

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL

JUL-SEPT 2019

# voice

of Persecuted Christians

## COURAGEOUS FAITH

*Believers who lay  
down their lives*



*News, stories and prayer requests  
from persecuted Christians around the world*



# Welcome

by Paul Robinson, CEO

## Remembering modern-day Christian martyrs

**Saturday, June 29, is the day on which some churches in the UK and Ireland remember the martyrdom of the apostles Peter and Paul.**

This year we're inviting you and your church to join us on that day (or another day of your choice) to remember modern-day Christian martyrs – and to pray for their families.

On page 11 you can read testimonies of believers from around the world who in recent years have paid the ultimate price to follow their Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Please take time to reflect on these accounts, and to uphold their precious families in prayer. The loss of a main source of income means that many of these families are today struggling to survive.

Pray too for victims of the recent bomb attacks by militants on churches and hotels in Sri Lanka, which have devastated the lives of hundreds of families.

Asha, whose son was killed by one of the blasts, still struggles to comprehend what happened. As she told our partner: *'Everything is different now.'*

Your faithful support has enabled our partner NCEASL (the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka) to give immediate help to some of those critically injured and to the families of those killed, as you can read on page 6.

Given such anti-Christian violence, it is no surprise that a major new report describes religious persecution as an increasing 'global phenomenon' (see page 5).

The report, commissioned by the Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt, details how attacks against believers are spreading and growing in intensity.

Release International contributed substantial evidence for the review – please pray with us that our government will heed its findings and take action to support persecuted Christians.



### Your feedback

**It's not too late to take part in our supporter survey, which you can do online at [releaseinternational.org/survey](https://releaseinternational.org/survey) until the end of June.**

**Your feedback about our ministry, this magazine and other communications is very important to us – so please tell us what you think. We really value your help.**

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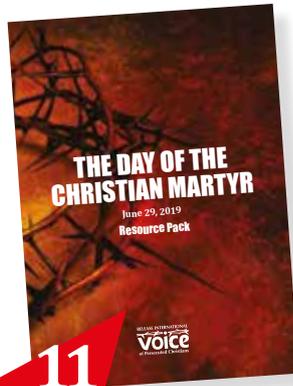
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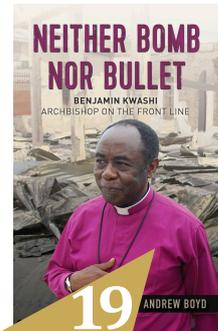
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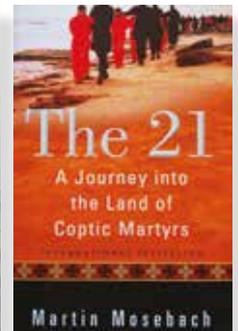
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RELEASE INTERNATIONAL

# 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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# Faith under fire



Photo: Morning Star News.

## Algerian church building closed

Authorities in north-central Algeria closed a church and its Bible school in May.

Citing a law that requires non-Muslim places of worship to be authorised, gendarmes (pictured) locked the doors of the evangelical church building in Boudjima, near Tizi-Ouzou, Kabylie region.

Church leader Youcef Ourahmane said that he had applied for a permit but, like all applications in Algeria, it had sat unattended.

*'I am sad to have to face this injustice,'* said Pastor Youcef. *'We prayed for those*

*authorities who are persecuting us, as our Lord Jesus Christ commanded. And in spite of all this, we are convinced that God is sovereign and is in control of this situation and all circumstances.'*

A 2006 ordinance governing non-Muslim worship in Algeria, commonly referred to as Law 03/06, stipulates that churches must obtain the permission of a national committee to be registered, but this committee has never met, and no church request has been officially considered or approved, he said.

**• Pray that the church and Bible school will be allowed to open soon.**



## Historic church stormed by agents

Assyrian Christians in the city of Tabriz, Iran, were shocked to discover that a historic Presbyterian church (pictured) has been forced to close.

Intelligence agents stormed the 100-year-old national heritage site in May. Locks were changed, the cross on the tower was torn down, and the church warden ordered to leave.

The building was officially confiscated due to a Revolutionary Court order in 2011, as were many other churches across the country. However, until now, church members were allowed to continue using the building for services.

**• Pray that the Iranian government allows the church to reopen soon.**

## Clampdown on Eritrean Christians

The Eritrean government arrested 141 Christians who were meeting in private in the capital Asmara on May 17. While 50 adults and 14 children were released within one week, 77 remain in detention.

The crackdown came ahead of Eritrea's Independence Day on May 24. Some of those detained are believed to be in Adi Abieto prison, close to where they were arrested.

As well as carrying out arrests, the authorities in Eritrea also shut down social media.

Release partner Dr Berhane Asmelash says that Christians inside Eritrea have become bolder as the Eritrean diaspora has become more outspoken in calling for greater religious freedom.

Eritrea is a one-party dictatorship ruled by President Isaias Afewerki since 1993. The nation had been in a state of war with neighbouring Ethiopia for 30 years.

Even though the two countries signed a peace deal last July, hopes that rapprochement with Ethiopia would lead to a freedom dividend have proved unfounded. One in five Eritreans is drafted into the armed forces for indefinite military service.

**• Pray for the release of all Christians currently detained in Eritrea.**

**Sign up to Release**



# Religious persecution is 'global phenomenon', warns Bishop in major new report

The persecution of Christians worldwide is spreading and increasing in severity, warns the Bishop of Truro in a major new report.<sup>1</sup>

The Bishop has been carrying out an independent review for Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt on the persecution of Christians worldwide. Release is one of the organisations that gave evidence for his interim report, released in May.

The report finds *'widespread evidence showing that Christians are by far the most widely persecuted religion' and that religious persecution is a 'global phenomenon that is growing in scale and intensity'*.

The report described a range of violent persecution. From mass violence expressed through the bombing of

churches to the torture of Christians by the authorities, extra-judicial killings and the enforced and involuntary disappearance of Christians.

It warned of the increasing threat from *'aggressive nationalism in countries such as China, as well as from Islamist militia groups.'* And it cited the example of India where, *'there is a growing narrative that to be Indian is to be Hindu.'*

Release CEO Paul Robinson has welcomed the report: *'This is a timely wake-up call to government that Christian persecution around the world can no longer be ignored.'*

• **Pray that the government will heed this review and take action to support persecuted Christians.**



## Terrorists kill 16 Christians in Burkina Faso

Militants have killed 16 Christians in three separate incidents in Zimtenga, Dablo and Silgadji in Burkina Faso. The attacks on the Christian community follow increased communal violence between armed groups and tribes in the country, which has resulted in the displacement of over 70,000 people.

*'The series of attacks on Christians indicates an intensification of Islamist violence on the Christian community in Burkina Faso,'* said the

World Evangelical Alliance Religious Liberty Commission.

*'With the growth of radical Islamist elements in the country, it is critical that the government recognise the threat to Christian populations.'*

According to the United Nations, the country is presently facing an unprecedented humanitarian crisis affecting some one million people. Since 2018, a State of Emergency has been declared in 14 out of 45 provinces in the country.

The rising wave of violence led to the resignation of the prime minister Paul Kaba Thieba in January 2019.

• **Pray for protection for all Christians in Burkina Faso.**

## Social media captures raid on church

Authorities raided a church in China's southern Guizhou province, according to an online video posted to Chinese social media.

The video depicts an attack on a small, rural church in Bijie, a mountainous area of the province, in which officials removed all of the church's property, said Release partner China Aid. In addition, two men knocked down the cross on the church's roof.

Because the video was originally posted on WeChat, a Chinese social media platform in which posts can be accessed by the government, Christians feared it was unsafe to discuss the incident, and no further details are known.

• **Pray that this rural congregation will know God's presence and will find a new location to meet.**

<sup>1</sup> [releaseinternational.org/fco-review](https://www.releaseinternational.org/fco-review)

**HELPING THE  
FAMILIES OF  
CHRISTIAN  
MARTYRS**



# 'PERSECUTED — BUT NOT ABANDONED'

*How your support is helping the victims of the recent devastating attacks by suicide bombers in Sri Lanka.*

On April 21, Easter Sunday, suicide bombers carried out a series of carefully-planned attacks on three Christian churches and three luxury hotels in different parts of Sri Lanka.

The government blamed two local Islamist groups – *National Thowheeth Jama'ath* and *Jammiyathul Millathu Ibrahim*. The explosions left more than 250 dead and 500 injured. Following the attacks, Islamic State (IS) claimed responsibility for the deadly bombings, a first on Sri Lankan soil.

One of the churches targeted by bombers was Zion Evangelical Church in Batticaloa, a member of Release's partner the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka (NCEASL).

***'The scale of this horror takes our breath away'***

According to NCEASL, 28 believers were killed by the attack on Zion Church, including 14 children.



*Ramesh Raju gave his life to stop a suicide bomber from entering Zion Evangelical Church.*

Photo: Twitter

The death toll would certainly have been much higher, were it not for the bravery of Ramesh Raju, a 42-year-old husband and father, who gave his life stopping a suicide bomber from entering the church that was packed with 600 people.



More than 100 worshippers were killed by coordinated bomb attacks at St. Sebastian's Church in Negombo and St. Anthony's Church in Kochchikade.

*'The scale of this horror takes our breath away,'* said Release's CEO Paul Robinson. *'All too often Easter has become the focus for violence against Christians.'*

Sri Lanka is religiously diverse. According to the 2012 census, more than 70 per cent of Sri Lanka's population of 20.8 million is Buddhist. Hindus make up 13 per cent, and Muslims a little less than 10 per cent. Catholics are about 6 per cent. Evangelical Christians form 1 per cent of the population – and are particularly vulnerable to persecution.

The growth of evangelical Christianity in Sri Lanka since 1980 has met

*Friends and relatives carry the coffin of one of the victims of the suicide bomb attacks on churches and luxury hotels on Easter Sunday in Sri Lanka. Photo: Reuters/Athit Perawongmetha.*

with violent opposition from Buddhist extremists. Persecution has intensified since 2012, coinciding with a rise in Buddhist nationalism.

Militants have burned churches and attacked Christians. Threats and intimidation are rife. In many cases, violent mobs have been led by Buddhist monks.

Buddhist extremists claim that Christians are unethically converting Buddhists in rural areas.

Christians say local government officials and police do little to prevent the attacks – and are sometimes complicit in them.

Our partner NCEASL has documented

**'We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.'**

**2 Corinthians 4:8-9, NIV.**

88 incidents of religious liberty violations against Christians in 2018 – and more than 40 incidents so far this year.

However, this latest attack at Easter marks the disturbing new trend that Islamist militants have extended their campaign of terror to new fronts such as Sri Lanka.

*'With regard to the radical Islamist threat, with Islamic State (IS) losing its caliphate in Syria and Iraq and shifting its attention to South and South East Asia, it appears that it is now pursuing a global insurgency model,'* says the World Evangelical Alliance Religious Liberty Commission.

*'This corroborates Sri Lankan intelligence reports indicating the existence of radical Islamist cells in the country comprising IS militants returning from Syria and Iraq. Moreover, investigations have also revealed that some of the Easter Sunday attackers were from affluent families and had studied overseas.'*

Christians in Sri Lanka continue to be vulnerable, as radical Islamists have vowed to continue their attacks on Christian churches.

## **Help for victims**

Thanks to your support, our partner NCEASL has been able to give immediate help to some of the critically-wounded, as well as the families of those killed.

*Continued overleaf..*

## HELPING THE FAMILIES OF CHRISTIAN MARTYRS



Asha

Asha, for example, a mother of two sons, has been devastated by the death of her youngest son, daughter-in-law and two grandchildren. She described her family as being 'full of

love and laughter' and is struggling to comprehend what happened. Her whole family has been affected psychologically.

*'Everything is different now,'* she told our partner.

Kamal lost his wife – and his two daughters sustained injuries to their legs. He himself received treatment to remove 39 bomb fragments from his body. His family will need continuing medical help, trauma-counselling and livelihood support, said our partner.

Priya lost her eldest son, the breadwinner who took care of the family. He had worked outside Sri Lanka for several years and had only just returned home. The whole family has been in a state of shock. Priya will need continuing support to cover her living expenses.

Many others are grieving the loss of loved ones – and are struggling to cope with the dramatic change in their circumstances. There are extensive needs for both medical care and trauma-counselling.

*'We are responding to the emergency situation, looking at the immediate medical needs, looking at those who have been injured, seeing what can be done,'* said our partner NCEASL.

*'We are looking at how these families can be supported, their livelihood needs met, and also thinking about trauma-counselling, psychosocial support, and how to rebuild the communities, rebuild the families, restore the victims who have been attacked. Those are all very difficult things to do, but that is our hope.'*



Photo: Reuters/Danish Siddiqui.

# PRAY FOR SRI LANKA

Our partner asks supporters in the UK and Ireland to pray urgently for the victims of the terror attacks, and for their own ministry of compassion.

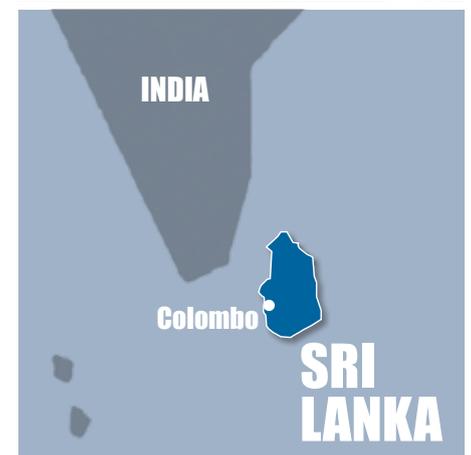
*'Please continue to pray for the victims. There are some families where the parents have passed away and only the children are left. There are some where the whole family has died. Pray for comfort and strength.'*

*'We also need to pray for the leadership of our country, to take appropriate action and to respond well in the situation.'*

*'We also need to pray for the people involved in this ministry: to make sure that God gives us strength and wisdom to do what is necessary, to act responsibly and to be who He wants us to be in the community.'*

*'Last but not least, pray for Sri Lanka as a country that we will be able to emerge out of this and come out stronger.'*

**You can hear a short interview with a representative of our Sri Lankan partner on our website [releaseinternational.org/sri-lanka](http://releaseinternational.org/sri-lanka).**



**Population:** 20.8 million

**Capital:** Colombo

**Government:** Presidential republic

**Religion:** Buddhist 70%, Hindu 13%, Muslim 10%, Christian 7% (Evangelicals 1%)

Sources: NCEASL, Release International, World Evangelical Alliance Religious Liberty Commission. Names have been changed.



*A woman attends a special service for those who lost their lives in the bomb attacks in Sri Lanka. Photo: Reuters/ Dinuka Liyanawatte.*

## Your opportunity to help the families of Christian martyrs

*In Sri Lanka and around the world Release supports Christians who face discrimination and violence – including the families of those martyred for their faith in Jesus Christ.*

**At times of violent attack and crisis, your gift can show precious believers that they are not on their own.**

**Your gift will be used to provide:**

- **practical support:** the death of the breadwinner often leaves families struggling to survive
- **livelihood support:** enabling families to start small businesses to earn an income
- **pastoral care and encouragement**

**Your gift can make all the difference to a vulnerable Christian family.**

**Please make a gift today:**

- **use the attached card**
- **give securely online at [releaseinternational.org/give](https://releaseinternational.org/give)**
- **call: 01689 823491**

**‘WE CAN  
AND MUST  
HELP THEM’**

Pastor Richard Wurmbrand, who inspired the founding of Release in 1968, experienced first-hand the horrors of imprisonment and torture in communist Romania because of his uncompromising faith in Jesus Christ.

*‘When a Christian goes to prison – and often to torture or death – the suffering only begins,’ he wrote. ‘The family suffers endlessly.’*

His powerful vision to support persecuted Christians around the world – including the families of Christian martyrs – remains at the heart of Release’s ministry today.



# ESCALATING ATTACKS

*Persecution is having a mounting impact on India's Christians, Pastor Kumar told supporters on a recent speaking tour of the UK.*

*Christians in Hyderabad protest against the increasing number of attacks against them.*



Pastor Kumar

*'Persecution is still increasing in some places, especially where the nationalist BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) is powerful,' said Pastor Kumar, who works with one of our partners in India. 'We are seeing a growing number of attacks on pastors.'*

Although India's constitution grants freedom of religion on paper, the reality is that Hindu extremists continue to oppose the Christian gospel – often violently, he said.

Attacks against India's Christian minority have more than doubled since the BJP came to power in 2014. That year, Christians suffered 147 attacks. But by the end of the BJP's first term in office, that number had risen to 325. Last year alone, violence

against Christians had soared by 57 per cent, according to the Evangelical Fellowship of India.

Following the landslide victory of the BJP in May, Christians in India fear that the level of violence will only continue to increase.

*'Escalating persecution has created a backlog of desperate physical need,' said Kumar. 'We are becoming increasingly aware of on-going needs among some families that have suffered attacks in the past.'*

Pastors who have suffered severe injury in violent attacks have often been left with crippling medical conditions requiring further treatment. Many find themselves in situations where they and their families are struggling financially.

Pastor Lenin, for example, was attacked and beaten unconscious in a Tamil Nadu village nearly four years ago. Although he was admitted to hospital at the time he has continued to suffer internal health problems and has been advised to have a CT scan.

## ***'We are depending on God for all we need'***

Pastor Paul was attacked and beaten with rods after a Sunday service in Telangana state back in 2011. He suffered head and back injuries – but also internal blood clots, which had to be removed.

He was bed-bound for three years and although he is now working again, if only in a limited capacity, he continues to suffer stomach and digestive problems that may need further surgery.



When Release staff met his wife Bharathi and teenage son Rana (pictured) last year, Bharathi told us: *'We are depending on God for all we need. Despite the many problems we face, we want to continue to stand for God.'*

Thank God that morale among India's Christians in general remains strong, said Kumar. *'God is still growing His church – even in the midst of persecution.'*

## **PLEASE PRAY**

**• Following the landslide electoral victory of the BJP in May, our partner has asked supporters to pray for the protection of India's Christians. Pray too that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will uphold religious freedom for all citizens.**

# COURAGEOUS FAITH

*Today the persecution of Christian believers is the highest in modern history – and Christians constitute by far the most widely persecuted religion.*

According to the current report on religious restrictions around the world by the Washington-based non-partisan Pew Research Centre, 'In 2016, Christians were harassed in 144 countries, up from 128 countries the year before.'<sup>1</sup>

'Evidence shows not only the geographic spread of anti-Christian persecution, but also its increasing severity,' reports the Bishop of Truro in his interim report on global Christian persecution for the UK Foreign Secretary (see page 5 of this magazine).<sup>2</sup>

The Bishop's report describes a range of violent persecution. From mass violence expressed through the bombing of churches to the torture of Christians by the authorities, extra-

judicial killings and the enforced and involuntary disappearance of Christians.

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***'The early church in all of its beauty, sacrifice, and dedication has come alive again in these countries.'***

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Richard Wurmbbrand, who inspired the founding of Release in 1968, challenged believers in free nations to hear the cry of their persecuted brothers and sisters – including those martyred for their faith.

*'Free Christians are part of the same Body of Christ that is now beaten in prisons in restricted nations, that even*

*now gives martyrs for Christ,'* he wrote in *Tortured for Christ*.

*'The early church in all of its beauty, sacrifice, and dedication has come alive again in these countries.'*

In the following pages we list some of the details of believers martyred in recent years for their faith in Jesus Christ.

***'They triumphed over him [the accuser] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.*** (Revelation 12:11)

Please use these details to continue to uphold the precious families of these martyrs in your prayers.

<sup>1</sup> [releaseinternational.org/pew](http://releaseinternational.org/pew)

<sup>2</sup> [releaseinternational.org/fco-review](http://releaseinternational.org/fco-review)



### **China: Christian human rights lawyer Dr Li Baiguang**

Celebrated Chinese campaigner Dr Li Baiguang, an internationally renowned human rights defence lawyer, was pronounced dead on February 26, 2018. He is said to have died in a government military hospital hours after checking in for a stomach complaint.

The hospital said he had bled to death due to a liver condition, but Dr Li, who was only 49 years old and neither drank nor smoked, had been in good health shortly before.

He died in hospital of apparent 'liver failure' after returning to China from the US. He is survived by his wife and young son.

### **Egypt: bus convoy attacked**

Seven Christians were killed and nine injured in an attack on a bus convoy in Minya, Upper Egypt, in November 2018. Armed Islamist terrorists opened fire on two buses as they were leaving Saint Samuel's monastery. The previous year a bus was attacked in the same area: 28 Christians lost their lives.



*'I know that my wife was a hero Christian, that she died for Christ'*

*Afewerki, whose wife Fekadu (pictured) died after being denied medical treatment while in prison in Eritrea.*

### **Eritrea: Fekadu Debessai Negassin, a wife and mother, martyred in prison**

Fekadu (pictured above) was arrested in May 2017 in the southern town of Adi-Quala, together with her husband and 17-year-old son as part of a door-to-door campaign to detain evangelical Christians. They were taken to Adi-Quala prison.

At the beginning of August Fekadu, her husband and 21 other Christians were moved to Metkel-Abet prison, a military prison in a semi-desert area northeast of the capital Asmara.

Conditions in this prison are notoriously harsh. Temperatures regularly rise above 40 – even reaching 48 degrees Celsius (118 degrees Fahrenheit). And being moved far from their home meant that they were unable to receive food from friends and family as they did while at Adi-Quala.

Fekadu died in prison in August after being denied treatment for an unspecified illness.

### **India: convert from Hinduism murdered**

Anant Ram Gond and his wife Shukabai came to faith in Christ last year. Villagers in Odisha state tried to force them to return to Hinduism, even summoning them to a public meeting, where they were told to reconvert.



While Anant's wife and four daughters were away visiting family, a group of Hindu extremists dragged him

from his home. They shot him in the head and then crushed his skull with a large stone. Anant's young son was at home at the time, but ran to his uncle's for safety.

'As my husband was killed for his faith in Jesus Christ I am sure I will not forsake Jesus Christ my Saviour, no matter what will happen,' Shukabai told our partner.

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## Indonesia: 14 Christians martyred in three churches

A family with children launched suicide attacks on three churches in Surabaya city in May 2018, killing 14 people.

A woman is believed to have blown up herself and her two daughters in an attack on one church. Within minutes, her husband had driven his car into another, while their teenage sons on a motorbike detonated a bomb outside a third. The youngest of the children was nine.

More than 40 were wounded in the three attacks, which were timed to coincide with Sunday services and occurred within ten minutes of one another. Islamic State later admitted responsibility.

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*'I really forgive them [my husband's killers] from my heart because they are just human beings. I always pray that the living God will change their hearts.'*

*Sarah Ambetsa, wife of murdered Kenyan pastor Philip.*

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## Kenya: Pastor and church members brutally murdered

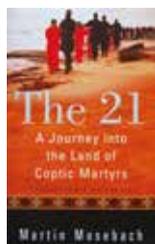
In March 2014, Islamist terrorists opened fire in a church in Likoni near Mombasa on the east coast of Kenya, killing the assistant pastor, Philip Ambetsa, and five other members of the congregation.

Sarah, Philip's wife, said of her husband's killers: *'I really forgive them from my heart because they are just human beings. I always pray that the living God will change their hearts and they will be born again and serve him.'*

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## Libya: 21 Coptic Christians killed in Libya

In 2015 ISIS fighters beheaded 20 Egyptian Copts and one Ghanaian Christian on a beach in Libya. The Egyptians, 13 of whom came from al-Our, a rural town of 10,000 people south of Cairo, had been kidnapped after travelling to Libya to find work.



See page 19 for details of the new book, *The 21*, which can be ordered from Release.

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*'I am consoled in the fact that God is the father of orphans and He will take care of my children'*

*Esther Daniel, Borno State, Nigeria, whose husband was killed by Boko Haram in 2014.*

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## Nigeria: Thousands of Christians murdered

Thousands of Christians have been killed by the Islamist terrorist group Boko Haram and militant Fulani herdsmen in northern and central Nigeria in recent years.



*Nigerian Pastor Yohana Gyang holds a photograph of his wife Rose, murdered by militants in Dogo Nahawa, Plateau state.*

One of Release's partners said that between January and June 2018 alone, 6,000 people were killed.

In June 2018 more than 200 Christians were slaughtered in attacks on ten villages near the state capital of Jos in Plateau State by Fulani herdsmen armed with guns and machetes. In one community, Nghar, it was reported that every house was burnt down and more than 70 people were killed. See feature on Nigeria on page 16.

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## North Korea: secret agents murder Han Chung-Ryeol

In 2016 North Korean secret agents martyred Han Chung-Ryeol, a Korean Chinese pastor who lived in Changbai, a Chinese town near the border with North Korea. For 23 years, as North Koreans knocked on the door of his church, he gave them food, clothing and Christ.

An unknown number of Christians have died in North Korea's 14 brutal labour camps which are estimated to hold at least 250,000 people.

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## Pakistan: Meng Lisi and Li Xinheng martyred by ISIS

Meng Lisi, a 26-year-old Chinese missionary to Pakistan, was murdered by ISIS in 2017. Meng, a teacher, was learning Urdu and felt God calling her



*Meng Lisi (left) and Li Xinheng. Photo: China Aid.*

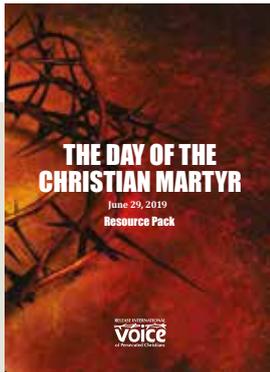
to share the gospel among Pakistani schoolchildren. She and fellow missionary Li Xinheng were kidnapped by the terrorist group in May 2017 and killed on June 8.

## Pakistan: Easter was a time of martyrdom

Easter is a particularly dangerous time for believers in Pakistan. In 2016, a suicide bomber targeted churchgoers at a park in Lahore, killing more than 70. Most of the victims were women and children.

During Easter 2018 four members of the Masih family were killed in an attack by Islamist extremists in Quetta, Balochistan province. The family had come together for Easter from different parts of Pakistan.

The Masih family had just got into a rickshaw in Quetta when two attackers opened fire, killing four of them instantly. Sidra, the 12-year-old daughter of one of those murdered, suffered bullet wounds – but survived.



## THE DAY OF THE CHRISTIAN MARTYR

These accounts of Christian martyrs are taken from our new resource pack to support The Day of the Christian Martyr – a special opportunity for churches in the UK and Ireland to remember modern-day Christian martyrs and their families on Saturday, June 29, or on any day of your choice.

Download resources from [releaseinternational.org/martyr](http://releaseinternational.org/martyr) or request your free printed copy by calling 01689 823491 or email [info@releaseinternational.org](mailto:info@releaseinternational.org).

## Sri Lanka: Easter Sunday bomb attacks

On April 21, 2019, Easter Sunday, suicide bombers carried out a series of carefully-planned attacks on three Christian churches and three luxury hotels in different parts of Sri Lanka. The explosions left more than 250 dead and 500 injured. See report on page 6.

## Tanzania: two husbands brutally murdered

In 2013, Mary Meshack's husband, a pastor and evangelist, was attending a night-time prayer meeting when a mob surrounded the church in Mwanza City. Although badly injured in the attack that followed, two members of the congregation survived. Mary's husband, however, died on the way to hospital.

Sometime later a machete-wielding mob attacked and killed Mathayo Kachila in the street. His widow, Generosa, has struggled to bring up their 11 children on her own.



## VOLUNTEER AS A CHURCH REP

Sharing the testimonies of persecuted believers is a vital way of keeping churches in the UK and Ireland informed about the needs of our persecuted Christian family.

You can make a real difference by volunteering as a Church Representative – and can tailor



## HOW YOUR SUPPORT HELPS THE FAMILIES OF CHRISTIAN MARTYRS

Your gift to Release enables the families of Christian martyrs to receive both emergency help at times of crisis and longer-term assistance. This includes:

- practical support: the death of the breadwinner often leaves families struggling to survive
- livelihood support: enabling families to start small businesses to earn an income
- pastoral care and encouragement

To support our precious persecuted family, please use the attached card, call 01689 823491 or give securely at [releaseinternational.org/give](http://releaseinternational.org/give) (selecting 'helping martyrs' families').

your contribution according to your opportunities, time and energy.

Church Representatives perform a vital role by:

- sharing copies of this magazine
- asking people to sign our petitions
- praying for persecuted Christians
- raising awareness in their church

If you believe that God is leading you to serve persecuted Christians in this way, please contact us at [volunteer@releaseinternational.org](mailto:volunteer@releaseinternational.org) or by calling Laura on 01689 823491. We'd love to hear from you!

# Good News

## Freedom for Asia Bibi

Praise God that Asia's ten-year ordeal is finally over!

Asia Bibi was finally allowed to leave Pakistan in May – six months after she was acquitted of 'blasphemy' and her life sentence was quashed.

She has arrived in Canada, where two of her daughters have already been granted asylum. Asia spent the past six months in protective custody, unable to leave Pakistan, amid death threats from extremists.



Her nightmare began in June 2009 when she was charged with blasphemy after sharing a cup of water with her co-workers on a farm in Punjab. They called her 'unclean' because she was a Christian.



## ABRAHAM BEN MOSES RELEASED

We are delighted to report that prisoner of faith Abraham Ben Moses, also known as Saifuddin Ibrahim, a well-known former Muslim and Christian apologist in Indonesia, has been released from prison.

Abraham, who was active in Internet evangelism and debates with Muslim groups, was arrested in December 2017 after a video showing him sharing his faith with a Muslim taxi driver was widely circulated.

Thank you to all supporters who have prayed for Abraham – please continue to pray for him as he rejoins his family.

## Strength to Stand



Thank you to volunteer Margaret from Kent, who encouraged her church to take part in Release Women's 40x40x40 Lent initiative.

People were asked to pray for our persecuted family daily for 40 minutes, for 40 days and each day give 40 pence.

Margaret's church family raised a fantastic £327 which will support Christian women in Egypt and Pakistan through our Strength to Stand groups.

You can read more about the difference these groups make to their communities in our Release Women newsletter *Embrace*. Thank you to everyone who took part at Margaret's church, and to many others across the UK and Ireland. Your prayers and gifts make a real difference!

**HELPING THE  
FAMILIES OF  
CHRISTIAN  
MARTYRS**

*Camp for internally displaced people in Makurdi, Benue state, Nigeria. Tens of thousands of Christians have fled their homes following violent attacks by militants. Photo: Reuters/Afolabi Sotundi.*

# UNDER ATTACK

*Your support provides a vital lifeline, say Christians suffering violent attacks in central Nigeria.*

*'We were woken by the shouts of people invading our village,' recalls Rebecca Ayafa of the night of March 3.*

*'So we started running – but the attackers followed us into the bushes. Children and older people who could not run fast enough were cut down and killed.'*



Rebecca Ayafa

*'We could see that some of the attackers were doing the killing, while others were burning. My husband was among those killed, but my four children survived. This provision from [Release partner] Stefanos Foundation will help a lot since we lost everything in the attack.'*

Rebecca's village, Dogon Noma in Kajuru local government area, is one of the many communities in Kaduna State to face violent attacks by Fulani militia.

Andrew Bande of Angwan Barde, Kajuru, told our partner how his

community had been invaded by well-armed militants in February and March:

*'We experienced two attacks: the first on February 10 around 9pm. When people were preparing to go to sleep, gunmen attacked us and killed 11 people.'*

*'The second attack was on March 10, when some 28 people were killed. They burnt houses, foodstuff and animals. We did not have anywhere to sleep. We are waiting on God to bring help in our situation.'*

*'We thank Stefanos Foundation and their supporters for the things they have brought, may God reward them. These relief items are important to us and will help us a lot.'*

*We pray that God would fight for us. We pray that God would heal our land and send defending angels to defend our people.'*

*'Fulani militias continue to ravage communities,' said our partner. 'Between February 2018 and April 2019 these attacks resulted in the death over 300 people with several houses and villages burnt down completely, thousands of animals stolen and thousands of persons displaced.'*

Thanks to your support, our partner



Andrew Bande

was able to distribute food supplies to 200 families displaced from their homes in Kajuru, Kaduna State.

*'Please pray for the survivors of these attacks,' said Stefanos Foundation. 'Pray that their faith will not fail, despite the persecution they face.'*

*'Pray also for those who have lost loved-ones, that God will give them strength to stand.'*



*Your support enabled our partner Stefanos to feed 200 displaced families.*

# CRISIS IN NIGERIA

*The Global Terrorism Index ranks Nigeria as the third most-terrorised country in the world.*



Between them Boko Haram terrorists and Fulani militants have killed tens of thousands and driven millions from their homes, together accounting for 88 per cent of terror-related deaths in Nigeria in 2018.<sup>1</sup>

*'These groups have also killed Muslims who do not accept their Islamist ideology,'* said Paul, who works with Release partner Ben Kwashi, the Archbishop of Jos.

*'There is ample evidence that Fulani herdsmen themselves have links with Boko Haram.'*

*'The military-style attacks, the accuracy of the coordination of multiple attacks on villages at the same time and their effective use of AK47s, machetes and knives is evident of a well-trained and well-coordinated group.'*

Currently over 100 predominantly-Christian villages in Plateau state, southern Kaduna, Taraba and Adamawa states have been taken over by Islamist Fulani cattle herders.

*'Reports of the massacres in the predominantly Christian villages in central Nigeria have been under-reported, especially by the government-owned media,'* added Paul.

*'This campaign by Islamic Fulani cattle herdsmen and Boko Haram terrorists is a strategic scorched-earth battle, a*



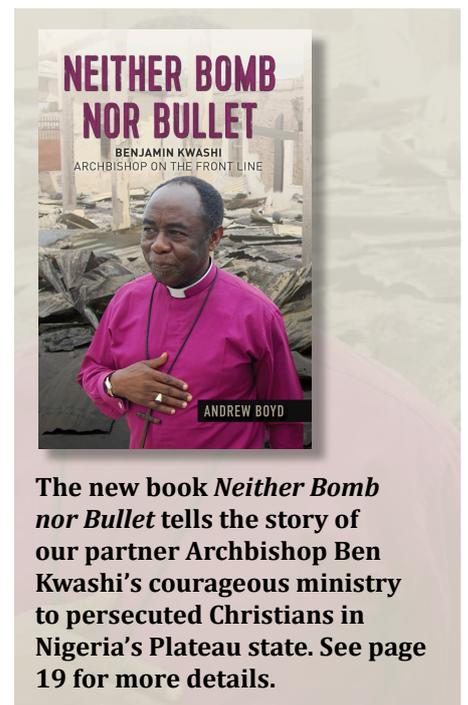
*modern-day jihad against Christianity in the northern and Middle Belt regions of Nigeria.'*

## **RLP declaration**

The Religious Liberty Partnership (RLP), of which Release is a founding member, met in April in Abuja to call on the Nigerian authorities to do more to protect the rights of all communities, including Christians.

*'We stand with our brothers and sisters in Nigeria, who seek the restoration of security, justice, rehabilitation, reconciliation, peace, equality before the law, and respect for the dignity and rights of all of their fellow citizens, regardless of creed or ethnicity,'* they said.

You can read the full statement at [rlpartnership.org](http://rlpartnership.org).



**The new book *Neither Bomb nor Bullet* tells the story of our partner Archbishop Ben Kwashi's courageous ministry to persecuted Christians in Nigeria's Plateau state. See page 19 for more details.**

<sup>1</sup> Global Terrorism Index 2018, p23. See [visionofhumanity.org/reports](http://visionofhumanity.org/reports).



to face ongoing discrimination and oppression each day.

In spite of this, his faith remains strong, and during our time together he was greatly encouraged by the fact that I had remembered him, had returned to see him, and that I had been praying for him and his family since we first met.

I also assured him that many of our supporters in the UK and Ireland were also praying for him.

He told me that just before I first met him, three of his friends who taught Sunday school with him were among the 21 martyrs beheaded by Islamic State on a beach in Libya in 2015.

Paul was so inspired by the way these 21 believers went to their death that he was writing a musical about their ordeal and sacrifice. He shared one of these songs with me, which powerfully conveyed their trust in God to the end of their lives.

In the song, one of the martyrs bravely declares to his captors: *"I don't care if I die as long as I meet the Saviour."*

It was obvious to me that the example of these courageous believers has really helped to strengthen the faith of Paul in his own difficult circumstances.

Release's partner has helped Paul by building a concrete roof for his family home and has provided him with a washing machine. Thanks to your gifts, our partner is able to provide this kind of tailored support to those in need.

I will continue to pray for Paul and his family and I trust that I will soon be able to encourage him once again face to face. **▶**

## INSPIRED BY THEIR SACRIFICE

*Egyptian believer 'Paul' tells Release's Jack Norman how the martyrdom of three of his Christian friends in Libya has strengthened his faith.*

When I first met Egyptian believer 'Paul' (not his real name) four years ago he told me how he had to flee his village after he was arrested for starting a Sunday school in his home. As well as being arrested himself, his father had been tortured by militants until he lost his hearing.

I met him again earlier this year and he shared with me how his life today is incredibly hard.

In spite of help he has received from our partners, he struggles to provide for his family, and even his daughter's wedding last year – which should have been a joyous occasion – has left him with debts he cannot repay.

Although he is a skilled carpenter there isn't much opportunity to sell his work. Like other persecuted Christians in Egypt, Paul continues

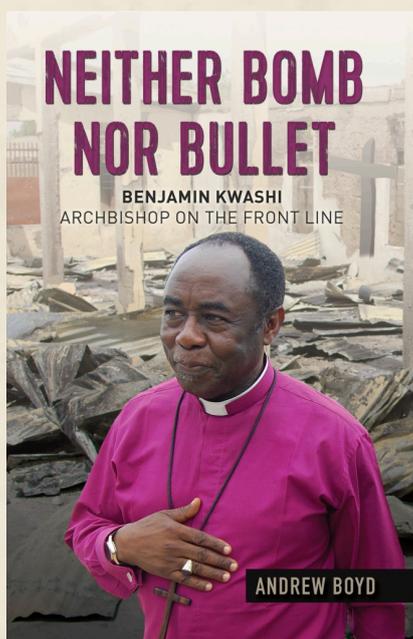
### THE 21: A JOURNEY INTO THE LAND OF COPTIC MARTYRS

**See opposite for details of how to order a new book about the 21 martyrs, available from Release now.**

KEEP  
INFORMED



## NEW RESOURCES TO HELP YOU PRAY



Release partner Archbishop Ben Kwashi is on the frontline of faith in Nigeria. Three times terrorists have targeted him... three times they've failed.

His message – to live joyfully for the gospel even in the face of terror – has never been so timely.

Heart-wrenching and humorous, this book by Release's Andrew Boyd will inspire you to live your life – and your faith – to the full.

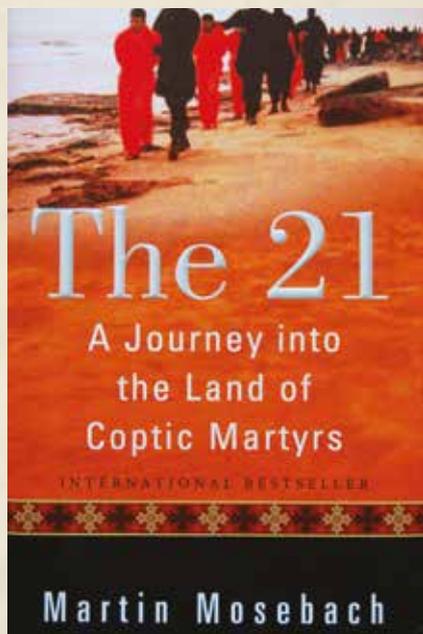
**Neither Bomb nor Bullet** costs £13.00 including p&p.



Our 12-minute film tells the stories of believers forced to flee for their lives from war and persecution in the Middle East.

*'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,'* said Release CEO Paul Robinson.

**Forced to Flee** is free to supporters.



A powerful account of the 21 Christians martyred by Islamic State in Libya in 2015.

*'Mosebach has a novelist's insight and way with words. The 21 is also a fine piece of journalism. It helps us to understand, if not the ferocity of the killers, the quiet heroism – the ordinary heroism, perhaps – of the martyrs.'*

Christian Today

**The 21** costs £22.00 including p&p.

### ORDER TODAY

Use the attached card, call: 01689 823491 or order online at [releaseinternational.org/shop](http://releaseinternational.org/shop).

# SUMMER EVENTS

## Meet us this summer

Release staff will be taking part in exhibitions at these summer events throughout the UK and Ireland. Please visit our stand – we'd love to meet you!

July 6-12	Keswick at <i>Portstewart</i>
July 13-August 2	Keswick Convention <i>Cumbria</i>
July 21-26	Wondrous <i>Ulster University</i>
July 21-27	Refuel, <i>Moray</i>
August 3-19	Creation Fest, <i>Wadebridge, Cornwall</i>
August 23-31	Worldwide Missionary Convention <i>Bangor</i>
October 18-19	Longing to Call Them Family <i>Belfast</i>

# FLOUR POWER!



### Basbousa Cake Recipe Card

Basbousa Cake is a traditional Middle Eastern sweet cake made from semolina, coconut, sugar and flour soaked in simple syrup. It is quick and easy to make. Basbousa is eaten by Coptic Christians in Egypt, and often baked during Lent and other times of fasting.

#### Take on the #FlourChallenge and try this recipe at home

Why not invite your friends round to share the cake and pray for our persecuted brothers and sisters who have been forced to flee? You could also organise a cake sale in your local church or prayer group to raise vital funds for Release projects.

[www.releaseinternational.org](http://www.releaseinternational.org)



Approved Charity (9477) (Charity 1049893)



***Come to our stand at these summer events and take part in our new #FlourChallenge.***

Flour is a staple food ingredient used across the world – and is often a component in the food parcels Release distributes to Christians displaced by persecution.

Our stand recreates a scene from a refugee camp, with large bags of flour loaded on timber pallets.

For a £2 donation towards a food parcel we'll give you flour and instructions so you can make a delicious Middle Eastern Basbousa cake at home. This is a sweet cake made from semolina, flour, coconut, sugar and almonds.

You could then invite friends round to share it and pray for Christians who have been forced to flee – or organise a cake sale to raise further funds for Release projects.

If you're attending one of these events do look out for us. We even have freshly made cake to sample on the stand!

Check out other opportunities to meet us at [releaseinternational.org/events](http://releaseinternational.org/events)

# PETER AND HADASSAH HAWK: SPEAKING TOUR

We are delighted to welcome partners Peter and Hadassah Hawk from South East Asia, who will be sharing their experiences at Release Women's national conference on October 12 (see below and page 23).

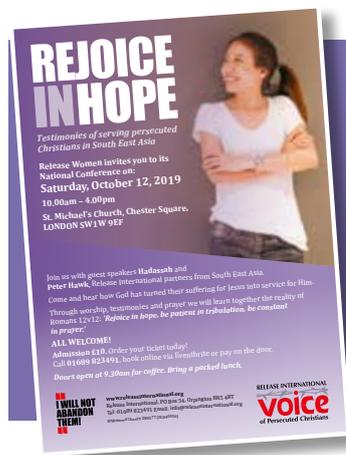
In addition the couple will be speaking at a number of venues in the south of England and in Northern Ireland during October.

Peter and Hadassah come from diverse religious backgrounds – one from the Western world, one from the Asian world. They were united through marriage and have been used by God in a mighty way!

Both have suffered in many ways for their belief in Jesus – and their story is a great witness to the power of God.

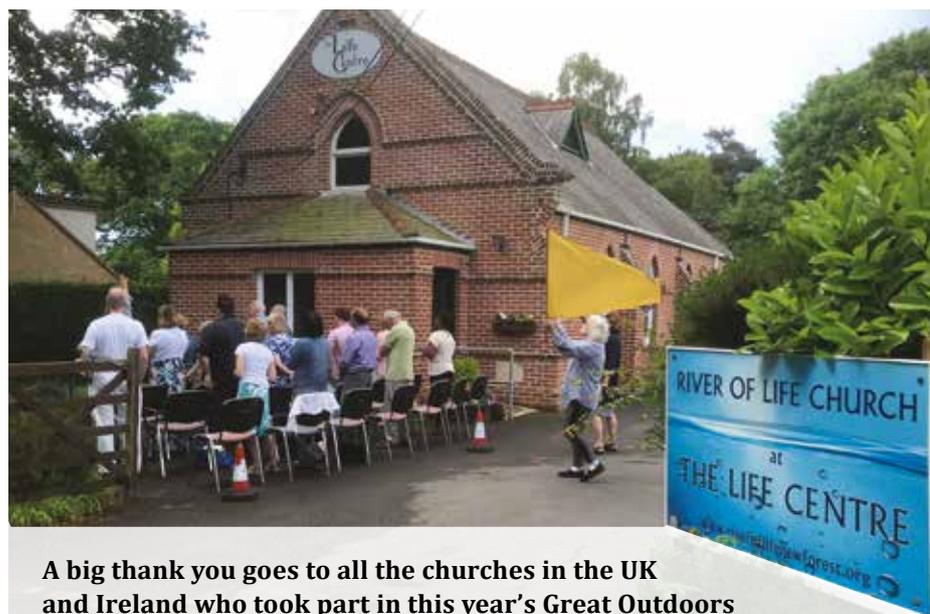
Their ministry is not an easy one, yet their testimonies continue to encourage many followers of Jesus, in various countries, to step out of their comfort zones and trust in God's will and purpose.

See [releaseinternational.org/events](http://releaseinternational.org/events) for further details of their speaking tour.



## RELEASE WOMEN NATIONAL CONFERENCE

All supporters are invited to Release Women's national conference, *Rejoice in Hope*, being held at St Michael's Church, Chester Square, in central London on Saturday, October 12. See page 23 for full details.



A big thank you goes to all the churches in the UK and Ireland who took part in this year's Great Outdoors Church Service in May. This is a powerful way of identifying with Christians who do not have the comfort or security of meeting in a building – and a great opportunity to pray for persecuted believers.

# 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  
07597 577041

### 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

Standing with persecuted Christians is part of our calling, writes Release trustee Geoff Daplyn.

# JOIN THE BATTLE

It's over three months now since the Easter bombings in Sri Lanka when Islamic extremists attacked both Western and Christian targets. It was truly shocking. As we listened to the news reports that Easter Sunday, there were many important questions which correspondents and reporters were asking.

Why was the earlier intelligence warning ignored or even withheld by Sri Lankan authorities? How did the perpetrators accumulate such weaponry and explosives without anyone knowing?

Instinctively, we know something deeper is going on here.

***'The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.'***

A roaring lion is loose and seeking prey to devour! It points to a clash of kingdoms taking place where our brothers and sisters overseas seem to be forever on the front line. But, of course, we are all involved in this spiritual battle, even if we, here in the UK, are often just the support divisions.

I'm sure that none of those who went to church that Easter Sunday would have seen themselves as martyrs. They were just celebrating the risen Jesus. But now that's exactly what they are.

Tertullian, the early Christian theologian, wrote in his *Apologeticus*: 'The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.'

It's not difficult to see scriptural backing for this. Jesus talked of Himself as a seed falling into the ground and dying, then bearing much

fruit (John 12:24). The apostle Paul witnessed Stephen's martyrdom as an impressionable young man (Acts 7:58). We may not understand how it works, but we recognise that the church in China and many other places has been built on the blood of martyrs.

So what is our response? Surely we must mourn with those who mourn, pray for those who need protection and financially support those who need provision. In doing this, we ourselves manifest the Kingdom of God and create a window for God to do His work. Rev 12:11 talks about how we overcome our enemy and part of that is not loving our lives 'so much as to shrink from death.'

By taking on this mantle ourselves, we add our spiritual weight to seeing the church grow and the Kingdom of

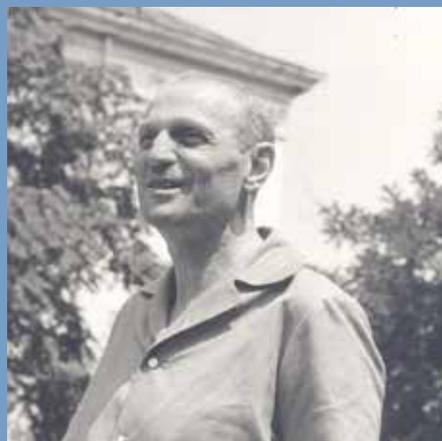
God increasingly manifesting even in the darkest places on the planet.

***'We must be in this for the long term, not just for the moment.'***

There is no doubt that the Kingdom is growing – particularly in the Muslim world. But persecution and martyrdom are not going away. We know that every advance will be met with resistance. Every breakthrough will be challenged. We must be in this for the long term, not just for the moment, terrible though this one is.

Sadly many people, even Christians, will have already forgotten the terrible events of Easter Sunday in Sri Lanka. But our enemy hasn't forgotten. God has not forgotten. And neither must we.

## INSPIRING FAITH



*'The life, the self-sacrifice, the blood that believers are ready to shed for their faith, is the greatest argument for Christianity presented by the underground church.'*

Pastor Richard Wurmbbrand 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.

# REJOICE IN HOPE

*Testimonies of serving persecuted  
Christians in South East Asia*

Release Women invites you to its national conference with guest speakers Hadassah and Peter Hawk, partners from South East Asia.

**Saturday, October 12, 2019**

10.00am - 4.00pm

St. Michael's Church, Chester Square,  
LONDON SW1W 9EF

Admission £10. All welcome. Doors open at 9.30am for coffee. Bring a packed lunch.

Order your ticket today by calling 01689 823491, book online at [eventbrite.com](http://eventbrite.com) or pay on the door.

Download a flyer from [releaseinternational.org/rejoice](http://releaseinternational.org/rejoice).



## 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** (Farnham to Reigate)

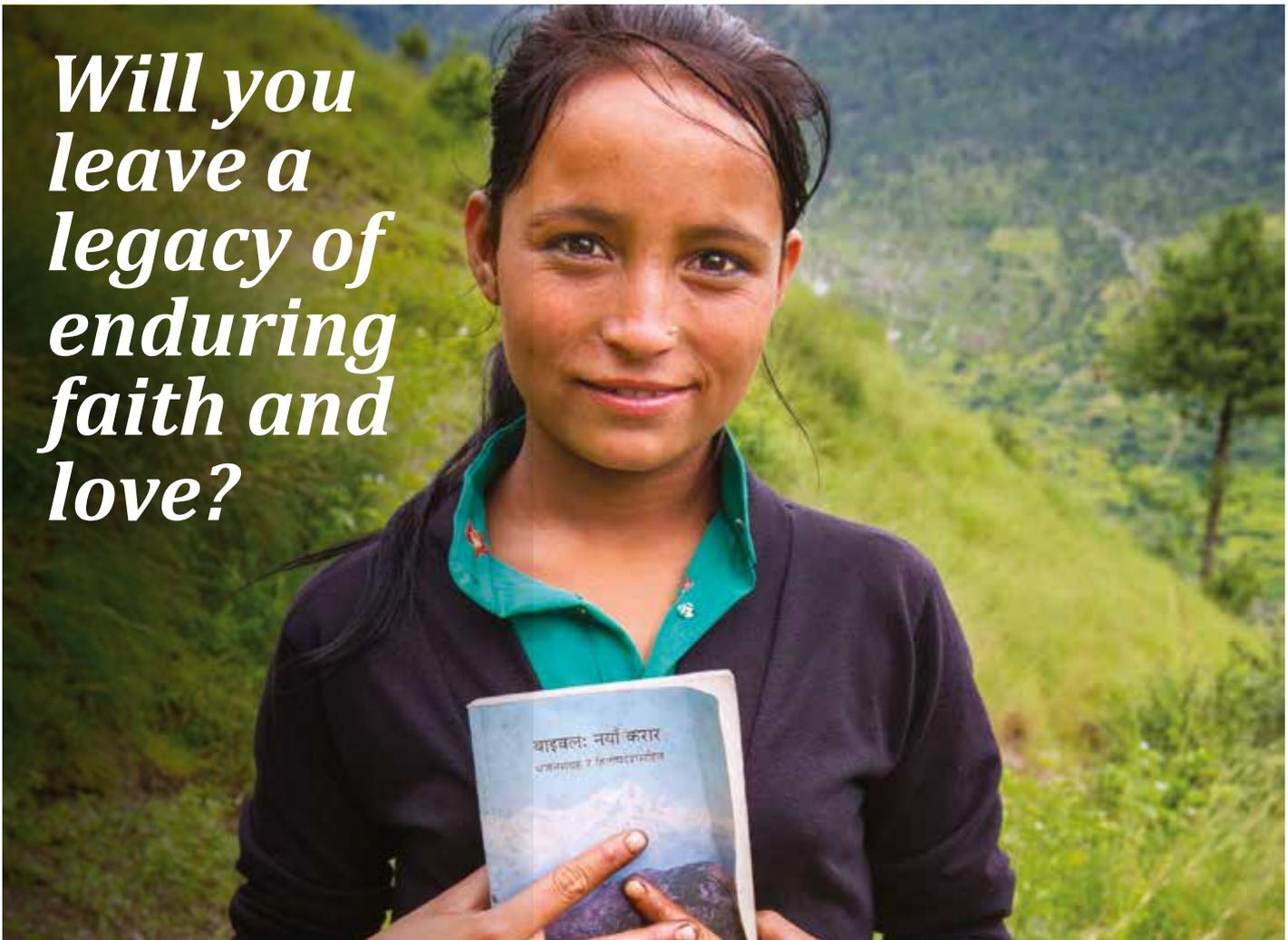
Organised by Action Challenge, this is a great opportunity for supporters of Release to take part, opting to support Release as their chosen charity, and to enjoy some of the finest scenery in the UK.

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 [releaseinternational.org/events](http://releaseinternational.org/events) and [ultrachallenge.com](http://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.



For further details, please see the brochure enclosed with this magazine.

**#IWillNotAbandonThem**

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL  
**voice**  
of Persecuted Christians

# prayershield

July – September 2019

*A Christian leader prays in front of a Hindu worship site on the Ganges.*



## JULY 2019

*Heavenly Father,  
Thank you, Lord, that  
whatever I go through,  
you are there with me. You  
never leave me, you never  
forsake me.*

*Even if I walk through the  
darkest valley, you are there:  
I need fear no evil (Psalm  
23:4).*

*Abba Father, I lift to you my  
dear brothers and sisters who  
walk in the shadow of the  
valley of death. I praise you  
that you are their Saviour,  
defender and champion.*

*Lord, may they know your  
power and your presence  
today.*

*Amen*

## INDIA

**MONDAY 1:** Pray for all those whose loved ones have been martyred for their Christian faith. Anant Ram Gand was murdered in Odisha, India, earlier this year – nine months after he turned to Christ.

**TUESDAY 2:** In Tamil Nadu, police have reportedly joined with Hindus going door-to-door telling Christians not to meet. Pray that officials will protect Christians' rights, instead of siding with their persecutors.

**WEDNESDAY 3:** Pray that the newly elected Government of India will take firm action to uphold religious freedom for all India's citizens. Pray that in his second term President

Narendra Modi will make it a priority to tackle rising intolerance in India.

**THURSDAY 4:** Pray for Neethiraj, a missionary, whom Hindu extremists forced to set light to Bibles and hymnals when they raided a prayer meeting he was attending in Tamil Nadu.

**FRIDAY 5:** Continue to pray for justice for Pastor Steeven whose land was seized by Hindu extremists. Pray that Release partners will succeed in efforts to recover his land for him.

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL  
**voice**  
of Persecuted Christians

**SATURDAY 6:** In Uttar Pradesh, Pastor Sindhu Bharti was beaten unconscious by police after they arrested her and five other church members during a Sunday service. All six were charged with offences including 'rioting': pray these charges will be dropped.

**SUNDAY 7:** Pray for all those receiving Bibles in local languages through Release-funded projects, in areas where churches are facing pressure from extremists.

**MONDAY 8:** Thank God for the overcoming faith of our Christian family in India. Many churches continue to spread the gospel despite threats. Pray that God's word will touch the hearts of their persecutors.

## ERITREA

**TUESDAY 9:** Fikadu was detained in Adi Quala in May 2017 and died two months later in prison. Ask God to provide for her husband, Afewerki, and their four children who are now living as refugees abroad.

**'EVEN THOUGH I WALK THROUGH THE DARKEST VALLEY, I WILL FEAR NO EVIL, FOR YOU ARE WITH ME; YOUR ROD AND YOUR STAFF, THEY COMFORT ME.'**

*Psalm 23:4*

**WEDNESDAY 10:** Prisoners in Eritrea are often held in appalling conditions, and are denied visits and legal representation. Many have died behind bars, because of abuse and neglect. Pray for reform of Eritrea's prison system.

**THURSDAY 11:** Cry out to the God of justice on behalf of all those prisoners of faith in Eritrea who are being held arbitrarily. In early 2019 Release partners said they knew of about 230 Christians in detention.

**FRIDAY 12:** Pray for the 141 believers arrested at a gathering in Asmara one Friday in May: more than 100 of them were women, and their number included children and elderly people. Sixty-four were reportedly released the same month.

**SATURDAY 13:** Many Christians, especially pastors, have been held for more than ten years: some have not been seen since their arrest. Thank God that He sees them: pray for their release.

**SUNDAY 14:** Some children have not seen their parents for years and been deprived of knowing their mother or father during their formative years. Pray that they will know they are loved by God the Father.

**MONDAY 15:** Twen Theodros, who has been in jail for more than 14 years, is now in Mai Serewa prison, which is said to be relatively better than her previous prisons. Pray for her release.

**TUESDAY 16:** Continue to pray for Father Abune Antonios, former head of the Orthodox Church, who was stripped of his title and put under house arrest in 2007 for speaking up for religious freedom. He is 92 and in poor health.

**WEDNESDAY 17:** Ask God to encourage 15 believers arrested earlier this year in Setanta Otto district, Asmara. All have now been released but some were held for several weeks.

**THURSDAY 18:** Yemane spent three years in the notorious Assab prison where he endured brutal treatment. A heat stroke led to a coma and Yemane was released to die at home. Praise God that he recovered and is now living as a refugee in Ethiopia.

**FRIDAY 19:** Thank God that Eritreans who have left their homeland are now speaking out against Eritrea's poor religious rights record. Pray that their advocacy and international pressure will bring reform.

**SATURDAY 20:** Continue to pray for evangelical Christians in Eritrea who are strongly discriminated against. Many have been made redundant, lost their business or had their bank accounts frozen.

## EGYPT

**SUNDAY 21:** There still about 5,000 unlicensed churches in Egypt: some have been waiting to register for 20

### **“FOR THE EYES OF THE LORD RANGE THROUGHOUT THE EARTH TO STRENGTHEN THOSE WHOSE HEARTS ARE FULLY COMMITTED TO HIM.”**

*2 Chronicles 16:9*

years. Pray that authorities will implement efficiently new laws designed to make registration easier.

**MONDAY 22:** Egypt's parliament has recently approved constitutional amendments that would allow President Abdul Fattah al-Sisi to stay in power until 2030. Pray the Government will uphold the rights of all citizens.

**TUESDAY 23:** A Coptic church in Upper Egypt was closed in April after an angry mob attacked it. Pray it will reopen soon and ask God to comfort the 200 Sunday School children who witnessed the attack.

**WEDNESDAY 24:** Pray that those who have attacked churches in Egypt will come to know the love of Christ and have their eyes and hearts opened to Him.

**THURSDAY 25:** Pray for a Sudanese convert to Christianity who faces death threats in Egypt: he fled Sudan after authorities threatened to kill him if he refused to return to Islam. Ask God to bless this man, provide for him, raise him up and use his testimony to draw many to Christ.

**FRIDAY 26:** A Christian mother who fled to Egypt from Sudan after converting from Islam and being jailed five times continues to receive death threats. Pray that God will strengthen her and reveal Himself to her brother who is still pressuring her to return to Islam.

**SATURDAY 27:** 'Paul' had to flee to Upper Egypt because he had started a Sunday School in his home. Thank God that although his life is still very hard, Paul's faith in the Lord is still strong. Release has been able to provide a new roof for his home and a washing machine.

**SUNDAY 28:** Thank God that a family who fled Egypt after the father was killed for his faith, in front of his young son, has now been granted asylum in the West.

**MONDAY 29:** Many hundreds of women have been helped by the Strength to Stand groups which Release supports: praise God. Many say they have shared with their family what they've learnt about the Bible.

**TUESDAY 30:** Pray for those in Egypt who reach out to the Muslim community with the love of Christ, often at great risk to themselves.

**WEDNESDAY 31:** Thank God for the many in Egypt who are turning to Christ from Islam. Despite often strong opposition from their families and communities, many are standing firm in their new faith.

## **AUGUST 2019**

### **INDONESIA**

**THURSDAY 1:** Pray for the many Christians with a Muslim background who are under intense pressure to return to Islam. Many face discrimination and intimidation; some have suffered detention, torture, threats or enforced time in 'purification centres'.

**FRIDAY 2:** Pray for three churches in West Kenali, Sumatra, forcibly shut by officials under pressure from hardline Muslims, including the Assemblies of God church pictured. Pray they will be allowed to reopen.

**SATURDAY 3:** Praise God for the release on bail of Pastor Ibrahim (also known as Abraham Moses). The evangelist was freed in May, part-way through a four-year sentence; he was jailed after sharing his faith with a taxi-driver.

**SUNDAY 4:** Thank God for the way He used Pastor Ibrahim (above) during his detention to witness to other prisoners. Pray that God's Word will bring freedom to these captives.

**MONDAY 5:** Continue to pray for survivors of church bombings in Surabaya, Indonesia, in May 2018 which killed at least 14 people: six members of the same family carried out suicide attacks.

**TUESDAY 6:** Pray for Agung Kurnia Ritonga, an agricultural student in his early 20s from North Sumatra who is serving



Christians in Sumatra hold a sign announcing their church has been 'sealed by the Government'.

an 18-month sentence for 'insulting Islam' on social media.

**WEDNESDAY 7:** Martinus Gulo, 21, is serving a four-year sentence for 'blasphemy' over a social media post. He was jailed under the controversial Information and Electronic Transactions law, which Christians fear that hardliners are abusing to persecute the church.

**THURSDAY 8:** Pray for Natanael Tumangger who is serving a five-year sentence for allegedly killing a Muslim in inter-religious clashes in Aceh Singkil in 2015; 11 churches were destroyed. Release contacts believe he is innocent.

**'PASTOR IBRAHIM WAS JOYFUL IN PRISON DUE TO THE MANY OPPORTUNITIES FOR HIM TO SHARE THE GOSPEL.'**

*Release contact, Indonesia*

## NIGERIA

**FRIDAY 9:** Pray for Christians in Ngurhlavu village, Borno State, raided by *Boko Haram* extremists in March. While most villagers safely escaped into the bush, six homes and a church were destroyed.

**SATURDAY 10:** Please continue to pray for all those Christians who have been abducted by extremists, including two sisters abducted from Ngurhlavu village (above), Leah Sharibu and more than 100 students from Chibok.

**SUNDAY 11:** Since mid-February, more than 130 Christians have been killed by Fulani militants in Kaduna state; hundreds of homes have been burned. Ask God to comfort their families.

**MONDAY 12:** Fulani herdsmen killed 17 Christians who had gathered for a service in Konshu-Numa, Nasarawa state, to dedicate a baby to

God; the dead included the child's mother. The baby's father was seriously injured. Pray that God will provide for this child.

**TUESDAY 13:** Pray that the governing officials and police presiding over Christian areas will take the necessary steps to protect vulnerable communities from attack and stop the violence.

**WEDNESDAY 14:** Pray that the men of violence in Nigeria will grow weary of bloodshed and start to question their purpose and motivation. Pray that many will find salvation and forgiveness in Christ.

## SRI LANKA

**THURSDAY 15:** Please pray for our family in Sri Lanka still coming to terms with the Easter Sunday church bombings which claimed 257 lives. Ask God to comfort those who mourn and heal the injured.

**FRIDAY 16:** The Easter Sunday bombings killed 14 children at Zion Evangelical Church in Batticaloa. Please pray for the mothers of these beloved young ones as they seek the face of Jesus in their darkest hours.

**SATURDAY 17:** Pray that Christians will not be cowed by the Easter Sunday attacks but rather that they will find Jesus amid their suffering. Our partners, who are caring for survivors, say that Christians have responded positively to calls for forgiveness and reconciliation.

**SUNDAY 18:** Moderate Muslims have been vocal in supporting Christians following the Easter attacks. Pray that the legacy of this tragedy will be greater unity and tolerance.

**MONDAY 19:** Pray that the authorities will do more to protect Christians. Senior church leaders criticised security arrangements for churches after the Easter bombings, amid revelations that officials had ignored warnings of attacks.

**TUESDAY 20:** Pray for wisdom, stamina and grace for Release partners in Sri Lanka as they work to comfort families who have been bereaved and to provide medical assistance.

**WEDNESDAY 21:** Pray for relatives of the Easter Sunday suicide bombers, that they will come to experience the life-transforming love of Christ.

**THURSDAY 22:** Pray for an end to discriminatory practices against Christians in Sri Lanka. Believers are routinely refused access to family burial plots in Buddhist cemeteries, denying them the ability to uphold cultural traditions of relatives being buried together.

**FRIDAY 23:** Pray that the state would treat all citizens equally. Buddhists in rural areas have ready access to financial support to help with funeral costs when a relative dies: Christians receive no such support.

**SATURDAY 24:** Pray that it will be possible to hold more Shalom camps, funded by Release, where Christians can come together for spiritual refreshment and mutual encouragement.

**SUNDAY 25:** In Bakamuna, central Sri Lanka, Buddhist monks filed a complaint against a Christian who held prayer meetings in her home. Police told her she must stop her meetings. Pray Bakamuna Christians can continue to meet.

**MONDAY 26:** A mob, led by Buddhist monks, raided the Christian Family Church in Galgamuwa; they threatened to kill church members and reported them to the police for 'breaching the peace'. Pray that police will uphold the Christians' rights, not bring charges.

## VIETNAM

**TUESDAY 27:** Pray that the religious rights of ethnic minority groups in Vietnam will be respected. Groups such as the Hmong in the

Central Highlands suffer intense repression.

**WEDNESDAY 28:** Pray for Hmong believers in Phá Lóm village in the Highlands whom officials have harassed in recent months. Pastor Hoang Van Pa says they have been told to renounce their faith or face expulsion. Four Christians have been arrested and beaten.

**THURSDAY 29:** In 2018, more than 100 Hmong believers were expelled from their homeland and made their way to Thailand, where they have applied for refugee status. Ask God to bless them as they try to make a fresh start abroad.

**FRIDAY 30:** Praise God for the courage of ethnic minority Montagnard believers in Daklak Province who continued their meeting when officials raided it, forcing them to wait until the end. Officials banned them from further meetings.

**SATURDAY 31:** Pray that the gospel will spread throughout Vietnam, through the work of the Holy Spirit and the faithfulness of God's people.



*The gospel is reaching even the most remote parts of Vietnam.*

## SEPTEMBER 2019

### ALGERIA

**SUNDAY 1:** Thank God for bold Algerian Christians such as 'Ali' and 'Chaima' (pictured) who plant churches in western Algeria. Ali used to be a jihadist, trained by the Taliban. The couple, supported by a Release sister ministry, have led many to Christ.

**MONDAY 2:** Pray for 'Simo' and his family who have had to flee Algeria due to death threats. Simo, a former

Muslim who has served with the army and police, spent 20 months in prison after speaking out about Christian persecution.

**TUESDAY 3:** Political instability in Algeria has led some local authorities to crack down on churches. Three church leaders have recently been summoned to appear in court for conducting 'illegal' services: pray these charges will be dropped.

**WEDNESDAY 4:** Pray for 'Ahmed' whose wife divorced him and forbade him from

seeing his two young daughters after he became a Christian.

**THURSDAY 5:** Pray for a Christian with a Muslim background whose estranged Muslim wife took him to court for 'inciting her to change her religion' – under pressure from her relatives.

### PAKISTAN

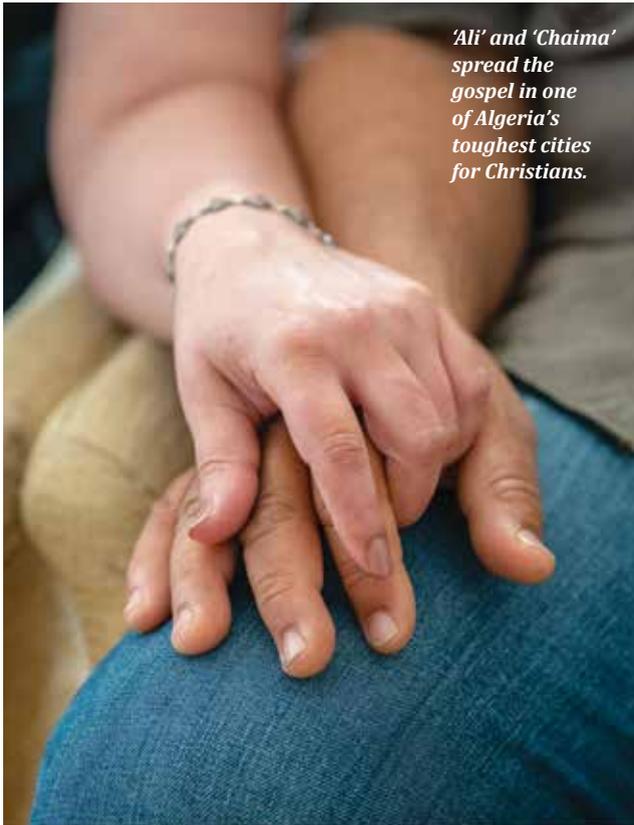
**FRIDAY 6:** Praise God that Asia Bibi has finally been allowed to leave Pakistan and be reunited with her family in Canada. Allegations of blasphemy led to her being on death row: she was acquitted last October.

**SATURDAY 7:** Thousands took to the streets in Pakistan demanding that Asia Bibi be killed and calling for the overthrow of the Government. Ask God to protect her and family.

**SUNDAY 8:** Please continue to pray that Pakistan will repeal its blasphemy laws, even though Prime Minister Imran Khan has pledged to defend them.

**MONDAY 9:** Pray that the influence of hardliners will begin to subside: the *Tehreek-e-Labbaik* party is demanding the death penalty for blasphemers.

**TUESDAY 10:** Pray for the more than 200 Christians in Pakistan who are behind bars for 'blasphemy'. Pray that their cases will now be reviewed.



*'Ali' and 'Chaima' spread the gospel in one of Algeria's toughest cities for Christians.*

**WEDNESDAY 11:** Pray that Pakistan's Christians will stand firm in their faith. At Easter they were concerned by warnings of a possible suicide bombing in Lahore, linked to Islamic State: praise God it did not materialise.

**THURSDAY 12:** Ask God to convict all those whose hearts are filled with hatred towards Christians to repent of their actions and turn to Christ.

**FRIDAY 13:** Pray for Stephen, a Christian suffering from 'mental impairment', who has been arrested under suspicion of 'blasphemy' after a row at home with a relative over fasting and prayer. A neighbour overhead and summoned a mob.

## SUDAN

**SATURDAY 14:** Stand with Christians in Sudan in praying that recent political upheaval, which led to President al-Bashir being ousted, will lead to true democracy and real religious freedoms.

**SUNDAY 15:** Thank God that Sudan's transitional Government has met with Christian leaders to discuss what they consider to be persecution against the church. The transitional council committee has promised to investigate.

**MONDAY 16:** The transitional Government has already addressed one of the Christian leaders' concerns: it has been announced that

Christian schools in Sudan will not open on Sundays. Pray for further progress in ending persecution and discrimination.

**TUESDAY 17:** Pray for wisdom for those in leadership in Sudan during this time of transition. Pray that their decisions will lead to greater religious freedoms for all.

**WEDNESDAY 18:** Please pray that Sudanese Christians will be given a say in shaping their country's future, and that their witness will inspire others to work for justice, peace and unity.

## CHINA

**THURSDAY 19:** Pray for than 20 Christian business leaders arrested by officials in Shanghai in April – and for Pastor Michael Yu, a pastor with Taiwanese and American citizenship who was detained with them.

**FRIDAY 20:** Pray for members of Shouwang Church in Beijing, which was completely shut down and liquidated in March, after years of persecution. The congregation had been forced to meet outside since April 2011.

**SATURDAY 21:** Pray for Pastor Jin Tianming, leader of Shouwang Church, who has been under house arrest since 2011.

**SUNDAY 22:** Please keep praying for members of the Early Rain Covenant Church in Chengdu, Sichuan province

(opposite). Eleven members remain in custody, including Pastor Wang Li and his wife, Jiang Rong, detained since December.

**MONDAY 23:** Chengdu officials have pressured several landlords to evict Christian tenants in Chengdu city. Pray that God will provide safe homes for Early Rain Christians.

**TUESDAY 24:** Pray for a husband and wife in Early Rain Church (above) who were allegedly beaten and tortured by local police in March. When they returned to their flat, they were told they were being evicted.

**WEDNESDAY 25:** Several Early Rain Church members have been ejected from the city. Elder Su Bingsen was taken by force to his home province, Fujian. Pray that they will be allowed back soon.

**THURSDAY 26:** Hundreds of Chinese pastors have been joined by church leaders from across the world in signing Pastor Wang Li's 'Declaration for the Sake of the Christian Faith', calling for an end to persecution. Pray the Chinese Government will respond positively to international pressure.

**FRIDAY 27:** Communist officials gathered recently in Hebi city, Henan, to discuss 'Christianity's enormous harm on security': pray that they will come to recognise the radical force for good that the church represents.



After government authorities closed the Early Rain Church in Sichuan, China, the congregation began meeting outdoors.

**SATURDAY 28:** In recent months, officials have increased pressure on non-registered churches, attempting to force all Christians to join state-approved churches. Pray that Christians will have ever greater trust in Him, wherever they worship.

**SUNDAY 29:** The Chinese Government is reportedly hiring citizen spies to report

anyone taking children to church: regulations introduced last year ban anyone under 18 from entering places of worship. Pray for parents trying to raise children as Christians.

**MONDAY 30:** Pray that the 'citizen spies' pretending to be church members in Henan (above) will turn to Christ as they listen to the gospel.

Sources: China Aid; Christian Post; International Christian Concern; Middle East Concern; Morning Star News; Release partners and contacts; *The Jakarta Post*; 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.

*Lord Jesus,*

*I praise you because you have won the victory over death and sin. None can stand against you, mighty Saviour!*

*And none can stand against us, all the days of our life (Joshua 1:5), when we stand with you.*

*Lord, please remind my persecuted family that you are their strength and shield (Psalm 28:7), that you have overcome, no matter what circumstances they are facing today. It is finished: it is done.*

*In your precious name,*

*Amen*

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