

JAN 2018

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL

voice

of Persecuted Christians

50
YEARS
1968-2018

**'DON'T
ABANDON
THEM'**

THE INSPIRING LEGACY OF
PASTOR RICHARD WURMBRAND

News, stories and prayer requests
from persecuted Christians worldwide



Welcome

by Paul Robinson, CEO

Overcoming Faith

Welcome to the first edition of our magazine for 2018 – and the first to celebrate our 50th anniversary!

This edition also includes our annual report on key project locations where Christians around the world will face intense persecution during the next 12 months (see pages 10-13).

Whether the target of Islamist extremists, repressive governments or other groups opposed to the Christian gospel, many thousands of believers will this year continue to pay a very high price for following their Lord and Saviour.

That is why our ministry – inspired by the life of love of Romanian pastor Richard Wurmbrand – is needed more than ever (see page 6).

Since 1968, the prayers and gifts of supporters throughout the UK and Ireland have helped many thousands of Christians who have been persecuted for their faith. For this we are truly humbled – and deeply grateful to God.

From the many reports we receive, we know that despite such intense opposition, the gospel continues to change and transform lives forever!

In China, for example, the courageous action of Christian lawyer Qiaoling Wang helped to

secure the release of her imprisoned husband – and brought transformation to her own life (see page 16).

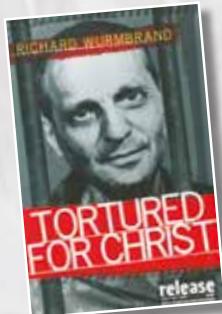
In Egypt, a precious Christian sister who participates in one of our Strength to Stand groups told us recently: '*God has protected me and given me the courage to continue... I now know I am valuable to God*' (see page 15).

While in Laos the faithful witness of 'Sanyahak' led to the conversion of 40 people – and time in jail for himself (see page 14).

Each of these believers, in different ways, reflects the same faith, love and courage that Richard Wurmbrand himself demonstrated.

'Abdul', one of our brave Egyptian partners (see page 15), recently told us how he had been greatly moved after reading *Tortured for Christ* – when he was just 12 years old!

'I never would have imagined that I would be partnering with a Richard Wurmbrand ministry 20 years later,' he said. *'God bless you all and for what you are doing. We are just glad that you are here!'*



Richard Wurmbrand's powerful testimony is available for just £8: see the back page and enclosed card.

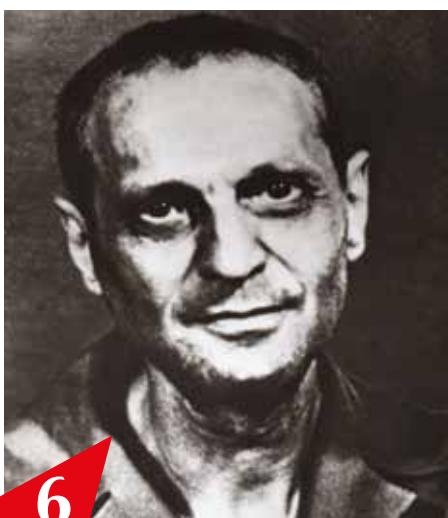
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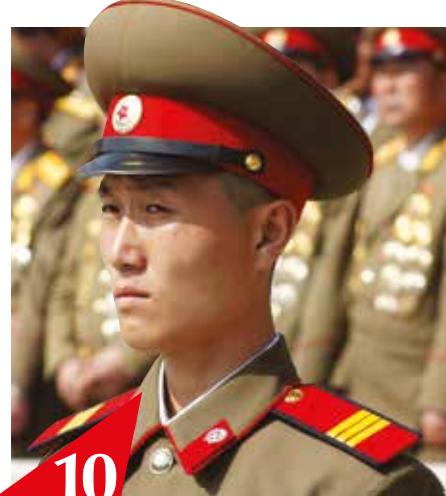
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Praying for persecutors

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

Release International: PO Box 54, Orpington BR5 4RT - T: 01689 823491 - E: info@releaseinternational.org –

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FAITH UNDER FIRE



Burmese pastors imprisoned

Two pastors (pictured) arrested by the Burmese army in December 2016 were sentenced in October on charges of unlawful association, defaming the military and spying.

Pastor Dom Dawng Nawng Latt, aged 65, received a prison term of four years and three months, and fellow pastor La Jaw Gam Hseng, 35, a term of two years and three months. Both men denied the charges.

Pastor Zau Ra, secretary of the Kachin Baptist Convention in Mong Maung town, Shan state, told Morning Star News that the two pastors were likely arrested and charged for speaking to media and helping local journalists cover army attacks on a church building, schools and houses in Shan state in November 2016.

• **Pray that God will protect and comfort these two prisoners of faith and their families.**

Photo: Morning Star News.



Fulani militants kill 75 in village attacks

Release's partner in Nigeria has documented how armed Fulani militants systematically attacked 12 largely Christian communities in Miango district, Bassa, Plateau State, during September and October.

'These attacks resulted in the death of 75 people. Some 23 were admitted to hospital for various injuries, 489 homes were burnt, and 13,726 people out of a total population of 80,000 were displaced,' said our partner.

'We were asleep when we heard gunshots around the house,' said Lissa (pictured), one of the survivors.

'Fulani militants surrounded our house shooting sporadically. A bullet wounded me on the cheek. They set the house ablaze with us inside. Five members of my family were killed.'

An attack on the village of Nkyie Dongwro in October by 20 armed militants left 29 villagers dead. One

eyewitness described how government soldiers had directed people to take refuge in a school classroom, only to withdraw, allowing the militants to open fire.

'Everyone in the classroom was killed, except for two who survived with serious gunshot injuries,' said the eyewitness. 'None of the 12 soldiers who were there fired to repel the attack.'

'This clearly is a threat of genocide,' our partner told a press conference in October in the capital Abuja. 'The perpetrators have not been arrested, nor justice done in this situation. In addition, most villages that were attacked are now deliberately being occupied by Fulani people.'

• **Pray for healing for the injured, for the families of those killed, and that those who carried out these horrific attacks would be brought to justice and turn to God in repentance.**

'This clearly is a threat of genocide. The perpetrators have not been arrested, nor justice done in this situation.'

ALGERIAN POLICE CLOSE CHURCH

Christians in Algeria ask for prayer for a church in Ain Turk which has been closed by police.

Authorities in November sealed the church hall, which was used for worship, and a bookshop owned by a member of the church.

Earlier the police had raided the bookshop, accusing its owner of illegally printing Bibles and evangelistic brochures. They confiscated books and equipment, but returned them when no proof of the allegations was found.

The closure order claims that the church is illegal, despite its affiliation with the officially recognised EPA (L'Église Protestante d'Algérie).

- *Pray that the church and bookshop will re-open soon.*

Turkish Government agrees to return 100 church properties

The Syriac community in Turkey has welcomed a government pledge that around 100 church properties appropriated by the state in Mardin province in June will be returned.

Deputy Prime Minister Hakan Cavusoglu stated in November that the seizure had been a mistake – but gave no further details, reported our partner Middle East Concern.

- *Please pray that these properties will be returned without delay.*



Photo: Morning Star News.

Indian believers told to stop worship at home

For 12 years former Hindu Mahendra Nagdeva and his wife met freely with friends and relatives at their house (pictured) in Madhya Pradesh, India, to worship and pray – until local officials forced them to stop.

Nagar Palika Balaghat municipality sent the couple a notice in November, threatening ‘stringent action’ if they continued their Christian activities. This surprised the couple since no official had ever said there might be problems.

Their activities included prayer, Bible study with other families and holding a Christian women’s group.

Chandra Kisore Bawre, chief officer of the Balaghat municipal council, said that neighbours had complained, and that he was ‘under pressure’ to take action.

However, one local source, who requested anonymity, believed that Hindu nationalists had forced him to issue the notice. ‘They suspect that Nagdeva forcibly converts Hindus, but it is not true,’ the source said.

- *Please pray that the notice is withdrawn and that the family can continue to worship freely in their home.*

In our fiftieth year,
Pastor Richard
Wurmbrand's passionate
plea continues to inspire
our ministry to serve
persecuted Christians
around the world.

DON'T ABANDON THEM!

This year supporters and friends of Release have a significant opportunity to remember the contribution that our partners have made to alleviate suffering from persecution – and to communicate our vision of hope and passionate transformational Christian discipleship for the future.

Fifty years is a significant milestone and an opportunity to offer praise and thanks to God. So we hope that you will join us this year in thanking God for His great mercy and faithfulness.

We are excited because our anniversary enables us and our supporters to open a dynamic, national conversation with Christians in the UK and Ireland about persecution issues worldwide – inspired by Pastor Richard Wurmbrand's passionate and defiant ministry (see box opposite).

'Hear the cries of our brothers and sisters'

In the past 50 years many thousands of Christians have been helped in numerous countries. Throughout this year we will revisit our past, share inspirational stories and relate them to the present to make the voice of our persecuted family ring out loudly.

After his release from prison in communist Romania, and subsequent escape to the West, Pastor Wurmbrand urged fellow believers to 'take a message to the free Christians

of the World'. That message was clear and simple:

'Hear the cries of our brothers and sisters in captive nations!'

Christians stand together as the one body of Christ, both locally and globally. Christians in the UK and Ireland are therefore also members of the persecuted church. We who live in relative safety, protected by the law, in a generous, peaceful,

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Throughout 2018 we will be marking our 50th anniversary by using our new logo.



A LIFE OF LOVE

RICHARD WURMBRAND (1909-2001)

1945: Communists seize power in Romania. Richard and Sabina Wurmbrand (pictured), both Christians from a Jewish background, set up an underground church to minister to the people and the invading Russian Red Army.

1948: Secret police abduct Richard and lock him in solitary confinement. He is to spend a total of 14 years in prison, where he is tortured regularly and given mind-altering drugs. He refuses to renounce his faith.

1956-59: Richard is released in 1956. He is warned never to preach again, but resumes his ministry. In 1959 he is re-arrested and sentenced to 25 years' imprisonment.

1965: The Wurmbrands are ransomed for \$10,000 by a group of

Norwegian Christians. The family travels to the West, and Richard's story spreads rapidly.

1966: The Wurmbrands come to England and start their ministry in the West. While testifying before a subcommittee of the US Senate, Richard strips to the waist to show 18 deep torture wounds. His autobiography *Tortured for Christ* is published. Many thousands hear Richard preach on his speaking tours.

1968: The Rev W. Stuart Harris founds Christian Mission to the Communist World, the organisation which becomes Release International in 1992.

2000-01: Sabina Wurmbrand passes to glory in August 2000, followed by Richard in February 2001.

inclusive society, have a duty in faith to help persecuted Christians, and to aid those who are oppressed, victimised, attacked, abused and imprisoned overseas.

Richard was imprisoned for 14 years, and today there are still thousands of Christians in prison for their faith in Jesus. So his call to action is as relevant today as it was in the 1960s.

RICHARD WURMBRAND'S 8 PLEAS

In his autobiography *Tortured for Christ*, Richard Wurmbrand called on the Western Church (which he defined as churches not under threat of persecution) to intervene on behalf of persecuted Christians.

He made eight clear pleas to believers in ‘unrestricted’ countries to help, remember and take action.

PLEA 1



‘GIVE US THE TOOLS WE NEED.’

Richard Wurmbrand was concerned about the growth of the church in persecuted environments. His overriding message was for Christians in the free world to give their persecuted family what they need to continue to flourish in hostile and restricted countries.

Such tools may include proper clothing, food, vehicles, printing, communication, duplication, office equipment, discipleship and evangelistic materials in written, audio, or video formats, training, and other such items relating to ministry.

PLEA 2



‘CHRISTIANS CAN HELP BY PROTESTING PUBLICLY.’

Giving a voice to persecuted believers has been, and remains, a key part of our ministry. In response to the requests of partners, we regularly raise issues that are important to them, through petitions, letter-writing and meeting people of influence. Your help is invaluable.



PLEA 3



‘PRAY FOR PERSECUTORS, THAT THEY MAY BE SAVED.’

In 2018 we will continue to pray for persecuted Christians – but also to pray for their persecutors. Richard Wurmbrand said that persecutors are ‘as much our neighbours as anyone else’.

This year we begin a special year of prayer, #PRAY50, to encourage you to pray for the persecutors every week, with regular information available from our website and via social media (see page 19).

PLEA 4



‘BIBLES ARE URGENTLY NEEDED.’

Many countries experience ‘Bible poverty’. Richard Wurmbrand was also concerned to produce engaging materials to help young people grow in the Lord. Release has a number of initiatives focused on getting the Bible in various formats into the hands of those with little access to the Scriptures.

‘REMEMBER US. HELP US. DON’T ABANDON US!’



PLEA 5



'JOIN HANDS WITH MEMBERS OF THE UNDERGROUND CHURCH AND GIVE THEM THE FINANCIAL MEANS TO TRAVEL ABOUT WITH THE GOSPEL.'

We need to help persecuted Christians withstand persecution. To do that we need to fund pastors to strengthen their communities and provide much-needed pastoral care. We already support many Christian pastors in-country to preach and travel to spread the Gospel.



PLEA 6

JESUS

'WE MUST BROADCAST THE GOSPEL.'

Richard Wurmbrand considered the use of radio to be the key to broadcasting the Gospel into restricted and hostile nations. It still is. Today we also support projects using satellite TV, and web-based and social media. We will continue to support broadcasting the Gospel into restricted and hostile communities throughout 2018, as Richard asked us to do.

PLEA 7



'WHEN A CHRISTIAN GOES TO PRISON – AND OFTEN TO TORTURE OR DEATH – THE SUFFERING ONLY BEGINS. THE FAMILY SUFFERS ENDLESSLY. WE CAN AND MUST HELP THEM.'

Richard Wurmbrand was a prisoner for 14 years and was very aware that the families of prisoners suffer unbearable anguish, discrimination and continued persecution.

In 2018 we will launch a new Release Christian Martyrs' Day and set up a relief fund to help families of Christian martyrs who live in poverty and need practical help and support.

PLEA 8



'ASK YOUR PASTORS AND CHURCH LEADERS WHAT IS BEING DONE IN YOUR NAME TO HELP YOUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS.'

Our persecuted family, often alone and without help, are waging the greatest spiritual battle of the 21st century, equal to the heroism, courage and dedication of the early church. Will you hear their cry: **'Remember us. Help us. Don't abandon us!'**

PLEASE SIGN OUR ANNIVERSARY PLEDGE CARD

Please cut out and sign the card below as part of your commitment to persecuted Christians, and return to the Release office. You can also email your response to IWillNotAbandonThem@releaseinternational.org. The card here is photocopyable, so please share with your Christian friends.



**I HEREBY PLEDGE TO STAND BY PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS IN 2018.
I WILL NOT ABANDON THEM.**

Print name:

Date:

Email:

Mobile no:

Address:

Church address:

Please return your completed card to:
FREEPOST RTKY-GCJU-SCZL, Release International,
PO Box 54, Orpington BR5 4RT.

I PROMISE TO SUPPORT THE FOLLOWING PLEAS:

-  PLEA 1: 'Give us the tools we need.'
-  PLEA 2: 'Christians can help by protesting publicly.'
-  PLEA 3: 'Pray for persecutors, that they may be saved.'
-  PLEA 4: 'Bibles are urgently needed.'
-  PLEA 5: 'Join hands with members of the underground church and give them the financial means to travel about with the Gospel.'
-  PLEA 6: 'Broadcast the Gospel.'
-  PLEA 7: 'When a Christian goes to prison – and often to torture or death – the suffering only begins. The family suffers endlessly. We can and must help them.'
-  PLEA 8: 'Ask your pastors and church leaders what is being done in your name to help your brothers and sisters.'



PERSECUTION TRENDS 2018

Key project locations where Christians will be under pressure this year.



Since the foundation of our ministry fifty years ago in 1968, Release has served Christians who suffer persecution for their faith, whether at the hands of repressive governments or militant groups opposed to the Christian gospel.

Today, as this report on the trends of persecution for 2018 shows, the need for prayer and support is greater than ever.

Please use this summary to inform your prayers: both for persecuted Christians – and those who persecute them (see page 19). ■

Paul Robinson Chief Executive

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AFRICA

NIGERIA

Christians in northern and central Nigeria continue to suffer regular and devastating attacks by Islamist terrorists and Fulani militants.

In October 2017 Release's partner held a press conference in the capital Abuja to highlight the increasing number of attacks by armed Fulani herdsmen in Plateau state, central Nigeria.

Our partner reported that during one recent five-week period 12 communities were attacked. Seventy-five people were killed, 23 injured, 489 houses burnt and 13,726 people out of a total population of 80,000 were displaced.

'These attacks have left us in tears, sorrow, despair and apprehension,' said our partner.



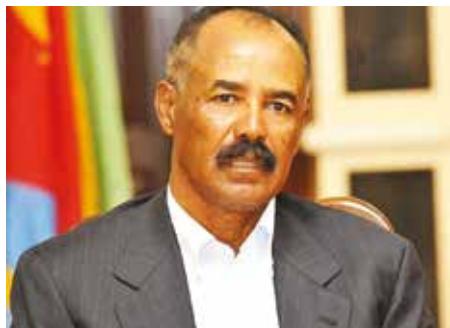
'We are concerned that the Nigerian army, with its reputation as a renowned regional force, are unable to apprehend these criminals.'

Since national and regional authorities have been unable to provide effective security, such violence against Christians is likely to continue unabated throughout 2018.

KENYA

The Islamist terror group al Shabaab, known for its brutal persecution of Christians in Somalia, is likely to continue to extend its reach into neighbouring Kenya during 2018.

During 2017 members of the group targeted Christians in a number of attacks in Lamu County, leaving seven men dead.



ERITREA

Hundreds of evangelical Christians remain detained without trial under the repressive regime of President Isaias Afewerki (pictured), who since 2002 has banned all Evangelical and Pentecostal churches. At least 170 believers have suffered more than ten years in jail in appalling conditions.

Despite international pressure, the government continues to arrest and imprison believers at will.

EASTERN ASIA

CHINA

Several key factors indicate that unregistered ('illegal') house churches in China – which have grown rapidly in recent decades – will face increasingly tough measures to control their activities during 2018.

First, during the 19th communist party congress in October 2017 President Xi Jinping (pictured right, centre) significantly strengthened his leadership by writing his name



into the constitution (the only living president to have done this since Mao).

Xi is determined to ensure that the party remains at the centre of national life and policy, where it can promote increasing sinicisation ('to be Chinese is to be communist and atheist').

Secondly, the new Regulations on Religious Affairs come into force in February 2018, giving the state much greater control over churches and other places of worship. This is likely to make things much more difficult for unregistered churches – and even for the official, government-sanctioned Three Self Church.

Our partner China Aid, which monitors the persecution of Christians in the country, reports that the number of incidents, including detentions, 'has climbed since President Xi took power in 2013, and the current condition of religious freedom in China is the worst it has been since the Cultural Revolution.'



NORTH KOREA

'Persecution of Christians in North Korea has remained, and will likely continue to remain, constant – if only because it has already reached maximum severity,' says Dr Eric Foley, CEO of our partner Voice of the Martyrs Korea.

'Reliably, we can say that there are 100,000 Christians in North Korea. About 30,000 are in concentration camps. Things have always been this bad, because North Korea sees Christianity as an offshoot of American imperialism.'

'Christians in North Korea will continue to experience horrendous levels of torture and imprisonment for the sake of their faith.'

In addition, growing restrictions in China (see left) are likely to reduce support for North Korean believers. 'China's government is cracking down on Chinese Christians, causing many to withdraw the willing hand to the North Korean underground church that was formerly outstretched,' says Dr Foley.



VIETNAM

The communist authorities continue to target Christians who make a stand for religious freedom – especially those who highlight the persecution of Montagnard believers in the Central Highlands.

Vietnamese Christians are concerned that the government's new Law on Belief and Religion, which comes into effect in January 2018, will increase pressure on churches and their leaders.



SOUTH ASIA

AFGHANISTAN

In Afghanistan those who convert to Christianity face severe pressure in their communities – and, under Islamic law, the death penalty. So the small but growing underground church will remain under intense pressure during 2018.

One of our partners tells us: ‘Our media ministry receives threats from time to time for presenting the truth of the good news.

‘However, there is now more of an awareness that believers in Christ exist among this predominantly conservative religious region.’

INDIA

Hindu nationalism has been on the increase since Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to power in a landslide victory in 2014. The hostile rhetoric of his nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has encouraged Hindu extremists in several parts of the country to attack churches and individuals.



During 2017 Christian human rights groups described the increase in the number of attacks as ‘alarming’. In addition local authorities are coming under growing pressure to restrict Christian activities and close churches.

For example, at the end of 2017 Hindu militants compelled officials and police in Tamil Nadu state to order 10 churches to stop worship services – and threatened to do the same to a further 20, said church leaders.

Given this hostile climate, it is anticipated that attacks against Christians will continue to increase in 2018.

PAKISTAN

Christians in Pakistan face discrimination at work, in education and the legal system. Each year a number are charged under the country’s blasphemy laws, which are open to abuse by those wishing to settle personal grievances.

In June 2017, for example, Ashfaq Masih, the owner of a bicycle shop in a poor suburb of Lahore, was charged with blasphemy following a dispute with a customer. He remains in prison awaiting trial.

In addition Islamist militants continue their campaign of sporadic violence against Christian targets.

Given the low status of the Christian minority, most of whom are poor and illiterate, discrimination and abuse will continue in 2018.

SRI LANKA

‘One of the main challenges, especially in rural and remote areas, is the persistent persecution fuelled by extremist Buddhist monks,’ reports Release partner the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka (NCEASL).

‘Often they rally local people to attack churches, to beat up pastors and to threaten the families of those who have become followers of Jesus.’

Local authorities have also misused government directive Circular 2008 to illegally pressure pastores to curtail their activities and to close meeting places.

During 2017 NCEASL identified more than 80 incidents against Christians, including church closures and physical attacks – and anticipates that these will continue during 2018.



Christians in Central Asia will face continuing persecution in 2018 for a number of reasons, reports our partner.

'The growth of radical Islam in the region is fostering increased hatred towards Christianity in general – but especially towards Christians who were converted from a Muslim background.'

This in turn has caused many governments to clamp down on religious activities: depriving both Muslims and Christians of their religious freedoms. Consequently churches continue to be raided, and pastors fined or detained as a result of their Christian ministry.

'The growth of radical Islam in the region is fostering increased hatred towards Christianity.'



MIDDLE EAST

EGYPT

In Egypt Christians remain second-class citizens, despite changes in the constitution to strengthen their rights. In 2018 militant groups are likely to continue their campaigns to attack churches and persecute individual believers, especially outside the capital and in rural areas.

In May 2017, for example, armed gunmen opened fire on two buses taking believers to attend services in Minya, southern Egypt. At least 28



Christians were killed and more than 20 were wounded.

Christian girls will continue to be at risk of abduction, such as the three who went missing in June 2017 in Al Khosous, a mainly Christian town just outside Cairo. Victims are made to convert to Islam, to be forced into marriage or sold to strangers.

As throughout the Middle East, converts from a Muslim background will face the greatest pressures from their families and communities.

IRAQ

Civil conflict in recent years has forced millions of Christians to flee to neighbouring countries or to be internally displaced – severely weakening the position and rights of the historic Christian churches.

While sectarian conflict continues, churches, Christian businesses and individual believers are easy targets for both extremists and criminals.

In 2018 the northern region of Kurdistan remains home to more than two million displaced Iraqis, including many Christian families who are unable to return to their homes.

'Most arrive in Kurdistan with nothing,' said our partner. 'Often they are in a state of shock and fear.'

IRAN

'The Iranian authorities have been targeting those who are involved in any kind of Christian ministry,' reports our partner, who foresees that this trend will continue during 2018.

'This is a campaign to stop the spread of Christianity, to arrest those who are leading house churches and those who are involved in evangelism and teaching.'

In addition, those arrested are being forced to pay increasingly large sums of money, in the form of bonds, to avoid imprisonment.

'These ongoing pressures have forced some believers and Christian workers to leave the country – and this is also likely to continue in 2018,' says our partner.

GOOD NEWS

FREEDOM FOR FOUR BELIEVERS IN LAOS!

Please join us in thanking God for the release from jail of four Christian men in Laos.

'Sanyahak', not his real name (pictured right), was detained in October last year after 40 people came to know Christ through his witness. The three other believers were arrested after being harassed for practising their faith.

Pray for God's wisdom for these four and their families: they are being closely watched by the authorities and could be re-arrested at any time.



ANDREW'S SONG OF WORSHIP

American pastor Andrew Brunson (pictured) is facing four life sentences for allegedly plotting to overthrow the Turkish Government last year – which he strongly denies.

Despite these circumstances, he has written a worship song from his prison cell in Izmir, which includes these moving words:

*You are worthy, worthy of my all
My tears and pain I lift up as an offering
Teach me to share in the fellowship of Your suffering
Lamb of God You are worthy of my all.*

*You are worthy, worthy of my all
But my heart faints, drowned in sorrow, overwhelmed
Make me like You, Cross-bearer, persevering, faithful to the end
To stand the trial and receive the crown of life.*



THANK YOU FOR PRAYING

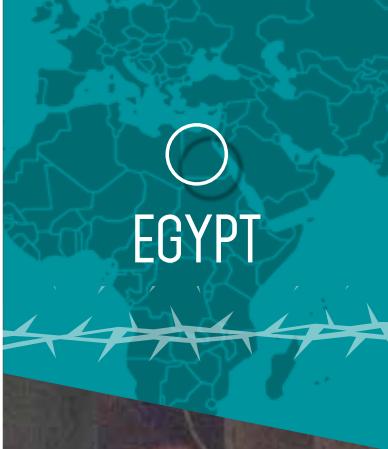
Our thanks go to all of you who took part in November's International Day of Prayer for the persecuted church (IDOP).

Supporter Andrew Wright in Shrewsbury set up a special exhibition with posters and flags of 'restricted' nations (pictured).

'I notified all the churches and put a letter in the local paper,' he told us. *'I have 40 flags of all the countries where Christians are persecuted – and we pray for them regularly.'*



Well done to supporter Samuel Bulled who completed the Belfast City Half Marathon in September – raising £170 through sponsorship to help Christian prisoners of faith in Eritrea.



An Egyptian Coptic priest comforts a believer.
Photo: Andrew Boyd.



'I now know I am valuable to God'



Laura Hayes, Release's Director of Engagement, recently travelled to Egypt with some of our volunteers to see first-hand how your support is helping to transform the lives of persecuted believers.

We arrive in the capital Cairo, a huge, loud, frantic metropolis of over 17 million people. It is also known as the 'city of a thousand mosques' – and the skyline is dominated by both Islamic and Christian architecture.

In a country with a population of over 95 million, Christians of all denominations number around 9 million. As the minority religion, life is incredibly tough for followers of Jesus Christ.

The majority of the Christian community are Copts who face a life of severe persecution, hardship, poverty and exclusion. In the past few years rampant inflation has made the prices of basic commodities four times higher. This has caused great hardship for all communities.

Our team was privileged to visit vulnerable women who are benefiting from our small network of Strength to Stand (S2S) groups.

The women who attend these pastoral self-help groups are taught to overcome difficulties in their lives – and they regularly attend Bible study as an important part of that ministry.

Since many of these Christian women are illiterate, they have the opportunity to learn to read and write. They learn sewing skills, so they can make hats and basic clothing for themselves. They also produce blankets and hairslides to supplement their low incomes.

'God has protected me and given me the courage to continue'

One group we visited had reached out to some 80 families – and they are training more group facilitators to develop an ongoing programme of care.

One of the girls told me: *'Before I came to the group, I was alone.'*

I was struggling to cope with my three children. But here God has protected me and given me the courage to continue. I don't feel this group is made up of my friends, but my sisters. I now know I am valuable to God.'

We visited another partner, 'Operation Matthew'. This organisation provides care and support to persecuted Christians in remote villages, including believers from a Muslim background.

The ministry was founded by 'Abdul' – a man of great determination and profound faith. He told me that he had read Richard Wurmbrand's book *Tortured for Christ* when he was just 12 years old – and how it had greatly moved him.

'I never would have imagined that I would be partnering with a Richard Wurmbrand ministry 20 years later,' he said. *'God bless you all and for what you are doing. We are just glad that you are here!'*

We are always in need of funds for our partner projects. If you would like to help make a difference to persecuted Christians in Egypt and around the world, please send us a donation using the enclosed card. God bless you.



A FEARLESS VOICE FOR FREEDOM



Your support helped Chinese lawyer 'Lydia' to free her detained husband – and to emerge as a strong Christian leader able to help other believers facing persecution.

Imagine that one night security agents break into your home, ransack your personal belongings and then handcuff and abduct your spouse – leaving your children crying in terror.

That was the real-life experience of Chinese mother and wife Qiaoling 'Lydia' Wang, a lawyer, in July 2015.

For the next two years, her husband Li Heping, also a believer, was detained without charge. Li is a respected lawyer who has defended house churches against the authorities.

Their children were regularly barred from schools because of his unnamed crime, and security agents forced Lydia and the children to move home every two months.

However, rather than being crushed by this merciless state persecution, Lydia found strength in God – becoming herself a fearless voice for freedom.

With the support of the international community and advice from our

partner, she persisted in challenging the authorities, leading to the eventual release of her husband who was given a three-year suspended sentence.

'Only after experiencing the past two years could I finally realise the true meaning of Christ's teachings on love, forgiveness, and not caring for yourself alone,' she told Release. *'In the past, these Scriptures were just knowledge in my head.'*

Li was tortured with electric shocks while in detention. *'There were times when I wanted to commit suicide,'* he said.

'I survived because of my Christian faith, the courageous advocacy of my wife, and the attention of the international community.'

Li's experience of persecution is far from unique for China's Christians.

Credible reports confirm that in 2016 more than 3,000 Christians experienced some form of detention



Lydia protests against the detention of her husband in Beijing in July 2017. Photo: Reuters/Damir Sagolj.

related to their faith – with just over 300 receiving actual criminal sentences.

This pattern continued last year, leading our partner to conclude that state repression of Christians in 2017 has been the worst since the end of the Cultural Revolution.

PLEASE GIVE

Release's partner provides vital legal advice and practical help to Christians such as Lydia and her husband who are being targeted by the Chinese authorities more than ever.

You can support courageous persecuted Christians in China and around the world by making a gift using the enclosed card.



BELFAST SUPPORTERS GO TO JAIL - AND RAISE £7,000!

Around 100 supporters in Belfast packed out the historic Crumlin Road Gaol in October to have dinner, meet Eritrean gospel singer Helen Berhane and take part in an auction – raising a fantastic £7,000 for persecuted Christians.

'We tried to combine an enjoyable evening along with the challenge of our prison surroundings,' said Stephen, our Development Manager for Ireland.

'We wanted to encourage participants to re-assess the freedom we have in the West and the cost of being a follower of Jesus in other parts of the world. The evening was sold out and was a great success.'

Tessa, one of our Release Potential Change Makers, described the event as 'wonderful'.

'Hearing Helen Berhane's story of her imprisonment in Eritrea really made the night and I could feel the entire room was really captivated by her and her fabulous singing,' she said.

The evening included an auction of donated prizes, including restaurant and hotel meals, art, clothing and various vouchers.

Thank you to everyone who took part in this great evening!

CREATIVE IDEAS FOR FUNDRAISING

Each year we are delighted that so many of you organise local fundraising events for Release. Supporters have taken part in local walks, fun runs, bike rides, marathons, triathlons and even the occasional bungee jump! You have also organised coffee mornings, cake, plant, card and jewellery sales, quiz nights and auctions.

If you have not already done so, you might be surprised at how much you can raise and how fulfilling it is to do something like this.

Please call: 01689 823491 (email: info@releaseinternational.org) and we'll send you creative ideas and sponsorship forms to help you arrange your event.

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
07722 076619

Imtiaz

London
07897 262975

Kenneth

South of England
07375 516408

Stephen

Ireland
028 9334 0014

James

Scotland
07977 936554

Kate

(Release Women)
01689 823491

THE WORD

'Don't abandon them', urged Richard Wurmbrand at the end of his inspirational book, *Tortured for Christ* (see back page). What might that mean for you, in practice? In a series of articles to mark our 50th anniversary year, Kenneth Harrod offers some biblical answers.

LET THE GOSPEL 'RUN'!

Somebody once said that for the Christian prayer is not the last resort... it is always the *first resort*.

Prayer is born of a true relationship with the living God. Prayer thrives as we trust in the sovereignty of God.

Those who are privileged to travel and to meet persecuted Christians know that prayer is always what they ask for. Praying for persecuted Christians is, then, the first and most important way we demonstrate that we will not abandon them.

Intercessory prayer is *kingdom work*. If we understand human nature, we will realise that prayer is vital for the gospel to progress in a hostile world. The world is hostile to Christ and the gospel. And whether that hostility appears largely as indifference (as it so often does in the West) or as violent opposition and oppression, prayer expresses dependence on God, to sustain us, to keep us faithful, and, above all, to build His kingdom.

At the end of his second letter to the church in Thessalonica, the Apostle Paul writes:

'Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honoured, as happened among you, and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men. For not all have faith.' (2 Thess. 3:1-2; ESV)

Paul was experiencing opposition, and this young church to which he writes was also experiencing opposition. But

Paul first requests they *pray for the gospel* (verse 1). More literally he writes: 'that the gospel should *run*.'

Pray that the gospel will go here, there, and everywhere – and be received!

So often today we find that Christians living in the midst of violent opposition have a gospel-centred priority that challenges us in the West.

God is faithful

Second Paul requests they *pray for gospel people* (verse 2). Persecution can be intimidating. It can be frightening. In the next verse Paul reassures them:

'But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one.'

'Establishing' Christians – particularly in the face of persecution – was crucial in the eyes of Paul. To promise that God would 'guard' them is not to promise they would be *spared* persecution (Paul knew they had suffered – and were suffering); rather it is a promise that the grace of God will keep them faithful – even as they suffer for Him.

Spiritually speaking, the world hasn't changed since Paul's day – or even since Richard Wurmbrand's day. And the gospel hasn't changed, either.

So will you pray, as the Apostle Paul requested, that the gospel 'runs'? And will you commit to pray for those who suffer for that gospel?

INSPIRING FAITH



'Not everywhere is there persecution, but everywhere the world is adverse to true Christianity. We have to be versed in the Scriptures if we wish our faith to survive.'

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.



PRAY FOR PERSECUTORS

You and your church can help create a powerful surge of prayer by joining our new 50-week prayer campaign inspired by the passionate plea of Pastor Richard Wurmbrand.

Our new #PRAY50 campaign – launched in our 50th anniversary year – honours the cry of Pastor Wurmbrand to pray ‘*for the persecutors that they may be saved.*’

Pastor Wurmbrand, who inspired the founding of Release in 1968, experienced brutal imprisonment and torture in communist Romania during the 1950s and 1960s because of his uncompromising Christian faith.

He was convinced that praying for those who promote hatred and violence against Christians is an important way in which Christians who enjoy religious freedom can directly support their persecuted family.

Richard wrote in his autobiography *Tortured for Christ*:

‘Western Christians can help us by praying for the persecutors that they may be saved. Such a prayer may seem naïve. We prayed for the communists and they tortured us the next day even worse than before

the prayer. But the prayer of the Lord in Jerusalem was also “naïve”. They crucified Him after this prayer. But only a few days later, they beat their breasts and five thousand were converted in one day.’

‘Our work is not to pray for the downfall of governments’

Eric Foley, a Release partner working with believers in North Korea, arguably the most repressive nation on earth, reminds us that our work is not to pray for the downfall of governments, or the death of leaders in countries such as North Korea. Instead, as Jesus commanded us, we are to love our enemies and pray for them (Matthew 5:44).

So please, will you join us this year and commit to pray for persecutors for 50 weeks?

It’s an important way that we can respond to both Pastor Richard Wurmbrand’s plea, and, more importantly, the command of the Lord Jesus.



#PRAY50 RESOURCES

As this year we commemorate the 50th anniversary of Release, we’d love as many of you as possible to join our #PRAY50 campaign.

To help you, from the third week in January we will be producing weekly prayers for use by churches, small groups, prayer groups and individuals, available from our website and on Facebook.

 releaseinternational.org

 [releaseinternational](#)

Almighty God, please give us Your compassion to intercede for those who attack and harm our Christian family.

Grant us the faith to believe that even torturers and terrorists can be transformed by Your love.

In just one holy encounter you reversed the destiny of the Apostle Paul forever: from great persecutor to greater church-planter.

Let Your Holy Spirit bring many more ‘Pauls’ to faith in Jesus in our generation! Amen.

LEAVE A LEGACY OF LOVE



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

Remembering those who are persecuted in your Will is vital to help Release International continue supporting Christian families in need worldwide.

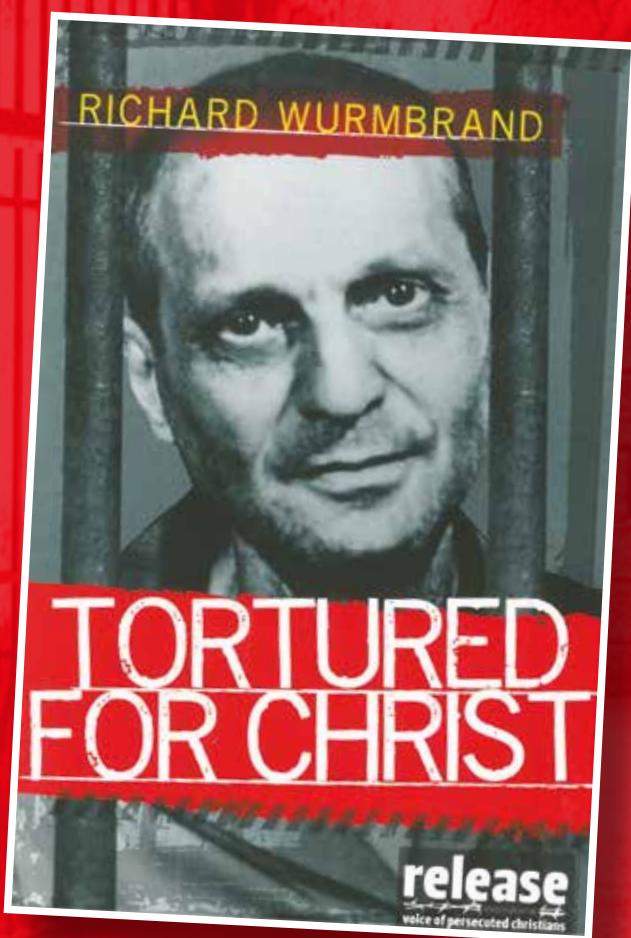
If you are thinking about making or updating your Will, please contact Paul Jones to request our legacy brochure, or to discuss how your legacy could be used.

**Telephone: 01689 823491
or email: pjones@releaseinternational.org**

This is the powerful testimony of the man who inspired the founding of Release 50 years ago: Pastor Richard Wurmbrand.

Here he describes his 14 years' imprisonment by the secret police in communist Romania after the Second World War. Despite regular torture, he refused to renounce his faith – and showed love to his persecutors. His message and vision are still powerfully relevant.

Order today for £8 (including P&P) using the enclosed card, or call: 01689 823491.



PRAYERSHIELD

JAN-MAR 2018



JANUARY 2018

LAOS

Heavenly Father,

Thank you for your unfailing, unconditional love. You gave your only Son because you so loved the whole world (John 3:16).

Thank you for the amazing grace and powerful witness of my persecuted family, and the way they forgive their persecutors. Like you, they choose to see the persecutor as someone created in your image.

Father, help me to see beyond the sins of those who persecute my Christian family, to see them as you see them, as lost souls who need a Saviour. Please teach me to pray for them.

Amen

MONDAY 1: On this first day of a new year, let's pray in faith that 2018 will be a year when the witness of our persecuted family will draw many in their communities to Christ, for His glory.

TUESDAY 2: Ask God to protect His people in Laos, and reassure them that He 'surrounds His people both now and for evermore' (Psalm 125:2).

WEDNESDAY 3: The 'Khab' family turned to Christ a few years ago and their witness was so powerful that five other families from their small village became Christians too: praise God! Village leaders expelled all six families, who are now camping in a rice field.

THURSDAY 4: Pray for new Christians in Laos who are ostracised when they turn away from the predominant animistic religion. Pray that the Holy Spirit will work through these people powerfully to spread the gospel.

FRIDAY 5: Ask God to touch the hearts of village chiefs who often spearhead local opposition to Christians whose faith is perceived as a threat to traditional beliefs and customs.



Persecution has not deterred 'Sonxi' from serving Christ in Laos.

SATURDAY 6: Pray for Christians like 'Sonxi' (pictured) who face opposition from relatives angered by the fact they have turned to Christ. Sonxi's parents threatened to sell her into the sex trade if she refused to stop going to church. She fled and became a full-time Christian worker.

CHINA

SUNDAY 7: Pray that God will continue to shine His light across China, spreading His love and building His church, despite intense persecution in some areas. Pray that His people will be encouraged today.

MONDAY 8: Officials in Hubei took Pastor Xu Shizhen, her daughter and her three-year-old grandson into custody in September. Mother and son were separated. Praise God for these two women who continued to spread the gospel in their local community despite officials' efforts to stop them.

TUESDAY 9: Continue to pray for imprisoned Christian lawyer Gao Zhisheng whose whereabouts are still unknown. Reports have circulated that two friends smuggled him out of house arrest briefly – only for him to be detained soon afterwards.

WEDNESDAY 10: Pray for 34 Christians in Yunnan province who face jail terms on false charges of being part of a 'cult'. Hundreds have been arrested since October 2016: at least 34 remain in custody.

THURSDAY 11: Three Christians from Yunnan – Li Shudong, Li Meihua and Peng Zhenghua – received four-year jail sentences on charges that included belonging to a 'cult'. Pray for their early release.

FRIDAY 12: Ask God to protect Li Baiguang, a prominent Christian human rights lawyer, who continues to receive death threats, despite officials' promise to investigate his kidnapping and beating at the hands of state-hired thugs in Zhejiang in October.

SATURDAY 13: Lift up in prayer Communist officials who see churches as a threat to their authority. Pray that they will come to recognise that the government is upon Jesus' shoulders (Isaiah 9:6).

SUNDAY 14: Pray for Pastor Li Wanhua of Fengle Church, Guangdong province, who was recently interrogated after

officials raided his home and ordered him to stop holding church services.

MALAYSIA

MONDAY 15: Pray for the church in Malaysia, an Islamic country whose reputation for tolerance is fading fast. Kelantan state has been pushing for the adoption of a strict Islamic penal code, 'Hudud', and now allows public caning.

TUESDAY 16: Pray for the safe return of Pastor Raymond Koh who was abducted by masked men in Petaling Jaya, near Kuala Lumpur, last February. His family are angry that police have been investigating whether he had been proselytising Muslims, which is forbidden in Malaysia.

WEDNESDAY 17: Pray God's protection of Susanna Liew, wife of Raymond Koh (above), who had also received threats and was persecuted like her husband before he was kidnapped.

THURSDAY 18: Pray for a pastor with a Muslim background and his wife who were reported missing last March and were last seen near Kuala Lumpur.

FRIDAY 19: Pray that Islamic officials in Malaysia will stop seeing Christians as a threat to national security and start to see them as a force for good.



Distributions of Christian literature help front-line workers share the gospel across India.

INDIA

SATURDAY 20: Pray for our Christian family in India who are experiencing increasing persecution and intolerance from Hindu nationalists. Pray that they will know God's peace and comfort.

SUNDAY 21: Anita Francis and her daughter Sophia, 19, face charges of kidnapping and forcible conversion after Hindu extremists attacked them and seven children they were taking to a youth Bible conference by train. Pray for justice for the women and the Christian families.

MONDAY 22: Ten church congregations in Tamil Nadu have been told to stop meeting for worship – and 20 more have been threatened with similar bans. They have been told to gain official permission

to meet – which can take several years.

TUESDAY 23: Ask God to touch the hearts of key leaders in Hindu nationalist organisations such as Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. Pray that Jesus will speak to their intolerance and fear.

WEDNESDAY 24: Praise God that as our Indian brothers and sisters draw near to God, He will draw near to them (James 4:8). Pray that God's presence will fill their homes.

THURSDAY 25: Pray that high-profile state officials will take a stand against the mounting religious intolerance in India and ensure religious liberties are upheld in every state.

FRIDAY 26: Pray for healing and justice for Pastor Abhay

Sagar from Uttar Pradesh who has lost hearing in one ear after Hindu extremists tortured him, pressured police to bring false charges against him and prevented doctors from treating him.

SATURDAY 27: Stand with Pastor Abhay (above) in praying for his persecutors and all those targeting Christians. 'I have forgiven the attackers and am praying for them every day,' he says. Pray that God will give grace to His people and help them to forgive.

SUNDAY 28: Masked attackers beat Pastor Banothu Sevya unconscious in Jamandlapalli village in Telangana after five local families turned to Christ. Pray for his complete healing.

MONDAY 29: Pray with Pastor Banothu (above) that he will be able to complete the building of his church in Sri Raja Thanda, a tribal hamlet in Mahabubabad district where he lives with his family.

TUESDAY 30: Thank God that the church in India is growing, despite and because of persecution. Pray God's protection over efforts to distribute Christian literature to strengthen the church (see photo).

WEDNESDAY 31: Praise God for 'Samuel' and the church-planting network he oversees in India. Thank God for rewarding Samuel's faithful service, despite persecution, by extending his network to include 6,300 pastors.

'WHEN THE LORD'S WORK IS TAKEN UP, THERE WILL BE HURDLES. I FORGIVE THE YOUTH WHO ATTACKED, AND I AM PRAYING FOR THEM.'

Pastor Banothu, attacked in Telangana, India.

FEBRUARY 2018 NIGERIA

THURSDAY 1: Pray that Christians facing persecution in north and central Nigeria will stand firm in their faith and not allow their hearts to grow cold (Matthew 24:12).

FRIDAY 2: More than a decade after Muslims attacked and displaced Christians in Tudun Wada Dankadai in Kano state, officials have forbidden Christians from rebuilding churches. Eight churches have been in ruins since 2007. Pray for the few remaining Christians in the town who rely on pastors visiting from outside.

SATURDAY 3: Church leaders in Tudun Wada have taken the Kano state government to court for prohibiting them from reconstructing their churches. Pray that state officials will relent.

SUNDAY 4: Nine Christians from Rim village, Plateau state, were shot dead by suspected Fulani herdsmen in November as they drove back from a market. Ask God to comfort their families.

MONDAY 5: Attackers thought to be Fulani herdsmen descended on one village in Rotsu, Plateau state, burned more than 30 houses and destroyed farmlands, despite a night-time curfew imposed by the governor. Pray that officials will do more to defend vulnerable Christians.

TUESDAY 6: Fulani herdsmen killed three members of a Christian family – Rebecca Daniel Choji, her 16-year-old daughter Suzanna and son Joel, 29 – in Jol village, Riyom, Plateau state in October, as they travelled to a health clinic. Pray for their grieving relatives.

WEDNESDAY 7: Pray in faith that the Holy Spirit will move through the ranks of *Boko Haram* and Fulani herdsmen and convict many of their deep need of God.

THURSDAY 8: Frequent attacks on Christian communities in central Benue state have led some to describe their persecution as 'ethnic cleansing' to oust indigenous Christians. By November, 139 Christians had been killed in the state last year.

FRIDAY 9: Pastor David Ayeola, 26, of Akure in Ondo state was kidnapped at gunpoint in an ambush in October and was later killed after failed rescue attempts by police. Pray for his church and family.

KENYA

SATURDAY 10: Pray that Christians in eastern Kenya who are being targeted by Islamist terrorists will stand firm in their faith and trust God for their future. Pray that God will hide them 'from the conspiracies of man' (Psalm 31:20).

SUNDAY 11: Pray for the families still grieving their loved ones after *al-Shabaab* militants killed four Christians in Bobo village, Lamu County, last year. Three were called out of their homes in the night and murdered. Another was killed after being forced to identify Christian homes.

MONDAY 12: After the murders in Bobo (above), many villagers fled their homes in terror. Pray that the Government will redouble its efforts to root out militants so that Christians can live in peace.

TUESDAY 13: Continue to pray for God's provision for Sarah Ambetsa whose husband, a pastor, was killed as he preached at the Joy in Jesus Church in Mombasa in 2014. Praise God that her fabric business is going well and her boys, aged four and nine, are thriving.

WEDNESDAY 14: Pray that God will give wisdom and firm resolve to those trying to end the *al-Shabaab* insurgency into Kenya. Pray in faith that Islamist militants will come to true repentance.

SUDAN

THURSDAY 15: Thank God for the courage and witness of Christians in Sudan. Pray that they would be emboldened to share the gospel more and more.

FRIDAY 16: Pray for five Sudanese Church of Christ (SCOC) leaders of a church

in the Hai Al Thawra West area of Omdurman who were arrested after refusing to stop worshipping. They were charged with disturbing the public.

SATURDAY 17: Pray for Mahjoub Abotrin, a senior leader within the SCOC in Omdurman, who was interrogated in September. Pray that God will set his angels around Mahjoub and his fellow leaders.

SUNDAY 18: Pray for wisdom for all leaders of the SCOC and several other denominations whose leadership the Government is attempting take over.

MONDAY 19: Rafat Obid and Rev Daniel William of the Sudan Evangelical Presbyterian Church (SEPC) were unjustly convicted in October on criminal charges after SEPC resisted government attempts to take over its leadership and sell off church property.

TUESDAY 20: Pray that President Omar al-Bashir and his Government will recognise that the Christians whom they are persecuting make a huge contribution to society and present no threat to national security.

WEDNESDAY 21: Praise God for a ceasefire that has ended the Government's aerial bombardment of the Nuba Mountains, home to many Christians. Pray for the Nuba people who are now facing severe food shortages due to drought.

PAKISTAN

THURSDAY 22: Pray that God will encourage and strengthen His people in Pakistan. Pray that they will know His peace and His perfect plan for their lives (Jeremiah 29:11). Pray that many more Pakistanis will be baptised.

FRIDAY 23: Mushtaq Masih, 14, was reportedly beaten to death by police in Punjab after he got into a fight at school with a classmate who tried to force him to renounce his faith: this boy's uncle is a policeman. Pray for justice for Mushtaq's family.

SATURDAY 24: Pray for imprisoned Christian Iqbal Masih from Lahore: he was arrested on the day of his son's funeral and charged with 'blasphemy', despite being mentally ill.

SUNDAY 25: Five Christian families – the only ones in Sukheki village – have

been forced into hiding after a Christian named Sonu Arshad, 18, was accused of 'blasphemy' online, in a fake Facebook page.

MONDAY 26: The Pakistani Government has set up a regulatory body to monitor 'blasphemous' content on the internet: pray that it will also take firm action against those making false accusations of blasphemy.

TUESDAY 27: Pray for the family of Mukhtar Masih, 70, who was on bail awaiting trial for blasphemy when he died in November. The family had been forced to leave Gujranwala for fear of reprisals.

WEDNESDAY 28: Ask God to soften the hearts of hardline Muslims who are on the look-out for opportunities to accuse Christians of blasphemy. Pray that their false accusations will be like arrows that fail to hit their target (Ephesians 6:16).



Christians in Pakistan celebrate a baptism – in a country where persecution is intense.

MARCH 2018

EGYPT

THURSDAY 1: Pray that the extremist bomb attack on a mosque in Bir al-Abed, near El Arish, in November will pave the way for warmer relations between moderate Muslims and Christians in Egypt. Pray this attack will thwart its perpetrators' aims to sow hatred and discord.

FRIDAY 2: A pro-Islamic State media outlet, Wafa Media Foundation, recently issued a new threat against Egypt's Coptic Christians, saying they must be attacked as 'infidel fighters'. Pray that God will silence these voices.

SATURDAY 3: Pray for Christians in Shobra El-Kheima, Qalyubia, whose church was closed just days after it opened, for fear of possible Islamist attacks. They have no alternative venue.

SUNDAY 4: Thank God that local Muslim families gathered in solidarity around the Coptic church in Shobra El-Kheima, to show their support for it when it first opened last November.

'IT IS AS THOUGH WORSHIP IS A CRIME THAT COPTS HAVE TO BE PENALISED FOR.'

Anba Macarius, Bishop of Minya, following church closures across Minya.

MONDAY 5: Pray for members of a church in El-Sheik Alaa village, Minya, which police closed late last year due to tensions with local Islamists. The church had been closed following extremist attacks in 2015 and had only just reopened.

TUESDAY 6: Anba Mousa El-Aswad church in Keshery village, Minya, has been closed after local extremists stoned the building and attacked Christians. None of the attackers were arrested.

WEDNESDAY 7: In El-Karm village, Abu Qurqas city, police have shut down Abu Sefeen church without reason. In 2016, extremists attacked Christians and their homes in El-Karm after a local Christian was falsely accused of committing adultery with a Muslim woman.

THURSDAY 8: Praise God for the recent reopening of Bethel Church, a Pentecostal church in Minya city, which was finally granted a government permit after 22 years without one.

FRIDAY 9: Pray that God will confound and confuse the plots of Islamic State militants who are active in parts of Egypt such as the

Sinai Peninsula. Pray that they will tire of violence and seek after the Truth who is Jesus.

IRAN

SATURDAY 10: Ask God to multiply His church in Iran. Pray that His people there will hunger and thirst for righteousness (Matthew 5:6) and that their witness will transform their nation.

SUNDAY 11: It remains a crime to convert to Christianity inside Iran. Pray for those who pay a high price for following Jesus, including being rejected by their families and discriminated against by their communities.

MONDAY 12: Naser Navard Gol-Tapeh recently lost his appeal against a ten-year prison sentence for 'missionary activities' and 'actions against national security'. Three Azerbaijanis convicted with him were allowed to leave Iran in 2016: pray Naser will be given his freedom too.

TUESDAY 13: Continue to pray for Victor Bet-Tamraz, Amin Afshar-Naderi, Kaviyan Fallah-Mohammadi and Hadi Asgari who were all given lengthy jail sentences last year for offences relating to evangelism and acting against national security.

WEDNESDAY 14: Between May and November last year, 21 Christians were sentenced to long prison

terms in Iran. Pray these sentences will be overturned on appeal.

THURSDAY 15: Four Christians were arrested in the city of Dezful in south-west Iran in October. One of them remains in custody and has been transferred to Ahvaz, more than 90 miles away. Pray for his release.

FRIDAY 16: Continue to pray for Iran's President Hassan Rouhani. Pray that he will keep his pre-election promises to reform his nation's religious record.

ERITREA

SATURDAY 17: A crackdown last year led to a sharp increase in the numbers of prisoners of faith in Eritrea. Numbers rose to about 400 by the end of 2017. Pray that many of those arrested will be released.

SUNDAY 18: Ask God to sustain those suffering harsh treatment in appalling conditions inside Eritrea's jails. Some of the worst prisons are located in remote areas where temperatures soar: torture and abuse are rife.

MONDAY 19: Ask God to restore the hope of the many Eritrean Christians who have been detained arbitrarily for more than ten years: Release is aware of about 170 such prisoners. Pray that their hope in Jesus will remain alive.

TUESDAY 20: Ask God to comfort and sustain the many

Eritrean families who have been torn apart by detentions and arrests. As a result of arrests made between May and August last year, more than 50 children were left without one or more parent.

WEDNESDAY 21: In May, security officials went from house to house in Adi Quala in southern Eritrea, arresting 25 adults and 12 children, all members of the Kale Hiwot Church. Many adults remain in custody.

THURSDAY 22: Fikadu Debesay died in custody within three months of her arrest in Adi Quala in May: her son and husband remain in jail, while her three other children are left without either parent. Pray this family will be reunited soon.

FRIDAY 23: Last July, 16 girls in their late-teens who were on national service were detained in Metkel Abiet prison camp – as were other Christians and relatives who tried to visit them. Pray that God will be close to these young women.

SATURDAY 24: Continue to pray that God will touch the heart of Eritrean President Isaias Afewerki. He is originally from the mainly Christian Highlands of Eritrea.

IRAQ

SUNDAY 25: Pray for God's people in Iraq: many have fled areas controlled by Islamist extremists. Most

'WE WANT THE LIGHT OF JESUS TO STAY IN IRAQ'

'Hani', Christian displaced from Qaraqosh, Iraq.

face discrimination, and persecution is rife. Ask God to multiply His church in Iraq.

MONDAY 26: Pray that the mainly Christian city of Qaraqosh will once again be a place where large numbers of Christians worship Jesus. Before the Islamic State insurgency, there were 50,000 Chaldean Christians in Qaraqosh: most fled the fighting, but some are now returning.

TUESDAY 27: Praise God for the courage of 'Hani', a displaced Iraqi Christian who wants to return to his hometown, Qaraqosh, to start a church. He was held captive by IS fighters in Qaraqosh for 26 days in 2014 and then later fled for Kurdistan when Islamic State raided the city again.

WEDNESDAY 28: Thank God that many Iraqis like 'Hani' (above) who have fled their homes are meeting Jesus for the first time or in new ways, in Kurdistan. Hani had a Christian background but came to know Jesus as Lord in Erbil.

THURSDAY 29: Please pray that Almighty God will touch the hearts of defeated Islamic State fighters in Iraq,



Militants destroyed this church in Qaraqosh, Iraq: now Christians want to rebuild it.

and across the world, and help them see that love overcomes hate.

FRIDAY 30: On Good Friday, let's thank Jesus for suffering and dying on the Cross so that we could be free. Let's pray that all those who are suffering today for His name's sake – in Iraq and worldwide – will also know the power of His

resurrection in their own situations.

SATURDAY 31: At Easter, please pray that our persecuted family will know that they are part of one body and that others are praying for them. Ask God to reassure them that He is with them always, 'to the very end of the age' (Matthew 28:20).

Sources: China Aid; Morning Star News; Release partners and contacts; The Guardian; VOM USA; World Watch Monitor.

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

Precious Jesus,

Thank you that you are always near, and you draw close to me as I draw close to you (James 4:8). You never leave or forsake me.

Lord, be close to my persecuted brothers and sisters today. Help them to be still and know that you are Lord. You have a plan for their lives, and you know the end from the beginning.

May they find rest, joy and hope in you, Lord, and teach them – and me – to sit at your feet and trust you for everything.

Amen

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Release International, PO Box 54, Orpington BR5 4RT
Tel: 01689 823491 Email: info@releaseinternational.org
Registered Charity 280577

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