

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL

JUL-SEPT 2021

# voice

of Persecuted Christians

**KEEP ON  
PRAYING FOR  
PERSECUTED  
BELIEVERS**

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



# Welcome

by Paul Robinson, CEO

**'We can and must help'**

**Richard Wurmbbrand, the Romanian pastor who inspired the founding of Release, was freed from prison in 1964 having endured the most terrible deprivations and torture. This profound experience shaped the rest of his life as he travelled throughout the Western world, passionately urging believers to support the families of Christian prisoners and martyrs in restricted nations.**

'When a Christian goes to prison – and often to torture or death – the suffering only begins,' he wrote in his bestselling autobiography *Tortured for Christ*. 'The family suffers endlessly. We can and must help them.'

That's why supporting the families of Christian martyrs has been one of our key activities during more than 50 years of ministry.

In 2018 we launched our annual **Day of the Christian Martyr**, celebrated this year on **June 29**, to provide an opportunity for churches in the UK and Ireland to support and pray for the families of today's courageous Christian martyrs.

In the following pages you can read some of the powerful stories and testimonies of the most recent generations of martyrs and their families.

Rashin Soodmand-Bazmjou, for example, describes the inspiring life of her father Rev

Hossein Soodmand, who was martyred in **Iran** in 1990 (see page 14).

'My father was utterly committed, and his love for God always came first,' she writes. 'In every circumstance of life, he never betrayed his Master. He took up his own cross, denied himself, and followed his beloved Lord.'

Rashin movingly recalls how, as a girl of just 13, she and her family visited her father in prison – little knowing that this would be the last time they would see him alive (page 15).

In **Nigeria**, attacks against Christians continue unabated (page 10) – leaving many hundreds widowed and orphaned. While many testimonies remain untold, some have been captured on social media. Rev Lawan Andimi, for example, who was abducted by terrorists in 2020, and killed three weeks later, used a video filmed by his kidnappers to declare that he was not discouraged because he was 'in the hands of God' (see page 11).

Persecuted Christians in **Burkina Faso** (page 6) and **Indonesia** (page 12) also need our prayers and help as they endure new waves of terror by jihadists.

Thank you so much for your continuing support of these courageous followers of Jesus.

**Please sponsor my Summer Skydive at [justgiving.com/Paul-Robinson149](https://justgiving.com/Paul-Robinson149)**



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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



## Church returned

Algerian Christians thank God for the return in May of an ancient church building seized by the authorities – but ask for continued prayer that other buildings will be allowed to re-open.

The umbrella organisation for protestant churches in Algeria, the Église Protestante d'Algérie (EPA), had requested the return of the church in Mostaganem for more than a decade. Since November 2017 the authorities have ordered 20 churches to cease their activities, sealing 16 church buildings.

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Release



Police officers stand guard in Hong Kong on the 32nd anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989. Photo: Reuters/Lam Yik.

## China's ongoing repression

On the 32nd anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre, Release urged China to grant full religious freedom for its citizens.

Today Christians can be arrested for street preaching, pastors threatened – and more than 200 weeks have passed since the disappearance of Christian human rights lawyer, Gao Zhisheng.

On June 4, 1989, Red Army tanks rolled into Tiananmen Square to crush the growing pro-democracy movement – nobody knows how many were killed. Christians were among the protesters, and today believers continue to be arrested for their faith, churches demolished and crosses torn down, in the continuing clampdown on freedom.

China has also arrested more than a million Uyghurs, in the north-western Xinjiang region, who have been rounded up into re-education camps. Although most are Muslims, a minority are Christians. They include Alimujiang Yimiti, who was sentenced to 15 years in 2008 for allegedly leaking state secrets.

*'Chief among all freedoms is the freedom to believe,' says Release CEO Paul Robinson. 'Despite its constitutional guarantees, China is continuing its crackdown on Christianity.'*

*'Release International again urges China to recognise the God-given right of its citizens to worship freely.'*

**• Please pray for wisdom for Christian leaders as they respond to these repressive policies.**

## Christian couple freed from death row



The Lahore High Court, Pakistan, in June acquitted a Christian couple sentenced to death on charges of blaspheming Islam.

Shagufta Kausar and her husband Shafqat Emmanuel were sentenced to death in 2014 for sending blasphemous text messages to

a local imam. The case drew international condemnation of Pakistan's controversial blasphemy laws. The European Union parliament, for example, was concerned that the evidence against the couple was 'deeply flawed'. The parliament also noted an 'alarming' increase in the use of blasphemy accusations in the country.

**• Pray for the couple as they are reunited with their family, and for their protection. Pray too for the acquittal of all Christians falsely accused of blasphemy.**

## Check out our latest podcasts



**North Korea: 'Safe' is a relative term** Despite extreme repression and suffering, there is an unquenchable thirst for the Word of God in North Korea – and the church is growing. Partner Eric Foley talks about some of the myths surrounding North Korea, the questions over Bible distribution into the country and the remarkable enduring faith of our Christian family.

**What does God want me to do now?** Release benefits hugely from the contributions of dedicated volunteers who speak in churches, organise prayer groups, fundraise or share information. Volunteer Co-ordinator Andrew Wilmshurst and volunteers Annette, Simon and Suzanne talk about the transforming impact of volunteering.

**Burkina Faso: one million displaced** Our brothers and sisters in the West African nation of Burkina Faso are being targeted, displaced and killed – because of their Christian faith. Susanna, who works for our sister ministry, Voice of the Martyrs, Poland, talks about the current situation and how your gifts are helping families and communities.

**Our topical Voice podcasts are available from [releaseinternational.org/podcast](http://releaseinternational.org/podcast) or via your favourite podcast app.**



**AFGHANISTAN:** Many fear the prospect of civil war and the return of Islamic law after US troops withdraw over the coming weeks. Pray for the tiny underground church during this time of change. Photo: Wali Sabawoon/NurPhoto.

## Indian police rescue pastor – then jail him

Police took a pastor and his family into custody to protect them from an attack by a 300-strong Hindu extremist mob – but then jailed the pastor under a baseless charge of forcible conversion.

Pastor Manu Damor, 35, was jailed after the mob attacked the worship service of five families in Rangwasa village, Indore District, Madhya Pradesh, on Easter Sunday, reports Morning Star News.

*'The police initially detained us to safeguard us from being killed by the mob,' said Pastor Damor. 'However,*

*the tables turned after large crowds of Hindu extremists and influential political people poured into the police station on the evening of our detention.'*

During the attack, assailants broke through a door and a metal roof in their attempt to reach the Christian families. *'We were very scared,'* said the pastor's wife Asha. *'We prayed for God to send help.'*

**• Pray that all charges against Pastor Damor are dropped – and for protection for these precious Christian families.**

## Father and baby son killed by militants



Fulani militants in Niger state, Nigeria, shot to death Pastor Leviticus Makpa and his three-year-old son, Godsend, in May. His wife managed to escape with their daughter.

Pastor Makpa, 39, a graduate of industrial chemistry from the University of Jos, had established a Christian school in Kamberi village – a remote area with few resources. The family had previously been attacked by militants, but managed to hide in a cave.

**• Pray for Pastor Makpa's wife and daughter at this time of loss; pray that God will meet their every need.**



***Christians are increasingly under attack in the West African nation of Burkina Faso, writes Release's Andrew Boyd.***

In August 2019 Pastor John's church was attacked by armed militants, leaving six church members dead. After three hours of shooting, John, his wife and seven children managed to flee for their lives, leaving behind all their possessions. Release's partner was able to give them emergency help.

In September 2019 Pastor Stephen was away from home when five armed jihadists turned up at his house in the Centre-Nord region of Burkina Faso to kill him.

The only way out for his family to escape was to break open a metal kitchen window. His wife, Naomi,

managed to scramble out with her four children – with shots ringing out behind them.

By the following day all their belongings and evangelistic materials had been stolen. Naomi and the children fled to a place of safety, where she was later reunited with her husband. A Release partner gave the family food and toiletries, telling us that Stephen and Naomi praised God for their narrow escape.

Pastor Daniel's church in the north of the country was also attacked by some 40 armed militants. While he, his wife and six children initially managed to escape, Daniel was shot

and killed when he returned to the village. Our partner also gave his family emergency aid.

Today African nations such as Burkina Faso have become the prize for violent jihadists trying to impose their firebrand version of Islam on the world.

The Global Terrorism Index confirms the jihadist centre of gravity is shifting from the Middle East to Africa. The number of killings by Islamic State (IS) terrorists in sub-Saharan Africa has risen by 67 per cent in a year.

According to the Washington-based Centre for National Interest: *'The epicentre [for jihadism] has moved westward to places like Syria and into the African Sahel... Various jihadist factions have set Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad, Nigeria, Somalia and Mozambique ablaze.'*

Until 1960, landlocked Burkina Faso was the French colony Upper Volta. Two thirds of the population are illiterate and unemployment is widespread – conditions that are ripe for unrest.

Before 2015, Muslims, Christians and animists generally lived together in peace in Burkina Faso, whose name means 'Land of incorruptible people'. Since then, however, militants affiliated to Al Qaeda and IS have stepped up their assaults. By 2020 militants had killed almost 4,000 Burkinabés.

### ***'Attacks range from bombings, killings, kidnappings and school burnings to assaults on places of worship and religious leaders'***

The UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) has recorded more than a million refugees in the country. These are mainly women and children, fleeing *'attacks by armed groups against security forces, and the kidnappings and killings of civilians and religious representatives,'* says the agency.

Aid workers warn of a humanitarian crisis. According to the UK charity Save the Children, a third of all children under the age of five in Burkina Faso are now malnourished.

### **Christians targeted**

In parts of the north, Christians are the primary targets. The attacks range from bombings, killings, kidnappings and school burnings to assaults on places of worship and religious leaders.

Over one period of three months, Islamists killed 14 at a Catholic church, and set fire to a Protestant church, killing a further 24 worshippers, including a pastor.

They also killed five members of a church in Sebba, including the pastor, his son and two nephews. They spared only the pastor's two daughters.

Our partner working in Burkina Faso



*Attacks by militants have caused more than a million people to be displaced.  
Photo: Reuters/Luc Gnago.*

says that the jihadists have been targeting pastors and priests, forcing churches to close their doors and meet in secret.

During these attacks, the militants stop villagers and demand to know their religion. Any who say they are Christian are killed immediately, while those of other faiths are allowed to return home unharmed.

But Christians are not the only target. The jihadists are also attacking Muslim imams who oppose their beliefs. And in areas under their control in Mali they have imposed a harsh version of sharia (Islamic law).

### **As goes Nigeria?**

Local Christians fear that Burkina Faso could become the next Nigeria, where armed militants continue to terrorise Christians.

In Burkina Faso, just as in Nigeria, militants have ready access to weapons from Libya. The country is awash with arms, following the fall of strongman Colonel Gaddafi in 2011.

In Nigeria, the terrorist group Boko Haram has split into pro-al-Qaeda and pro-IS factions. Broadly, the same has happened in Burkina Faso, where the

jihadists have divided into three main groups.

According to the Global Terrorism Index, the faction responsible for most of the killings – including that of Christians – is Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS).

However, over the past year the number of attacks has decreased and the death rate has fallen.

Observers say this is partly due to vicious infighting between rival factions who are too busy murdering each other to kill outsiders.

But according to the International Crisis Group: *'The country is locked in a perilous downward spiral.'* In the words of risk consultancy GlobalStrat: *'Africa is going to be the battleground of jihad for the next 20 years, and it's going to replace the Middle East.'*

### **Deterioration**

Susanna is a staff worker of our associate ministry Voice of the Martyrs Poland.

In recent years, she has witnessed the rapid deterioration of Burkina Faso and the impact on Christians there.

*'Burkina Faso was beautiful and*

## HELPING THE FAMILIES OF CHRISTIAN MARTYRS

*peaceful,' she says, 'but now everything is lost.'*

To begin with, she says, the insecurity affected everyone equally. *'Then in April 2019, the jihadists announced they would focus on Christians.'*

Most of Burkina Faso's Christians live in the south, but the minority in the north soon found themselves targeted by the jihadists from Mali. *'The jihadists came looking for Christians to kidnap or kill them.'*

As a result, many have fled, swelling the numbers of refugees.



## YOUR HELP MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Thanks to your support, food and toiletries have been given to more than 8,000 persecuted Christians in Burkina Faso, and wells have been drilled to provide them with clean drinking water.

Our partner has also paid for school fees and school kits for 440 children from Christian families displaced by conflict. These include the children of widows who have lost their husbands in terrorist attacks, as well as the children of displaced pastors.

Many of these precious families have found themselves in the most desperate circumstances.

Some of these children, for example, have been driven out of their schools by both Covid and conflict for up to three years. Helping to provide for their education not only benefits the children – but also their parents and caregivers, who are struggling to provide for the needs of their families.

*'We are so happy about this educational project,'* said pastor's wife Miriam, whose family had to flee when terrorists attacked their village.

*'We need your prayers,'* says Susanna of Voice of the Martyrs Poland. *'There is so much to do. The burden on families and local churches is enormous. We need wisdom to help those who are suffering.'*

*'In Burkina Faso we now have a million displaced people. They have nothing.'*

*'Please pray for those who have lost loved ones, and for the Christians there to be a light to others in this horrific situation and to work to bring change.'*

*'The situation facing Christians in Burkina Faso is now similar to Nigeria,'* she believes. There, attacks against Christians in the north and Middle Belt are a daily occurrence.

And, just as in Nigeria, the jihadists have attacked schools to try to purge the Western influence from their culture. They have burned down schools and forced 2,000 to close, denying 300,000 pupils an education.

*'Children have seen their teachers beaten and killed,'* says Susanna. *'I can't imagine what it must be like to be a small child and to witness such horrific things.'*

**Hear Susanna talk about the current crisis in Burkina Faso in our recent podcast (see page 5).**



**Population:** 21.4 million

**Capital:** Ouagadougou

**Government:** Presidential republic

**Religion:** Muslim 62%, Roman Catholic 23%, Traditional/Animist 8%, Protestant 6%, Other 1%

Sources: World Factbook.



*Militants in Burkina Faso have attacked schools, forcing 2,000 to close, and denying 300,000 pupils an education. Stock photo.*

## Please pray

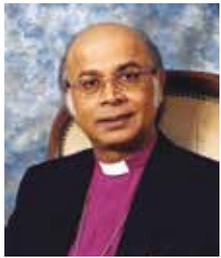
- that God will protect churches and believers as they face growing attacks by armed militants throughout sub-Saharan Africa
- that national and regional authorities will take stronger action to protect all citizens
- for Release's partner which is providing food and toiletries to displaced Christian families – and helping their children to receive an education

*Names have been changed.*

# THE GROWING JIHAD

*Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali, who is on the council of reference of Release International, expresses his concern that extremism is spreading in Africa.*

In Nigeria, it is certainly a resumption of the jihad which was interrupted by the arrival of the British. This may be true of other areas in the region which came under the influence of colonial powers.



The arrival of foreign jihadists from as far away as Syria and even Afghanistan is reinforcing the ability of the local militants to

penetrate more deeply into countries such as Burkina Faso and also the west of Nigeria.

The withdrawal of NATO-led forces from Afghanistan will certainly be seen as Western weakness by the jihadists and will encourage further adventures in poorly governed areas like the Sahel.

What is needed is both an African response led by the West African states and a UN-backed international response which will commit to staying until the problem is resolved.



*Boko Haram terrorists, Nigeria*

If Nigeria is to continue as a single entity, a concerted military and political effort has to be made to stop the depredations of so-called herders in the Middle Belt and Yoruba land.

Humanly speaking, the prognosis doesn't look good. Agencies such as Release will have to prepare to support more and more Christian communities under pressure with prayer, advocacy and relief. 

## YOUR OPPORTUNITY TO HELP THE FAMILIES OF CHRISTIAN MARTYRS

*'If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you'*

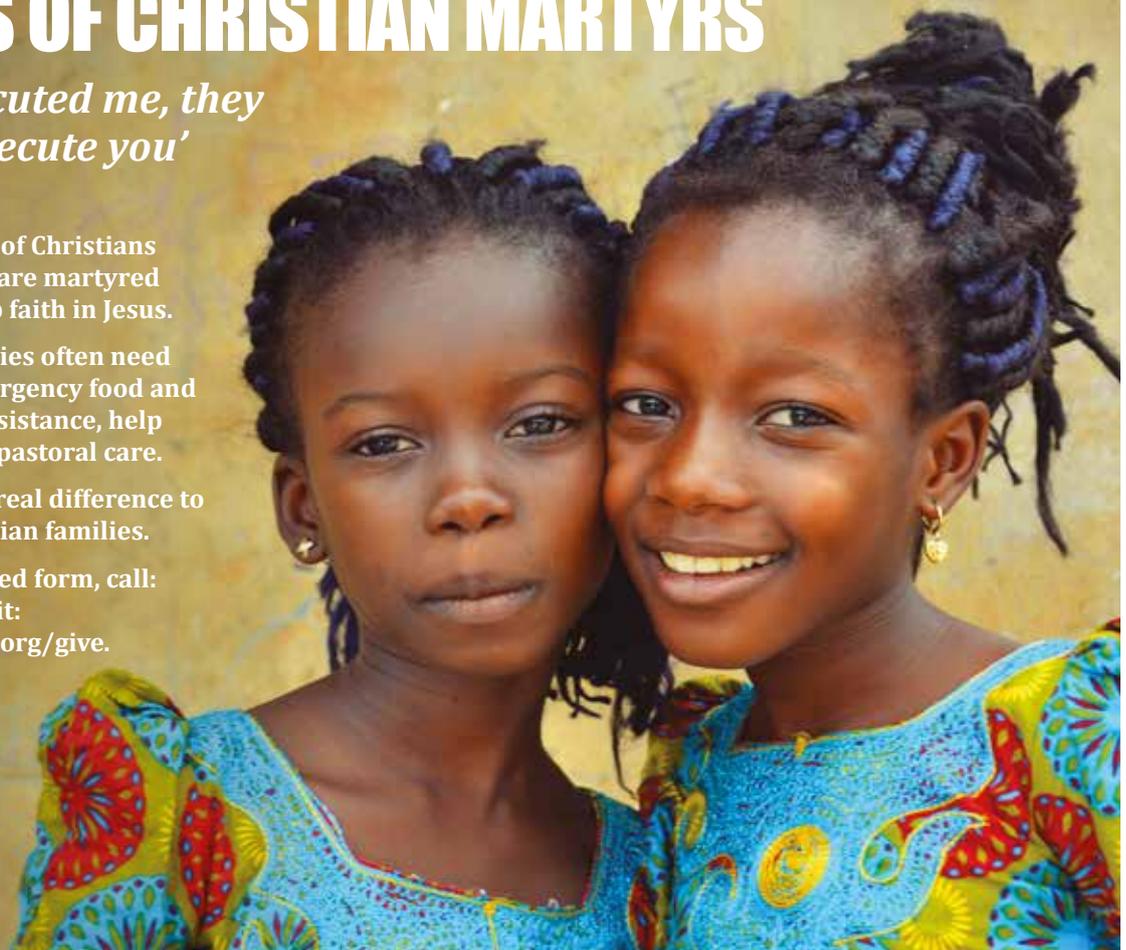
John 15:20

Every year a number of Christians in restricted nations are martyred because of their deep faith in Jesus.

Their surviving families often need support: such as emergency food and supplies, financial assistance, help with school fees and pastoral care.

Your gift can make a real difference to these precious Christian families.

Please use the attached form, call: 01689 823491 or visit: [releaseinternational.org/give](http://releaseinternational.org/give).



# When the pain goes on

*A year has passed since Islamists attacked Bilkisu's village. But for this Nigerian Christian, the pain and the traumatic memories are still raw, writes Release's Kenneth Harrod.*

Seven members of Bilkisu's family were killed on the night Fulani militants attacked Chibob village in southern Kaduna state last July.

Her young son survived the attack, but suffered a gunshot wound. Bilkisu was also shot in the arm. Over the past year she has had several operations to try to repair the shattered bone; in the most recent surgery doctors took a piece of bone from her leg to replace the damaged part in her arm.

She still suffers nightmares about the attack – and some nights can hardly sleep. The pain from the wound is



*Bilkisu lost seven members of her family when militants attacked her village.*

sometimes unbearable, she says, despite being on constant medication and painkillers.

***'I know that God, who has preserved my life, will continually be my comfort'***

*'It is painful. I don't know what to think, I don't know what to do,' she said. 'I am nursing my wounds now. When I am better then I can think of where to live and how to care for my son. I thank God for saving him. I will think about his education when I get better.'*

Bilkisu is currently staying with a relative, to minimise bills while her hospital treatment continues. *'I know that God, who has preserved my life, will continually be my comfort and will provide for me and my child,'* she said.

Asked what her thoughts are towards the attackers who killed many of her family and left her in such pain, she admitted: *'Honestly, at this stage, I can only pray for God to give me the will to forgive. It is hard.'*

- Please pray that Bilkisu will be completely healed from the gunshot wound. Pray that the Lord will provide for her and her young son, and will give her the grace to forgive.



**Population:** 219 million

**Capital:** Abuja

**Government:** Federal presidential republic

**Religion:** Muslim 53%, Christian 50%, Other 7%

*Sources: World Factbook.*

## RELEASE'S MINISTRY IN NIGERIA



**Release has helped persecuted Christians by providing:**

- training and help for persecuted pastors
- care and counselling for the victims of trauma
- support for families displaced by violence
- support for the families of martyrs

# Kidnapping on the rise in Nigeria

*The abduction of Christians is becoming the latest potent weapon used by Islamists, says one of Release's partners.*



In recent years, the death toll in Nigeria has been high, as heavily armed Islamist militants have continued their relentless assault on Christian communities. Even the Covid-19 pandemic has not stopped the killing of Christians in the north and across the central belt of the country.

But now it seems extremists are increasingly turning to kidnapping as well – and one of Release's partners in Nigeria thinks this is a deliberate tactic.

*'The targeting and kidnapping of Christians has been a deliberately calculated part of their jihad, to further impoverish Christian communities by the demands of millions of naira in ransom,' he said.*

Though the government has denied paying any ransoms, and families are warned by security agencies not to admit to paying them, unofficial

reports say that so far Christian communities and churches have been forced to pay more than 200 million naira (about £380,000) in ransom to the Fulani militia since 2019.

***'In the first four months of this year, more than 2,200 Christians have been abducted.'***

For example, the Kaduna state government reported that between January and March of this year 323 people – all from Christian villages and communities – were killed by Fulani militants. But the same report added that they had kidnapped as many as 949 people in the same period. One human rights group in Nigeria estimated that nearly 1,500 Christians have been killed across Nigeria in the first four months of this year – and that more than 2,200 have been abducted.

Sometimes militants post video of those kidnapped on social media, such as Rev Lawan Andimi (pictured), a state chairman of the Christian Association of Nigeria, who was abducted in January 2020 – and killed three weeks later. In the video he spoke movingly and with confidence about his faith, declaring that he was not discouraged because he was 'in the hands of God'.

Our partner has met with church leaders in Kaduna who have been raising money to pay ransom money for church members. *'The targeting of church members has escalated,'* he said. As a result, our partner has had to be flexible with their programme to train pastors.

***'Your prayers are keeping us alive and we continue to see the Lord's protection, grace and guidance'***

*'The security situation has been bad and we had to abort a trip – twice, unfortunately. We have made further plans, praying that the situation will be a little better, especially for the pastors coming from various villages, which is where most of the challenge is.'*

*'In Borno state, Boko Haram has taken over some communities on the outskirts of Maiduguri and has hoisted its flags there. As far as we know, no pastors have been abducted recently from our group in that area – but so many have been kidnapped in the past few months.'*

Our partner added: *'Thank you so much for keeping us in your prayers. Your prayers are keeping us alive and we continue to see the Lord's protection, grace and guidance in all we do.'*

**• Please continue to pray for all Christians in Nigeria's north and central belt regions, and especially for church leaders. Pray too for Release's partner providing training and encouragement for persecuted pastors.**

# INDONESIA



Armed police officers stand guard outside a church in Jakarta, Indonesia, at Easter. Photo: Reuters/Ajeng Dinar Ulfiana.



Six Christians were killed in November when terrorists attacked their village.

## Christians killed by militants

*Indonesian believers are concerned by a number of attacks in recent months, reports Release's Stephen McIlroy.*

In November 2020, a militant group attacked half a dozen homes in Lembantongoa village in Central Sulawesi. The mob were said to have used swords and guns to kill six Christians, believed to be members of the Salvation Army.

The authorities blamed the attack on Sulawesi-based East Indonesia Mujahideen (MIT), one of the Islamist groups that have pledged allegiance to Islamic State (IS).

Village head Rifai told the AFP news agency that one victim had been beheaded. Some villagers who managed to hide in the forest have returned, while others are trying to resettle in different locations.

According to witnesses, the perpetrators had asked for food from the victims – who were attacked when they refused. The Salvation Army in Indonesia condemned the

violence as 'an inhuman act'.

Such attacks are nothing new for Indonesian Christians. In 2018, an IS-linked group Jamaah Ansharut Daulah staged a wave of suicide bombings by families – including young children – at churches in the country's second-largest city, Surabaya, killing a dozen believers.

More recently, at the end of March 2021, suicide bombers attacked a church in Makassar, South Sulawesi, which was celebrating Palm Sunday. It is believed that a young, newly-wed couple rode up to the building on a motorcycle and attempted to gain entry. After being challenged by guards, they detonated a pressure-cooker type bomb, filled with high explosive and nails, which killed them and wounded around 20 others.

Had the attackers managed to get into the main entrance of the church,

many more could have been injured or killed, according to the mayor of Makassar.

The Indonesian authorities believe that the perpetrators were members of Jemaah Anshorut Daulah (JAD), which is also affiliated to IS. This same group was responsible for attacks on a coffee shop in 2016 and on churches and a police station in 2018.

A further four Christian men, aged between 52 and 61 years old, were killed in Sigi village, Central Sulawesi, in May. The victims were working in their coffee plantation 4km away from their village. It is believed that they were attacked by five terrorists; one of the farmers was beheaded, and the others stabbed. Three of the farmers came from local Protestant churches while the fourth was a member of a Catholic church.

**• Please pray that these attacks by terrorists will stop, and pray for protection for all Christians in Indonesia. Pray too for all the families who have suffered loss in recent months.**



**Population:** 275 million

**Capital:** Jakarta

**Government:** Presidential republic

**Religion:** Muslim 87%, Christian 10%, Hindu 2%, Other 1%

Sources: World Factbook.

# HINDU EXTREMISTS ATTACK PASTORS

*In India gospel ministry continues to be targeted by Hindu nationalists, with church leaders frequently being accused of breaching conversion laws, writes Release's Kenneth Harrod.*

Pastor Ram Niwas (pictured) and his wife willingly accepted the invitation to attend a prayer meeting at the home of a member of his congregation. But the small meeting was to come to an abrupt and violent end.

A group of Hindu nationalists broke in, accused the pastor of converting people, and attacked both he and his wife with iron rods and sticks. The attackers warned the pastor that he would be killed if he didn't either leave the area or stop his gospel ministry.

The couple, along with their host, a Mr Nagender, were all taken to the local hospital with head injuries. Release's partner in India was called and was able to provide some financial support to pay for hospital treatment.

## *'Pastor Samaru was dragged from his pulpit'*

Pastor Niwas has been running an independent church in the Sitamari district of Bihar state, in the north of India, for the past eight years. During that time he has faced several threats from local Hindu nationalists. But he has persevered in his ministry.

On many occasions in India the disruption of church services and prayer meetings is coupled with accusations that a pastor is indulging in some form of fraudulent conversion activities.

Pastor Samaru was dragged from his pulpit during an Easter service at his church in Madhya Pradesh. The attackers taunted him and warned him to stop leading Christian services in the area. Later they informed the local police, who arrested him. He was questioned at the police station before Release partners and other local church leaders were called to intervene. Later the same day he was released without being charged with committing any offence.

This pattern of intimidation and accusation is repeated constantly across India, although, according to our partner, there has never been a court conviction of a Christian pastor under anti-conversion laws.

Earlier this year tougher anti-conversion laws were passed in Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat and a similar law is awaiting approval in Uttar Pradesh. Release's partner fears that other states in India could move to adopt similar, tougher laws – which will continue to be used by extremists to hinder legitimate gospel ministry.

• **Please continue to pray for pastors in India – especially those who face attacks and accusations intended to hinder their ministry. Pray that stricter anti-conversion laws will not be passed across the country.**



Pastor Ram Niwas



**Population:** 1.3 billion

**Capital:** New Delhi

**Government:** Federal parliamentary republic

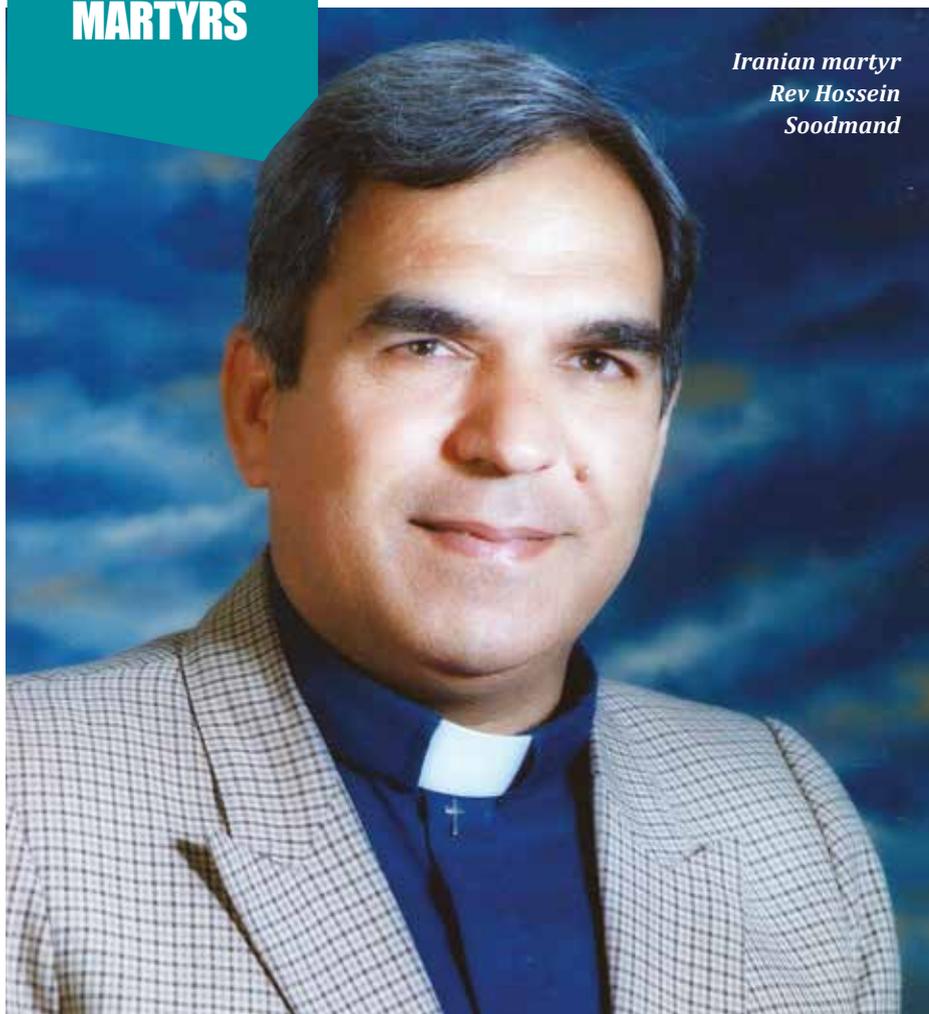
**Religion:** Hindu 74%, Muslim 14 %, Christian 6%, other 6%

Sources: World Factbook, Operation World.

## RELEASE'S MINISTRY IN INDIA

**Thanks to your gifts, Release helps persecuted Christians in India by providing:**

- financial and practical help for victims of attacks
- financial support for the families of martyrs
- legal help and advice
- Bibles and Christian literature for outreach and discipleship



*Iranian martyr  
Rev Hossein  
Soodmand*

*a bad example for them. So, I am ready to go to prison and, if necessary, to give my life.”*

My father was utterly committed, and his love for God always came first. In every circumstance of life, he never betrayed his Master. He took up his own cross, denied himself, and followed his beloved Lord. And so, he was arrested.

***‘In a strange way my father’s martyrdom strengthened my faith, as I knew he had died as a soldier in God’s army.’***

I was just thirteen years old when my father was executed (hanged) in Mashhad prison on December 3, 1990, for his Christian faith and service, without the knowledge of his family. He was buried in a part of the graveyard where we were not even allowed to put a headstone.

After such a tragedy, I could have become full of self-pity, but in a strange way my father’s martyrdom strengthened my faith, as I knew he had died as a soldier in God’s army.



*Rev Hossein Soodmand’s unmarked grave.*

## **‘I am ready to sacrifice my soul for my sheep’**

*Rashin Soodmand-Bazmjou recalls the inspiring life of her father Hossein Soodmand, who was martyred in Iran in 1990.*

“I came to know Jesus as a young child through the example of my father and mother in Iran.

My father, the Rev Hossein Soodmand, was born a Muslim, but became a Christian in the early 1960s. Such was his love for the Lord Jesus that he became the leader of the Assemblies of God churches in Mashhad – a fiercely fanatical Muslim city in the west of Iran.

My father led a church in the basement of our house, and also

many other home groups. I vividly remember all the people whose lives were changed. Because of the impact of his ministry, the Islamic authorities increased their persecution of Christians.

*“I am a follower of the great shepherd of the sheep, our Lord Jesus Christ, and I am ready to sacrifice my soul for my sheep,” said my father. “For me to escape from this persecution would cause the hearts of my flock to become cold and weak. And I never want to be*

I wrote a letter to God, promising to serve Him as my father had done. I came to England to attend Bible college, and there met my husband, Rev Amir Bazmjou. Now 29 years have passed since I dedicated that letter to God – and during these years, He has led me faithfully step by step and has shown me His plans. ”

*Rashin and her husband Amir are the founders of Torch Ministries, whose vision is to see Farsi speakers follow the Lord Jesus, be transformed, restored, disciplined and serve the Kingdom of God.*



**Population:** 86 million  
**Capital:** Tehran  
**Government type:** Theocratic republic  
**Religion:** Muslim 95.9%, Christian 1.6%, Other 2.5%

*Sources: Operation World, World Factbook.*

**Rashin Soodmand-Bazmjou**

# When I last saw my father...

One autumn morning in October 1990, I woke up with a strange sense of joy, a joy that was driving out the intense sadness that had ruled my young thirteen-year-old heart for so many days.

Before my father’s arrest I had always known this joy. It was the simple joy a young girl has when she is with her family, the joy of having her father nearby, the joy of being in her home. Now I was about to feel this joy again, not in our home this time, but in the visiting room of our city’s prison. For me this didn’t matter: I was going to see my Dad. I was so happy!

My Mum was blind, so when we arrived, we held her hand firmly to lead her. We were told to wait in a room and that our Dad would come shortly. When he arrived after a few minutes, we hugged him with uncontainable joy and started crawling all over him, telling him about anything and everything.

Dad asked about school and what we were doing. He talked in his usual loving tone, but also with authority, emphasising that we

should study well and work hard. We were all very happy and so was my father, but he seemed a little strange that day.

When it was time to go, my siblings and I were confused. We didn’t know why we had to ask someone else’s permission to see our father; we didn’t know why someone else should decide how long we could see him. I knew he was a good man.

He would go and visit people who needed help, riding his bicycle for hours until he reached their homes, pedalling with legs that suffered from varicose veins. He did this because he was a follower of Jesus, and he said that Jesus was not interested in empty words. Jesus wanted men and women of action.

Alas, we had no choice. We had to say goodbye and be separated from

him. As we were walking away, we looked back to see my father’s face one more time that day. He was standing in the doorway. We held his gaze and looked into his eyes filled with tears; one rolled down his cheek, squeezed my heart, and made me miss him again.

We thought at the time that his were tears of longing, but two weeks later, when we were told of his execution, we realised that those tears were not for our temporary separation and passing sadness – but for his last visit with his loved ones.

That day, my father had a choice: he had to choose between his blind wife and children, and his faith in Christ, the faith that requires a man of action.

I am proud he chose Christ.



**Read more from courageous Christian women in Embrace, the free newsletter of our Release Women ministry. Order your copy using the attached form.**

## FUNDRAISING

*Your opportunity to help Robert de Berry and accompanying cyclists raise £250,000 for Release and CSW next year.*



*Robert and team raised £60,000 for persecuted Christians in 2017.*

# Pedal Power!

**In 2017, in support of Release International and CSW, three of us completed a 900-mile pilgrimage from the north coast of Scotland to the Sussex coast, and dozens of other riders joined us for a day or two. I have done sponsored bike rides every five years, and guess that this ride in 2022 might be my last, as it will be completed in my 80th year!**

At the end of each day we will visit local churches for a 90-minute meeting to raise awareness, to stimulate prayer, to invite people

to support CSW and Release, and to raise sponsorship.

We are encouraged that so many people have already enthusiastically agreed to help and to join us on the ride for a day – or even the whole distance.

I invite you to do what you can to help us get support and encouragement to persecuted Christians. **👉**

**Robert de Berry**



## PLEASE SUPPORT ROBERT'S BIKE PILGRIMAGE 2022

Retired vicar Robert de Berry is undertaking a massive sponsored bike ride for persecuted Christians between May 14-June 25, 2022 – and needs your help!

### ROUTE: NORTH FORELAND POINT LIGHTHOUSE, KENT, TO LAND'S END, CORNWALL – AND BACK!

Robert will be speaking in local churches along the way and aims to raise £250,000 through sponsorship. He hopes to achieve this by recruiting ten whole journey riders each raising £3,000 or more, and ten stage riders each day, each raising £500 or more. The total will be divided equally between Release International and CSW.

- To join the ride in your area, or perhaps for half or for all of it
- To offer to be one of the support drivers from town to town
- To offer evening meal and overnight accommodation to one of the riders

Please complete the form at [releaseinternational.org/bikepilgrims](https://releaseinternational.org/bikepilgrims)

**ROBERT'S ROUTE** • North Foreland Point Lighthouse • Canterbury • Maidstone • Orpington • Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells • Redhill and Cheam • Dorking • Godalming • Cranleigh • Winchester • Salisbury • Sherborne • Taunton • Barnstaple • Bude • Newquay • Land's End • Penzance • Truro • St Austell • Plymouth • Exeter • Seaton • Axminster • Dorchester • Bournemouth • Southampton • Portsmouth • Chichester • Worthing • Brighton • Eastbourne • Hastings • Ashford • Folkestone • Margate • North Foreland Point Lighthouse

# Good News



## PAUL'S SUMMER SKYDIVE!

**Please support Release CEO Paul Robinson as he leaps from 15,000 feet to raise at least £5,000 for Release.**

*'I struggle with heights, so this will be hard for me!'* says Paul, who is preparing for a freefall skydive in August, when he will jump from a plane at 15,000 feet – the highest available tandem skydive in the UK.

*'When I was young I thought nothing of climbing mountains or parachuting out of aircraft. But two years ago, while climbing a volcano in Kenya, I developed a very real difficulty with heights. I was disoriented and sometimes "frozen" to the spot – but I had to keep going because there is no mountain rescue in Kenya!'*

Please pray for Paul as he prepares for this great aerial challenge. You can sponsor Paul – and send him an encouraging message – at [justgiving.com/Paul-Robinson149](https://justgiving.com/Paul-Robinson149).



## Sponsored rides raise £650 for trauma counselling



**Well done to the energetic youth group at Easterhill Community Church, Glasgow, who raised a fantastic £650 for persecuted Christians in Nigeria.**

*'We heard that in some countries, young people are denied access to good jobs when they leave school if they say they are a Christian and they can be badly discriminated against in their school and community,'* they said on their fundraising page at JustGiving.

*'After looking through some of Release's Lockdown Church resources, they decided to raise money for a project in Nigeria which provides trauma counselling to Christians who have suffered violent attacks,'* said youth leader Joy. *'This was particularly relevant because the project includes special workshops for young people.'*

In response to these needs, members of the youth group organised sponsored bike rides, promoted on JustGiving, raising to date a terrific £650. A brilliant effort!



**FREEDOM FOR IRANIAN CONVERT:** We thank God for the release from prison of MajidReza Souzanchi Kushani in April, who had been jailed for establishing house churches in Iran. Pray for MajidReza, who caught Covid while in detention, as he looks for work and adjusts to life outside prison.

# IF PRISON WALLS COULD SPEAK

*Don't miss the exciting new drama tour by Artless Theatre Company which launches this September. This is an ideal opportunity to raise the profile of persecuted Christians across the UK. Could your church be a venue, this year or next?*

*If Prison Walls Could Speak* is an inspiring one-man performance featuring immersive video and sound. Based on the book *Imprisoned with ISIS*, the play tells the story of Petr Jasek, who, in 2015, was jailed for his work aiding persecuted Christians in Sudan.

Charged as a spy and forced into horrifying prison conditions, Petr faced torturers, Islamic State terrorists and legal challenges on his path to freedom. Drawing on the testimonies of persecuted Christians from around the world this production sheds light on the wider

struggles of the underground church – and serves as a rallying cry for prayer and intercession.

*If Prison Walls Could Speak*, which runs for one hour 40 minutes (including interval), is a dramatic and compelling testimony of God's faithfulness and the unstoppable nature of His Kingdom.

Artless Theatre Company describes their mission as being 'to provide an opportunity for Christians and particularly non-Christians to encounter the gospel through high-quality theatre and performance'.

The company is looking to stage performances in around 100 churches in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, starting in September 2021 and continuing until the end of 2022.

*'This production contains a message that is both inspiring and challenging for both Christian and non-Christian audiences alike,'* says Artless Director Chris Poch. *'If you're looking for a powerful and thought-provoking outreach opportunity, this may be it. We would love to partner with your church as part of our national tour.'*

*'We are so pleased to collaborate with Artless in this innovative multimedia tour,'* says Release's Director of Engagement, Laura Hayes.

*'This is a fantastic opportunity for churches throughout the UK to raise the profile of persecuted Christians by hosting a performance.'*

# IF PRISON WALLS COULD SPEAK



Artless  
Theatre Co.  
RELEASE INTERNATIONAL  
**voice**  
of Persecuted Christians

## JOIN THE TOUR!

Please discuss with your church leaders about hosting a performance. Email Laura at [lhayes@releaseinternational.org](mailto:lhayes@releaseinternational.org) to request our free information pack which gives full details of what is required.

Artless charges churches a subsidised booking fee of £580, plus travel, per performance - and recommends that churches sell tickets at £5 each (or whatever price they wish). A share of the booking fee will be donated to Release.

Artless provides lighting, sound and raised staging that can fit most church layouts. Publicity materials, including personalised A3 posters, will also be provided for churches to promote their event - as well as resources from Release.

More than 30 churches throughout the UK have already booked to host performances in 2021 and 2022.

Email [lhayes@releaseinternational.org](mailto:lhayes@releaseinternational.org) to request our free information pack. Dates and locations may be subject to change.

## TOUR DATES

### 2021

**LONDON (within M25)** Sept 10-16

**KENT** Oct 11-17

**EAST ANGLIA (Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambs)**  
Oct 25-31

**ESSEX/HERTS** Nov 8-13

### 2022

**NORTHERN IRELAND** Jan 24-30

**WEST MIDLANDS** Feb 7-20

**NORTH EAST** Mar 7-13

**SOUTH WEST** May 9-22

**WALES** June 6-12

**SOUTH (East/West Sussex, Hampshire, Surrey)** June 20-26

**EAST MIDLANDS** July 11-17

**SCOTLAND**  
Aug 1-5  
Aug 6-11  
(Fringe)

**NORTH WEST** Sept 12-25

**LONDON (within M25)** Oct 17-23

**OXFORD & BUCKS** Oct 31-Nov 6

See [artless.org.uk/prisonwalls](http://artless.org.uk/prisonwalls) for the latest tour information.

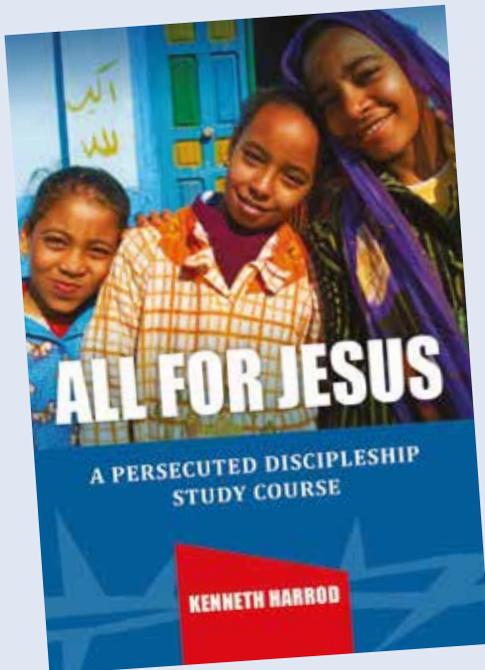
### KEY TO REGIONS



- A LONDON
- B KENT
- C EAST ANGLIA
- D ESSEX/HERTS
- E N. IRELAND
- F W. MIDLANDS
- G NORTH EAST
- H SOUTH WEST
- I WALES
- J SOUTH
- K E. MIDLANDS
- L SCOTLAND
- M NORTH WEST
- N OX & BUCKS

## RESOURCES

*Our books and other resources can help you get better informed about the experiences and needs of persecuted Christians. Check out our full range at [releaseinternational.org/shop](http://releaseinternational.org/shop).*



## Small group Bible study

**Our five-part Bible study for small groups explores what it means to live 'all for Jesus'.**

We may not experience persecution in the way that many of our brothers and sisters do around the world today – but there are valuable lessons we can learn about living the Christian life from their experience.

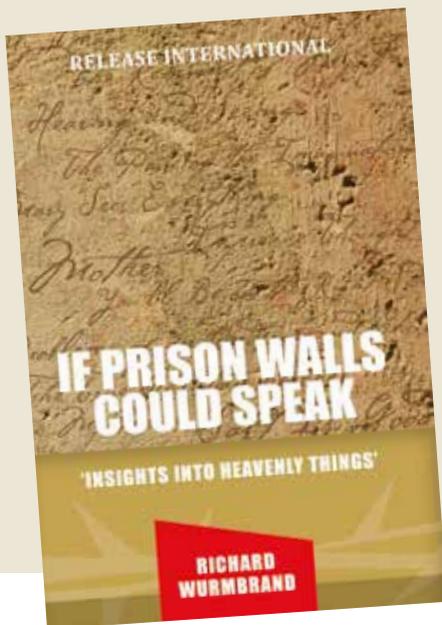
The booklet looks at the Christian life, the Christian church, the Christian gospel,

the Christian hope and the call to Christian endurance. Each study focuses on a passage of Scripture.

*'All for Jesus enables us to reflect on genuine discipleship – and reminds us how normal persecution was for New Testament Christians,'* says Release CEO Paul Robinson. *'We commend it to you.'*

**The booklets, including p&p, are priced at £4 each – or just £9 for a pack of ten.**

## Richard Wurmbrand's sermons from prison



**Richard Wurmbrand – the Romanian pastor who inspired the founding of Release – was repeatedly tortured by prison guards, yet was determined to pray for and love those who inflicted such cruel punishment.**

In this intensely moving book, Richard shares 20 condensed sermons which he committed to memory while in prison.

'My purpose is to show what imprisonment and torture can do to a Christian's mind and faith,' he wrote.

'If this book will have caused some to shed a tear, to say a prayer, and to practically help the martyrs, my aim in publishing it will have been achieved.'

***If Prison Walls Could Speak costs £7 including p&p.***

You can order both books using the enclosed card, at [releaseinternational.org/shop](http://releaseinternational.org/shop) or call: 01689 823491.

**RELEASE  
AND YOUR  
CHURCH**



**Monday, November 1**  
**Northern Ireland**

**Tuesday, November 2**  
**Scotland**

**Wednesday, November 3**  
**Wales**

**Thursday, November 4**  
**England**

## **Making a difference in Kurdistan**

**This autumn you have the opportunity to hear how your support is making a real difference to the lives of thousands of Christian refugees in northern Iraq.**

Release partner Jamal (pictured) is the founder of a Christian ministry working in the Kurdistan area of Iraq to support and care for Christians who have been forced to flee. His ministry provides aid, spiritual discipleship – but also vocational training to desperately needy Christians.

Jamal will be speaking online, over four nights, at the beginning of November. The event will follow the pattern of previous popular online meetings we have staged with partners over the past year.

We provide a regional focus each evening, involving local Release speakers – although you can attend any of the meetings you wish. Booking will be through Eventbrite (eventbrite.co.uk). Further details will be given nearer the time – but do get these dates in your diary now!



**A big thank you to everyone who went barefoot to take part in May's *All Out for God* event – praying for and showing solidarity with persecuted Christians worldwide.**

**Check the latest information at [releaseinternational.org/events](https://releaseinternational.org/events).**

## **INVITE A RELEASE SPEAKER**

**Our experienced speakers are available to join your church or online meeting to help you support and pray for persecuted Christians:**



**Ireland: Stephen on 028 9334 0014 or 07933 313169**

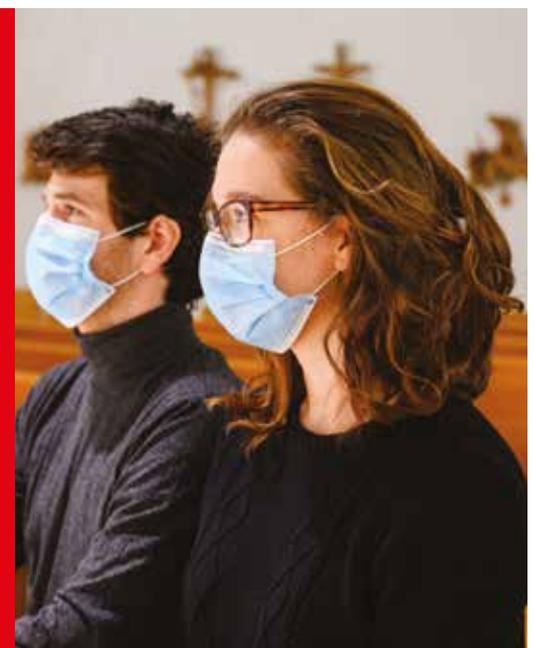
**London: Imtiaz on 07861 655100**

**Midlands & North: Kenneth on 07375 516408**

**Scotland: James on 07434 894016**

**South: Kenneth on 07375 516408**

**Wales & W Midlands: Paul on 07861 651139**



## THE WORD

**Pakistani partner Waseem reflects on how Jesus taught His disciples that they could expect persecution and martyrdom as they followed Him.**

# The cost of being a witness

*'I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor Me.'*

(John 16:1-3, ESV)

A martyr is a person who is killed because of their testimony of Jesus and God. The word comes from the Greek word *martus*, which also means a witness.

In the early church Stephen was the first martyr reported in the New Testament, stoned under accusations of law breaking by the Sanhedrin. Towards the end of the first century, the martyrdom of the Apostles Peter and Paul is reported by Clement of Rome.

The Jewish historian Josephus wrote that James, the brother of Jesus, was stoned to death. Furthermore, Acts 12:1-2 tells us that Herod 'killed James the brother of John with the sword'.

In John Chapter 16 Jesus prepares His disciples for their coming mission and predicts that they will suffer excommunication from the synagogue – and even death. This follows His warning in the preceding verses that they would be hated by the world, just as He was hated (John 15:18-19).

The Apostle Paul confirmed in 2 Timothy 3:12: 'Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.'



Release partner Waseem (left) visits persecuted believer Pervaiz Masih.

As Christians in Pakistan, we are privileged and proud to be witnesses of Jesus, and prepared to expect what Jesus foretold.

In Pakistan Christians are at constant risk of being falsely accused of blaspheming Islam, the Koran or Mohammed, as a result of the blasphemy laws introduced by the military government of General Zia-ul Haq in the 1980s.

Muslim fundamentalists and extremists claim that Pakistan was created on Islamic principles, and argue that non-Muslims have no

right to live in the country – except as second-class citizens holding only menial jobs. This belief has brought about increasing discrimination and persecution of Christians during the past three decades.

Dear supporters of Release, will you please remember persecuted Christians in Pakistan in your prayers, including the families of martyrs, as we face a deteriorating situation? Will you, in the words of Hebrews 13:3, continue to 'remember... those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering'? Will you also share in our rejoicing as we walk with our Lord Jesus – whatever the cost?

May the Lord bless you as you partner with persecuted believers in Pakistan.

*Thanks to your support, Waseem's ministry provides pastoral care and financial help to persecuted Christians, including prisoners and their families. You can watch a Frontline Report from Waseem on our YouTube channel.*

 [releaseinternational](#)

## INSPIRING FAITH



*'The essence of the Christian religion is not winning, but daring. Jesus is the way, not only the prize.'*

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.

# Host an online coffee morning with Hazaq

*Why not host an informal and relaxed coffee morning on Zoom – and raise funds for persecuted Christians at the same time.*

Simply deliver some Hazaq coffee, pastries and our *Voice* magazine to your friends and meet online. You could discuss one of the articles in *Voice*, followed by prayer for our persecuted family.

Ask your friends for donations to cover their coffee and cake – and share how buying coffee from Hazaq helps support Christians who are being persecuted.



Order your coffee from [hazaqcoffee.com](http://hazaqcoffee.com): 20% of profits go to Release.



## Please serve our persecuted family!

Our family around the world are being persecuted for following Jesus. Our team of volunteers play a key role in raising awareness in their own churches, and you can help do this too. Get in touch by emailing [volunteer@releaseinternational.org](mailto:volunteer@releaseinternational.org) or call our Volunteer Co-ordinator Andrew Wilmshurst on 01689 823491 to find out more.



*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.

Your support enables Release's partners to provide prayerful, pastoral and practical help to persecuted Christians in over 25 countries. Including a gift to Release International in your Will enables that support to continue.

To request a free legacy brochure please call us on 01689 823491 or email [info@releaseinternational.org](mailto:info@releaseinternational.org) or use the enclosed response card.



RELEASE INTERNATIONAL  
**voice**  
of Persecuted Christians

releaseinternational.org

# prayershield

July–September 2021



*This girl's father is a pastor serving in one of Colombia's highly dangerous 'red zones'.*

## JULY 2021

*Eternal God,*

*Thank You, Lord, that You are our rock and firm foundation. Amid uncertainty and turmoil, You remain steadfast and sure.*

*I pray that my persecuted family across the world will know that 'underneath are the everlasting arms' (Deuteronomy 33:27).*

*May they know, heavenly Father, that their eternal life in You has already begun. May they trust Your promise that 'they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand' (John 10:28).*

*In Jesus' name,  
Amen*

## COLOMBIA

**THURSDAY 1:** Continue to pray for the church in Colombia, especially in the so-called 'red zones' of the north and west where guerrillas and paramilitary forces are active. These groups violently persecute Christians.

**FRIDAY 2:** Colombia's rebel groups target pastors in particular because of their influence in their communities. Ask God to protect church leaders in dangerous areas, give them wisdom and renew their strength.

**SATURDAY 3:** Thank God for the bravery of Christians who put themselves at great risk to

**'No longer will violence be heard in your land... but you will call your walls Salvation and your gates Praise.'**

*Isaiah 60:18*

transport Bibles into remote rebel-held areas.

**SUNDAY 4:** Pray that God's Spirit will move among those groups who persecute Christians in Colombia – and lead many to Christ.

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL  
**voice**  
of Persecuted Christians

## CHINA

**MONDAY 5:** Thank God for the overcoming faith of His people in China. Despite restrictions, millions of believers continue to meet in banned house churches, refusing to join government-controlled churches.

**TUESDAY 6:** Please continue to pray for members of the Early Rain Church in Chengdu who have experienced sustained persecution since more than 100 of them were arrested in December 2018.

**WEDNESDAY 7:** Pastor Wang Yi of Early Rain Church (pictured) is serving a nine-year prison sentence, yet remains strong in his faith. Pray that God will sustain him and his family.

**THURSDAY 8:** Pray for the owner of an online Christian bookshop who was arrested in September 2019. Authorities launched an extensive investigation into its customers, confiscating books and interrogating Christians across China.

**FRIDAY 9:** Hard copies of Bibles are no longer available to buy online in China. Bookstores owned by the state-sanctioned Three-Self Church have been increasingly displaying the teachings of President Xi Jinping rather than Christian books. Thank God that the power of His Word can overcome these barriers.

**SATURDAY 10:** The Chinese authorities have removed Bible apps and blocked



*Pastor Wang Yi and his wife before he was imprisoned in 2018.*

Christian social messaging accounts. Pray that believers will find other ways both to nourish their spiritual growth and to spread the gospel.

**SUNDAY 11:** It remains illegal to disciple anyone under the age of 18 in China. Pray that young people will nevertheless hear the gospel and respond.

**MONDAY 12:** The printing and selling of Bibles is tightly controlled by the Government. Pray that God's Word will come alive to those receiving scripture through Release-supported projects.

**TUESDAY 13:** Pray for 'Leo' who was detained for a year during the pandemic for commissioning the printing of several thousand unofficial Bibles. Praise God for his testimony of God sustaining him with His peace.

**WEDNESDAY 14:** Esther, a kindergarten administrator in Liuzhou, was imprisoned for two years in China – as a way of punishing her husband,

John, a full-time Christian worker. Pray for the couple who now minister to Chinese students in the US.

## BURKINA FASO

**THURSDAY 15:** Please pray for the church in Burkina Faso, especially in the north where believers are in a minority and under attack from violent jihadists including some linked to Islamic State and *al-Qaeda*.

**FRIDAY 16:** Pray for Pastor 'John' (see *Voice* magazine, page 6) whose church was attacked by militants, leaving six church members dead. Pastor John and his family fled for their lives, abandoning their home and possessions.

**SATURDAY 17:** Pastor 'Stephen' was away when five jihadists arrived at his home in the Centre-Nord region to kill him. Thank God his family managed to escape through a window.

**SUNDAY 18:** Please pray for the family of Pastor 'Daniel' who

was killed by militants. They also attacked his church in the north of Burkina Faso.

**MONDAY 19:** Pray for a Release partner providing practical and spiritual support to families including those of pastors Daniel, John and Stephen (above).

**TUESDAY 20:** Some of those whom Release partners are supporting in Burkina Faso include children whose fathers were killed in terrorist attacks. Pray that God will provide role models and mentors for these children.

**WEDNESDAY 21:** Please pray that national and regional authorities will take stronger action to protect citizens, especially those targeted by extremist violence because of their faith.

**THURSDAY 22:** Pray that God would thwart jihadist plans in Burkina Faso, so that they will be overtaken by infighting and rivalry. Pray that the church will be more unified than ever.

## ERITREA

**FRIDAY 23:** The Eritrean Government actively seeks to infiltrate underground churches and imprison their leaders. Pray that God will keep Christian leaders hidden from their persecutors.

**SATURDAY 24:** Thank God for the release of 22 women detained at a prayer meeting in March in Asmara. Pray for the release of a man from this group who remains in custody.

**SUNDAY 25:** Thank God that 14 Christian men who were

arrested four years ago and held in Dahlak Island Prison were recently set free. Ask God to help them readjust to life outside jail.

**MONDAY 26:** Please pray for the continued release of prisoners in Eritrea. Between October and April, 171 Christians arrested for their faith were set free.

**TUESDAY 27:** Some fear that recent prisoner releases are simply a ploy by the Government to add to the list of military conscripts. Pray for those Christians who apply for exemption on religious grounds.

**WEDNESDAY 28:** Please pray for the many conscripts who have been locked up for practising their faith. Pray that they will find fellowship and encouragement in custody.

**THURSDAY 29:** Pray for the estimated 129 Christian prisoners who remain in state jails in Eritrea. Ask God to sustain them physically and spiritually.

**FRIDAY 30:** Please pray for Patriarch Abune Antonios, head of the Eritrean Orthodox Church, who has been deposed and replaced by the Eritrean regime after 15 years of house arrest. He has never been charged or tried.

**SATURDAY 31:** Pray for 12 Christian men who were detained in Assab for attending a prayer meeting earlier this year and are still being held at a nearby prison. Ask God to strengthen their faith.

## AUGUST 2021

## MALAYSIA

**SUNDAY 1:** Pray for Christians in Malaysia who are concerned about growing intolerance against believers, and Islamist groups trying to stir up religious hatred.

**MONDAY 2:** The Malay people consider being Muslim as central to their identity. Pray for Christians with a Muslim background: the Government severely punishes Christian converts, including sending them to harsh re-education centres.

**TUESDAY 3:** A recent online video identified a number of Christians by name and called them 'enemies of the state'. Ask God to protect these individuals and their reputations.

**WEDNESDAY 4:** Thank God that a court of appeal has ruled that a 1986 government directive restricting Christians from



*Pastor Raymond Koh's wife Susanna (centre) with children Jonathan and Esther. Photo: FreeMalaysiaToday.com*

using four 'prohibited' words including 'Allah' was not a blanket ban. This had posed limitations on Christian recordings, worship and teaching.

**THURSDAY 5:** Pray that the whereabouts of Pastor Raymond Koh would be made known. He was abducted from the street in broad daylight in 2017. Ask God to comfort and strengthen his wife, Susanna (pictured), and their children.

**FRIDAY 6:** Believers fear that *Sharia* (Islamic law) is being extended. Many say they feel threatened and are considering fleeing the country. Pray that the church in Malaysia will stand firm.

## MYANMAR

**SATURDAY 7:** Please continue to pray for the church in Myanmar, especially during the current unrest. Pray that God will equip and inspire Christians



to be peacebuilders and reconcilers.

**SUNDAY 8:** Chin and Karen people groups identify as Christian and are oppressed by the Government, as well as local officials and tribal militias. Pray that God's Spirit will move mightily among these groups.

**MONDAY 9:** Villagers who are experiencing hardship often blame Christians for their suffering, claiming they are 'angering local spirits'. Pray that God will give wisdom, courage and grace to His people.

**TUESDAY 10:** Pray for believers in Myanmar with a passion for spreading the gospel, including church planters. Pray too for those involved in the country's Bible schools, most of which are illegal.

## INDIA

**WEDNESDAY 11:** Thank God for Christians in India who continue to have a steadfast faith despite persecution and the threat of violence.

**THURSDAY 12:** When Christians in India are attacked, they often drop charges against their assailants to show forgiveness. Thank God for this powerful witness and pray that their persecutors will be deeply moved by it.

**FRIDAY 13:** Please pray for Christians who are facing persecution even as they try to serve communities badly hit by the pandemic. Pastor 'Raj' and his team were trying to support people in



a rural area when extremists attacked him, breaking his leg, and accused him of trying to convert people.

**SATURDAY 14:** Pray for Pastor Dilipsingh Vasunia Alirajpur who was charged with forced conversion after a mob raided his church in Madhya Pradesh and pressured police to press charges. The pastor was released on bail.

**SUNDAY 15:** The same mob who raided Pastor Dilipsingh's church (above) then disrupted a service at Pastor Malsingh Meda's church in a nearby village, attacking church members and pressuring police to arrest 21 of them on suspicion of forcible conversion. Thank God no one was detained.

**MONDAY 16:** A new anti-conversion law came into effect in Madhya Pradesh in January. Believers fear this will encourage further persecution against them. Pray such legislation will be repealed in all Indian states where it exists.



## PAKISTAN

**TUESDAY 17:** Please continue to pray for Zafar Bhatti. His appeal hearing against a blasphemy conviction has been adjourned many times. In 2019 a judge said he should be released for lack of evidence.

**WEDNESDAY 18:** Pray for Adnan Bashir, a Christian with learning difficulties in Punjab, who was allegedly converted to Islam in return for sherbet. His family have been threatened and told not to force Adnan to reconvert as this would amount to 'apostasy'.

**THURSDAY 19:** Nabeel Masih was detained for more than four years after being charged with blasphemy at the age of 16, for allegedly posting a sacrilegious photo on social media. In 2018 he was sentenced to ten years in prison. Thank God he was recently released on bail until his appeal is heard.

**FRIDAY 20:** Thank God for the recent acquittal on appeal of Shagufta Kausar and her paralysed husband, Shafqat Emmanuel, a Christian couple on death row for blasphemy since 2014. They were accused of sending blasphemous text messages to a Muslim cleric.

**SATURDAY 21:** Pray for justice and freedom for the 24 Christians known to be in prison in Pakistan on blasphemy charges.

**SUNDAY 22:** Pray for justice for Haroon Ayub Masih and Salamat Mansha Masih who were accused of blasphemy after reading the Bible in a park in Lahore. Haroon went into hiding; Salamat was detained and allegedly tortured until he made a false confession.

**MONDAY 23:** Pray for Lahore nurse Sakina Mehtab who is in hiding after colleagues accused her of blasphemy. She had shared a video about a European Parliament resolution condemning the persecution of religious minorities in Pakistan.

**TUESDAY 24:** Pray for nurses Mariam Lal and Navish Arooj who were charged with 'defiling the Koran' after they followed their supervisor's instructions to remove Islamic stickers from their hospital in Faisalabad.

**WEDNESDAY 25:** Pray for nurse Tabeeeta Gill from Karachi who has reportedly fled Pakistan. She was attacked by a violent mob after a co-worker accused her of insulting Islam and she was charged with blasphemy.

## IRAN

**THURSDAY 26:** Thank God for continued church growth in Iran, one of the most repressive regimes in the world.

**FRIDAY 27:** Please pray for three Christians with a Muslim background, Amin Khaki, Milad Goodarzi and Alireza Nourmohammadi, who have been charged with 'propaganda' against the state. If convicted, they could face up to five years in prison.

**SATURDAY 28:** Pray for several Christians who have been threatened with jail after their homes near Karaj were raided in November. They have faced pressure to stop all church activities but have refused to comply.

**SUNDAY 29:** Pray for Ismail Narimanpour, Mohammad Ali Torabi, Alireza Vark Shah and Hojjat Lotfi Khalaf, Christian men detained in April in separate raids across Dezful. In custody, they were reportedly beaten before being temporarily released on condition they report regularly to intelligence officials.

**MONDAY 30:** Pray that God will give His people in Iran the courage to stand up for and hold fast to their faith, despite intimidation and the threat of imprisonment.

**TUESDAY 31:** Thank God for the way that the powerful witness of Christian martyrs such as Rev Hussein Soodmand in Iran continues to inspire believers today, including Hussein's daughter Rashin (see *Voice* magazine, pages 18–19).

## SEPTEMBER 2021

### ALGERIA

**WEDNESDAY 1:** Thank God that the church of Algeria has been growing, especially among the ethnic Berber people.

**THURSDAY 2:** Please pray that the concerted campaign against believers in Algeria, including numerous church closures, will prompt many more Algerians to explore Christianity.

**FRIDAY 3:** Pray for Pastor Rachid Seighir who runs a church and bookshop in Oran. He and his shop assistant, Nouh, were recently given a one-year suspended jail sentence for 'agitating the faith of Muslims'. That same week, his church was forcibly closed.

**SATURDAY 4:** Several Christians in Algeria have been sentenced to prison in recent months for 'blasphemy'. Pray that these convictions will be overturned.

**SUNDAY 5:** Thank God for the powerful witness of Christians' obedience to God in Algeria. On the door of a church which had been forcibly closed, a Muslim neighbour taped this note: 'I am sure that Jesus is proud of you because at times you must lay aside the things that are important to you in order to follow His path. All my respect.'

**MONDAY 6:** Pray that Algeria will become a beacon of religious tolerance, an

African nation where people of different faiths can live together in peace.

### LAOS

**TUESDAY 7:** Continue to pray for a group of Christian families (pictured) who are refusing to leave their homes, despite ongoing persecution from their community. Release associate ministries have provided practical support, including food.

**WEDNESDAY 8:** Thank God for the release of Pastor Sithong Theppavong. He was detained in 2020 after refusing to stop his worship services in Savannakhet. He was recently given a one-year sentence for 'creating disorder' but he had already served his time behind bars.

**THURSDAY 9:** Pray for Sa whose parents rejected and expelled her when she became a Christian. She is now living with another family but their village has a history of persecuting Christians.

**FRIDAY 10:** Many Christians in Laos are socially ostracised by their community because they have abandoned traditional religions. For example, local shops refuse to sell to them. Ask God to meet all their needs.

**SATURDAY 11:** Praise God that a house church in Boke province whose building was destroyed by police has seen such strong growth that it has had to expand its new building.



*These Christians in northern Laos have refused to abandon their homes, despite intense persecution.*

### INDONESIA

**SUNDAY 12:** Ask God to renew a steadfast faith in the church in Indonesia where a number of recent attacks on believers have spread fear.

**MONDAY 13:** Pray against the rise of several radical Islamist groups in Indonesia, including some linked to Islamic State. Pray that their plans will be thwarted.

**TUESDAY 14:** Pray for Christians in Lembantongoa village in a remote area of Central Sulawesi, where a mob attacked several homes in November, brutally killing four people.

**WEDNESDAY 15:** Ask God to comfort and provide for the many villagers from



Lembantongoa who fled after the November attack (previous prayer) and have tried to resettle in other areas.

**THURSDAY 16:** Pray for the congregation of a church in Makassar whose building was targeted by suicide bombers on Palm Sunday. Twenty people were injured in the attack.

**FRIDAY 17:** Four Christian men were killed by suspected Islamist extremists at Sigi, Central Sulawesi, while they worked on their coffee plantation. Ask God to provide for their grieving families.

## NIGERIA

**SATURDAY 18:** Please pray for encouragement and fresh resolve for the Nigerian church, facing threats from numerous groups, including

Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), *Boko Haram* and Fulani.

**SUNDAY 19:** In the first four months of 2021, Nigeria 'lost no fewer than 1,470 Christians... the highest number recorded since 2014', according to Nigerian NGO Intersociety. Pray that grieving families will choose to stand firm in their faith.

**MONDAY 20:** Between January and April, 2,200 Christians in Nigeria were abducted by jihadists who then demanded high ransoms, according to Intersociety figures. Pray for an end to these abductions, which appear to be an attempt to terrorise and impoverish Christian communities.

**TUESDAY 21:** Pray for relatives and friends of Rev Alphonsus Bello of St Vincent's Church in Malumfashi, Katsina state, who was killed recently by suspected Fulani. Pray too for Rev Joe Keke, who was abducted in the same raid.

**WEDNESDAY 22:** Please pray for Christians living in 12 northern states of Nigeria under *Sharia*: strict blasphemy laws attract harsh sentences.

**THURSDAY 23:** Pray for Haske Baptist Church in Manini, Kaduna state, which Fulani gunmen attacked in April, killing a member of the congregation. Please pray for the safe return of four women, Charity, Rose, Alheri and Liatu, whom the gunmen abducted.

**FRIDAY 24:** Pray for the release of Fulaki, wife of Pastor Ozigi Hassan of the Mercy Place Ministry Church, Kaduna. The couple and their children were kidnapped in April. Thank God police managed to rescue the pastor and his children.

**SATURDAY 25:** Pray for an end to collaboration between *Boko Haram* extremists and Fulani gunmen. The two groups were suspected of a joint operation in which 72 villagers were abducted from Libera Gida, Kaduna, in April.

**SUNDAY 26:** Members of ISWAP took control of Geidam, Yobe state, in April, looting and burning as they went. Around 2,000 residents fled. The attackers circulated leaflets calling for the establishment of an Islamic state. Pray that God will thwart their aims.

**MONDAY 27:** Please pray for Bilkisu James (see *Voice*, page 10) who lost seven relatives when Fulani militants attacked Chibob village, Kaduna state, last July. She and her young son suffered gunshot wounds, for which she is still receiving treatment.

**TUESDAY 28:** Thank God for the witness of Ibrahim Izang Aziobo (pictured overleaf) who lost his sight in a Fulani gun attack in Jos in 2008. After he gave his life to Christ in hospital, the first sermon he heard in church was about forgiveness. 'I saw that



*Ibrahim was blinded when he was shot by Fulani militants during 2008 elections in Jos, Nigeria.*

the best thing was for me to forgive, so I forgave,' he says. Ibrahim, now supported by Release associate ministries, was later confronted by Fulani militants again, but they let him go when they realised he was blind.

**WEDNESDAY 29:** Please pray that Release partners' pastor training programmes

will continue, despite the pandemic and insecurity forcing some events to be postponed.

**THURSDAY 30:** Pray that God's Spirit will move among the ranks of those who oppose Him in Nigeria, convict people's hearts, and lead them to repentance and salvation in Christ.

*Lord Jesus,  
Thank You that Your heart is for those on the margins, those who are pushed to the side and spurned.*

*Jesus, please remind my persecuted brothers and sisters that You are with them, that Your grace is sufficient for them and Your power is made perfect in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9).*

*May they know the touch of Your hand, the power of Your Spirit flowing in them and out through them today.*

*Amen*

Sources: China Aid; International Christian Concern; Intersociety; Middle East Concern; Morning Star News; Release partners and contacts; VOM Canada; VOM USA.

Names in inverted commas have been changed to protect identities.

While we do not provide financial support to every Christian mentioned in *Prayer Shield*, we believe in the power of prayer to change lives.

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**voice**  
of Persecuted Christians