

voice

OF PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS



**HELPING
CHRISTIANS
FORCED
TO FLEE**

The church on the run!
One step ahead of the hitmen
Ex-prisoner on special UK tour
Curtain closes on captivating drama

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL
voice
of Persecuted Christians

WELCOME

PAUL ROBINSON, CEO



IN THIS EDITION OF VOICE, WE HAVE DEDICATED A DOZEN PAGES TO PAKISTANI CHRISTIANS WHO HAVE SUFFERED FOR THE GOSPEL AND YET DESPITE OFTEN TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCES HAVE STOOD FIRM IN THEIR FAITH.

From page 7 you can read about 'Sandy', who was abducted and appallingly abused. It is not easy reading. 'Ruth' was forced to go on the run with her children; 'Victor' suffered brutal physical punishment at the hands of the authorities, while 'Anil' escaped an assassination attempt!

All of them have in common the fact that they were forced to flee their country because of persecution and were assisted by our partner. If this partner had not been able to intervene we dread to think what would have happened to these dear brothers and sisters.

As you read their stories, thank God that we were able financially to assist our partner in this work – all the result of your compassionate and generous support.

REGULAR SUPPORT

By giving regularly to Release International through a Direct Debit we are able more easily to plan how we can support partners such as the one above who helped persecuted Christians in Pakistan. Please see page 23 for more details.

FINAL ACT

It's been an amazing run: Artless Theatre Company first staged *If Prison Walls Could Speak* back in 2021. Little did we know then how successful the production would be. As we celebrated the last performance at Kensington Temple in May, with Petr Jasek, the subject of the drama, in the audience, it felt like an era had ended. Thank you to Jon and Chris at Artless for their amazing dedication and professionalism; nobody could have told Petr's story better.

NEW DESIGN

I hope you enjoy the new look of *Voice* magazine. Be assured that even though we have updated the design the subject matter will not change; we are committed to continuing to be a voice of our persecuted family around the world, to providing them with a platform to tell you their inspirational and moving stories, and for you to see how your support is making a difference in their lives.

CONTENTS

VOICE MAGAZINE • ISSUE 131
JULY – SEPTEMBER 2025

- 4 FAITH UNDER FIRE**
News for your prayers
- 6 CHURCH ON THE RUN**
Helping Christians fleeing for their lives
- 10 PASTOR PAYS FOR INTEGRITY**
Police turn on church leader
- 14 ONE STEP AHEAD OF THE ASSASSIN**
Family hunt for Christian convert
- 18 THE ROAD MORE TRAVELLED**
Fabulous marathon fundraisers
- 19 EX-PRISONER'S UK TOUR**
Special IDOP event for 2025
- 22 FLIGHT IS NOT THE END**
Biblical reflection

'THANK YOU TO THE TEAM FROM RELEASE INTERNATIONAL FOR COMING TO BE WITH US, TO PRAY WITH US AND TO HEAR OUR STORIES. IT MEANS SO MUCH (SEE PAGE 8).'

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL

voice
of Persecuted Christians



Release International helps Christians in the UK and Ireland to engage actively 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



Nawab Bibi has to make a ten-hour trip to visit her husband in prison

FAMILIES OF BLASPHEMY-ACCUSED CONTINUE APPEALS

Provisional permission has been given for Ishfaq Masih to be relocated to a prison in Lahore, Pakistan.

Ishfaq, who was accused of blasphemy and has been in prison about 70 miles from Lahore for more than eight years, was sentenced to death in 2022.

Nabeela, his wife, is able to visit Ishfaq once a month for 30 minutes, but travelling and waiting time can mean this takes more than four hours.

The family are continuing to appeal against the death sentence given to Ishfaq and are hopeful that an application for bail will be successful.

PRAY FOR RELEASE

Nawab Bibi is just about able to manage the trip to visit her husband, Zafar Bhatti, once a month: it is a ten-hour journey and she is allowed to visit for one hour.

His appeal hearing has started in Rawalpindi but the judges are reluctant to hear it because it is thought that they are under threat from the TLP, an Islamist political party banned by the Government.

Nawab continues to ask for prayer; that Zafar will be released, and that God will do a miracle and help both her and Zafar with their poor health. **See Prayer Shield**



Gideon Dawell, a Nigerian pastor whose wife and five children were killed when Fulani militants set fire to his property (see *Voice*, Oct-Dec 2024), stands outside what will become his new home. Construction of the house is being funded by a Release International associate ministry.

Hundreds flee after Nigerian villagers killed

More than 40 people in three predominantly Christian communities in northeast Nigeria were killed by Fulani herdsmen in May.

In Taraba state's Karim Lamido County, the assailants invaded Munga Dosso, Munga Lelau and Bandawa villages, destroying homes as well as attacking residents, according to Christian Daily International-Morning Star News (CDI-MSN) sources.

'My people in Karim Lamido Local Government Area, who are mostly Christians, have been attacked by Fulani herdsmen. Our houses have been burnt, and more than 42 Christians killed,' local resident Miriam Silas told CDI-MSN in a text message.

Taraba state governor Kefas Agbu described the attacks as a *'direct assault on the peace-loving people of the area'* and *'horrendous and unacceptable'*. He said that he would ensure that the assailants were found, arrested and prosecuted.

In a text message, resident Obadiah Abbawa said the attack had *'forced hundreds'* to flee, while Dr Tijo Kenneth Mingeh, a prominent local Christian, said: *'This tragic attack has brought untold pain and disruption to lives, homes and livelihoods. These communities have been torn apart.'*

- One of two Christian workers kidnapped in northwest Nigeria in May has reportedly been freed. Ojo John and Silvanus Abu of Nupe Missions were working among the predominantly Muslim Zabarmawa people of Kebbi state when they were abducted from their mission station, said Moses Solomon of the Nigeria-based ministry. John, aged 33, also known as Mallam Yahaya, was released on May 26.

(Source: Christian Daily International-Morning Star News)



- A judge in Pakistan has acquitted a Christian of blasphemy and terrorism charges, noting that prosecutors had *'miserably failed'* to establish the case against him, his attorney, Javed Sahotra, said. Chand Shamaun (pictured, centre), father of two young children, was arrested in June 2024 and charged with insulting Islam. Shamaun was earlier granted bail by Lahore High Court last October. Judge Zia Ullah Khan acquitted Shamaun of *'the baseless case registered against him by the police,'* in May, Sahotra said.

(Source: Christian Daily International-Morning Star News)

Listen to our latest podcasts



Standing firm: Christians in India

In this edition of Release International's Voice podcast we're speaking to Release International CEO, Paul Robinson. The annual Persecution Trends Report is the report of Release International's partners on the ground: their summary of what has been happening to Christians in their country. Listen as Paul highlights some of the countries mentioned in this year's report – and tells us how we can read and use it.

Under pressure: Christian faith and witness in Malaysia In this episode, Release International staff member Stephen McIlroy shares insights from his recent visit to Malaysia. Discover how God is the true missionary, revealing Himself through dreams and visions; learn about the realities of faith under pressure, and join us in praying for the church in Malaysia.

CEO Paul Robinson: Unpacking the Persecution Trends Report

We speak to Release International CEO, Paul Robinson, about the annual Persecution Trends Report – our partners' summaries of what has been happening to Christians in their country. Listen as Paul highlights some of the nations mentioned in this year's report — and tells us how we can read and use it.

Lebanon: Cast out for Christ Lebanon is a country that has been besieged by problems in recent years. In this edition of the Voice podcast we speak to Release International partner Naji who continues to minister to persecuted Christians in, and despite, the current difficulties.



Almost £100,000 has been demanded as bail for Aida Najaflou

she was transferred to the women's section of the prison.

Human Rights in Iran (HRANA) reports that Aida is facing charges of 'acting against national security' and 'propaganda against the regime'.

The sum of 11 billion tomans (about £99,000) has been demanded as bail, which Aida's family has been unable to pay.

Please pray that God will give his comfort and peace to Aida and her family; that she will be released soon, and that Iran will stop oppressing its Christian citizens, including converts.

(Source: Middle East Concern)

Iranian believer remains in detention

Friends of Aida Najaflou request prayer as she remains detained in Tehran's Evin prison since her arrest early this year.

Aida was arrested in the capital and taken to Evin's Ward 209, which is operated by Iranian Intelligence. Later

COURT HANDS CHRISTIAN GIRL TO ABDUCTOR

A magistrate in Pakistan handed custody of a Christian girl to the man who kidnapped and forcibly married her despite evidence that she was coerced into stating that she had converted to Islam, her father said.

'My daughter, Jessica Iqbal, couldn't recite the Kalima [Islamic conversion proclamation] or respond to any other question about Islam in the courtroom,' Iqbal Masih told Christian Daily International-Morning Star News (CDI-MSN). 'It was quite evident that she had been forced to claim that she had willingly converted her faith, yet the magistrate still allowed her to go with her abductor.'

Masih, a house painter in Lahore, said a Muslim neighbour had taken his 16-year-old daughter from their house in the early hours of April 30.

'I don't know how [he] fooled my innocent child into going with him,' Masih said. 'We have no idea how or since when he had been grooming her into doing this. She was clearly enticed by the man who is almost double her age.'

Masih registered an abduction case against the man the same day, but police released him after some hours, he said.

'[The man] had returned home after hiding my daughter somewhere to show that he wasn't involved in her disappearance,' Masih said. 'I was very hopeful that he would reveal Jessica's whereabouts during police interrogation, but I was shocked when they freed him.'

On May 16, Jessica appeared before judicial magistrate Hassan Sarfraz Cheema in Lahore and recorded her statement, in which she claimed that she had converted to Islam and married of her free will, Masih said.

'My wife and I begged Jessica to reconsider her statement, but she told us that she was helpless,' he said. 'She was clearly under immense pressure to speak in her abductor's favour because she repeatedly said that she was fearful for our lives.'

Masih said that he and his wife were in agony over their daughter's well-being.

'Our lives have been completely devastated,' he said.

HARDS Pakistan, which is supporting the Masih family's legal struggle, has petitioned the sessions court to challenge the magistrate's order.

- Despite fierce opposition from Islamist groups in Pakistan, President Asif Ali Zardari signed into law a landmark Bill to curb child marriage, setting the minimum age for marriage for both genders at 18 years in the Islamabad Capital Territory, on May 29.

(Source: Christian Daily International-Morning Star News)

**SIGN UP TO
RELEASE**



**HELPING CHRISTIANS
IN FLIGHT**

CHURCH ON THE RUN!

Sandy stayed loyal to Christ despite suffering terrible abuse at the hands of her abductors. Stock image

PAKISTANI CHRISTIANS WHO HAVE HAD TO FLEE FOR THEIR LIVES ARE STILL IN FEAR OF BEING DISCOVERED BY THEIR PERSECUTORS. **TOM HARDIE** SPENT TIME WITH THEM AND HEARD HOW THEY HAVE PERSEVERED IN THEIR FAITH DESPITE SOMETIMES HARROWING EXPERIENCES

'Sandy* was just 21 years old when she was abducted and despicably abused in Pakistan, yet despite the horrors she endured refused to renounce her faith in Christ.

We sit chatting in a small, sparsely equipped apartment in a large, sprawling city whose name I cannot reveal for the simple reason that those who raped and tortured her may still try to find her.

She smiles warmly and has a gentle spirit but one cannot begin to imagine the trauma she must carry in her heart. Sandy, like the other believers I meet, also worries that the people who persecuted her back in Pakistan will find her before her asylum application with the UN can be approved. The process can take a number of years and as they wait they are continually looking over their shoulder or wondering if a stray comment or a casual conversation with a Muslim neighbour could lead to exposure.

Sandy was born into a Christian family in Gujranwala and after finishing her studies started working in the financial sector in order to support her family.

In 2019 a couple visited the bank where she worked and the man showed her what appeared to be a police identity card.

After discussing a number of financial matters with her the man convinced Sandy that it would be helpful for him if she brought the paperwork to his house, which she agreed to do.

'He came to pick me up with another man but instead of taking me to his home he drove me to an unknown place,' she said.

As soon as she realised that she was being abducted she started to scream but it was too late. The man who, it later transpired, was a drug dealer and the leader of a prostitution ring, then raped her at gunpoint.

His associate made a video of the attack and threatened to post it on the internet and send it to Sandy's family and employer if she reported what had happened to the police. He also threatened to throw acid on her face.

However, in 2020, Sandy did report

the incident to the police but to no avail; they would not prepare a First Information Report (FIR) against the man. Instead it appears that her attacker found out what she had done and then abducted her again.

This time her experience was even worse.

'I was kept locked and tied up in a dark room where I was unable to see the sunlight for four months,' she said. *'I was subjected to brutal physical and sexual violence.'*

Her abductor attempted to get her addicted to drugs and at one point denied her food and water for three days.

'He tried to force me to accept Islam but when I refused they severely tortured me. One day he hit me with an iron rod which fractured my left leg. Almost every part of my body was hurt; even the fingers on my left hand and wrist had fractures. I could not go to the bathroom by myself and had no choice but to urinate into my headscarf.'

The man then made a fake marriage certificate and sent it to Sandy's home, telling her family that they should forget her as she was now married.

Thankfully, though, after four months of being held captive, she was able to escape and contact her brother.

She said: *'We called the police and reported him and while hiding in my sister's house I started getting medical care.'*

Unfortunately, the man discovered her whereabouts and late one night in October 2020 he arrived at the property with four armed accomplices and forcibly abducted her for a third time.

'He tortured me the entire night, compelling me to withdraw my police report and to accept Islam, threatening to chop off my hands. To scare me they even dug a grave in front of me, threatening to bury me alive. I was in this predicament for three days before the police finally found me and took [the man] into custody.'

An FIR was filed and the court received a transcript of Sandy's statement. However, her attacker then falsely accused her brother and brother-in-law of being kidnappers and thieves

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**BECAUSE OF YOUR
HELP IT SHOWS ME
THAT GOD HAS NOT
ABANDONED ME'**



'Sandy' said Release International's partner had helped her to find hope for the future

HE CAN DO NOTHING TO US BECAUSE OF THE BELIEVERS' PRAYERS'

and in 2022 he was released from custody. After this Sandy and her family started receiving death threats so in January 2023 she had no choice but to try to leave Pakistan altogether.

It was at this point that Release International's partner became involved and in due course Sandy managed to escape to another country, where she is currently registered as an asylum seeker with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Although grateful to have left Pakistan she is still afraid of being sent back there if her application is unsuccessful.

'I am very scared and feel unsafe. What if I am sent back to Pakistan; it could potentially cost me my life as the people looking for me are very resourceful.'

However, she added: *'It was very hard leaving family, friends and home, and there are challenges where I now am but I have felt strongly the presence of God; He has never left me nor forsaken me. Because of the help of [Release International's partner] it shows me that God has not abandoned me.'*

Sandy said that God had sent our partner *'like an angel'*, enabling her to find hope for the future.

She added: *'Thank you too to the team from Release International for coming to be with us, to pray with us and to hear our stories. It means so much.'*

She asked Christians in the UK to pray that she would be swiftly relocated to a third, safe country; that her health issues would be resolved, her faith strengthened and that God would use her for his glory.

Sadly Sandy's story of a Christian woman in Pakistan being abducted and abused is far from unique.

A MODERN-DAY HAGAR

'Hagar'* was a school teacher from a Christian family in Pakistan when her parents arranged for her to marry her cousin in 2007.

She enjoyed the first few months of married life but it was not long before her husband began a friendship with a group of Muslim men.

In due course Hagar gave birth to a son but owing to the influence of these new friends her husband proceeded to take a Muslim woman as a second wife.

It was not long before Hagar began to

fear that he would desert her and take their child with him so she arranged to flee with the boy to Thailand.

There she hoped for a new start but instead she and her son were arrested and detained in an immigration centre. *'It was very hard for me as a single mother with a young child,'* she told me, the pain of the memory still etched on her face.

'We were in the centre for 39 days and because of the unhygienic conditions my son developed a skin condition, which he still has not recovered from.'

Eventually, with no other option available, Hagar and her son were forced to return to Pakistan where she had to live like a fugitive, regularly checking to see if her husband or his associates were on her trail.

'Because of the tribal structure of the society it was not difficult for my husband to find out where we were and snatch my son,' she said. *'I was constantly having to move from one place to another.'*

Eventually realising that they would never be safe in Pakistan Hagar again made the decision to flee the country.

Life was not easy in her new homeland but at least she and her son felt more secure there. She kept a low profile and carried on as best she could, trying to put the past behind her and create a new life, particularly for the sake of her child.

However, three years after escaping to what she hoped would have been a safe environment her husband discovered her whereabouts.

'He came to see me and threatened me that he would do something terrible to me and take away my son, who is now a teenager,' she said.

'We feel very unsafe; he knows where I live and work and where my son goes to school. We are like sitting ducks but I believe that he can do nothing [to us] because of the prayers [for us] of believers. God is our protector.'

She asked Christians in the UK to pray that she would remain safe and would soon find sanctuary in another country; *'somewhere where I can go to work and not fear my son will be taken; where he can go to school and finish his studies.'*

FAITH, FAMILY AND FEAR

Like Hagar, 'Ruth'*^{*}, who comes from a strict Muslim family in Pakistan, has had to flee to more than one country in an effort to escape family members intent on abducting her and her children.

In 2019 she visited Azerbaijan to set up a business while her husband was working in Dubai.

'It was my first time outside Pakistan and I was alone with our three children,' she told me.

'Life was busy but then Covid broke out, the airport was closed and work dried up. I was alone at home with the children when a Pakistani Christian family asked me for help.

'At first I refused but, even though my husband told me not to get involved, it was in my heart to help them, especially as they were from my home country.'

For two weeks the family sought her assistance with translation work at their church and eventually she agreed to go with them.

'It was a different feeling for me as a Muslim being in a church,' she said. 'I started to inquire about the church and Christianity and even asked for a Bible!'

'Then I started reading John's gospel at night and after I had read two pages I noticed a fragrant aroma in my room. I was afraid and ran out of the room but the next day I went to the church to ask about these mysterious things and the priest told me not to be afraid and just to carry on reading.'

Ruth was careful not to tell her husband, children or wider family that she had started reading the Bible but despite her caution someone took a photo of her praying in the church and sent it to her relatives.

'My family started to make inquiries and even though I told them I was just visiting the church they said it was blasphemy even to enter the building.'

'They then sent people from Pakistan – my husband's cousins and other family members – to catch me, so I had to go into hiding. I was afraid they would find me and send me back to Pakistan. I know that two of my brothers came to Azerbaijan to try to find out where I was.'

'Apparently it was the talk of the town in Pakistan; the family saw it as bringing



Ruth finds comfort and peace in her faith as she waits for her asylum application to be processed

shame [on them] and was a matter of honour. They were also thinking about how it would impact other girls in Pakistan if it became known that I had converted.'

She added: *'In my heart I thought they would kill me. You have to realise that, previously when my cousin had said that she liked a boy who was not in the family, they just killed him. They burned him [to death] in front of us.'*

'In the strictly Islamic area I was from – I had to wear a hijab – we weren't allowed even to talk to Christians. They don't like minorities in Pakistan so I knew what I had done was a big deal for them.'

In order to evade her pursuers Ruth, accompanied by her children, spent three months on the run, at one point being forced to sleep outdoors in a park in freezing temperatures.

'[My family] sent me a message saying they just wanted the children back but I knew they would take me as well,' she said.

In order to support herself and her children Ruth managed to find work in a café but it was not to last long: the owner dismissed her when he discovered that she was attending church.

Thankfully she was then able to make contact with Release International's partner, after which she found a way to leave Azerbaijan and travel to Dubai in

2022. However, although she initially felt safer being out of Azerbaijan it was not long before her family found out that she had relocated.

'One of my brothers came to find me in Dubai. I happened to see him on the street and instantly felt afraid; but at the same time I felt love for him even though I knew he would not forgive me.'

Ruth also knew that, even if she managed to evade her family, due to Dubai's immigration regulations she would not be able to renew her visa for a second time and would be sent back to her home country of Pakistan when it expired.

(As well as being afraid that at any time her husband or brothers could find her she was also concerned that her children were not receiving an education.)

Realising the danger that Ruth was in, contact was made again with our partner who was able to offer advice; and thankfully she found a way to leave Dubai.

Ruth, along with Hagar and other Pakistani Christians, is now waiting on the UN to process her asylum application so that she and her children can settle in a safe country. Please pray that these dear brothers and sisters will swiftly be able to find a safe place to live where they can grow in the Lord and flourish in their faith.

*Names changed to protect identities

COURAGEOUS PASTOR PAYS HEAVY PRICE FOR INTEGRITY

AFTER SURVIVING AN ATTEMPT ON HIS LIFE RURAL PASTOR VICTOR REGISTERED A COMPLAINT WITH LOCAL POLICE. THAT PROVED ONLY THE START OF HIS NIGHTMARE, WRITES

TOM HARDIE

It is hard to imagine being shot at by someone opposed to our religious beliefs in this country. It is arguably more difficult to picture oneself then being arrested, detained and tortured by the very people sworn to protect us and uphold justice.

However, that is precisely what happened to a pastor in Pakistan, who was fired on by an extremist after refusing to embrace Islam and who then registered a complaint with the police.

Pastor 'Victor'* relies on the physical support of his wife and a walking aid to be able to move around the family's small apartment. He is still suffering the effects of torture in Pakistan and has to lie down as we talk.

Despite his injuries, though, he is clearly strong in his faith and has not wavered in his beliefs but understandably grows tearful when we discuss the events he endured. The memories of physical abuse but also betrayal by the authorities are still raw.

'I was a pastor in a rural district and looking after a number of villagers. Everything was okay until the Jaranwala incident in 2023.'

In August that year more than 20 churches and around 80 Christian homes were the subject of coordinated attacks by militants.

Victor, whose church was located near Jaranwala, said that after this incident the peaceful co-existence between Christians and Muslims came to an end.

'Christians were then accused under the blasphemy laws in a number of cities and Islamist slogans began to appear on

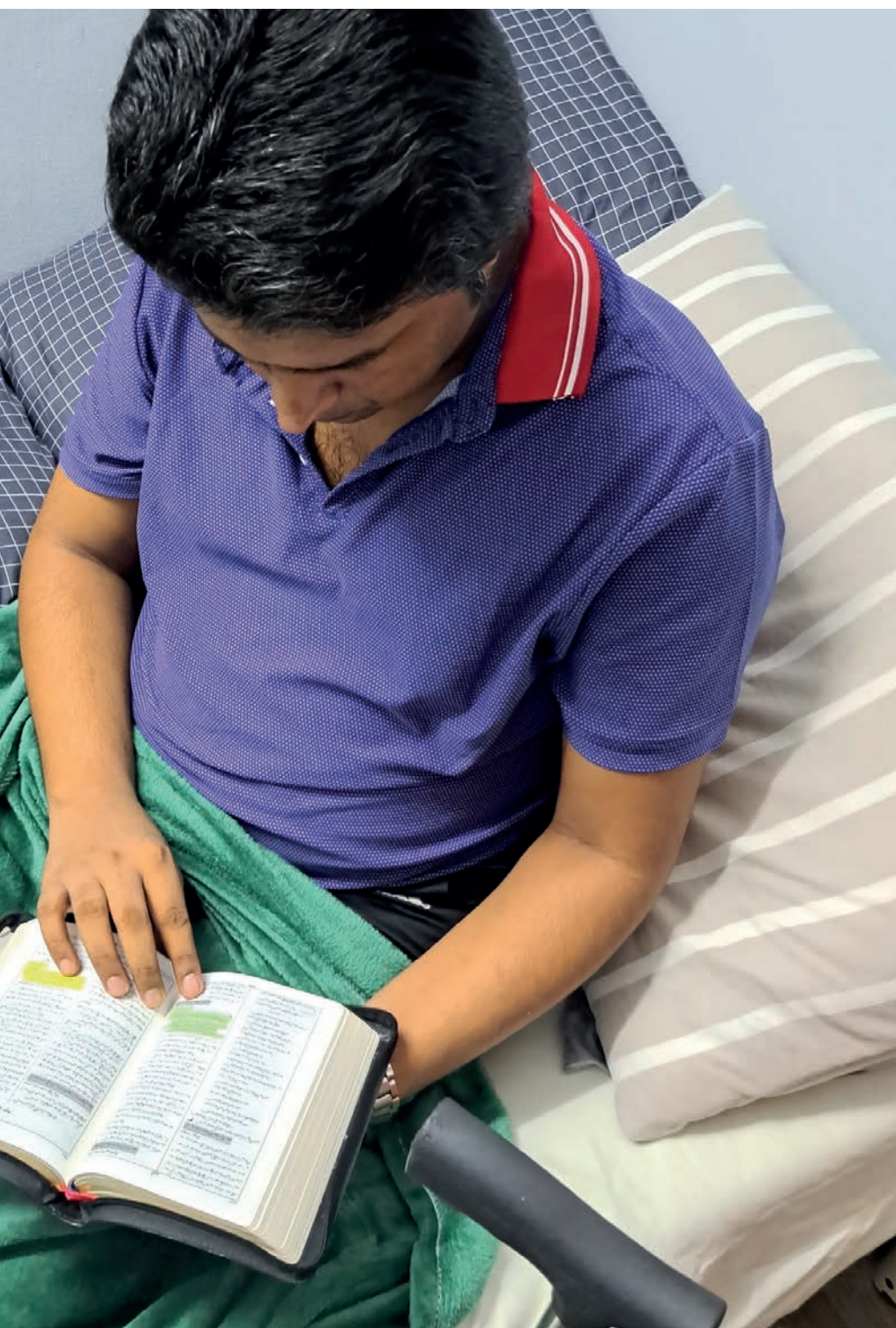
**“
I WOULD NOT
SAY THE NAME
OF ANYONE
EXCEPT JESUS”**



Victor was shot in the arm after refusing to deny Christ



Pastor Victor still suffers the effects of torture and needs assistance in order to walk even short distances



church walls,' he said.

It was not long before Victor's church was targeted. *'After a morning worship service I was informed that words had been written on our building so I called the police helpline.'*

Officials told him to remove the slogans before they visited. *'I said to them that if I did that I could get into trouble as the surrounding villages were the stronghold of an extremist group. I knew that if I erased the name of Mohammed from the church walls then I could be accused of blasphemy.'*

In response police officers visited the church and removed the graffiti for him and after this a certain degree of normality seemed to return. It did not last long, however.

Victor was on his way back home one day after dropping his son at school when he was confronted by three men who told him that, as he had *'removed the name of [Islam's prophet] Mohammed he too would be removed from the earth very soon.'*

He said: *'Again I called the police and requested help and protection. They told me that they were keeping an eye on me and that I would be safe but I'm a village pastor so I had to go out and visit my congregation.'*

After a worship service one evening in September Victor was travelling back on his motorcycle when he stopped to relieve himself in a nearby field.

'While I was in the fields, a bearded man approached me and said that I should immediately say the Islamic creed, thereby becoming a Muslim. He then pulled a gun and said that unless I followed his instruction my time would be up!

'However, I replied that I would not say the name of anyone except my Jesus Christ.'

At that point the man opened fire.

'I fell backwards and thought that my life was over. As he was very close to me I reckoned I had probably been shot in the chest but after the man walked away I came to my senses and discovered that the bullet had hit my arm. My right side was covered in blood.'

Victor called to a teenager whom he had left to guard his motorcycle and told him what had happened. The boy helped him to get to nearby shops where locals called the police; officers

then transported him to hospital in Faisalabad.

However, it was while he was being treated in hospital that events took a turn for the worse.

'A senior policeman visited me and asked me to change my statement. He said that because of the Jaranwala incident Pakistan was gaining a bad reputation and so if I reported that a Christian pastor had been shot that would worsen the country's reputation even more.'

'He told me to say it was an attempted robbery; refusing to hand over my mobile phone I was shot at in the scuffle.'

'He then warned me that if I did not follow this the police would say something else had happened and that I had fabricated the medical evidence, adding: "We will mess up your case so that no one will believe you. Then you will disappear".'

Very early the next day Victor was discharged from hospital and taken home where, because he had refused to change his statement, he was placed under house arrest.

'Christian organisations were contacting me [to talk about] Jaranwala but [the police] did not want me to speak to anyone so they put a guard on my house on the pretext that it was to protect me from extremists. Even though I was the complainant I was treated like the criminal.'

That treatment was to get worse as just a few days later Victor was taken to another location where he was tortured.

'They tied my feet together and then the same with my arms before stretching my body so it was hard to breathe,' he said.

They then beat his legs so badly that he is unlikely ever to be able to walk normally again.

On top of that Victor was denied food and water for three days. *'I am diabetic and regularly need an insulin injection to help to keep me alive but they deprived me of even that.'*

The only way he was able to survive was by scavenging for the remains of food that had been thrown away. At one point he found a few drops of liquid at the bottom of a can of soft drink which helped to maintain his sugar levels.

However, on the third day of his ordeal

those levels dropped dangerously low and he fell unconscious. It was only the timely arrival of his wife and aunt, who had been allowed to visit, that he was taken to hospital and saved.

'On September 18, a petition against my forceful abduction and disappearance was submitted and the courts sent a bailiff along with my cousin to retrieve me from police detention.'

However, *'the police refused to let me go. The officer in charge took me to the sessions court where I was asked who had been responsible for treating me this badly.'*

"You Muslims did this to me," I replied. *"What else can you do? It seems you will kill me and dismember my body."*

'The judge ordered that I should immediately be taken to hospital for proper treatment.'

As a result of the torture Victor's left side had started to show signs of paralysis but even at the hospital he was treated with contempt.

'The doctors and nurses had a bigoted and discriminatory attitude to me because the police had told them that I was against Pakistan and anti-Islam and Mohammed.'

A few days later he was returned home by officers but with cuffs on his hands and feet like a criminal, adding to the humiliation.

'I felt terrible as my wife and sister were there.'

Even at home there was a constant police presence, with officers even standing next to his bed.

Victor insisted on being allowed to go to church, a not unreasonable request for a pastor, but instead he was taken back to jail where multiple charges were registered against him.

There officers again inflicted extreme physical, mental and psychological suffering on him, constantly using insulting language and forcing him to confess to being a criminal on a video which they then posted on social media.

'It made some Christians doubt that I was the victim,' he said.

PRISON BAPTISM

Despite his suffering Victor testifies to a deeper communion with God.

'I asked Him why I had to suffer and He

**“
WE WILL
MESS UP YOUR
CASE; THEN
YOU WILL
DISAPPEAR”**



Peaceful co-existence between Muslims and Christians ended after the Jaranwala attack. Stock image

led me to many Scriptures including from the book of Job (chapter 2, verse 10) where it says, "Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?"

At the same time many Christians in Pakistan and elsewhere were making his case publicly known. He believed God was reassuring him that he would get him out even though the crimes he had been implicated in were non-bailable and carried a 15-year prison sentence.

The authorities refused his request for a Bible but one of the prison guards indicated that, if he was willing to pay, his wife could bring in the Scriptures for him each day.

Victor agreed and even told him that he could read it when he took it back from him at the end of the day.

As a result of reading the Bible, the guard informed him that his life had started to improve. He had stopped

fighting with his wife, and had thrown away an amulet with Islamic verses on it.

'He had been told that if he did this he would get epilepsy but it did not happen. At the same time he was afraid that if he became a Christian he would lose his family as well as his pension. I told him that it was about a relationship with God, not a religion.'

Victor led the guard to the Lord and baptised him by pouring a glass of water over him and making the sign of the cross on his forehead. *'I gave him the name "Barnabas".'*

In early October Victor was granted bail but, with Islamist extremists vowing to kill him, human rights activists moved him into hiding in another city. Eventually he was helped to escape Pakistan.

It would be gratifying to believe that Victor's trials ended after fleeing

Pakistan but on December 31 last year he suffered a stroke and was on a ventilator in hospital.

'Because of the torture I can't sleep properly at night and that led to my blood pressure rising and the stroke,' he said.

With all that he has suffered it would not be surprising if Victor felt bitterness towards those who had caused him, an innocent man, so much pain and anguish. However, he holds no resentment against them.

'I forgive them from the bottom of my heart and pray that the Lord will give them opportunities to be saved,' he told me.

'Please pray for me as well; that God will heal the paralysis on my left side and will also make a way for me to be able to move to a safer country than where I am now.'

*Names changed to protect identities

HELPING CHRISTIANS IN FLIGHT



Gunmen in a car opened fire on Anil and his wife, narrowly missing the couple
Stock image

ONE STEP AHEAD OF THE ASSASSIN'S BULLET

TOM HARDIE MEETS A BUSINESSMAN WHO FOUND FAITH – AND A TARGET ON HIS BACK – AFTER HELPING A DESPERATE CHRISTIAN WOMAN AND HER CHILDREN



Even though he has fled Pakistan Anil remains vigilant

'Anil* comes from a *Sayyed* Muslim family, which means he can trace his genealogy back to the prophet of Islam, Mohammed, and would make him in the eyes of many a superior member of the religion.

That, however, has not stopped him from being hunted down by those who consider him a betrayer of Islam. In fact it has most likely made matters worse.

We sit in his small, high-rise apartment enjoying a delicious Pakistani meal that has been lovingly prepared by his wife and children as he tells us the inspiring story of coming to faith in Christ.

At the same time it is sobering to reflect that if his whereabouts are discovered then none of us would be safe.

Anil owned a business in Lahore which required him often to visit other cities in Pakistan. On one occasion he was returning home when he met a woman and her three children at a bus stop

and struck up a conversation with them.

While he had been away Anil had seen a vision of someone telling him that he would marry a Christian, not a Muslim. He was surprised because his family were at that very time making arrangements for his wedding to a Muslim woman.

'I had talked to my aunt about the vision and she tried to reassure me that it was just pre-wedding nerves. So I dismissed it but I had another vision in which I was told that not only would I marry a Christian woman but that she would have three children!'

'So when I met this family at the bus stop I wondered if she was the one. She explained that she had been kicked out of her home by her husband and as they had no possessions she and her children were in a helpless situation.'

Anil bought them food and took them to stay at his farmhouse so that they would be safe.

His kindness, however, was not appreciated by everyone. When, a short time later, his brother discovered that he was looking after a Christian family he had no choice but to relocate them to another property.

'My family found out that I was visiting them and began asking questions. Because I had shared the vision with my aunt, my mother found out and said that I had married this woman. They would not listen and became very threatening, saying I was bringing dishonour to the family and unless I got rid of her immediately they would kill me!'

Fearing for his life while at the same time not wanting to abandon the woman and her three children, Anil took them with him to the city of Gujranwala.

There they settled and for three months all seemed well. However, it was not long before he realised that the place they were staying was not safe either so they again had to move. Anil found work in the city and they continued with their lives as best they could, while at the same time the family of his betrothed called off the wedding.

With that door closed, Anil told the woman and her children that they

would all have to convert to Islam if they wanted to stay with him, and especially if she wanted to marry him, but she refused.

'I asked her why she wouldn't after all I had done for them. Instead she suggested we study the Bible and Koran together and then choose the right way, which I agreed to do.'

As they studied the Bible Anil began to notice how much he was changing as a person; so much so that he eventually felt compelled to become a Christian. Excited about his new-found faith and in an effort to learn more about Jesus he then made contact with an old Christian friend whom he felt would be able to help him further.

However, because he used an old SIM card on his phone that contained the friend's number and then failed to remove it after making the call, his family was able to trace his whereabouts.

One day as he and the woman were travelling on a motorcycle gunmen in a car opened fire on them. A number of bullets went through her headscarf

but miraculously none of them hit her or Anil.

'We raced down an alleyway as the car couldn't get through, which saved our lives,' said Anil.

Understandably the pair were shaken. *'We thought we would not survive another attack so we went straight to our house, gathered the children and our belongings together and caught a bus to Islamabad.'*

Given all that happened to them the couple, who were now married, felt they could not trust anyone so they booked in at a hotel and tried to contact local pastors to see what support was available.

Sadly, however, the church leaders, fearing a backlash from the Muslim community, refused to help. *'They said it was too risky as it would threaten many lives.'*

As a result Anil and the family were forced to move again, initially to a hotel in Karachi, then to a safe house organised by a local pastor, who helped Anil to find work.

Anil was baptised but was still *'worried and depressed and prayed for help. The pastor told me that my family was still trying to hunt me down and so we would have to leave Pakistan.'*

During this time of uncertainty Anil was strengthened by another vision in which Jesus assured him that He was with him and that he had no need to worry.

It was after this that another church leader put him in contact with Release International's partner who was able to offer advice. In 2021 Anil, his wife and three children left Pakistan.

They are currently awaiting the result of their asylum application with the UN to see if they can relocate to the West.

'We are very grateful to [Release International's partner] who has looked after us,' he said. *'You Christians are my family now. Please pray that God would give me a bigger anointing of the Holy Spirit and that we will be able to move to a safe country.'*

**Names changed to protect identities*

PLEASE HELP CHRISTIANS WHO HAVE BEEN FORCED TO FLEE PERSECUTION

These precious believers need your prayers and gifts to survive – and to rebuild their lives.

Your gift could provide:

- Life-saving intervention/advice and support
- Accommodation and help with other living expenses
- Practical and pastoral care and Christian discipleship

To make a gift please use the enclosed form, call 01689 823491 or give online at releaseinternational.org





Amara has finally found acceptance and belonging at a Release International partner's safe house

'MY GOD WILL SAVE ME!'

ON A RECENT TRIP TO PAKISTAN WE MET CONVERTS TO CHRISTIANITY WHO HAVE PAID A HIGH PRICE FOR FOLLOWING JESUS YET PERSEVERE IN THEIR FAITH

Born into a Muslim family, 'Amara'* was just six years old when her mother was murdered; following this traumatic experience her father remarried but then left the little girl to be brought up by her aunt.

This woman showed little care for her niece, who would wander the streets alone, going from place to place. But thankfully one adult in her life, a Christian maid employed by the family, offered her the love she needed and the two developed a close bond, with Amara visiting her house from time to time. The woman would take her to church, where she was intrigued to see people singing, even at funerals.

“ WHY NOT JUST KILL HER? ”

The girl was keen to find out more about Christianity but the church was cautious about welcoming in a Muslim.

However, she pleaded with the church leaders and eventually they agreed that she could attend meetings. By this time she was a teenager and, although

she enjoyed going to services, she understood little that was happening.

It was also around this time that her sister, who had recently married, took Amara to live with her. Her sibling subsequently arranged for Amara to marry an older man who already had a wife and three children.

Sadly it was not long before the man started physically abusing Amara and she was forced to flee. A friend from church took her to what was hoped was a safe location but unfortunately her husband found her and, angry that she had attended church, beat her brutally, leaving her with fractured wrists and ankles as well as a number of scars on her body. On top of this, one of her eyes was damaged, which affected her vision.

As a result of the injuries Amara was bedridden for three months, and when she was finally able to walk again, with the aid of a stick, her husband grabbed her around the neck and threatened, 'Who will save you?'

In her heart, she replied, 'My God will save me!'

Place of safety

Thankfully she managed to escape from the house and found a place of safety with Christians, who were unaware of

Amara's Muslim background. For the next two and half years she was free to go to church and read her Bible and in due course she married a believer. The couple had a son together and life appeared to be going well for the family but at the same time she began to sense that someone was watching her. Had her first husband sent people to find her?

One day, she heard a conversation outside her house in which the participants were talking about planting drugs in her property and framing her. Then one of them said: *'Why not just kill her?'*

Amara became very afraid as it soon became apparent that these people had revealed to the community that she was from a Muslim background. Pressure was put on her to leave the neighbourhood and as a result she suffered severe depression, ending up for treatment at a clinic. She was then forced to attend a mosque where she was locked in the attached *madrassa* (religious school) in an attempt to reconvert her.

There she was given a prayer mat and told to pray and in the evenings was taught the Koran, which she was forced to recite. However, Amara had no peace; only the lyric of a Christian song, *'O God, I need your help'*, would play in her head, she said.

Eventually an opportunity arose to escape which she seized, fleeing barefoot from the school.

It was not easy to find sanctuary but in due course she was taken in by a Christian family who looked after her for a year, during which time she was baptised and grew in her faith.

In due course she relocated to another area and it was while living there that a Release International partner heard about her struggles. He subsequently moved her to a safe house last summer, where she is now thriving.

Although she has known significant rejection in her life, Amara has finally found acceptance and belonging in a place where she is loved and, through that, God is healing and restoring her.

Sadly, however, because there is so much fear and sensitivity in the church over contact with Muslim converts to Christianity, Amara is not able to see her son, who is now aged 14. He continues to live with her second husband, who has remarried.



Hania was baptised in secret

FAMILY HOSTILITY GREET'S COUPLE'S CONVERSION

'HANIA* and her husband, 'Habib*', are a young married couple from a Muslim background. They are now Christians and Hania was recently baptised in secret.

Habib came to faith after another convert to Christianity gave him a copy of the New Testament. As he read, encouraged by this friend to pray and fast as he did so, he became curious but at the same time felt a sense of peace.

He then attended a Bible study class, which he enjoyed, and eventually gave his life to Christ.

However, it was not long before word of his conversion spread to his family who, angry at his decision to follow Jesus, had him questioned by the police.

His wife at the time also caused him a number of problems before leaving him. Naturally Habib was very upset by this but says that he is blessed to have met Hania; they are now happily married, and enjoy reading the Bible and praying together.

At the same time they are conscious that hostility towards them can surface at any moment. Hania was baptised in secret recently but shortly afterwards she was overheard singing a psalm by her brother-in-law, who then slapped and beat her for her faith in Jesus.

*Names changed to protect identities

PRAY FOR CHRISTIANS IN PAKISTAN

- Accepting Jesus can mean rejection from family and friends. Pray that converts can find fellowship with other believers so that they can encourage each other in their faith
- For protection from extremists and family members who are hostile to the Christian faith
- For safety and wisdom for Release International partners as they pastorally and practically look after believers

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL AND YOUR CHURCH



Lynn running in Berlin and
Aimee with her Belfast City
Marathon medal



Inspired by the moving story of Pastor Gideon in Nigeria whose wife and five children were killed by militants (see *Voice*, October 2024) long-time Release International supporter Margaret, pictured on the right, and members of a local Churches Together group held a jumble sale of high-quality items to raise money for persecuted believers. In all the sale raised £1,500!

WHEN THE RUNNER HITS THE ROAD ...

IT WAS a case of the road more travelled for Release International volunteers Lynn and Aimee who have undertaken two amazing challenges to raise funds to help persecuted Christians.

While Aimee completed her first marathon, the Belfast City event, in May, raising £600 in sponsorship, Lynn has started a six half-marathon challenge that has already seen her run in Berlin, Prague, Cardiff and Lisbon.

Aimee, aged 26, said: *'I've been volunteering with Release International for about five years now and have been deeply moved by every story I've heard. As I was already planning to run my first full marathon, I thought the very least I could do was to raise funds for our persecuted brothers and sisters. It was a real privilege to be able to run for them.'*

Lynn, who will be competing in the two remaining 'SuperHalves' – Copenhagen in September and Valencia in October – said: *'A couple of years ago my husband*

ran a 90km race in South Africa and raised money for Release International, which inspired me to do something similar. When I read there were six half marathons in Europe called "the SuperHalves" – in Prague, Cardiff, Lisbon, Berlin, Copenhagen and Valencia – I decided to challenge myself to run them.'

She continued: *'I find running difficult, but I have been training – doing track sessions and strength training each week – along with running a half marathon every month.'*

'I would love to raise as much money as possible to help persecuted Christians, so please do sponsor me. Knowing that people have generously given for my suffering brothers and sisters will definitely inspire me to keep going when I'm struggling!'

A huge thank you to Lynn and Aimee for your dedication and commitment to your persecuted Christian brothers and sisters around the world.

You can support Lynn at <https://www.justgiving.com/page/lynn-price-1>



HEART-FELT GRATITUDE

Our thanks to Sandra and other 'crafty' supporters who have hand-made these wonderful felt hearts for persecuted Christians as a reminder of God's love for them. They are warmly received by so many who have suffered for the faith.

Andrew Brunson, who was imprisoned in Turkey, will share his inspiring story in the UK this November



EX-PRISONER OF FAITH ON UK SPEAKING TOUR

WE ARE excited to announce that former prisoner of faith Andrew Brunson and his wife, Norine, will be joining us for a series of live events across the UK this November as part of our package of events and resources for the International Day of Prayer for the persecuted church (IDOP).

For 23 years, Andrew and Norine served as missionaries in Turkey, starting churches, providing aid to refugees, and leading a house of prayer. In October 2016, they grabbed global headlines when they were arrested and falsely accused of terrorism. For the next two years, Andrew was held in Turkish prisons. Following a worldwide prayer movement and

significant political pressure from the American Government, he was dramatically released in October 2018 and together they returned to the US.

Today, Andrew and Norine lead a ministry called WaveStarters and are committed to preparing the next generation of Christians to stand in difficult times.

Andrew and Norine will share their compelling story with us, encourage us to remember those who remain in prison for their faith, and challenge us to consider how ready we are to face opposition for Jesus.

Information about IDOP resources for churches plus the dates and venues

for Andrew's visit will be included in the next edition of *Voice* and on our website, releaseinternational.org.

IDOP, which is a well-established date in the Christian calendar, falls on Sunday, November 2, this year. It may seem a long way off but now is a good time to start preparing for the event, which provides a focused reminder of the importance of praying for persecuted believers.

If you would like to invite a Release International regional speaker to your church on a Sunday in November to mark IDOP then please make contact using the numbers in the box below.



INVITE A SPEAKER

Our team of experienced speakers are available to join your church or online meeting to help you support and pray for persecuted Christians. They would love to hear from you!

Ireland:
Stephen on 028 9334 0014
or 07933 313169

London & South:
Jonny on 07861 656269

Central England & Wales:
Allister on 07916 396178

Scotland & North of England:
James on 07434 894016

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL AND YOUR CHURCH



Petr Jasek, flanked by Artless Theatre Company's Jon and Chris, takes audience questions after the performance

CURTAIN CLOSES ON CAPTIVATING DRAMA

AUDIENCE MOVED TO TEARS
AT FINAL PERFORMANCE OF
'PRISON WALLS'

AN audience of 250-plus packed London's Kensington Temple for the final performance of the innovative and moving drama, *If Prison Walls Could Speak*.

Over nearly four successful years *Prison Walls* has been performed about 100 times before thousands of people, including at the Keswick Convention and New Wine. It has picked up a well-deserved five-star review from Premier Christianity Magazine and, most importantly, has served as a powerful means of raising the voice of persecuted Christians with the UK church.

This remained true for the final performance, with many in the audience moved to tears and convicted to pray more for their persecuted brothers and sisters. The impact of the performance was magnified, in no small part, by the presence of Petr Jasek himself – whose experience of imprisonment in Sudan the play is based on – and his wife, Vanda.

At the conclusion of the performance, Petr participated in a question-and-answer session and urged all those present to commit to praying for the suffering church, as he reflected on his own experiences of answered prayer in the cell he shared with ISIS fighters.

'Every night, no matter what was happening to me, no matter where my enemies were hitting me, I fell asleep at 9pm. I was thankful to the Lord for this, for it helped to keep me in my right mind. Three months after my imprisonment, I was allowed to receive my first letter from my wife. In it I read of how people back home were praying for me. In particular, I read that my home church had made a commitment to pray for me for one hour every evening, no matter what they were doing. When did they pray for me? At 8pm. Then I realised, 8pm Czech time is 9pm Sudanese time!'

As Petr continued, he gently challenged all those present: *'What is the most common Christian social phrase? "I will pray for you!" It was then that I realised how often I had not been faithful to that and I made a commitment that, when I was released from prison, I would strive to be.'*

Paul Robinson, Release International CEO, said: *'Our heartfelt thanks to Chris Poch and Jon Maltz, the Artless Theatre Company directors and performers, for producing this amazing drama. I know it has had a hugely significant impact on many thousands of Christians in the UK during its long and successful run, opening believers' eyes to the suffering of the church around the world and instilling within them a passion for prayer for their persecuted brothers and sisters.'*



Release International volunteers Wendy and Steve on the stand at Spring Harvest

FOCUS ON MARTYRS AT SUMMER EVENTS

Release International will be attending a number of Christian events and festivals across the UK this summer, using our stand to draw attention to stories of Christian martyrs and their families.

Recently, in places such as Nigeria and Burkina Faso, thousands of Christians have been killed because of their faith in Jesus, which has had a traumatic impact on those left behind. As well as dealing with personal shock and grief they can face material hardship and need ways to process what has happened.

Our main banner features a project we support in Nigeria. We will be sharing the stories of individuals who have been helped by this work as well as distributing small wooden crosses to encourage prayer for these brothers and sisters.

It was great to meet supporters at Spring Harvest in Skegness and Minehead as well as Bible by the Beach, the Elim Leaders' Summit and the Baptist Assembly earlier this year. During the next few months we will be at the following events:

Keswick Portstewart July 5-11

Refuel, Moray July 21-24

New Wine July 30-August 4

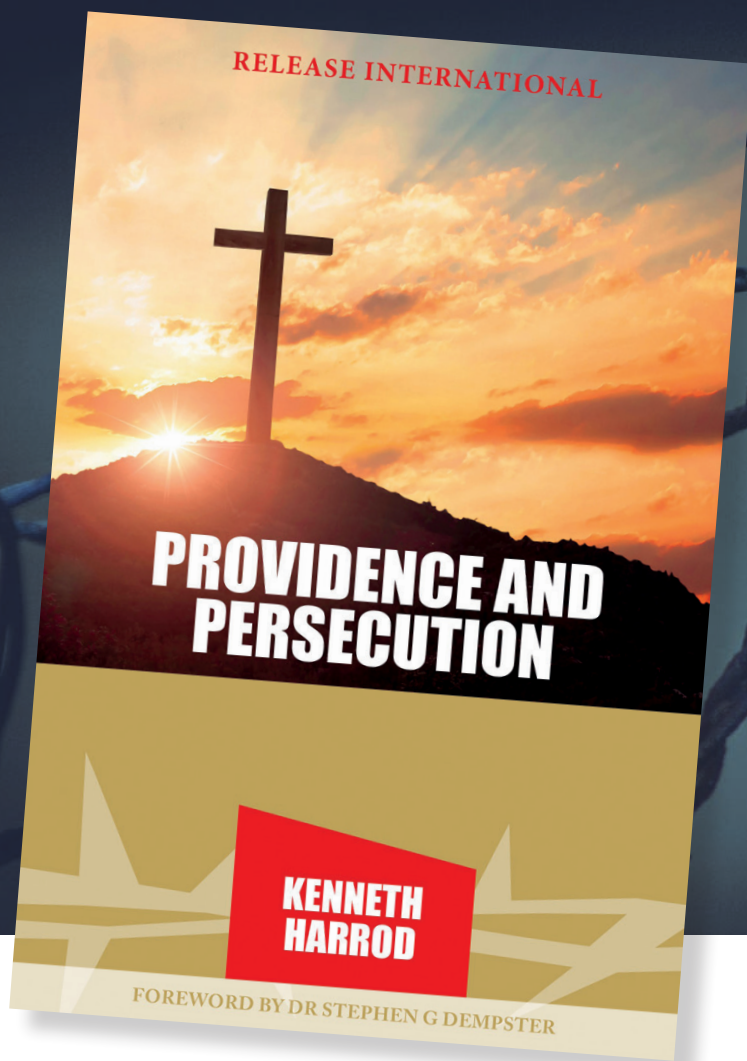
**EMW Aberystwyth Conference
August 11-15**

Bangor Worldwide August 15-24

Big Church Festival August 22-24

**FIEC Leaders' Conference
November 10-12**

If you are attending any of these events please do come say hello at our stand. We would love to see you.



PROVIDENCE AND PERSECUTION

If God is sovereign, why does he allow the awful persecution of his beloved children?

Understandably, that is a question that taxes many Christians.

Release International's new book, *Providence and Persecution*, looks at the important biblical theme of God's sovereign providence and how this helps us to respond to the painful reality of the persecution of our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world.

The book offers a robust, biblical picture of our sovereign, creator God. Biblical examples, as well as those from the lives of contemporary Christians, serve to remind us how

God is at work – even in the midst of persecution – to bring about his good purposes.

Petr Jašek, who spent more than a year in a Sudanese prison for his Christian work (and whose story is told in the book, *Imprisoned with ISIS*), has written a moving Afterword to the book. The Foreword is by North American Old Testament scholar, Stephen Dempster.

This very readable and helpful new resource is available for £10 (including postage and packing) from our website shop (releaseinternational.org) or by calling 01689 823491.

What others have said about this book

'Reading this book will certainly change the way that you view persecution, and may change the way you view God.'

John Stevens, National Director, FIEC

'This is a book for all Christians to read, to pray over and by it to be strengthened in their faith.'

Archbishop Ben Kwashi

'Reading this book helped me again to see that, as we ponder the harsh reality of what our brothers and sisters in Christ are suffering for the gospel, the sovereignty of our loving Father God is in fact satisfying, faith-sustaining and, in its own way, comforting.'

Paul Robinson, CEO, Release International

FLIGHT IS NEVER THE END OF THE STORY FOR GOD'S PEOPLE

HOPE AND COMPASSION CAN RISE FROM THE ASHES OF DESPAIR FOR EVERY BELIEVER, WRITES
ALEX SMYTHE

I will never forget interviewing Luka in Nigeria, a man driven out of his village when it was attacked by Fulani militants (see *Voice*, Jan-Mar 2025). He escaped the village with his only surviving child, Magnificent, who was left with life-changing injuries – particularly to his face.

Luka told me: *'After the attack on Kagoro, the villagers fled to a camp for the internally displaced. Everybody was traumatised.'* Like other believers the events of that night had a huge impact on his faith; he questioned how God could have allowed this to happen to His children. Some of the men from the village returned but women and children are still displaced – too afraid to go back.

Luka is just one of an estimated 210,000 Christians forced to flee worldwide in 2024* – with almost half of that number being in Nigeria.

The Bible tells of countless men and women of God who fled persecution – Moses, Elijah and the family of Christ being just three examples.

The Book of Acts records that when Stephen, the first Christian martyr, was

stoned to death, 'a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria' (Acts 8:1). As we read on, however, we see that the result of this was not a decline of the church; rather Christianity both spread and increased (Acts 8:4; Acts 11:19).

Later, in Acts 12:17 the apostle Peter fled when his life was threatened, while the apostle Paul took flight on numerous occasions to avoid persecution and threats to his life (eg, Acts 14:6).

As Christians in the UK it appears unlikely that we will ever have to flee persecution. However, sometimes we might feel like running away from the difficulties of life. Maybe our spouse has died, we have lost our job, we develop health problems or have financial difficulties. We do not know what is ahead and are not sure of our path; in fact for all of us life can be disconcerting at times.

Thankfully, however, we have God as our refuge and the Holy Spirit as our guide. Though we may not realise it at the time, He is with us even in the darkest moments of life.

From a place of doubting God after the attack on his village, the Lord has given Luka in Nigeria the compassion to want to help other Christians who have fled persecution.

God can turn our most difficult times too to ones of hope and purpose that can help others who are suffering.

*UK Government Hansard report, April 8, 2025



HE IS WITH US EVEN IN THE DARKEST MOMENTS'



INSPIRING FAITH

'The more you are aware of God's love for you, the more you will be able to love God'

Pastor Richard Wurmbbrand was imprisoned for 14 years in communist Romania in the 1950s and 1960s. In 1968 he inspired the founding of Release International, which today continues his ministry to serve persecuted Christians around the world in the name of Jesus.



SIMPLE WAY TO SHOW HOW MUCH YOU CARE

Your regular support enables our partners to provide prayerful, pastoral and practical help to persecuted Christians in around 30 countries.

Regular gifts such as through Direct Debits mean it is so much easier for us and our partners to plan that support, whether it's practical help such as providing food or shelter for Christians forced to flee, help for the families of those who have been

imprisoned for their faith and so are unable to provide for their spouse and children, or counselling for those who have suffered horrific trauma as a result of losing loved ones to violence.

Knowing that the funds are available to meet the needs of their persecuted brothers and sisters is also one less consideration for our partners at a time when they themselves can be

challenged by the demands of their ministry.

'Thank you to everyone who gives to help our persecuted family,' said Paul Robinson, Release International chief executive. 'Regular giving particularly is very much appreciated. The more we know how much will be available the more we know how much we have to fund the needs of our persecuted brothers and sisters.'

- Use the tear-off section of the letter or the Connect and Support card to set up your Direct Debit. Please make sure you include your name and address on the card.

REGULAR SUPPORT IS VITAL

Regular giving (even small amounts) through a Direct Debit helps us to plan ministry support around the world. It is a great way to show ongoing love and concern for persecuted believers.

giftaid it

In order to Gift Aid your donation you must tick a box below. I want to Gift Aid my donation:

today Today, and any donations I make in the future or have made in the past 4 years.

I am a UK taxpayer and understand that if I pay Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax that the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations to that tax year is to my responsibility to declare. Please notify us if you want to cancel this declaration or change your name or home address. We no longer pay interest tax on your account and/or capital gains. If you pay Income Tax at the higher or additional rate and want to receive the additional tax relief due to you, you must include all your Gift Aid donations on your Self Assessment tax return or ask HM Revenue and Customs to advise you on tax code.

Name

Date

Yes, I want to partner with Release International

Instruction to your Bank or Building Society to make gifts by Direct Debit

Banks and Building Societies may not accept Direct Debit Instructions for some types of account. PLEASE COMPLETE YOUR NAME AND ADDRESS ON THE REVERSE PAGE. THIS FORM CANNOT BE PROCESSED WITHOUT THEM.

Please pay Release International Direct Debits from the account detailed in this Instruction subject to the safeguards assured by the Direct Debit Guarantee. I understand that this instruction may remain with Release International and, if so, details will be passed electronically to my Bank/Building Society.

Amount: £ Monthly Quarterly Annually

Make each payment on the 1st or 15th of the month, beginning on

These gifts are to be used wherever they are most needed.

Name of account holder

Account number Sort code

Name of your Bank/Building Society

Date Signed

I confirm that I am the account holder and am the only person required to authorise this Direct Debit.

Thank you!

The Direct Debit Guarantee • This Guarantee is offered by all banks and building societies that accept instructions to pay Direct Debits. • If there are any changes to the amount, date or frequency of your Direct Debit, Release International will notify you 3 working days in advance of your account being debited or as otherwise agreed. If you request Release International to collect a payment, you are entitled to a full and immediate refund of the amount paid from your Bank or Building Society; if you receive a refund you are not entitled to, you must pay it back when Release International asks you to. • You can cancel a Direct Debit at any time by simply contacting your Bank or Building Society. Written confirmation may be required. Please also notify Release International.

Please return to Release in the Freepost envelope provided.
Or to **FREEPOST RELEASE INTERNATIONAL**

www.releaseinternational.org 01689 823491 Charity Reg No 280577 (Scotland: SC040456)

A DIRECT DEBIT IS SIMPLE TO SET UP
Use the tear-off section of the letter or the Connect and Support card to set up your Direct Debit. Please make sure you include your name and address on the card.

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 our partners to provide prayerful, pastoral and practical help to persecuted Christians in around 30 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, email info@releaseinternational.org or use the enclosed response card.

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL
voice
of Persecuted Christians



PRAYER SHIELD



Displaced Christian children have been helped by our partner's education project

JULY 2025

*Heavenly Father,
As the source of all wisdom,
please give clear guidance
and discernment to my
persecuted brothers and
sisters as they face trials and
challenges for their faith.
May they know Your divine
presence with them at all
times and may those who
have been forced to flee their
homes draw comfort and
strength from knowing that
You are still sovereign and
will fulfil Your purposes for
their lives wherever they find
themselves.*

*In Jesus's precious name I
pray.*

Amen

BURKINA FASO

TUESDAY 1: As Burkina Faso once again tops the Institute for Economics & Peace's Global Terrorism Index, please pray for comfort for those Christians who mourn loved ones lost to Islamist violence and pray for peace in this nation, and throughout the wider Sahel region from Mali to Sudan.

WEDNESDAY 2: Pray for protection, wisdom and blessing on our partner, Pastor S and his team, especially as they travel in and out of dangerous parts of the country to meet persecuted and displaced Christians and to administer the projects that help them.

THURSDAY 3: Pray for the Christian children our partner is supporting through schooling despite having been

displaced from their homes and communities. Pray that they will make new friends, enjoy a fresh sense of belonging and grasp the opportunity to fulfil their potential in the places to which they have been displaced.

FRIDAY 4: Give thanks for the displaced pastors and widows of martyrs who have been able to establish new livelihoods through our projects. Pray that their livestock and new businesses will provide enough support for them and their families as well as others in need.

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL
voice
of Persecuted Christians

PRAYERSHIELD

SATURDAY 5: Thank God for the 45 students who recently completed their baccalaureate qualification thanks to our project funding schooling for displaced Christian children. Pray for God's guidance and encouragement for them as they seek work, training or higher education.

SUNDAY 6: Pray for the displaced pastors who are now running new churches in IDP (internally displaced person) camps around the cities. They minister to thousands of displaced individuals with acute spiritual and physical needs. Pray for God's wisdom, strength and provision on their ministry.

MONDAY 7: As the situation in the country constantly changes, Christian women have started to cover their heads and wear Islamic clothes in order to protect themselves from harassment or worse. Pray they will have wisdom to know how best to live out their faith.

INDIA

TUESDAY 8: Pray for Jose and Sheeja Pappachan, who have been sentenced to five years in prison under the anti-conversion laws in Uttar Pradesh state (the first conviction of its kind). Pray that they will be acquitted on appeal and that there will be no more convictions under these unconstitutional laws.

WEDNESDAY 9: Pray for our Bibles for Pastors project

which is putting local-language Bibles into the hands of believers and seekers. Pray for a continued reliable supply of copies.

THURSDAY 10: Please pray for pastors such 'Mohan', who have been arrested and charged under anti-conversion laws and now face long-running legal cases. Pray for God's protection on them as they continue to serve and that they will be acquitted.

FRIDAY 11: Remember in prayer the leaders of our partner organisation who face increasing surveillance and pressure. Pray that they will know God's protection when they travel and His wisdom in their decision-making and leadership.

SATURDAY 12: Pray for protection for the rural village pastors in Odisha, Chhattisgarh and other eastern Indian states who have been attacked and threatened by Hindu mobs intent on destroying their ministries.

SUNDAY 13: Pray for Christians from Manipur who have been displaced by ethnic and religious violence. Pray that the Government would seek to restore peace there and to allow the hundreds of burned churches to be rebuilt and reopened.

MONDAY 14: Pray for 'Rajendra' from Rajasthan, who was viciously attacked and nearly killed in 2016, and was attacked again in March this year, along with his wife and parents, during a church service. Pray for healing, wisdom and courage.

NIGERIA

TUESDAY 15: Join us in giving thanks for the construction of a new home for Rev Gideon Dawell, which will replace the family home destroyed by militants (see *Voice*, Oct-Dec 2024). Pray for comfort and strength for Gideon whose wife and children were killed in the attack.



Gideon Dawell, whose wife and children were killed when militant herdsmen set fire to his property, stands in front of what will become his new home. A Release International associate ministry has funded the construction

PRAYERSHIELD

WEDNESDAY 16: Pray for the trauma-healing workshops run by our partner, Stefanos Foundation, which help Nigerian Christians to come to terms with the horrific attacks they have suffered.

THURSDAY 17: Pray for wisdom and courage for church leaders and Christian politicians in Nigeria as they stand up for the rights of persecuted believers, not only against Islamist violence but also against the imposition of *Sharia* (Islamic law) across northern states, even among non-Muslim populations.

FRIDAY 18: Please pray for Magnificent (pictured), who is awaiting facial reconstructive surgery. The boy, who featured in *Voice* (Jan-Mar 2025), was shot in the mouth during a raid on his family home.



SATURDAY 19: Please pray for our partner, Archbishop Ben Kwashi, and his wife Gloria. Although now retired as an Anglican bishop, Ben, along with Gloria, continues to oversee many projects including the care of orphaned children.

SUNDAY 20: Please pray for Release International's partner, Mark Lipdo, and the dedicated staff at Stefanos Foundation who have worked tirelessly to highlight the plight of persecuted Christians and to provide them with care and practical assistance. Their trauma-healing workshops have brought healing and peace to thousands.

MONDAY 21: Pray for Rev Mark Mukan, a Release International partner, and his ministry among

thousands of persecuted Christians in central and northern Nigeria. Join us in both thanking God for his energy and perseverance in the face of persecution, and praying for God's protection over and blessing on Mark's ministry.

EGYPT

TUESDAY 22: Please pray for God's blessing and protection over our partner, Operation Hope, as it deals with hugely difficult situations faced by the Christian families it serves.

WEDNESDAY 23: Please pray for the many Christians who are daily wage earners in the impoverished areas of Egypt in which Operation Hope works. As well as facing societal discrimination they, like other Egyptians, struggle with the challenging economic conditions.

THURSDAY 24: Pray for new believers from a Muslim background in Egypt, who can face severe repercussions as a result of their conversion. Pray that they will quickly be able to find fellowship with others who can help them to grow in their new faith.

FRIDAY 25: Pray that converts to Christianity will find safe ways to share their new faith with family and community.

SATURDAY 26: Pray for the many Christians in Egypt who find themselves displaced to other parts of the country as a result of the oppression they face. Pray for Release International partners who seek to help them to re-establish their lives while

continuing to serve God in their new locations.

SUNDAY 27: Give thanks to God that two Christian converts who were locked in an Egyptian prison and held for three years without trial have been released. Pray for continued protection for Abdulbaqi Saeed Abdo and Nour Girgis.

MONDAY 28: Praise God for those in Egypt who seek to share the love of Christ often in hostile environments. Pray that He will be their shield.

UGANDA

TUESDAY 29: Pray for an end to the increasing violence perpetrated by hardline Muslims in eastern Uganda. Earlier this year an evangelist, Robert Kasozi, also known as Mulokole, was beaten and stabbed after he and his team led a widow to Christ during an open-air gospel meeting. Pray for the three co-workers who were also beaten.

WEDNESDAY 30: Pray for the children and friends of Nasiimu Mirembe, who was stabbed to death by her husband two days after becoming a Christian in March. Nasiimu's six children range in age from 3 to 18. She was 41 years old.

THURSDAY 31: Pray for the untold number of Christians who have received death threats and suffered violence for leading Muslims to Christ. Pray that God would give believers wisdom and protection as they share the gospel.

AUGUST 2025 PAKISTAN

FRIDAY 1: Pray for Nawab Bibi, the wife of Zafar Bhatti, who is imprisoned for his faith (see *Voice*, July-Sept 2024). Nawab's health is poor and she needs substantial care and support.

SATURDAY 2: Pray for Nabeela and Angelica, the wife and daughter of Ishfaq Masih, who has been imprisoned for blasphemy since 2017. He was sentenced to death in 2022. Please pray that the appeal against this sentence would succeed.

SUNDAY 3: Pray for 'Avidan', who featured in a Release International appeal last year, and his family, who have been repeatedly attacked and threatened. Pray for them as they settle in another country where it is safer to be a Christian.

MONDAY 4: Pray for 'Hania' and 'Habib', a young couple who are secret believers from a Muslim background (see *Voice* magazine). Following her baptism Hania was overheard singing a Christian worship song and was beaten by a family member.

TUESDAY 5: Pray for 'Amara', who has experienced severe rejection since becoming a follower of Jesus (see *Voice* magazine). With our partners, she has now found a place of love and acceptance.

WEDNESDAY 6: Praise God that 'Shezhad' and 'Noor' are able to live in a safe house provided by one of our



Nabeela, wife of prisoner Ishfaq Masih

partners. The couple, who featured in *Voice* (April-June 2024), are growing in their faith.

THURSDAY 7: Pray for 'Rose', who has experienced severe persecution in the past because of her faith in Christ. She and her family have been forced to move house and yet are still being threatened.

SRI LANKA

FRIDAY 8: Praise the Lord for training sessions provided by our partners for persecuted pastors. One attendee said: "They were very useful and valuable, especially in our personal lives, helping us to evaluate ourselves, rebuild ourselves, and correct our weaknesses."

SATURDAY 9: Buddhist nationalists consider those who embrace Christianity as treasonous. Pray for those who have faced hostility for embracing Christ and pray that those being drawn to Him will not be deterred.

SUNDAY 10: Pray for peace

between the various religious groups in Sri Lanka and that there would be no resurgence in extremism.

MONDAY 11: Thank the Lord for a new initiative by our partners to support youth leaders. After attending a seminar, one leader said: 'I began to see the current situation in a new way and understand what we, as believers, need to do to bring peace and change to our nation.'

TUESDAY 12: Pray for Linda, a volunteer Christian teacher, who heads a small school of 50 Christian children. She is teaching them to be resilient in the face of opposition.

WEDNESDAY 13: Praise God for a one-day training event for volunteer Christian teachers. The training focused on the evolving landscape of legally related persecution, their freedom of religion or belief rights, and how they can actively defend those rights.

THURSDAY 14: Pray for a camp for Christian teachers organised by our partners. Ask God to refresh those who attend and inspire them to continue serving young Christians throughout Sri Lanka.

CHINA

FRIDAY 15: Pray for members of the All Ranges Church. Yang Zhijin, who is aged 75, Song Yude (72) and Ma Fuxiu (66) are all facing charges related to their church activities.

SATURDAY 16: The All Ranges Church in China needs our

PRAYERSHIELD

prayers. While in Tibet, ten believers were arrested. Yao Xilin, Zhang Wei and Ren Xiaoyun remain in a detention centre.

SUNDAY 17: Pastor Sun Chenghao, a Chinese house church leader, has been held by authorities for 'organising illegal border crossings' after a visit to South Korea. Pray for his release and for strength for his family during this trial.

MONDAY 18: Praise God for our partners who are training Chinese underground church leaders. Many of the participants regularly face persecution from the Government for their faithful witness.

TUESDAY 19: Pray for a Christian sister who was baptised at a recent training event held by our partners. Pray for her protection and that she will continue to grow in her faith.

WEDNESDAY 20: Pray for an imprisoned Chinese pastor and for his family. He has been detained for more than a year without a trial and his family members have been abandoned by some of their church because of government pressure.

THURSDAY 21: Pray for continued Bible distributions in China. There has been an ongoing government crackdown on Christian materials, meaning our partners have had to become ever more creative in how they distribute copies.

NORTH KOREA

FRIDAY 22: Remember in prayer Pastor Zhang Wen Shi, also known as Deacon Jang, who was kidnapped from China in 2014 and sentenced to 15 years in a North Korean prison. Please pray for his release.

SATURDAY 23: Sister P is a North Korean living in China. She is discipling her family members and other North Korean Christian women. Pray for her protection and that the Lord will bless her ministry.

SUNDAY 24: Pray for our partner in South Korea, training North Korean defectors to reach out to their neighbours with the gospel. As fellow defectors with a shared experience and background they are uniquely placed to communicate effectively.

MONDAY 25: Tighter surveillance and restrictions by the Government, coupled with natural disasters and other obstructions, have made Bible distribution in North Korea more challenging. Pray that our partner will have wisdom and know the Lord's providence as distributions continue.

TUESDAY 26: Continue to pray for South Korean pastor Kim Kuk-Gi, who was sentenced to life imprisonment with hard labour in North Korea in 2015 on charges of espionage.

WEDNESDAY 27: Give thanks for 96 year-old Mrs Lee who despite persecution and personal tragedies in her life

continues to witness to the love of God. As a child she witnessed the courageous faith of church leaders threatened with execution in a North Korean village (see *Voice*, April-June 2025).

THURSDAY 28: Pray for the North Korean defectors who desperately miss their families back in their former homeland. Pray that they will know the Lord's comfort and be assured that He hears their prayers for their loved ones.

INDONESIA

FRIDAY 29: Pray for the handful of Muslim-background believers who used to work with our partner and have been forced to return to their former religion. They have been passing on sensitive information to a radical group who are using it against our partner and the underground church.

SATURDAY 30: Please pray for our partner, who is experiencing an increase in the number of threats to him and those he is training to share the gospel. Pray too for the provision of a secure location for the training to take place.

SUNDAY 31: Despite all the opposition, praise God for the recent baptisms and continued growth of the underground church. Pray for believers who are sharing the gospel with their fellow Indonesians, many of whom have had no previous contact with Christianity.

SEPTEMBER 2025

IRAN

MONDAY 1: Remember in prayer Iranian Christians who are held in Tehran's brutal Evin prison, some of whom were previously released and then rapidly re-arrested. Pray for God's comfort for them and their families and that they will receive medical and other care in prison. Pray too for wisdom for their lawyers.

TUESDAY 2: Please pray for our partners who mentor and teach leaders in Iran's underground church. Pray for God's blessing on the conferences they run in a neighbouring country. These events enable Iranian believers to meet, train and worship together and to encourage each other.

WEDNESDAY 3: Pray particularly for those recently prosecuted and convicted simply for being Christians, such as Narges Nasri, who is pregnant and has been sentenced to 16 years in jail. Pray that God will comfort them as they come to terms with the injustice of their convictions.

THURSDAY 4: Continue to pray for Iranian Christians who live in exile as refugees – especially for those who are being held in detention centres and have been threatened with deportation. Pray too for our partners who minister to them in their difficult circumstances.

FRIDAY 5: Pray for all those involved in the translation, printing and distribution of Bibles in Iran's many languages. Pray that each copy will reach those in need of the Scriptures, despite the risks and restrictions in place.

SATURDAY 6: Pray for Iranians who have come to faith in Christ in recent years, many through online and media ministry; that God will strengthen their faith and guide them to opportunities for fellowship with other believers.

SUNDAY 7: An imprisoned Iranian Christian convert, Amir-Ali Minaei, who has a heart condition and was recently assaulted by a prison guard, went on hunger strike in April. The 31-year-old is also understood to have ceased taking his medication in protest against the denial of access to a telephone in Evin prison. Remember him in your prayers.

MALAYSIA

MONDAY 8: Lift up in prayer secret believers from Malay backgrounds who are fearful for the future. Pray that, built up by the Spirit, they will persevere in their faith. In particular, remember 'Fatimah' (see *Voice*, April-June 2025) as she seeks faithfully to follow Jesus.

TUESDAY 9: Many believers in Malaysia are afraid to share the gospel with others

because of the repercussions from militants in the Muslim majority. Pray that real and perceived persecution would not deter them.

WEDNESDAY 10: Ask God to protect, inspire and lead Susanna Koh (pictured) as she faithfully ministers while at the same time seeking justice for her husband, pastor Raymond Koh. Remember too her three children who have been profoundly affected by the absence of their father, who has not been seen since his abduction in 2017.

THURSDAY 11: Pray for the political leaders in Malaysia as they continue to be put under pressure from radical groups to implement *Sharia* (Islamic law) nationally.

FRIDAY 12: Pray for protection for house churches as they are becoming ever more important for persecuted believers. May the established churches recognise the importance of these places and start to support them.

SATURDAY 13: Rural Christians, many of whom are illiterate, have been registered as 'Muslim' on their official identity cards without their knowledge. Pray that a way is found for them to be able legally to amend this identification, which has huge implications for their children's education.

SUNDAY 14: The Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party has



Susanna Koh continues to seek justice for her missing husband, pastor Raymond Koh

been trying to implement a Bill known as RUU355, which would increase *Sharia* punishment power. Pray that this draft legislation would be rejected by the Parliament.

TANZANIA

MONDAY 15: Pray for church leaders such as Rev Joseph Mitinje, who is the pastor of

a large evangelical church in Dar es Salaam. Pray for him as he and his church train, equip, support and send pastors and evangelists to plant churches in dangerous locations.

TUESDAY 16: Pray for protection for Musa, who pastors a local church and is the principal of a Christian school in a Muslim

community, as well as for his family and congregation. Pray that they will not fear the death threats from local radicals.

WEDNESDAY 17: Pray for Pastor Don, who is serving discreetly on an island off Tanzania. He has recently baptised a number of people. Pray particularly for his and his family's needs as they are discriminated against in areas such as healthcare, education and buying land.

THURSDAY 18: New believers from a Muslim background are suffering in many ways. Often they are rejected and persecuted by their own family members. Pray that their family in Christ will support, love and care for them.

FRIDAY 19: Pray against the radical Muslim cells that are trying to take hold in northeast and southeast Tanzania. There is growing concern about groups such as al-Shabaab which are influenced and supported by interests outside the country.

SATURDAY 20: Pray that Release International partners would be able to support pastors who are experiencing pressure from those opposed to the gospel.

SUNDAY 21: Pray for protection for Tanzanian politicians as they interact with different faith communities in various regions of the country.

UKRAINE

MONDAY 22: Pray for Christian families in Ukraine who have lost loved ones in the war with Russia. Their sorrow is deep and their hearts are heavy with loss. Pray that they find support, healing and the assurance of God's presence.

TUESDAY 23: Pastor 'Alexis' and his team ministered under Russian occupation despite significant danger. Pray that he and his wife will receive the care and support they now need.

WEDNESDAY 24: Pray for Christian leaders serving in the occupied regions of Ukraine. Russian invaders seized many church buildings, arrested and tortured pastors, forcing Christians to go underground. Any form of Ukrainian evangelical Christianity is banned. Russians raid even home groups, so Christians live under constant fear of being discovered.

THURSDAY 25: Pray for Release International

partners who are seeking to meet the spiritual and psychological needs of Christians in Ukraine caused by persecution and war-related trauma.

FRIDAY 26: Pray for healing and restoration for church leaders who have been imprisoned and tortured because of their Christian activities.

SATURDAY 27: Pray for Christians within the Ukrainian military who face difficult moral choices as a result of the war. Pray for chaplains and others who minister to them and for their families, especially during times of separation and anxiety.

SUNDAY 28: Many pastors have lost loved ones and homes and have lived in continual fear while seeking to serve others. Pray that they will experience healing through trauma-relief retreats for Christian leaders.

MYANMAR

MONDAY 29: 'Win Aung' was arrested and imprisoned for

sharing the gospel. Please pray for him and his family. Our partners are providing food, rent and school fees to support them while Win is in prison.

TUESDAY 30: 'Aye Myint' was evicted from her family home when she came to faith in Christ. The 63-year-old is now living in a corner of a church building. Pray that she knows the faithful provision of the Lord in this challenging season.

Lord Jesus

Please grant me empathy and compassion for the needs and suffering of those whom in obedience have taken up their cross (Luke 14:26-27) and so have lost precious relationships and possessions in order to be your disciple.

Help me also to recognise the cost yet emulate their example in the context in which You have placed me.

May Your kingdom come in my life, as in theirs.

Amen

Sources: Article 18; ChinaAid; Christian Daily International-Morning Star News; Release International associate ministries, partners and contacts; Voice of the Martyrs Korea.

Names in quotation marks 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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