jesus Christ, so that His love for Sri Lanka will be evident to all.

DAY 25: Evangelical Christians make up just one per cent of the Sri Lankan

The information in this prayer guide may be reproduced in church magazines and news bulletins, provided the source, Release International, is acknowledged.



population. They tend to be a key target for persecution. Pray that their witness as 'salt of the earth' will have a powerful impact on society (Matthew 5:13).

DAY 26: Pray that God will provide so that rural evangelical churches that are half built can be completed and so that those churches that have been damaged can be repaired.

DAY 27: Pray for believers who are not currently attending a church or receiving discipleship, due to persecution. Pray that their faith will remain strong and they will find fellowship through other means.

DAY 28: Pray that Christians in Sri Lanka will see persecution as a prompt to seek God's face and His counsel. Pray they will trust in Him with

all their heart and not lean on their own understanding.

DAY 29: Pray that, despite intimidation, churches in Sri Lanka will continue to spread the gospel and not be ashamed to do so (Romans 1:16). Pray that the church will reach into remote rural areas and touch 'unreached' ethnic groups.

DAY 30: Ask God to strengthen and teach pastors in Sri Lanka, so that they become, like Him, good shepherds to their congregations, able to guide and protect them. Thank God that He is raising up the next generation of Christian leaders – men and women after His own heart.

DAY 31: Sri Lankans continue to have deep wounds after the civil war. Ask God to use His people as channels of reconciliation, healing and blessing.