

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL

APR-JUN 2019

voice

of Persecuted Christians

FLIGHT

*Christians are fleeing
for their lives*



*News, stories and prayer requests
from persecuted Christians worldwide*



Welcome

by Paul Robinson, CEO

Helping believers in flight

According to the United Nations¹, there are today 68.5 million people forcibly displaced as a result of persecution, conflict, violence or human rights violations – a record high and more than the total population of the UK.

Of these, 25.4 million are refugees and 40 million are internally displaced.

These alarming figures make this the worst refugee crisis since the Second World War.

As we know, many of those refugees and displaced people are Christians fleeing persecution and conflict (see map page 12).

In this edition we highlight some of the courageous individuals known to us who have been forced to flee, and how your support is helping them and others to survive.

On pages 6-8 you can read about Amera and Clark, Iraqi believers displaced to Kurdistan in the north, and Syrian refugee John, now living in Lebanon. All three give thanks to God for His faithful care during their traumatic experiences.

Christians in Pakistan face discrimination, attacks by militants and the prospect of false accusation under the unjust blasphemy laws (see story, page 5). As a result, hundreds have

taken refuge in Thailand: including Ron and Miriam, and Peter and Kandice. You can read their moving testimonies on page 10.

North Korea remains the most repressive nation on earth, forcing those who have the means to defect to China, South Korea and other countries. On page 16 you can read the overcoming testimony of Esther, who was so desperate to escape that she sold herself to traffickers and even tricked her friends into forced marriages.

As you read these reports, please pray for these saints in Christ – as well as the thousands more who, though unknown to us, are known by our loving God.

Please give us your feedback

Your feedback about our ministry, this magazine and other communications is very important to us. We've set up a short online survey at releaseinternational.org/survey which is available until the end of June. Please do fill it in – we really value your response. Thank you.

¹ Global Trends: forced displacement in 2017, UNHCR, 2018.

Dates for your diary

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Martyrs' Day Saturday, June 29 (page 23)

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**GREAT
OUTDOORS**
Church
Service

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RELEASE INTERNATIONAL

voice

of Persecuted Christians

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

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Registered with
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REGULATOR

Faith under fire



Fined for giving away a Bible

A Christian man was fined two weeks' average wages (around £50) in Uzbekistan in January after police discovered that he had given a New Testament to a local woman.

Shukhrat Safarov, from Bukhara, said that he gave the Uzbek-language Bible as a gift. The court ordered the book to be destroyed.

'Uzbekistan imposes total censorship of all printed and electronic religious literature, and police often confiscate books which have [even] passed the state's compulsory censorship,' said news service Forum 18.

• **Pray that Christians in Uzbekistan will be bold and courageous in their faith.**



Photo: Reuters/Afolabi Sotunde.

Nigerian President urged to protect Christians

Following the re-election of President Buhari in Nigeria in February (pictured), Release has urged him to do more to protect Christians, especially from attacks by Boko Haram terrorists and armed Fulani herdsmen.

The Global Terrorism Index ranks Nigeria as the third most terrorised country in the world for the fourth consecutive year. Between them, Boko Haram and Fulani militants have killed tens of thousands and driven thousands from their homes (see map p12).

'They have killed with impunity, and that impunity must stop,' said Paul Robinson, Release's CEO.

In late January, Boko Haram devastated

the north-eastern border town of Rann, slaughtering around 60 people. The Africa Center for Strategic Studies described the attack as the deadliest yet by the Islamist terror group, driving 40,000 people across the border into Cameroon.

Last year saw a sharp rise in attacks by Fulani militants against farmers in largely Christian areas. The effect is to drive Christians from the north, fuelling suspicion that the attackers may be serving a similar Islamist agenda to Boko Haram.

• **Please pray that President Buhari and his government will do more to protect Christians in Nigeria.**

Elections in India may ignite persecution



The Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI) has given warning that the forthcoming general election may spark increased persecution of the Christian minority.

'With general elections due in April-May 2019, religious polarisation is at an all-time high,' it said.

'Hate speeches... have acted as a catalyst in dividing people along religious, ethnic and even linguistic lines.'

In a recent report EFI's Religious Liberty Commission recorded 325 incidents where Christians experienced violence, intimidation or harassment during 2018. This is a slight decrease on the 351 cases recorded in 2017.

However, EFI points out that the report is not an exhaustive compilation:

'Most cases go unreported either because the victim and witnesses are terrified, or the police, especially in the northern states, just turn a blind eye and refuse to record the mandatory First Information Report of the crime.'

• **Pray that the forthcoming elections are peaceful.**

**Sign up to
Release**



'I will kill you,' threatens Chinese security official

Relatives of the detained church members.
Photo: China Aid.



An official in Sichuan province, China, threatened to kill the family members of four Christian prisoners after they had sought help from German diplomats.

Last December authorities detained more than 150 leaders and members of the Early Rain Covenant Church. While most were released, elders Su Bingsen and Tan Defu and members Dai Zhichao and Li Xiaofeng remain in prison.

In February the spouses of the four met with representatives of the German consulate in Chengdu. The next day, the authorities summoned them for interrogation.

Zhou Jiao, an official from the Chengdu Municipal Public Security Bureau, allegedly told the Christian women that they were 'scum' and 'should not live in this world... I will kill you all sooner or later.'

According to Release partner China Aid, the authorities have continued to harass the Early Rain Covenant Church, detaining 44 members, including 11 children, at the end of February.

• ***Please pray that all the church members will be released soon***

Five believers arrested in Iran

The Iranian authorities recently detained five female Muslim-background believers, including Ruhsari Kamberi, a 65-year-old who was arrested and detained in Karaj and forced to endure ten days of intensive interrogation.

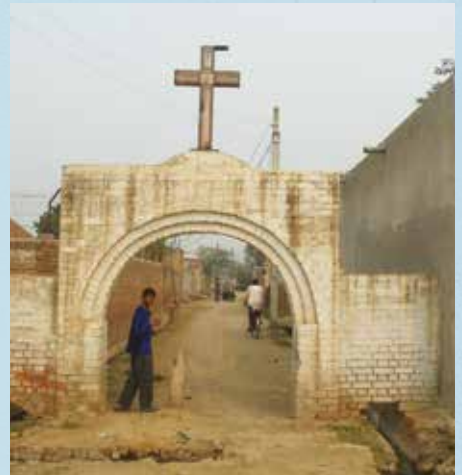
Ruhsari was arrested at her home by three members of Iranian intelligence, reported our partner

Middle East Concern. They searched her residence, confiscating mobile phones, Bibles and other Christian materials.

Four other female Christian converts, from different church groups, were arrested at the same time.

Ruhsari was interrogated from morning until evening for ten consecutive days, then released after paying bail of around £5,000.

• ***Pray that God will help all Iranian Christians to stand firm.***



Freedom for blasphemy-accused

A judge in Pakistan has acquitted a Christian man, Pervaiz Masih, more than three years after a business rival accused him of blasphemy.

Kasur District Judge Ijaz Ahmed Bosal dropped charges against Pervaiz in January after prosecutors failed to present even one witness against him during the three-year trial in Punjab Province.

'The acquittal is good news for him and his family, but they have suffered a lot in the last three years,' said his lawyer Aneeqa Maria.

Pervaiz's wife, Zareena, was so badly beaten during a police interrogation that she was unable to walk; as a result she was not fully able to watch the couple's three-year-old child who wandered away and was later found drowned. The exact cause of the tragic drowning remains a mystery.

'Even though Masih is free from the charges, I have serious concerns for his security,' said his lawyer. 'He has been declared a blasphemer by the local Muslims, and his life will always be at risk.'

• ***Pray that God will restore to Pervaiz and his family all that has been taken from them.***

PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS IN FLIGHT

Photos: Andrew Boyd

ON THE RUN

The rapidly dwindling Christian population in the Middle East has prompted the Archbishop of Canterbury to warn of 'Christian extinction' in the birthplace of the faith. Release's Andrew Boyd travelled to Iraq and Lebanon to meet persecuted Christians being helped by your support.

Kurdistan in northern Iraq has declared itself a safe haven for refugees. About 160,000 fled to its major city, Erbil – many to get away from Islamic State (IS) forces when they advanced from the south. Even after IS was declared defeated, its fighters still launched 1,200 attacks in Iraq.

Today, Release partners in Kurdistan are reaching out to refugees, Christian and Muslim alike.

Before the troubles, Erbil was in the grip of a construction boom. Today, many half-finished buildings are occupied by refugees such as Amera and her family. Her home today is above a vacant concrete shopping mall, in the shadow of the city's historic ancient citadel.

Amera used to live in the Christian town of Qaraqosh, on the historic plains of Nineveh. But Qaraqosh was exposed and alone and perilously close to Mosul, the major city captured by IS fighters in June 2014.

Rockets



Amera

exploded during her funeral.

'Everybody took what they could and started leaving,' she said. But the old and sick had to stay behind.

'When we saw rockets being fired we knew we had to leave,' Amera told me. The first rocket was fired at a church service and killed a woman. The second

The family piled into a pick-up truck at night and headed out. 'By then the fighters had shut the roads,' takes up Doaa, Amera's daughter. 'We were praying. We trusted Jesus to open the roads for us.'

It took them 11 hours to reach Kurdistan. 'After we got to Erbil, we heard that IS had taken over the whole town,' says Amera. 'We thank God we managed to flee before they came.'



Clark

shooting and I was afraid,' he said.

'But I have a very strong faith. I knew Jesus would never leave us.'

At one time some 5,000 Christian families lived in Qaraqosh. Today, however, it is mainly Muslim, since many Christians are too frightened to return.

Your support has helped refugees in this camp in Kurdistan.



Release partner Jamal: 'God put it in our hearts to help refugees.'

'We forgive'

Despite all they have suffered at the hands of terrorists, Amera says, *'We raised our family to forgive our enemies, as Jesus tells us. If we saw an IS fighter now, we would pray for him.'*

Thanks to your support, Amera's family and many other Iraqi refugees have been given practical help by Release's partner Jamal. He told me:

'God put it in our hearts to help refugees. From that day, we have provided whatever they need: blankets, mattresses, heaters, cookers and food.'

We give aid to these people every month.'

'Thank you for your support,' says Amera. 'Without it we could not live. Please keep praying for us. Many are still emigrating because there is no security in the region.'

Jamal took myself and Release CEO Paul Robinson to a Muslim refugee camp, where we helped hand out bags of clothing. When the last bag had been gratefully received by outstretched hands, the camp chief turned to Paul:

'We would like to thank you so much for your care and love for the people who live in this camp.'

'It's not just us,' said Paul, 'there are many Christians in the UK and Ireland who want to help you. We share God's love by giving aid.'

But food and clothing alone will not give these children a future. Your help also supports a school for refugee children. When I visited, the pupils were singing a rousing rendition of the Kurdish national anthem.



Release's Paul Robinson helps to distribute aid to refugees in northern Iraq.

'The head teacher, a Muslim, says our partner is like the hand of God in everything he is doing here,' says Paul. 'This is a wonderful opportunity to reach out to children in this environment.'

'I LOST A MILLION DOLLARS – BUT I GAINED JESUS CHRIST'



says Syrian refugee John, now living in Lebanon.

John was a nominal Christian, a wealthy agriculturalist who lost everything in the civil war. And when IS moved in they made him pay jizya tax – a fine in gold for being a Christian.

They came to his farm to steal his animals and shot him in the leg. But astonishingly, John says it was worth it all.

'I lost a million dollars,' he says, 'but I gained Jesus Christ.'

As well as IS, he had Syrian militia to contend with. *'They were kidnapping Christians, so I was afraid for my daughters. I sent my family to Lebanon.'*

Later, friends helped him escape. But it wasn't plain sailing for John in Lebanon.

'For the first six months I was depressed. I thought if Jesus wanted to save me, He would have saved my property. I lost everything in the war and I was bitter.'

But John's wife persuaded him into going to an evangelical church, which partners with Release in supporting refugees.

'The Pastor told me to read the Bible,' says John. 'As I read it, I realised that

although I had lost a million dollars in property, I was gaining Christ. I went on to work for the church and help other refugees.

'Today, Jesus is everything! I no longer care what I have lost. Now I sleep soundly because I have given Him all that I am and I know He will provide for me every day.'

John considered himself a Christian – until he found Christ personally. And many Muslims refugees have found Jesus, too – often through direct revelation of Jesus (see opposite).

According to the United Nations, there are close to one million Syrian refugees in Lebanon, a country with a population of just six million.

Scaled up to the UK, that would make as many refugees as the entire populations of Birmingham, Manchester, Portsmouth and London combined.

And the Lebanese have every reason to be suspicious of Syrians. Lebanon has been occupied by Syria, dominated by Syria and at war with Syria in recent history. Now the country is having to feed, clothe and house many thousands of its people.

'Today, Jesus is everything! I no longer care what I have lost.'



Release CEO Paul Robinson spoke to refugees like John for Release's new 12-minute film, *Flight*. *'It's so hard to leave everything behind, but that's what our brothers and sisters in the Middle East and other lands often have to do – simply because they believe in the name of Jesus Christ,'* he said.

Flight, which is free to supporters, is available in April. Ask for your copy by calling 01689 823491 or by using the attached card.

Visions of Jesus

'God is revealing himself to refugees in amazing ways,' says Release partner in Lebanon Pastor 'Timothy'.

'Many hundreds say Christ is revealing himself in dreams – even on the road from Syria. One woman who was desperately escaping with her children said, "All of a sudden, I saw Christ ahead of me on the cross and I was so happy. I was full of joy and peace." Now she walks for an hour every Sunday to get to church.'

'Sara', who is from a Sunni Muslim background, had to flee Syria with her five children when her husband was killed in the fighting.

'I dreamt about a very long, dark road. And at the end of this road I saw an angel. He extended his hand to me and said, "Don't be afraid, for I am with you." I woke up shivering. I was crying so hard.

'When I started telling people at the church about this vision, all of them told me, "This is from Christ. The Lord is with you."

Sara's relatives persecuted her for her faith in Jesus, and she had to escape again.

'But even now,' she says, 'when I remember the story, I remember the Lord is with me. I believe this truly.'

Names have been changed



'We must not forget Christians in the Middle East'

The Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby has recently urged believers in the UK and Ireland to do all they can to help persecuted Christians in the Middle East.

*'Hundreds of thousands have been forced from their homes. Many have been killed, enslaved and persecuted or forcibly converted,' he wrote in The Telegraph*¹

'We must support and help them in every way we can.'

¹ December 1, 2018.



YOUR OPPORTUNITY TO HELP PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS IN FLIGHT

'Today Christians in the Middle East and around the world continue to flee for their lives. Let's stand with them in their hour of need.'

Paul Robinson, Release CEO

£10 could cover the cost of a Christian worker visiting refugee families in Lebanon for a month

£25 could purchase ten Bibles for refugees in Iraq

£50 could cover the cost of providing a food and hygiene package to a refugee family in Lebanon

Please make a gift today

- use the attached card
- call 01689 823491
- give online at releaseinternational.org

PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS IN FLIGHT



THREATENED AND BEATEN BY EXTREMISTS

Threats of violence are forcing a growing number of Pakistani Christians to seek refuge in Thailand. Your support provides pastoral care and practical help to those who have lost everything.



Ron owned and directed a successful Christian TV channel in Pakistan. Then extremists demanded that he take the channel off air.

At first, he complied, but later felt it was his duty to keep on broadcasting. After he went back on air the extremists returned and destroyed his office.

They dragged Ron into the street and beat him badly. They threatened to kill him and his family – and brought false charges of blasphemy against him.

In the following days, the extremists continued to threaten Ron, wife Miriam and their three children. So they had no choice but to flee Pakistan for Thailand.

Thanks to your support, however, Ron and his family now have food and shelter, and all three of the children (pictured) are able to attend school.

LOVE OVERCOMES

When Kandice fell in love with Peter, she was a Muslim, but converted to Christianity before they married.

Her family were so enraged that to preserve 'honour' Kandice's brother tried to kill them.

Now considered an apostate, Kandice knew that she and Peter would never be safe in Pakistan again. Like Ron and Miriam, they too fled to Thailand.

Since then, they have had two children. Without official papers, they are in constant danger of arrest by immigration police. If caught, they could be jailed and held indefinitely in appalling conditions.

Thanks to your support, our partner in Thailand is empowering Peter and Kandice to teach refugee children who are unable to go to school, and providing pre-school materials for their daughter, Elizabeth.

Names have been changed

release
POTENTIAL



INSPIRING FAITH

Amy, one of our Release Potential Change Makers, was thrilled to visit Thailand as part of her year-long discipleship programme:

One family we met really inspired me. They had fled from Pakistan to Thailand – and had lost everything. The father was a doctor and his wife a midwife. They had three teenage children. They had to escape when their home and their father's medical practice were set on fire. Yet their faith was so strong!

I will remember this family forever because the time we spent together was precious. The bonds in God's family are so strong – uniting people from all tribes, tongues, nations and languages.

Meeting them changed my life.

• Find out more about our Change Makers discipleship programme for young adults at releaseinternational.org



Where persecuted Christians are forced to flee – and how you are helping them to survive



“It is hard for us to imagine the trauma that many persecuted Christians suffer when they’re forced to flee for their lives – simply because they have chosen to follow Jesus.

Today hundreds of thousands of believers have been displaced as a result of conflict and persecution by both governments and militants.

Your support counts – and makes a real difference to believers who often have lost everything.

If you can, please display the map overleaf in your church to encourage prayer for our persecuted family.”

Paul

Paul Robinson, Release CEO

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL
voice
of Persecuted Christians

‘The attackers came in the night with torches, guns and machetes,’ said Tyokua, a farmer in Plateau state, Nigeria.

‘They shot and killed six people. I hid in the bush all night. When I returned I found that the Fulani militants had destroyed my house and also my yam seeds.’

Such devastating attacks have caused tens of thousands of Christians in central and northern Nigeria to flee for their lives — and to seek refuge in safer regions, including neighbouring countries.

In the first half of 2018 it is estimated that more than 6,000 were killed and 50,000 displaced.

‘The escalation in the killing is clear,’ one Release partner told us.

Believers in **Syria** and **Iraq** have also experienced long-term conflict and instability, forcing tens of thousands to become refugees. Many escape with no more than the clothes they wear.

Brutal persecution of believers by repressive governments in **North Korea**, **Eritrea** and **Iran** has also exacerbated today’s global refugee crisis.

PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS IN

FL



Persecution and war have forced hundreds of thousands of Christians to flee for their lives.



Practising faith is forbidden. Many Christians have defected and live under cover in China – or make the dangerous journey to South Korea.

NORTH
KOREA
SOUTH
KOREA

PAKISTAN

Christians live as an oppressed minority. Some who have been accused of blasphemy or threatened with violence have fled to Thailand and other countries.

THAILAND

MALAYSIA

SRI LANKA

releaseinternational

YOUR SUPPORT CAN CHANGE LIVES

*Persecuted Christians in flight need
your prayers and gifts to survive.*

Your gift could provide:

- emergency aid to vulnerable families
- Christian discipleship and pastoral care
- vocational training to help believers start small businesses
- trauma-healing for the victims of violence

*Please stand with your persecuted
family today.*

- use the attached card
- call 01689 823491
- give online at releaseinternational.org



*Almighty Father, God of
compassion,*

Watch over each refugee family,

*All those separated from their
loved ones,*

Those who have fled in fear.

*May they - and we - find
refuge in You*

*And grace to share Your love
With strangers. Amen.*



RICHARD WURMBRAND'S PLEA 1

**'Give us the tools
we need.'**



Richard Wurmbbrand
– the Romanian
pastor who inspired
the founding of
Release in 1968 –
was passionately
concerned about the

growth of the church in persecuted
environments.

He therefore pleaded with
Christians in the 'free' West to give
persecuted believers the tools
needed to survive and reach their
communities.

Such tools include emergency aid,
clothing, food, discipleship and
evangelistic materials, Bibles and
other support.

TORTURED for CHRIST



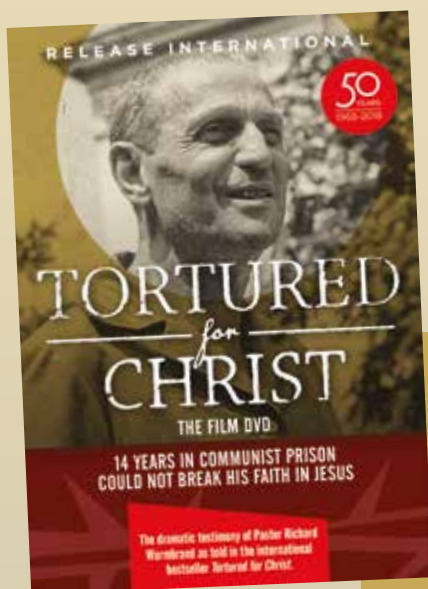
'POWERFUL, MOVING AND CHALLENGING'



Many churches throughout the UK and Ireland have been raising the profile of persecuted Christians by screening our film Tortured for Christ. These are just some of the comments we've received from viewers:

'A hard-hitting film that portrays the reality and truth of those who have suffered persecution and still are ... Those who viewed it were stunned into quiet reflection, as they considered the enormous cost paid by some Christians to follow Jesus.'

'Powerful and visual film which takes the viewer into the tension, trial and torment of the suffering church — but also into the triumph and testimony of God's servants then and today.'



'A very powerful, moving and challenging movie. Extremely relevant to what many are facing today - and many more will face in the years to come. Every believer should see this!'

SEE THE FILM

Check out the listing at releaseinternational.org/events to find out where *Tortured for Christ* is being shown in your area.

Why not show *Tortured for Christ* in your church?

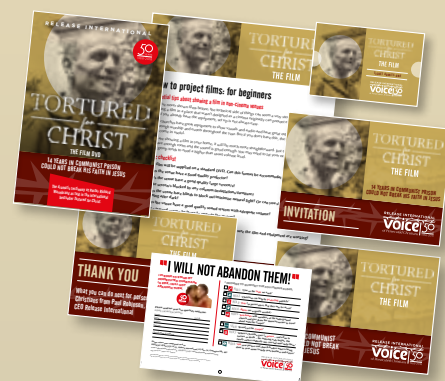
The 70-minute film is a powerful depiction of the man who inspired the ministry of Release in 1968, based on his bestselling testimony.

We've produced a free pack to help you organise your film event. It includes:

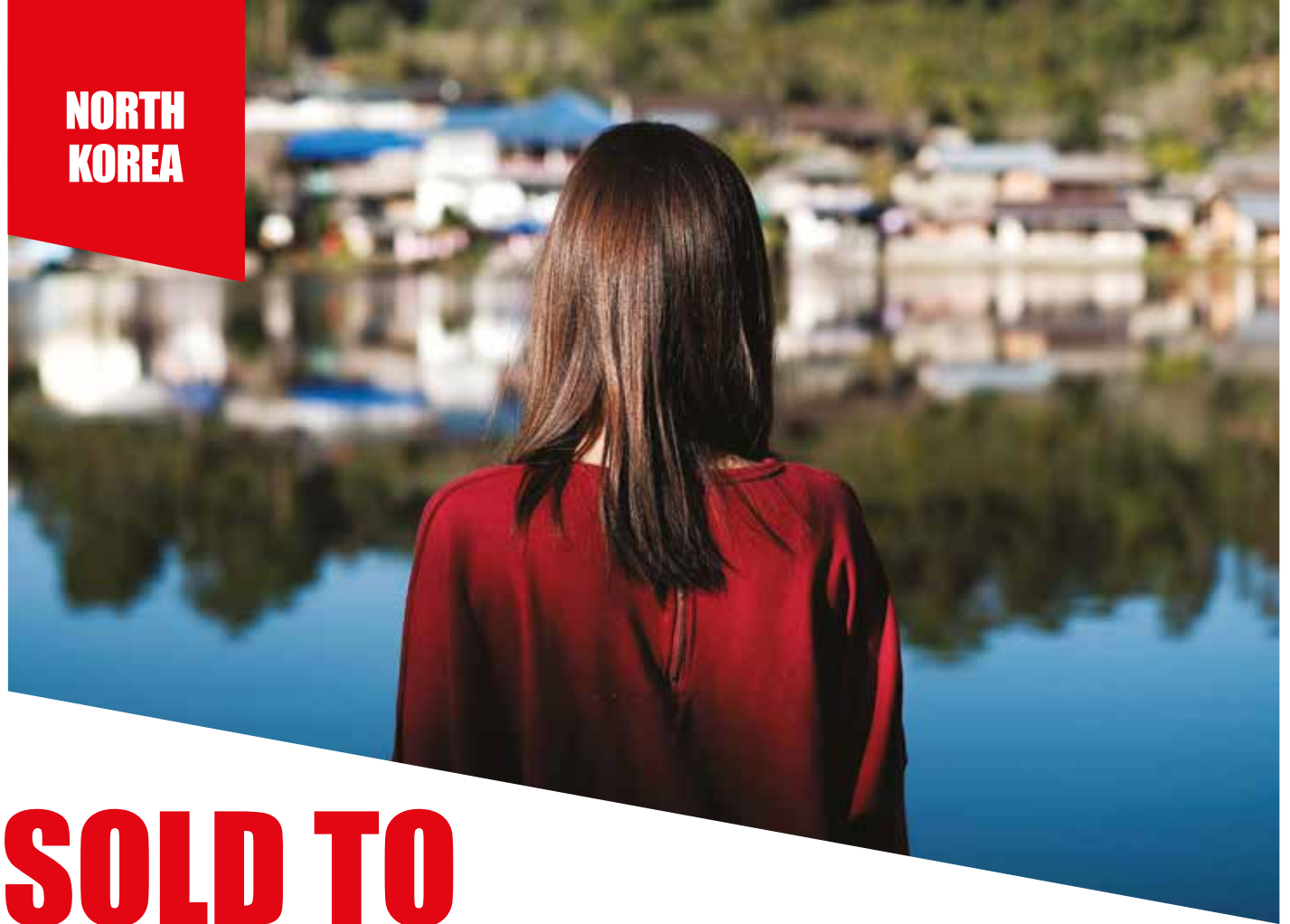
- *Tortured for Christ* DVD
- Advice for showing the film
- A5 invitation cards & A5 flyers
- A4 poster to promote your event
- Tickets
- Collection envelopes
- Thank You cards
- 'I will not abandon them' pledge cards

Simply tell us **how many guests** you would like to invite – and we'll send you everything you need.

Order today by using the attached card, by calling 01689 823491 or by emailing info@releaseinternational.org



**NORTH
KOREA**



Library photo

SOLD TO TRAFFICKERS

'Esther' was so desperate to escape from brutal North Korea that she agreed to be sex-trafficked into neighbouring China. Then she tricked ten of her friends into being sold to traffickers too. Yet today all these lives have been remarkably transformed by the power of the gospel.



'Esther' (not her real name) was desperate to make money to feed her parents and family. Eventually she reluctantly chose to be trafficked from North Korea to marry a Chinese husband.

Yet her plan backfired when the broker who fixed the deal reneged on his promise – giving her and her family nothing.

Still desperate, she offered to deceive all of her friends inside North Korea into being trafficked as well. She was responsible for ten of them being sold into forced marriage.

'That was the first time I was personally involved in trafficking

women,' she told one of our partners working in China. 'I knew it was not the right way to live and I felt guilty, but I needed to earn money and send it back home. I felt the only way I could survive was to step on the heads of others, so I began working with the broker.'

Later, however, Esther was caught by the Chinese authorities and sent back to North Korea, where she was sentenced to imprisonment.

When the police informed her father, he managed to find the money to pay a bribe to have her released.

But when he learned what she had done – even though it was to save

her family – he was so ashamed that he told her, 'From now on, I have no daughter.'

Esther was crushed. She had lost her own dignity, sold her friends to traffickers and now her family had rejected her.

She decided to escape again to China and then head on to South Korea in order to make money there and have a better life.

But as her flight began, she came across one of the discipleship bases run by a Release partner. There she heard about the Lord and was given a Bible.

'I will never forget the day I received the Bible from them. I was so happy. I kept reading it and writing down the words in my notebook,' she said.

'As time went by, I began to understand more about Jesus and what He has done for me. I started to repent of my sin, especially the trafficking work I had done.'

Esther felt in her heart that God had set her free – and from that point on her life was completely changed.

Soon the Holy Spirit powerfully convicted her to go to all of the friends she had tricked, and to share the gospel with them.

'I searched and found five of the North Korean women I had sold. I wanted to ask for their forgiveness and to share the gospel with them, but I was sure they wouldn't forgive me,' she said.

'All ten became believers, and all ten led their husbands to Christ!'

'To my surprise, no one hated me or had bitterness or anger toward me. They could see that something inside me had changed. They willingly accepted my request for forgiveness and came with me to learn more about the true freedom that I had found. It was a miracle.'

Over time she found the rest of her friends who had been trafficked. All ten became believers, and all ten led their husbands to Christ!

These Chinese men had originally bought their wives from traffickers. But now, through the gospel, the homes of all ten families have become locations for house churches that are reaching out to others.

Remarkably, Esther today oversees a number of such locations in China.

Despite the constant threat of forced repatriation to North Korea, she bravely takes the gospel into rural villages to minister to North Korean women who, like her, are victims of trafficking.

Hear Esther's song of Thanksgiving

When Esther first received forgiveness from God, she wrote a song of praise and thanksgiving that described the great grace of God she had experienced:

I didn't know my Lord when I wandered

I was stubborn, went only my way and committed all sin

Oh my Lord, how can you forgive a sinner like me?

Can I be forgiven although I am worse than a worm?

You can hear Esther singing her song at releaseinternational.org/esther



Your support is helping these North Korean refugees to be disciplined in South Korea.

Supporting North Korean defectors

Thanks to your support, Release partners are enabling North Korean converts like Esther to reach out with the message of the gospel and to transform lives inside China and North Korea.

Our partners disciple and provide vocational training for North Korean refugees – helping them to start new lives and to earn an income for their families. Refugees are given opportunities to be involved in ministry that can have a big impact on the lives of those inside North Korea itself.



Foreign Office reviews Christian persecution

Release welcomes the first independent review of Britain's support for persecuted Christians, launched by the Foreign Secretary, Jeremy Hunt, on January 30.

'A quarter of a billion Christians are suffering some sort of persecution all over the world, and we know that a number of the countries where this happens are countries that we don't necessarily talk about,' said Jeremy Hunt.

'We wanted to ask ourselves a question as to whether we really are doing as much as we possibly could.'

The unprecedented review will be led by the Bishop of Truro, Rt Rev Philip Mounstephen, and will make recommendations on how the government can better support Christians under threat.

'The evidence is that 80 per cent of all the people who are suffering religious persecution are Christian,' said Mr Hunt.

'Where freedom of worship is hampered or prevented, then usually

that's a sign of lots of other things going wrong, and we wanted to make sure that the UK is doing everything to champion the values that we all believe in.

'I want to make absolutely sure when I am meeting a foreign minister, a prime minister or a president in another country, and there's an issue concerning religious freedom, and in particular the rights of Christians, I want to make sure that it is absolutely on my list of things that I need to raise.'

Mapping persecution

The five-month review aims *'to map levels of persecution of and other discrimination against Christians in key countries around the world... to provide an objective assessment of the impact and levels of FCO (Foreign and Commonwealth Office) support and make recommendations in this regard.'*

The terms of reference also state that the review *'will draw on leading experts to promote engagement in a wide public consultation, enabling representation from across the global Christian community.'*

One of our Board members, Rev Dr Berhane Asmelash (pictured with the Foreign Secretary), spoke recently to a gathering at the Foreign Office about the persecution of Christians in Eritrea and his own imprisonment there.

'In meeting with the Foreign Secretary, I was encouraged by his willingness to publicly declare the magnitude of persecution against Christians,' said Release CEO Paul Robinson.

'We welcome this review and hope it will result in recommendations and action to positively impact persecuted Christians right where they live.'

For further details of the review and a transcript of the Foreign Secretary's speech, visit releaseinternational.org/fco-review.

Good News

'We love our groups!'

Our Strength to Stand (S2S) groups in Pakistan give the Christian women who attend them powerful strength in their difficult circumstances: living under oppression and in the midst of poverty.

Many of these precious women tell us how much they love their S2S groups!

We recently heard that some of the children of group members, both girls and boys, are now allowed to attend church. Previously, worried parents had kept their daughters away out of fear that they could be negatively



influenced or even that the girls, if unaccompanied, would run off with local boys.

Read more about our S2S groups in Egypt in Release Women's spring edition of its newsletter, Embrace. Request your free copy by using the attached card or call 01689 823491.

See page 21 for details of our forthcoming Release Women National Conference in London on October 12.



THANK YOU TO ALL OUR FUNDRAISERS

A big thank you to all our supporters who organise fundraising events for Release.

Every month we are amazed at the variety of your efforts: whether baking cakes, running marathons or undertaking sponsored challenges, to name just a few.

If you want to make a difference to the lives of persecuted Christians, please ask for our free fundraising pack. It contains creative fundraising ideas, colour posters (pictured), pledge cards, leaflets, collecting boxes and more!

Order using the attached card, call 01689 823491 or email info@releaseinternational.org.



Visit Sri Lanka with Release Potential

Are you a Christian aged 18-30 who would like to show love to our persecuted family through action and encouragement? Or maybe you know someone who is?

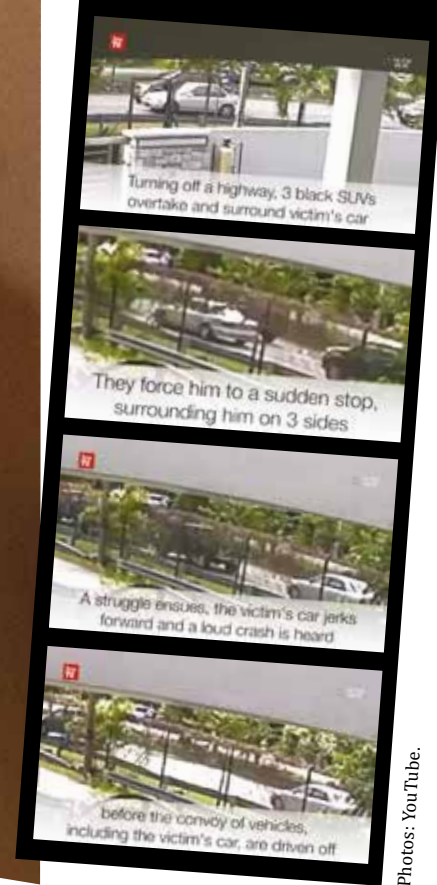
This year Release Potential is organising a 10-day Change Makers ministry trip to Sri Lanka to meet and support persecuted Christians.

Participants will help at a camp for children and young people and will have the opportunity to visit a local church. Team members are expected to do practical work, and to record their own video blogs.

We require a £300 deposit – but you have up to a year to pay the balance. Total cost is around £1,200 including flights, transfers, food and accommodation.

For more details: contact potential@releaseinternational.org, call 01689 823491 or visit releaseinternational.org/release-potential.

Photo: change.org



Photos: YouTube.

Abducted pastor missing for two years

Please pray for pastor Raymond Koh who was abducted in February 2017 — and has not been seen since.

'We were due to meet with pastor Raymond in 2017 around the time he was taken,' recalls our Development Manager for Ireland, Stephen McIlroy.

'We were shocked to discover that he had been abducted by what seems to have been a highly-professional team of at least 15 individuals, all with faces covered.'

CCTV footage shows three black SUVs surrounding the vehicle carrying Raymond, and several men running towards his car before all the vehicles drive away. The video (pictured) has been circulated widely online by Malaysian media.

Stephen later had the privilege of meeting with Raymond's wife, Susanna, and members of the family.

'They have been traumatised by the whole event but Susanna, in particular, remains strong,' said Stephen.

'She admitted to me that at one stage she was very weak and at her lowest — but God intervened and lifted her

with supernatural strength, enabling her to press on with the search for her missing husband.'

Helping the poor

Raymond ran a non-governmental organisation called *Harapan Komuniti* (Hope Community) in the capital Kuala Lumpur — helping the poorest members of society.

In 2011, his organisation was investigated by Malaysia's Islamic authorities. It was accused of attempting to convert Muslims when it hosted a party at a local church, the BBC reported. Apostasy is an offence in this Muslim-majority country.

Although the allegations were later dropped, Raymond remained a target of rumours and even received two bullets in the post shortly afterwards, said his family.

In February this year church members and leaders from many denominations in Malaysia met to continue to pray for Raymond.

Susanna thanked all those attending, saying:

'God is good. Even though the enemy plans evil, God will turn it for good.'

While no trace of Raymond or his car have been found, there have been renewed hopes for a fresh enquiry following the election of a new Prime Minister last May.

• Pray that God will restore pastor Raymond to his family.

RELEASE'S MINISTRY IN MALAYSIA

Currently we support:

- Ministry to refugees
- Mentoring of new believers in secret locations



Population: 31.8 million

Capital: Kuala Lumpur

Government: Constitutional monarchy

Religion: Muslim 63%, Chinese 13%, Christian 9%, Buddhist 7%, Hindu 6%, Other 2%

Sources: World Factbook, Operation World.

GREAT OUTDOORS Church Service



GET READY FOR THE GREAT OUTDOORS!



Don't miss this year's Great Outdoors Church Service on Sunday, May 26*.

We're asking churches in the UK and Ireland 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.

Churches that have previously taken part say how meeting outside gave them a taste of what it is like for believers who do not have the comfort or security of meeting in a building. It's also a great witness in your local community.

'Please do encourage your church to take part,' said Release CEO Paul Robinson. '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.*

COULD YOU HELP ON ONE OF OUR STANDS?

Through the course of the year Release has stands at a number of events. At many of these we rely on the terrific support of volunteers to present Release's ministry to visitors.

If you would like to find out more about volunteering on a Release stand at an event this year, please contact Gene on 01689 823491 or email volunteer@releaseinternational.org.

RELEASE WOMEN NATIONAL CONFERENCE

**Saturday, October 12
Central London**

Our ministry to persecuted Christian women invites all supporters (both men and women) to its National Conference on Saturday, October 12, at St Michael's Church, Chester Square, LONDON, SW1W 9EF (10am to 4pm). Further details will be given in our next magazine, and at releaseinternational.org/events.

release & your church



Invite a Release speaker to your church

To request a speaker for your church or fellowship group, please contact these numbers:

Ireland

Stephen on
028 9334 0014

London

Imtiaz on
07957 677162

Midlands & North

Kenneth on
07375 516408

Scotland

James on
07434 894016

South

Kenneth on
07375 516408

Wales & W Midlands

Paul on
07747 535588

Release Women

Laura on
01689 823491

Or call 01689 823491

THE WORD

Development Manager Imtiaz shares how persecuted Christians – and us – can find comfort in the truths of Psalm 46.

GOD IS OUR REFUGE

Many generations of Christians have found that reading and meditating on the Psalms has helped them find peace and comfort.

The Psalms can help us on our journey with God and they encourage us to trust in Him – especially when we are in a place of darkness, fear, depression or stress.

During my ministry with Release I have witnessed how Christians in Pakistan suffer because of persecution. Some have even had to go into hiding to escape beatings and persecution.

Yet in the midst of their difficulties and struggles they know that God is their refuge. They are able to say with King David:

‘The Lord is my light and my salvation – whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life – of whom shall I be afraid?’ (Psalm 27:1)

It is in times of difficulty that we need to know who God is and what He is like.

Psalm 46, for example, reveals three amazing aspects about God.

First verse one reveals that God is our safe place:

‘God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.’

When trouble comes into our lives, we can seek refuge in the Lord. Knowing God as our refuge enables us to trust Him more.

David is a great example of someone who knew God like this. At different points in his life David was on the run from people who wanted to kill him, but he always found safety in God.

Secondly verse one reveals that God is our strength.

I have discovered that when trials and troubles come our way it is so easy to get anxious, worried and stressed.

When we experience these kinds of emotions, they can cause us to lose our strength and drain our energy. Sometimes we are not strong enough on our own to overcome our difficulties – but when we go to God He will give us the strength to cope (see Isaiah 40, verses 29 and 31).

Paul the apostle encourages us in Ephesians 6:10 to ‘be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power’

Because of this Paul could also write to the Philippians: ‘I can do all things through Him who strengthens me’ (Philippians 4:13).

Thirdly, the opening verse of Psalm 46 also tells us that God is our ever-present help in trouble.

Sometimes in life’s difficulties we can allow the pain of a situation to make us feel hopeless. We may wonder where God is.

This verse reminds us that God is with us every second of the day: and we can turn to Him at any moment for His help.

As the writer of Hebrews says: ‘He has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you. So we can confidently say: The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?’ (13:5-6).

Invite Imtiaz to speak in your church

Imtiaz is one of our team of Development Managers and regularly speaks in churches in the London area. If you’d like him to visit your church, please call him on 07957 677162. For other regions in the UK and Ireland, see our list of speakers on page 21.

INSPIRING FAITH



“For believers, days of trouble are small in comparison with the eternity of glory. We are identified with Him on His cross, but also in His victory.”

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.



NOT FORGOTTEN

Saturday June 29 2019 is the day the church traditionally remembers the martyrdom of St Peter and St Paul.

On this day Release invites you and your church to join us in remembering modern-day Christian martyrs.

To find out more and to order a free resource pack for your church email us on: martyrsday@releaseinternational.org.

The Day of the Christian Martyr

#IWillNotAbandonThem

GET READY FOR A CHALLENGE!

Join us on one of these four UltraChallenge walks – and raise funds for persecuted Christians at the same time.

July 13-14	PEAK DISTRICT (Dales-Bakewell)
Aug 31-Sept 1	SOUTH COAST (Eastbourne-Arundel)
Sept 7-8	THAMES PATH (Putney Bridge-Henley)
Sept 28-29	NORTH DOWNS (tbc)

Organised by Action Challenge, this is a great opportunity for supporters of Release to take part, opting to support Release as their chosen charity, and to enjoy some of the finest scenery in the UK.

Come as an individual or group, choosing to complete the whole route or a shorter section. You'll get full support and hospitality all the way.

Find out more at ultrachallenge.com.



*Will you
leave a
legacy of
enduring
faith and
love?*



A legacy gift to Release International can be a natural continuation of your commitment to share God's love and compassion with persecuted Christians around the world.

For 50 years, your generous gifts have enabled Christians to stand strong in their faith in the face of persecution. With your support, Release's partners are providing prayerful, pastoral and practical help to persecuted Christians in over 25 countries.

By including a gift to Release International in your will you can enable that support to continue.



To request a free legacy brochure please call us on 01689 823491, email info@releaseinternational.org or use the attached card.

#IWillNotAbandonThem

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL
voice
of Persecuted Christians

prayershield

April – June 2019

Liliana intends to go into full-time ministry despite the high price her family have paid for their faith.



APRIL 2019

*Heavenly Father,
Thank you for your grace,
which you say is all
sufficient for us so that we
may have all we need in all
things at all times so we
can 'abound in every good
work' (2 Corinthians 9:8).*

*We praise you, Lord,
because the same is true
for our persecuted family,
even as they pass through
the darkest of times.*

*Thank you for the
overcoming faith of our
church family whose lives
speak powerfully of your
victory on the cross, now
and for always.*

Amen

COLOMBIA

MONDAY 1: Despite Colombia's 2017 peace accord, the church remains a target for attack, especially when Christians stand up to rising levels of crime and gang violence. Ask God to protect and give wisdom to His people there.

TUESDAY 2: Liliana (pictured) grew up seeing her father threatened, assaulted and eventually killed by guerrillas. Praise God for His grace at work in her as she prepares to become a full-time missionary.

WEDNESDAY 3: Colombia has more than 6.5 million internally displaced people. Pray that Christians, who are among those who have had to flee violence, will be a beacon of hope among displaced communities.

THURSDAY 4: Pray that the church in Colombia can play a leading role in shaping the future of the nation. Pray that it will have influence and show leadership in pursuing truth and justice.

FRIDAY 5: Ethnic minority Christians in Colombia come under pressure from their community for rejecting traditional beliefs. Many face discrimination, eviction, even violence. Pray that entire communities will turn to Christ.

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL
Voice
of Persecuted Christians



Fulani herdsmen killed Zwandien's sister, Mary.

NIGERIA

'We cannot fight back... [as] law-abiding citizens of this country.'

Church leader Abel Bako, Gindin Dutse, Kaduna

SATURDAY 6: The UNHCR estimates that more than 1.9 million people are internally displaced in Nigeria. Pray that the Government will act with firm resolve to end violence by Fulani herdsmen and *Boko Haram* extremists.

SUNDAY 7: Christians displaced by violence in areas such as Plateau state often lose their homes as well as loved ones. Pray that God will provide for women like Talatu Gado who lost her family and home in a raid on Angwan Kauna village: she is now homeless.

MONDAY 8: Pray for Gyang, a university student in Jos, Plateau state, whose entire family were wiped out by Fulani militants recently. His parents, grandmother and three siblings died in the attack, along with six other villagers.

TUESDAY 9: Pray that the militants will turn away from violence and pursue peace. Church leaders say that 646 Christians in Plateau state alone were killed from March to October last year.

WEDNESDAY 10: Pray for Christians in Gindin Dutse village, Kaduna, where Fulani herdsmen recently shot dead 70-year-old John Karik and wounded John's son and a neighbour. Many Christians have fled the area.

THURSDAY 11: Pray for Zwandien (pictured) whose sister Mary

was killed, along with 19 others, when Fulani herdsmen attacked Godogodo village in Kaduna. Zwandien says he has forgiven Mary's killer.

FRIDAY 12: Pray for the family of Dr Raphael Maiwada Galadima who was abducted and killed in Kaduna as he tried to calm tensions between Muslims and Christians in the state.

SATURDAY 13: Pray that God will give His protection and authority to church leaders promoting peace and tolerance in Nigeria, including Release partner the Rt Rev Ben Kwashi, Archbishop of Jos.

SUNDAY 14: Christian leaders in Plateau state have accused the Nigerian military of arming Fulani militias and also soldiers of acting as hired mercenaries. Pray the Government will investigate these allegations.

MONDAY 15: Pray for the release of kidnapped Christians, including Leah Sharibu, a teenager abducted from Dapchi in February 2018. Leah refused to recant her faith in exchange for her freedom.

ERITREA

TUESDAY 16: Twen Theodros (pictured) has spent more than 13 years behind bars in Eritrea. Praise God that when Twen was asked how people might pray for her, she asked only that His name be glorified in Eritrea.

WEDNESDAY 17: Continue to pray for the release of

**'MY GRACE IS SUFFICIENT
FOR YOU, FOR MY POWER
IS MADE PERFECT IN
WEAKNESS.'**

2 Corinthians 12:9

Christian prisoners still being held in Eritrea. Latest estimates suggest there are about 230 of them. Pray that God will build their faith and sustain their hope.

THURSDAY 18: Pray for unity and strong fellowship among prisoners, especially those held together in close confines such as shipping containers.

**PRAYERS FOR
EASTER**

GOOD FRIDAY: As we remember Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, please pray that persecuted Christians in Eritrea – and worldwide – will find fellowship with Him in their suffering and know that He is with them always.

EASTER SATURDAY: As we remember how Jesus' friends and family must have struggled with despair after His death, pray that Christians in Eritrea will hold on to hope as prisoners await release and the church prays for freedom.

EASTER SUNDAY: Let's celebrate Jesus' victory over sin and death and



Twen Theodros's faith remains strong after more than 13 years in jail.

pray that every single one of our persecuted brothers and sisters will know His victory over all that oppresses them today.

EASTER MONDAY: Pray that God will lift the heads (Psalm 3:3) of all the families of prisoners whom Release supports practically, both in Eritrea and beyond.

UZBEKISTAN

TUESDAY 23: In May 2018 Uzbekistan made it even more difficult for churches to apply for state permission to operate. Pray that Christians in Uzbekistan and throughout Central Asia will draw ever closer to God.

WEDNESDAY 24: Ask God to protect Pastor Ahmadjon Nazarov and other Christians in Urgench, north-west Uzbekistan, after police raided a house where they were eating together and interrogated those present.

THURSDAY 25: Pray for Lolakhon Umarova who refused to yield to demands that she denounce her pastor for holding 'unauthorised meetings' after a police raid (previous prayer). She and her son were thrown out of the family home, after relatives were pressured by police.

FRIDAY 26: Pray God's protection over Ravshan Yunusov from Pap, who made a formal complaint about a police raid on his home as friends gathered for a meal and to read the Bible. Ravshan has been told to expect to be prosecuted.

SATURDAY 27: Even young people have been forced to sign false statements against Ravshan (above). Pray that the Holy Spirit will move powerfully among the young people of Uzbekistan.

SUNDAY 28: Shukhrat Safarov was given a stiff fine for handing a New Testament to a woman in Bukhara. The government has since claimed that using scriptures for 'missionary purposes' is illegal: pray that the gospel will spread across the region regardless.

MONDAY 29: Pray for Christians in the Tashkent region, where police recently raided a meeting of about 40 Christians. Four South Koreans were deported and many of those present fined.

TUESDAY 30: Up to 40 officials raided a Baptist meeting in Tashkent and ransacked the building. Pray that God will strengthen this church's resolve to spread the gospel.

MAY 2019

CHINA

WEDNESDAY 1: In the past two years, at least 250 churches have been closed or demolished in China. Pray especially for Christians in Henan: officials have removed or burned the crosses on at least 4,000 churches there.

THURSDAY 2: A government hotline has been set up in Henan, encouraging people to report 'illegal religious activities'. Pray that these efforts to turn citizens against one another will backfire.

FRIDAY 3: Several Christians passed out when security officials raided a meal they were holding in a hotel in Nanyang, Henan, and began taking pictures. Pray that God will comfort these believers.

SATURDAY 4: Officials recently removed the first of the Ten Commandments from the

wall of Dongcun Church in Luoyang, Henan: 'You shall have no other gods before me'. Praise God that He reigns above all other powers.

SUNDAY 5: Thank God that Huang Yan, a Christian human rights defender who has helped many prisoners of conscience, is now starting a new life overseas after suffering imprisonment and extreme abuse from officials.

MONDAY 6: Pray for members of the Early Rain Covenant Church in Sichuan detained since December on charges such as 'picking quarrels and provoking troubles'; 44 more were arrested in February.

TUESDAY 7: Pray for wisdom and courage for Pastor Wang Yi and his wife, Jiang Rong, who lead the Early Rain Covenant Church (above). Both are in custody and have been denied access to lawyers.

WEDNESDAY 8: Officials recently raided Fountain of Life Church in Chengdu, Sichuan, during a Bible study, declaring the church to be illegal. Pray this congregation will be able to continue to meet.

THURSDAY 9: Chinese officials have allegedly been spreading propaganda among students that religion is harmful. In a number of provinces, youths are banned from religious venues. Pray that young people will grow hungry for His word.

FRIDAY 10: Officials partially demolished Xunsiding Church's kindergarten in Xiamen city, Fujian, in January. Parents and teachers were blocked from leaving their homes during the demolition. Ask God to provide new premises.

SATURDAY 11: Pray for Pastor Cao Wen and members of a Guangzhou city church in eastern China whom officials have ordered to stop holding events.

SUNDAY 12: Pray for an unofficial church in Inner Mongolia where officials harassed the congregation during a Sunday service. They were told to attend an official Three-Self Church – but refused.

MONDAY 13: Please pray for Pastor Yang Hua and his family. The leader of Huoshi Church was tortured, and jailed for two years for 'divulging state secrets'. Since his release, he has been under tight surveillance. One of his teenage sons is now in the US.

Chinese officials destroyed the Linfen Golden Lampstand Church in 2018.



ALGERIA

TUESDAY 14: Thank God that the church in Algeria is flourishing, especially among the Kabyle Berber people in the east of the country.

WEDNESDAY 15: The Algerian Government is reportedly being pressured by other Muslim countries to respond to church growth. It closed at least 11 churches last year. Pray that the Government will resist this external pressure to curb the church.

THURSDAY 16: A 2006 decree requires churches to have a licence, yet no licence has been issued since 2006. Pray that the churches that have been closed will be allowed to reopen.

FRIDAY 17: Pray that church leaders and their congregations in Algeria will know the Lord's peace, wisdom and guidance amid growing pressure.

SATURDAY 18: Pray for the persecuted Church of Azagher in the Kabylie region. When officials sealed their building last October, the congregation put up a tent and have worshipped there since.

SUNDAY 19: Pray for four Christians from Bouira who were recently acquitted of 'inciting a Muslim to change his religion', which is a criminal offence. The prosecutor is contesting their acquittal.

MONDAY 20: Please pray for an Algerian Christian who recently faced blasphemy charges, brought by his

wife's family. Though he was acquitted, his in-laws have denied him access to his children and forced his wife to divorce him.

TUESDAY 21: Pray that Algerians generally would recognise the rights of the Algerian church and show greater tolerance towards believers.

PAKISTAN

WEDNESDAY 22: Pakistan's Supreme Court recently upheld its acquittal of Asia Bibi, leaving her free to leave the country after almost eight years on death row. Pray that she and her family can rebuild their lives in peace and safety.

THURSDAY 23: Death threats against Asia Bibi continued even after her acquittal. Pray that God will speak into the hearts of hardliners and turn them away from violence.

FRIDAY 24: Praise God that Pervaiz Masih has been acquitted of 'blasphemy': after he was falsely accused by a business rival, hundreds of Muslims took to the streets, threatening to burn him alive.

SATURDAY 25: Zareena, wife of Pervaiz Masih (above), was so badly beaten by police that she was left unable to walk or stand. Unattended, the couple's three-year-old daughter wandered off and was later found drowned. Pray that God will restore all that this couple have lost.

SUNDAY 26: New regulations in Punjab requiring churches

to have security measures such as cameras means that poor churches which cannot afford them may face closure. Pray that police will protect churches from attack.

PHILIPPINES

MONDAY 27: Pray for the congregation of the cathedral in Jolo, southern Philippines, where more than 20 people died and more than 100 were injured in a bomb attack in January. Militants pledging allegiance to Islamic State admitted responsibility.

TUESDAY 28: Many believe that Islamist militants active in the southern Philippines want to stir up conflict between minority Muslims and the country's majority Christians. Pray people will unite against extremism and for peace.

WEDNESDAY 29: Pray that the extremists of southern Philippines will come to repentance and find faith and forgiveness in Jesus.

THURSDAY 30: Pray that this time of uncertainty and insecurity will cause Christians in the Philippines to draw closer to God and encourage more people to turn to Christ.

FRIDAY 31: Ask God to give His wisdom to church leaders in the Philippines and pray that their congregations will honour those in authority over them. Pray that God will multiply His church in the Philippines and bring revival.

JUNE 2019

'WE ARE DEPENDING ON GOD FOR ALL WE NEED.'

Bharathi, pastor's wife, India

INDIA

SATURDAY 1: Pray for Bharathi and her husband, Pastor Paul. He was attacked several years ago by Hindu extremists and suffered internal injuries from which he is still recovering.

SUNDAY 2: Pray for Pastor Richard (pictured) and his

team, who distribute Gideon Bibles. Hindu activists threatened to burn them and accused them of distributing Bibles near a Hindu temple.

MONDAY 3: Pray for Pastor Subhosh and his wife, Sara, who each spent more than three weeks in custody after being accused of converting Hindus. Pray that they and their congregation will stand strong in their faith.

TUESDAY 4: Pastor Arun and his congregation in northern India have been attacked by Hindu nationalists, who

have threatened to kill Arun. The congregation no longer meets in one place. Pray that their persecutors will give their lives to Jesus.

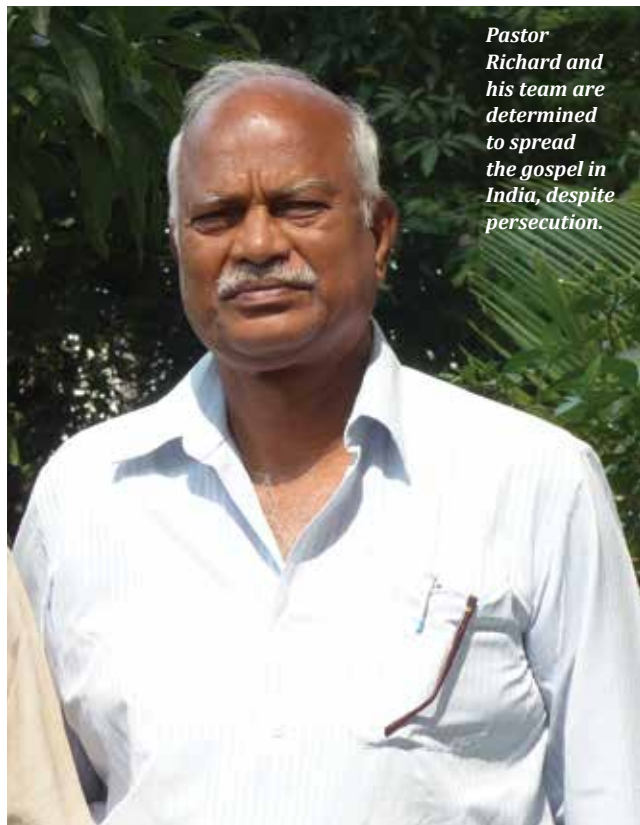
WEDNESDAY 5: A church in Narnepadu, southern India, was recently demolished because local Hindus said its position violated Hindu principles similar to those of the Chinese system of Feng Shui. Pray that the church can be rebuilt elsewhere.

THURSDAY 6: Pray for a group of pastors in Uttar Pradesh who were charged with 'causing religious enmity' after more than 35 Hindu extremists raided their meeting in Agra and beat them with hockey sticks and baseball bats. The pastors have been released on bail.

FRIDAY 7: The pastors' meeting in Agra (above) was also attended by their families, including their children. Pray that their wives and children especially will stand firm in their faith after their ordeal.

SATURDAY 8: Local Christians in the Agra area were afraid to go to church following the attack (above). Pray that local officials will uphold Christians' rights, despite Hindu hardliners' false accusations of 'forcible conversion'.

SUNDAY 9: Pray for Pastor Gupta of Full Grace Gospel Church and his family in Bhadupura, Agra. Extremists have threatened to kill them unless they leave the area.



MONDAY 10: Pray for staff and children at a Christian orphanage in Agra where Hindu extremists alleged forcible conversions were taking place. Thank God that police, who came with extremists, dismissed these allegations.

TUESDAY 11: Pastor John Lakra from Odisha was beaten by extremists who then took him to a Hindu shrine, doused him in petrol and threatened to kill him. Praise God that a power cut confused his attackers and police arrived in time to save his life.

WEDNESDAY 12: The attack on Pastor John Lakra (above) came after someone hacked his phone and sent derogatory messages about Hindu deities from his account. Pray that God will thwart the plans of those whose intent is to sow hatred.

THURSDAY 13: Pray for Pastor Dharmendra Singh in Uttar Pradesh, who was accused of 'alluring people to convert' by someone pressured by extremists. The pastor was able to share the gospel in prison before being released on bail.

IRAN

FRIDAY 14: Praise God that the church in Iran continues to grow as Iranians become disillusioned with other religions. Ask God to protect Iran's house churches, a particular target for persecution.

SATURDAY 15: There was an 'unprecedented' wave of raids on house church meetings late last year. Pray for all those who are still detained, many of whom have a Muslim background.

SUNDAY 16: Pray for wisdom for the many Christians arrested last year who, though later released, have been ordered to have no further contact with fellow believers.

MONDAY 17: Pray for Sina Moloudian, aged 26, arrested in Esfahan in January, in front of his parents. Officials confiscated Christian materials and allegedly beat Sina before taking him into custody.

TUESDAY 18: Pray for Ismaeil Maghrebinejad, aged 64, who was arrested in Shiraz in January and released on bail. Officials confiscated his laptop and phone. He has previously survived an attempt on his life.

WEDNESDAY 19: Pray that the Iranian authorities will stop intimidating Christian converts. Pray that officials will start to consider why these Christians are willing to pay a high price for turning to Christ.

THURSDAY 20: Five Christian women with a Muslim background were arrested recently. Among them was Ruhsari Kamberi, aged 65, who was arrested at her home in Karaj and endured ten days' intense interrogation.

FRIDAY 21: Pray for four Christians with a Muslim background detained in Ahvaz since December: sisters Shima and Shokoofeh Zanganeh were reportedly assaulted during interrogation.

SATURDAY 22: Amir Taleipour and his wife, Mahnaz Harati, were at home in Mashhad with their seven-year-old child when they were arrested. Pray this family can be reunited soon.

SUNDAY 23: Christians Behnam Ersali and Davood Rasooli were recently arrested separately as they prepared to travel to meet one another in Mashhad. Pray that God would thwart the efforts of the intelligence services to root out Iran's secret believers.

MONDAY 24: Ask God to encourage all those behind bars in Iran. Pray that they will sense His presence and His Spirit at work in their lives and that He will use them to lead many to Christ.

IRAQ

TUESDAY 25: Pray for Christians from the Nineveh plains who were displaced by Islamist terrorists. Some have now returned but many of their villages have been taken over by ethnic Shabak Muslims.

WEDNESDAY 26: Many Christians from the Nineveh plains are said to want to emigrate due to ongoing



Groups of believers now worship in areas of Iraq where there were once few churches.

insecurity. Pray that peace will return to their land so they can return to their ancestral home.

THURSDAY 27: Pray for St George's Church in Bartella which was recently visited by a group who fired gunshots

into the air outside the church for about 30 minutes. When the pastor asked them to stop, they threatened him.

FRIDAY 28: Pray that Iraqi Christians will stand firm against intimidation and fear. Pray that officials

will take strong action to protect churches and uphold Christians' religious rights.

SATURDAY 29: Today, on the Day of the Christian Martyr, when the church traditionally remembers the martyrdom of St Peter and St Paul, please join us in remembering modern-day Christian martyrs, in Iraq and worldwide (see *Voice* magazine, p.23).

SUNDAY 30: Please pray for wisdom for church leaders in Iraq, that they will know God's peace, wisdom and guidance amid ongoing pressures and persecution.

Lord Jesus,

I praise you because your banner over me is love – and your love never fails.

Your love is far beyond our earthly understanding: it has the power to raise the dead, to break down walls and to drive out hatred and intolerance.

Lord, overwhelm my persecuted brothers and sisters with your love today so that they may know that they are on your heart and in your hands.

*In your precious name,
Amen*

Sources: China Aid; Forum 18; Middle East Concern; Morning Star News; Release partners and contacts; VOM Canada; VOM USA.

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.

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