

voice

OF PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS



**HELPING
OPPRESSED
CHRISTIANS**

Relief among the devastation
When flight is the only option
How £8 changed a life
International Day of Prayer 2025

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL
voice
of Persecuted Christians

WELCOME

PAUL ROBINSON, CEO



IN 1 CORINTHIANS 4:12 (NIV) THE APOSTLE PAUL WRITES: '... WHEN WE ARE PERSECUTED, WE ENDURE IT.' INTERESTINGLY ON THIS OCCASION PAUL DOES NOT ASK FOR AN ESCAPE FROM PERSECUTION BUT THE ABILITY TO ENDURE.

In this edition of *Voice*, we include stories that show believers enduring persecution in different ways. In Zike village in Nigeria we met survivors of a herder attack that claimed the lives of more than 50 Christians (see pages 6-11) and saw first-hand how our partners are helping them. In Pakistan, we heard how Strength to Stand groups are equipping Christian women not only to provide for their family's physical needs but also to help them to know their identity in Christ (page 18).

Though different in many ways what these two stories have in common is the way in which Release International partners are helping the body of Christ to endure.

Every time you pray for persecuted believers or send in a financial gift to help them practically you are enabling that to happen.

ONGOING CHALLENGE

'Ilya' and 'Milad' (see pages 12-15) may have escaped the threat of persecution but that is not the end of the story, as is often the case for persecuted believers we meet who have had to flee. They can leave behind a good lifestyle as well as friends and support networks to arrive in another country with little more than the clothes on their back. Yes, they are physically safer but they can still carry trauma in their hearts and need our ongoing prayers and support.

REGULAR SUPPORT

Giving regularly to Release International through a Direct Debit enables us more easily to plan how we can support partners such as those in Nigeria who have cared for Christians in Zike and elsewhere. See page 23 for details.

IDOP 2025

We are delighted that former prisoner of faith, Andrew Brunson, and his wife, Norine, will be joining us in November to mark the International Day of Prayer for the persecuted church (IDOP), the theme of which this year is 'Pastors under Pressure' (see page 19). Andrew, who was a church leader in Turkey when he was arrested in 2016, will be speaking at several churches in the UK. Also for IDOP we have produced a number of free digital resources for you to use in your church service or prayer groups, which are available on our website. These can be used on the day itself, November 2, or at any time during the month.

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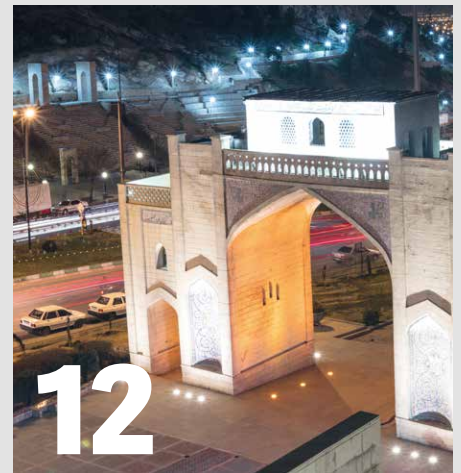
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'I HAD NO EDUCATION, NO SKILL, BUT BY JOINING THE STRENGTH TO STAND GROUP MY LIFE CHANGED (SEE PAGE 18).

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



A screenshot from a video on Facebook showing the attack on the prayer house

CHILDREN HURT AS MILITANTS ATTACK PRAYER HOUSE

A group of Islamist extremists stormed a prayer house in Indonesia, injuring two children, as police officers looked on, sources said.

The attackers shouted the jihadist slogan, 'Allahu Akbar [God is Greater]' as they disrupted state-mandated religious education for children provided by Anugerah Faithful Christian Church of Indonesia (GKSI) in Padang Sarai village in West Sumatra Province, a widely viewed video shows.

Armed with wooden blocks, knives and stones, the intruders damaged property inside and outside the building where religious instruction was underway for children who could not receive it in school. Panicked students and their parents rushed outside as some could be heard crying loudly.

Two Christian students, aged 7 and 11, were severely injured in the attack on July 27, according to the video. Sound system equipment, chairs, fans, a pulpit podium, windows and other items were damaged.

West Sumatra police said they had arrested nine people in connection with the attack and that the number of suspects in the case could increase if more evidence emerged.

(Source: Morning Star News)



While Hindu priests in Uttarakhand participate in a ceremony to freely worship the river Ganges, Christians in the state are facing new draconian restrictions on their religious freedom

Indian state approves chilling conversion law

India's Uttarakhand state has passed an amendment to its controversial anti-conversion law which increases punishment to life imprisonment.

The Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) state government introduced the Freedom of Religion (Amendment) Bill 2025 during an assembly session. The amendment extends penalties from the current maximum of 10 years in prison to life imprisonment, with fines reaching 1 million rupees (£8,500) for 'forced conversions'.

The Bill, passed in August, introduces India's most chilling restrictions on freedom of religion and speech. Among concerning provisions are measures that criminalise 'propaganda on social or digital media' as participation in religious conversion, with the government stating that 'acts like promoting or inciting conversion through social media, messaging app or any online medium' will now be forbidden and punishable.

'When laws criminalise social media discussions about faith they threaten every citizen's fundamental right to religious expression in the digital age,' said Rev Vijayesh Lal, general secretary of the Evangelical Fellowship of India. 'These provisions, with penalties up to life imprisonment, represent some of India's harshest anti-conversion measures and could turn ordinary conversations about belief into criminal acts.'

Rohit Singh, an attorney in Uttarakhand, told Morning Star News (MSN) that since the Bill had been introduced many pastors had 'removed their sermons and social media posts from online platforms. Some pastors are thinking of leaving the state. Online donations have almost stopped to churches and Christian organisations as no one wants to get in trouble. I think our rights have ended in India now.'

At the time of writing the amendment still required the assent of the state governor but that was largely expected as there was no opposition from the Indian National Congress party.

Critics have said that especially troubling are provisions allowing district magistrates to confiscate properties based on mere suspicion of connection to alleged conversion activities.

The legislation introduces sweeping enforcement measures that civil liberties advocates say violate basic constitutional rights.

A.C. Michael, convenor of the United Christian Forum, said it was now 'dangerous for Christians to practise their faith in India'.

(Source: Morning Star News)

'I THINK OUR RIGHTS HAVE ENDED IN INDIA NOW



Listen to our latest podcasts



Nigeria: Face to face with suffering
In this episode we speak to Release International's Charlie Frank, after his first visit to Nigeria. Listen as he shares about his first impressions of the country, about preparing himself to hear distressing stories, and about the encouragement of meeting both Release International partners and Christians who have suffered — and who are persevering in their faith.

Providence and Persecution: Book launch webinar What does it mean to believe in the providence of God when facing persecution? In this deeply moving and theologically rich discussion, author Kenneth Harrod is joined by John Stevens (National Director, Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches) and Archbishop Benjamin Kwashi (Release International partner in Nigeria) to explore the themes of his new book, *Providence and Persecution*. Hosted by Paul Robinson, CEO of Release International, the panel reflects on how God's sovereignty speaks into the harsh realities of suffering and persecution across the world today.

Armenia: The forgotten Christian story A discussion on Armenia's history, recent conflicts and the state of Christianity in the world's first Christian nation. Armenia has faced significant challenges, including a genocide during WWI and recent conflicts with Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh. These conflicts have led to the displacement of more than 100,000 Armenians. The Armenian Apostolic Church, which comprises 95 per cent of the population, is largely nominal due to historical oppression. The discussion highlights the ongoing geopolitical threats and the desire for a deeper faith among Armenians. See Page 16.



Chinese lawyer Gao Zhisheng (right) and Malaysian pastor Raymond Koh

REMEMBERING THE DISAPPEARED

It is now more than eight years since prominent Chinese Christian lawyer Gao Zhisheng was last seen and since Malaysian pastor Raymond Koh was abducted off the street.

The current whereabouts of both are unknown despite the tireless efforts of their families to advocate for them and to keep their cases in the public eye.

In August 2017 Gao temporarily escaped from detention but since then there has been no contact with the outside world.

Gao was faced with brutal retaliation from authorities for speaking up for vulnerable groups.

In 2007, after publishing a letter exposing China's human rights abuses, he was tortured by state security officers and went missing for long periods. Under international pressure, he briefly resurfaced, and in April 2010 gave an interview to the Associated Press,

revealing horrifying torture details. He was then sent to prison for three years after which he was placed under house arrest. On August 13, 2017, several supporters attempted to rescue him so he could see a dentist but the authorities tracked them down and found Gao. Since then there has been no word of his whereabouts.

Gao's wife, Geng He, and their two children fled China for the US. Geng has never ceased advocating for her husband, appealing to the international community for help in gaining information of his whereabouts.

Another woman who has ceaselessly advocated for her missing husband during the past eight years is Susanna Koh.

On February 13, 2017, Raymond Koh was abducted off the street within minutes of leaving home. Eyewitnesses described his abduction as being like a scene from a film with men dressed in black stopping his car and forcing him into an SUV. No one has heard from him since, although responsibility for his kidnapping has been laid at the door of the Malaysian Special Branch.

Release International CEO, Paul Robinson said: *'I urge supporters to continue to pray for these two dear Christians and their families until the truth of their whereabouts is known.'*

Abductor forces Christian teenager into prostitution

A Christian teenager who was rescued from a man who abducted her has said he forcibly converted her, sexually assaulted her as part of a sham Islamic marriage and forced her into prostitution.

The forced prostitution resulted in serious health issues for the 16-year-old, who said she was taken from her home in the Mananwala area of Nankana Sahib district in Punjab province, Pakistan, by the married man on May 19.

After her abduction, the man coerced her *'into putting my thumb impressions on some blank papers, which he then used to fabricate my false conversion to Islam and marriage to him,'* she said. *'He then took me to his home, but his Muslim wife refused to accept his "second marriage" and left for her parents' home along with her two children. In the following days, [the man] repeatedly raped me and subjected me to immense physical and psychological abuse.'*

She said she was drugged and forced her to sleep with others. If she refused, she was tortured.

The girl was only rescued when a legal aid group, Christians' True Spirit (CTS), filed a *habeas corpus* petition for her recovery in August.

(Source: Christian Daily International-Morning Star News)

SIGN UP TO RELEASE



CHRISTMAS CATALOGUE

Please use the enclosed leaflet to order your Christmas cards and gifts and so help persecuted believers. NB: Please remember to use the response details on the leaflet and NOT the Release International address.



HELPING OPPRESSED
CHRISTIANS

**'WHERE IS YOUR GOD?
LET HIM COME AND
SAVE YOU!'**

Release International partners distribute
aid to survivors of the attack on Zike
village © Release International 2025

ON A RECENT TRIP TO NIGERIA A RELEASE INTERNATIONAL TEAM MET SURVIVORS OF A BRUTAL ATTACK ON A CHRISTIAN VILLAGE AND SAW FIRST-HAND HOW LOCAL PARTNERS ARE HELPING THEM. **JOHN LAWSON** REPORTS

W *here is your God? Let Him come and save you!* These

chilling words, spoken in Fulani, were what the scared villagers of Zike heard soon after they had been woken abruptly by gunshots at midnight after a day of Palm Sunday services in their church. They, of course, mirror the words used by the temple guards and Roman soldiers who taunted Jesus between his arrest and crucifixion.

Jerry was one of the first to hear the gunshots and went to warn others of the raid so they could flee. His sons ran ahead of him and his wife, Issi, hid in the bush.

He explained how one of their sons, Kaja, was caught and killed while the others managed to escape.

Issi had been sick, with a persistent cough, which gave away her hiding place, and she too was killed without mercy, shot by one of the more than 100 Fulani militants who raided their village that night. It was a co-ordinated and well-armed attack.

Danjuma's story was a little different. He awoke to the sounds of gunshots and told his entire household of ten to flee into the bush without delay. As he ran with them he heard the Fulani behind them shouting: *'We will kill you with our bare hands'* – but they couldn't catch him and their attempts to shoot at him as he ran all failed.

Danjuma found a hiding place in a bush and then could only watch as the Fulani militants chased down terrified villagers. He said he was surprised to see them killing some, brutally, but sparing others, quietly telling them to lie still and then moving past them.

'I wondered if they were people they knew,' he said.

On returning to his house, he found that his wife had been shot dead, but their young baby, strapped to her back in the traditional way that most African mothers carry their young, was completely unharmed.

The family of Asabe Moses (who featured in our recent appeal), also experienced both extreme loss and

almost miraculous survival. The family home is at a crossroads at the entrance to the village, so they had almost no warning, or time to flee, when the attack started.

After their 14-year-old son had been taken out to the front of the house and *'slaughtered like a goat'*, Asabe, her mother-in-law Talatu and her youngest daughter Joanne (aged six), hid in one bedroom with the door locked while her husband Moses and their other son, ten-year-old James, were in another. Unable to get to them, the militants set the house on fire and moved on into the village, continuing to attack whomever they could find and burn the houses in which people were hiding.

At first Asabe remained quiet, hoping not to be noticed by the militants, but when the heat from the fire became unbearable, the family cried out, hoping that the militants would come and kill them to put them out of their misery. They did not know, however, that the Fulani had moved on and their cries alerted other villagers who were able to rescue them from their burning house. Moses and James died of their injuries but Asabe, her mother-in-law and Joanne survived, although all three suffered burns to their hands or arms, which require ongoing care and treatment.

Pastor loses sons

In Plateau State, and right across Nigeria's Middle Belt central region, human life is fragile and whether people live or die seems to hang by a thread – and sometimes a thread that holds once will snap when pulled a second time. Rev Adam is the pastor from a neighbouring village, who lost one of his sons, Joshua, in an earlier attack on his village by Fulani extremists in 2023, which he and his other son, Daniel, survived. Tragically, Daniel was then killed in the attack on Zike.

This particular raid was not a one-off incident: such attacks have been happening systematically across the Middle Belt, particularly in states such as Plateau and Benue, for several years.

Amnesty International* reports that 6,896 people in Benue and 2,630 in Plateau were killed between June 2023

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THE MILITANTS SET THE HOUSE ON FIRE AND MOVED ON INTO THE VILLAGE, CONTINUING TO ATTACK'

HELPING OPPRESSED CHRISTIANS

One of the properties in Zike destroyed by Islamist Fulani raiders



and June 2025. Nor was it spontaneous. Several people who we spoke to referred to having seen an unmarked helicopter arrive and linger in the area a few days before the attack. Similar sightings have been reported from other villages which were attacked within a few days of the helicopter's arrival.

Given that the Fulani militants have been attacking using automatic weapons, and burning people's homes – and in some cases their crops – using what appears to be fuel or accelerant, it seems highly likely that this aircraft is being used to deliver ammunition and other supplies in advance of each attack. Who is funding such supplies and helping to plan and co-ordinate these raids is not known, but it is clear that some within the Nigerian authorities must, at the very least, be turning a blind eye to these activities, if not actively colluding with them.

Against such orchestrated and well-funded operations, local villagers, in contrast, are defenceless.

Zike's village chief, Luca Mori, told us that local communities are completely dependent upon government security forces for their protection because police will confiscate any weapons that they have.

He said: *'Local government needs to wake up. There is no equipment for people to defend themselves. If you're empty handed, how can you defend yourself? Only the Government can arrest a Fulani man and say: "You did this; now you must face justice"'. Unfortunately, there is no evidence of anyone being caught, let alone facing justice, for these attacks, despite the presence of large military bases near many of the areas that have been targeted.*

The Nigerian Government is proving unwilling or unable to restrain Fulani militias from attacking defenceless Christian communities and even denies that this is what is happening, often simply referring to incidents as isolated acts by 'unknown gunmen'.

'Herder-farmer conflict'

Most mainstream media outlets in the UK and elsewhere continue to refer to this escalating situation as nothing more than 'herder-farmer conflict' triggered by a desire for arable land that is becoming scarcer due to climate change. Such ill-informed reporting simply promotes two misconceptions: first, that this is a conflict between two roughly equal-armed sides, rather than a brutal assault upon communities which are basically defenceless and peaceful, by another that is well-armed and ruthless; and, secondly, the suggestion that this has little or nothing to do with religion, despite evidence to the contrary.

It would be easy for the Christians of Nigeria's Middle Belt to feel that they have been forgotten. However, it is through the actions of our partners, and other local Christians, that they are being reminded that that is far from the case; that they are loved and there are believers who care for them – even in other countries.

During our trip to Nigeria, less than two months after the Palm Sunday attacks on Zike, we had the privilege of visiting the village with both our local partners: Stefanos Foundation and Rev Mark Mukan, with whom we work through our partnership with Archbishop Ben Kwashi.

A key part of Stefanos's work, a

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**I LOST ONE
MEMBER OF MY
HOUSEHOLD,
BUT OTHERS
LOST MORE'**

project called 'Love in Action', involves distributing buckets of essential food and hygiene supplies to those who had suffered in the attack. Many had lost the family breadwinner as well as their home and means of livelihood. As well as destroying business property the attackers had stolen domestic animals used by the villagers.

The aid is a vital means of helping people to keep going during the initial aftermath of such horrific violence. In the longer term, Stefanos runs week-long trauma-healing workshops to help those who are grieving, or sometimes overcome with feelings of rage, vengeance or despair, to come to terms with their trauma and seek God's wisdom in how best to rebuild their lives. Both the Love in Action project and the trauma-healing workshops are made possible by the funding provided by generous supporters of Release International.

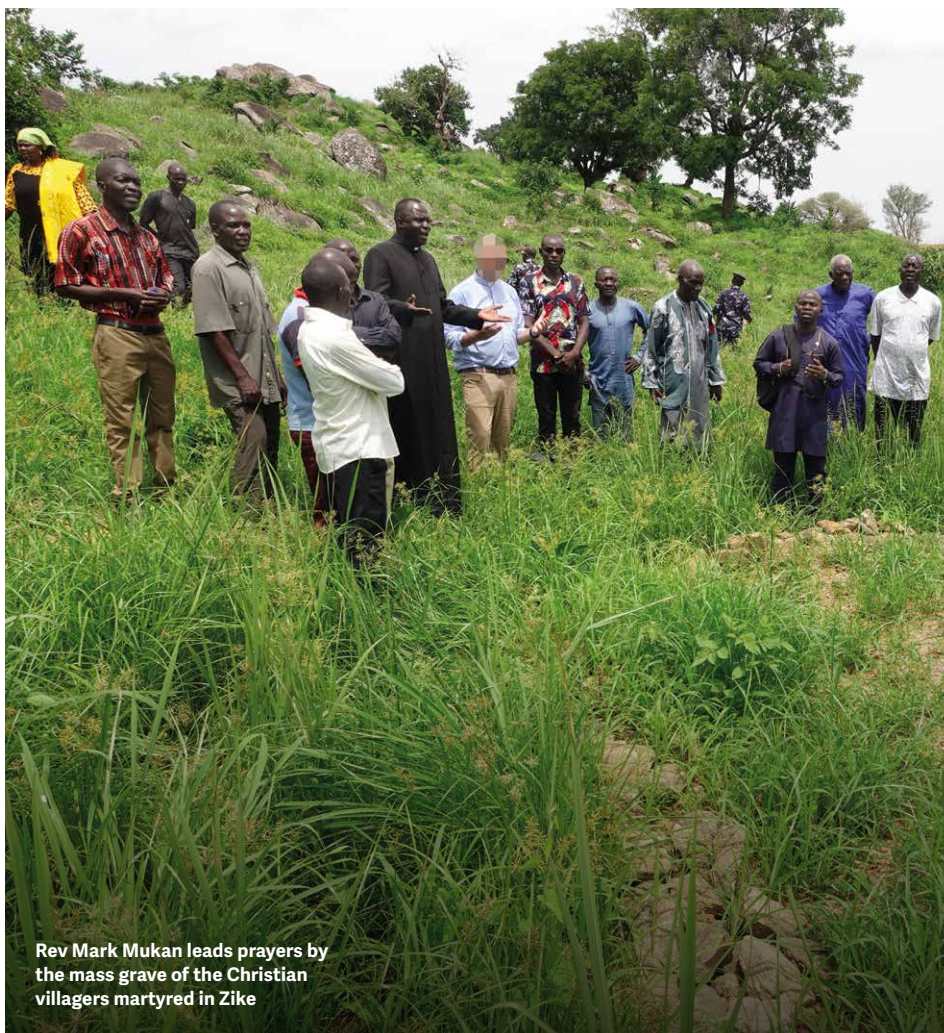
During a church service we were able to distribute hand-written cards of encouragement filled with relevant passages of Scripture made by creative Release International supporters before one of our team preached. There was much singing, dancing and praising of God, despite all the tragedy that had befallen this village and the many challenges, and enduring grief, which they continue to face.

Such people are not easy to defeat. Militarily they may be a soft, defenceless, target – the mass grave of 51 men, women and children in a tranquil spot at the edge of the village is testimony to the ease with which they can be attacked and killed – but spiritually and socially, they are strong. They are attached to their beautiful and fertile land, which they have no intention of leaving, despite intense provocation to do so, and they are supportive of one another, helping and encouraging each person through their difficulties.

Danjuma, having just lost his wife, still found strength to support others in the village, saying, *'I have strength to comfort other people. I lost one member of my household, but others lost more.'*

Most importantly, they continue to seek God and give thanks for His blessings and mercies.

**Nigeria: Mounting death toll and looming humanitarian crisis amid unchecked attacks by armed groups (Amnesty International, May 2025)*



Rev Mark Mukan leads prayers by the mass grave of the Christian villagers martyred in Zike

JOY AMONG THE DEVASTATION

STANDING by the mass grave of 51 Christians on a hillside on the outskirts of Zike is an experience that I shall never forget.

The grave itself was surprisingly unremarkable. You would have expected there to have been a monument to mark out the site as special. Instead, a humble rectangle of earth and stone, partially reclaimed by the bush, was all you could see.

The most striking aspect of the grave, other than its size, was its surroundings. Vivid lime-green foliage, bright red-brown soil, rolling hills and dramatic monoliths are all set against a backdrop of azure sky. Nigeria is a staggeringly beautiful country, so it seems so incongruous that such undiluted evil should have taken place in such lovely surroundings.

Walking to and from the gravesite, we passed many young children, most of whom were delighted to receive a wave and a smile. I was left wondering if there was a single child in Zike who had not lost someone close to them: a parent, sibling, cousin, aunt, uncle, grandparent, friend or neighbour.

Certainly, all of these children will carry a deep trauma from the attack itself. Whether they fled into the bush, hid unscathed at home or escaped burning buildings, all of them have experienced a terror that most of us cannot begin to imagine.

Yet there is joy in Zike. Amidst the tears, pain and suffering, their singing and dancing are a stunning example to us, an eloquent testimony to the power of hope in Christ. Thank God for Zike.

Charlie Frank



Paul Robinson with Daniel Tagwi, who has been helped through Bible college by Release International's partner

PREACHER'S EXECUTION INSPIRES BROTHER TO ENTER MINISTRY

IT HAS BEEN five years since Daniel Tagwi's brother, Matthew, was martyred in cold blood for proclaiming the gospel (See *Voice*, Apr-Jun 2023). Now, he is preparing to enter into the same ministry that saw his brother killed, writes Charlie Frank.

In 2020 Matthew was a newly appointed pastor ministering to his rural community. That year, he was executed in broad daylight by Fulani Islamist extremists, having previously refused their calls to stop preaching. Matthew left behind Rose, his widow, and their three children.

Daniel's response to his brother's martyrdom was to follow in his footsteps and become a pastor himself. Now Daniel is preparing to graduate

from theological college, where he has particularly enjoyed studying homiletics, the art of preaching. When we asked him how he would pastor communities facing Fulani onslaughts he answered: *'I will encourage them to stand firm, serve the Lord and keep up in prayer.'*

It is not yet clear what the future holds for Daniel, his wife Jessica, and their four children. What is clear, however, is their unswerving trust in the Lord. Jessica has also been studying at theological college and graduates next year.

For Daniel prayer has been the most important discipline he has learned at college.

Now, he asks us for prayer: for clarity in where he and Jessica will serve God, as well as for their own security and safety.

Daniel, who has been helped through college by Release International's partner, Stefanos Foundation, said: *'Honestly, I feel joy. I'm grateful Stefanos has helped us. There are many people like me who need help. Keep it up; keep helping more people.'*

Paul Robinson, Release International's CEO, who met Daniel in 2023, said: *'Daniel is living testimony to the power of God to bring good out of the worst of circumstances. It is so encouraging to see him take on his brother's mantle.'*

The Word, page 22

PLEASE HELP OPPRESSED CHRISTIANS

In Nigeria and around the world today Christians face hostility from a number of different sources: militant groups, hostile authorities and even local communities and families.

Your gift can bring encouragement, pastoral care and practical support to our precious sisters and brothers in Christ.

Please make a gift today by using the enclosed form, calling 01689 823491 or giving online at releaseinternational.org.

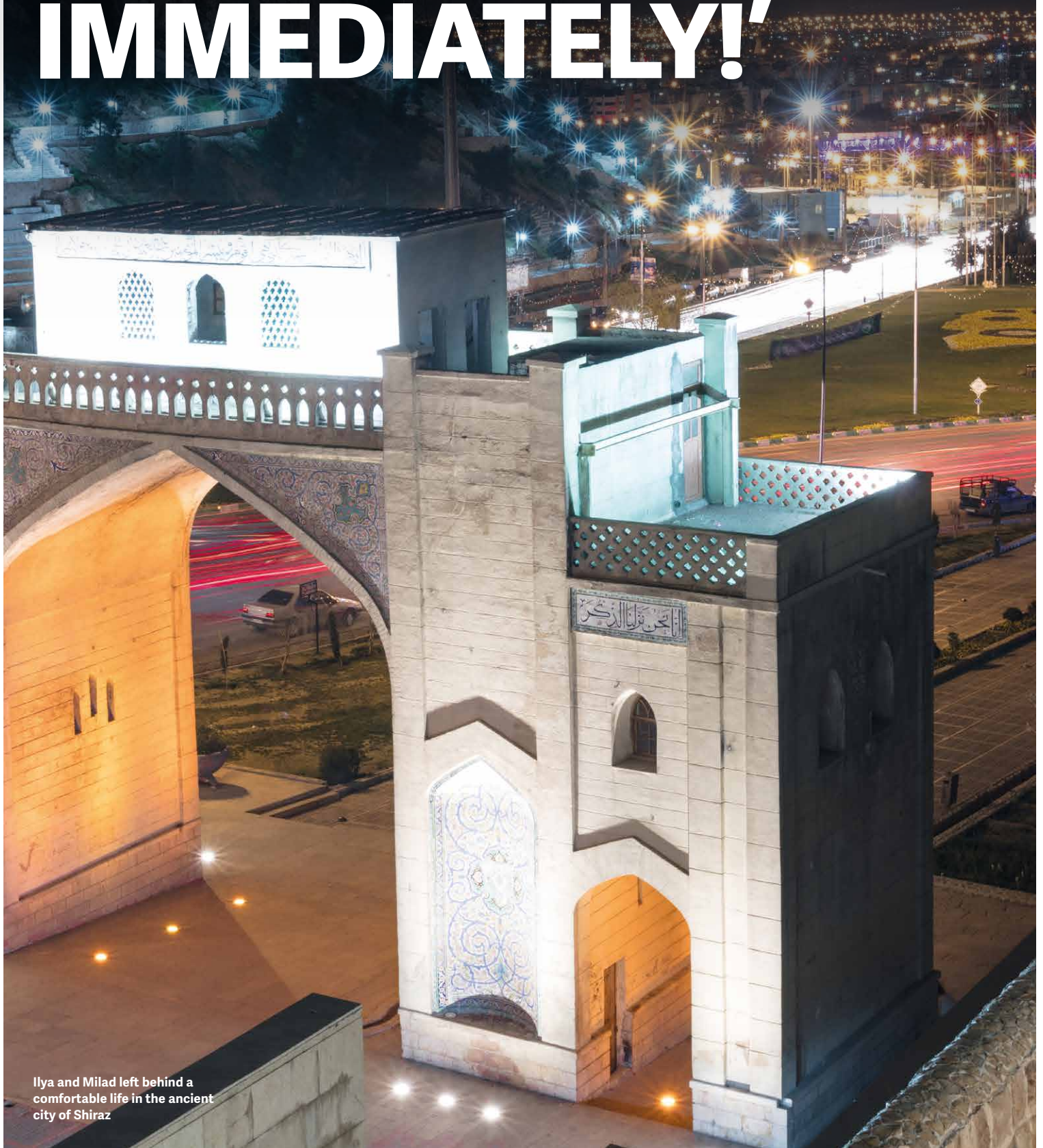


HOW TO PRAY FOR NIGERIA

- Pray for an end to the violence against Christians that has ravaged northern Nigeria and beyond for many years
- Pray for protection for vulnerable communities and Release International partners who risk their lives to help the persecuted
- That the bereaved and traumatised would find healing and hope as they attend workshops held by our partners
- That corrupt officials in the Government and security forces would be rooted out
- That God would convict the terrorists of their sin and open their eyes to the truth of the gospel
- For success in raising awareness and prayer for Nigerian Christians in the church in the UK and Ireland

IRAN

'WE HAVE TO LEAVE IRAN – IMMEDIATELY!'



Ilya and Milad left behind a comfortable life in the ancient city of Shiraz

WHEN POLICE TURNED UP TO ARREST HER CHRISTIAN FRIENDS, ILYA KNEW IT WAS TIME TO FLEE BUT LIFE IN HER NEW HOMELAND HAS NOT PROVED EASY EITHER.

TOM HARDIE TRAVELLED TO MEET HER AND HEAR HER MOVING STORY

Ilya* was born into a large family in the southern Iranian city of Shiraz, the country's ancient centre of Persian culture.

Growing up in a strict Muslim household with many religious rules and customs led to intense conflict with other family members, particularly her father.

'I was unwanted and felt abandoned,' she told me as we sat drinking homemade spiced tea in her new home, a small apartment she lives in with her husband and two young children.

'I was rejected, ignored and disliked by my family even from childhood but especially when I entered teenage years. I only realised later that this was because I was a girl. I had to wear long skirts and wasn't allowed to talk to men or even play with my brothers as a child because of the religious rules. For many years I didn't have any identity, and I didn't believe anything.'

It was not just emotional abuse and restriction of her freedom that Ilya suffered. *'I was "punished" physically many times in my life especially by my dad.'*

'Even when I was married, and pregnant, my father pushed me down the stairs and I miscarried.'

GIFT FROM GOD

However, it was at the hospital she visited after the miscarriage that she met a friend whom she described as a *'gift from God'*.

'She didn't tell me directly she was a Christian, out of concern for her own safety, but we talked and she started to explain about Christianity,' she said.

As a result of this encounter Ilya wanted to find out more about Jesus and began secretly visiting a small gathering of Christians which her friend attended. She kept her activity from her family but her reluctance to attend Islamic functions in their home began to raise suspicions. It would only be a matter of time before they guessed something significant was happening in her life.

At the same time she was told by the doctors that, because of the miscarriage, and despite treatment, she would not be able to become pregnant again.

However, it wasn't long before she experienced what she described as *'a miracle'*.

'I became pregnant!'

Overjoyed with the news, Ilya and her husband, 'Milad', felt life was finally heading in the right direction. They had a home of their own, good jobs that paid well and now a child on the way.

However, that feeling of well-being was not to last long.

Milad did not at first know his wife was attending the Christian meetings but was aware that something was happening to her.

'I saw this change in her mental state and eventually she told me she was going to these secret gatherings. She talked about the Christian way of life and I felt I needed to know more about Jesus.'

Not long after, she greeted him with the news that they needed to leave Iran – immediately! Her group had been discovered by state security officials even though they had taken precautions and changed location every time they met.

She said: *'One night the police turned up at a home meeting and arrested members of our group. I had arrived late and was looking for somewhere to park when I saw the police. They were arresting people. Two of them were being brought out; one of them was my friend.'*

'I thought they would torture my friends to get my name and for the sake of our unborn child I knew we had to get out of Iran.'

Milad takes up the story: *'Ilya called me; she was terrified and distressed so we arranged to meet at another location in the city. From that moment on we could not go home again. It was a big shock when she said that we needed to flee Iran. We had good jobs and good salaries, a house in a nice area. It meant we would have to leave it all behind – in one moment. It was terrible.'*

However, concerned for his pregnant wife's safety and the health of their baby, Milad began to find out how they could escape.

ROAD TO FREEDOM

So began a journey they had never expected to make.

The couple travelled to a remote location away from the city where they would not be known. They stayed there

SHE TALKED ABOUT THE CHRISTIAN WAY OF LIFE AND I FELT I NEEDED TO KNOW MORE ABOUT JESUS'



Ilya was pregnant when she and her husband fled Iran

“ WE WERE NOW HOMELESS AND HAD NOWHERE TO LIVE. AT THE SAME TIME ILYA WAS NOT WELL’

for a couple of days, during which time a relative organised their passage out of Iran.

‘We travelled further south before eventually arriving in an Arabic-speaking country,’ said Milad.

‘Ilya was four to five months pregnant at this stage and we knew that any upset could impact the baby so I had to believe that God would help us. We were praying and trying to be calm but it was not easy.’

From there the couple were able to catch a plane and make it to the West.

‘When we landed Ilya was in great pain. She should not have flown so our priority was to make sure the baby was okay.’

Concerned airport officials took the couple to a local hospital where they stayed for a few days after which they moved to temporary accommodation.

‘We should have been happy there but we had left our whole life in Iran to stay in one room. It was not easy.’

During this time Ilya’s mental health had also begun to suffer. Even though after the baby had been born doctors recommended they be moved somewhere with cooking facilities, sadly they were unable to find suitable accommodation and so they stayed where they were, eventually having to rely on help from local charities for items such as clothing.

Finally Ilya, who was now expecting again, Milad and their baby moved to another property in the city, an attic room that was supposed to have a kitchen; that turned out to be just a sink with a tap.

Then after two months there they were sent an eviction notice and had no alternative but to approach the authorities for help. *‘We were now*

homeless and had nowhere to live. At the same time Ilya was not well and doctors were concerned about the baby's growth,' said Milad.

If that was not hard enough the couple were told that a new family would arrive soon to occupy the premises. Milad, who had by this time become a Christian, and Ilya were asked to leave their belongings outside in the yard while they went to the council offices to register themselves as homeless and ask for help.

BAD DREAMS

'We were moved to a property in another location, which was in a predominantly Muslim area with several mosques,' said Milad.

'As a result of her childhood trauma Ilya had a strong reaction to the sounds around us; the people made her scared. There were many signs that could trigger memories of the past, which all caused her nightmares. Many nights I had to wake her up as I could tell she was having a bad dream.

'The way people looked at her suspiciously, all wearing hijabs, shopkeepers asking about our religion. "Where are you from?" "Are you Muslim?" They did not ask directly why she was not wearing a hijab but you could sense it in other things they said. Even when I looked for a job in that area they asked about my religion.'

As a result the couple stayed mostly in their home; if they did venture out it was to places further afield where they felt safe.

'We travelled an hour's journey by bus to do the shopping, which was quite a test with a double buggy.'

That was not the only challenge. They soon discovered that their new home was infested with mice; particularly upsetting for Ilya who has a phobia of rodents.

'Mice ate our food and were everywhere. When we were cleaning baby bottles we were not sure whether they were clean or not. It was an awful situation. We didn't want to go out but we also didn't want to stay indoors. We complained to the authorities but it was a number of months before the issue was dealt with.'

Thankfully the family has now relocated to another, habitable



property in an area that does not trigger upsetting memories for Ilya. However, rebuilding their lives remains a daily struggle.

'PRAY FOR US'

'Please pray for us,' says Milad. 'Pray that Ilya can let go of the past and we can leave it all behind and be at peace. It's not easy dealing with all that happened, the trauma, especially for her.'

In Iran the couple were involved in helping people in desperate situations and are keen to get involved in similar work in their new homeland. They are involved in a local church and Milad now volunteers with a charity in the area.

'We want to be good and useful members of the society here, which has helped us, and live normal lives,' he said.

*Names changed to protect identities

'PRAY THAT ILYA CAN LET GO OF THE PAST AND WE CAN LEAVE IT ALL BEHIND AND BE AT PEACE





The ruins of Zvartnots temple, a cathedral that was built in the 7th century, are a reminder of Armenia's Christian heritage. Mount Ararat is pictured in the background

JOY AND SUFFERING IN THE FIRST CHRISTIAN NATION

THREATENED ON ALL SIDES AND FEARFUL OF BEING WIPED FROM THE MAP, THIS PROUD PEOPLE NEEDS A SPIRITUAL REVIVAL, SAYS AN ARMENIAN MINISTRY LEADER

“
THE PEOPLE WILL CARRY THE GOSPEL WHEREVER THEY ARE”

The beautifully scenic country of Armenia prides itself on being the first nation to adopt Christianity as its official religion – in the 4th century! The impact of that decision is still felt in the culture today but, even though most Armenians are immensely proud to describe themselves as Christian and would almost all profess a belief in God, it does not mean that the majority have a living faith in Christ.

However, it does mean that there is an openness to the gospel which churches and Christian aid organisations that Release International visited recently are trying to respond to – which is timely because there are fears that the country may not exist as a distinct nation in a decade or two.

Due to Armenia's traumatic history there is a great need for healing but also for revival, so that, whether the

nation exists or not, the people will carry the gospel wherever they are, a ministry partner told us.

Concern about Armenia's future is not surprising given the history of the people, and specifically its church. For generations Armenian Christians have resided in a region split between various empires including the Ottomans, the Persians and the Russians. The Armenian genocide, which began in 1915, involved close to a million Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire being forced on 'death marches' into the Syrian desert without food or water and then slaughtered. More than 100,000 women and children were forcibly converted to Islam during this time.

Shortly after World War I the area that is now the country of Armenia was absorbed into the Soviet Union. This was another difficult time for the church. Priests who were able to remain in their positions were those prepared to co-operate with the ruling authorities, while evangelicals had to meet in secret.

This meant that by 1991, when Armenia gained its independence, many would have declared themselves atheist. However, since then there has been a rapid increase in those identifying as Christian.

Modern-day Armenia's over-riding problem is geography: it is situated between Turkey and Azerbaijan, both larger, more powerful neighbours that object to its very existence.

Turkey's President, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, has talked openly about a desire for the Turkic world to be linked up all the way to Western China. This tension is characterised by frequent attacks on Armenia by Azerbaijan and the siege and conquest of Nagorno Karabakh (a disputed area that was captured by Azerbaijan in 2023) leading to the deportation of tens of thousands of ethnic Armenians. While this conflict in itself cannot be categorised directly as persecution of Christians, refugees from the areas that have been annexed, although mostly nominal believers, are still prepared to suffer because of their identity as 'Christian'. At the same time, although the reason for Azerbaijan and Turkey wanting Armenian land is largely about resources and power, their soldiers see the conflict as an Islamic *jihad* or holy war. Islamic State fighters from Syria have been among those taking part.

One ministry leader has compared recent conflict to the previous genocide, in that, although it was ostensibly perpetrated by atheist regimes, religion was used as a motivating factor.

Ironically Armenia's only friend in this conflict is the repressive Islamic republic of Iran, which is also not keen on being surrounded by Turkic nations that can cut off its trade routes. Interestingly at the same time that Iran was being hit by rockets from Israel in June, a series of missiles were fired from Azerbaijan into Armenia.

However, despite these historical wounds and the current tensions, the church is flourishing.

On a recent trip to Armenia a Release International team visited a number of churches and ministries that appear to be thriving, full of joy and passionate about sharing the gospel but equally keen that the church in the West knows about their challenges and prays for them.

Although one ministry leader declared that he was not sure that Armenia would exist as a country in 10 or 20 years' time, his prayer was that, no matter what happened, there would be revival that saw the established church awakened.



Present-day Christian believers in Armenia listen to a sermon

He said: *'We believe in the power of prayer and we believe in a God who is almighty, so if this happened to us (the attacks by Azerbaijan) and He allowed it to happen, then we must accept that. We as a nation must still turn back to God. This is what will bring us healing and eternal life. We are not only for this world. So mostly we need prayers for revival.'*

He added: *'Armenians are a proud people, which generally is not a good thing. You have to ask: "How much more will we have to suffer until finally we as a nation kneel down and call on God?" You have to be on your knees to get back to God. Our nation needs this. Our people need this. We see this also in the work we are involved in, the humanitarian and psychological programmes for those traumatised by war or refugees. They help people for a while and to a certain degree but they do not change them.'*

'What really changes people is God's healing. Armenia and its people need that healing. So our most important prayer request would be for revival in our land, then for peace, wise government and so on. But most important is revival.'

• **Release International's Voice podcast, 'Armenia: The forgotten Christian story', is available on our website and via your favourite podcast app.**

“**WE ARE A PROUD PEOPLE, WHICH GENERALLY IS NOT A GOOD THING'**



Rubina has learnt her God-given value through a Strength to Stand group

HOW £8 CHANGED A CHRISTIAN WOMAN'S LIFE

A RELEASE INTERNATIONAL PROJECT CONTINUES TO EMPOWER POOR BELIEVERS IN PAKISTAN

Where once Christian women and girls in Pakistan thought of themselves as inferior and without value they now see themselves as valued and special to God.

That is all thanks to the impact of Release International's Strength to Stand (S2S) groups which continue to change the lives of women as well as their families.

One of those who has been helped is Bindia, who has three daughters and two sons of school age. Her elderly father-in-law has been ill and her husband was having to bear single-handedly the load of paying for all the family's costs — even at one point having to sell part of their property to pay off loans. Even then they were struggling financially.

However, after joining an S2S group Bindia was encouraged to open a small shop in her home. She took the loan of 3,000 rupees (about £8) offered by the group and used it to buy snacks for children as well as toiletries. Her

husband now helps her to buy the goods from the market and Bindia then sells them on for a profit. As a result she is now managing her children's school expenses and looking after the home, her elderly father-in-law and the children, as well as running the shop.

She said: *'I never thought of this. I had no education, no skill, but by joining the Strength to Stand group my life changed. I am very thankful for the group.'*

S2S groups have been helping Christian women in villages and brick kilns to know their true value in the sight of God.

Rubina, one of those who attends, said: *'We have spent our lives with a sense of being an inferior member of society. I am very happy to learn about my value today in the eyes of God.'*

Sania, who is aged 16, added: *'I used to wish I was a boy so I could have the freedom boys have and always asked why I was a girl and thought my life was useless. But today I have learnt that I am not inferior to boys but I have my roles in family, in society and for the purpose of God!'*

As well as learning about their value before God, groups have been made aware of their human and legal rights and have discussed the reasons behind conversions to Islam, such as poverty, lack of education, blackmail and a poor understanding of the Christian faith.

Paul Robinson, Release International CEO, said: *'It is truly heart-warming to hear how S2S groups are continuing to change lives for the better and all thanks to the generosity of Release International supporters.'*

'WE HAVE SPENT OUR LIVES WITH A SENSE OF INFERIORITY



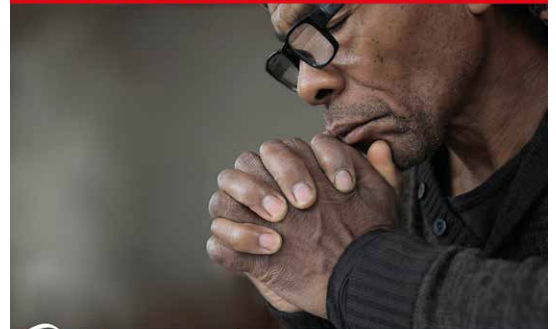
Andrew Brunson, who was imprisoned in Turkey, will share his inspiring story when he visits the UK in November



IDOP 2025

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL
voice
of Persecuted Christians

International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church



Pastors under pressure SUNDAY
2 NOV

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER

EX-PRISONER ON UK CHURCH SPEAKING TOUR TO MARK SPECIAL TIME OF INTERCESSION FOR THE PERSECUTED

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 to mark the 2025 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.

IDOP, which is a well-established date in the Christian calendar, falls on Sunday, November 2, this year. If your church would like to participate, please feel free to use the resources listed below. They are ideal for use in a church service, prayer meeting, home group or special IDOP event.

SPEAKING DATES

Andrew Brunson will be sharing his inspiring story at the following churches:

- **Wednesday, November 19:** Holy Trinity, Eastbourne, 7.30pm
- **Thursday, November 20:** Esher Green Baptist, Esher, Surrey, 7.30pm
- **Friday, November 21:** Sketty Community Church, Sketty, Swansea, 7.30pm
- **Sunday, November 23:** Bilton Evangelical Church, Rugby, 10.30am
- **Sunday, November 23:** St Thomas Church, Aldridge, 6.30pm
- **Monday, November 24:** St John's Church, Ballyclare, 7.45pm
- **Tuesday, November 25:** Harper Church, Glasgow, 7.30pm

There is no need to register for the events; simply turn up on the night. We look forward to seeing you there!

IDOP RESOURCES

We have produced a pack of digital resources for you and your church to use at an IDOP service in November including a short, inspirational video that includes recent interviews with persecuted Christians in Sri Lanka.

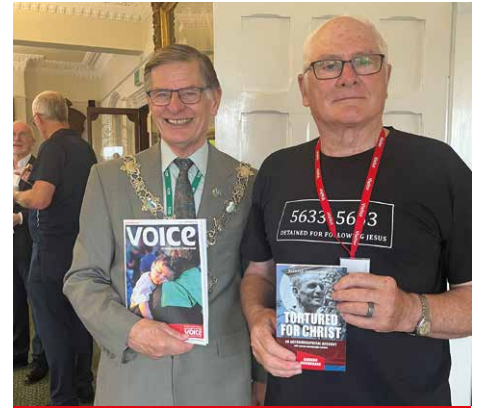
Also in the pack will be a Bible talk outline, PowerPoint presentation, prayer points, discussion questions and children's activity sheet.

You can access the video, titled *Pastors under Pressure*, along with the other IDOP resources via our website, releaseinternational.org.



A still from our short IDOP 2025 video for showing in church services

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL AND YOUR CHURCH



Release International was one of three charities to benefit from a mayoral coffee morning in the summer. Councillor Frank Andrews, Mayor of Fylde in Lancashire, is pictured at his fundraising event with a Release International representative. The ministry will receive £400.

'RAINING' CHAMPIONS!

EVEN TORRENTIAL rain could not dampen the spirits of the 12 teams that took part in a special five-a-side tournament organised by Dennistoun Baptist Church in Glasgow to raise funds for persecuted believers.

After the event, which raised more than £2,000, pastor Mark Morris (pictured) shared the story of Monday Ali, a Nigerian Christian whose parents were killed and sisters abducted in an attack on their village.

Each player received a gift bag containing a book and a small wooden cross. *'The cross is a reminder that suffering is often a part of what it*

means to be a follower of Jesus,' said Mark. *'When you pick it up remember Christians who are going through persecution.'*

Proceeds from the summer fundraiser will go to a Release International project that supports pastors and church leaders living and ministering in the context of persecution.

As an added bonus on the day Release International's very own Engagement Manager for Scotland, James Fraser, played in the tournament and scored the winning goal in the final! It was not fixed ... promise!

KNITTERS MOVE THE NEEDLE TO HELP RAISE VITAL FUNDS

A 'KNITATHON' competition in Grimsby organised by Release International volunteer Marilyn was part of a church event to raise valuable funds to help persecuted Christians.

Altogether the afternoon, which included the sale of freely donated plant cuttings, raised more than £500!

Thank you to Marilyn for organising, to everyone who donated or bought items and, of course, to the knitting competitors!

If you are planning to organise an event to raise funds for our work, please do let us know in advance by emailing info@releaseinternational.org. We would love to hear from you.



INVITE A SPEAKER

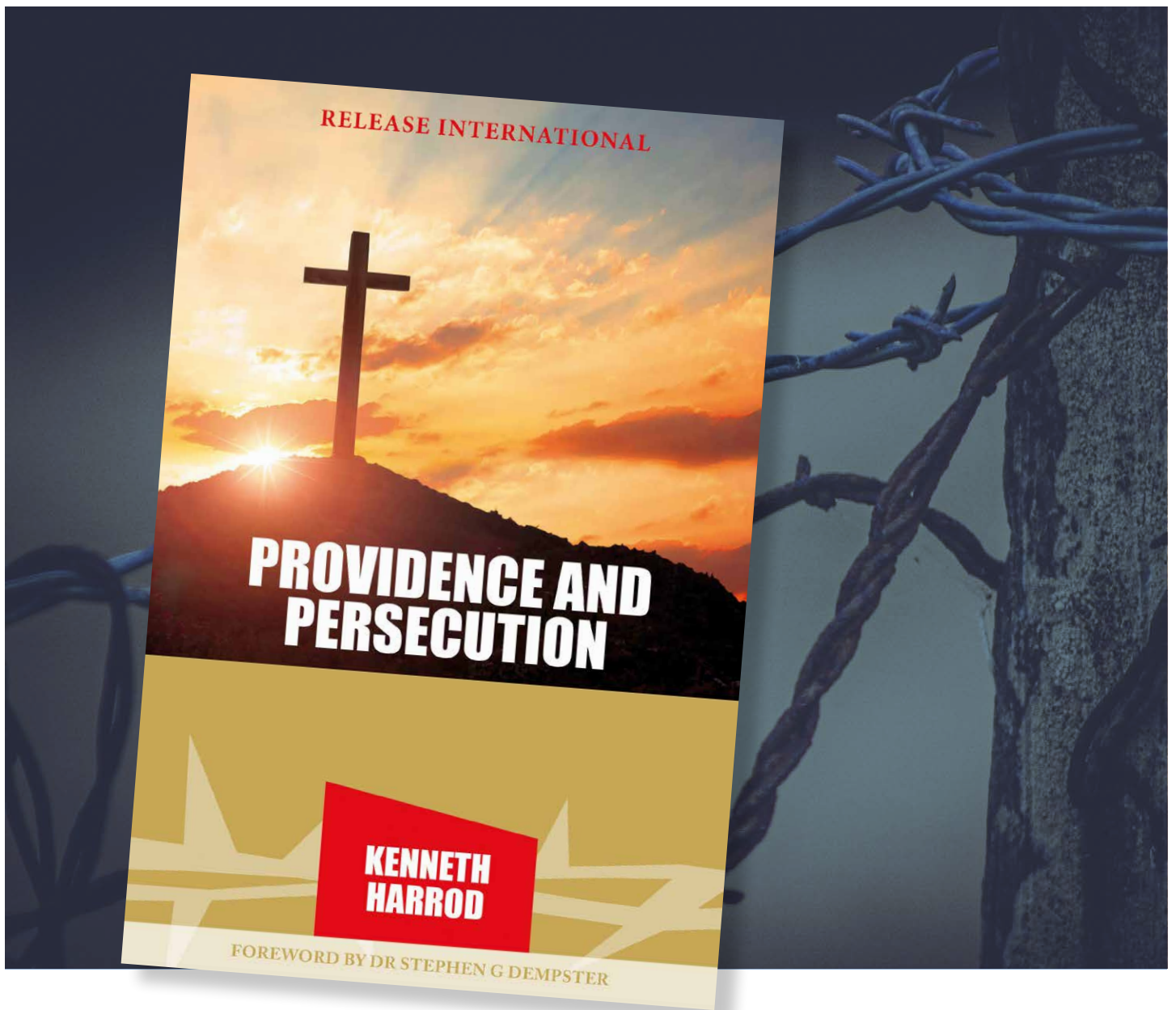
Our team of experienced speakers are available to join your church or online meeting to help you support and pray for persecuted Christians. They would love to hear from you!

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



PROVIDENCE AND PERSECUTION

Our recent webinar discussion on the book, *Providence and Persecution*, is now available as a Voice podcast on our website, releaseinternational.org, or through your favourite podcast app.

In this deeply moving and theologically rich discussion, author Kenneth Harrod is joined by John Stevens (National Director of the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches) and Archbishop Benjamin Kwashi (Release International partner in Nigeria).

Hosted by Paul Robinson, CEO of Release International, the panel

reflects on how God's sovereignty speaks into the harsh realities of suffering and persecution across the world today.

Topics covered include: What is providence? Is God in control when evil happens?

How the gospel flourishes through persecution; Stories of faith and courage from the 16th century martyrs to modern-day Nigeria; Why we need a bigger view of God, and How prayer is an act of faith under sovereign providence.

Providence and Persecution is written for every Christian who wants to

have a faith that endures and offers both theological depth and pastoral care. It includes an afterword by Petr Jasek, who spent more than a year in a Sudanese prison for his Christian work.

'This is a book for all Christians to read, to pray over and by it to be strengthened in their faith,' said Archbishop Ben, while John Stevens concluded: *'Reading this book will certainly change the way that you view persecution, and may change the way you view God.'*

Obtain your copy for £10 (including postage & packing) from our website shop (releaseinternational.org) or by calling 01689 823491.

'THIS BOOK MAY CHANGE THE WAY YOU VIEW GOD



WAS STEPHEN'S DEATH A TRAGEDY?

THERE ARE TWO SIDES TO THE FIRST MARTYRDOM AND MUCH WE CAN LEARN FROM THE ACCOUNT THAT IS RELEVANT FOR TODAY, WRITES **JAMES FRASER**

Stephen is well known as being the first Christian martyr, and the account of his death in the book of Acts (chapters 6 and 7) is deeply moving. A question I have asked myself in reading this story and considering how it relates to accounts of contemporary Christian martyrs is this: was Stephen's death a tragedy?

On the one hand the answer to that question is a definite 'yes'. Death was not part of God's creation intention for humanity and, when the precious life of someone made in God's image is deliberately and violently cut short, it is tragic. It is tragic for the family who are left behind. They suffer loss, grief and often ongoing material hardship. From the perspective of justice, Stephen's death was again tragic. Justice is very clearly not done. There are false witnesses, a sham trial, a mob lynching, corruption at the highest levels of society, and no one is held to account.

However, the account of Stephen's death does not read like a tragedy. When he stands before the council being accused his face is like the face of an angel – he is calm and at peace with what is happening. During his trial, he is given an extended platform to share the gospel – because of this more people hear the good news. As he is being stoned, the text says that he is full of the Holy Spirit – he has a special experience of God at the point of his greatest suffering. Stephen

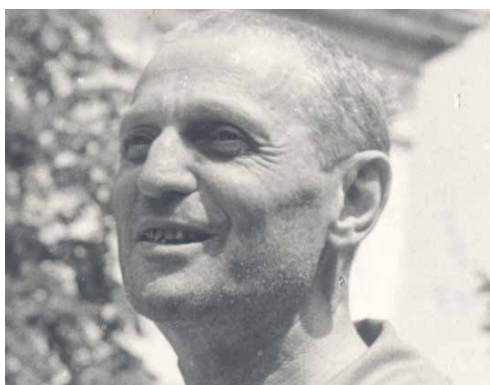
dies with the words of forgiveness on his lips – even in this most unjust and violent event there is hope for the perpetrators. And finally, during his attack, Stephen sees Jesus Christ standing at the right hand of God as if to welcome him into heaven. Death is not the end. Evil will not have the last word. Stephen's story reads more like a triumph than a tragedy.

Furthermore, in the narrative flow of Acts, Stephen's death, and the widespread persecution that follows, act as a catalyst that propels the church outward from Jerusalem to fulfil its mission to be Jesus' witnesses to the ends of the earth. In the minds of Stephen's killers, death was meant to silence his testimony about Jesus. Instead, it achieved the opposite. That is the great irony of a martyr's death.

When we hear the stories of Christian martyrs today in places such as Nigeria and Burkina Faso we must not minimise the tragedy of their deaths. They have been cruelly attacked and robbed of all the possibilities of their future. Their families have been left with heart-wrenching grief and material deprivation. Injustice appears to be triumphing in the contexts in which they live.

However, that is not the complete picture. In faith, we trust that they are now with the Lord. Their suffering is over and they have passed into new life. Death could not hold them. And, in the world they have left behind, their testimony lives on. We are witnesses to their faithfulness. We recognise that they *'did not love their lives so much as to shrink from facing death'* (Rev 12:11), and consequently we are emboldened to persevere in the costly faith we share with them. God's triumph over evil is embedded in the tragedy of every Christian martyrdom.

“DEATH WAS MEANT TO SILENCE HIS TESTIMONY. INSTEAD, IT ACHIEVED THE OPPOSITE”



INSPIRING FAITH

‘If the heart is cleansed by the love of Jesus Christ, and if the heart loves Him, one can resist all tortures’

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 is that tax you are in my responsibility to pay any difference. Please notify us if you want to cancel this declaration • change your name or home address • no longer pay income tax on your income 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 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)

R120

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



OCTOBER 2025

*Heavenly Father,
Grant my persecuted brothers
and sisters Your unending
grace as they face challenges
of many different types,
whether bereavement, injury,
imprisonment, being forced
to flee their homes, general
discrimination or surveillance.
May my persecuted brothers
and sisters daily experience
the fulfilment of Your promise,
'that in all things God works
for the good of those who love
Him, who have been called
according to His purpose'
(Romans 8:28).
Let their testimonies
encourage me to live
wholeheartedly for You despite
any challenges this brings me.
In Jesus's precious name I pray.
Amen*

NIGERIA

WEDNESDAY 1: Pray for Rev Mark Mukan and his wife, Eunice, as they minister to traumatised communities throughout the north and east of Nigeria. It is not uncommon for Mark, a Release International partner, to lead mass burial services of those martyred in attacks. Pray that he would have opportunity to rest.

THURSDAY 2: Give thanks for the work of our partner, the Stefanos Foundation, as it meets the practical and spiritual needs of those who have survived brutal attacks. Pray for the team, as it encounters horrific situations. Pray too for Mark Lipdo, who leads the ministry, and his wife, Peace, as they battle ill health.

FRIDAY 3: Pastor Andrew and his wife, Patience, run a transformation centre for young people who have survived attacks and who are struggling to rebuild their lives. Ask God to grant the couple resilience and rest and to be a blessing to those they care for.

SATURDAY 4: On Palm Sunday, more than 50 Christians were martyred in a midnight attack on Zike village in Plateau state. Pray for the survivors as they process their trauma and grief. Pray for those whose means of income has vanished and for those recovering from grievous injury. Pray that they would continue to trust in Jesus.

PRAYERSHIELD

SUNDAY 5: Pray for the peace and good governance of Nigeria, especially that the authorities would act to protect all citizens and bring to justice perpetrators of attacks against Christian communities.

MONDAY 6: Pray for Daniel Tagwi (pictured), and his



wife Jessica, as they prepare to graduate from theological college. Daniel

was called to ministry after his brother, Matthew, a pastor in rural Nigeria, was martyred. Pray that Daniel would be wise and trust in God's guidance.

TUESDAY 7: Praise God that work to build a new home for Pastor Gideon Dawell



(pictured) is progressing. Gideon lost his wife and five children in a

Fulani attack on Christmas Eve 2023 (see *Voice*, Oct-Dec 2024). Pray that there would be no delays to the building project.

NORTH KOREA

WEDNESDAY 8: Please pray for 'Seo Gyeong-hee'. A member of her underground church network asked her to connect with somebody in another location but, while doing so, she was stopped and interrogated by the authorities. She was released but now lives with the trauma of her experience.

THURSDAY 9: Pray for 'Cheol-ju Park', a young man whose mother and father were sent to a concentration camp after engaging in Christian activities. Cheol-ju and his siblings have grown up without parents and are still trying to make sense of their relationship with the Christian faith.

FRIDAY 10: Pray for 'Mrs GS', a defector living in South Korea who was previously the head of an underground church network in North Korea. After one of her church members was caught and interrogated by the authorities, she fled in order to avoid arrest.

SATURDAY 11: Sadly North Korean defectors who are Christians are often influenced by cults. Pray that they would be increasingly rooted in the Word of God and established in their faith.

SUNDAY 12: Pray for believers in North Korea to be courageous and to be guided by God as they persevere in the faith in the face of extreme persecution.

MONDAY 13: Pray for Kim Jong-Un, the leader of North Korea, whose regime actively persecutes Christians. May he be convicted by the Holy Spirit and turn to Christ in repentance and faith.

TUESDAY 14: Pray for 'Choi Sun-yeo'. While on official government business in China, she responded to the gospel. Now, having returned to North Korea, she is carefully considering how to practise her faith and share it with her family members without getting caught.

CENTRAL ASIA

WEDNESDAY 15: In Kyrgyzstan the spiritual battle lines are being drawn. New religious laws are being imposed, unregistered gatherings are being banned and sharing the gospel criminalised. Pray for believers who are coming under increasing pressure.

THURSDAY 16: Thank the Lord that the church is growing in Kyrgyzstan. Pray that it would remain strong and faithful as opposition increases.

FRIDAY 17: Pray for Christian leaders throughout Kyrgyzstan who are having to reconsider how their fellowships meet and work through the implications of new restrictions. May the Lord grant them great wisdom and courage.

'The church [in Kyrgyzstan] is ready to go underground if it must'
Pastor 'Nikolai'

SATURDAY 18: Pray for Pastor 'Seb', who leads a network of Kyrgyz churches. He regularly travels throughout this mountainous nation to small villages, bringing encouragement to handfuls of believers who meet in secret.

SUNDAY 19: Pastor 'Nikolai' says: 'The church [in Kyrgyzstan] is ready to go underground if it must.' He asks us to pray that he will remain a faithful leader in the face of various threats.

MONDAY 20: Praise the Lord for one church in Kyrgyzstan which, after having its building burnt down by Muslim

PRAYERSHIELD

fundamentalists, is thankful for the opportunity this has given members to be a witness in the community to God's love and forgiveness.

TUESDAY 21: 'Aibek', a Christian leader in Kyrgyzstan, asks: 'What can we do but pray, wait and trust?' Please join in prayer with Christians throughout the nation as they put their trust in the Lord at this challenging time.

PAKISTAN

WEDNESDAY 22: Continue to pray for Zafar Bhatti who has been in prison on a false blasphemy charge for 12 years. His health has recently deteriorated and he requires critical medical care. Remember too his wife, Nawab Bibi (pictured), who struggles with her own health issues and needs substantial care and support.

THURSDAY 23: It has been estimated that there were nearly 350 new blasphemy cases in Pakistan last year, the majority being against Muslims,

suggesting an increased abuse of the country's notorious blasphemy laws. Pray that these laws would be repealed. Mere accusations against Christians have resulted in mob violence against their communities.

FRIDAY 24: Pray for the many Christians who are threatened when attempting to pursue justice. They are often forced to drop cases due to intimidation and threats as well as mounting, unaffordable legal costs.

SATURDAY 25: Christian girls as young as ten years old can be vulnerable to abduction, forced conversion and marriage. Pray that those who have been kidnapped would escape their captors and that the courts would grant them and their families justice and protection.

SUNDAY 26: Pray for a teenaged Christian girl who recently escaped after being kidnapped by a local Muslim man and his son. During her captivity, she was tortured, beaten and raped and suffered a miscarriage. She attempted suicide before

managing to escape.

MONDAY 27: The wife of a Christian brick-kiln worker was brutally raped at gunpoint while her husband was out working. After harassing her over a long period of time, her attacker forced his way into the family home before assaulting the mother of five.

TUESDAY 28: Pray for Release International partners who serve the persecuted in Pakistan. One faithful partner was recently forced to leave his home after being maliciously targeted by a neighbour. Another partner has been trying to deal with serious false accusations, which have affected his physical and mental health.

SOMALIA

WEDNESDAY 29: Praise God for initiatives that our partner is taking to nurture and disciple Somali families in the word of God as well as to provide healing for the many believers who have experienced trauma as a result of persecution.

THURSDAY 30: Please pray for 'Andrea', an older Somali believer who has experienced considerable persecution since coming to Jesus. However, despite her life being at risk she continues to reach out with the gospel to local Somali Muslims through her small business.

FRIDAY 31: Praise God that 'Andrea' (see previous day) has recently seen seven women and two men come to Christ. They are now part of the underground church that she helps to run.



Nawab Bibi struggles with her health

NOVEMBER 2025

CHINA

SATURDAY 1: Multiple branches of Beijing Zion Church were raided in June, with a large number of church members being summoned for questioning. Pray that the harassment of this influential church will ease and that the Lord will give its leaders wisdom to know how to respond.

SUNDAY 2: Continue to pray for Early Rain Covenant Church in Chengdu whose pastor, Wang Yi (pictured), is in prison. A number of church members are under strict surveillance with cameras installed at their front doors, and some have even been subjected to violent eviction from their homes. Pray that the Lord will give them strength to endure.

MONDAY 3: Ten church leaders, including Pastor Gao Quanfu, from Light of Zion Church in Xi'an were criminally detained in May on charges of 'using superstition to undermine the implementation of the law'. Several church members were also questioned and pressured by police into signing pledges not to attend worship services at the church. Pray for God's protection on Light of Zion and its leaders.

TUESDAY 4: Give thanks that Pastor Deng Yanxiang of Shengjia Church in Guangdong was released and reunited with his family in May after spending two years in prison. In 2023 he was unjustly charged with 'illegal business



operations' associated with the distribution of Bible study materials.

WEDNESDAY 5: Continue to pray for our partner's radio broadcasting ministry into China. This is a vital discipleship tool for persecuted Christians. Pray that the Chinese Government's increased signal-jamming efforts would be ineffective.

THURSDAY 6: New government regulations which came into force in May further restrict the involvement of foreign nationals in religious activities within China. Pray that, despite these pressures, foreign Christians living in China will find a way to continue practising their faith.

FRIDAY 7: Internet regulation of religious sites in China is tightening, which is presenting new challenges for churches. Pastors fear that the Government's increased control over the digital space will create a divide with some church members unable to access vital discipleship resources. Pray that churches will be able to overcome these obstacles.

ERITREA

SATURDAY 8: There are currently about 500 prisoners of faith within Eritrea. Praise God for how He has provided for their needs. Pray for their continued good health and spirits.

SUNDAY 9: Pray that church leaders in Eritrea would have wisdom and courage as they lead underground cell groups.

MONDAY 10: Please pray for the protection of Christian workers who are involved in prison ministry in Eritrea. Thank God for their courage and that they have access to the jails; pray that this may continue.

TUESDAY 11: Pray that the families of Christian prisoners would remain faithful to the Lord in spite of often many years of separation from their loved ones.

WEDNESDAY 12: Pray that, despite missing their families, exiled Eritrean Christians would be able to settle in their new environments and be accepted by the communities.

THURSDAY 13: Continue to remember long-term prisoners, some of whom have been behind bars for more than 20 years, and their families. These include Kiflu Gebremeskel, Futsum Gebrenegus, Million Gebreselasie, Tekleab Menghisteb, Haile Naizghe, Rev G. Gebregioris, Kidane Weldou and Mussie Ezaz. They covet our prayers.

FRIDAY 14: Praise God that the gospel continues to have an impact on Eritrean lives

PRAYERSHIELD

despite the Government's clampdown; at the same time pray that the persecution of Christians would end.

LAOS

SATURDAY 15: Much of the population in rural Laos fears evil spiritual forces and feels compelled to placate them. When villagers come to Christ they are seen to be angering these spirits and as a result face persecution. Pray that the light of Christ will shine in this darkness.

SUNDAY 16: Pray for Pastor 'Phouang', who has been harassed and threatened by the authorities because of his Christian work. Pray that he and his family will experience the Lord's special protection (see *Voice*, April-June).

MONDAY 17: Pray for Pastor 'Vong', a former witch doctor, who leads a village church. He has been threatened with eviction because of his preaching (see *Voice*, April-June).

TUESDAY 18: Pray for Pastor 'Somsak', who was removed from his position as a village leader because of his faith and has been threatened with eviction. He said, 'If God wants me to stay in the village and be salt and light, then God will make a way' (see *Voice*, April-June).

WEDNESDAY 19: Give thanks that the church in Laos is growing despite determined opposition in several regions. Pray that the minority people groups in the country will have the opportunity to hear the gospel.

THURSDAY 20: Pray for 'Nyok' and all the workers involved in the distribution of Bibles, Christian literature and worship materials. Pray that these consignments will not be intercepted or confiscated by the authorities (see *Voice*, April-June).

FRIDAY 21: Pray for our partner in Laos, who organises regular Bible training seminars for pastors, many of whom are experiencing persecution. They provide teaching on a range of subjects as well as the much-needed opportunity for fellowship.

SRI LANKA

SATURDAY 22: Pray for Christian teachers in Sri Lanka who are supported by our partners. They are uniquely placed to help young believers to remain steadfast in the context of significant hostility.

SUNDAY 23: Pray for 'Joyce', a Christian teacher who, along with her husband, is reaching and encouraging young people with the gospel. Pray that the couple would be encouraged, despite the opposition they face.

MONDAY 24: Praise the Lord for an annual camp of Christian teachers run by our partners. Pray that the camp continues to offer an enriching time of fellowship and encouragement, and that those attending leave better equipped to serve.

TUESDAY 25: Many Christian teachers, and their students,

experience significant rejection. They are often marginalised and opposed, even by other teachers in their schools. Pray that they would have resilience to persevere, and love for those who mistreat them.

WEDNESDAY 26: Thank God for training seminars that equip pastors and other church leaders serving in contexts of persecution to know how to respond to violations of religious rights.

THURSDAY 27: Pray for our partners as they support many pastors who have experienced persecution. Pray that these pastors would know healing, encouragement and growing resilience to remain faithful in this challenging environment.

FRIDAY 28: Thank God for pastor 'Alan', who has expressed his deep gratitude for our partner's programme which helps church leaders affected by persecution.

PHILIPPINES

SATURDAY 29: Pray for the growing number of former Muslims who have come to faith in Christ and are sharing the Good News in their communities. Pray for wisdom, protection and a boldness as they share God's love.

SUNDAY 30: Praise God for the church denominations that are supporting workers in dangerous locations and are prepared to adopt new methods of evangelism and church planting that are sensitive to the local culture.

DECEMBER 2025

MIDDLE EAST & NORTH AFRICA

IRAN

MONDAY 1: Pray for Christian Mehran Shamloui, aged 37, who was arrested on his arrival in Iran after being deported from Turkey in July. Mehran had been sentenced to a total of ten years in prison following his arrest in Tehran in November 2024. In connected raids on homes, two other Christians, Abbas Soori (48) and expectant mother Narges Nasri (37), were also arrested. All three fled Iran while on bail.

TUESDAY 2: Give thanks for the impact of multiple media ministries that transmit the gospel into people's homes, bypassing government attempts to repress Christianity. Pray for those working to translate the *Jesus* film, *The Chosen* and other evangelistic material into Iran's many indigenous languages.

WEDNESDAY 3: Pray for the training events run by our partners in neighbouring countries to equip and encourage the leaders of Iran's house church movement. Without the infrastructure of established churches, these networks and their leaders need regular training and opportunities to meet safely.

THURSDAY 4: Our partner asks for prayer for its team

in Turkey and for those Iranian Christians there who face threats of deportation, regular harassment from local authorities and discrimination in their schools and workplaces. May God soften the hearts of those who are mistreating them.

FRIDAY 5: Children in Iran are indoctrinated by state propaganda and hatred in school from a young age. Pray for those growing up in Christian homes who hear such contrasting views from their parents and teachers, and for whom saying the wrong word in class could lead to their parents' arrest.

SATURDAY 6: Pray for God's blessing on two Christian converts who fled Iran after each being sentenced to 12 years in prison on charges related to the possession of multiple copies of the Bible. Mehdi Rahimi, aged 49, and Kia Nourinia, 55, were sentenced in April after raids by intelligence officers on their homes in Tabriz.

SUNDAY 7: Pray for work translating the Bible into the many ethnic-minority languages of Iran. In a closed country with no physical churches and where even home groups can be at risk, a believer's Bible – especially in their indigenous language – is vital.

ALGERIA

MONDAY 8: Please pray for

the re-opening of the more than 45 Algerian Protestant churches that have been closed by the Government.

TUESDAY 9: Pray for the ongoing court cases involving pastors and other church leaders who have been prosecuted simply for their Christian ministry. May those who have been convicted see their sentences overturned on appeal at the Supreme Court.

WEDNESDAY 10: Pray for wisdom, courage and grace for church leaders as they continue to struggle for legal recognition, freedom and rights for Christians and churches within Algeria. Pray for an end to the relentless hounding of the church by the authorities.

THURSDAY 11: Please pray for God's protection and care for Algerian Christians such as our partner, pastor 'Yuba', and his wife and children, who take great risks to stay in Algeria and continue ministering.

FRIDAY 12: Pray for freedom of conscience and religious belief for all Algerians, not only in law but also in their minds, hearts, homes and communities. May God's people have courage to stand up for the truth in this challenging period.

SATURDAY 13: Pray that Christian children and youth in Algeria will have opportunities to remain in their country and to grow and develop in their faith



Gendarmes closing a church in Algeria

without persecution or discrimination.

SUNDAY 14: Give thanks for the technology that allows Algerian believers to have fellowship and to spread God's word even while their church buildings are closed. Pray for all those encountering the gospel for the first time through such media.

LEBANON

MONDAY 15: Pray for our partner church and give thanks for its flourishing ministry among both Lebanese and Syrians. Pray for God's blessing and protection on the pastor and his growing ministry team.

TUESDAY 16: Pray for 'Fatima', a Syrian refugee who lives in

fear because her family back home have threatened to kill her for becoming a Christian.

WEDNESDAY 17: Pray for members of the Lebanese military and police who have become Christians but cannot reveal their faith. May God bless and protect them as they help to rebuild their shattered country and constrain the activities of Islamist terrorist groups.

THURSDAY 18: 'Michael', a Syrian refugee who leads Bible study groups for new believers in Lebanon, ministers with energy and joy despite his relatives trying to kill him for having changed his faith. Pray for protection for him and his family.

FRIDAY 19: Ask for God's blessing on a couple who

fled to Lebanon after severe persecution in Egypt and whose young son has many complex medical needs. Pray that his forthcoming treatment will be successful and that the family can live in peace and safety and resume its ministry.

SATURDAY 20: Pray for the successful completion of our partners' building project to improve the school where they teach Syrian refugee children; and ask for God's blessing on the education programme itself.

SUNDAY 21: Pray for young Lebanese Christians such as 'Charles', who are using social media to spread the gospel in Arabic and reaching wide audiences. Pray that their efforts will bear fruit and that God will bless and protect those hearing the Good News whose families may try to prevent them following Christ.

LIBYA

MONDAY 22: Remember in prayer seven believers in prison for apostasy (converting from Islam to Christianity) in Tripoli who are awaiting final sentencing. Pray that none will receive a death sentence; and that God will grant them and their lawyers courage and wisdom.

TUESDAY 23: Pray for Dhiyaa ad-Din Ahmed Muftah Bala'ou, a Libyan believer who was sentenced to death for apostasy in 2022 and is

being held on death row in Misrata. Pray that God will grant him grace and strength and that the Supreme Court will pardon him.

HOLY LAND

WEDNESDAY 24: Pray for Christians in the Holy Land. In the past two years several churches and their congregations in both Israel and Palestine have been attacked. Pray especially for all those holding Christmas services in and around Bethlehem. May they know God's peace and continue to be a light to those around them.

THURSDAY 25: As we celebrate the birth of our Saviour in Bethlehem, pray for all followers of Christ in the Holy Land, whether Palestinian or Israeli, who face persecution for their faith. Pray for those believers suffering from the protracted conflict in this region, especially those in Gaza who have been forced to flee their homes – some of them on numerous occasions.

SUDAN

FRIDAY 26: Pray for peace in Sudan and protection for believers as the warring factions, the Sudanese Armed Forces and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, have taken advantage of the chaos to inflict faith-based persecution, especially upon Muslim-background followers of Christ.

SATURDAY 27: Pray that a chaplaincy programme at a hospital in Sudan would provide spiritual healing to patients who are receiving physical care.

SUNDAY 28: Pray that the Bibles that have been taken into the country will reach the internally displaced believers who need them. Pray that the word would be an encouragement to them and lead to growth, and that they would be strengthened in their faith and witness.

MONDAY 29: Pray that training will provide refreshment and encouragement to pastors and evangelists, who, despite much persecution and dangerous conditions, have

remained in Sudan in order to share the gospel and minister to those in need.

TUESDAY 30: Pray that the 5 per cent of the Sudanese population that is Christian will stay strong in the face of multiple challenges. Pray that those who have been displaced to the Nuba Mountains region of South Kordofan state would receive the essential aid they need.

WEDNESDAY 31: As we prepare to celebrate the start of a new year let us pray for a new season of God's anointing on our persecuted family in Sudan and around the world.

Lord Jesus

At the start of this new year help me to recommit myself to standing in faithful prayer for my persecuted brothers and sisters. Thank You that they – like myself – are Your beloved for whom You intercede at the right hand of God.

May we stay faithful in the circumstances to which You have placed each one of us and let us see together Your kingdom come on earth.

Amen

Sources: Article18; Chinese Church Support Ministries; ChinaAid; Christian Daily International-Morning Star News; Middle East Concern; 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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