

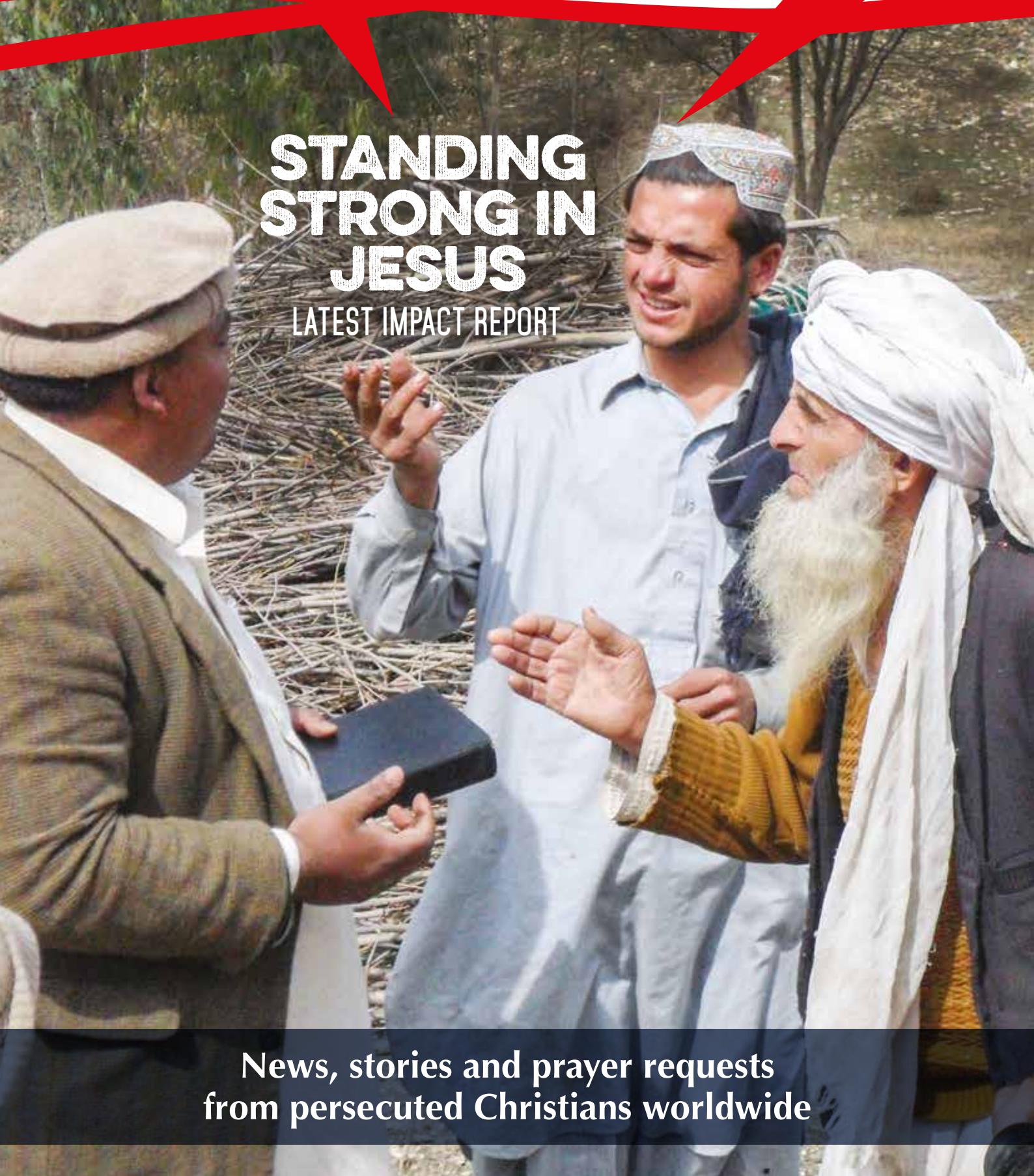
may june 2017

voice of persecuted christians

# release

## STANDING STRONG IN JESUS

LATEST IMPACT REPORT



News, stories and prayer requests  
from persecuted Christians worldwide



# Welcome

by Paul Robinson, CEO

**'You weirdos  
are all the  
same!'**

## **In Luke chapter 6, verse 28, Jesus tells us to bless those who curse us.**

A colleague was once travelling on the London Underground at night when a man somewhat the worse for wear started accosting anxious fellow travellers. He picked on one young man opposite who was sitting peacefully with his girlfriend and in a loud voice, punctuated with expletives, challenged him aggressively: '*You weirdos are all the same!*'

Unprovoked the young man looked at his girlfriend and with a smile on his face turned back to the drunk. '*I guess we are,*' he replied calmly.

The drunk started smiling and then laughing — potential enemies had now become temporary travelling buddies. The sense of relief among the passengers in the compartment was also palpable.

What had happened? The young man had completely defused the situation with kind, humorous and unexpected words; rather than exacerbate a tense situation by responding back in a similar aggressive fashion he had turned the tables and won over a potential hostile force as well as bringing peace and relief to all.

The young man had not uttered a 'blessing' over the drunk in the traditional sense of the word but his words had indeed blessed the other man: he had

turned conflict into an occasion of peace, fun and goodwill.

It's proof that when we bless those who curse us, we can defuse conflicts and make friends out of potential enemies.

In this magazine, you can read powerful testimonies of Christians who are 'blessing those who curse them'. However, unlike the incident on the train, their challenges are not temporary. They involve hostile family members and long-term threat to life.

## **Choosing to bless**

In **Kenya** Somali convert Fardowsa has chosen to bless the community that rejected her by befriending Muslim women — despite the risk to herself (see page 11). In **Laos** Boonmee is committed to honouring his parents — even after they expelled him from the family home (see page 12).

Unlike the young man on the train they cannot easily defuse hostility with a one-off sentence of course — but like him they can change situations by blessing through their actions those who hate and curse them. They can win over their persecutors just as the young man won over his aggressor.

As we pray for them to succeed in this let's also see how we can turn around hostile situations for good in our own lives by blessing those who curse us.

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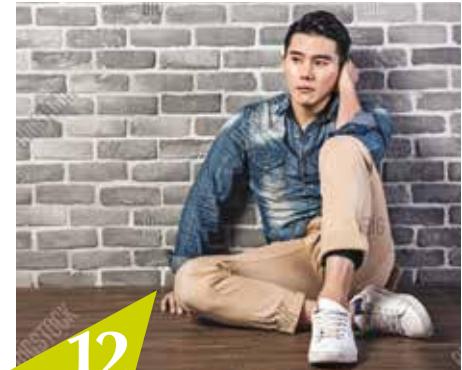
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Reflection by Daniel Macleod

# 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

## Hindu extremists beat pastor and student

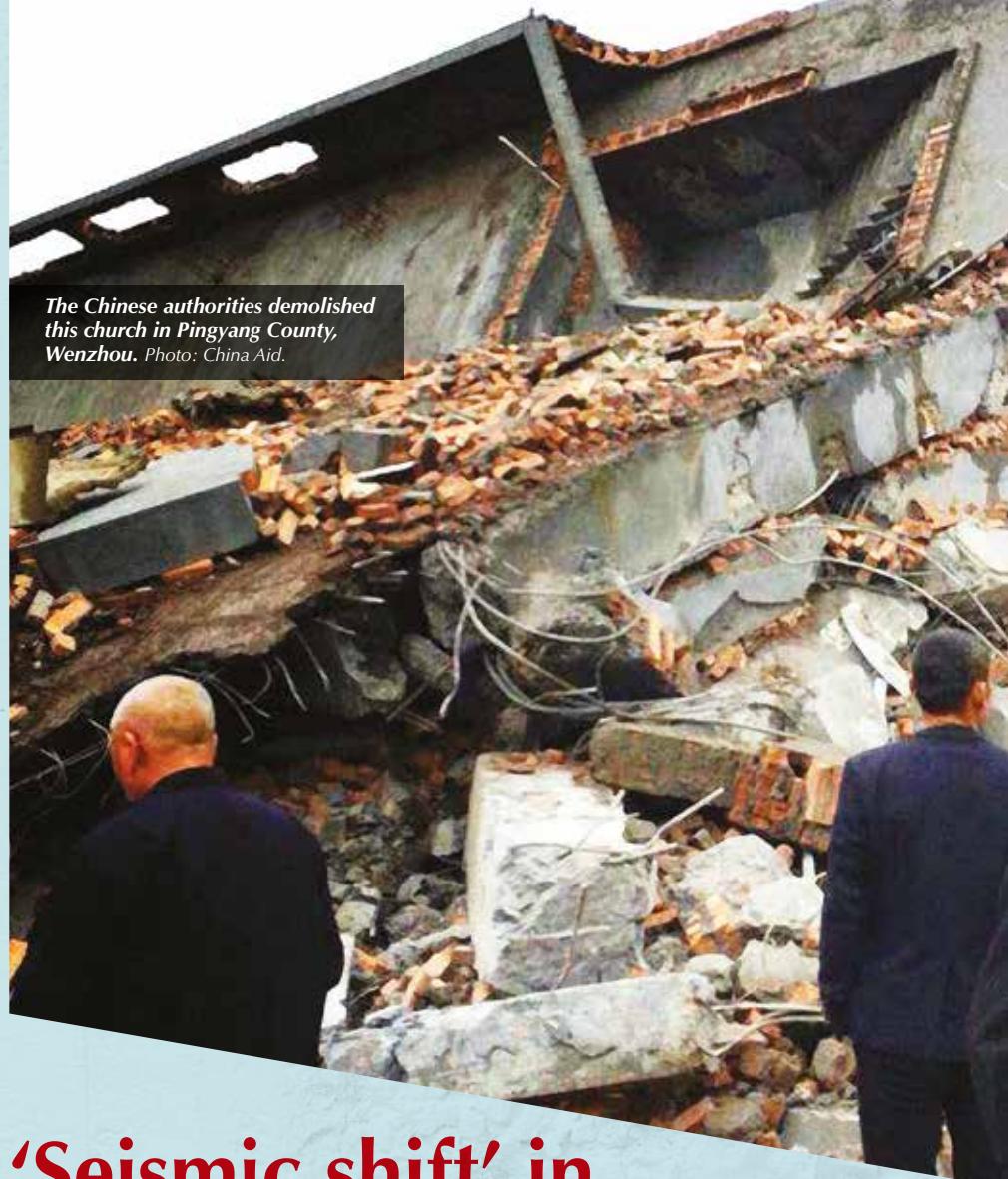
Hindu extremists in India's eastern state of Bihar lured Assemblies of God pastor Ajay Kumar and a Bible college student called Assaryav to a marketplace in March and beat them.

The extremists, members of the youth organisation Bajrang Dal, offered Pastor Kumar money to officiate at a wedding. When he refused, suspecting that this was a trap to accuse them of taking money to convert people fraudulently, they were repeatedly punched and kicked.

It is alleged that the militants intimidated a policeman at the scene to keep away during the attack. When senior officers arrived, they arrested the two Christians rather than the assailants, detaining them until after midnight.

The two Christians have been charged with the 'deliberate and malicious intention of outraging religious feelings'.

- Please pray for Pastor Kumar and Assaryav and that all charges will be dropped.



## 'Seismic shift' in China's religious policy

Release partner China Aid has warned that a 'seismic shift' in the Chinese Government's religious policy is expected to lead to further persecution of unregistered (illegal) churches.

Last year, during the National Conference of Religious Work, Chinese President Xi Jinping stated the importance of all religions in China 'persistently following the path of Sinicisation' (ie to be fully integrated with state policy). As a result, government departments have steadily increased their attacks on unregistered churches.

This new policy 'pivots on the Government's assumption that other countries are using religions to undermine its authority', said China Aid.

'Previously, the Chinese Communist Party focused its efforts on encouraging religions and socialism to mutually adapt, a policy introduced by former President Jiang Zemin.'

Consequently our partner expects that the authorities will now coerce unregistered churches to join the government-monitored Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) by threatening them with forced closure.

'Religious freedom is rapidly deteriorating,' said China Aid's Bob Fu. 'We call upon the international community to be increasingly vigilant.'

- Pray that God will give wisdom and courage to the leaders of unregistered churches as they face these new conditions.



## Mother and son arrested in Iran

Two Christian converts have been arrested in Urmia, the capital of West Azerbaijan province, Iran.

Revolutionary Guard intelligence officers raided the home of Anousheh Reza-bakhsh (known as Veronika) and her son Soheil Zagarzadeh Sani (known as Augustine) in February.

Augustine has been a keen follower of online Christian theological training programmes and Christian satellite TV.

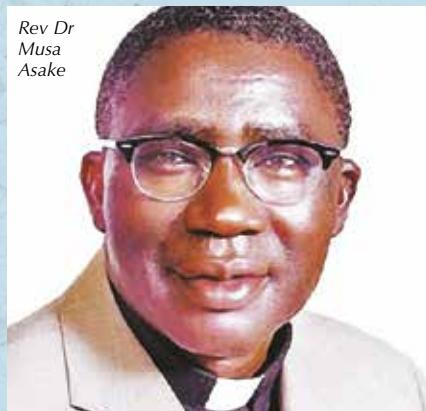
It is believed that they have been held at the intelligence building of the Revolutionary Guards, where access to information and detainees is strictly denied.

• Please pray for God's protection for both Veronika and Augustine and that they will be released soon.

## Nigerian Government stops national prayer day

Having urged journalists and Christian leaders to stop speaking about anti-Christian violence in Nigeria, the Government ordered the cancellation of a planned day of prayer and national mourning for slain Christians, due to be held on March 19.

Christian leaders report that they had been under pressure by government and security officials to cancel the day because, it was claimed, it would breach national security. The event was intended to mark the growing number of deaths of Christians caused by Muslim



Fulani herdsmen and others. The Rev Dr Musa Asake, General Secretary of the Christian Association of Nigeria, said that leaders had no choice but to cancel their plans indefinitely. This was due to 'misunderstanding, misinterpretation and subsequent security concerns', he said.

'In the meantime, we are all urged to remain steadfast and resolute in the grace of God that Nigeria shall overcome the present distress and peace shall prevail all over the nation,' he said.

• Please join believers in Nigeria by asking God to bring lasting peace to their nation.

## MORE THAN 10,000 SIGNATURES COLLECTED FOR SRI LANKA PETITION



Thanks to your fantastic efforts more than 10,000 have signed our recent petition to support persecuted Christians in Sri Lanka.

The petition, due to be delivered to the Sri Lankan High Commission in London, calls on the authorities to withdraw a government circular, issued in 2008, which is being used to intimidate and close down churches.

'This petition has certainly created awareness and helped to strengthen the cause of Christians in Sri Lanka,' said our partner, the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka.

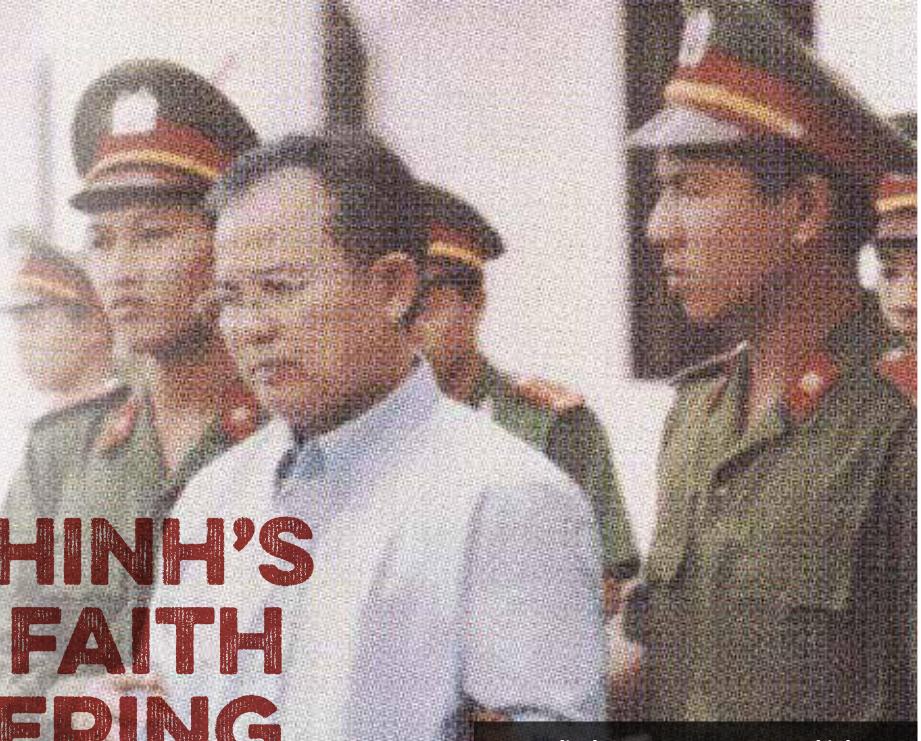
'We are grateful for all your support. Please continue to pray for the cancellation of this circular.'

• Please pray that the petition prompts the Sri Lankan Government to cancel Circular 2008.

## INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER 2017

This year's International Day of Prayer (IDOP) for persecuted Christians takes place on **Sunday November 19**. In a change from previous years, the UK Religious Liberty Commission, of which Release is a member, is urging churches to dedicate the whole month of November to remembering persecuted believers.

Please make a note of the date, and ask your church leaders now if it is possible to hold an IDOP prayer event in your church or house group. Prayer resources for use at IDOP will be available later in the year.



# PASTOR CHINH'S STORY OF FAITH AND SUFFERING

Please pray for evangelical leaders in Vietnam who are facing systematic persecution.

Churches and pastors are often under surveillance by the authorities (see opposite) — and risk beatings, imprisonment and torture for preaching the gospel and speaking out in support of religious freedom.

For example, courageous prisoner of faith Pastor Nguyen Cong Chinh, who was arrested in 2011 and sentenced to a punitive 11 years in prison for 'undermining national unity', has been repeatedly abused while in jail. These attacks have included being:

- assaulted by police while praying in his cell
- beaten by fellow prisoners, after incitement by guards
- assaulted with stun guns and pepper spray
- subjected to humiliating 'criticism sessions' by fellow inmates

Pastor Chinh has also been prohibited from praying in his cell and has been denied a Bible.

After first enduring 20 months of solitary confinement at the T20 prison in Gia Lai province, he was moved to An Phuoc prison, in the southern province of Binh Duong, where he is currently confined.

In addition to suffering prolonged separation, his wife, Tran Thi Hong, has also been subjected to systematic persecution.

In March 2016 officials tried to prevent her from meeting the US Ambassador at Large on International Religious Freedom, who was visiting Vietnam. Two weeks after the meeting went ahead, Mrs Hong was interrogated and beaten by plainclothes agents for three hours, leaving her with multiple injuries.

## Run over by military truck

Other Christians have also faced brutal persecution because of their faith in Jesus.

On the evening of May 5, 2016, Pastor Dang Ba Nham of the Vietnam Good News Mission Church, his wife, and a church elder were praying on a roadside with a woman who had recently converted to Christianity in Vinh, on the north central coast.

They stood in front of the property of the new Christian, Phan Thi Thanh Huyen, to ask God for His blessing in building a new house. As they were praying, a large pickup truck with red military plates veered across the street

*Evangelical pastor Nguyen Cong Chinh was arrested in 2011 and sentenced to 11 years in prison for 'undermining national unity.' He has been tortured while in prison.*

and deliberately ploughed into the small group.

Pastor Nham was dragged about 15 metres and died at the scene. He was 56. The new believer, Huyen, died of injuries the next day.

Such 'accidents' are a common way for the authorities in Vietnam to take care of those they deem trouble-makers.

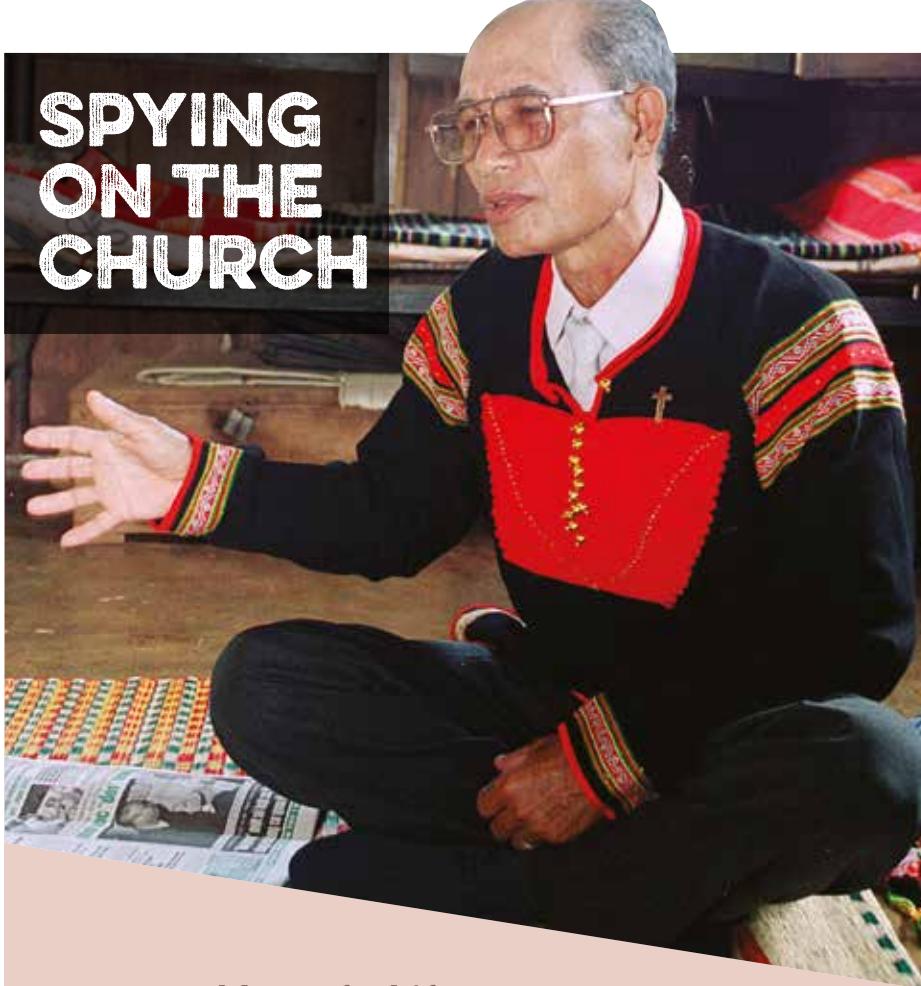
*'These attacks, which continue today, show the intense level of persecution endured by our Christian family in Vietnam,' said our Prisoners of Faith Manager.*

*'The communist regime is intent on stamping out evangelical Christianity — using whatever means necessary.'*

*'Please lift up our brothers and sisters in prayer, asking God to renew their courage and hope in Him.'*

**SUPPORT PRISONERS OF FAITH:** Join our network of prayer partners by signing up to receive our monthly Prisoners of Faith prayer alert emails. Call: 01689 823491 or email: [info@releaseinternational.org](mailto:info@releaseinternational.org).

# SPYING ON THE CHURCH



**How would you feel if someone was spying on your church? Pastor Paul faces that situation every Sunday.**

Every time Pastor 'Paul' (not his real name) preaches, he looks round to see if the spy is in attendance. For some time now he has known that a certain man is feeding information to the local Vietnamese authorities.

Our partner in Vietnam asked him if he is ever tempted to preach a compromised message because of the spy's presence.

He replied emphatically: '*I will never compromise the word of God because of this spy. Perhaps he will be convicted by the messages that I preach and be saved!*'

Last year we heard that Pastor Paul was unwell and that he had been diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumour. Despite his weakness, he was continuing to trust God each day.

Recently we heard that he is feeling a lot better and has been able to go back into the pulpit and preach the word of God.

We thank God for the great faith and devotion of believers such as Pastor Paul who fearlessly share the gospel in nations such as Vietnam.

- Please ask God to strengthen Pastor Paul and to enable him to preach His word with power.

Stock photos have been used to protect those we serve. Main photo: Reuters.

# WILL YOU HELP CHRISTIAN PRISONERS IN VIETNAM?



**When a Christian is imprisoned for their courageous witness, often their whole family suffers.**

That's why our Prisoners of Faith ministry provides practical help and pastoral care to both prisoners and their families.

Will you send a gift today to help them?

Your gift could enable our partner to:

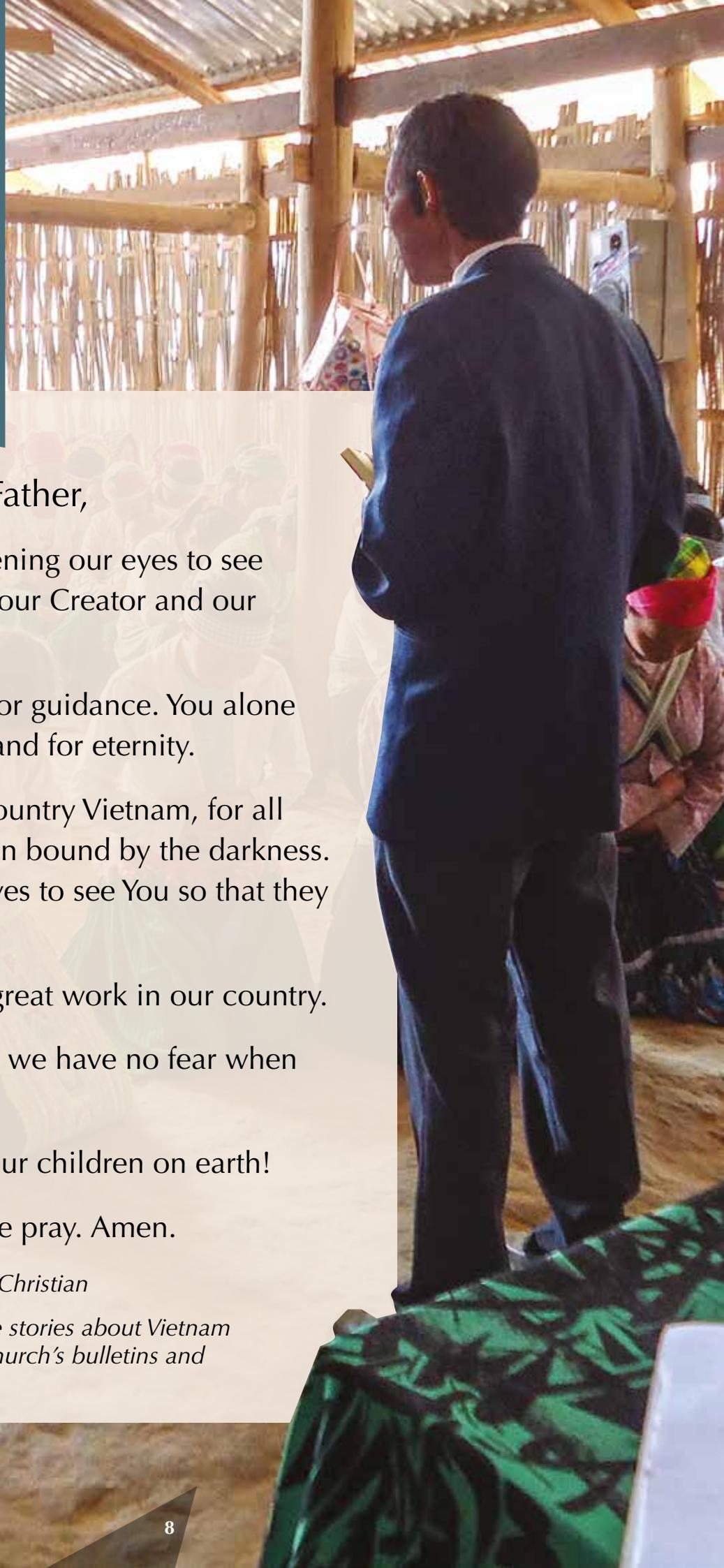
- provide gift packages for Christian prisoners
- provide food, medicines and other support to the families of prisoners
- help families visit their loved ones in jail

**Please give using the enclosed form**

**Call: 01689 823491 to give over the phone**

**Give online at [releaseinternational.org](http://releaseinternational.org)**

# A PRAYER for Vietnam



Dear Heavenly Father,

Thank You for opening our eyes to see  
You as our Saviour, our Creator and our  
mighty God.

We look to You for guidance. You alone  
are our hope: now and for eternity.

We pray for our country Vietnam, for all  
those who have been bound by the darkness.  
Please open their eyes to see You so that they  
can follow You.

You are doing a great work in our country.

Be with us so that we have no fear when  
sharing the Gospel!

Be glorified by your children on earth!

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

*Written by a Vietnamese Christian*

*Please feel free to use the stories about Vietnam  
and this prayer in your church's bulletins and  
prayer meetings.*

# STANDING STRONG IN JESUS



## 'THANK YOU FOR MAKING A DIFFERENCE TO THEIR LIVES'



Our latest Impact Report tells how your prayers and gifts helped persecuted Christians stand

strong in Jesus around the world during 2016. There is not room here to describe all the work your support accomplished, but here you can read how lives are being changed and God's word shared — even in the most hostile environments.

**Paul Robinson** Chief Executive

### SRI LANKA

#### You are helping the church survive persecution

Pastors and their congregations in rural areas of Sri Lanka continue to be attacked by mobs incited by extremists, including Buddhist monks, while officials have tried to close churches and prevent prayer meetings.

In such circumstances it is easy for church leaders to become discouraged.

Our partner holds regular camps to provide a much-needed break for pastors and their families, and

**NIGERIA:** In 2016 your support helped hundreds of Christian families displaced by Boko Haram terrorists. Our partner provided food, cooking utensils and secure shelter — as well as trauma healing for the victims of violence.

to provide teaching and times of refreshment in a safe environment.

*'As a result the unity of the church has grown,'* said our partner. He says the camps have also:

- helped persecuted Christians persevere in their faith
- encouraged Christian witness and preaching in hostile areas
- reduced the sense of isolation felt by rural pastors

*'Believers have told us that their personal and spiritual lives are richer,'* added our partner.

# IMPACT REPORT

## EGYPT

### You are enabling Christians to bless those who persecute them

Members of the Christian minority in Egypt are often discriminated against at work, in education and in the legal system — simply for choosing to follow Jesus.

But believers from a Muslim background face the additional burden of being rejected by their families, sometimes even enduring violent attacks.

That's why one of our partners is working to strengthen the faith of more than 50 converts by holding special retreats and conferences, and through regular pastoral visits.

*'We've been encouraged that many of the new believers have been able to share their faith with their families without fear,' said our partner.*

Some of the new believers have also received loans to start small businesses, giving them vital income.

Stock photo



*Small businesses help to provide income for new believers in Egypt.*



## NIGERIA:

Esta and her children had to flee for their lives when Boko Haram terrorists attacked her village. Thanks to your support, our partner provided her with food and a safe place to live. *'I'm grateful to God that I'm alive,'* she said.

## IRAN

### You are providing Bibles to those who desperately need them

*'We thank the Lord for all that he did in 2016,'* said our partner. *'We are living in circumstances where persecution is on the increase.'*

*'The Government has not only closed down church buildings but also two gardens that were used for Christian conferences.'*

*'The enemies of the church are seriously searching for house church leaders.'*

*When they find them they arrest them and persecute them. There are now 80 believers in prison — and this figure is constantly changing.*

*Your support enabled our partner to hold regular seminars and conferences to strengthen the growing number of underground churches, and to provide much-needed Bibles and Christian literature.*

*'Having the word of God is the greatest need of Christian believers in Iran.'*



**PAKISTAN:** A Release worker prays for a Christian who lost two daughters in the bomb attack that killed 75 people in Lahore at Easter 2016. Your support enabled us to provide medical care and practical help to a number of victims of the attack.

## ERITREA

### You are encouraging believers in distress

Since 2002 the authoritarian Government of President Isaias Afewerki has systematically closed evangelical churches and targeted their leaders. During this period, many hundreds of believers have been detained without trial in appalling conditions – often suffering torture.

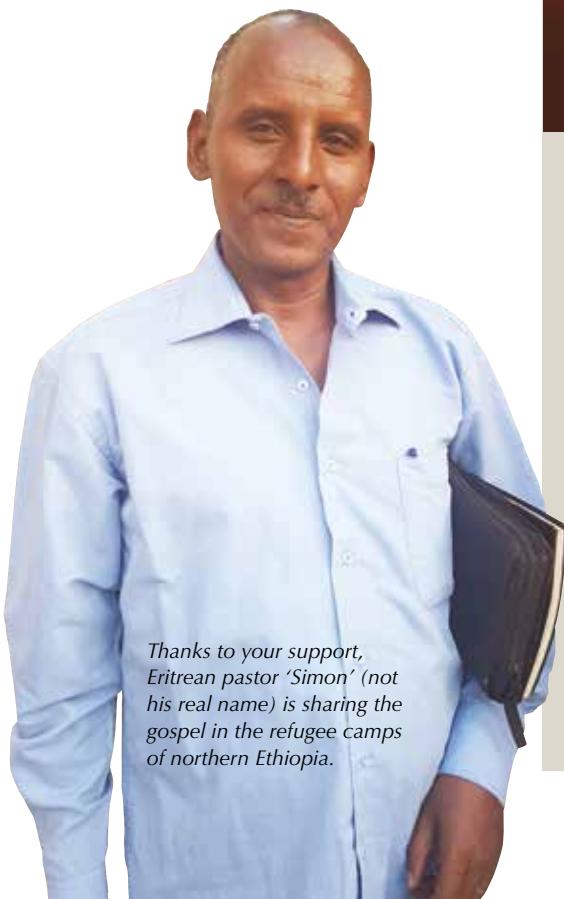
Today it is estimated that more than 170 believers remain incarcerated, with many having endured jail for more than ten years.

During 2016, your support enabled our partner to help dozens of Christian prisoners and their families by providing food, clothes and other vital assistance.

For many, this has been a lifeline.

For example, ‘Sarah’ (not her real name) has struggled to support her family. ‘My husband has been in prison for years now,’ she said.

When our partner visited her with a love gift, she told him: ‘I was wondering what I was going to feed my children. You really have been sent by God!’



Thanks to your support, Eritrean pastor ‘Simon’ (not his real name) is sharing the gospel in the refugee camps of northern Ethiopia.

## GIVE NEW HOPE TO ERITREAN REFUGEES



Eritrean refugees are coming to Christ in northern Ethiopia.

Repression, enforced military service and economic collapse have forced tens of thousands of Eritreans to flee as refugees to neighbouring Ethiopia.

Four refugee camps have been established in northern Ethiopia, where a number of churches have been planted by Eritrean Christians inside the camps.

Your support has enabled us to train emerging leaders, giving them a better biblical understanding of persecution and discipleship.

*‘I hope we’ll now make a great impact in the camps, because there are a lot of needy people there,’ said one pastor.*

*‘The training has changed my understanding,’ said another. ‘Before I focused only on helping Christians, but now I want to help those who are opposed to my faith.’*



## WILL YOU SHOW YOUR LOVE FOR ERITREAN CHRISTIANS IN PRISON?

By sending a gift today you can help Christian prisoners and their families to survive inside repressive Eritrea.

Many of the prisoners we minister to have endured harsh conditions long-term and now suffer poor health.

Your generous gift could be used to buy much-needed food and clothes: a tangible demonstration that they’ve not been forgotten.

Our partner also supports prisoners after their release by helping them to start their own small businesses.

Your gift will make a real difference to Eritreans enduring persecution for the name of Jesus. Please make a donation today.

- **Use the enclosed form**
- **Call: 01689 823491**
- **Give online at [releaseinternational.org](http://releaseinternational.org)**

# IMPACT REPORT

## SOME OF THE PARTNERS AND PROJECTS WE SUPPORTED IN 2016

Your gifts enabled us to support these and other projects in 2016 – bringing help and hope to persecuted Christians around the world.

### AFGHANISTAN

#### Christian media

**£10,000**

Our partner produced innovative media to support evangelism, the development of healthy fellowships and discipleship of new believers.

#### Christian media

**£10,300**

Another partner produced inspirational materials, radio programmes, and audio/video resources to serve Christians in both Afghanistan and Pakistan.

### CENTRAL ASIA

#### Church planting and discipleship

**£33,900**

A team of 22 national workers served throughout the region to plant churches and encourage believers in areas where Christians experience persecution.

### CHINA

#### Legal defence

**£10,600**

Enabled a worker to co-ordinate the legal defence of Christians facing detention and imprisonment by the state.



*Your support enabled us to give legal and other help to Chinese pastor Yang Hua who has been detained by the authorities since December 2015.*



### IRAQ

#### Displaced families

**£30,000**

Provided relief aid for Christian families who fled from Islamic State militants, as well as support for Muslim-background believers in their ministry.

### NIGERIA

#### Relief

**£42,700**

Continuing support to help displaced families, and trauma-healing for Christians suffering violent attacks.

### PAKISTAN

#### Ministry to Muslim-background believers

**£12,800**

Pastoral care for converts who are often rejected by their families after coming to Christ.

#### Safe house

**£1,800**

Funded the provision of a safe house to support Christians facing persecution in Pakistan.

#### Help for bomb victims

**£17,700**

Provided practical and financial support for a number of Christians injured or traumatised by the bomb blast in Lahore on Easter Sunday, 2016.

#### Strength to Stand groups

**£13,300**

Our network of Strength to Stand groups continued to empower and train needy Christian women in a number of locations.

#### Support for prisoners

**£10,300**

Enabled regular pastoral visits of Christians imprisoned because of their faith, including some held under the much-abused blasphemy laws.

### SRI LANKA

#### Respite camps for persecuted Christians

**£3,900**

In 2016 more than 100 Christians benefited from special camps run by our partner. *'This camp has given me the strength and encouragement I need to go back to our village and work for the Lord again,' said one pastor's wife.*

# SPREAD THE WORD



PLEASE HELP TO RAISE THE PROFILE OF PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS BY SHARING RELEASE MAGAZINE WITH OTHER BELIEVERS.

One way you can directly help our persecuted family is by encouraging other Christians in your circle to request a copy of *Release* magazine.

By doing this you can help to encourage prayer and support for persecuted Christians around the world.

If you would like to help in this way, please use the covering letter to request three extra copies of the **next edition** of *Release*, for you to give without obligation to Christians you know.

The three extra copies will be sent to you with your own copy of the magazine at the end of June.

## WHAT SOME OF OUR READERS HAVE SAID:

*'Thank you for such an inspiring magazine'*

Faith

*'Informative on issues that the mainstream media does not pick up on, and an important resource for prayer'*

Karen

*'The accounts are often heart-rending, but we trust our great Saviour always to do what is right and good'*

Mike



# GOOD NEWS



## FREEDOM FOR PETR

In case you missed the news, Christian worker Petr Jasek has been dramatically released from prison in Sudan after being pardoned by the President. Thanks to everyone who prayed for his release.

Petr, who works for our associate ministry Voice of the Martyrs, was given a punitive life sentence in January for 'spying' and 'inciting hatred'.

*'I personally have made the commitment to the Lord that I will be praying daily for those who are prisoners, because it is so important,' he said following his release.*

**Please continue to pray for the two Sudanese nationals arrested with him who are still behind bars.**

Read more at [releaseinternational.org](http://releaseinternational.org).



**RELEASED:** We thank God for the release from prison of Kyrgyzstan pastor Marat Niyazaliev who had been falsely accused of molesting a young girl. All charges against him were dropped in January. 'He thanked us for our help,' our partner told us.



## CONVERTS BAPTISED

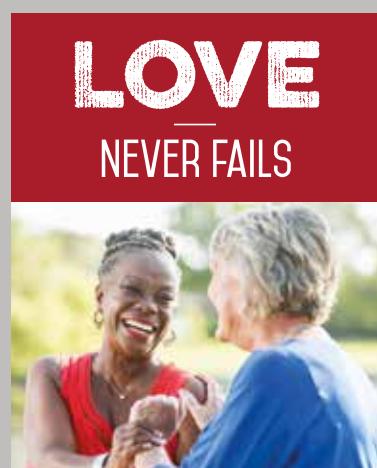
Our partner 222 Ministries reports that Iranian believers in Turkey – most of whom are refugees escaping persecution in Iran – are seeing many in their community turn to Christ.

As a result of recent evangelism, baptisms were held in the open air (pictured above).

*'We rented a generator and speakers and took 80 church members out to a lake where we baptised 40 converts,' said our local contact.*

*'It was an absolutely glorious event and many tourists watched us with great interest!'*

## Celebrate ten years of ministry to persecuted Christian women



Saturday, October 7, 2017

10.30am-3.30pm

St Michael's Church, Chester Square,  
LONDON, SW1W 9HH

Admission £10

Join us for a special conference with guest speaker Eritrean gospel singer and former prisoner of faith Helen Berhane (to be confirmed).

Come and hear what God has done in the lives of our persecuted sisters over the past ten years! All welcome.

Call: 01689 823491 or email us at [info@releaseinternational.org](mailto:info@releaseinternational.org) for more details.



# SHARING GOD'S LOVE WITH SOMALI WOMEN IN KENYA

Muslim-background believer Fardowsa was rejected by her family, but now has a powerful ministry reaching out to Somali women in Kenya – as Release trustee Mary (pictured) discovered on a recent visit.

*'Yes, I'm afraid to go back to the Muslim communities, but I have to do what Jesus tells me to do,' Fardowsa' (not her real name) told me.*

*'So I go, and I tell others about Him. Yes, sometimes we are afraid, but His love is greater!'*

Fardowsa is part of a team of Somali converts in Kenya who are today discipling persecuted Christians – and reaching out with the love of God to hostile communities.

Each has chosen to bless their communities, rather than curse them.

Fardowsa became a believer after speaking to Christian friends. Although fearful of being rejected by her community, she received a dream from the Lord in which He told her that the truth was more important than their respect.



## YOUR OPPORTUNITY TO BLESS SOMALI WOMEN IN KENYA

If you have been moved by Fardowsa's powerful testimony of how God is at work among Muslim women in Kenya, please consider making a gift to support this ministry.

Your donation can enable Fardowsa and the team of Muslim-background believers to:

- support Somali Christians practically and pastorally
- reach out to Muslim communities with the gospel

By doing so you will help these precious believers to bless those who curse them. Please make a gift:

**Using the enclosed form**

**Call: 01689 823491**

**Online at:  
[releaseinternational.org](http://releaseinternational.org)**

Read more about the radical teaching of Jesus to 'bless those who curse you' on page 14.



Despite being disowned by his family, Boonmee wants to love and honour his parents.

'Boonmee' (not his real name) is a 21-year-old man in Laos, south-east Asia, who accepted Jesus as Lord about two years ago. However, his parents do not like his new faith in Christ at all.

Boonmee tries to please his family, but his parents want him to stop attending the house church where he fellowships. Instead his parents want him to worship at the village spirit house, but he refuses.

Last November his parents kicked him out of the family home. So now he is staying with the pastor of the church, who loves him like a member of his own family.

Boonmee has a deep longing to serve God and wants to spend time studying the Bible in neighbouring Thailand. Thankfully our partner is able to offer him a place at a Christian centre in Chiang Mai, northern Thailand. Despite continuing opposition from his parents, Boonmee wants to bless them and love them.

Our prayer is that eventually his parents will see that their son is a good man, and will come to accept Christ for themselves.

- **Pray for Boonmee as he undertakes his study of the Bible, and pray for a breakthrough in his relationship with his parents.**

## BIG CHURCH DAY OUT



Calling all students, youth leaders and young people: we will be at the Big Church Day Out Christian music festival over the late May Bank Holiday (May 27-28) at Wiston House, West Sussex. Do come to our stand and say hello!

## LENT PRISON MEDITATIONS

A big thank you to everyone who took part in our recent Lent initiative. We trust that you were as inspired as we were by the series of reflections taken from Richard Wurmbrand's book *100 Prison Meditations*. Check out: [releasepotential.org/lent](http://releasepotential.org/lent).

## BE THE CHANGE!



Are you 17-23? Want to travel and use your voice to help others? Looking for an adventure in God? Applications are now open for our year-long flexible discipleship programme Change Makers. Change Makers help support

our persecuted family through fundraising, prayer, mission and campaigning. Places are limited.

Call us on 01689 823491 or check out [releasepotential.org](http://releasepotential.org).



# ROBERT GEARS UP FOR A CYCLE CHALLENGE!



Help him raise £50,000 for persecuted Christians

Sprightly Robert de Berry is celebrating his 75th birthday by doing a staggering 750-mile sponsored bike ride over 32 days to raise funds for persecuted Christians.

Retired vicar Robert and a team of sponsored cyclists will ride from Cape Wrath on the north coast of Scotland to Peacehaven, East Sussex, on the south coast, starting on May 16.

He is hoping that their combined efforts will raise £50,000 to help

persecuted Christians around the world — to be divided equally between Release and Christian Solidarity Worldwide.

'On almost every evening we shall also be praying for persecuted Christians in local churches along the route,' says Robert (see below).

To sponsor Robert, please visit his page at [mydonate.bt.com/fundraisers/robertdeberry3](http://mydonate.bt.com/fundraisers/robertdeberry3).

## JOIN ROBERT AT THESE PRAYER EVENTS

### MAY

- Wed 17 KINLOCHBERVIE 01971 521287  
Thur 18 LAIRG 01863 766472  
Fri 19 DINGWALL 01349 862183  
Sat 20 INVERNESS 01463 793191  
Sun 21 INVERNESS 01463 793191  
Mon 22 KINCRAIG 01479 821116  
Wed 24 PITLOCHRY 01796 470411  
Thur 25 PERTH 01738 621213  
Fri 26 SOUTH QUEENSFERRY 0131 331 1100  
Sat 27 BIGGAR 01899 229291  
Sun 28 BIGGAR 01899 229291  
Mon 29 THORNHILL 01848 331191  
Tues 30 DUMFRIES 01387 253043  
Wed 31 CARLISLE 01228 810616

### JUNE

- Thur 1 PENRITH 01768 862787  
Thur 1 KENDAL 01539 721248  
Fri 2 LOW BENTHAM 01524 261609

- Fri 2 LANCASTER 01524 590410  
Sat 3 GARSTANG 01995 603204  
Sat 3 BOLTON 01204 599900  
Sun 4 DEANE 01204 659637  
Mon 5 MANCHESTER 0161 432 5604  
Tues 6 SHEFFIELD 0114 249 0779  
Wed 7 NOTTINGHAM 0115 970 1855  
Thur 8 LEICESTER 0116 271 0519  
Fri 9 KETTERING 01536 628501  
Sat 10 BEDFORD 01234 217519  
Sun 11 BEDFORD 01234 320045  
Mon 12 CHESHAM 01494 784372  
Tues 13 CHEAM 020 8642 5070  
Wed 14 SEVENOAKS 01732 740340  
Thur 15 CROWBOROUGH 01892 652081  
Fri 16 PEACEHAVEN 01273 587732

For a list with full details please call: 01689 823491 or email [info@releaseinternational.org](mailto:info@releaseinternational.org).

release  
&  
your church

## Invite a Release speaker to your church

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

**Anthony**  
Central England & Wales  
01234 271855

**Ben**  
North of England  
07969 361557

**James**  
Scotland  
07977 936554

**Kate**  
(Release Women)  
01689 823491

**Kenneth**  
South of England  
07540 530153

**Stephen**  
Ireland  
028 9334 0014

# HOW CAN WE BLESS THOSE WHO CURSE US?

**Daniel Macleod, lead elder of Hope Church, Bromley, Kent, reflects on the Jesus revolution.**

Jesus planted the seeds of a revolution when He founded a community that would love, expecting nothing in return. And more, would actually love their enemies.

If people hate and harm us, it might feel noble not to retaliate; but simply not retaliating is not Christ's way.

Jesus said, '*Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you*' (Luke 6:27-28).

### DO GOOD

We are called to actively engage in the revolution. People may expect us to get our own back, or at best simply not retaliate, but we do more: we love, we do good, we bless, we pray.

But before we give this kind of love away, we need to know that we ourselves have been on the receiving end of this love first.

Jesus was constantly persecuted. By those around him in the first century — and, in another way, by us. We are His persecutors ...we killed Him. God's son was sent to us and yet we've chosen to kill Him (Matthew 21:38).

Jesus was crucified for our sin: as Wesley wrote, '*Died He for me, who caused His pain.*' We persecuted Christ. As Martin Luther famously wrote, '*We all carry about in our pockets His very nails.*'

Yet how does Jesus treat us? When He could righteously call down judgment on us, He loves us, He does good, He blesses, and He prays for us.

We have the joy of participating in the revolution by passing on God's love for sinners. And as we join Him, we have the dignity of working alongside our Father as children of the Most High.



## WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

- 1** Would you be ready to bless those who curse you?
- 2** In the light of the terrorist attack in London in March, how do you feel about blessing those who cause us pain and want us to fear them?
- 3** Are there any times in your life when you have blessed those who did you harm? What prompted you? How did it feel?
- 4** Please feel free to share this article with your friends and to discuss it in your home group.



## INSPIRING FAITH

*'We will respond, even in the face of irony and slander, with the sweetness of love. We can afford to take this attitude because good anvils do not fear the blows of many hammers.'*

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

# ARE YOU READY FOR DARING DEVOTION?

GET HOLD OF A BOOK  
THAT'S CHANGING LIVES!

**'Moving and challenging' and 'So humbling, yet so inspiring' were just two of the comments about our new devotional book.**

In fact *Daring Devotion* has already changed lives: one reader who had been asked to try it out before publication said it had prompted her to resolve a family dispute.

*Daring Devotion* is not the usual devotional guide. Rather than providing daily reflections, it looks at key themes of discipleship through the eyes of persecuted Christians.

Topics such as forgiveness, humility, faith, hope and overcoming rejection take on a new depth as they are examined through the perspective of those who have suffered as a result of their faith in Christ.

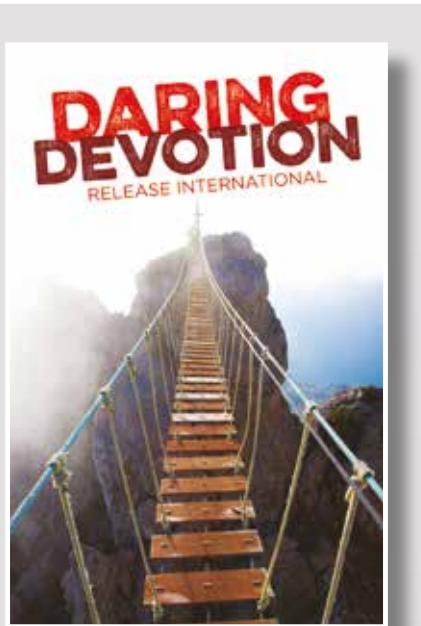
As Release CEO Paul Robinson says: *'I may know what faithfulness is in the light, but do I know what it is in the dark, when my enemies surround me and my life's on the line?'*

**'These are not stories of sadness and fear — but of encouragement and hope'**

The book includes a number of stories from Christians Release has met around the world, from Sarah in Kenya whose pastor husband was killed by militants during a church service to Maryam and Marziyeh, two bold Christian women who were imprisoned after evangelising in Iran, to John, a Christian who never lost hope during seven years in an Eritrean jail.

Yet these are not stories of sadness and fear — but of encouragement and hope that inspire us to love more and to trust God more.

As well as being a personal devotional, *Daring Devotion* is ideal for small group discussion because of its in-depth focus on themes. It includes creative input sections in every chapter as well as biblical reflections and a response and action guide.



***Daring Devotion* is available to Release supporters in the UK for £6 (including P&P) or six copies for £30 (inc P&P).**

**Order your copy today  
by calling 01689 823491  
or visiting  
[releaseinternational.org](http://releaseinternational.org).**



# GREAT OUTDOORS CHURCH SERVICE

Photo: Al Gordon



LOCKED OUT: Members of the GKJ Yasmin church in Bogor, Indonesia, have been forced to hold outdoor meetings ever since their building was closed by the authorities in 2010.

SUNDAY, MAY 21, 2017\*

Stand with persecuted Christians by holding your Sunday service in the open air.

Download stories, prayers, sermon notes and more from [lovekillshate.org](http://lovekillshate.org).

\* or any Sunday of your choice



# PRAYERSHIELD

MAY / JUNE 2017



Pastor Bakhytzhan  
Kashkumbayev led  
many to Christ in a  
Kazakh prison.

## MAY 2017

**Heavenly Father,**

**You made me to worship you, to walk in step with you. Thank you, Lord, that, as I submit to you, you guide my path and fulfil your purposes in me.**

**I pray for my brothers and sisters in Christ who are suffering today, those who are in danger of giving in to fear or anger and bitterness.**

**Help them to guard their hearts so that they will not be diverted from the path you have set before them.**

**Strengthen them, Lord.**

**Amen.**

## CENTRAL ASIA

**MONDAY 1:** In Central Asia, Christians can be arrested for reading the Bible in a public place such as on a bus. Even praying together can be deemed 'illegal'. Pray that God will encourage His people in the region.

**TUESDAY 2:** Pastor Bakhytzhan Kashkumbayev (pictured) was convicted of crimes including 'inciting religious hatred' and was sent to jail in Kazakhstan. Over nine months, he led almost 100 of his fellow inmates to Christ.

**WEDNESDAY 3:** Yklas Kabduakasov was sentenced to two years in a Kazakh labour camp in 2015 for proselytising. The Supreme Court refused to hear his appeal in November. Pray that Yklas will know God's presence every day.

**THURSDAY 4:** In 2011, Kazakhstan adopted laws that required religious groups to re-register with the government, and faith groups' activities were closely monitored. Pray that Kazakhs will know freedom in Christ.

# PRAYER SHIELD

**FRIDAY 5:** Three Kazakh Baptist pensioners were recently fined more than two months' pension for praying with hospice residents and offering New Testaments in East Kazakhstan Region.

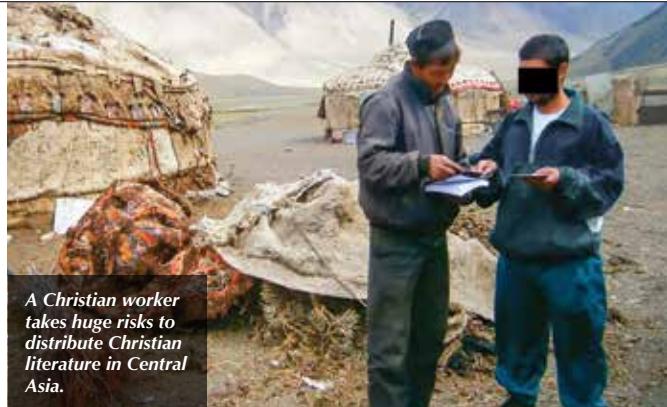
**SATURDAY 6:** New regulations in Tajikistan forbid parents to take children under the age of 18 to church. Pray that God will speak to Tajik youth in other ways.

**SUNDAY 7:** Pray for 'Dilnara' in Tajikistan: she suffered huge discrimination when she left Islam to become a Christian. Her husband left her too. She now ministers to women and new Christians.

**MONDAY 8:** In Turkmenistan, most Christians cannot gather, even in small groups of three, unless they belong to the same family. Pray that Turkmen Christians will find creative ways to enjoy fellowship.

**TUESDAY 9:** Thank God for deaf and mute Turkmen evangelist 'Sergei', whom Release supports. His ministry has led to more than 40 people being baptised. His daughter translates his sign language for him.

**WEDNESDAY 10:** Ask God to protect our partner 'Pavel' and his co-workers: with Release support, they minister to Christians across Central Asia who are sharing the good news and discipling new believers.



## EGYPT

**THURSDAY 11:** Islamic State published a video in February calling on its followers to kill Christians in Egypt. Pray that God's people in Egypt will know His perfect peace and unfailing love.

**FRIDAY 12:** Ask God to comfort and provide for about 200 Christian families forced to flee their homes in al-Arish, North Sinai, after extremists killed at least seven Christians there. Some had also had to flee in 2011.

**SATURDAY 13:** Pray that Christians in Egypt suffering persecution will resist bitterness. A Release contact working with families from al-Arish (above) said many are wrestling with doubts and fears.

**SUNDAY 14:** Pray that God will make a way for Release to expand its Strength to Stand (S2S) groups in Cairo, a ministry supporting marginalised Christian women. Pray that more local churches will help set up and sustain new groups.

**MONDAY 15:** Lift up in prayer all those who are working hard to support persecuted Christians in Egypt. Pray especially for the facilitators in Release's S2S groups who serve their communities with such great enthusiasm, despite suffering persecution themselves.

**TUESDAY 16:** Christian women – even those who are married – are being groomed or kidnapped by Muslim men, then forced to marry them and convert to Islam. Release contacts say women are being targeted systematically to try to weaken the church.

**WEDNESDAY 17:** Having a daughter who converts to Islam and marries a Muslim – even against her will – brings great shame on a Christian family. Pray that affected families will find freedom from shame and new life in Christ.

**THURSDAY 18:** Pray for God's protection over a poor Christian family who have been rehoused by a Release partner, to protect their daughters from an attempt

to convert them to Islam. The girls' aunts appear to be behind the plot.

**FRIDAY 19:** Pray that God will provide for the many Christians leaving Upper Egypt and Minya to escape hostility and the threat of attacks. Many are relocating to Cairo slums where it is hard to find work.

## MALAYSIA

**SATURDAY 20:** Pastor Raymond Koh was abducted in Petaling Jaya in February. His family fear he may have been murdered, though a man was arrested after making a ransom demand. Raymond has previously been threatened by jihadists.

**SUNDAY 21:** Pray for the family of a pastor and his wife abducted in January. Pray they will be returned to their family soon and ask God to keep them all in His peace.

**MONDAY 22:** Christians in Malaysia are increasingly concerned about threats to religious freedom as Parliament debates a Bill proposing that parts of a strict Islamic penal code (*hudud*) are incorporated into the legal system.

**TUESDAY 23:** Pray for Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak who appears to be trying to win favour among hardline Muslims ahead of next year's elections. He is in favour of introducing *hudud* into the penal system (see above).

## SUDAN

**WEDNESDAY 24:** President Omar al-Bashir and his Government are relentlessly pursuing an agenda of introducing a stricter form of *Sharia* (Islamic law) into Sudan – and eradicating Christianity. Pray that God's people in Sudan will have unshakeable faith.

**THURSDAY 25:** Thank God for the release of Czech Christian aid worker Petr Jašek, freed from jail in Sudan after international diplomacy helped secure a presidential pardon for him. He had been given a life sentence for charges including 'spying'.

**FRIDAY 26:** The two Sudanese men jailed for 'aiding and abetting' Petr (above) – Pastor Hassan Abdurahem and Abdulmonem Abdumawla – remain in jail. Pray their appeal will be heard soon and they too will be released.

**SATURDAY 27:** At least 25 church buildings in Khartoum North are currently under threat of demolition. The Government says they were built on land 'intended for other uses': mosques in the area are not affected.

## NORTH KOREA

**SUNDAY 28:** Pray that God will revive the hope of His people inside North Korea. Pray that they will see signs

and wonders that remind them that God is in control.

**MONDAY 29:** North Korean security agents regularly cross the border into China in search of defectors, with the tacit support of Chinese officials. Pray that God will protect those who flee, and lead them to people who will tell them about Christ.

**TUESDAY 30:** Pray for the family of Pastor Han Chung-Ryeol (pictured) from Changbai, China, near the North Korean border. He was killed last year, apparently by North Korean officials, for supporting North Koreans who went to his church for help.

**WEDNESDAY 31:** At least four people Pastor Han led to Christ have since been executed by the North Korean Government. Ask God to protect brave North Korean Christians who return to their homeland to spread the gospel.



Pastor Han was killed in China for his ministry to North Koreans.

# PRAYER SHIELD



Alimjan Yimit's family have been able to visit him only infrequently since he was jailed nine years ago.

## JUNE 2017

### CHINA

#### THURSDAY 1:

Alimjan Yimit is serving a 15-year jail sentence for evangelising China's Uyghur Muslim population. He was sentenced in 2008. His wife (pictured with relatives) is able to visit only occasionally, for 15 minutes at a time.

**FRIDAY 2:** Zhang Xiuhong is starting a five-year jail sentence. Zhang, a former deacon of the much persecuted Huoshi Church in Guizhou, was convicted of 'illegal business operations'.

**SATURDAY 3:** Praise God that Huang Yan was able to receive vital surgery for ovarian cancer, thanks to support from her fellow Christians worldwide. Chinese medics had refused

to operate, apparently due to her human rights work.

**SUNDAY 4:** Continue to pray for the release of Christian lawyer Li Heping, detained since 2015 for his work defending house church leaders and environmental activists. He is said to have been tortured.

**MONDAY 5:** Li Heping's brother, lawyer Li Chunfu, spent more than 500 days in jail and suffered brutal torture. He showed signs of mental illness on release from jail. Continue to pray God will heal him totally.

**TUESDAY 6:** Pray that China will give in to international pressure and release the scores of lawyers, church leaders and justice campaigners who have been rounded up by the authorities in a clampdown since 2015. Many of those detained are Christians.

### IRAN

**WEDNESDAY 7:** Pray for the release of Amin Nader Afshar and Hadi Askary who have been detained without charge since August. The men went on hunger strike until officials promised them medical care and progress in their case.

**THURSDAY 8:** Yaser Mosibzadeh, Saheb Fadayee and Mohammad Reza Omidi were sentenced to 80 lashes for taking communion wine. Pray they will win their appeal.

**FRIDAY 9:** Yaser, Saheb and Mohammad (above) have also been charged with acting against national security. Pray these charges will be dropped.

**SATURDAY 10:** Pray for Veronika and her son, Augustine, who were arrested in February in Urmia, just months after being baptised in Turkey. Revolutionary Guards raided their home and found Christian literature.

### TURKEY

**SUNDAY 11:** Pray for the release of Pastor Andrew Brunson (pictured overleaf) who has been imprisoned in western Turkey since October after false accusations were made that he has links to 'terrorists'.

**MONDAY 12:** Christians in Turkey fear religious liberties are under threat as



Pastor Andrew Brunson has served the Turkish people for 23 years – but is now behind bars.

the Government continues its crackdown on those suspected of links to the Gulen movement which it blames for last year's attempted coup.

**TUESDAY 13:** In the past four years, at least 100 pastors serving in Turkey have reportedly been denied visas or permits, and forced to leave. Several have been accused of 'threatening national security'. Ask God to protect church leaders.

**WEDNESDAY 14:** Pray that Christians in Turkey will stand firm in their faith and not be discouraged by the recent crackdown.

## PAKISTAN

**THURSDAY 15:** Praise God that evangelist Babu Shahbaz was released from police custody after accusations

of 'blasphemy' proved unfounded. Continued threats to his family mean they have not been able to return to their home in Kamahan near Lahore.

**FRIDAY 16:** Pastor Judoon was apparently abducted from Kamahan in January because of his involvement in Babu Shahbaz's case (above). Pray for news of what has happened to him.

**SATURDAY 17:** Mukhtar Masih, a 70-year-old Christian from Gujranwala, Punjab, has been accused of 'blasphemy' for allegedly making derogatory remarks about the Koran and Islam's prophet, Mohammed, in a letter. Ask God to protect him and his family.

**SUNDAY 18:** An Anti-Terrorism Court in Lahore recently cleared 106 Muslims of attacking Joseph Colony, a Christian community in Lahore, during a blasphemy row in 2013. Christians fear Pakistan's courts are biased against them. Pray that officials will take firm action against such riots in future.

**MONDAY 19:** The Joseph Colony riots (above) followed accusations of blasphemy being made against a Christian road-sweeper named Sawan Masih. He was sentenced to death in 2014: his appeal has yet to be heard.

**TUESDAY 20:** Pray for 32 Christians accused of killing two men suspected of suicide bomb attacks on two

churches in Youhannabad, Lahore, in March 2015. Their prosecution is being contested by Christian lawyers.

**WEDNESDAY 21:** Pakistan's Supreme Court has just granted bail to evangelist Adnan Prince, more than two years after he was detained over accusations he had written blasphemous comments in a book about Islam.

**THURSDAY 22:** Pray that almighty God will be the advocate for the many Christians in Pakistan unjustly accused and prosecuted because of their faith: pray He will help secure justice for them.

**FRIDAY 23:** Continue to pray for the repeal of Pakistan's blasphemy laws. Pray for a radical shift in attitudes towards religious minorities in Pakistan, where intolerance appears to be growing.

**SATURDAY 24:** Pray for the release of Christian Imran Ghafur who is serving a life sentence because a neighbour claimed to see him burning pages of a copy of the Koran.

**SUNDAY 25:** Asia Bibi, a Christian woman who has been convicted of blasphemy, is still waiting for Lahore's Supreme Court to hear her appeal against a death sentence. A hearing last October was postponed at the last minute after a judge stepped down.



*The father of these Eritrean girls was imprisoned because of his Christian witness.*

## ERITREA

**MONDAY 26:** Eritrea has jailed thousands of prisoners of conscience, including many Christians, over the years. Some have been held for more than two decades without charge. Thank God that the current number of Christian prisoners in Eritrea, estimated at 178, is relatively low. Pray that God will strengthen His people behind bars and use them to draw many other prisoners and guards to Christ.

**TUESDAY 27:** Pray for the families of Christian prisoners, including the young girls pictured. Many have not been allowed to visit their loved ones. The family of Dr Kiflu Gebremeskel have not seen him since 2004.

**WEDNESDAY 28:** Haile Nayzgi was among several church leaders arrested in Eritrea in 2004. His family fled the country. Pray that Haile and his family – and other families who are separated – will be reunited.

Sources: AFK Insider; China Aid; Christian Today; Forum 18; Middle East Concern; Morning Star News; Release partners and contacts; Reuters; The Association of Protestant Churches in Turkey; VOM USA; World Watch Monitor.

**THURSDAY 29:** About 5,000 people flee Eritrea every month, many of them Christians. Ask God to protect them. Most of the 3,000 emigrants who died last year in the Mediterranean, trying to cross into Europe, were Eritrean.

**FRIDAY 30:** The UN is calling for Eritrean leaders to be prosecuted over allegations of widespread human rights abuses since 1991. Pray that Eritrea will respond to international pressure and restore religious freedoms.

**Lord Jesus,**

**You invite me to cast all my burdens on to you. Precious Lord, thank you that I can bring my anxiety and fear to the foot of the cross – and leave it there.**

**Jesus, speak to my persecuted brothers and sisters today: reassure them of your love, teach them to trust you and help them to give themselves completely to you (James 4:7). Help me to do the same, Lord.**

**Amen.**

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Names in inverted commas have been changed to protect identities.

**releaseinternational.org**

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