

50
YEARS
1968-2018

Embrace

Newsletter of Release Women
Autumn 2018



Sabina Wurmbrand

“I would prefer to die!”

On a visit to one of the refugee camps in northern Ethiopia, Release’s magazine editor met Eritrean Christian Mulu, living there with her 19-year-old son.

Mulu, her husband Kiros, and their baby son, lived in Eritrea. Both were active members of the Word of Life Church, where Mulu was also the assistant pastor. But 18 years ago, when their son was just a year old, life changed forever. Kiros was arrested and sent to a military prison because of his Christian faith. The military police would not even allow Mulu to visit him.

Four years later, Mulu received the devastating news that Kiros had been executed in prison; shot with several other believers. The authorities would not acknowledge his arrest, or even his death.

The religious crackdown in Eritrea, led by President Afwerki, made everyday life increasingly difficult for Christians and Mulu was no exception. She too was arrested and detained several times, because of her faith in Jesus. In 2012, the church was meeting in secret in

her home when it was raided by the military police. Mulu and 24 other church members were arrested and detained over the coming months as a result of this raid.

During her imprisonment Mulu was treated brutally. She was frequently tortured with the aim of making her renounce her faith. Mulu says, ‘They beat me with a police baton. They told me: “Your faith is not accepted here.” They repeatedly asked me to sign a piece of paper to renounce my faith. But how could I do this? I would prefer to die!’

Mulu recalls that every night the police would come to the cells and take some of the women away and rape them; her included. She became sick while in prison and she was released on health grounds in August 2013. However, when she received medical treatment she learnt that the result of the rape was that she was now HIV positive.

Although free from prison, she was constantly being followed by the authorities, and now had this devastating diagnosis to deal with.

Eventually, with the help of some Christian brothers, Mulu escaped across the border into Sudan and then made her way to the refugee camps in northern Ethiopia. She now lives in one of the camps and receives medication from the UN, but she looks thin and her health is poor.



Mulu holding a photo of her husband Kiros

Despite support from the church in the camp, Mulu sometimes feels excluded, even from Christian activities, because of her condition. ‘God knows me,’ she says, ‘He knows that I did not get this [condition] because of my sin.’

Unsurprisingly, Mulu doesn’t want to live like this - not because she thinks she deserves better but because she wants to support the church. She wants to help Christian prisoners inside Eritrea, where people like her husband Kiros are still dying behind bars. Her words echo Richard Wurmbrand’s plea that we can and must help those in prison: ‘Please pray for God’s people in Eritrea. Pray that the suffering will stop and all believers will be released from prison.’

Will you pause for a moment now and join with Mulu to pray for God’s people in Eritrea and especially for those in prison?

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL
voice 50
of Persecuted Christians YEARS
1968-2018

Release Women: Connecting Christian women in the UK and Ireland with their suffering sisters around the world.



Would you give away your Bible?

A member of the Release Women team shares this story of a young woman in Pakistan, and how it reminded her of the importance for Christians of having a copy of the Bible, God's word.

Anya (not her real name), a young Muslim woman, was working in a department store when she met a member of staff called Rahib (not his real name). She noticed how badly he was treated by the other workers and even by the store management. She felt sympathy for his situation and wondered why someone who appeared to be so hard-working and honest was being so badly treated. She was shocked to learn that his harsh treatment was because he was a Christian. Anya felt sympathy for him and she tried to support him in his work. Over a period of time Anya fell in love with Rahib.

One day Anya secretly visited Rahib's family. They were kind and loving toward her, the opposite to her own family. She asked Rahib's father to give her a Bible to read and he immediately

gave her one. This amazed her, for if she had given her holy book to a non-Muslim it would have been considered 'unclean'.

Anya started to read the Bible and she was attracted by Jesus's teaching, especially the Sermon on the Mount. It wasn't just the teaching she read that captured her, it was the way she saw it being lived out in Rahib's life.

The next step for Anya was an unusual one, as she proposed marriage to Rahib! He accepted and they soon got married in secret and moved in together with Rahib's family. This was the start of Anya's Christian life.

If Anya's story was a fairy tale this is where it would end with 'and they all lived happily ever after'. But instead, this was the start of their difficulties.

Once Anya's family realised that she had become a Christian they denounced her and declared that if anyone found her they were to kill her.

Anya changed her name to hide her identity. She and Rahib went into hiding. They were excited when Anya became pregnant with twins and rejoiced when their two boys were born. Sadly, due to the pressures they were living under and lack of food and medicine, one of their sons died aged just six months old. Anya and Rahib were desperately sad and discouraged, but they sought God and cried out to Him. In time they met with a Release partner who helped to find them a safe place to live and he looked after them. They have since had another son and together they are living and growing as a Christian family.

Anya and Rahib have counted the cost of being Christians. They are so grateful for the support they have received from Release's partner and they are thankful for all of you who have prayed for them, whether you realise it or not, in the difficult journey of their Christian life.

I wonder if Rahib's father knew what impact giving a young woman his Bible would have? How a life would be changed as she read God's word and saw it being lived out in her future husband.

There are still places in the world today where access to the Bible is limited through regulation, societal pressure or resourcing. Through a partner in India, Release is able to help to provide Bibles to Indian pastors. The pastors attend a conference where they are encouraged and strengthened to lead their churches through the persecution they face. They are provided with Bibles to use in their ministry so that they can help people feed on God's word. Please use the response card in this edition of *Embrace*, and mark it for Bibles in India, if you would like to help to provide pastors there with Bibles. A Bible changed Anya's life. Your gift may have the same impact on another young woman.



youngest daughter Vera and her two older sisters all waited for David – they didn't abandon him, and neither did you. You prayed, you gave, you wrote cards. Recently we have been in touch with the Shestakov family again to let them know that even after all these years they are still remembered; they have not been abandoned.

They are now living in the US and it was a joy to hear back from them.

The following is an extract from their letter:

'It's been two years since we moved to the US. We moved... with [the] desire to start a church. According to some reports, there are about 300,000 Russian-speakers [in the area]. We already have a small home group of 10-12 people. We make some small evangelist programs. For now we are in need of a building for our meetings... This is our prayer needs. And please tell everyone who remembers and prays for us a huge thank you. We really appreciate everything you did for us. May the Lord bless you abundantly.'

Thank you for remembering us!

These two smiling individuals, Vera on the left, and her mother Marina, have been the 'face' of our 50th anniversary campaign, 'Do Not Abandon Them!' Marina's husband, Dmitry Shestakov, also known as David, an evangelist and pastor, was imprisoned in Uzbekistan for four years for 'illegal religious activity'.

That was in 2007 and after serving his sentence David was released. Marina,

'The scripture we got before moving:

"The whole hill country will be yours; though it is a forest, you can clear it and it will be entirely yours. You can conquer the Canaanites, though they have chariots with iron-rimmed wheels and are strong."

Joshua 17:18

On this we stand. Thanks again and hello to everyone who knows us.'



David with wife Marina and daughter Vera

Enclosed in this edition of *Embrace* is a copy of our anniversary pledge card. If you haven't yet signed and returned it to show your willingness not to abandon your persecuted brothers and sisters, please do so today.



One of the eight pleas on the pledge card is 'Ask your pastors and church leaders what is being done in your name to help

your brothers and sisters.' Will you do just that? Sunday, November 18, is the International Day of Prayer for the persecuted church. Maybe you could ask to lead prayers in your own church that day or any available Sunday; share Vera and Marina's story and pray for the family. Further ideas and resources to inspire and equip you are on our website.

Or maybe you could ask if you could hold a Sabina Supper, as Hilary, Carol, Ruth and Linda did in South Chadderton Methodist Church, Oldham. Here's what they said:

'To commemorate Release International's 50th anniversary several women from our church family met together for a Sabina Supper Afternoon Tea. On the afternoon of Saturday, September 29, we shared fellowship

in a variety of ways enjoying delicious, eye-catching cakes and unlimited tea and coffee.

'Using Sabina's book, *The Pastor's Wife*, we heard details of her life via carefully chosen extracts read out at various times throughout the afternoon... In an informal interview, Jill, our very own 'Pastor's Wife' honestly and sensitively shared her testimony with us. Even though she felt that she didn't have as vital or as spectacular a story as Sabina there were very clear connections to be made; not least the times of trauma, anger and ultimate forgiveness. Jill also posed a question to us, "Where is your frontline?" Where could we be most useful for Christ and His Gospel? It was a great privilege for some of us to lay hands on Jill and seek God's continuing blessing and equipping for her future journey.

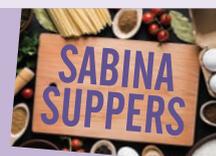
'After some brief, personal testimony, Ruth referred to some of Sabina's words that we'd heard earlier, "Sometimes the stones of remembrance which we took from the valley of suffering were

beautiful." She then, very gently, led us into silent prayer as she sang. Candles were lit and placed before the cross on cards bearing the names of women who still suffer for their faith today. Woman to woman we quietly held them in prayer before the Father; keeping the candles burning until the end of the afternoon.

'It's our prayer that many of the women who attended will now have a clearer understanding of the issues facing our sisters in Christ in many places around the world and an awakening compassion that will lead them into regular prayer on their behalf.'

Thank you so much Hilary, Carol, Ruth and Linda! If you have been inspired

to hold your own Sabina Supper, please download a leaflet from the website or contact the office for one. Do let us know how it goes. We'd love to get your feedback.



Editorial

Dear sisters in Christ

The year is really moving on and we are now in the countdown to Christmas! As we consider the year behind us no doubt we remember all the good times we've had: family gatherings, holidays, days out with friends, etc. We will also have had problems, some large and some small. As Christians it is how we handle both the good and bad times that matters; how do others perceive us? Do we stand firm in our faith or do we waver at the first little problem?

As we read through the pages of *Embrace* most of our problems seem trivial compared with those of the women we have read about. These women really stand firm in their faith and are a great encouragement to us to act according to the word of God, to pray without ceasing and to do His bidding. The good times they look back on are those where the Lord has been with them and never failed them. They will only be able to look back on their bad times through the grace of God.

I was really impacted by Mulu's story; not only was her husband murdered but she was imprisoned, tortured, and raped which resulted in HIV. She is now forced to live in a camp and all because she is a Christian. Her response to all that has happened to her is that she wants to continue to work for the Lord by helping others who are imprisoned. What a courageous lady she is, what a wonderful example for us to try to follow. There are not many good things for her to look back on, but she continues to rely upon the Lord for all her needs and looks towards the blessed hope of the Lord's return.

Sisters, can I call upon you to please continue in prayer daily for all our persecuted family. Thank you for all you do in the name of Jesus.

Blessings

Wendy

Prayer Points



'Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.'

(Romans 12:13)

Please pray for Mulu:

- For medication and food to be available for her and that this will help her condition and make her stronger.
- For acceptance and compassion from fellow Christians in the camp.
- For God's guidance to enable her to help Eritrean Christian prisoners.

Please pray for Anya:

- That the Lord's hand will be upon her to keep her and her family safe and secure.
- That she will continue to grow in her faith and bring others to the Lord Jesus.
- That those who disowned her will come to know the Lord as their saviour.

Please pray for Marina:

- For the growth of their house group and a building to meet in as their fellowship grows.
- That all their needs will be met spiritually, physically and financially.
- That the Lord will encourage them and those who attend the evangelistic meetings.

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NOTICEBOARD



Tortured for Christ film

Look out for a local screening of our inspiring new film* based on Richard Wurmbrand's best-selling testimony *Tortured for Christ* this autumn. Dates and venues are listed on the Events page of our website.

**We recommend parents/carers consider the content of the film before showing it to children.*

Archbishop Benjamin Kwashi tour

The Rt Rev Dr Benjamin Kwashi is well known for faithfully serving persecuted Christians in Plateau State, central Nigeria. You can hear Archbishop Ben, a powerful speaker, sharing his experience at various venues in the UK between November 20-27. Further details on the website.

Please give

Please make a gift if you can. It's the generosity of people like you that enables us to help people like those you've read about in this edition of *Embrace*. You can give by using the response card inside this letter or by contacting our Supporter Relations Team (contact details below).

If you no longer wish to receive *Embrace*, please phone or email our Supporter Relations Team (see contact details) and ask to be removed from the mailing list.

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Release Women is part of Release International

www.releaseinternational.org
Release International, PO Box 54,
Orpington BR5 4RT Tel: 01689 823491
Email: info@releaseinternational.org
Registered Charity 280577 Scotland SC040456