

APRIL-JUNE 2018

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL

voice

50
YEARS
1968-2018

of Persecuted Christians

**'WE MUST
BROADCAST
THE GOSPEL'**

News, stories and prayer requests
from persecuted Christians worldwide



Welcome

by Paul Robinson, CEO

Send the Word

In 1967 Richard Wurmbrand pleaded to Western Christians in *Tortured for Christ*: ‘We must broadcast the gospel into captive nations by radio. Using stations in the free world, we can spiritually feed the underground church, which itself is in great need of the Bread of Life.’

Since our founding in 1968, Release has been committed to broadcasting the gospel of Jesus into restricted nations by whatever means possible: both to win souls for Christ, and to encourage persecuted believers in their own gospel ministry.

From the early years of Christian Mission to the Communist World (as Release was then called) radio was an invaluable – and cost-effective – way of reaching the unreached. It still is.

Today our partners make use of satellite television and the internet to communicate the gospel effectively in hostile environments such as **Afghanistan, Egypt, Iran and Pakistan** (see page 6).

As one innovative partner in Afghanistan told us: *‘We are committed to seizing every opportunity to share the good news of Jesus Christ in the ever-changing digital world.’*

In previous decades, the gifts and prayers of supporters in the UK and Ireland also enabled less-conventional ways of spreading the gospel: such as sending hundreds of thousands of helium-filled ‘Scripture balloons’ into **North Korea**, each one containing 49 pages of gospel Scriptures in the local language (see page 16).

North Korean defectors subsequently reported how these unusual broadcasts brought encouragement to persecuted believers – and enabled the gospel even to reach soldiers in the North Korean army.

Throughout the Book of Acts, Luke notes how the Word of God ‘increased and multiplied’ (Acts 12:24). Our prayer likewise is that God will use each of these varied gospel initiatives to extend His kingdom.

50th ANNIVERSARY ACTIVITIES

- Hold your Sunday meeting outside on May 27 in solidarity with persecuted believers (see page 17)
- Carry the Cross: a public witness in your town (see page 8)
- Sign up for our #Pray50 campaign and make use of weekly prayers for churches, groups and individuals (see page 8)
- Don’t miss former prisoner of faith **Petr Jasek** speaking in June and July (see page 9)

**GREAT
OUTDOORS**
CHURCH
SERVICE

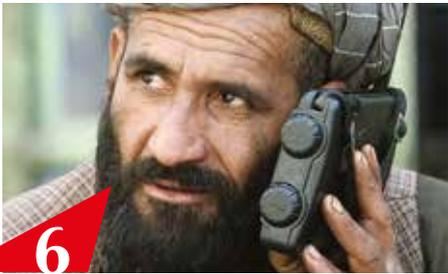
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RELEASE INTERNATIONAL
Voice 50 YEARS
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Release helps Christians in the UK and Ireland to actively engage with their persecuted brothers and sisters around the world: praying with them, standing with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

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FAITH UNDER FIRE



Photo: Morning Star News.

Hindu extremists burn Bibles

Hindu extremists in southern India verbally abused a group of elderly Christians who were distributing Bibles – then seized the scriptures and set them on fire.

The Christians – all senior citizens associated with Gideons International – were attacked in Singotam village, Nagar Kurnool District, Telangana state.

‘From now on, if any of you distribute Bibles, we will attack you brutally,’ one of the attackers warned the Christians.

The hostilities come after ‘one of the most traumatic’ years of persecution of Christians, according to a report by the Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI).

• ***Please pray for protection for Indian believers as they share their faith.***



Dr Li Baiguang (right) with Bob Fu of China Aid in 2010.
Photo: Justin Black.

Suspicious death of renowned Chinese Christian lawyer

Celebrated Chinese campaigner for Christian freedom, Dr Li Baiguang, has died in suspicious circumstances.

Dr Li, an internationally renowned human rights defence lawyer, was pronounced dead on February 26. He is said to have died in the Chinese government military hospital in Nanjing, hours after checking in for a stomach complaint.

The hospital said he had bled to death due to a liver condition – but Dr Li, who was only 49 and neither drank nor smoked, had been in good health shortly beforehand. Other human rights campaigners have died in similarly suspicious circumstances.

‘We are deeply saddened by the loss of this courageous, bold and compassionate Christian lawyer’

The authorities had previously used violence and threatening behaviour against Dr Li. In October 2017, for example, he was abducted by officials in Zhejiang province, beaten and threatened with dismemberment for defending farmers whose land was seized by the government.

In February 2018 Li said he felt threatened after attending the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington. While he was out of the country, Chinese authorities interrogated his pastor.

He leaves a wife and eight-year-old son.

‘We are deeply saddened by the loss of this courageous, bold and compassionate Christian lawyer,’ said Release CEO Paul Robinson. *‘We call on China to give a full, independent and transparent account of the reasons for his sudden and unexpected death.’*

Release partner Bob Fu described the death as ‘really suspicious’.

• ***Please pray that God will comfort and strengthen Dr Li’s family.***

CHURCH IN ZANZIBAR DEMOLISHED

A congregation on Tanzania's semi-autonomous island of Zanzibar has been without a place to worship after local authorities demolished their church building, the pastor said.

Local government officials gave no prior warning to church leaders before a bulldozer razed the building in Zanzibar Town to make way for a state university to use the land, pastor Charles Madama of Zanzibar Pentecostal Church of Jesus said.

'It came to us as a big surprise when the bulldozer pulled down the church building without notice, and we lost everything,' said the pastor.

- *Pray that this church in Zanzibar will find another place to meet.*



Sudanese authorities bulldoze church building

The 64 members of the Evangelical Church in Al Haj Yousif in the Sudanese capital Khartoum have no place to worship after a bulldozer accompanied by police demolished their building without warning.

Police arrived in three trucks just a few hours after the end of Sunday worship, said a church leader. *'They took everything from the church,'* she said.

Eyewitnesses said police confiscated chairs, tables and Bibles before the demolition.

Officials said that the church was demolished because their meetings were creating a public disturbance. However, church leaders said that the government is helping a Muslim business interest to seize their land, which they have owned since 1989.

- *Pray that God will encourage these believers and enable them to continue to meet.*



To show solidarity with believers whose buildings have been closed or demolished, why not take part in this year's Great Outdoors Church Service on May 27? See page 17.



NEW WEBSITE

Visit our new website at releaseinternational.org to find out how you can take action to support persecuted Christians.

- Download free resources
- Buy books and DVDs
- Find project information
- Give securely online

50TH
ANNIVERSARY

WE MUST BROADCAST THE GOSPEL...

...pleaded Richard Wurmbrand after his release from prison. In our 50th anniversary year, let's heed his words and spread the gospel by radio, satellite TV and the internet to hostile nations.

'Our greatest joy in talking with our audience is to hear believers gathering together in fellowship and experiencing growth,' said our partner in Afghanistan – where the law remains extremely hostile to believers from a Muslim background.

However, despite this restrictive environment, our partner's innovative use of radio, TV and social media is helping to spread the gospel – and to encourage believers who often experience rejection by their families and communities.

'We have started a TV series called The ABCs of the Christian faith, which is adapted from the Alpha course,' they said. *'Muslims want to know what Christians believe. We explain the Christian faith in a way that our audience can understand.'*

In response to these broadcasts, our

partner receives many inquiries and requests for follow-up, not just from Afghanistan, but from neighbouring Pakistan and Iran as well. These are just a few recent examples:

'We are a group of believers that gather once a week and watch your TV show. We enjoy it and learn a lot. Each programme has so many lessons for us.'

'I live in Iran with 13 friends in one room. I started listening to your radio programmes and reading the Bible. I asked my friends to listen. They are all reading the Bible and listening to your broadcasts.'

A caller from northern Afghanistan told our partner: 'God opened my eyes to see the beauty and love of God through listening to your programme. I am really in love with what you guys teach.'

He requested a Bible from our partner and said: *'I do not want my children to go to the madrasa and learn how to kill and destroy. I hope that they would learn how to truly love.'*

'We are committed to seizing every opportunity to share the good news of Jesus Christ'

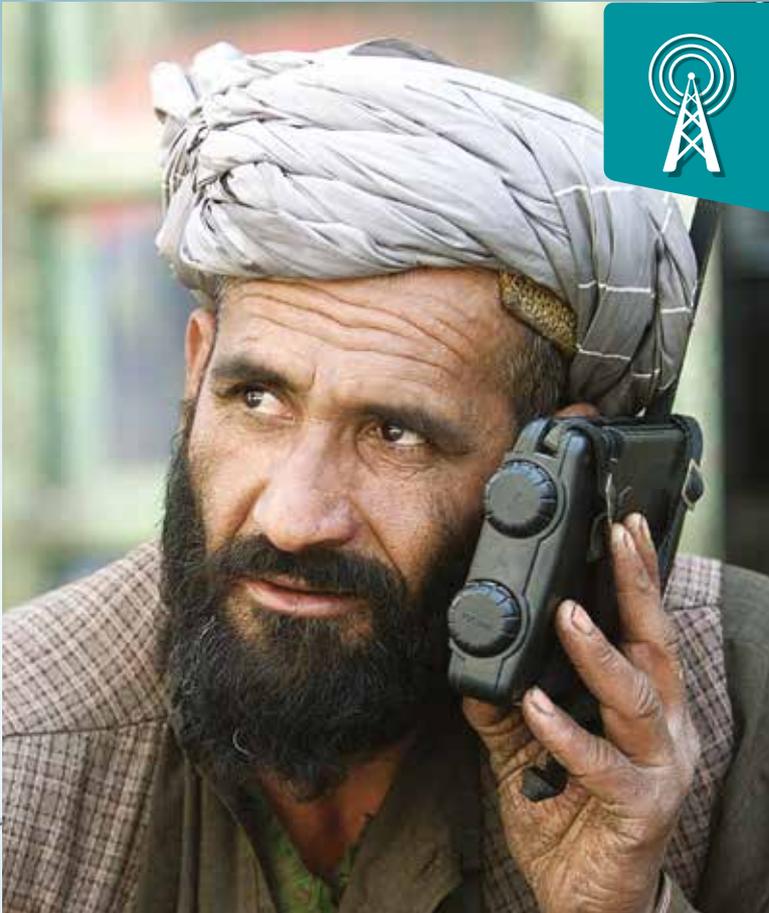
Another listener said: *'I am in the Afghan Army and getting together for prayer, worship and Bible study once a week with a group of other believers.'* He thanked our partner for the broadcasts.

This vital radio and TV ministry provides encouragement for believers in difficult circumstances.

One Afghan caller rang to say: *'I am listening regularly; your programmes give me hope to live and help me keep going. The Taliban are in control in the area. Please keep us in your prayers.'*

At the end of the call our partner prayed for him and the place where he lives.

Today our partner is also making



GOSPEL MINISTRIES

In addition to supporting our partner in Afghanistan, Release also funds:

- a recording studio producing Christian programmes in **Laos**.
- discipleship training for defectors from **North Korea**, some of whom now produce gospel radio programmes that are broadcast into that country.
- two other ministries broadcasting Christian programmes into **Afghanistan, Iran** and tribal areas of **Pakistan**.
- ministries in **Kenya** and **Egypt** which train new believers to reach out to their communities. Many of these use the internet to share the Gospel.

use of social media to broadcast the gospel: 'Several young Afghan colleagues have joined our team and have "rebooted" our social media ministry with fresh and regular Facebook and YouTube postings as well as lively engagement.

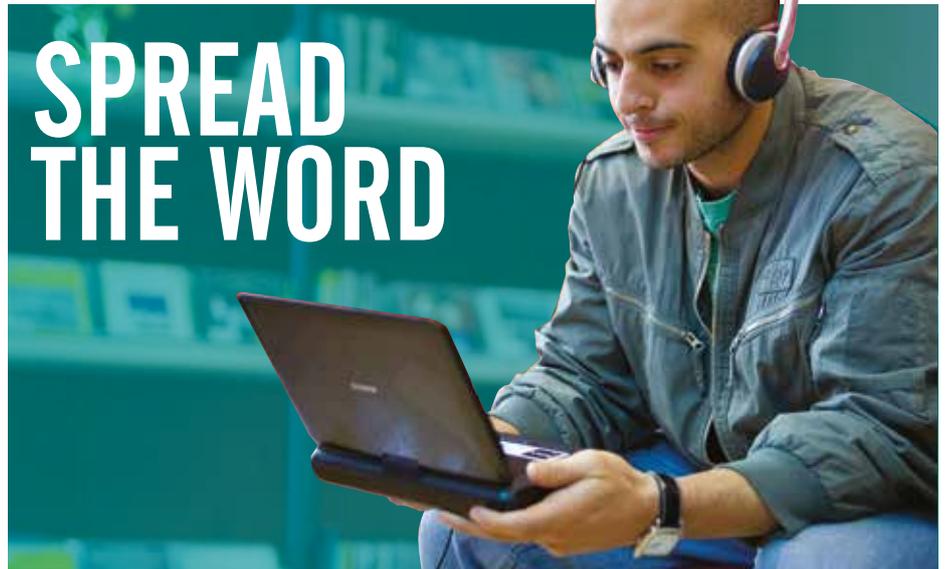
'We are committed to seizing every opportunity to share the good news of Jesus Christ in the ever-changing digital world.'

RICHARD WURMBRAND'S PLEA

Richard considered the use of radio to be the key to broadcasting the Gospel into restricted and hostile nations. Today we also support projects using satellite



TV, and web-based and social media. With your support, we will continue to broadcast the Gospel into restricted and hostile communities throughout 2018, as Richard asked us to do.



Radio, satellite TV and the internet provide unique and powerful ways of reaching the unreached with the gospel.

As you can read here, many lives are being transformed and local believers strengthened in their faith.

In our 50th anniversary year, will you help us so that even more may hear the good news of Jesus in their own language?

Please give generously by using the attached card, or by calling 01689 823491.

DO NOT ABANDON THEM

Here are some special ways you can support persecuted Christians during Release's fiftieth year.



ORDER OUR NEW FUNDRAISING PACK

Make a difference to the lives of persecuted Christians by using our new pack to organise your own fundraising event or activity.

Contains:

- Creative fundraising ideas
- Four A3 and A4 colour posters (pictured)
- Pledge cards (see opposite)
- Children's leaflets
- Collecting boxes and more!

Order your free pack today using the attached card or call

01689 823491

(email info@releaseinternational.org)



CARRY THE CROSS IN YOUR TOWN



As part of our 50th anniversary, Release is calling on churches to organise their own Cross Walk (complete with full-size wooden cross) to show in public their solidarity with persecuted believers.

Your local speaker (see page 17) can provide guidance, including instructions on how to make the cross and what permissions are needed for this event.

This could be a powerful act of witness for your church – or even group of churches.

Why not suggest this to your church leader?

#PRAY50



We'd love as many of you as possible to join our #PRAY50 campaign, and commit to praying for persecutors every week this year.

You can find weekly prayers for use by churches, small groups, prayer groups and individuals on our website and on Facebook.

 releaseinternational.org

 [releaseinternational](https://www.facebook.com/releaseinternational)

MEET US AT THESE EVENTS

April 3-7
Spring Harvest (Harrogate)

May 4-7
Bible by the Beach (Eastbourne)

May 26-27
Big Church Day Out (Sussex)

June 1-2
Big Church Day Out (Cheshire)

June 27-July 9
Petr Jasek speaking tour (see box)

July 23-29
Refuel (Scotland)

July 27-August 10
Keswick

July 28-August 11
New Wine (Shepton Mallet)

August 28-31
Greenbelt (Northamptonshire)

November 20-27
Archbishop Ben Kwashi speaking tour (see box)

October 4
50th Anniversary Thanksgiving Service (London)

Please check our website releaseinternational.org for the latest details

BE INSPIRED BY TWO OUTSTANDING PARTNERS

Two high-profile partners of Release will be speaking at churches in the UK. This is a great opportunity to be both informed and inspired.



venues **June 27-July 9.**

PETR JASEK Christian aid worker Petr Jasek was accused of spying and imprisoned in Sudan for 445 days, before being released in February 2017. Today he works for our associate ministry Voice of the Martyrs (USA). He will be sharing his experience at various



ARCHBISHOP BEN KWASHI The Rt Rev Dr Ben Kwashi is well-known for faithfully serving persecuted Christians in Plateau State, central Nigeria. You can hear Ben, a powerful speaker, at various venues **November 20-27** (to be confirmed).

Further details will be posted on our website releaseinternational.org.



ANNIVERSARY VIDEO

We've made a special short video to commemorate 50 years of ministry to persecuted Christians. Please watch on YouTube, leave a comment and share the link with your friends.

[releaseinternational](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=releaseinternational)

SIGN THE PLEDGE AND PASS IT ON

"I WILL NOT ABANDON THEM!"

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

PLEASE SEND ME YOUR FREE QUARTERLY MAGAZINE. PLEASE USE BLOCK CAPITALS.

Name: _____ D.O.B: _____
 Email: _____
 Mobile: _____
 Address: _____
 Church name & address: _____

Please return your completed card to FREEPOST BTKN-GCJL-SCZL, Release International, PO Box 54, Orpington BR5 4GT.

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: 'Refuges 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.'

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL
voice 50
 of Persecuted Christians 1968-2018

We are delighted that many of you signed and returned the Pledge card in the last edition of our magazine – pledging not to abandon persecuted Christians this year. This is a wonderful act of support!

If you know of others who would be willing to sign the pledge, please ask us to send you some printed Pledge cards.

Call 01689 823491 or email info@releaseinternational.org. You can also download the card from releaseinternational.org.

**I WILL NOT
ABANDON
THEM!**

50
YEARS
1968-2018

Vera and Marina waited four years for Pastor Dmitri Shestakov to be released from prison. Help and support from Release made sure that they were not forgotten.



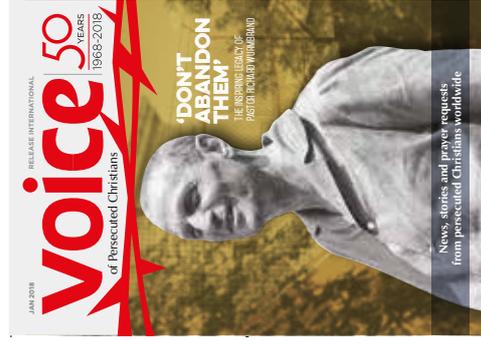
ARRESTED. IMPRISONED.

SEPARATED FOR 4 YEARS.

Persecuted Christians need your help today. Please don't abandon them.

PLEDGE YOUR SUPPORT

for persecuted Christians around the world.



SIGN OUR PLEDGE CARD

to support persecuted Christians

TEXT JESU00 £10 to 70070

to make a vital donation today

SIGN UP for our free uplifting quarterly magazine

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Charity Registration No 280577 (SC No 040456)
Registered with the Fundraising Regulator.

GO TO

releaseinternational.org

EMAIL

info@releaseinternational.org

OR CALL 01689 823491

to sign up and to order
Pledge cards for you and
your Christian friends.

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

In this extract from *Tortured for Christ*, Richard Wurmbrand describes how the Saviour's love helped him to endure extreme suffering – and even to love his persecutors.

‘HOW WE COULD BE JOYFUL – EVEN IN PRISON’

When I look back on my fourteen years in prison, it was occasionally a very happy time. Other prisoners and even the guards very often wondered at how happy Christians could be under the most terrible circumstances. We could not be prevented from singing, although we were beaten for this. I imagine that nightingales, too, would sing, even if they knew that after finishing they would be killed for it. Christians in prison danced for joy. How could they be so happy under such tragic conditions?

I meditated often in prison about Jesus' words to His disciples, 'Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see' (Luke 10:23). The disciples had just come back from a tour through Palestine where they had seen horrors. Palestine was an oppressed country. Everywhere there was the terrible misery of a tyrannised people. The disciples met sickness, plagues, hunger and sorrow. They entered houses from which patriots had been

taken to prison, leaving behind weeping parents or wives. It was not a beautiful world to look upon.

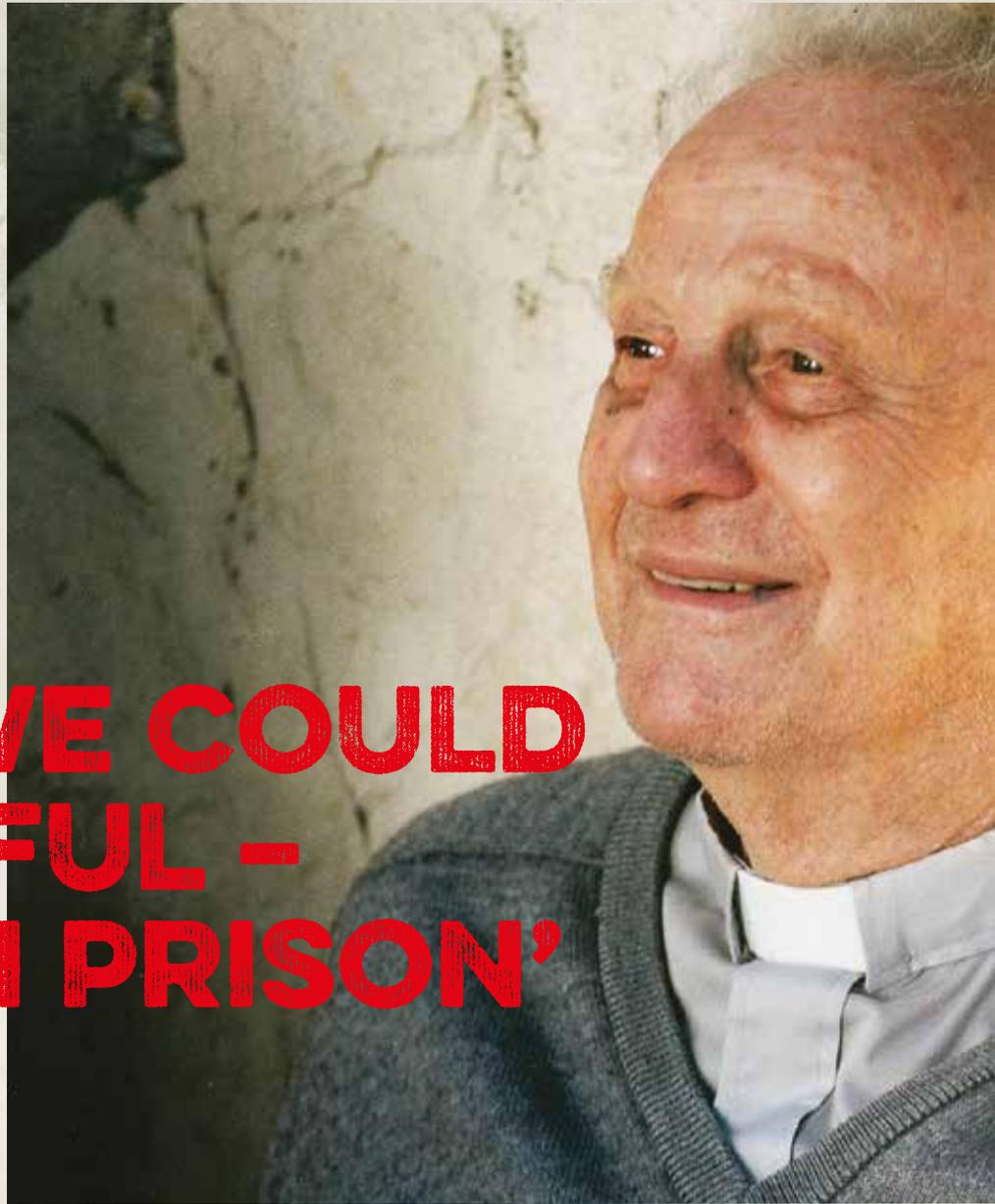
Still Jesus said, 'Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see.' That was because they had not seen only the suffering. They had also seen the Saviour.

It was in prison that we found the hope of salvation for the Communists. It was there that we developed a sense of responsibility towards them. It was in being tortured by them that we learned to love them.

God sees things differently than we see them, just as we see differently than an ant. From the human point of view, to be tied to a cross and

smearing with excrement is a horrible thing. Nonetheless, the Bible calls the sufferings of martyrs 'light afflictions'. To be in prison for fourteen years is a long period to us. The Bible calls it 'but for a moment', and tells us that these things are 'working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory' (2 Corinthians 4:17).

Pastor Richard Wurmbrand was released from prison in communist Romania in 1965. His powerful testimony inspired the founding of Christian Mission to the Communist World in 1968 – the organisation that later became Release International. His passionate vision to help persecuted Christians continues to inspire our ministry today.



REMEMBERING RICHARD



For many, hearing or meeting Richard and Sabina Wurmbrand was a life-changing experience.

REV STUART HARRIS first met the Wurmbrands in Bucharest in 1964:

'We met Mrs Wurmbrand and also their son, Michael. They all looked very sad, and yet there was a light in their eyes because of the joy of their reunion with the pastor after so many years. Richard Wurmbrand told us the story of his experiences in prison. He took off his shirt and showed us the marks on his body, both back and front. We were amazed and stunned by what we saw and heard. It was unbelievable that such tortures and horrors should be enacted in our own continent of Europe. Yet, there it was before our eyes and our hearts were deeply moved.'

In 1968 Stuart set up Christian Mission to the Communist World (CMCW) – the ministry that became Release International in 1992

Former board member **GEOFF ALEXANDER** recalled:

'I, with many others, was deeply impressed by what Richard had to say about the suffering he had been through. He was particularly gifted in the ability to express this, both verbally and in writing. He made a

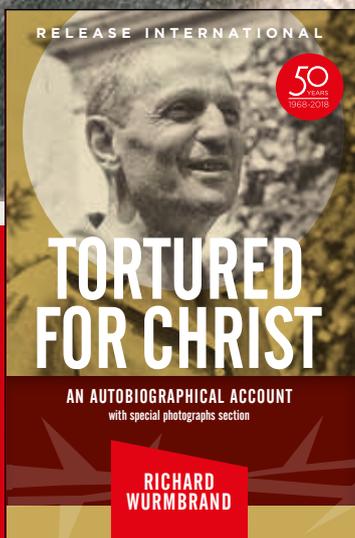
tremendous stir in the West at that time.

The stories he was telling about communism and Marxism and the effect it was having on Eastern Europe and Russia itself were incomprehensible, unbelievable, so it took a long time to sink in. He made extensive tours of the UK, various European countries and of America in those years following his release.

Sabina was an extraordinary woman. He was very tall and a bit bowed. She was like a little bird, up to his waist roughly, but she had a heart like a lion. She was an incredible woman.'

JOHN BARTHOLOMEW remembers when the Wurmbrands stayed at his home in 1972:

'We had the privilege of having them to stay in our home in Surrey and witnessed the scars on his body. I well remember booking the Albert Hall for him to speak and he filled it to the doors. What a pair! She, of course, was knee-high to a grasshopper but had a character and a witness for the Lord which was bigger than the ocean.'



TORTURED FOR CHRIST

Use the attached card or call: 01689 823491 to order your 50th anniversary edition of Richard Wurmbrand's powerful testimony *Tortured for Christ* for just £8 including postage and packing.

GOOD NEWS

FLAMES STOP SHORT OF OPEN BIBLE

Christians in Kyrgyzstan are rejoicing after the flames caused by a firebomb attack on an evangelical church went out – just before reaching an open copy of the Bible.

Firemen who tackled the flames later found several bottles of petrol which had failed to ignite.

'This is an amazing sign,' said our partner in Kyrgyzstan. *'This happened once before when Communists set fire to a Pentecostal church during the night. The Bible and that building survived too, and there is no doubt the church in Kyrgyzstan will survive – and continue to preach the Gospel.'*

The attack on the Evangelical Christian Baptist Church in Kaji-Say, on the south shore of Lake Issyk Kul in the country's north east, was featured by the *Daily Mail* online – based on our reporting.



THE POWER OF LOVE

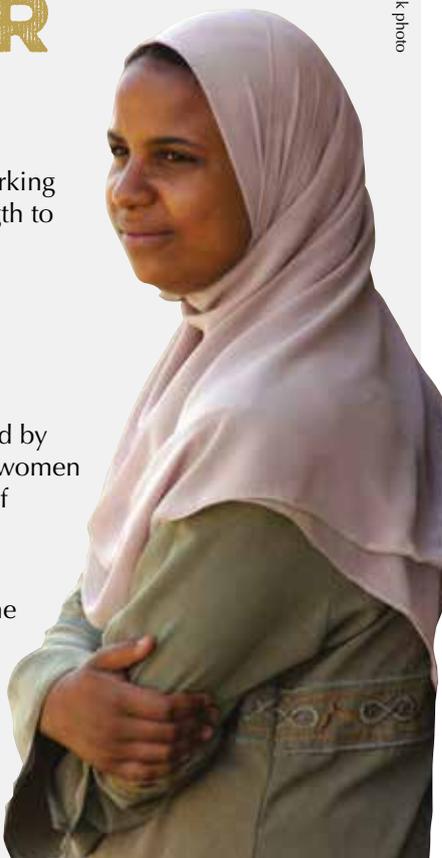
For the past three years Faith has been working as a facilitator for three of Release's Strength to Stand groups in Egypt.

During this time she has got to know over 45 vulnerable Christian women and their families – and has seen some remarkable transformations too.

Rita, for example, lived a life overwhelmed by fear and negativity. But when Faith asked women in the group to describe Rita with words of love, it was the first time anyone had said anything positive to her.

Rita now leads devotions in the groups, she laughs and is joyful, even though her circumstances remain the same. She may still face taunting and abuse in the street – but now she knows that she is a daughter of the King!

Names have been changed



LAO CHRISTIANS RELEASED

Six Christians in Laos who spent more than a month in jail for celebrating Christmas have now been set free.

Release contacts say the Christians in Vientiane province were taken into custody because they had not sought official permission to hold a Christmas party. As part of their celebrations, they invited the whole village to watch the *Jesus* film.

The six were freed after each paid a fine of £355. Release contacts provided food for the believers while they were in jail, as well as support for their families.

WILL YOU DO SOMETHING SPECIAL

for our 50th anniversary?

What do you, or your youth or student/young adults group have on your bucket list for 2018?

You could run, walk, bake or cycle to raise funds for Christians facing persecution around the world.

Why not challenge your group to use their skills to support those who face extreme persecution for their faith?

Here are a few fundraising ideas to get you started. You could organise:

- A band gig
- Sponsored walk
- Cake sale
- Bike ride
- Movie night
- 'Sabina supper' (see right)



If you do any of these, we'd love to hear how you get on (send an email to potential@releaseinternational.org).



HOST YOUR OWN 'SABINA SUPPER'

Many Release supporters have attended an 'Esther Experience' event over the past few years which have raised well over £6,000 to date – thank you!

Are you ready to do something new to help persecuted Christians? If so, we'd love to invite you to host a 'Sabina Supper' to support our 50th anniversary.

It's simple to take part: just put on a supper or tea party in your home or church (or a picnic outdoors in the summer) and invite members of your church, your friends and family.

During the meal, take the opportunity to share Sabina Wurmbrand's powerful story (she and her husband Richard inspired the founding of Release in 1968).

We have prepared a new pack to help you plan your event, which you can download now from releaseinternational.org (or call 01689 823491 if you want a printed copy).

We also have Sabina's inspiring book *The Pastor's Wife* available to buy. You can listen to a recording of Judy Moore performing an extract from *The Pastor's Wife* at releaseinternational.org.

All funds will support our Strength to Stand projects which help persecuted Christian women in Pakistan and Egypt - part of our Release Women ministry. Find out more at releaseinternational.org/release-women.

FROM THE
ARCHIVES

UP, UP AND AWAY!

In our fiftieth year we look back on one of the most interesting – and innovative – projects to share the gospel in a restricted nation.



Since the early years of Release, Christian partners in Asia have been committed to the dangerous task of sharing the gospel inside North

Korea – arguably one of the most repressive nations in the world.

In our newsletter report of 1998 (pictured), we described how many thousands of helium-filled ‘Scripture balloons’ were being sent into North Korea, each one containing over 49 pages of Scripture to explain the good news of Jesus.

‘I thought they had forgotten us’

As our report explained: ‘Some are found – and read – by the North Korean army. These Scriptures have

been sent over the entire length of the nation, up to the Chinese border.’

The gospel balloons also brought encouragement to North Korean believers by showing that Christians outside the country were praying for them and wanting to support them.

Our partner describes how one elderly North Korean woman was overjoyed after her granddaughter discovered one of the colourful balloons. Unable to see, the grandmother asked the child to read out the Scriptures carried by the balloon. ‘Oh, I thought they had forgotten us,’ she said.

Our report concluded: ‘Someone out there was interceding before the Lord and the balloon arrived to them in their village. It had arrived about 120 miles away from its launch site.’

In recent years much larger weather balloons were used (pictured), complete with satellite tracking to ensure that they reached their intended destination.



While Release does not directly fund the balloon project at the moment, we support the discipleship of North Korean defectors who often go on to work with our partners, including assisting with balloon launches.

To find out how you can help to broadcast the gospel to restricted nations, see page 6.

**GREAT
OUTDOORS**
CHURCH
SERVICE



OUTDOOR PRAYER WARRIORS!



Is your church taking to the great outdoors this year to stand in solidarity with persecuted Christians?

On Sunday, May 27*, churches in the UK and Ireland are invited to hold their services in the open air to pray for our brothers and sisters around the world who have been deprived of their meeting places or can only get together as believers in secret.

Will you be part of this important prayer event for the persecuted in our fiftieth year?

Churches that have previously taken part in Release's Great Outdoors Church Service have told us how meeting outside has given them a taste of what it is like for believers who do not have the comfort or security of meeting in a building, while also being a great witness to their local communities.

We'd love to know how you get on this year so please do send us your feedback and any photos you take. Email info@releaseinternational.org.

Release CEO Paul Robinson said: *'Please do encourage your church to take part. This is a really great opportunity to be prayer warriors for the persecuted.'*

Find out more at releaseinternational.org/gocs.

**Please feel free to choose another date if that is more convenient.*

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
01689 823491

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*. What might that mean for you, in practice? In a series of articles to mark Release's 50th anniversary year, Kenneth Harrod offers some biblical answers.

STRENGTHENING THE PERSECUTED

Ever had the feeling 'I just want to get home'? Perhaps at the end of a long day at work, or standing in a queue at the supermarket – or even waiting in a foreign airport at the end of a wonderful holiday.

At that point all you want to do is get home, as quickly and as painlessly as possible.

The Apostle Paul's first missionary journey had been a ground-breaking event in the expansion of Christianity. Paul had seen many people won for Christ – but he had also faced opposition.

His journey with Barnabas had been a circuitous one. In the southern Galatian city of Derbe we are told they 'made many disciples' (Acts 14:21; ESV). What would they do next? If your Bible has maps at the back you can see the obvious route from Derbe. Head east. Complete the circuit. Get home at last to Antioch in Syria.

But that's not what Paul did.

Instead we read: 'They returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch (the other Antioch, in Pisidia)...' Paul chose the long and difficult route home, deliberately retracing his steps; deliberately returning to the very places where he had faced such violent opposition! Why?

The next verse has huge implications and significance as we consider our response to the persecution of Christians.

They retraced their steps, Luke tells us, 'strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God' (Acts 14:22).

We may not be called upon personally to go the lengths Paul was willing to go to – but we should share his concern.

Paul was more concerned for the discipling of those now facing opposition than he was for his own comfort.

Strengthening persecuted Christians is another important way we demonstrate that we will not abandon them.

We may not be called upon personally to go the lengths Paul was willing to go to – but we should share his concern.

Persecuted Christians need discipling. Yes, the needs will sometimes be physical and practical. But as they seek to serve Christ they may need training. They may need Bibles. They may be in desperate need of resources.

Richard Wurmbrand's pleas to Christians in the West (in the final chapter of *Tortured for Christ*) reflect many of these issues. Do you have the Apostle Paul's heart for those who suffer for Christ? Are you concerned to see them strengthened in their faith? Will you commit to supporting that vital work today?

INSPIRING FAITH



'Jesus died for our sins... but death could not hold Him. It could not contain the best. God gave the best He had. We also are meant to give our best to Him.'

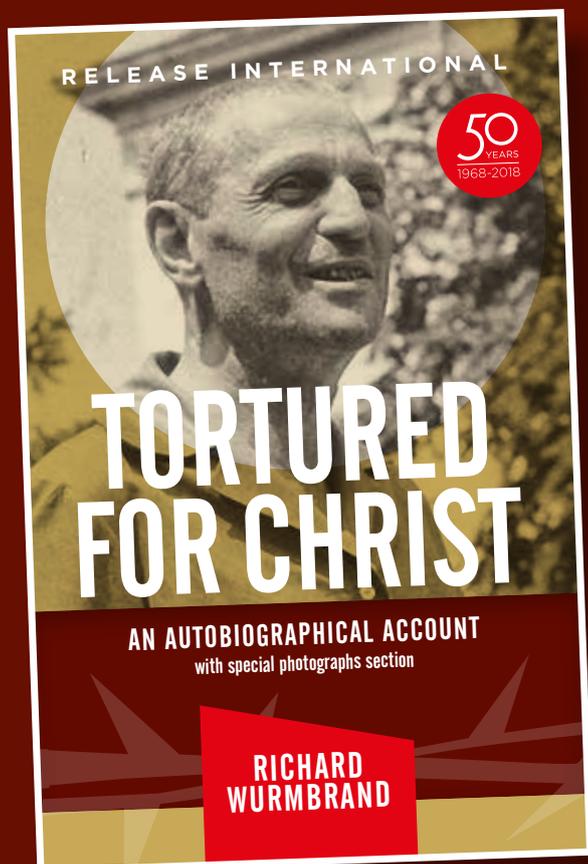
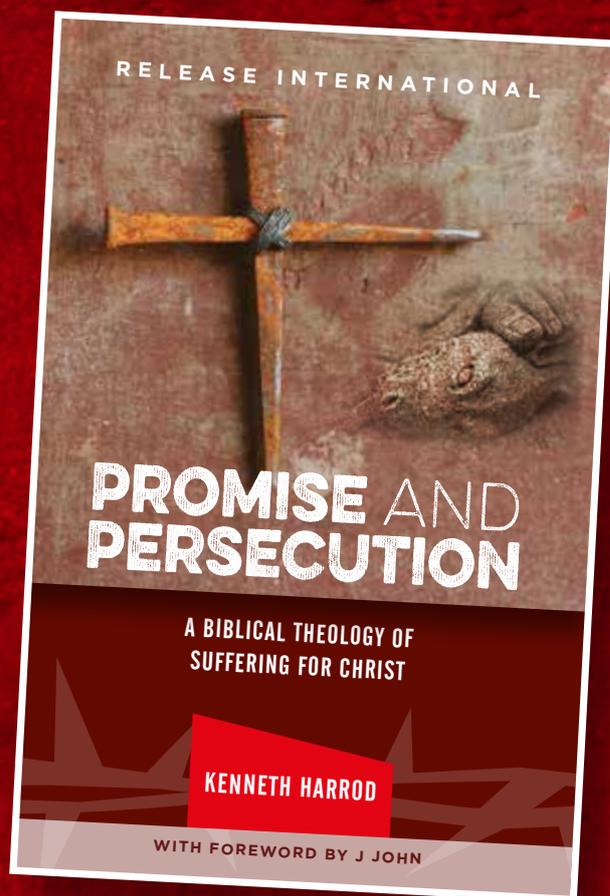
Pastor Richard Wurmbrand was imprisoned for 14 years in communist Romania in the 1950s and 1960s. In 1968 he inspired the founding of Release, which today continues his ministry to serve persecuted Christians around the world in the name of Jesus.

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

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

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

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



Don't miss the special 50th anniversary edition of Richard Wurmbrand's inspiring testimony *Tortured for Christ*: complete with a new selection of archive photographs.

Richard powerfully describes how after the Second World War he was imprisoned for 14 years in communist Romania. Despite regular torture, he refused to renounce his faith – instead choosing to love his persecutors. His message and vision are still powerfully relevant today.

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

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 in your Will those who are persecuted 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

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



PRAYERSHIELD

APRIL-JUNE 2018



These Christians are distributing God's word in remote areas of Vietnam.

APRIL 2018

Heavenly Father,

Thank you that your word is a double-edged sword, alive and active with the power to transform lives. We praise you that wherever it is spoken, it is fruitful (Isaiah 55:11).

Please strengthen our persecuted family, comfort them and drive out all fear with words of wisdom, hope and love. Lord, for those who have no Bible, bring to mind scriptures they fear they have forgotten.

Give them the sword of the Spirit, your word (Ephesians 6:17), so that they can declare your truth over their circumstances, Lord, and see you transform their situation.

Amen

VIETNAM

SUNDAY 1: On Easter Sunday, let's pray that persecuted Christians in Vietnam and across the world will have a powerful experience of the joy and hope that Jesus' resurrection brings.

MONDAY 2: Pray for Christians in Vietnam as new laws on religion, now in force, threaten to limit their freedoms. Now, religious groups must be registered and approved by the Government.

TUESDAY 3: Thank God that relations between the Government and faith groups have improved slightly in recent years. Pray that the new law (above) will not threaten this progress.

WEDNESDAY 4: Ask God to protect those Christians who speak out against corruption and rights abuses. Many have been taken into custody during a recent crackdown on perceived dissent.

THURSDAY 5: Christian lawyer Nguyen Van Dai and Pastor Nguyen Trung Ton are both still in custody in Hanoi since their arrests in December 2015 and July 2017 respectively – after they called for greater religious freedom.

FRIDAY 6: Christian activist Maria Tran Thj Nga was recently sentenced to nine years in prison for 'propaganda against the state'. Pray this sentence will be reduced.

SATURDAY 7: #Pray50
Please pray that God will speak to the hearts of those who persecute our Christian family in Vietnam – and reveal His great love for them.

NORTH KOREA

SUNDAY 8: #Pray50 Please pray for Pyongyang's leaders, that God will meet them in His grace and His glory so they have a radical change of heart and Christians can practise their faith freely.

MONDAY 9: Pray that God will protect all those involved in a Christian radio programme which Release associate ministry VOM Korea broadcasts into North Korea.

TUESDAY 10: Praise God for the way He is using 'Hannah' (pictured), now a familiar voice on VOM Korea radio programmes broadcast into North Korea. Hannah defected: her family remain in North Korea.

WEDNESDAY 11: 'Kyung-ja' first heard about Jesus through a prison guard in North Korea as he beat her and falsely accused her of being a Christian. This piqued her curiosity. On her release, she defected and turned to Christ: praise God!

THURSDAY 12: Pray that God will make invisible those

brave Christians who risk everything to enter North Korea, spread the gospel and support the underground church.

FRIDAY 13: Ask Jesus to sustain and strengthen Christians in North Korea and restore their hope in a future where His name is glorified across the Korean peninsula.

SATURDAY 14: Pray for the release of South Korean pastor Kim Kuk-gi who is serving a life sentence in North Korea for 'spying'.

SUNDAY 15: #Pray50 Thank God that guards in some of North Korea's harshest prisons and labour camps know of Jesus – and the 'dangerous' religion He represents. Pray that they will come to know Him personally.



North Korean defector 'Hannah' now broadcasts Christian radio programmes into her homeland.

CHINA

MONDAY 16: A crackdown on 'cults' in Yunnan province has led to mass arrests of about 200 Christians – with many now facing long jail sentences. Ask God to grant His peace to those convicted and those awaiting trial.

TUESDAY 17: Pray for the release of six members of a church in Lincang, Yunnan, who have been handed sentences of between four and 13 years – for being part of a 'dangerous sect'.

WEDNESDAY 18: Officials have told some of the lawyers defending Yunnan Christians (above) that they are suspected of defending their clients 'illegally' and that their qualifications will be 'reviewed'.

THURSDAY 19: Huoshi Church in Guizhou province was fined £800,000 after a court decreed church offerings were 'illegal income'. Officials forcibly sold off the three church sites to cover this fine. Pray that God will provide new buildings.

NIGERIA

FRIDAY 20: Seventy-five people were killed in a string of recent attacks by Fulani militants on Christian villages in Miango, Plateau state. Some communities had just finished repairs after a 2017 attack.

SATURDAY 21: Up to 3,000 villagers from Miango sought refuge in neighbouring communities after attacks earlier this year (above). They have lost their homes and livelihoods: ask God to provide for them.

SUNDAY 22: Pray that President Muhammadu Buhari will take firm action against the Fulani and their associates: many believe that 'terrorists' are in fact responsible for some recent attacks.

MONDAY 23: Pray that external support for militants attacking Christian communities in the Middle Belt will dry up: assailants have been armed with AK47s and other expensive weapons.

TUESDAY 24: #Pray50
Lift up in prayer the men of violence who want to destroy lives and seize land by force. Pray that God will convict them of their sin and cause them to be appalled by the bloodshed.

INDIA

WEDNESDAY 25: Pray for the family of Pastor Gideon Periyaswamy who was found hanged in Kanchipuram, southern India. Local

believers have been harassed by militant Hindus; many believe the pastor was murdered.

THURSDAY 26: Ask God to protect Pastor Jeeewer Joeswa who is accused of forcibly converting a young Christian woman called Seema in Jammu and Kashmir state. Extremists set fire to his church.

FRIDAY 27: When Seema (above) died, extremists blamed Pastor Jeeewer for her death and tried to burn alive her widower, Rinku. Pray that Rinku will stand firm in his faith.

SATURDAY 28: Pray for Rev Shaju Devassy, director of a Christian college in Vidisha, Madhya Pradesh, which has faced huge demonstrations by extremists in recent months.

SUNDAY 29: Thank God that federal and state officials intervened to protect Rev Shaju's college (above): they provided heavy security and several Hindu nationalists were arrested during protests.

MONDAY 30: #Pray50 In parts of India, local officials appear to collude with Hindu extremists to persecute Christians. Pray that these officials will take seriously their public duties and treat all citizens as equals.

**'I WILL DIE A MARTYR FOR CHRIST;
BUT HIS MINISTRY WILL NOT END.'**

Pastor Gideon Periyaswamy, India, before his murder

MAY 2018

MALAYSIA

TUESDAY 1: It is illegal for Malays to convert to Christianity or to have a Bible. Most churches in Malaysia operate in minority languages, not Malay. Pray that the Holy Spirit will move among the Malay community.

WEDNESDAY 2: Ask God to heal three churchgoers injured in January when a device made from fireworks exploded at the Luther Centre in Petaling Jaya.

THURSDAY 3: In January, a petrol bomb was thrown at a Methodist church in Kota Bahrū in a suspected extremist attack. Its windows had been broken four days earlier. Ask God to protect this congregation.

FRIDAY 4: Pray that Malaysian police will do more to protect church communities. Pray for greater commitment among political leaders to protect religious liberties.

SATURDAY 5: Pray that moderate Malaysians will resist apparent efforts to fuel distrust between different faith groups. Pray that the victor in Malaysia's general elections will champion religious rights.

SUNDAY 6: #Pray50 Ask God to speak peace and love into the hearts of extremist groups which appear bent on stirring up intolerance in Malaysia. Pray that they will become peace-builders.

PAKISTAN

MONDAY 7: Pray for Elisha, 12, who was reportedly abducted in November. and forced to convert to Islam and marry her abductor. Her father is now bringing charges against her 'husband' – despite threats from her kidnapper's family.

TUESDAY 8: Thank God that Asia Bibi remains in good health and good spirits, according to her lawyer, despite her being behind bars since 2009. Pray that a date will be set soon for her appeal against a death sentence for 'blasphemy'.

WEDNESDAY 9: Pray for justice for Christian Sharoon Masih, 17, who died after a Muslim student beat him for drinking water from a shared glass, thereby making it 'unclean'. The suspect has been released on bail.

THURSDAY 10: Pray for the family of Shahzad Masih who died after inhaling poisonous gases as he worked in Karachi's sewers. Pray that the Government will do more to protect Pakistani Christians who generally have low-paid, often hazardous jobs.

FRIDAY 11: Pray for a Christian girl, 13, who was raped near Gujranwala as she cared for cattle. Thank God the suspect is now in custody and pray that justice will be done.

SATURDAY 12: #Pray50 Pray that God will have mercy on

four Islamist terrorists who killed the church gatekeeper, George Masih, and nine Christians in a blast outside Bethel Memorial Methodist Church in Quetta.

SUNDAY 13: Pray for the release of a group of Christians detained on suspicion of involvement in mob violence after bomb attacks on churches in Youhanabad in 2015. Two detainees have died and 11 others are seriously ill – apparently for lack of medical care.

IRAN

MONDAY 14: Pray for Christian converts Amin Nader Afshari and Hadi Asgari as they appeal against sentences of 15 and ten years respectively for 'acting against national security'. Praise God that both are reportedly still strong in their faith.

TUESDAY 15: Pray peace over Assyrian pastor Victor Bet Tamraz and his wife, Shamiram, who are awaiting appeal hearings to contest prison sentences of ten and five years respectively.

WEDNESDAY 16: Pray for increasing unity within the church in Iran. Praise God that Pastor Victor (above) says he has received strong support from other church leaders.

THURSDAY 17: #Pray50 Pray that God will open the ears and hearts of Iranian officials so they will act on calls from the international community for the religious

PRAYERSHIELD

rights of all Iranian citizens to be respected.

FRIDAY 18: Pray for Naser Navard-Goltap who is serving a ten-year jail sentence for illegal house church activity. He was arrested at a wedding in June 2016 and lost his appeal last November.

SATURDAY 19: Ali Amini was arrested at work in Tabriz last December and remains in jail without charge. He is father to two small children. Pray he will be freed immediately.

SUNDAY 20: Ask God to pour out His Holy Spirit upon His people in Iran today, just as He did at Pentecost. Pray that many will be added to their number (Acts 2:47).

MONDAY 21: Majidreza Souzanchi Kushani and Fatimeh Mohammadi were arrested last November and are being held in Evin Prison. Majidreza has been charged with evangelism and being part of evangelistic groups.

SUDAN

TUESDAY 22: Government-imposed members of a Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church (SPEC) committee have been selling church properties to people with close ties to the government. The SPEC does not recognise these 'sales'. Pray for an end to this injustice.

WEDNESDAY 23: In February a court gave seven Christians stiff fines for resisting the takeover of a school belonging to SPEC in



An Afghan family receive practical support from a Release associate ministry.

Omdurman. In fact, an armed mob had attacked them, killing a church elder.

THURSDAY 24: Several Sudanese Christians face court for resisting the takeover of church buildings. Pray that they and their lawyers will be led by the Holy Spirit in court.

FRIDAY 25: #Pray50 Pray that those determined to silence the church's voice will have dramatic encounters with Jesus and repent of their opposition to Him.

SATURDAY 26: Five leaders from the Sudanese Church of Christ are on trial for causing 'sound pollution'. It is thought the real reason for their trial is their refusal to hand over the church to state ownership

SUNDAY 27: As churches across the UK hold a Great Outdoors Church Service today, let's pray for persecuted congregations worldwide who have been evicted from their buildings or seen them destroyed, including some in Sudan, Egypt, India, Iraq, Syria, China and Zanzibar (Tanzania).



AFGHANISTAN

MONDAY 28: Campaigners say that Afghanistan's record on religious rights has further deteriorated recently. Pray that God will work powerfully in and through His people there.

TUESDAY 29: Pray for Christians who are persecuted by their own families. Leaving Islam is considered to bring 'shame' on their family. Pray that Afghan Christians will find a new, loving family among fellow believers.

WEDNESDAY 30: #Pray50 The number of civilians being killed in Afghanistan is reportedly at an all-time high. Groups such as the Taliban and Islamic State are responsible for many civilian deaths. Pray that these groups will start to question their aims and ambitions – and see their futility. Pray that God will protect and strengthen His people in Afghanistan.

THURSDAY 31: Pray for Christian converts from Afghanistan who fail in their bid to secure asylum abroad and are repatriated. Asylum-seekers returning home are at high risk.

JUNE 2018

LAOS

FRIDAY 1: Thank God that six Christians in Vientiane province who were taken into custody for celebrating Christmas without official permission have been set free after more than a month in jail and a stiff fine.

SATURDAY 2: Most of the six Christians arrested in Vientiane over Christmas (above) were ethnic Hmong. As part of their celebrations, they invited their whole village to watch the *Jesus* film. Pray many more will come to Christ.

SUNDAY 3: Pray for a group of Christians in Savannakhet province, southern Laos, who were also detained for being involved in Christmas celebrations. They too were only released when they paid a fine.

MONDAY 4: #Pray50

Pray for the Lao officials who detained Christians for celebrating the birth of their Saviour: pray that these same officials will celebrate Christmas this year!

KENYA

TUESDAY 5: Suspected *al-Shabaab* militants shot dead two Christian teachers

and the wife of one of them as they slept at their primary school in Wajir, near the Somali border, in February. Ask God to comfort their relatives and friends.

WEDNESDAY 6: Thank God that one teacher at the Wajir primary school where three Christians were shot dead (above) survived the attack: he was shot in the hand then pretended to be dead.

THURSDAY 7: Pray for the many Christians in the Wajir area who have fled to their home villages, after the gun attack on a local primary school (above) appeared to target non-local Christians.

FRIDAY 8: Ask God to protect Christians in Wajir and Garissa who fear they are the new target for *al-Shabaab* after the Government erected a border wall to protect Mandera, a previous target.

SATURDAY 9: #Pray50 Pray for those in Kenya's Somali community who refuse to accept that a Somali can be a Christian. Pray that they will discover that our human identity transcends race and colour and that they find their true identity in Christ.

SUNDAY 10: Thank God for the work of Release partners in Kenya who are providing

training in life skills and practical support to Somali Christians. Pray they will use these skills to bless their community.

MONDAY 11: Pray for Christians who are sharing the gospel with Somalis in border areas of Kenya. Pray that God will protect them and anoint them to share His word powerfully.

TUESDAY 12: The children of Somali Christians often face bullying and rejection at school. Pray that these children will stand firm in their family's faith and choose not to reject Christ.

WEDNESDAY 13: Ask God to protect Pastor 'Jeremiah', leader of an underground church of Somali believers. After being forced to move location several times due to death threats, his family seem to have somewhere safe to settle.

THURSDAY 14: Pray for 'Joel', a member of Pastor Jeremiah's church (above). He lost all his close family in the conflict in Somalia but thankfully his church has become his new family. Ask God to bless the clothing business Joel hopes to start with Release funding.

FRIDAY 15: Pray for 'Martha' and other Somali Christian women who have set up small clothing businesses, with support from Release. Pray these women will bless their

**'EVEN IN THE TIMES WE WORRY,
GOD NEVER LEAVES US.'**

'Joel', Somali Christian, Kenya

PRAYERSHIELD

communities as well as providing for their families.

SATURDAY 16: Pray for a sports outreach project which encourages Christian and Muslim youth to play on the same team together. Pray that the games will continue to break down barriers and make a way so the gospel can be shared.

ERITREA

SUNDAY 17: Praise God that a long-term prisoner of faith was recently released from Eritrea. Please continue to pray for the scores of Christians who have been detained for ten years or more.

MONDAY 18: Ask God to bless 'Priscilla' and 'Joshua' and their radio ministry which serves prisoners in Eritrea, their families and other persecuted believers. Ask God to provide more workers.

TUESDAY 19: Ask God to heal 'Shiden', who has struggled with his mental health since being freed from jail, where he suffered appalling abuse and conditions for 13 years. He was 22 and on military service when he was detained.

WEDNESDAY 20: #Pray50
Pray that members of the Eritrean Government led by President Isaias Afewerki will start to question and reject the repressive policies they are implementing.

KYRGYZSTAN

THURSDAY 21: Churches in Kyrgyzstan have faced growing opposition from both Islamic radicals and state officials. Pray that our family will be radiant with God's love and grace and be a strong influence on society.

FRIDAY 22: Thank God for His people in the Evangelical Christian Baptist Church in Kaji-Say: they chose to focus on the Bible on the altar that survived a firebomb attack on their church, rather than the devastation of their building. They view this as a sign from God they should stand firm in their faith.

SATURDAY 23: #Pray50
Pray that the militants suspected of the firebomb attack on Evangelical Christian Baptist Church in Kaji-Say (above) will hear about the Bible on the altar and start to consider the reality of Christ.

SUNDAY 24: Let's stand with our Kyrgyz family in

'THERE IS NO DOUBT THE CHURCH IN KYRGYZSTAN WILL SURVIVE - AND CONTINUE TO PREACH THE GOSPEL.'

A Release partner in Kyrgyzstan

asking God to forgive those who burned the church and lead them to repentance. Pray that their forgiveness will be a powerful witness.

EGYPT

MONDAY 25: Thank God for 'Walid' who came to Christ because of the witness of his work colleague. His colleague responded to Walid's animosity with love - even though Walid once tried to kill him.

TUESDAY 26: Ask God to protect 'Asim' and 'Zarah' who converted to Christianity from Islam and have faced fierce opposition from relatives. They live in the same block of flats as Asim's family.

WEDNESDAY 27: Thank God for providing a loving church family for 'Duhra' who suffered intense abuse from relatives after she became a Christian as a child. Her estranged husband from an arranged marriage refuses to let her see her son because of her faith.

THURSDAY 28: #Pray50
Pray that Egyptian officials will treat Christians and Muslims equally. The Coptic owner of a meeting room in Kafr al-Waslin was fined £14,600 for 'hosting a church without a licence'; 15 people who vandalised the building were each fined £20.



Christians in Egypt continue to stand firm in their faith, despite continued pressure on them.

FRIDAY 29: A Christian blacksmith, Awad Zaki, was thrown out of his village in Beheira Governorate after allegations he had attacked a Muslim woman. The woman's husband made false allegations against Awad because he owed Awad payment.

Sources: Anglican News; AsiaNews; China Aid; Middle East Concern; Morning Star News; Release partners and contacts; UCANews; 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.

SATURDAY 30: So-called 'reconciliation meetings' with local officials in Awad's village (previous prayer) forced Awad to leave and local Christians to pay more than £2,000 to Awad's accusers. Coptic church leaders say such meetings routinely discriminate against Christians.

**Precious Jesus,
How beautiful is your name,
Lord!**

**We pray that your name will
one day be glorified in those
places where now it is a crime
to mention it.**

**Lord, may the praise of your
name be heard through every
prison, every parliament, every
village where today it is reviled.**

**May those who persecute you
speak your name with reverent
fear and awe.**

**At the sound of your name,
every knee shall bow.**

Amen

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