

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL

APR-JUN 2020

voice

of Persecuted Christians

RELEASE RAYMOND

*Sign our petition
to free abducted
Malaysian pastor*

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



Welcome

by Paul Robinson, CEO

**Strengthening
believers facing
oppression**

Around the world, many Christians continue to face harassment and oppression – simply for following Jesus Christ.

According to the current report on religious restrictions by the Washington-based non-partisan Pew Research Centre¹, 'In 2017, Christians reportedly were harassed in 143 countries, declining slightly from 144 countries in 2016.'

The report defines harassment – either by governments or individuals – as 'an offence against a religious group or person due to their religious identity, and can include being physically coerced or singled out with the intent of making life or religious practice more difficult. The severity ranges from verbal or written harassment to physical violence and killings.'

As you can read in the following pages, your prayers and gifts are directly helping Christians to face such pressures.

This includes the victims of last Easter's devastating bomb attacks in **Sri Lanka** – many of whom today still struggle to rebuild their lives (page 12).

In **Egypt** your gifts are helping vulnerable Christian women to participate in our network of Strength to Stand groups – which are making a real difference in their lives – while other partners care for 'secret believers' from a Muslim background (page 10).

In **India**, your support enables persecuted Christians to withstand physical attacks by Hindu extremists – and opposition to their ministry in the law courts (page 18) – while in **East Africa** Somali believers are starting their own small businesses, benefiting both their families and communities (page 6).

Thank you so much for helping Christians around the world to endure oppression for the name of Jesus.



SPEND AND GIVE

If you shop at Amazon, there's a simple way that your purchases can benefit Release.

Just visit the webpage smile.amazon.co.uk first, nominate Release International as your chosen charity, and Amazon will donate 0.5% of your eligible purchases to help persecuted Christians.

¹ A Closer Look at How Religious Restrictions Have Risen Around the World, 2019. See releaseinternational.org/pew.

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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



REMEMBER LEAH

Please keep praying for Leah Sharibu, the 16-year-old Christian abducted by Boko Haram terrorists in February 2018 from her school in Dapchi, Nigeria.

While the 109 girls abducted with her have been released, Leah remains in captivity – most likely because she has refused to recant her faith in Christ. *'Leah has spent two years in captivity. We don't know where Leah is, we don't know the condition or the situation that Leah is in,'* said her mother recently.

Some sources claim that she has been forced to marry a terrorist commander, and has since given birth to a child.

• *Please pray that Leah will be released and reunited with her family.*

**Sign up to
Release**



This 3,000-seat megachurch in Anhui was demolished by the authorities last October. Photo: China Aid.

Chinese government restrictions continue to bite

As part of its five-year plan to 'Sinicise' Christianity – to make it conform to Chinese communism – the government is putting increasing, systematic pressure on all churches.

The 2018 *Regulations on Religious Affairs* forbade landlords from renting buildings to unrecognised churches, banned Chinese citizens from travelling overseas for religious conferences or operating religious schools, and required all churches to implement communist values.

In 2020 these repressive measures are continuing to bite across the nation, as both unregistered ('illegal') house churches – and those belonging to the government-approved Three-Self Patriotic Movement – are targeted. The aim is to bring all under the absolute control of the Communist Party.

In their recently released 2019 annual report of government persecution, Release partner China Aid documents widespread oppression, including: removal of crosses and demolition of church buildings, intimidation and arrest of pastors and church members, and restricting access to Christian literature. During 2019 all house church leaders were summoned and interviewed by the police.

'The policies, if fully implemented, will cause house churches to lose any space for existence and development and lose their autonomy,' reports China Aid.

'These policies highlight the Chinese authorities' agenda of taking full control of churches and wiping out house churches.

'Even house churches that haven't been outlawed are facing great challenges with congregating to worship. Congregations of more than 100 believers are hard to find, and most church venues in office buildings have closed.'

China Aid notes that *'many persecuted churches, obviously pressured by the authorities, dared not disclose details of their persecution to us.'*

• *Please pray that God will grant wisdom to church leaders as they respond to these repressive measures.*

Thousands flee attacks in Nigeria

Thousands fled for their lives when Boko Haram terrorists launched a five-hour attack on their town in Nigeria's Adamawa state.

The attack in February on the mainly Christian town of Garkida began when hordes of extremists arrived by truck and motorbike. They ransacked houses and set them alight, as well as burning down three churches and several public buildings.

Local Christians said that reports of an impending attack reached the town after extremists were spotted in nearby Chibok. But military personnel stationed near Garkida failed to respond until the attack had begun – and the violence lasted for hours. A number of Christians were reportedly abducted and others wounded.

• *Ask God to comfort and provide for all those affected by the Garkida attack*



Don't miss our latest audio podcasts, available from releaseinternational.org/podcast or via your favourite podcast app:

- Coffee anyone? Matthew and Thor talk about the vision behind Hazaq Coffee – a new brand directly supporting persecuted Christians.
- The martyrdom of Rev Lawan Andimi: a Release partner discusses the context of persecution today in Nigeria.
- Iranian believer Sara Afshari, a member of Release's Council of Reference, describes how she came to faith.

CHRISTIAN LEADER EXECUTED



Boko Haram terrorists have executed a state chairman of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN).

They kidnapped Rev Lawan Andimi (pictured) during a raid on Michika in early January. He was abducted by

men in military uniform who drove into Michika in convoy, ransacked the town, and bundled the CAN chairman into a Toyota Hilux.

Before his killing in January, Boko Haram released a video of Rev Andimi, in which he spoke movingly and with confidence about his faith. He declared that he was not discouraged because he was 'in the hands of God'.

See the video at releaseinternational.org/boko – and find out more about persecution in Nigeria in our audio podcast (see below).

• *Please pray that God will comfort and provide for Rev Andimi's family.*



Indian pastor attacked – then jailed

Pastor Jai was viciously assaulted by Hindu extremists in January – and then falsely accused of 'forced conversion'.

A huge mob surrounded his house church in Bichpari, Haryana state, before about 30 people dragged Pastor Jai outside, along with the house owner, Naresh, and attacked them. Pastor Jai was then driven to a Hindu temple where the beatings continued.

Hours later, the extremists handed Pastor Jai over to police, wounded and bloodstained. He was formally charged with offering people money to convert, along with Naresh and several other Christians. Pastor Jai was held until a judge granted him bail, two days after the attack.

Read more about the pressures facing Christians in India on page 18.

• *Please ask God to comfort Pastor Jai, Naresh and their church family.*



Stock photo

Pakistan High Court validates forced marriage

A High Court in Pakistan has validated the marriage and forced conversion to Islam of a 14-year-old Christian girl who was abducted last year.

The High Court in Sindh Province in February dismissed a petition to have the marriage and forced conversion of Huma Younus overturned, ruling that both were valid. According to Sharia (Islamic law), a girl can marry after her first period.

Huma was taken from her home in Karachi's Zia Colony last October, while her parents were away, and was forced to marry the man who abducted her, identified by her lawyer as Abdul Jabbar.

• *Please pray that God will free Huma from this forced marriage.*

**STRENGTHENING
BELIEVERS FACING
OPPRESSION**

SHARING CHRIST WITH SOMALIS

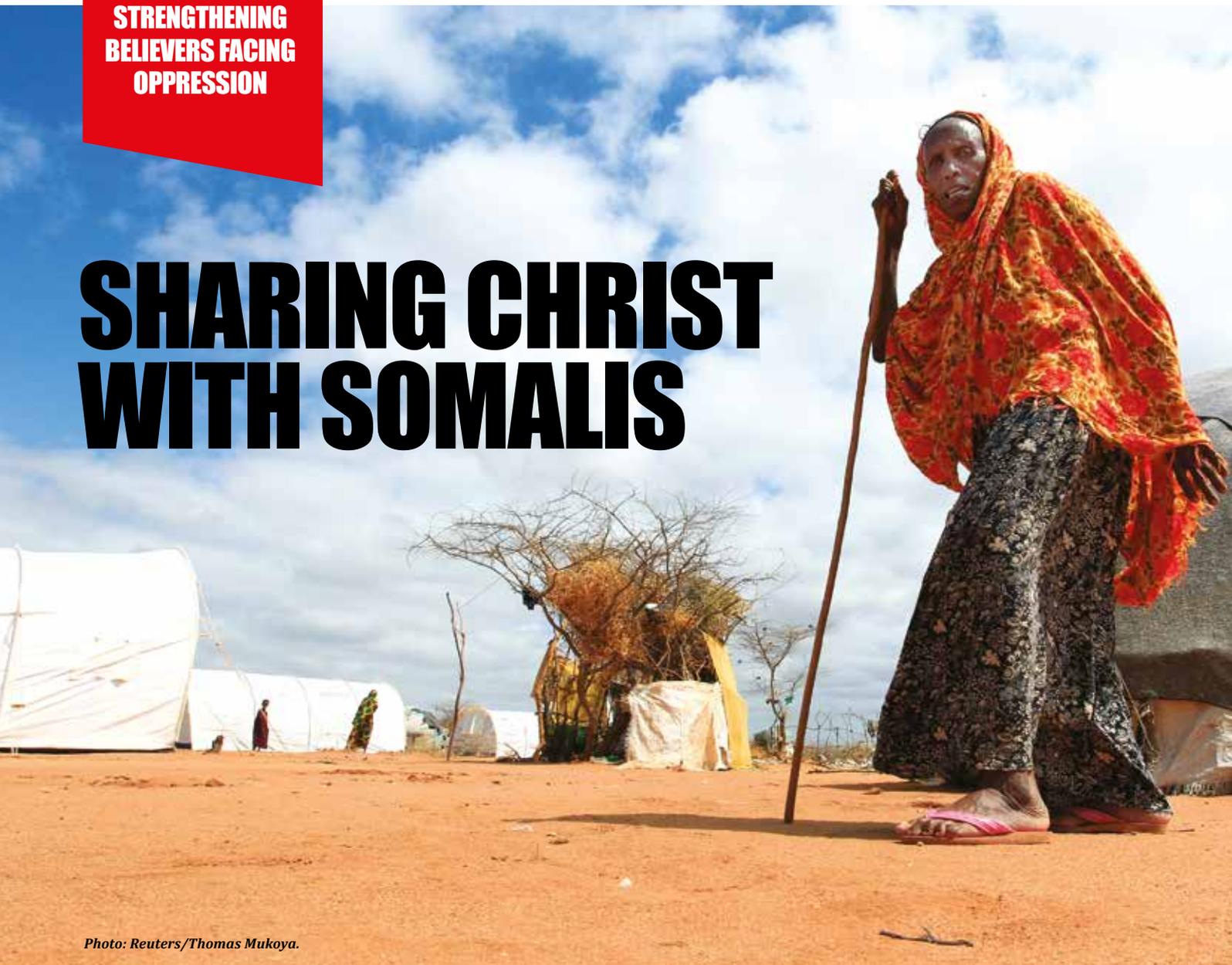


Photo: Reuters/Thomas Mukoya.

Your support is helping Somali Christians to share their faith – despite violent opposition, writes Release’s Chioma.

During a recent visit to East Africa I met with Somali believers and got a taste of the amazing work of our partners there.

Their faith and resilience in the face of adversity were absolutely incredible. Their heart, commitment and passion for Jesus were so contagious that it made me more determined to serve Jesus faithfully when I got back home!

During that visit, I met believers who had become Christians – and who had been beaten up and disowned.

I heard how Muslim wives had divorced Christian husbands and how husbands had divorced converted wives – taking away their children – just because they called on the name of Jesus.

One Christian mother told me that she has a 12-year-old son, whom she was prevented from seeing for the first ten years of his life. When her son finally came to live with her and her Christian husband, the family had to flee in case he was taken from her a second time.

Despite these great difficulties, her son today enjoys spending time with Christian young people.

Many believers from a Muslim background are oppressed because they bring shame on the family due to their association with Christians. Some are viewed as outcasts and infidels or unbelievers by their community, because the Koran calls anyone who turns their back on Islam an infidel.

Many of these believers come from close-knit communities and villages – and so found rejection by their families very hard. Others lost homes, marriages, children, inheritances, possessions and jobs.

Without their own community, these new believers have become reliant



on church and Christian leaders for support. Yet because many had previously experienced betrayal and rejection by their families, they often find it difficult to trust.

'Their own families rejected them because of their new-found faith, and they lost everything,' our partner told me.

'We give them love and encouragement, and welcome them into the family of the Messiah, so they can begin to live again.'

To help strengthen new converts, church leaders organise one-to-one and group Bible classes, teaching believers to grow in their faith.

While some of the pastors have attended Bible school and are knowledgeable about the Scriptures,

the emphasis is on learning together. This allows believers to confront old ideologies and beliefs and completely embrace their new life of discipleship, faith, love of the Father and belonging to the family of God.

Past trauma

In addition, leaders identified that many families, including children, have experienced high levels of trauma due to the years of civil war and violent unrest in Somalia. The church is committed to helping these victims of trauma, even though talking about such issues is not typical in Somali culture.

In addition, women have been appointed to key roles in the fellowship. This means that female converts can be discipled by Christian women who share an understanding of their plight – and can strengthen them in their identity as children of God.

In particular, the church focuses on helping families to raise their children in godly ways, with husbands and wives working together in partnership.

These practices are counter-cultural to the way marriage and family work in most Somali communities. Women in traditional Somali households are inherently subservient.

New believers are encouraged to share openly about both their struggles and successes. The many testimonies of people coming to a saving knowledge of Jesus inspire them to take the gospel to their family and friends.

Outreach strategy

I learned from my visit that there are three key factors that have led many to Jesus.

Love and kindness of Christians: Many Muslim-background believers say that seeing Christians live sacrificially for the sake of the kingdom and treating them with love, kindness and respect drew them to the Saviour – despite knowing the price they would pay for doing so.

Finding Jesus in the Koran: Many

converts as children had learned and recited the Koran and attended Islamic school. The Koran describes Jesus (Isa) as being sinless, a Saviour, performing miracles, healing the sick and raising the dead and tells how He is coming again as judge of all.

Dreams and visions: I heard of one man who had a dream in which Jesus told him that he was going the wrong way and needed to go to a church.

He visited the church in his Muslim clothes, which scared the pastor, and asked for help. The pastor cautiously shared the gospel with him and took him into the church, but feared reprisals. After the man was baptised, his wife left him because of his new-found faith. However, he is now married to a Christian woman and serves God faithfully, although the family is struggling financially.

Self-supporting businesses

Thanks to your support, Release is helping a number of these precious persecuted believers to start their own small businesses so they can become financially self-sufficient.

Believers first identify what businesses they want to set up, and pitch these ideas to church leaders. These have included a motorcycle taxi business, a barbers and beauty shop.

I discovered that some of the businesses are now working really well, earning income for their families. For example, 'Yusaf' (not his real name), was a successful businessman, running his own restaurant. But

Continued overleaf



Al-Shabaab terrorists have targeted Somalis who turn to Christ.



Somalis who follow Jesus must worship in secret.

everything changed when he converted to Christianity. His family persecuted him and took over his business. His aunt, who was giving him accommodation, forced him out of her house.

Then a friend sponsored him to go to Bible college and afterwards he worked with churches and a Christian organisation broadcasting radio programmes in his local language. However, there were financial challenges and he had to leave.

Yusaf now is slowly being accepted back into his community – and

he sees lots of opportunities for outreach.

He was given a small plot of land by his community, and your support enabled Release to give him funds to start his own venture growing fruit and vegetables and making bricks.

He has been working hard and is hopeful that his business will benefit many. In the future he wants to start a literacy class for local people.

“I’m very grateful for the help you’ve given me,” he said. 

Population: 11.7 million

Capital: Mogadishu

Government: Federal parliamentary republic

Religion: Sunni Muslim 99.7 per cent; Orthodox Christian 0.3 per cent

Sources: *Operation World, World Factbook.*

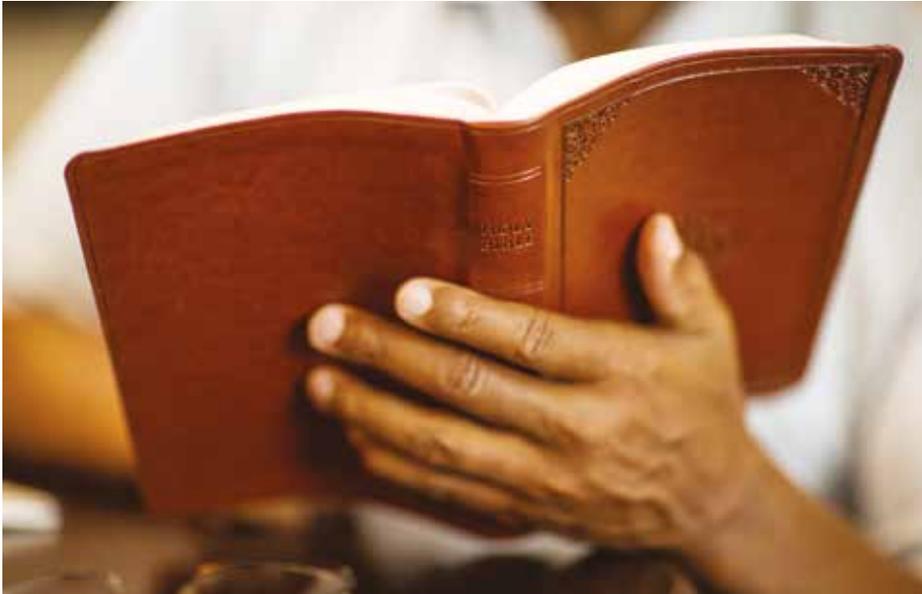
It is estimated that there are only 4,000 evangelical Christians inside Somalia. To be a Christian in Somalia is to live under constant threat. Believers cannot freely practise their faith, and must follow Jesus in secret.

The Islamist militant group al-Shabaab is committed to killing any Somali who abandons Islam to become a Christian. The threat to Somali Christians outside the country is still a reality, particularly in neighbouring Kenya, Djibouti, parts of Ethiopia and some other African countries.

PLEASE PRAY

- that God will protect His people from attacks by militants
- for church leaders as they disciple new believers, especially those from a Muslim background
- for wisdom for Release partners as they help believers establish their own small businesses

'I WILL STAND FOR WHAT I BELIEVE'



'Micah' (not his real name) became a Christian after believers gave him a copy of John's gospel. He was intrigued to read how 'the Word became flesh' (John 1:14).

After further discussions Micah eventually gave his life to Jesus, and decided to share the news with his family. They told him that he had shamed his whole clan, and one family member even offered him money to give up his new-found faith.

Although relations with his family later improved, he has received death threats from Islamist extremists who believe that any Somali who becomes a Christian deserves to die.

Despite this constant danger, he remains firm in his faith. Micah told Release: *'I will stand for what I believe — even if it means death.'*



YOUR OPPORTUNITY TO HELP PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS

Around the world Christians in restricted nations face discrimination, oppression and violent attacks – simply for choosing to follow Jesus Christ.

Your gift can provide practical help and pastoral care that enable our persecuted family to stand strong in their faith.

Please give using the enclosed form or securely online at releaseinternational.org/give

**STRENGTHENING
BELIEVERS FACING
OPPRESSION**

'Is it OK for me to cry?'

Stock photo



Release's Jack Norman heard on a recent visit to Egypt how Christians continue to suffer in a culture of oppression.

Life for Christians in Egypt has been marked for 2,000 years by persecution.

Most recently, for example, suicide bombers attacked St Peter and St Paul's Church in Cairo in 2016, killing 29 people. In 2017 at least 30 Christians travelling to a monastery were forced off their bus and shot after refusing to convert to Islam. The following year, seven believers were ambushed and killed while making the same journey.

Despite freedom of religion being protected by the constitution, mobs have attacked churches in rural areas with seeming impunity, and young Christian girls continue to be kidnapped and forced into marriage with Muslim men.

In Egypt today all believers face a daily life of discrimination and oppression. This is most evident in the lives of those who converted from Islam.

One such family of Muslim-background believers came home one day to find their apartment broken

into. They quickly discovered the thief – but when confronted he told them that if they reported him he would tell their entire community that they were now 'Jesus followers', and they would be forced to flee their home.

This man has returned several times to steal more items with impunity, knowing that they are powerless to stop him.

'As a secret believer, Fatima is not able to share her faith openly with her family'

I was told about Fatima (not her real name), the wife of a prominent man described as 'very serious' about his Muslim faith.

Fatima began following Jesus some time ago, but is largely confined to her home. Discipleship takes place via the phone, when her husband is out.

As a secret believer, Fatima is not able to share her faith openly with her

family, but chooses to stay and live as salt and light among them.

I was told she sometimes calls our partner and simply asks 'Is it OK for me to cry?'

Once given 'permission', they told me that Fatima can cry for several hours over the phone.

I asked our partner if this was because she was being abused or beaten. The answer was surprising. 'She cries because she cannot worship God openly as she would like to in her heart,' he told me.

For some who are exposed as Christians, oppression can quickly turn to violence – there are many stories of new believers being kidnapped and tortured by family members to force them back to Islam.

Such is the price paid by those turning to Christ in Egypt.

However, although life will never be the same, they know the treasure they have found. They choose to live as secret believers, aware of the price they might pay if discovered – but praying that through the testimony of their changed lives they might one day see their families saved.

These courageous believers deserve our prayers and support.

EGYPT



Population: 104 million

Capital: Cairo

Government: Presidential republic

Religion: Muslim (mostly Sunni) 87%; Christian 13%

Sources: Operation World, World Factbook.



EMBRACE NEWSLETTER

Read more about the courageous faith of persecuted Christian women in *Embrace*, the free newsletter of our Release Women ministry. Request your free copy today by calling 01689 823491 or by using the enclosed form.



Stock photo

BUILDING RESILIENCE

While all Egyptian Christians face oppression and discrimination, women believers face unique challenges.

Helping women to build spiritual and economic resilience, and to take responsibility in their household, are some of the aims of Release's Strength to Stand groups in Egypt and also in Pakistan.

Thanks to your prayers and gifts, much success has been achieved in meeting these aims – but there have been many less obvious outcomes too.

For example, 'Mary' (not her real name) was always quarrelling with her neighbours and had little understanding of the Bible and prayer. During one of our Strength to Stand groups, she was encouraged to show love to others. As she put this into practice it had an impact on her community, leading to stronger relationships with her neighbours.

Some women in the groups gather family members and neighbours to study the Bible together. They teach what they have learned in the group and get people to memorise scripture for themselves.

It's not just women who are benefitting. In one neighbourhood husbands have seen the positive changes in the lives of their wives – and have asked church leaders to start a group for them!

The outcome of all of this is that 'many families are returning to church and the church overall is being strengthened', said our partner.

**STRENGTHENING
BELIEVERS FACING
OPPRESSION**

'HARD PRESSED – BUT NOT CRUSHED'

One year after suicide bombers attacked churches in Sri Lanka, believers are still rebuilding their lives, reports Release's Linda.

More than 250 were killed and 500 injured when three churches and three luxury hotels were bombed on Easter Sunday – leaving hundreds of families devastated.

On a visit to Sri Lanka following the attack I was privileged to spend time with some of our persecuted Christian family who are still recovering from the trauma.

I met one Christian grandmother whose family was caught up in the attack on Zion Church, Batticaloa. It was clear that she had been holding

everything together for her family. When she met me the floodgates opened and she held on to me and wept. I could do nothing but cry and hug her until the wave of grief had passed.

I heard something of her story and how four of her five children were affected by the tragedy.

Her eldest son's only child, her 13-year-old grandson, died in the attack, and her eldest daughter suffered serious leg injuries. Her youngest daughter was also badly

injured, with burns to her face, arms and legs; only the youngest son escaped unharmed.

But it was the story of the middle daughter's family that touched me the most. The daughter died at the scene and her husband eight days later. Their seven-year-old daughter was blinded and received burns to her limbs, but their 10-year-old son escaped unhurt.

Amazing faith

The boy was found in the aftermath of the explosion by one of his aunts, the mother's eldest daughter. At the time he believed that his parents and sister were all dead, but his words to his aunt in the face of the unfolding



A believer takes part in a vigil to remember the victims of bomb attacks in Sri Lanka last Easter. Photo: Reuters/Dinuka Liyanawatte.

While last Easter's attacks made the headlines around the world, many pastors and churches in Sri Lanka continue to face constant threats and persecution – often by mobs stirred up by Buddhist extremists.

One pastor, who leads a church of 100 believers, told me how, facing escalating harassment, he thought it safer for him and his family to sleep in the church.

One night, however, a crowd attacked the building, throwing large stones through the windows, and damaging the door of the church. One stone narrowly missed their young child, but caught his wife on the head. He told me that when he went to the police, they refused to accept his complaint.

Another pastor agreed to meet us, but away from his own church, as

this was too dangerous for him. He told me how in 2018 a mob of 300 people, led by hardline Buddhist monks, surrounded and attacked his house. The crowd threw stones and kerosene. Just seconds after his wife had moved their baby from his cot, the roof came down. The mob left after police intervened and put a guard on the house.

Since then the pastor has been given a police escort whenever he goes to this area to meet church members, but he constantly has to change his times and routes.

Despite these great challenges, however, two of the monks who had been part of the mob came to speak with the pastor. They told him that they wanted to help him – because they could see the good work he was doing for the people. ▮



PRAY FOR SRI LANKA

- for all those who are still suffering following last year's devastating bomb attacks
- for Release partners as they continue to provide care and support in the name of Jesus
- that Christians will stand strong, despite ongoing persecution



Population: 22.9 million

Capital: Colombo

Government: Presidential republic

Religion: Buddhist 70%, Hindu 13%, Muslim 9%, Christian 8% (Evangelicals 1%)

Sources: Operation World, World Factbook.

tragedy were, "I think we'd better pray". What amazing, unshakeable faith from someone so young!

The eldest daughter, unable to have children herself, is now caring for the nephew she found after the blast and for her niece. 'God has now blessed us with two children,' she told me.

Thanks to your gifts and prayers, our partner has been able to provide practical help and pastoral care to a number of Christian families who have suffered greatly as a result of the attacks. Please continue to pray for these precious believers who continue to put their trust in God.



More than 250 were killed by the Easter 2019 bombings in Sri Lanka. Photo: Reuters/Athit Perawongmetha.

**STRENGTHENING
BELIEVERS FACING
OPPRESSION**

CRACKDOWN ON ALGERIAN CHURCHES



Algerian police seal shut Tafath (Light) church in Tizi Ouzou in October 2019. Photo: Morning Star News.

Since November 2017 the government has forced 19 church buildings to close.

'The Algerian government has been engaged in a systematic campaign against Christians,' reports our partner Middle East Concern.

Churches affiliated with the EPA, *Église Protestante d'Algérie*, the legally recognised umbrella organisation of Protestant churches, have been challenged to prove they are licensed under Ordinance 06-03. This law states that all non-Muslim places of worship must be authorised by the National Commission for Non-Muslim Worship.

'However, the government has yet to issue a single licence for a church building under this ordinance, ignoring applications from churches to regularise their status,' said our partner.

Since the end of 2017, 19 churches have been ordered to close, 13 of which are EPA-affiliated churches that have had their buildings sealed shut by the authorities.



Population: 43 million

Capital: Algiers

Government: Presidential republic

Religion: Muslim 97.3%, Christian 0.3%, non-religious 2.4%

Sources: Operation World, World Factbook.

RECENT CLOSURES



Closed: the Full Gospel church in Tizi Ouzi. Photo: Morning Star News.

Jan 2020: The House of Hope church in Ain Turk, near Oran, is ordered to close.

Jan 2020: Oratoire (Oratorical) church, Oran, is ordered to close.

Oct 2019: Police seal shut the country's largest evangelical fellowship, the 700-member Full Gospel church (EPPETO) and Tafath (Light) church (100 members), both in Tizi Ouzou. Police violently arrest 97 people in Tizi Ouzou who protest about the closures.

Oct 2019: Source of Life church, Makouda (500 members), is closed.

Sept 2019: Two EPA-affiliated churches are closed by police in Tizirt and Boghni, both in Tizi Ouzou province.

Sept 2019: Police seal the Prince of Peace church, Ighzer Amokrane, Bejaia governorate.

May 2019: Police close an evangelical church and Bible school in Boudjima, near Tizi Ouzou.

Oct 2018: The Ville de Refuge fellowship, in Azagher, near Akbou in the Kabilye area, is sealed. Around 400 members then meet for worship in a tent in the church yard. In June 2019 the landlord is sentenced to six months in prison for holding prayer in an unauthorised place.

Pray that the government will end its systematic campaign to close churches and restrict Christians' freedom to worship, and that all these churches will re-open soon.

Good News

PASTOR KHOLMATOV RELEASED

We rejoice that Pastor Bakhrom Kholmatov has been released from prison in Tajikistan.

He was detained in April 2017 after a raid on his church, Sunmin Sunbogym Protestant Church, in Khujand, Sogd, and was jailed for three years for allegedly 'inciting religious hatred'. During his trial he was accused of singing too loudly in church, and interfering with 'the comfort and rest' of people who lived nearby.

Pray for Pastor Bakhrom as he rejoins his family.



FREED ON BAIL



Give thanks that Iranian believer Mary (Fatemeh) Mohammadi, who was arrested in Tehran in January during protests over the shooting down of a Ukrainian plane, has been released on bail. Mary, who is a student, was

held at several prisons including Evin Prison, Tehran, and Qarchak women's prison in Varamin, where she was reportedly beaten and abused.

Mary was previously arrested at a house church in November 2017 and imprisoned for six months for 'engaging in Christian activities'. Since then she has campaigned for legal rights for Christian converts and for freedom to attend a Christian place of worship.

Please keep praying for Mary: her court hearing in March was postponed, apparently due to the spread of coronavirus.

MARATHON MAN



Supporter Peter Price is training for his seventeenth marathon – and hopes you will sponsor him to raise funds for Release.

He plans to take part in the 95th Comrades Marathon in South Africa in June – and must complete the 55-mile run from Pietermaritzburg to Durban in under 12 hours.

Find out more at his page: justgiving.com/peter-price15.

MAKE A DIFFERENCE!



Our free fundraising pack is full of creative ideas to help you raise funds for persecuted Christians. It comes with colour posters, pledge cards, leaflets, collecting boxes and more. Order using the attached card, call 01689 823491 or email info@releaseinternational.org.

FREE RAYMOND



Turning off a highway, 3 black SUVs overtake and surround victim's car



They force him to a sudden stop, surrounding him on 3 sides



A struggle ensues, the victim's car jerks forward and a loud crash is heard

Please sign our petition calling on the Malaysian government to free Pastor Raymond Koh – abducted three years ago.

Release is pressing Malaysia to set free a Christian pastor who was abducted in a military-style operation in February 2017– and who hasn't been seen since.

CCTV cameras captured the moment Pastor Raymond Koh was abducted in broad daylight in Selangor by a well-organised team. Evidence points towards a disciplined and highly trained snatch squad.

Video footage (pictured) shows three black SUVs surrounding and boxing

in Pastor Koh's car, forcing it to a halt. Two other cars and two motorcycles were also involved in the kidnapping.

Several men then ran towards Pastor Koh's vehicle before the entire convoy was driven away.

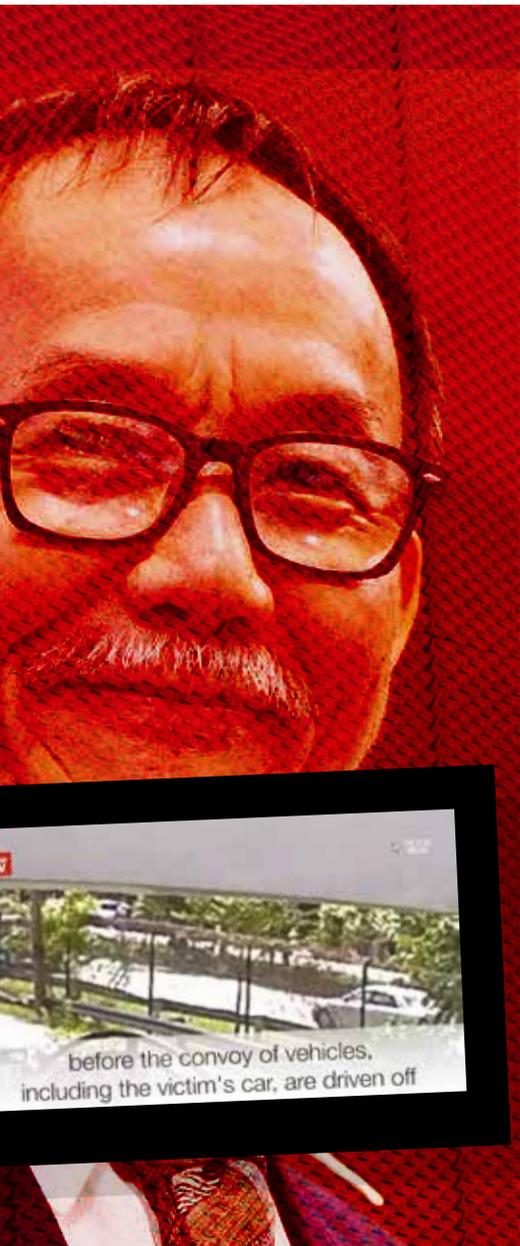
'Last year, one of the officers confessed that the operation, the abduction, was done by the police'

Warned off

A passer-by, whose vehicle entered the scene, was warned off by a man in a balaclava and forced backwards by a motorcyclist. Some 15 men are said to have been involved in the abduction.

Pastor Koh's wife Susannah pieced together what happened. She described the kidnapping to Release International's sister organisation, Voice of the Martyrs (USA):

'There was an eye-witness, right smack in the middle of that scene. He thought it was a movie production. My children went door-to-door and found CCTV footage of the entire incident. It was a very military-style operation, well-organised, and done in about 40



seconds. Last year, one of the officers confessed that the operation, the abduction, was done by the police.'

Disappeared

In 2019, Malaysia's Human Rights Commission accused the Malaysian Special Branch of carrying out two abductions – that of Pastor Koh and Amri Che Mat, a Shia Muslim social activist. Both were suspected of trying to convert Sunni Muslims. Both were boxed in by vehicles in similar abductions and have disappeared.

Another pastor, Joshua Hilmy, and his wife Ruth also went missing in 2016.

Pastor Koh ran Hope Community, an organisation set up in the capital



Pastor Raymond's wife Susannah (centre) with children Jonathan and Esther.
Photo: Free Malaysia Today.

Kuala Lumpur to help the poorest members of society.

In 2011, Hope Community came under scrutiny by the authorities who accused Raymond of trying to convert Muslims during a party at a local church.

Bullets

The allegations against Pastor Koh were later dropped, but soon afterwards he was sent bullets in the post as a clear warning to end his Christian ministry.

After criticism from the country's Human Rights Commission, the government set up an investigation into the abductions. But critics point out the taskforce is composed of current and serving police officers.

'Three years ago, Pastor Koh was abducted,' says Release CEO Paul Robinson. *'Yet there has been no word whether Pastor Koh is dead or alive. Malaysia must secure his release and account for his disappearance, which by any standard is a crime.'*

View video footage of Pastor Raymond's abduction at releaseinternational.org/releaseraymond

- Christians make up about nine per cent of the population of Malaysia, which is officially a secular state. Proselytising Muslims – attempting to convert them – is forbidden by law in Malaysia. The state also prohibits its Muslim citizens from converting to another faith. Under Malaysian law, those who change their religion could be charged with apostasy.

SIGN THE PETITION



Release is working with others to press the Malaysian government to investigate the disappearance of Pastor Koh and bring about his release.

Our petition to the Prime Minister and the Inspector General of Police states:

'One of your country's loyal citizens has been missing for three years. Pastor Raymond Koh was kidnapped off the streets on February 13, 2017, and has not been seen since. His wife and children have been left to wonder what happened to him and whether he is still alive.'

'We, Pastor Raymond's fellow Christians from around the world, call on your government to release any and all information related to the forced disappearance... including any involvement of Special Branch.'

- Sign the petition enclosed with this magazine – and ask your friends and church to sign too
- Sign online at releaseinternational.org/releaseraymond

STRENGTHENING
BELIEVERS
FACING
OPPRESSION

JUSTICE
DELAYED
IS JUSTICE
DENIED



Stock photo

Indian Christians face new legal challenges

Hindu extremists are increasingly using the law to attack Christian pastors, reports Release's Kenneth Harrod.

Over the past two decades a growing nationalist movement in India has been behind attacks on Christians, on pastors in particular, and on church buildings. Release staff have met pastors who have been beaten and whose churches have been vandalised. In fact we have previously reported instances of Christians being martyred for the gospel.

But while physical violence continues, partners are seeing a sharp rise in legal charges being filed against Christians.

'Making serious criminal allegations is the new order of the day,' said one

of our partners. *'Much of the focus has shifted from physical assault and violence to making criminal cases.'* This can make life very difficult for those accused, such as pastors and their families, and church members.

In one sense, simply accusing pastors and evangelists of 'fraudulent conversion' is nothing new. In the past, however, such accusations were often swiftly dealt with. Our partners point out that not a single accusation of fraudulent conversion (forcing or bribing people to become Christians) has ever led to a conviction.

For example, in northern Uttar Pradesh state, following a complaint

by Hindu extremists of 'conversion activities', a pastor was arrested by police last October after a Sunday morning service. Thanks to the intervention of Release partners he was released later that day without a charge being registered against him.

In central Madhya Pradesh the following month an Assemblies of God pastor and four church members were assaulted by extremists after a prayer meeting in a church member's home. They were taken into custody accused of 'religious conversion' activities, but, again, thanks to Release partners, were released without a formal charge being made.

In December a group of about 20 Hindu extremists attacked a group of Christians in Karnataka state who were distributing gospel tracts in a village. Two Christians were severely beaten and were taken to hospital. The rest were taken to the local police station where they were accused of conversion activities through gospel tract distribution. Again through the intervention of Release partners the men were all later released.

'The new strategy is to file accusations under different – and more serious – sections of India's penal code'

Incidents like these have been common in India in recent years, with pastors usually being released quickly without being charged. At the same time, physical attacks on Christians in the past have sometimes led to successful charges being brought against the attackers, with jail sentences being given.

New trend

The new strategy by militants is to file a variety of accusations against pastors under different – and more serious – sections of India's penal code. This can make bail applications more difficult and can frustrate gospel ministry in a local area – without any danger that the extremists themselves will be charged with any crime.

Our partners told me of a pastor in northern India who was arrested in early January and accused of hurting religious sentiment and causing enmity among religious groups, as well as fraudulent conversion and unlawfully detaining people (at a church gathering). Despite no criminal record being produced by the police, several initial bail applications were refused. He was finally granted bail about a month later.

'The twist is the addition of severe charges against the pastors. It is seen as much more than the handiwork of a few religious fanatics. These [charges] are added while framing the cases in the law-enforcement agencies,' said our partner.

More recently there have been calls from hardline Hindu members of parliament in India to force all Christian missionaries to leave the country. One MP was reported as saying that Christian missionary work threatens the unity of the country and that conversions to Christianity are weakening democracy.



PLEASE PRAY

- for all Christians facing false legal charges: may God give them strength to overcome
- for wisdom for Release partners as they provide support, pastoral care and legal advice
- that God will enable Indian Christians to share their faith in the power of the Holy Spirit



Population: 1.3 billion

Capital: New Delhi

Government: Federal parliamentary republic

Religion: Hindu 74%, Muslim 14%, Christian 6%, other 6%

Sources: Operation World, World Factbook.



VOICE PODCAST

Find out more about the challenges facing Christians in India in our 18-minute audio podcast Untouchable. Host Sarah is joined by Release partner Pastor Kumar who was brought up as an 'untouchable' Dalit. Listen via your favourite podcast app or at releaseinternational.org/podcast.



Pastor Anil Juit's church building in Arrah, Bihar state, was attacked by Hindu extremists. Photo: Morning Star News.

IMPRISONED WITH ISIS

Don't miss this exciting speaking tour by former prisoner of faith Petr Jasek in June.

Christian aid worker Petr Jasek was arrested in Sudan in December 2015 and accused of spying. Sentenced to life imprisonment, he spent 445 days in jail, before he was pardoned and released in February 2017. Today he works for our associate ministry Voice of the Martyrs (USA). He is a gifted and dynamic speaker.

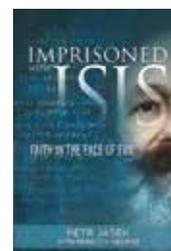
Hear his inspiring testimony of how God sustained him during his time in prison – and news from persecuted Christians – at these venues:



Fri June 19	7pm	Faith Mission Bookshop, BELFAST BT1 6EA
Sat June 20	12 noon and 2 pm	Faith Mission Bookshop, GLASGOW G2 6NU
Sun June 21	10.30am	Vine Christian Centre, BRIDGEND CF31 1LY
Sun June 21	6pm	Dunvant Christian Fellowship, SWANSEA SA2 7SJ
Wed June 24	7.30pm	St Luke's Church, WEST NORWOOD SE27 0DT
Thurs June 25	7.30pm	The People's Christian Fellowship, TOTTENHAM N15 4DW
Sat June 27	3pm	Orpington Baptist Church, ORPINGTON N15 4DW
Sun June 28	9am and 10.30am	Christ Church, PURLEY CR8 2BN

Other venues awaiting confirmation: please check releaseinternational.org/events for the latest details.

Petr tells the story of his imprisonment and release in his powerful new book, which will be available in June (see releaseinternational.org/store for details in due course).



Forthcoming tour by key Nigerian partner

Hassan John, who works alongside Release partner Archbishop Ben Kwashi in Plateau state, Nigeria, will be speaking at a number of venues in October and November. Don't miss this valuable opportunity to hear first-hand about the current situation facing persecuted Christians in Nigeria – and how you can pray for them.

Details will be given in following editions of *Voice* magazine.

**GREAT
OUTDOORS**
Church
Service



GREAT OUTDOORS CHURCH SERVICE MAY 24, 2020

Don't miss out on this year's Great Outdoors Church Service – a great opportunity for you and your church to stand in solidarity with persecuted Christians.

On **Sunday, May 24***, churches in the UK and Ireland are invited to hold their services in the open air to pray for our brothers and sisters around the world who have been deprived of their meeting places.

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

Will you be part of this important prayer event for our persecuted family?

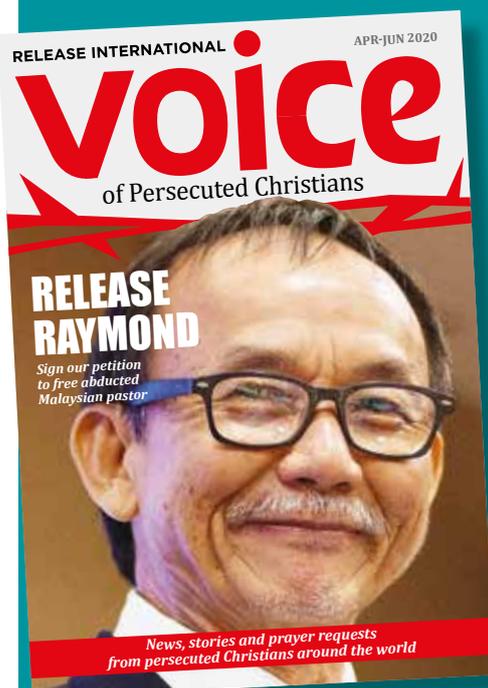
Churches that have previously taken part have told us how meeting outside has given them a taste of what it is like for believers who do not have the comfort or security of meeting in a building, while also being a great witness to their local communities.

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

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

Find out more at releaseinternational.org/gocs.

Share *Voice* magazine in your church



You can encourage prayer and support for our persecuted Christian family by distributing *Voice* magazine in your church. Find out more from your local Release contact:

Ireland: Stephen on 028 9334 0014

London: Imtiaz on 07395 425507

Midlands & North: Kenneth on 07375 516408

Scotland: James on 07434 894016

South: Kenneth on 07375 516408

Wales & W Midlands: Paul on 07747 535588

Or call 01689 823491

THE WORD

The book of 1 Kings teaches us that, despite oppression and opposition, God remains faithful to His people, writes Development Manager Stephen.

THE FAITHFUL GOD OF ELIJAH

The question has been asked before: Why do Christians in restricted nations continue to suffer oppression and persecution because of their faith in Jesus?

I believe that the book of 1 Kings provides us with some valuable lessons about how the Father works in His world.

In chapter 17, for example, we encounter God's people ruled by King Ahab, who provoked God's anger more than any other king. The nation had sunk to a condition of deep degradation.

False gods

It had been 58 years since King Solomon reigned and, in between, there had been seven wicked kings who had allowed worship of Astarte and Ba'al. In particular, Jezebel, a non-Jew, had married into Hebrew royalty, insistent on bringing her pagan gods with her. The adoration of Ba'al oppressed God's people like never before.

Into this arena, from the east (the original land allotted to the tribe of Gad) appears the prophet Elijah. He arrives on the scene from almost nowhere with a message from God (a little like Melchizedek, the king and priest in the book of Genesis). His fellow prophets had suffered tremendous oppression and been forced into hiding.

Elijah's call was for the whole nation to turn away from false gods and to worship the one true God – Jehovah (Yahweh). If not, the God who provides water for the land and the people would hold back the rain. Their trust in Ba'al for the provision



of all needs would be shown up for the worthless faith that it was.

We know the end of the story – God proved Himself to be unique and incomparable. There is no god like our God, the God of Elijah. He provided food and water for Elijah, safe travel for him throughout the land and comfort during distress. Most importantly, Elijah experienced God's presence.

Nothing has changed for God's people today. Kings and queens, regional governments and national regimes, local communities, false ideologies and militant groups all continue to oppress His people. Yet, their threats do not overcome His family.

Like Elijah, believers are human, weak, passionate, failing, impatient, strong and lonely.

However, God's way is often to teach His people through times of oppression: preserving His people, developing their character, instructing them that life is nothing without Him. He imparts lessons in obedience, matures many through affliction, driving out self-dependency and demonstrating His power.

For Christians enduring oppression, there is hope. Hope is a person who died but was raised to life. Messianic Jews know Him as Y'shua, Arabs as Isa, and you and I as Jesus.

INSPIRING FAITH



'The underground church is a poor and suffering church, but it has few lukewarm members.'

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.

GET READY FOR A GREAT WALKING CHALLENGE!

Enjoy some of the finest scenery, while helping your persecuted brothers and sisters.

June 27-28	COTSWOLD WAY	(Bath-Cheltenham)	100km
July 4-5	PEAK DISTRICT	(Bakewell-Bakewell)	100km
Aug 29-30	SOUTH COAST	(Eastbourne-Arundel)	100km
Sept 12-13	THAMES PATH	(Putney Bridge-Henley)	100km
Sept 12	THAMES BRIDGES	(Putney Bridge-Tower Bridge)	25km

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 all the way.

Find out more at ultrachallenge.com



THE DAY OF THE CHRISTIAN MARTYR

Monday, June 29, 2020

Release invites you and your church to join us this year in remembering modern-day Christian martyrs on or around June 29.

A resource pack will be available in April.

Please use the attached card to order your pack today.



☎ 01689 823491 🌐 releaseinternational.org/martyrs

✉ martyrsday@releaseinternational.org

🐦 #IWillNotAbandonThem



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 sharing 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.

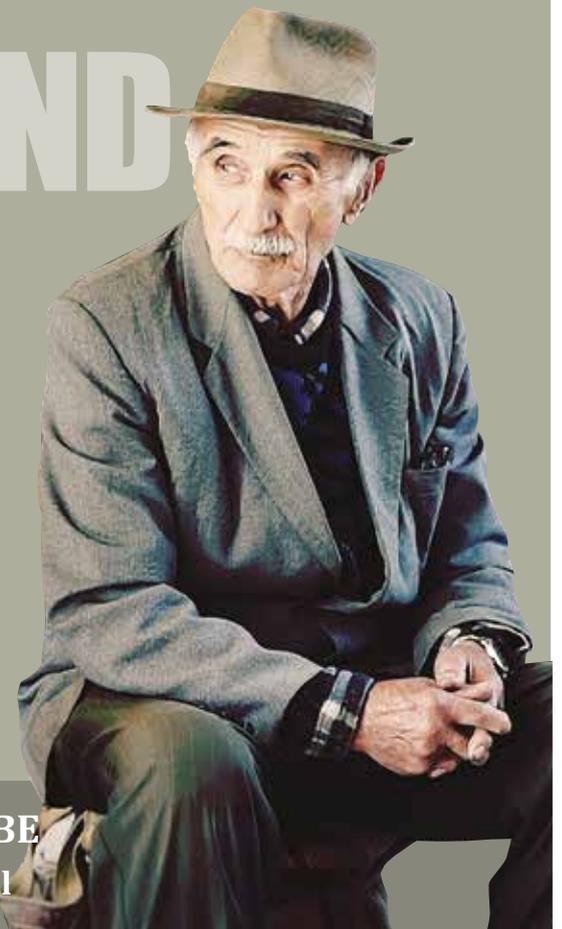
To request a free legacy brochure please call us on **01689 823491** or email info@releaseinternational.org

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL
Voice
of Persecuted Christians

UNDERGROUND

Despite the fall of communism 30 years ago, Christians in Central Asia are still being persecuted for their faith. Find out more – and how you and your church can help – in our 12-minute film *Underground*. Free to supporters.

- Call: 01689 823491 or use the accompanying form to get your DVD.



CHECK OUT OUR LATEST VIDEOS ON YOUTUBE

Subscribe to our channel at:  [releaseinternational](https://www.youtube.com/releaseinternational)

prayershield

April-June 2020



Faith has helped Monica Dra and her son in Nigeria overcome loss and trauma.

APRIL 2020

Heavenly Father,

Lord, I choose to trust You completely, with my whole heart.

Help me not to lean on my own understanding (Proverbs 3:5).

Lord, please enable my persecuted brothers and sisters to entrust their lives and families to You, fixing their eyes on You, not on their circumstances.

Keep their minds steadfast so they can enjoy Your perfect peace (Isaiah 26:3) because You are 'the same yesterday and today and forever' (Hebrews 13:8). Hallelujah!

In Jesus' name.

Amen

NIGERIA

WEDNESDAY 1: Pray for the family of Rev Lawan Andimi, a senior Christian leader in Adamawa state, who was kidnapped and killed by militant group *Boko Haram* earlier this year. Praise God for his strong faith: in a video released by his captors, he said he was 'in the hands of God'.

THURSDAY 2: Thousands of people in the mainly Christian town of Garkida fled their homes when hundreds of militants launched a five-hour assault recently, burning homes, churches and public buildings. Ask God to restore what has been lost.

FRIDAY 3: Pray for Rev Joshua Samaila and 40 others

kidnapped by *Boko Haram* in a raid on Kasaya, Kaduna state, in January. Pray the federal and state authorities will do more to stop the kidnappings and bloodshed.

SATURDAY 4: In 2009, extremists killed the husband of Monica Dra (pictured, with her son) then attacked her. Her recovery has been long and slow: she has had surgery on her neck seven times, supported by Release associate ministries. Pray that the new tailoring skills she has gained with their support will help meet the family's needs.

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL
voice
of Persecuted Christians

'GOD IS STILL ALIVE... DON'T CRY, DON'T WORRY, THANK GOD FOR EVERYTHING.'

Kidnapped pastor Lawan Andimi, in a video message to his family before Boko Haram killed him

SUNDAY 5: In Kulben village, Plateau state, 13 Christians were killed in early January. The attackers, Fulani herdsmen, had reportedly lived peacefully alongside local Christians for years.

MONDAY 6: Student Ropvil Daciya Dalep was abducted in Borno state in January. A video released by his captors appeared to show he was killed by a child soldier. Pray for Ropvil's family – and his killer.

TUESDAY 7: Pray for the families of bride-to-be Martha Bulus and her two bridesmaids killed by *Boko Haram* near Gwoza, Borno state; the women were en route to the wedding. On that same day in December, eight other Christians were killed in separate attacks in the same area.

AFGHANISTAN

WEDNESDAY 8: Release sources say that Christians are now present in every one of Afghanistan's 34 provinces. Pray that God will encourage these believers, especially those who have no fellowship with others.

THURSDAY 9: Pray that the church in Afghanistan will continue to grow. Ask God to provide more workers for this difficult mission field.

GOOD FRIDAY: Jesus' death on the cross is the most powerful reminder of God's willingness to sacrifice everything so that our relationship with Him could be restored. Pray that God's unending love will overwhelm His people in Afghanistan – and everywhere they are persecuted.

EASTER SATURDAY: As we remember how Jesus' friends mourned His death and no doubt pondered his promises about being raised to life, let's stand with our persecuted family in Afghanistan as they pray for breakthroughs, deliverance and peace... and dare to hope.

EASTER SUNDAY: Let's praise our almighty God and risen Saviour! And let's pray that His victory over sin and death will be a daily reality for believers whose lives are under pressure and under threat.

MONDAY 13: Thank God that His word does not return empty (Isaiah 55:11). Pray that many, including those in the most remote areas of Afghanistan, will hear the gospel through media such as satellite TV.

TUESDAY 14: Becoming a Christian puts an Afghan at risk of attack from many different quarters, including their own family. Pray that whole families in Afghanistan will come to Christ.

WEDNESDAY 15: Ask God to give wisdom and creativity to those who work to support the underground church in Afghanistan.

EAST AFRICA

THURSDAY 16: Pray for the Somali Christian community in East Africa who are under threat from extremists. They are forced to worship in secret for fear of violent attack.

FRIDAY 17: Ask God to protect the children of Somali Christians in East Africa. If they don't join in with Islamic prayer and rituals at school, they risk exposing their family as non-Muslims.

SATURDAY 18: Ask God to prosper the Release-funded small business initiatives which are helping Somali Christians provide for their families and sustain their church ministries.

SUNDAY 19: One pastor and his family have had to move ten times in three years for fear of attack. Praise God his family are now in a much safer area. Release partners have helped him set up a business to support his ministry.

MONDAY 20: Pray for a Somali Christian whose son was taken away from her when she turned to Christ. Now 12, the child was recently returned to her. Thank God that they have been reunited and pray that God will rebuild their relationship.

TUESDAY 21: Pray for Somali Christians who are receiving discipleship training through

our partners. Many would otherwise have little access to Christian literature and teaching.

WEDNESDAY 22: Please ask God to heal and protect residents of a home for women who have faced persecution because they have become Christians. One woman's family told officials she had become a 'terrorist' when she turned to Christ.

THURSDAY 23: Ask God to heal Somali Christians suffering trauma. The insecurity and persecution they are experiencing currently can exacerbate trauma they suffered in their homeland.

FRIDAY 24: Ask God to protect His people in border areas of Kenya such as Garissa, where believers have suffered intense persecution. *Al-Shabaab* extremists killed three Christian teachers at a school in Kamuthe in January.

INDIA

SATURDAY 25: Pray for three Christians from the village of Vadi in Madhya Pradesh who have been charged with 'medical malpractice' after fellow villagers objected to them praying for someone to be healed.

SUNDAY 26: Thank God that Bijaya (pictured above) and six other Christians detained for more than ten years over the murder of a Hindu extremist leader in Odisha have been freed on bail. Pray that they will be acquitted when their case comes to the High Court.



Bijaya (second from left) was one of seven Christians accused of murdering a Hindu extremist and released on bail last year.

MONDAY 27: Ask God to comfort 'Saisha' in Odisha whose husband, Pastor Saanvi, was killed in front of his family by radical communist Naxalites.

TUESDAY 28: A recently approved Bill denies citizenship to Muslim refugees but Christians fear it could easily be exploited to persecute them too. Pray the Government will respond to international pressure for greater religious freedom.

WEDNESDAY 29: Pastor Jai from Haryana state could not walk after extremists took turns to beat him – and then he was falsely charged with 'forced conversion'. Please pray for healing and justice for him.

THURSDAY 30: Pray for eight Christians recently acquitted of false charges of kidnapping and forcibly converting children – because they had accompanied them to a Christian summer camp in 2017. The court case has caused them to lose their jobs and left them traumatised.

MAY 2020

EGYPT

FRIDAY 1: Pray for all those who have had to flee the Sinai region of Egypt in recent years as Islamic State (IS) affiliates have sought to drive out Christians. Pray that they will experience God as their 'refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble' (Psalm 46:1).

SATURDAY 2: Continue to pray for the families and communities who were bereaved in 2015 when IS executed 20 Egyptian Christians on a beach in Libya.

SUNDAY 3: Thank God that through Release's Strength to Stand groups, women in Egypt are learning to be more resilient in their Christian faith and to take the lead in teaching the Bible in their homes.

MONDAY 4: The facilitators in our Strength to Stand groups (above) often put themselves at risk to reach out to the women they want to serve. Pray for their protection. Please ask God to heal one facilitator who is being treated for cancer.

TUESDAY 5: Pray for believers with a Muslim background in Egypt, whose families and communities often persecute them. Pray especially for Sudanese Christians who have sought safety in Egypt yet still receive death threats for abandoning Islam.

WEDNESDAY 6: Thank God for the way Egyptian Christians have been able to express forgiveness and love towards

those responsible for attacks such as the bombing of St Peter and St Paul's Church, Cairo, in 2016.

THURSDAY 7: Ask God to strengthen His people in Egypt so that they will bring light in the darkness and restore hope.

PAKISTAN

FRIDAY 8: Please pray for Marriam and her daughter Sara (pictured). Marriam's husband, Paulus, was hospitalised after his family beat him for rejecting Islam and he later died of sepsis.

SATURDAY 9: Ask God to bless and protect Marriam (above) who has continued the ministry of her late husband, Paulus. Their daughter's left eye was damaged during a separate attack on her father. Paulus's son was poisoned to death soon after coming to faith.

SUNDAY 10: Pray for 39 Christians who were acquitted

of killing two Muslims after the 2015 church bombings in Youhanabad. Their acquittal came after the Muslims' families were paid about £15,000 – even though the Christians maintain their innocence.

MONDAY 11: Pray for justice for the family of Saleem Masih, a young Christian man who died in Kasur in February after being tortured by a Muslim landowner for 'polluting' his well by washing in it.

TUESDAY 12: A 14-year-old Christian girl from Karachi was kidnapped in October and forcibly converted and married to her kidnapper. Pray that she – and the many other Christian girls who suffer this abuse – will be able to return home.

WEDNESDAY 13: Please ask God to protect our partners in Pakistan – and across the world – as they risk their own lives to stand up for persecuted Christians.

ERITREA

THURSDAY 14: Continue to pray that Christians in Eritrea will begin to experience greater religious freedom following the signing of a peace deal between Eritrea and Ethiopia in 2018.

FRIDAY 15: Release associate ministries estimated in early 2020 that about 600 Christians were imprisoned in Eritrea and about 47 children of Christians had been left without carers.

Pray that God will strengthen the faith of His people.

SATURDAY 16: Recently, the Eritrean Government has started seizing and closing church-run schools and hospitals. Pray for wisdom for Christian leaders as they respond.

SUNDAY 17: Pray that God will move powerfully through His people in Eritrea so that many in this repressive nation will experience His love and find salvation.

CHINA

MONDAY 18: Pray for the release of Christian Uyghurs being 're-educated' in huge detention camps in Xinjiang. Most Uyghurs are Muslims. Christian Uyghurs are deemed to be even more of a threat to social order as generally they have converted from Islam.

TUESDAY 19: Ask God to encourage Uyghur Christian Alimujiang Yimiti, serving a 15-year sentence for allegedly 'leaking state secrets' – just because he spoke to an American by phone. He has been detained since 2008.

WEDNESDAY 20: Please also pray for Gulinuer, wife of Alimujiang (above), and their two sons, who are closely monitored by security officials. They are no longer allowed to visit him.

THURSDAY 21: Pray for believers in the city of Weifang where authorities have hailed ten of its subdistricts and 12 local villages as 'role models' for



Marriam has continued her late husband's ministry even though it cost him his life.

their efforts to crack down on 'evil religions' such as Christianity.

FRIDAY 22: Thank God for the way He encourages prison inmates through the witness of Pastor Zhang Shaojie of Nanle County Christian Church, who is serving a 12-year sentence. Prison officials recognise his 'uplifting' influence.

SATURDAY 23: Ask God to be among believers in Wuhan who shared messages of peace and hope in the midst of the coronavirus crisis. Pray that the Holy Spirit will move powerfully across the city.

SUNDAY 24: As we hold our Great Outdoors Church Services today in solidarity with the persecuted church, let's remember our church family who are forced to worship in the open air (or in secret). Praise God that so many – including members of Early Rain Covenant Church in Chengdu, forcibly closed in 2018 – remain committed to spreading the gospel.

MONDAY 25: Pray for Pastor Wang Yi of Early Rain Covenant Church (above), sentenced to nine years in prison for 'subversion'. He was arrested with 100 other church members in 2018. His wife Jing Rong and their child were put under house arrest.



Members of Early Rain Covenant Church worship while detained at a police station.

TUESDAY 26: Several members of Early Rain Covenant Church detained in 2018 say they were tortured in custody; some have suffered poor mental health since. Ask God to heal them and give them peace.

IRAQ

WEDNESDAY 27: The BBC reports some 10,000 Islamic State fighters are regrouping in Iraq. Ask God to give His peace and protection to Christians in the region.

THURSDAY 28: Pray for Release partners in Iraqi Kurdistan who help Christians reach out to refugees of all faiths. Pray that Kurdistan can remain a safe haven for Christian refugees.

FRIDAY 29: Praise God that the churches in Kurdistan are growing. Thank Him for the continued commitment of the Kurdistan Government to welcome and support persecuted minorities and to uphold religious liberty.

SATURDAY 30: Please pray for Christians who are returning to their communities after fleeing to escape Islamic State. Pray that God will give them fresh vision and purpose.

SUNDAY 31: Many churches in Iraq have seen their congregations dwindle dramatically because so many have fled their homeland and sought sanctuary abroad. Pray for unity as congregations are re-formed.

JUNE 2020

MALAYSIA

MONDAY 1: Please continue to pray for the safe return of Pastor Raymond Koh (pictured), who was abducted in Petaling Jaya in 2017. His whereabouts are unknown. Some have accused 'state agents' of kidnapping him.

TUESDAY 2: Pray for the success of a Release petition calling on the Malaysian Government to account for the disappearance of Pastor Raymond Koh (above). Pray that the international outcry over his abduction will help secure his release.

WEDNESDAY 3: Continue to pray for Christians with

a Muslim background in Malaysia. Release sources say many are in hiding for fear of being persecuted.

THURSDAY 4: The Malaysian Government is cracking down on anything it perceives to be evangelism aimed at Muslims. Pray that the gospel will spread regardless.

FRIDAY 5: Pray against ploys to tempt Christians to renounce their faith by people who offer business advantages or cash rewards.

SATURDAY 6: Please continue to pray for strength and boldness for house church leaders in Malaysia who are a particular target for persecution.

IRAN

SUNDAY 7: Pray for Christians in Iran amid continuing tensions following the US killing of Iranian general Qasem Soleimani. Pray that their witness will help build religious tolerance.

MONDAY 8: Release contacts say that a crackdown on the Farsi-speaking church in the past four years is driving many Christian leaders overseas. Pray that God will raise up new leaders in Iran.

TUESDAY 9: Rising persecution of Christians has been linked to an increase in the number of people converting from Islam and growth in house churches. Ask God to multiply His church in Iran.

WEDNESDAY 10: Release supports the families of Christian prisoners in Iran, as well as training house church leaders and supplying Christian literature. Please pray that God will continue to provide for this work.

THURSDAY 11: Ebrahim Firouzi is currently spending two years in internal exile in southern Iran, as punishment for his church activities. Ask God to protect him in an area which is a hotspot for Islamist militants.

FRIDAY 12: Thank God for the powerful witness of Nasser Navard Goltapeh, arrested in 2016 and serving a ten-year sentence. He remains 'confident in all hardships'. Pray that his family will come to know Christ.



Pastor Raymond Koh has not been seen since February 2017.

'I am confident in all hardships and I believe I will become free by Him... because the Lord our God does not forget his children.'

Nasser Navard Goltapeh, prisoner of faith, Iran

SATURDAY 13: Praise God for the early release of Asghar Salehi, Mohammadreza Rezaei and another unnamed Christian. The three have been arrested twice in recent years and convicted of 'propaganda against the state'.

SUNDAY 14: Ismaeil Maghrebinejad was sentenced to three years in jail for forwarding a mobile phone message he had been sent that was deemed insulting to Iranian clerics. Pray for the success of his appeal.

MONDAY 15: Pray for Christian student Mary (Fateme) Mohammadi, arrested in Tehran in January during protests over the downing of the Ukrainian passenger jet and charged with 'disrupting public order'. She was reportedly beaten and abused in jail before being released on bail.

SUDAN

TUESDAY 16: After President Omar al-Bashir was deposed, Sudan experienced great unrest. Pray that God will use this period of transition to

build His kingdom in Sudan and grow His church.

WEDNESDAY 17: Senior government officials attended a Christmas service at Khartoum Bahri Evangelical Church that suffered intense persecution under President al-Bashir. Pray that religious tolerance will grow in Sudan.

THURSDAY 18: Pray for Raja Nicola Eissa Abdel-Masih, a Christian and former judge who is among 11 people serving on a Sovereignty Council overseeing the transition to civilian rule in Sudan. Pray that Christians will have a stronger voice under the new administration.

FRIDAY 19: Pray for the return of the many Christian- and church-owned properties seized by the Government. The headquarters of the National Congress Party is among those buildings confiscated.

INDONESIA

SATURDAY 20: Pray for a steadfast spirit for the church in Indonesia, and especially for believers with a Muslim background who often feel they have to keep their faith a secret.

SUNDAY 21: Radical Islamist groups continue to pose a threat to churches in more conservative areas such as Aceh. Pray for wisdom and courage for Christians in such places.

MONDAY 22: Pray that an increasing number of Christians in Indonesia will have a heart for sharing the gospel in their communities.

TUESDAY 23: Pray for the congregations of evangelical churches in Yogyakarta and in Sumatra that have been closed recently, following complaints by Muslim neighbours.

WEDNESDAY 24: Pray for wisdom for leaders of a Baptist church near Semarang city, Java, which has been closed and denied permission for building works even though it has had planning permission for years.

ALGERIA

THURSDAY 25: Between late 2017 and early 2020, 12 churches in Algeria had been forcibly closed as part of a crackdown on Protestant congregations. Pray they will be allowed to reopen soon.

FRIDAY 26: Please pray for a Protestant congregation in Oran: a court ordered their church to close in January. Pray that the church's appeal against the ruling will be successful.

SATURDAY 27: Pray for a change in Algerian law to end the deadlock over church licensing. Churches are currently required to have a licence for 'non-Muslim worship' – yet the authorities refuse to issue them.



Algerian special police put a lock on a church door while Christians take photos.

SUNDAY 28: Three churches shut in October were among the largest congregations in Algeria. Pray that the Algerian church nationally will experience fresh unity and revival.

MONDAY 29: On this, the Day of the Christian Martyr, let's ask God to sustain believers in Algeria and across the world

Sources: China Aid; *Daily Post* (Nigeria); International Christian Concern; Middle East Concern; Morning Star News; Release partners and contacts; *The Nation* (Nigeria); 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.

– and strengthen those whose loved ones have paid the ultimate price for their faith.

TUESDAY 30: Despite the Government's campaign to close church buildings, the body of Christ in Algeria is reportedly growing rapidly, especially within the Berber community. Praise God!

*Lord Jesus,
Thank You for marking out
the path that we should run,
and encouraging us to press
on towards the goal.*

*You suffered and died on the
cross for the joy set before
you (Hebrews 12:2).*

*Please, Lord, be with my
persecuted family today, as
they suffer for your name's
sake. May they not grow
weary or lose heart, but
find strength in the joy of
knowing You.*

Amen

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