

sept oct 2016

voice of persecuted christians

release

FACING DEATH FOR THE GOSPEL

'Love your enemies': defectors receive training to share God's love inside repressive North Korea



Welcome

by Paul Robinson, CEO

A picture of reality

A little while ago I travelled to South Korea to spend time with defectors from North Korea who have come to faith. It was humbling to meet some who are today being trained by our partners to be involved in getting the gospel message into North Korea. Others are actually going back into the country to share the good news.

Yes, that's right – they are choosing to go back into North Korea!

Not to the free West or even China or Thailand, but back into what is the most repressive nation on earth, potentially to die in a concentration camp for their faith, alone and forgotten by almost everyone except God.

If we ever needed to picture in our modern world what Jesus meant when He said 'take up your cross and follow me', this is surely it.

Sometimes we read the words and say to ourselves: 'Yes, I'm prepared to take up my cross.' But we can't really picture a situation where that would happen.

That is what our persecuted brothers and sisters give us – a picture of reality.

They challenge us in our commitment, but they also bring to life Jesus's words. They give us concrete examples of

how faith is worked out. They show us what it really means to give up everything for the gospel. They also reveal the transforming power of God – after all, what is worth going back to such a place as North Korea for?

'We need to listen to persecuted Christians'

It must be something so important it transcends death. It must be a love that transcends all loves. If we ever needed proof that Jesus died and rose from the grave, we don't have to listen to biblical historians. We need to listen to persecuted Christians.

Read more about Paul's visit to South Korea on page 6.

International Day of Prayer

One important way of supporting persecuted Christians is for you and your church to take part in this year's **International Day of Prayer for the persecuted church (IDOP)** on **Sunday, November 20**.

This is much more than individual churches praying for persecuted Christians. It's all about the Body of Christ standing as one and praying together, so your support is vital. You can find out more on page 12.



WHAT A CHALLENGE!

A big **THANKYOU** to our eight brave Release supporters who took on the Release Abseil Challenge with our CEO in July. Read their story on page 14.

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Persecuted Christians really are blessed, argues Amy Orr-Ewing



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



Evangelist killed while preaching

The last words of a Nigerian evangelist who was killed while she was street-preaching were: 'Blood of Jesus,' her husband said.

Eunice Mojisola Olawale, a deaconess in the Redeemed Christian Church of God that her husband pastors in Abuja, was stabbed to death by Islamists in July. The mother of seven children was killed two weeks before her 42nd birthday.

'My wife loved Jesus so very much,' said pastor Olawale Elisha. 'People close to where she was killed told us that her last words were "Blood of Jesus! Blood of Jesus! Blood of Jesus! ". And that was the end.'

A Muslim leader and five others from a mosque in the Gbazangō area of

Kubwa, Abuja, have been arrested in connection with the murder.

Pastor Elisha, whose church has about 70 members, said God has given Christians a ministry of reconciliation. He hopes that the killers repent so they can join his wife in heaven.

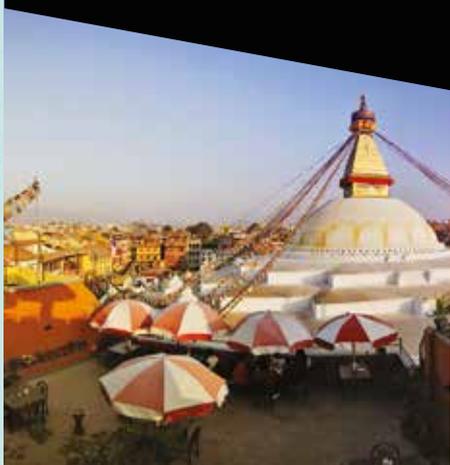
'Our persecutors were also created in God's image,' he said. 'It is because we are weak that we think people who do evil are stronger. But if we are committed, God knows how to handle our persecutors and increase people coming to His kingdom.'

Pray that those who killed Eunice will indeed know the reconciling power of the gospel. Pray too for Pastor Elisha and his seven children.

Christians to share their beliefs with others in their homes, online and in the open air – anywhere outside a registered church building in fact. So a conversation about God with a non-believer in the street could be seen as illegal missionary activity.

Russian church leaders plan to lobby deputies newly appointed to the Duma in September to amend the law while Christian lawyers are also planning to appeal to the Constitutional Court.

Pray that the Duma will amend the new law.



Christians arrested in Nepal

Eight Christians were arrested in Dolakha District, 130km east of the capital Kathmandu, after being accused of converting others to Christianity.

Amongst those detained were the Christian principals of Mount Valley Boarding School and Modern Nepal School, as well as some of the staff of Teach for Nepal, a Christian volunteer organisation.

They were arrested for handing out the Christian book *A Great Story* to 885 students.

While the seven men and one woman were released following appeals by Christian leaders, local politicians who reported them to police are pressing for charges on the ground that the 2015 Nepalese Constitution prohibits missionary activity.

Pray that God will strengthen the eight who were arrested.

Sharing your faith in Russia now against the law

A new law rushed on to the statute books in Russia could mean stiff fines for Christians who share their faith.

The controversial law, which came into force in July, aims to crack down on terrorism and extremism. However, Christians fear it will have the effect of linking them with potential terrorists. The law, passed by the Russian Duma (assembly), will make it unlawful for

Bible college students detained

Two Hmong Bible college students in Laos recently found themselves in prison – for talking to villagers.

David and Visay needed to conduct research as part of their studies, and chose to survey 11 Hmong villages.

Although they had sought the permission of local leaders, David was arrested by four policemen shortly after he began talking to villagers. The police told him: 'Because you are sharing about Jesus, we've come to catch you.'

When Visay went to the police to ask for David's release, he was arrested too.

Conditions in the prison were poor and they were given just one small bowl of rice twice a day.

After two days, Visay's brother paid his fine, and he was released. But David was detained for several months

because he told police that he was planning to hold a conference for Hmong Christians.

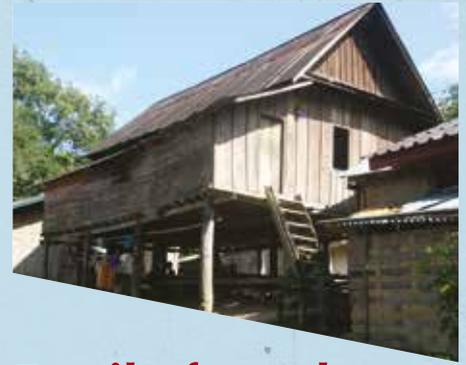
Undeterred by their experience, both men graduated from Bible school and are now actively sharing the gospel.

Visay said that the experience 'gave me more boldness and more understanding of how to do ministry. But I need to be more careful than last time.'

According to our partner in Laos, believers may not be aware of persecution, especially in rural areas. 'They tend to think the whole country is like where they live, so they may not understand the danger they could be in,' he said.

Names have been changed

Pray that God would protect David and Visay and that they see many lives transformed by the gospel in Laos.



Stock photo

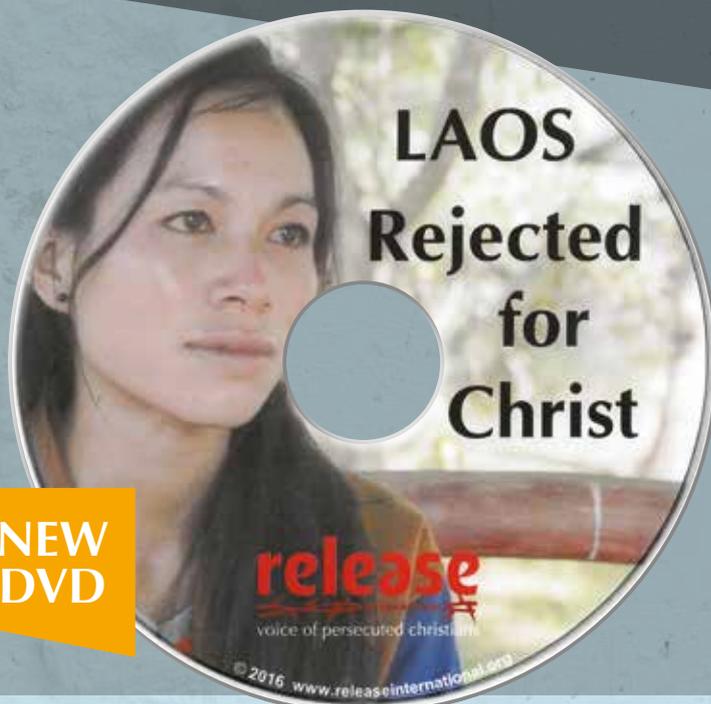
Family forced from their home

A family of Khmu Christians in Laos have been forced to leave their home after receiving threats from a village leader.

Havika (not his real name) told Release partners that the leader had threatened him and his family because five other Khmu families in the village had come to Christ. The village leader apparently believed that the other families would abandon their new Christian faith if Havika and his family left.

Please pray that Havika and his family, as well as the new believers, will remain strong in their faith.

Discover what it's like to be a Christian in Laos



Our latest DVD *Rejected for Christ* tells the moving stories of three converts in the Buddhist nation of Laos who are remaining strong in their faith, despite opposition and rejection. And a bonus film on the DVD shows how your support is helping to equip and encourage church leaders today.

Free to supporters, it's ideal for use in a prayer group or home group.

Call: 01689 823491

Watch now at
[youtube.com/ReleaseInternational](https://www.youtube.com/ReleaseInternational)





NORTH KOREA

Photo: Reuters/Kim Kyung-Hoon



FACING DEATH FOR THE GOSPEL

Your support is enabling courageous Christians to share their faith with the people of North Korea, the world's most repressive nation. Release CEO Paul Robinson reports on his recent visit to meet defectors now living in South Korea.

☞ The morning after I arrived in South Korea I woke at 5am, eager to begin our journey to the North Korean border. Here I met around 30 North Korean defectors who were taking part in a Christian service of worship led by our partner.

Most of these defectors were quite young. All seemed to express faith in Christ or have some meaningful interest in Him.

Inside North Korea Christians are extremely careful about who they talk to about their faith. Most will not even talk with close family members because doing so can easily result in being reported to government officials, being sent

to concentration camps or even execution.

And because owning a Bible is highly illegal, North Koreans who come to faith in Christ often don't know a lot about the Scriptures.

Training

That's why our partner Voice of the Martyrs Korea runs a Bible training school that is geared to supporting their unique needs, which includes helping defectors adjust to life in the very different environment of South Korea.

The school grounds these precious believers in the Word of God and offers them a deeply relational model

of Christ-centred discipleship. **Your gifts and prayers support this vital ministry**, so it was a special privilege for me to meet first-hand some of the believers you are helping.

'No one had taught or prepared them as deeply as our partners'

I was able to speak with several graduates of the training school and it was clear that it really accomplishes what it sets out to achieve. All those I spoke to have a developed understanding of the Bible and had memorised many passages of Scripture — not just verses, but whole chapters!

Every one of them independently told me the same story: that throughout their whole journey of faith and defection, including being at various churches in South Korea, no one had taught or prepared them as deeply as our partners.

The training school equips them to share their faith meaningfully with others, and many engage in missionary activity to reach the people of North Korea. This is something they are really passionate about!

'Hana' (not her real name) fled from North Korea to China when she was 27 years old.

Beaten

'On my journey I was sent back to North Korea several times, and I was also beaten harshly in jail inside China,' she said. 'My two sisters, older brother and father were captured and sent back to North Korea. I have no news of them, and really miss them. This breaks my heart.'

Yet despite her sorrow, Hana is also determined to reach out to the people of North Korea with the love of Jesus.

'I really like packing the small New Testaments which we send into North Korea,' she said.

As I saw first-hand, these New Testaments are regularly 'launched' into North Korea using high-grade weather balloons filled with hydrogen gas. This is a sophisticated operation



Sending the Word: Release's Paul Robinson helps to prepare one of the high-grade weather balloons used by our partner to send New Testaments into North Korea.

that has been refined by our partner during the past ten years, helping them send many tens of thousands of Bibles to the North Korean people.

'I pray for every Bible'

The launches are even monitored by GPS to ensure that the balloons reach their targets.

As one defector told me: 'I pray for every Bible because if only one soul is saved by our work I will rejoice!'

Our partner also broadcasts Christian radio programmes into North Korea, presented by believers who have been trained at the Bible school.



Paul meets North Korean defectors at the training school run by our partner Voice of the Martyrs Korea.

It's estimated that as many as two million people may be able to hear these: the Government encourages citizens to own radios so they can receive official propaganda.

In addition, a number of trained believers even choose to risk their lives by returning to North Korea as secret missionaries. If they are discovered by the authorities, they will almost certainly be imprisoned and tortured, perhaps executed. In fact one of our partner's team members had been brutally martyred just a few weeks before my visit.

I'm truly humbled that God has enabled Release and our partner to serve such brave believers.

It is **your prayers and gifts** that help the Bible training school to keep going year after year, patiently preparing godly men and women to reach the most repressed nation on earth. **J**



Your support will help to disciple defectors at this Bible training centre in South Korea. Many of the students have a deep passion to share the gospel inside North Korea.

WILL YOU HELP TO DISCIPLE NORTH KOREAN CHRISTIANS?

By sending a gift of £10 or whatever you can share today you can ensure that our partner, Voice of the Martyrs in South Korea, can:

- Encourage North Korean defectors to come to terms with the trauma they experienced in their long and dangerous journeys to freedom.
- Continue to disciple defectors at the Bible training school they have set up in South Korea. Some will become missionaries and evangelists working with the underground church inside North Korea.

Give using the enclosed form

Call: 01689 823491

**Give online:
lovekillshate.org**

PRAY

for North Korea



Our 12-minute video *No Other God* features the moving testimonies of North Koreans who have escaped from the brutal hermit kingdom.

Call: **01689 823491**
for your free copy

Although made in 2011, before the death of Kim Jong-il, the DVD still reflects the current state of Christian persecution.

Lord, we ask that You shake North Korea with huge waves of revival.

We ask that You fill North Korea with the wind of Your Holy Spirit.

We ask that You make the capital Pyongyang experience a revival even greater than the revival of 1907.

Please restore the conscience of North Korean leaders.

Please bring these leaders to repentance.

Father, let us see North Korea in the way that You do.

And help us to pray not just for our North Korean brothers and sisters, but with them.

Written by Release partner, Voice of the Martyrs Korea

Please use this prayer in your church

GOOD NEWS



TOWARDS A BETTER LIFE: Thanks to your support for our Strength to Stand (S2S) groups in Pakistan, lives are being changed. Brick kiln worker Rubina (pictured) has just started a small business selling snacks, drinks and toiletries: earning extra money to support her family. 'The group gave them ideas to generate income – and dream of a better life,' said our partner.



IN PRISON, BUT RESTING IN GOD

Chinese house church pastor Yang Hua recently wrote to his wife from prison, sharing good news of answered prayer, and reminding her of the eternal promises of God.

To my dear wife

I'm well!

It must be the result of everyone's prayers that my lower back pain is no longer an issue. I sleep soundly at night.

The Book of Isaiah says, 'In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength' (Isaiah 30:15). It's a kind of rest, staying inside.

You shouldn't be too anxious. It's best to remain peaceful and wait for God. God is omniscient. I believe that He never makes a mistake.

Let's pray and leave things to God. Let's carry the cross and hasten down the road to heaven, until the day we meet the Lord.

Always be happy and peaceful. Never stop praying. Be grateful, because that's God's will conveyed through Jesus Christ.

Amen! Emmanuel!

Love, your husband

SIGN OUR ONLINE PETITION AND SUPPORT PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS IN PAKISTAN

Thank you to everyone who has signed our online petition at change.org. If you haven't, it's not too late to make your voice heard.



1. Go to: change.org and search for 'Repeal Pakistan's blasphemy laws'
2. Sign the petition
3. Leave a comment if you wish
4. Share the petition with your Facebook friends directly from change.org.
5. If you wish to collect signatures in your church download the form from: releaseinternational.org/pakistan-petition

Sign today at change.org

PRAY FOR PRISONERS OF FAITH IN IRAN



Ebrahim Firouzi

Ebrahim, 31, a welder, was sentenced in January 2015 to five years in prison for allegedly 'disturbing the national security of Iran' by organising Christian meetings.

He had previously served prison terms for founding a Christian website, evangelism and having contact with so-called anti-Islamic agents abroad.

Ebrahim is currently detained in Evin prison, Tehran.

'We sometimes have to sacrifice our freedom to live in God's love,' he wrote. 'Pray for the reopening of churches that the Government has forcibly closed.'

Prisoner Profile available from releaseinternational.org

Maryam, 37, was arrested in 2012 and sentenced to four years' imprisonment for 'acting against national security'.

Her 'crimes' included converting from Islam, setting up house churches, evangelising Muslim women and youth and propagating Christianity.

Maryam suffers from a hole-in-the-heart condition, and has been denied medical treatment while being held in Evin prison.

Following a hunger strike she was allowed to go to hospital for three weeks in June - after her family paid a security bond of £80,000. However, she was unable to receive sufficient treatment before being sent back to prison.

Prisoner Profile available from releaseinternational.org



Maryam Naghash Zargaran

Evin prison, Tehran

Photo: Mahabat News

PRISONERS

It is estimated that around 90 Christians are being held in prison today in Iran because of their faith in Jesus Christ. Inside jail conditions are poor and prisoners may be denied medical treatment. Most are likely to experience interrogation and torture.



Behnam Irani

Pastor Behnam is currently serving a five-year sentence in Karaj for offences against national security. He has been held in appalling conditions and has suffered severe ill-health, including a bleeding ulcer and herniated disc. His family have been concerned that he may die in prison. He is due to complete his sentence in October 2016: please pray for his release.

Prisoner Profile available from releaseinternational.org.
Support Behnam as a Facebook cause: releaseinternational.org/behnam.

WILL YOU SUPPORT CHRISTIANS IN IRAN?



Your generous gift will enable our partners in Iran to:

- Respond to the urgent needs of individuals and families who are being persecuted.
- Encourage and support families of prisoners of faith.
- Train and mentor underground church leaders and mission workers to share the good news of Jesus.

To give today call: 01689 823491 or visit: releaseinternational.org

'WHETHER I AM IN CHAINS OR DEFENDING AND CONFIRMING THE GOSPEL, ALL OF YOU SHARE IN GOD'S GRACE WITH ME'

PHILIPPIANS 1:7

Pin this on your church noticeboard to encourage prayer for Christian prisoners in Iran.



Sri Lankan Christians face discrimination by local authorities and Buddhist militants.

Christians in Sri Lanka are suffering discrimination because a non-legislative directive known as Circular 2008 is being used against them to close church buildings and restrict religious freedom.

This year a number of pastors in Sri Lanka have received written ultimatums from local authorities stating that their Christian meetings are illegal and must be immediately registered. If not, the letter warns, their church will be closed.

While the authorities cite a government circular as the basis of their action, a Release partner says that this has no legal validity.

'The circular was issued by the Ministry of Buddha Sasana and Religious Affairs in 2008,' said our partner.

'Government officials are discriminating against Christians'

'It says that any new construction of a place of worship must obtain approval from them. Usually circulars need to be based on parliamentary legislation,

but this circular is not. However, even though the directive specifically says new construction, it is routinely used against Christian prayer meetings and services, and against churches which have been in existence for a long time, even prior to 2008.

'Local government officials are discriminating against Christians. There is no law in place for registration of church buildings in Sri Lanka.'



For example, in February the pastor of a church in Puttalam district received a letter from the Divisional Secretary of the area. The letter claimed that the church was unauthorised, according to Circular 2008.

Later the pastor was on his way to church, when he was followed by two men on a motorbike. The pastor was then accosted by a drunken mob who pulled him out of his vehicle and interrogated him about his Christian activities. The mob abused him verbally and stole church documents from his vehicle.

In a separate incident in January two plain-clothed policemen questioned the pastor of a church in Kurunegala district. An hour later, two uniformed policemen arrived and told the pastor that a complaint had been filed against the church, saying that it was unauthorised.

The pastor was asked to attend an inquiry the following day: also present were two Buddhist monks from the village temple, five villagers and the Officer-in-Charge (OIC).

The OIC repeated that the pastor's place of worship was illegal, and the Buddhist monks said that they would not allow the pastor to register his place of worship. They demanded that he stop all religious worship activities immediately. The villagers cited Circular 2008.

Refusal

The pastor, however, asserted his rights and informed the OIC that he would continue with his religious activities.

The OIC said that he would inform the Divisional Secretary and told the pastor that he would bring a court order against the church if the pastor's activities amounted to a breach of peace in the village.

Given these incidents, Christians in Sri Lanka are concerned that Circular 2008 could become law.

'Right now the circular is very much a threat and it could lead to law, but we don't know about that as yet,' said our partner. *'The problem*

PRAY FOR SRI LANKA

'Pray that Circular 2008 will be cancelled and that the Lord will give us wisdom in the work we do with persecuted Christians,' says Release's partner.

though is that local authorities are acting as if it was a law already.'

In response, our partner has supported pastors facing similar threats, with some success.

'We sent legal letters questioning the authority of the circular, which eventually stopped the harassment. The authorities were unable to give a legal response.'

Petition

In addition, our partner is asking supporters to sign a petition that calls on the Sri Lankan Government to cancel Circular 2008 and to protect the rights of the Christian minority. This will be enclosed with the next edition of *Release* magazine.

'Signing the petition, and asking others in your church to sign, will pressurise the government to take effective steps,' said our partner.

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

Sunday, November 20, 2016



Hundreds of churches around the world will be praying for persecuted Christians on November 20: why not join them and make your prayers count!

This year we are asking supporters to pray and take action to help persecuted Christians in Sri Lanka (see opposite).

Further details will be given in the next edition of *Release* magazine, which will also include the STOP THE CIRCULAR petition. Your IDOP church service will be a great opportunity to obtain signatures.

ABSEIL CHALLENGE

THE £15,000 DROP

CEO Paul Robinson and eight hardy Release supporters recently overcame their fears to conquer the world's tallest permanent abseiling tower. Release staff member Emöke asked them why they did it.

LOCATION: National Abseil Centre, Northampton.

STRUCTURE: Lift tower, used in the 1980s and 1990s to test lifts in free fall. AKA the 'Northampton lighthouse'.

TOWER HEIGHT: 400 feet (122 metres). Due to bad weather, the abseil took place on the inside of the tower.

THE TEAM: Arnold, Danny, David, Helen, Julian, Paul, Russ, Ryan and Tamsin (pictured top).

WHY DID YOU DO IT? 'To help the persecuted church. It's a good way to bring this issue to the fore and to raise money,' said Julian. 'I love a challenge,' said Paul. 'We have it easy in Great Britain,' said Arnold. 'We need to think of people who have to live their faith in very difficult conditions.'



WHAT REACTION DID YOU GET FROM OTHER PEOPLE?

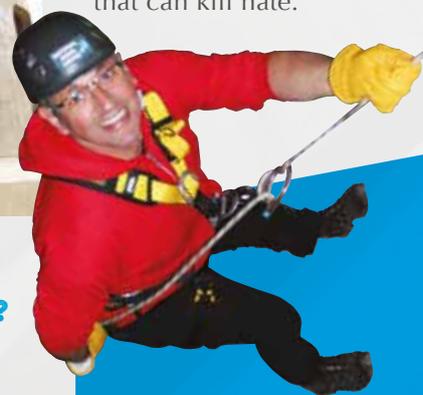
'I got a lot of "I'm glad it's not me" comments,' said Julian, 'but otherwise a lot of support and people were really encouraging.' 'Some people thought I was crazy,' said Helen. 'They were quite surprised that I would do something like this.'

WHAT WAS IT LIKE? 'I only realised how nervous I was when I rounded the corner and saw this great big tower in the middle of a housing estate,' said Helen. 'Stepping off the platform was the best part,' said Russ.

AS A SPECTATOR SAID: 'I'm full of admiration ... I'd never jump off there,' said John.

TO SPONSORS: 'Thank you so much for your amazing generosity,' said Tamsin. 'It's very humbling to think how this money will change the lives of our persecuted brothers and sisters around the world.'

'Your support will enable them to share God's love: the love that God instills by His Holy Spirit, the love that can kill hate.'



HELP PAUL REACH HIS £5,000 TARGET!

Paul has raised over £4,100 so far from generous friends like you. But he needs another £900 to reach his target. Will you help him? Call: 01689 823491 to donate or go to: justgiving.com/Paul-Robinson73. Altogether the team hopes to raise £15,000 for persecuted Christians: a fantastic effort!



RAISING AWARENESS

The Release Potential team had an inspiring time at this year's Big Church Day Out (BCDO) challenging young people to help persecuted Christians around the world.

'Big Church Day Out has become one of the country's largest annual gatherings of the church,' said Release Potential's Lyanna. 'So this summer we asked our Change Makers Molly and Rachel and volunteers Annette and Joy to join us on our exhibition stand.'

'We spent the weekend raising awareness and challenging young people from across the UK. We had such a great time, filled with so many inspiring conversations!'

PLANTING SEEDS

I've volunteered to help at BCDO before, but it never ceases to amaze me just how many Christians I meet during the weekend who are totally oblivious of the plight of Christians all over the world.

So the discussions we had with young people were a highlight. Many were really interested to find out more, and their questions left me feeling absolutely thrilled. In these conversations we are planting seeds: who knows what God could do in these lives as a result?]

Annette

PASSION

This was a great experience for me. Volunteering with Release Potential is amazing: I get to meet so many people with a passion for the persecuted church, which is very dear to my heart.

We offered our famous 'tribal' face paint as a sign of identifying with the 'stripes' suffered by persecuted believers. These certainly attract young people and children to the stall and are a great way of communicating the basics of persecution.]

Joy

LYANNA'S SAD FAREWELL



Release Potential Team Leader Lyanna is shortly to leave Release in order to study in the US.

'Saying goodbye to Release is something that I knew would never be easy,' she says. 'Working at Release has been one of the most important and inspirational things I have ever done.'

'I am so pleased to have met Christians here and abroad who have helped to shape and change who I am: I genuinely aspire to be like them.'

'Although it is hard to say goodbye, I know that God has many new opportunities in store for Release Potential.'

Help to uncover persecution



You too can help to raise awareness with young people and students in your church by using our Persecution Uncovered resource pack, packed with inspiring ideas for running interactive sessions.

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

FOLLOW US

Twitter Facebook YouTube Releasepotential.org



JOY, PAIN AND INSPIRATION

On a sunny Saturday in June over 150 Christian women and men gathered for our conference *Blessed are the Persecuted?* which was hosted by Release Women in London. Here are some of the comments from those who attended.



Pastor Yetunde reported how Christians are continuing to suffer violent attacks in Nigeria.



Jesus really did teach: 'Blessed are the persecuted', said author and lecturer Amy Orr-Ewing (see page 18).



Release CEO Paul Robinson told the conference how Pakistan's blasphemy laws are used to persecute Christians. Pastors Waseem and Imran gave moving, first-hand accounts of the devastating bomb attack on Christian families celebrating Easter in Lahore.



Anne Coles of New Wine Network challenged supporters to prepare for persecution in the UK.



Former prisoner and Release partner Dr Berhane Asmelash described how Christians inside Eritrea are still experiencing persecution today.



‘What struck me the most was hearing about the Easter bomb blast in Pakistan. It’s not easy to understand what other people go through until you meet people who are helping these victims and refugees, like Release does all over the world.’
Joseph, Walton on Thames, Surrey.



‘It was a really joyful occasion. We heard some very serious and sad stories, and we prayed for people who were suffering. Yet there was a real sense of happiness, optimism and joy. It was a great day.’
Lavinia, Southampton



Call: 01689 823491 to request the latest copy of Release Women’s newsletter Embrace.

Audio recordings of the talks from the conference are available online at releaseinternational.org



‘The testimonies of people experiencing persecution have made it more real,’ said Helen (pictured left) from Kingston, Surrey. ‘We need to support our brothers and sisters.’
‘I didn’t recognise that this was going on,’ said Theresa from Croydon. ‘People are dying for their faith. I will ask the Holy Spirit to help me be consistent in praying.’



‘It was good to hear people from Nigeria and Eritrea give us up-to-date news of our brothers and sisters.’
Chris, Southampton

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT PERSECUTION



THE PROMISE OF BLESSING

Yes, the persecuted really are blessed, writes Amy Orr-Ewing, Christian apologist, author and lecturer and the keynote speaker at our recent conference.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:10)

Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man! Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. (Luke 6:22-23)

According to these striking words of Jesus, persecution carries the promise of blessing in the present.

This transcends human circumstances, and can be a profound experience for those who witness it.

We must remember what persecution really is: the negative treatment and reaction that we as Christians receive due to our active identification with the Lord Jesus and His purposes.

'I have never experienced such joy in worship'

These verses in Matthew and Luke tell us, surprisingly, that alongside the pain of persecution there is promised a present dimension of the kingdom of God – for the enjoyment of those being persecuted!

This is startling. Plenty and comfort in this life are not promised in the

kingdom. Instead, those who are crying tears because they've been excluded and insulted as a result of their firm allegiance to Christ have this nearness to God within their time of crisis. This is a profound and mysterious truth.

I witnessed this myself when worshipping with 250 leaders of the underground church in China. Many had suffered beatings and persecution because of their faith in Jesus. Yet I have never experienced such joy in worship!

Richard Wurmbrand, who inspired the founding of Release, wrote of literally leaping with joy in his cell as he recalled the promise of Luke 6:23 – even as his persecutors were trying to break him.

In the New Testament, Jesus' life is marked by persecution. The One who came as the light of the world was called demonised. He was maligned and accused of breaking the law, of hanging out with sinners, of being a glutton and of talking to women of notoriety. He was constantly accused.

Jesus says: 'If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first' (John 15:18).

Scripture tells us that we are to expect persecution — yet is this

topic regularly spoken about in your church?

In the New Testament we read that there is a direct link between persecution and the role of the Holy Spirit, as described throughout the book of Acts.

In Acts 5 the apostles are beaten, but rejoice (v41). In Acts 7 the outstanding leader Stephen is killed, but a seed is sown within Saul (v58) that will turn the world upside down.

In Acts 8 there are more arrests, which result in scattering the church and spreading the gospel. In Acts 9 a plot to kill Paul leads to unity amongst believers. And so it goes on.

There is a direct, dynamic link between the persecution of God's people and the church growing rapidly as God's kingdom advances. This is a biblical principle.

Today we still see the martyrdom and persecution of believers, and, at the same time, the extraordinary growth of the church and the powerful work of the Holy Spirit.

Audio recordings from the conference are available at releaseinternational.org

*Thousands of
Christian families
have been driven
from their homes in
Iraq and Syria.*



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**‘GOD WILL
JUDGE US NOT
ACCORDING
TO HOW
MUCH WE
ENDURED, BUT
HOW MUCH
WE COULD
LOVE.’**

Richard Wurmbrand, who
inspired the founding of
Release International

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PRAYERSHIELD

SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 2016



Colombian pastors from previously rebel-held areas gather at a retreat organised by a Release associate ministry.

SEPTEMBER 2016

Heavenly Father,

Thank you that you are our mighty Lord and Saviour and a gentle loving Father. You never leave me or forsake me, and underneath me are your everlasting arms (Deuteronomy 33:27) – always. I pray that every single member of my Christian family will find refuge in the shadow of your wing (Psalm 17:8). Draw them close to you, Lord, and remind them that you have the victory over sin and death. Your name be praised!

Amen.

COLOMBIA

THURSDAY 1: Praise God that the Colombian Government has agreed a ceasefire with FARC guerrillas, ending 52 years of civil war. Pray for just and lasting peace. Pray that the church will have a key role in rebuilding society.

FRIDAY 2: Many Christians were killed by guerrillas because they opposed the latter's drug activity or depleted their ranks through evangelism. Pray that their families' grace and forgiveness will help shape the new Colombia.

SATURDAY 3: Pray for Luz, whose husband Diego, a

pastor, was brutally murdered by FARC guerrillas in 2007. Luz and her three children had to relocate when Diego's killer was freed from jail last year.

SUNDAY 4: Pray for church growth in rebel-held areas of Colombia where many pastors were killed or forced to flee during the civil war.

MONDAY 5: Pray for wisdom for Colombian pastors (such as those pictured) as they minister to communities still coming to terms with violence and loss.

EGYPT

TUESDAY 6: Pray that parliamentary efforts in Egypt to repeal the country's controversial 'blasphemy law' will succeed. The law is used disproportionately against those who criticise Islam.

WEDNESDAY 7: The Egyptian Parliament is debating legislation that could strengthen Christians' religious freedom, including draft laws to regulate church construction. Pray that any new laws passed will uphold religious rights for all.

THURSDAY 8: Pray for Pastor Karas Nasr and his church in Qaryat Al Bayda village, south of Alexandria. A violent group attacked church-owned property: thank God moderate Muslims intervened to stop them.

FRIDAY 9: Security forces summoned to stop violence in Qaryat Al Bayda (above) arrested Christians whom extremists accused of wanting to build a church illegally. Pray Egyptian officials will defend minorities' religious rights.

SATURDAY 10: Release's women's ministry is helping to establish Strength to Stand (S2S) groups in Cairo, to support marginalised Christians. Pray that every woman involved will find her true identity in Christ.

SUNDAY 11: The women in the S2S groups learn to pray together, worship, read the

Bible and find out more about Jesus. The ultimate goal is for the whole community to build resilience to persecution.

MONDAY 12: Thank God that kindergarten staff have remarked that the children of women involved in our S2S groups stand out because they are 'well cared for and behave better'.

TUESDAY 13: Pray that God will continue to provide for these S2S groups so that more and more women and families in poor communities can be released into their full God-given potential.

WEDNESDAY 14: Praise God that many Muslims are coming to Christ through dreams and visions, according to church leaders. Pray that God will protect them and raise them up to be people who transform their communities.

THURSDAY 15: Many young Christian girls are groomed by Muslims, then forced to convert to Islam and marry Muslims. Men are allegedly paid large sums for each new convert and can marry up to four young girls at a time.

FRIDAY 16: Pray that God will touch the hearts of Egyptian men so that they value and respect women in their country. Pray that Christian men will lead the way in modelling how to honour women.

SATURDAY 17: In Upper Egypt in May, 300 armed men burned Christian homes and

beat, stripped and paraded a 70-year-old Christian woman after accusing her son of adultery.

CHINA

SUNDAY 18: Pray for members of Huoshi Church in Guiyang city, Guizhou: they've been banned from meeting as a body and forced to divide into small groups.

MONDAY 19: Three Huoshi Church members (above) – Pastor Yang Hua, Wang Yao and Zhang Xiuhong – are in custody. Pastor Yang's wife, Wang Hongwu (pictured), is under surveillance, as is Pastor Su Tianfu.

TUESDAY 20: Release partner China Aid reports 'a seven-fold rise in the persecution of Christians in China since 2008'. Thank God that He is still sovereign in that nation.

WEDNESDAY 21: Officials have threatened violence against Christian Bai Fengiu if he protests against their seizure of his three-acre field to build a Buddhist temple in Henan province.

THURSDAY 22: Zhongfu Wanmin Church, a house church in Guangdong, was raided seven times in May and June. Money was stolen and members were accused of illegal activities and pressured to register with the state-run Three-Self Patriotic Movement church.



Wang is under surveillance in Guizhou; her husband, Pastor Yang, is in jail.

FRIDAY 23: Christians in Guangdong and Shenzhen believe provincial authorities have launched a new campaign to suppress religious freedoms, with a particular focus on house churches.

SATURDAY 24: Pray that anyone receiving the books, Bibles and Christian resources that Release funds for distribution in China will meet with the living God in a fresh way.

PAKISTAN

SUNDAY 25: Pray for women involved in Release support groups in Pakistan called 'Light of Hope'. Pray that they will continue to grow in faith and wisdom as they learn about God's love and empower one another.

MONDAY 26: Stand with support group member Naseem in praying that her husband, a drug addict, will

come to know Christ as his Lord and Saviour. Thank God that the group strengthens her faith.

TUESDAY 27: Pray that Release's petition calling on the Pakistan Government to repeal the country's notorious blasphemy laws will have an impact. Pray that officials will take heed and that legal reform will follow.

WEDNESDAY 28: Pray that God will heal survivors of Lahore's Easter Sunday suicide bomb blast: many people have serious health issues arising from ball bearings lodged in their bodies from the blast.

THURSDAY 29: Release is sending counsellors to Pakistan to help victims traumatised by the Easter bomb blast, which claimed more than 70 lives and maimed and injured about 300.

FRIDAY 30: Pray for Pastor Riaz John and his church in Fazlia colony, Lahore: they've been threatened with further violence if they take legal action over an aggressive police raid in which Pastor Riaz was beaten.

OCTOBER 2016

NIGERIA

SATURDAY 1: Pray that many lives will be changed through Release's appeal this month to raise funds for trauma-healing workshops and essential supplies for people displaced by violence.

SUNDAY 2: Continue to pray for Danjuma Shakaru (pictured with his mother): he was left for dead after an extremist attack on his village. His faith has grown since the attack. 'Let's be faithful and let's be kind,' he says.

MONDAY 3: Methodus Chimaije Emmanuel, 24, was killed by a mob in Pandogari town, Niger state: they accused him of posting a blasphemous statement about the prophet Mohammed on Facebook.

TUESDAY 4: Two churches were destroyed in Pandogari town during the riots that followed accusations that Methodus (see previous) had committed blasphemy on Facebook.

WEDNESDAY 5: Muslim Fulani herdsmen killed three Christians in their beds in Jema in the northern Kaduna state: the dead included Zakka Kagoma, 40. Local Christians fled the area in panic.

THURSDAY 6: Pray for the family of Rev John Adeyi who was kidnapped in Benue state. He was seized in April and his body was found two months later.

FRIDAY 7: Fulani herdsmen with machetes killed Pastor Zakariya Joseph Kurah in June while he was working at his farm in Nasarawa state. Pray for his grieving family.

Villagers dug a grave for Danjuma after extremists left him for dead: he survived.



SOMALI CHRISTIANS

'I will stand for what I believe, even if it means death.'

Micah, Somali Christian in hiding

SATURDAY 8: Pray for Somali believers living in Kenya. They are often forced to hide their faith. Pray that the Kenyan church will increase its support of its Somali brothers and sisters in Christ.

SUNDAY 9: Somali Christian 'Micah' is in hiding in Kenya after receiving death threats from extremists. But he remains firm in his faith: 'I will stand for what I believe, even if it means death.'

MONDAY 10: Pray for Somali Christian 'Ruth' in Kenya: her children have decided to go to live with Muslim relatives and she has had no contact with them. Pray for relationships between them to improve.

TUESDAY 11: 'Grace' is a very poor Somali Christian who is studying theology in Kenya. Please pray that God will meet her needs, including medical costs for treatment on her eye.

WEDNESDAY 12: Pray for 'Rachel', a Somali believer in Kenya who suffers from diabetes and struggles to support her children: her husband deserted her and moved abroad.

THURSDAY 13: Pray for our partner organisation which supports Somali Christians in Kenya with training in life skills and gives them the confidence to share their faith.

FRIDAY 14: Pray for unity among cell group leaders of Somali believers in Kenya: pray that denominational differences will be put aside. Pray that the body of Somali Christians will grow in number and in faith.

SATURDAY 15: Pray for the children of Somali Christians living in Kenya: most of them face bullying and discrimination at school, often because of their faith.

SYRIA

SUNDAY 16: A suicide bomber disguised as a pastor blew himself up at St Gabriel's Church in Qamishli in June, killing three Assyrians and wounding five others.

MONDAY 17: The intended target of the suicide bombing in Qamishli (above) is believed to be Syriac Orthodox Patriarch Ignatius Aphrem II, who survived the blast. Pray for his protection.

TUESDAY 18: The church service in Qamishli (above) was being held to commemorate Christian victims of genocide 101

Syria's church has come under intense pressure during the protracted civil war.

years ago, under the Caliphate of the Ottoman Empire. Thank God that the Syrian church has survived decades of persecution.

WEDNESDAY 19: Pray that God will comfort and bless His people in Syria and across the Middle East as they suffer intense persecution.

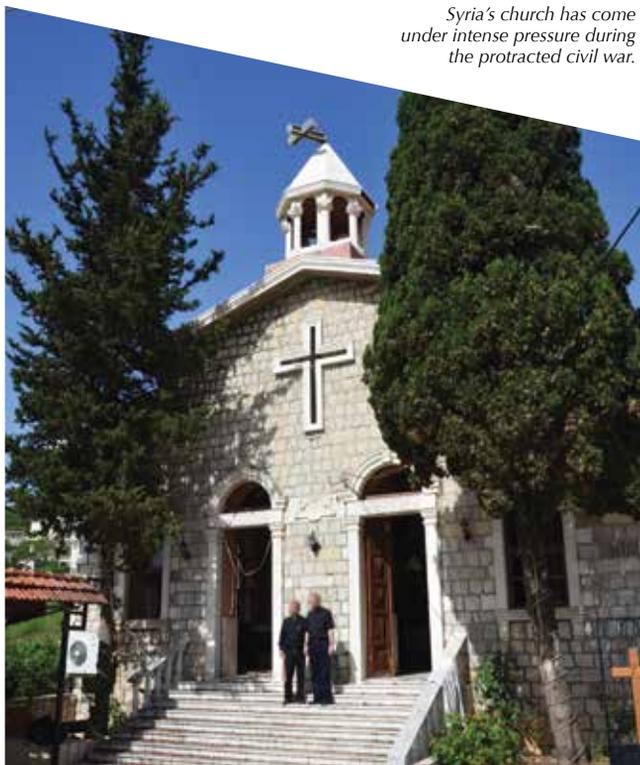
KENYA

THURSDAY 20: Thank God for trauma-healing counsellors who have helped Christians affected by extremist attacks in Mpeketoni and Hindi to start to come to terms with their painful experiences.

FRIDAY 21: Continue to pray for provision for Sarah Ambetsa and her two sons. Sarah's husband, Pastor Phillip, was killed by extremists in Likoni. The family now live in Nairobi where Sarah runs a business selling second-hand clothes, thanks to Release start-up funding.

SATURDAY 22: Give thanks that the Kenyan Government is attempting to deal with radicalisation. Pray that it will take firmer steps as the threats to security grow.

SUNDAY 23: Pray that Christians in Kenya will not be cowed by the threats of extremists but rather be bold to live out their faith and face persecution with love and forgiveness.





Maryam is serving a four-year sentence in Iran for 'acting against national security'.

IRAN

MONDAY 24: Maryam Naghash-Zargaran (pictured) was allowed out of prison to receive medical care for serious health issues in June, but was returned to jail after three weeks, before treatment was completed.

TUESDAY 25: Thank God for the release of Mohammedreza Omid. He was arrested in Rasht in May,

along with Yasser Mossayebzadeh and Saheb Fadaie. All three were released on bail: pray that any charges against them will be dropped.

WEDNESDAY 26: Praise God for women like 'Mitra' who is sharing the gospel with 82 people in Iran every day: keeping a promise she made to God after she trusted Him for her son's healing.

THURSDAY 27: Ask God to bless and protect the Release partner supplying evangelists such as Mitra (above) with Scriptures to give to those they witness to.

SRI LANKA

FRIDAY 28: Sri Lanka is to be the focus of the International Day of Prayer (IDOP) for the persecuted church next month. Pray that our church family there will know they are not forgotten.

SATURDAY 29: Pray that Release's petition to the Sri Lankan Government will

result in the withdrawal of an official circular which has been misused to persecute Christians.

SUNDAY 30: 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 country.

MONDAY 31: Pray for lawyers working with Release partners in Sri Lanka: pray that God will protect them and give them authority so that their calls for religious rights to be upheld are heard and acted upon.

Lord Jesus,

Thank you that you walk alongside us, every moment of every day. Jesus, when we walk in step with you, you make our paths straight. Lord, I lift to you my brothers and sisters who are suffering in your name today. Teach them to find the 'good ways' so that they will find rest (Jeremiah 6:16), even amid their pain. Prompt me, Lord, to walk with them more closely in prayer.

Amen.

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Sources: China Aid; Daily News Egypt; Middle East Concern; Morning Star News; Release partners; *The Independent*; VOM USA. Names in inverted commas have been changed to protect identities.

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