

# BUILDING ONE BODY

*Release International Projects*



RELEASE INTERNATIONAL  
**Voice**  
of Persecuted Christians

*So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, **grows and builds itself up in love**, as each part does its work.*

(Ephesians 4:11-16)

# Dear church leader



Thank you for considering partnering with **Release International** in supporting and strengthening Christians around the world who suffer persecution for their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Our ***Building One Body*** programme enables you and your congregation to develop a deeper relationship with your persecuted brothers and sisters by engaging with one of the projects Release supports.

We believe this will be to the blessing and enrichment of your own congregation's faith and Christian discipleship – as well as being a means of blessing to those who are persecuted.

This brochure showcases a selection of projects from around the world.

We hope that you will choose to support one of them.

## WHAT'S INVOLVED?

- You will receive updates from our partner to maintain your involvement and to inform your prayers;
- You will receive a summary report of the project each year;
- You will be offered the chance to have a speaker visit your church. This could be your regional Release representative, a senior member of staff, or possibly the project partner.

## WHAT DO WE ASK OF YOU?

- To promote awareness among the congregation about the project you support;
- To commit to praying for the chosen project and for the Christians it impacts;
- To support the project financially – and to commit to doing so on a regular basis;
- To have a Release regional speaker preach at your church biennially;

We hope you will find this Building One Body programme an attractive, practical way of involving your church in wider mission, and of being challenged in Christian discipleship and service, as you join us in strengthening God's church, to the glory of his name.

***"I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now."*** Philippians 1:3-5 (ESV).

With every blessing

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul".

**Paul Robinson**  
CEO Release International



## NIGERIA

# Trauma-healing workshops

## BACKGROUND

Nigeria is a country that has witnessed horrendous violence against Christians and Christian communities in the past few years. Although freedom of religion is established as part of the country's constitution, its 12 most northerly states have all adopted forms of *Sharia* (Islamic law), and Islamists actively pursue transforming the country into an Islamic nation.

The Islamist group *Boko Haram* has targeted Christians and churches in the north. Many people have been killed, and thousands more have had to flee homes and land. Further south Fulani Muslim herdsmen have attacked Christian communities with the intent of taking over the land. The death toll of Christians has been high, and many more live with the trauma of seeing loved ones killed or brutalised.

## THE PROJECT

Our partner in Nigeria runs trauma-healing workshops, helping Christians respond biblically and in a Christ-like way to severe persecution. The workshops help victims who have experienced suffering and loss to express their pain, to face up to it and to bring it to Christ, so that feelings do not become buried deep within. The workshop seeks to bring victims to a point where, by the grace of God, they are able to forgive those who have hurt them. They then have a foundation on which to rebuild their own lives.

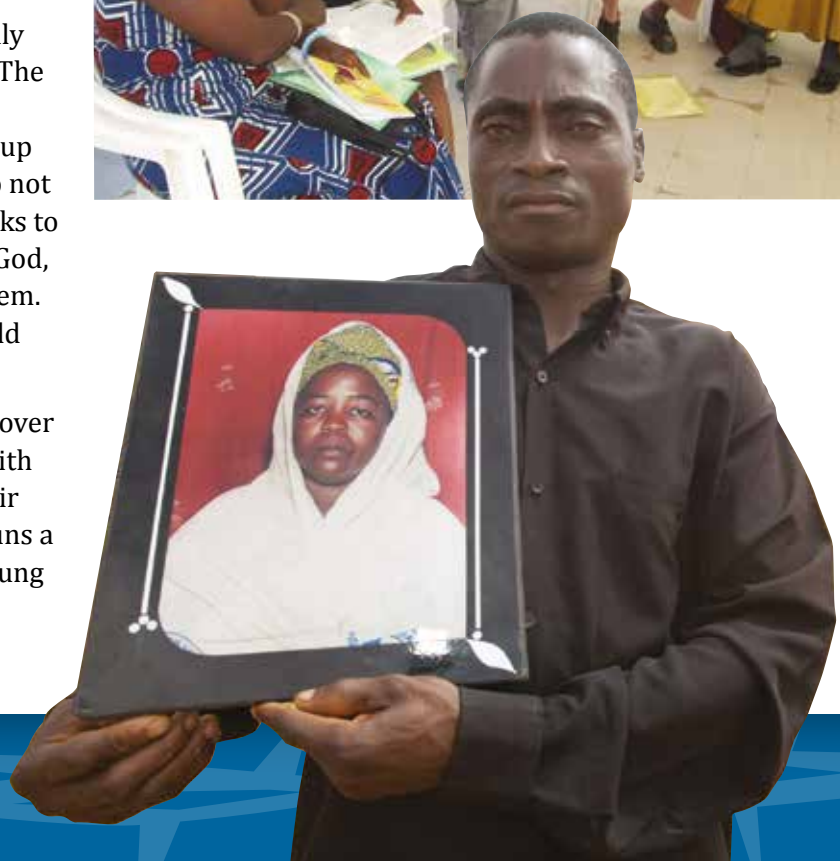
The workshops typically help about 40 people over a five-day period. They equip church leaders with biblical principles to respond to suffering – their own and the suffering of others. Our partner runs a separate youth version of the workshop, for young people traumatised by the violence.



## WHAT YOUR SUPPORT ACHIEVES

Costs will vary, depending on the location and numbers, but a single trauma-healing workshop will typically cost in the region of £200 per person attending. This involves transport, accommodation and food, along with workshop materials and the cost of facilitators running the programme.

*"Before, I didn't know about the importance of forgiveness, but it made me realise that you need to."* – Regina, who attended the young people's version of the trauma-healing workshop.



# **SRI LANKA**

# **Legal support**

## **BACKGROUND**

On Easter Sunday 2019 Sri Lanka was devastated by a series of bomb attacks on churches and hotels. More than 250 people were killed in the explosions, carried out by a little-known local Islamist militant group.

News of this shocking atrocity quickly spread around the world. But Christians in Sri Lanka have long been facing violent opposition from a different source – militant Buddhists. Churches have been burned down, individual Christians have been attacked – and threats and intimidation are rife.

In recent years a religious circular, related to the registration of places of worship, has been misused by Buddhists to force the closure of churches – and even to stop Christians meeting in their own homes for prayer.

Christians often face legal difficulties in the burial of their dead and find themselves discriminated against when applying for school places for their children. In rural areas social ostracism extends to preventing Christians renting houses – and even buying basic foodstuffs. All of this despite Sri Lanka having a constitution which supposedly guarantees freedom of religion.

## **THE PROJECT**

Our partner in Sri Lanka provides legal support for persecuted Christians. This includes lobbying for religious freedom and running awareness programmes for pastors. Sometimes our partner has had to turn away Christians who need legal aid, due to lack of finance.



## **WHAT YOUR SUPPORT ACHIEVES**

Release currently aims to contribute about £10,000 a year to this vital work. Members of Release staff have met Christians and pastors who have been helped with legal aid and advice. They have expressed great appreciation for this support, as they seek to serve the Lord and to proclaim the gospel in difficult circumstances.





## PAKISTAN

# Support for believers from a Muslim background

## BACKGROUND

Christians are estimated to make up about 2.5 per cent of Pakistan's 221m mainly Muslim population. In recent years they have experienced increasing discrimination and persecution. There have been a number of attacks in rural areas and others have been accused under Pakistan's notorious blasphemy laws. Christian women have experienced all kinds of abuse, including rape and kidnapping.

In such an environment it is extremely difficult for those who come to faith in Christ from a Muslim background (such as 'Peter', in the top picture). Many have had to go into hiding, in the face of threats from their local community – even from their families. One Christian convert has not seen her family for 11 years, and said that if she went back to her community she would be killed. She told Release that at times it felt like she was "living in a prison".

## THE PROJECT

One of our partners in Pakistan runs a ministry that supports those who have converted to Christianity from Islam. The team regularly visits these new believers, with the aim of strengthening them and supporting them, both practically and spiritually.

Because some of these Christians live in isolation our partner brings them together to have fellowship with one another and to be



strengthened in their faith. Many of these believers find it hard to obtain employment and so struggle to make ends meet. Release staff and volunteers have seen for themselves the difficulties some of these believers face. However, in the midst of their struggles and difficulties these believers continue to trust in the Lord and to find their hope in him.

## WHAT YOUR SUPPORT ACHIEVES

Your support funds the pastoral work among believers from a Muslim background, and also covers the rent of a safe house which is used for short-term accommodation for families who have had to flee their homes, and as a meeting place for Bible study and fellowship sessions. The whole project costs about £18,000 a year to support.



# INDIA

## Pastors' Conferences

### BACKGROUND

India is a country where Christians have experienced growing persecution over the past two decades, at the hands of a radical Hindu nationalist movement. The country has a secular constitution which, in theory, grants freedom of worship and witness – but this is not always upheld in practice.

Hindu extremists have been open and violent in opposing the church, particularly in rural areas and where new gospel initiatives are taking place. There have been cases of pastors being murdered, and many more have been beaten up and seen property damaged or destroyed. Pastors are also frequently accused of 'forcibly' converting people to Christianity – a tactic intended to intimidate, and to hinder gospel work.

### THE PROJECT

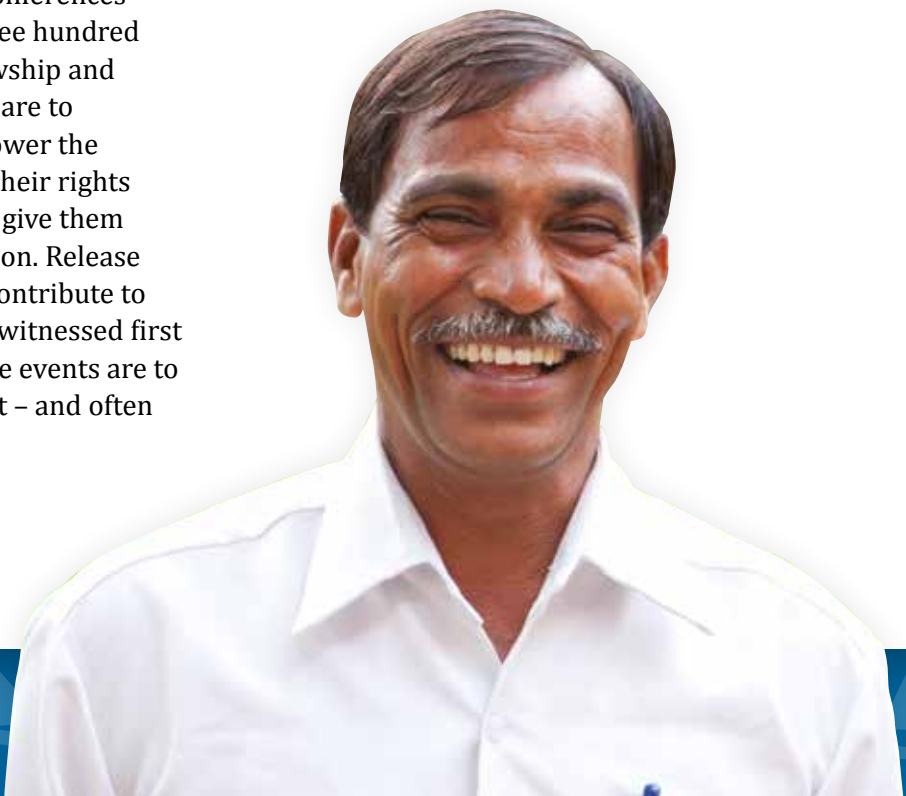
Our partner organisation in India runs several one-day conferences throughout the year, for pastors living in sensitive areas where persecution has been rife. These conferences draw together, typically, two or three hundred pastors for a day of teaching, fellowship and prayer. The aims of the conference are to encourage, inform, unite and empower the pastors; to help them understand their rights under Indian law and, above all, to give them solid biblical teaching on persecution. Release staff have had the opportunity to contribute to the latter over the years, and have witnessed first hand what an encouragement these events are to pastors serving the Lord in difficult – and often isolated – situations.



### WHAT YOUR SUPPORT ACHIEVES

It costs approximately £1,500 to fund a single pastors' conference. This includes helping the pastors with travel costs and providing a midday meal.

*"I was very encouraged by the teaching from 1 Peter at the conference. Whatever happens, we will continue with what we were called to do."*  
– Pastor Nagaraju, speaking after a Pastors' Conference.





# EGYPT

## Message of Hope

### BACKGROUND

Egypt is a country where Christians have experienced persecution from the early years of the Church. The persecutors have changed over the years; today persecution comes primarily from various forms of radical Islam, including, more recently, Islamic State. The form of persecution varies widely from ongoing oppression to direct and violent attacks. The ten million-plus Christians in Egypt are marginalised when it comes to education and suffer high levels of poverty, especially in the more rural areas such as Upper Egypt. There is particular pressure on those who convert from Islam, and the law in Egypt does not allow the changing of religion on a person's ID card if they are Muslim. At various times the persecution has taken a more deadly form, as seen in the attacks in August 2013 following the ousting of President Mohammed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood, and more recently in deadly bomb attacks on churches, and the targeted killing of Christians in the North Sinai region.

### THE PROJECT

Our partners in Egypt serve the Christian communities in Upper Egypt, mainly around the city of Minya. Release supports their ministry providing compassionate assistance. For Christians in the region poverty is a real issue, with many having to flee their homes due to ongoing oppression, leaving behind all their possessions. Our partners help Christians to rebuild their lives by, for example, providing beds, toilets and roofs for their new homes, as well as helping some to establish micro projects to earn a living.



### WHAT YOUR SUPPORT ACHIEVES

Release aims to fund the project with £12,000 per annum. "Now that you know, you must do something about it." – these were the words that Ruth, who leads this ministry, sensed God saying to her when she first saw the situation of Christians in Upper Egypt. She identifies her work with 1 Corinthians 12:25-26, requiring Christians to be a real body, the Body of Christ.





# AFGHANISTAN AND NORTHERN PAKISTAN

## Enabling outreach and discipleship through media

### BACKGROUND

In Afghanistan and the northern tribal areas of Pakistan the intimidation of Christians is ever present. A close association of Islam with nationalism has led to frequent attacks on Christians – be they converts, ethnic Christians or Christian workers.

If converts are discovered there is the risk that they will be killed. Anyone doing Christian work in this area, including expatriates and their children, are also at great risk.

Believers are few in number and many of those who have converted have on-going links to someone from the west who provides pastoral support. Unfortunately this can lead to the falling away of individuals and fledgling Christian churches if the western pastoral support dries up. Encouraging indigenous Christian leadership in the church continues to be a major challenge.

### THE PROJECT

Our partners support the local church, both with outreach, and working alongside persecuted believers. This includes the development and distribution of Christian materials (whether in print form, or in audio and visual formats), intended to help believers stand firm and grow in a very difficult environment.



It is an exciting time as more local people are becoming involved in the work. The daily radio broadcasts are also streamed on the internet and are suitable for mobile phones. This ministry received more than 1,500 unique calls in 2016, with many people calling multiple times. Nearly 5,000 follow-up calls were made and the follow up team is in regular contact with 500-600 people. Those producing and speaking on the programmes are from Pakistan and Afghanistan, which is a great step forward. Five websites established by the ministry have been visited 29,000 times and many Bibles and portions of Scripture have been produced and distributed. Nearly 5,000 people are receiving scriptural encouragement via text or memory cards for mobile phones (which contain evangelistic, teaching and discipleship material). The demand for material is at a level not seen previously.

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## CENTRAL ASIA

# Supporting pastors and Christian workers

## BACKGROUND

Central Asia (the former Soviet republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) is the vast area between the Caspian Sea and China, with Russia to the north and Afghanistan to the south.

Churches are raided and Christians are arrested – especially if they are meeting in homes because they cannot get their church registered. Pastors have been prosecuted for allowing children to attend their meetings, and have been fined, imprisoned, and had their activities banned. Promotion of their faith can result in prosecution and even imprisonment, while Bibles and Christian literature are confiscated and burnt.

‘People who become Christians are forced out of society and face many problems at work,’ says pastor Anton, from Tajikistan. He described a teenager who became a Christian. When his family found out, they locked him in his house and beat him. ‘They made him lie on a cold floor for months,’ said Anton. ‘I praise the Lord that he gave him strength not to give up on Jesus. Eventually he managed to escape.’

## THE PROJECT

This project supports 22 Christian workers across the region. It has been running for over 15 years. They lead churches which are generally too poor to support them. Many of them have part-time jobs, and Release’s gifts supplement their income to make their ministry possible.

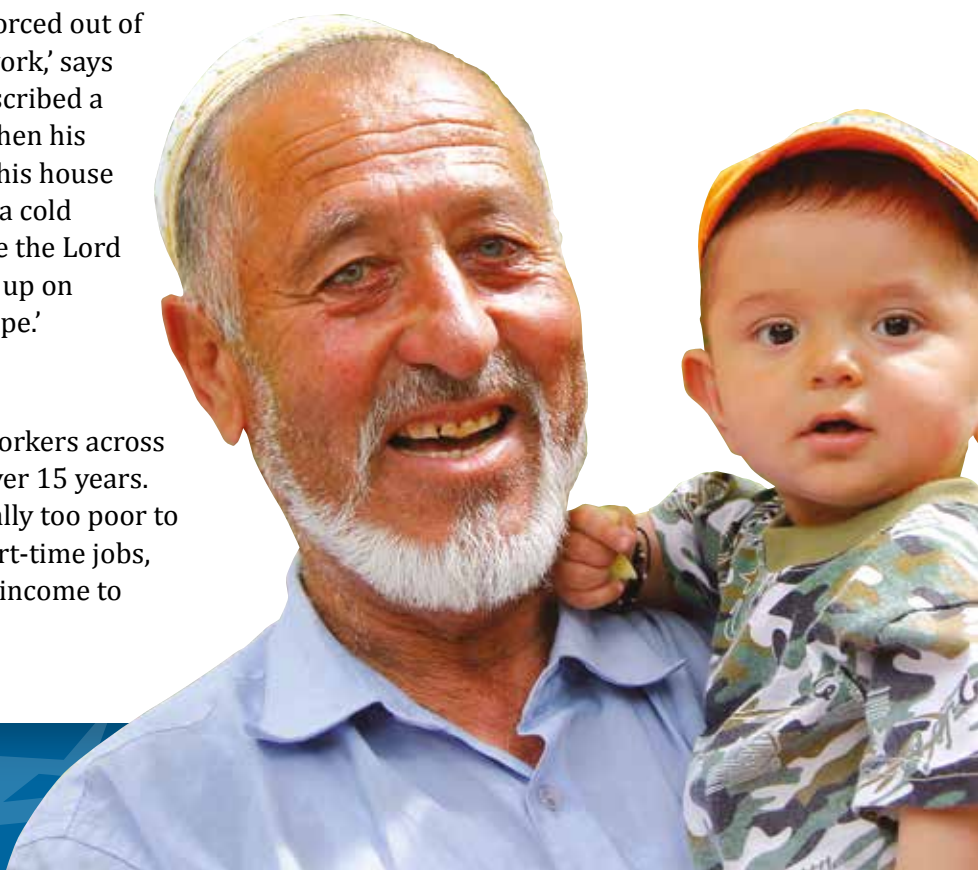


They regularly report how non-Christian neighbours in trouble turn to them and find wonderful answers to prayer which lead them to put their trust in Jesus and become his followers. These new believers then need to be built up in their faith, and the money from Release can help to provide Bibles, Christian literature and study materials.

## WHAT YOUR SUPPORT ACHIEVES

£2,000 would cover our support for one of these Christian workers for a whole year.

The long-term support is a great encouragement to them and enables a consistent Christian witness in hostile environments.





# Prayers



## HEAVENLY FATHER

Thank you that you never leave or forsake your people.

Thank you so much that you care for those who are hungry, naked, sick or in prison. Inspire us to care for them, too.

May all those who are suffering be assured of your love for them.

May they be strengthened by the practical help we give them through our partners who visit them in their distress, providing gifts of food, clothing, medicines and Christian resources to them and their families.

Amen.

## PRECIOUS JESUS

We love you, Lord, and we thank you for the honour of bearing your name together with all your people.

May those who are suffering for your name's sake be sustained and encouraged by the practical love of Release's partners around the world.

May we, and they, be ever more conscious of all being members of one body. May we share each other's burdens and express your love to one another so that the world can see the reality of your eternal love.

Amen.

## Prayer resources

**Prayer Shield** Our quarterly leaflet contains single daily prayer points for persecuted Christians in different countries.

**Praying for Persecuted Christians** is a helpful booklet with 30 examples of how our prayers can be made more specific.

Please also ask about our free world prayer map and prayer alert emails if you do not already receive them.





*Release partner Petr Jasek with a young victim of extremist attacks in northern Nigeria.*

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

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