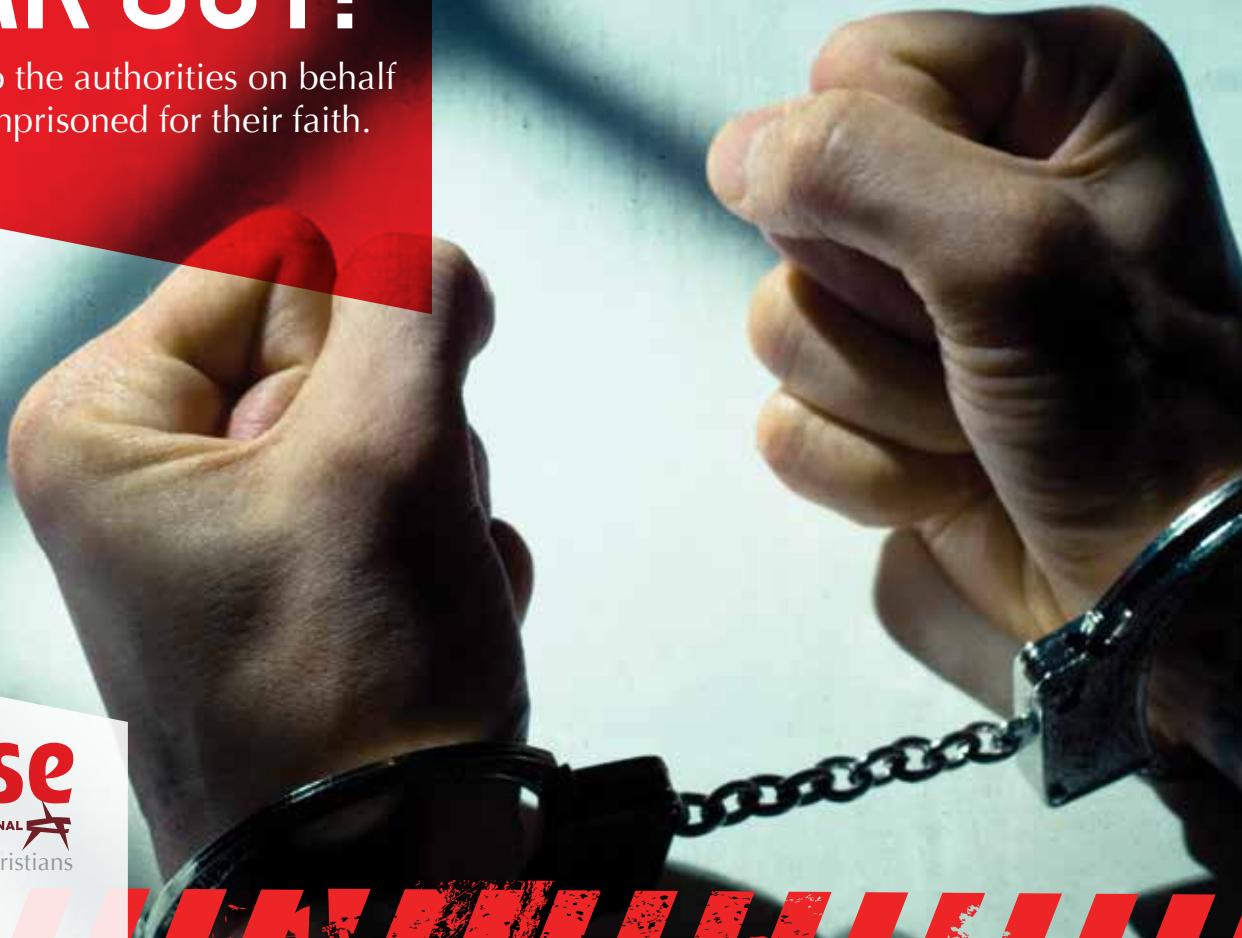
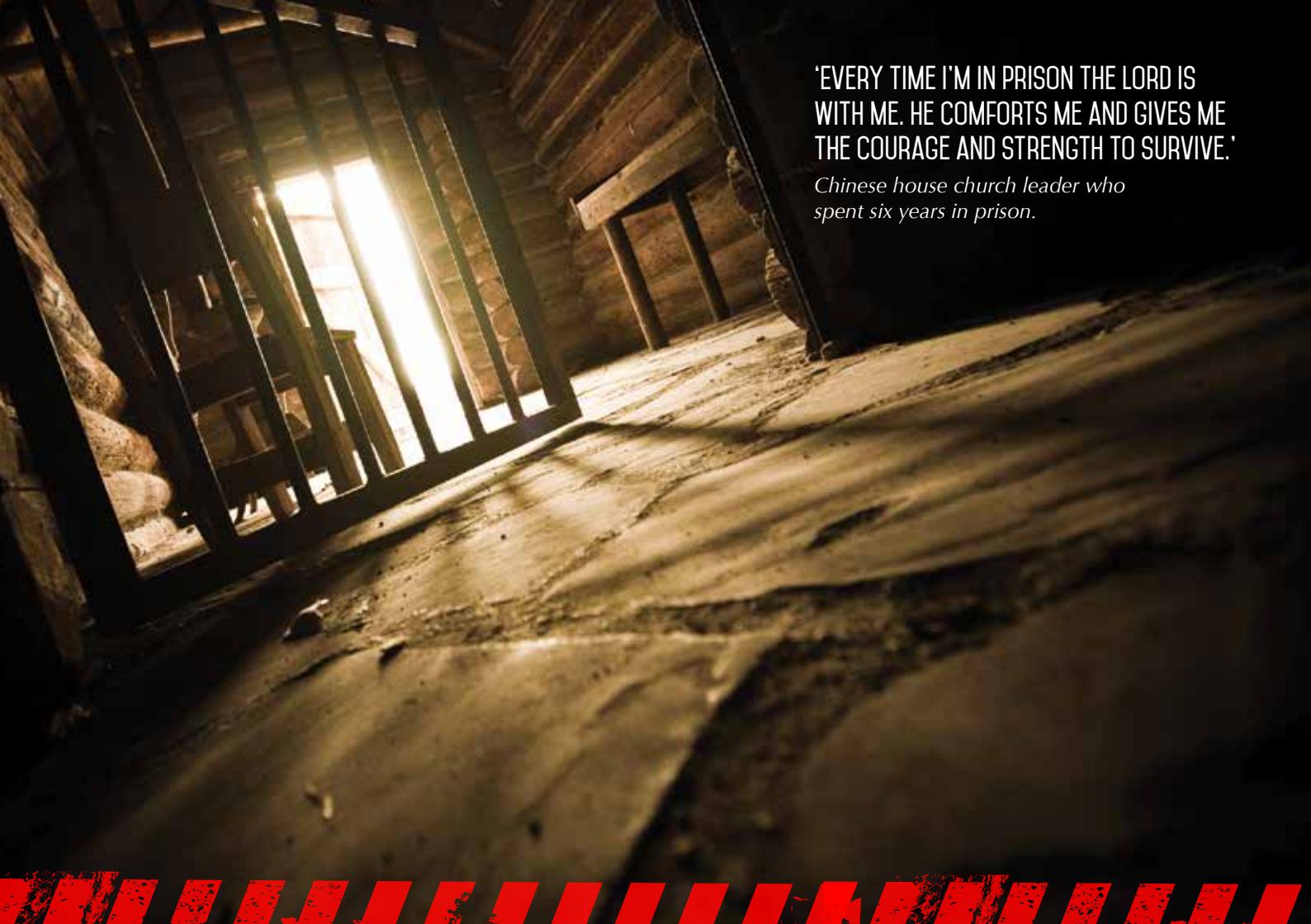


'SPEAK OUT!'

Writing letters to the authorities on behalf
of Christians imprisoned for their faith.

release
INTERNATIONAL
voice of persecuted christians

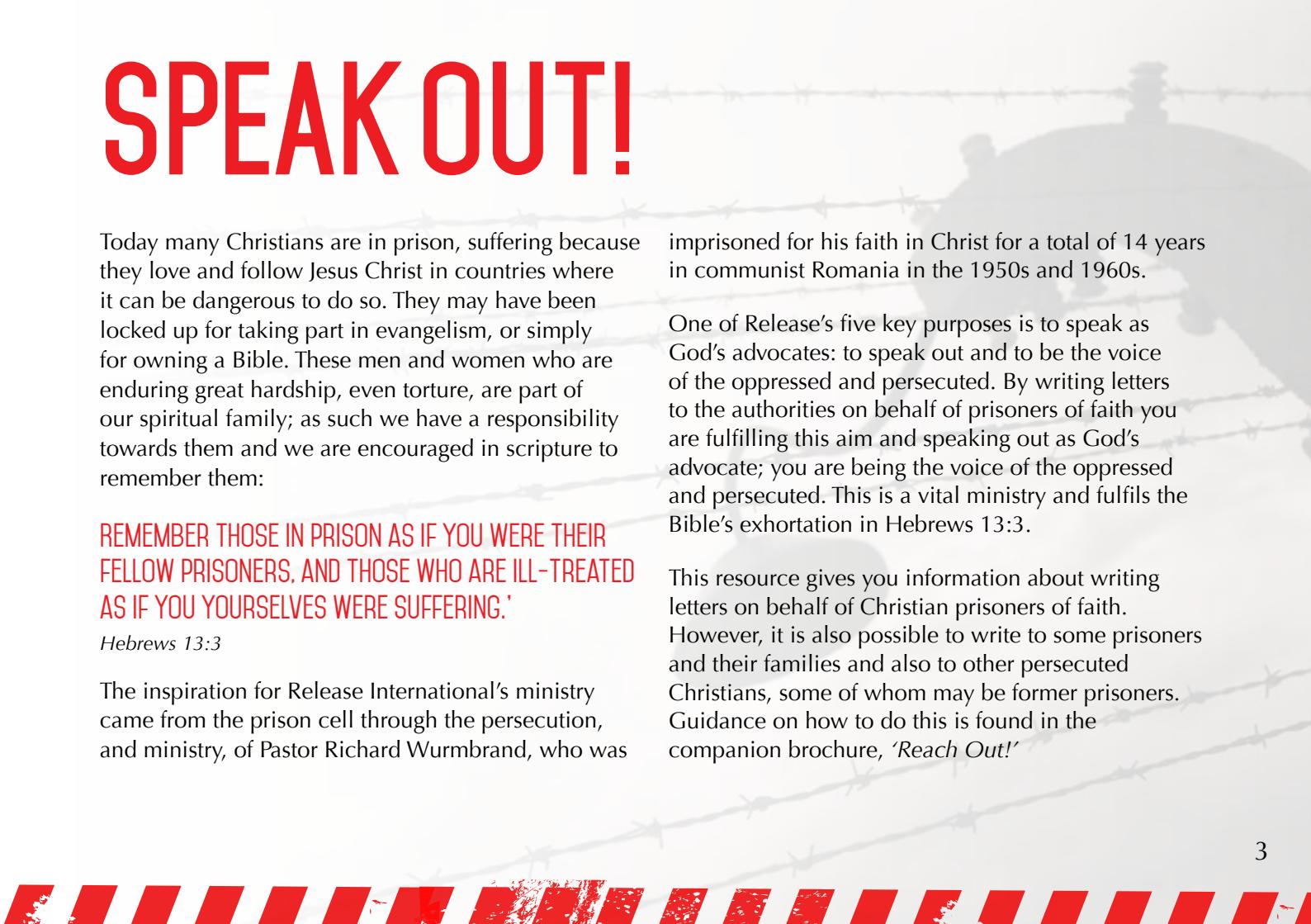


A photograph of a dark, confined space, likely a prison cell. The floor is made of rough, textured concrete. In the upper left corner, there is a window with vertical bars, through which a bright, almost blinding light is visible, casting long shadows across the floor. The walls are made of dark, weathered wood or metal.

'EVERY TIME I'M IN PRISON THE LORD IS
WITH ME. HE COMFORTS ME AND GIVES ME
THE COURAGE AND STRENGTH TO SURVIVE.'

*Chinese house church leader who
spent six years in prison.*

SPEAK OUT!



Today many Christians are in prison, suffering because they love and follow Jesus Christ in countries where it can be dangerous to do so. They may have been locked up for taking part in evangelism, or simply for owning a Bible. These men and women who are enduring great hardship, even torture, are part of our spiritual family; as such we have a responsibility towards them and we are encouraged in scripture to remember them:

REMEMBER THOSE IN PRISON AS IF YOU WERE THEIR FELLOW PRISONERS, AND THOSE WHO ARE ILL-TREATED AS IF YOU YOURSELVES WERE SUFFERING.'

Hebrews 13:3

The inspiration for Release International's ministry came from the prison cell through the persecution, and ministry, of Pastor Richard Wurmbrand, who was

imprisoned for his faith in Christ for a total of 14 years in communist Romania in the 1950s and 1960s.

One of Release's five key purposes is to speak as God's advocates: to speak out and to be the voice of the oppressed and persecuted. By writing letters to the authorities on behalf of prisoners of faith you are fulfilling this aim and speaking out as God's advocate; you are being the voice of the oppressed and persecuted. This is a vital ministry and fulfils the Bible's exhortation in Hebrews 13:3.

This resource gives you information about writing letters on behalf of Christian prisoners of faith. However, it is also possible to write to some prisoners and their families and also to other persecuted Christians, some of whom may be former prisoners. Guidance on how to do this is found in the companion brochure, '*Reach Out!*'

WRITING LETTERS ON BEHALF OF PRISONERS

Writing a letter to a government or prison authority on behalf of a brother or sister imprisoned for their faith is a practical way of speaking out and being the voice of the oppressed and the persecuted when they cannot speak up for themselves.

Letters on their behalf can make a world of difference to imprisoned Christians. They are a clear sign to the authorities that we are aware of the plight of a particular Christian – and we care! Letters can result in better treatment for a prisoner – or even their release. Governments can be very sensitive about their image abroad. When they realise that people in other countries are monitoring a prisoner's situation, they may be shamed into taking action, such as providing prisoners with better care.

Political lobbying and letters will be much more powerful and effective when they are backed up with prayer. Remember: as you intercede in prayer for Christians in prison, you are reflecting God's heart and His compassion for those who suffer because they love Him.



'PRAYER IS THE MOST PRECIOUS THING.'

Cai Hong, wife of Chinese prisoner of faith Wenxi Li.

PRISONERS WHO NEED YOU TO 'SPEAK OUT!'

Profiles of prisoners of faith, including information about their families and addresses of the authorities to write to, can be found at www.releaseinternational.org/prisoners or call our Supporter Relations Team on 01689 823491 to ask for up to six Profiles to be posted to you.

Please remember: information about a prisoner can change; Profiles on the website are updated when new information is received but if you have printed off the Profiles or several weeks have elapsed between receiving the Profiles in the post and using them, please check that you are using the latest available information. Not doing so may put prisoners and their families at risk.

The prisoner Profiles include addresses of the authorities that you can write to on behalf of the prisoner. If the Profile does not include an address then it is either not helpful or else not possible to write on behalf of that prisoner.



'I WISH TO THANK ALL MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS WHO PRAYED FOR ME WHILE I WAS IMPRISONED.'

Uzbek Pastor Dmitry (David) Shestakov, who spent four years in prison, pictured above with his family.

WRITING TO YOUR MP AND MEP

As well as writing to the authority specified on the prisoner's Profile, you can also write to your MP or your MEP asking for their help on issues that concern you. Identify yourself as a constituent, but don't say your vote depends on their response; their job is simply to represent your concerns.

You can ask for your MP/MEP to contact the Minister responsible at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) with your concerns. Ask your MP/MEP for a copy of the response, as the FCO is obliged to respond to all letters from MPs and MEPs.

If the Minister's response is not satisfactory, you can ask your MP to try to put a Parliamentary Question, which will give your concerns some publicity. Or your MP might table an Early Day Motion by which he or she draws attention to a particular issue and can gather signatures of support for it.

MEPs have the right to put oral and written questions to the European Commission and the Council of Ministers – which is a way for individuals to highlight important issues.

You can write to your MP at:

The House of Commons
Westminster
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Or email via: www.writetothem.com

You can find out the details of your MP by telephoning 020 7219 4272 or online at www.parliament.uk.

You can write to your MEP at:

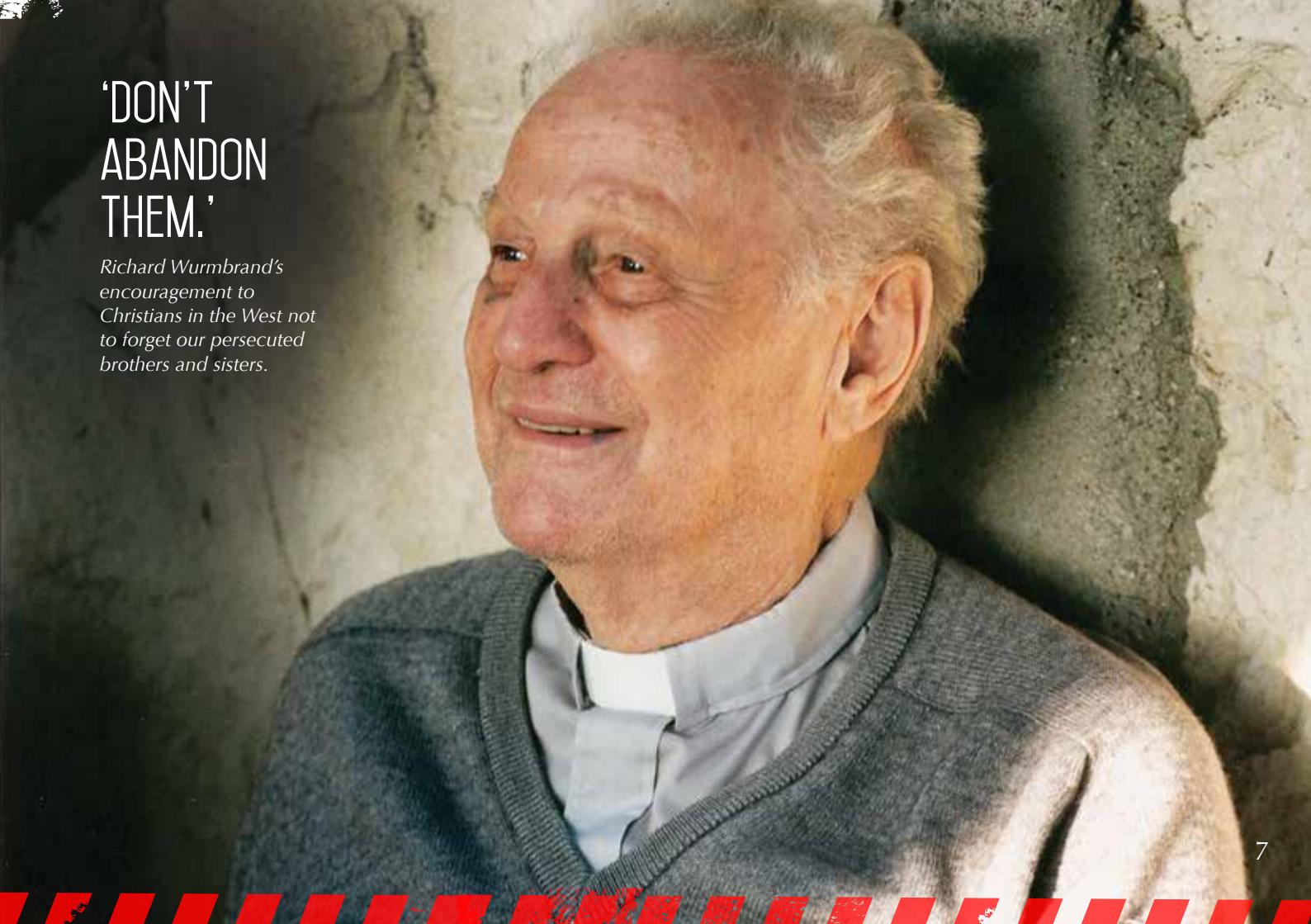
European Parliament
Rue Wiertz
B-1047 Brussels
Belgium

Or email via: www.writetothem.com

You can find out the details of your MEP by telephoning 020 7227 4300 or online at www.europarl.org.uk.

'DON'T ABANDON THEM.'

*Richard Wurmbrand's
encouragement to
Christians in the West not
to forget our persecuted
brothers and sisters.*



THINGS TO DO AND NOT TO DO!

DO:

- ✓ Check that you have the latest available information about the prisoner and which authorities you can write to – see page 5.
- ✓ Pray for the person who will receive your letter.
- ✓ Check page 9 for how to begin and end your letter.
- ✓ Keep your letter short and to the point.
- ✓ Be polite and respectful; remember that you are representing Jesus Christ and His Church. Take account of cultural differences.
- ✓ Be factual; identify yourself and state your concern. Give the name of the prisoner on whose behalf you are writing and any known details, eg, date of arrest, reason for detention, location, their home town.
- ✓ Be specific and be clear about what you would like to see done, eg, for the prisoner to be released or given medical treatment.

✓ Be diplomatic and say that you wish to see human rights upheld in keeping with the basic principles of religious freedom, as recognised by the international community.

- ✓ Be positive and assume that the authorities are open to reason and discussion. Acknowledge and welcome past developments to protect human rights. Thank them in advance for their positive actions. When you learn of positive changes in a prisoner's situation, write and thank the official you've been writing to.
- ✓ If you are under 16, check your letter with a Christian parent or church/youth leader.

DO NOT:

- ✗ Use out-of-date information.
- ✗ Mention Release International, the source of your information or other human rights organisations – it could put the work of those organisations at risk and adversely affect the people we are trying to help.
- ✗ Be aggressive or offensive.
- ✗ Offer political or religious opinions.
- ✗ Criticise the government or the authorities.

GUIDANCE ON HOW TO WRITE YOUR LETTER

There are no absolute rules on how to address officials in letters. Helpful information can be found online at <http://www.debretts.com/forms-address/titles>.

You can send your letter by post using the address on the Profile; please make sure that you use the correct postal rate. Address the envelope by hand (as printed labels can look too official and draw unwanted attention); mark it 'AIRMAIL' where necessary. You may be able to send it by fax if a fax number has been provided. You may also be able to send it by email if an email address has been provided but remember to include your full postal address.

**YOU CAN BEAT ME AS LONG AS YOU LIKE, YOU
CAN IMPRISON ME FOR TEN YEARS IF YOU LIKE,
BUT I KNOW WHO I BELIEVE IN.'**

'Stephen', Vietnamese evangelist and prisoner of faith.

WHAT NEXT?

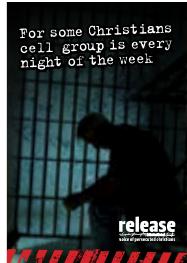
Prayerfully consider which prisoner or prisoners you wish to advocate for as there are many prisoners of faith, imprisoned in many countries around the world. Profiles of prisoners of faith and addresses of relevant authorities can be found at www.releaseinternational.org/prisoners or call our Supporter Relations Team on 01689 823491 to request up to six Profiles to be posted to you.

Please remember: information about a prisoner can change; Profiles on the website are updated when new information is received but if you have printed off the Profiles or several weeks have elapsed since receiving the Profiles in the post and using them, please check that you are using the latest available information. Not doing so may put prisoners and their families at risk.

HELP PRISONERS OF FAITH TODAY

By giving a monthly sum, you can make a real difference to Christians imprisoned for their faith, and their families. Please be as generous as you can; even £5 a month makes a difference and helps to provide:

- pastoral visits to those in prison, and to their families, so they know they have not been forgotten
- practical help for families who have been deprived of their breadwinner – and to help to pay the cost of prison visits
- legal and other assistance



To find out more, please call us on 01689 823491 or visit www.releaseinternational.org/prisoners where you can download a flier that includes a Standing Order form.

OTHER INFORMATION

Release produces a free monthly email, the Prisoners of Faith alert, which gives details of an individual Christian prisoner with their Profile as an attachment. This can be downloaded and printed, and includes specific prayer points and letter-writing information.

Please call our Supporter Relations Team on 01689 823491 or email info@releaseinternational.org to receive your monthly **Prisoners of Faith** alert.

You can also follow our special prisoners blog called *Light in the Darkest Places* at: <https://www.facebook.com/lightinthedarkestplaces/> It includes all the latest news and updates about prisoners of faith.

THANK YOU

Thank you for considering how you can 'Speak Out!'. As you take the next step and use the Profiles to write on behalf of prisoners, we pray that you will know God's blessing in this vital ministry. If you need further guidance or advice on how to speak out, or if you would like to know how you can get more involved in Release International, please contact us on 01689 823491 or info@releaseinternational.org.

'I AM HERE WITH
JESUS CHRIST
AND WE SUFFER
AND REJOICE
TOGETHER.'

*Pastor Zaur Balaev
(right) pictured being
embraced after his
release from jail in
Azerbaijan.*



'MY FELLOW PRISONERS ARE ALWAYS
IN MY MIND AND IN MY HEART, I CRY
FOR THEM EVERY DAY, FOR I KNOW THE
SITUATION I LEFT THEM IN. PLEASE CARRY
ON PRAYING FOR THEM JUST LIKE YOU DID
FOR ME; THAT WAY MY JOY WOULD BE
COMPLETE.'

Former Eritrean prisoner of faith Helen Berhane.



www.releaseinternational.org

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

Registered Charity 280577

All personal data/sensitive personal data herein are processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. Further details are available from Release International.

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