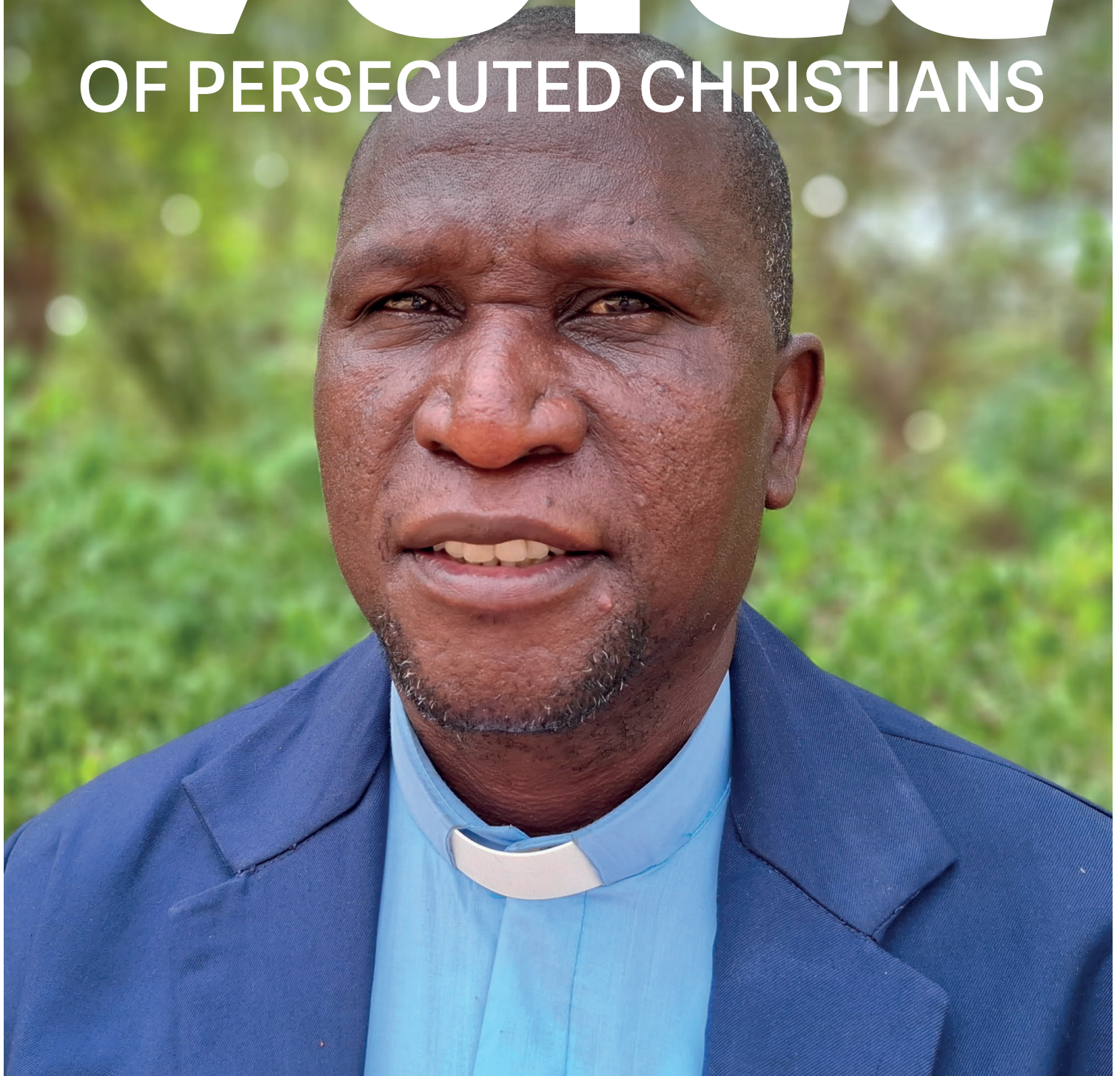


voice

OF PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS



**HELPING
OPPRESSED
CHRISTIANS**

Hope and healing in East Africa
How we survived prison in Eritrea
Constant witness in Central Asia
Special day of prayer

voice
OF PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS

WELCOME

PAUL ROBINSON, CEO



I'M SURE YOU'VE NOTICED THAT OUR LOGO HAS LONG CARRIED THE STRAPLINE, 'VOICE OF PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS'.

For many years, being a channel through which the voice of persecuted believers around the world can be heard here in the UK, has been at the heart of our mission. Today we are bringing it front and centre, because in the times we are living in, that voice matters more than ever.

You can find out more about the reasoning behind the new name and logo on page 12 but be assured: the name may have changed, but what we do has not.

FAMILY FOR THE OUTCASTS

The only way you can understand what life is like for Somalis in Kenya who decide to follow Christ is to imagine yourself having to move home, maybe from one end of the UK to the other, because your family and friends now hate you and want to kill you, then going to a local church but being rejected by the congregation because you don't look or sound like them and they suspect you may be trying to infiltrate their number for nefarious reasons. All the while you are treated as a second-class citizen by the authorities who deliberately delay your documentation. You are alone and never know if the stranger walking past your home is actually there to kill you.

It's hard to picture a more challenging start to the Christian faith, to put it mildly.

Therefore I am so grateful for the work of our partner in Kenya who provides the care and fellowship these believers desperately need. I dare not think what would happen to these dear brothers and sisters if that were not so. See main feature, page 6.

LIGHT WALK CHALLENGE

I want to say a huge thank you to all those who decided to join me on the Light Walk Challenge on June 14. At the time of writing we are all preparing for what promises to be a demanding but exhilarating experience: trekking up Scafell Pike, England's highest peak, in the dark while carrying a large wooden cross. I would further like to thank every one of you who has sponsored either myself or other team members as well as prayed for us. Your support means the world. If you would like to contribute, it is still possible to do so after the event. All information is available on the JustGiving website ([justgiving.com/campaign/lightwalkchallenge](https://www.justgiving.com/campaign/lightwalkchallenge)).

POWER OF THE WRITTEN WORD

My thanks also to all of you who have sent in cards and letters for persecuted brothers and sisters over the years. If you have never done so, may I encourage you to consider sending us a letter or card with a scripture verse on it or a message of encouragement. On a recent trip to Nigeria, our team were able to distribute many of these to people who have suffered great loss or been traumatised (see page 20). It is easy to underestimate the impact of such simple, loving actions.

CONTENTS

VOICE MAGAZINE • ISSUE 135
JULY – SEPTEMBER 2026

- 4 FAITH UNDER FIRE**
News for your prayers
- 6 FAMILY BUSINESS**
Caring for the persecuted in East Africa
- 12 THE VOICE OF CHANGE**
New name to reflect heart of ministry
- 14 BEAUTIFUL LAUNDRETTE**
Micro businesses helping Eritrean believers
- 16 FOOD FOR THE SOUL**
Meeting courageous Christians in Central Asia
- 18 THE HARD YARDS**
Fundraisers go the distance
- 22 THE REFINING FIRE**
Biblical reflection

'GOD REALLY DOES ANSWER PRAYERS. IT'S BEEN A BEAUTIFUL JOURNEY.'
(SEE PAGE 9)

voice
OF PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS



Voice of Persecuted Christians 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.

Voice of Persecuted Christians: PO Box 54, Orpington BR5 4RT T: 01689 823491

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FAITH UNDER FIRE



Leah Sharibu has refused to renounce her Christian faith

Remember Leah

Leah Sharibu, aged 23, who was abducted as a schoolgirl in an attack by terrorists in northern Nigeria's Yobe state in 2018, is still being held captive.

The militants killed five girls in the raid on Leah's college, according to reports. The following month, ISWAP (Islamic State West Africa Province) returned 104 girls to their families. The only student they refused to give back was 14-year-old Leah.

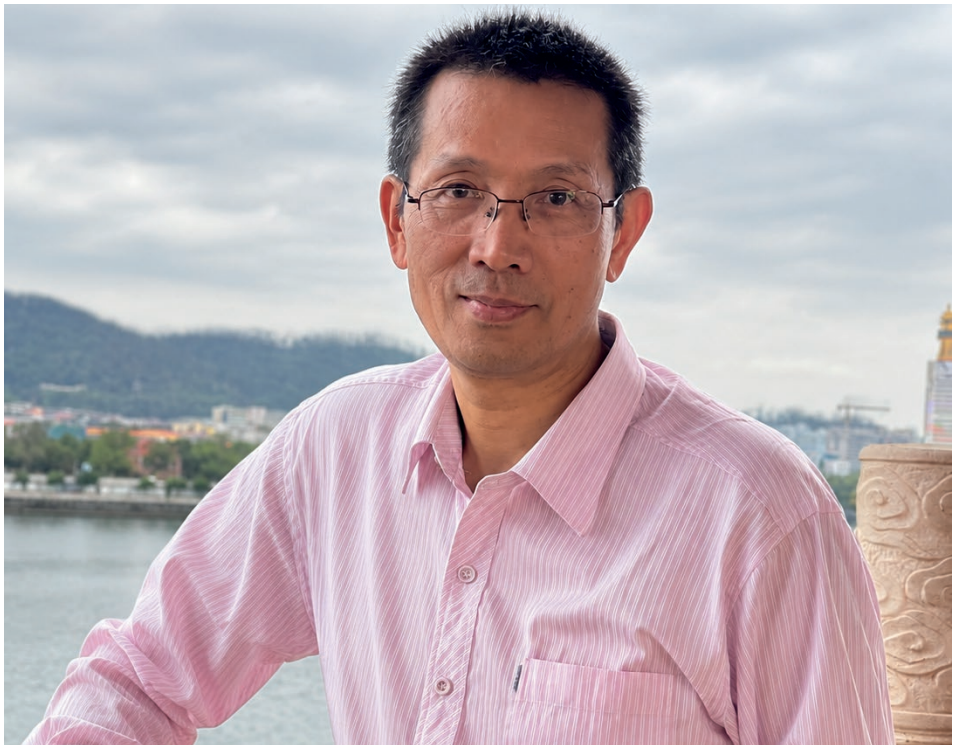
It is believed that Leah, a Christian, refused their demands to convert to Islam. ISWAP declared publicly that they intended to keep her as 'a slave for life'.

Intelligence suggests that she is being held either deep in the Sambisa forest or the Lake Chad region where there are insurgent strongholds.

As she entered her ninth year in captivity in February, it is understood that she has endured multiple forced marriages to militant fighters and several childbirths.

Please pray for Leah and her family. Leah's mother, Rebecca, said previously: 'The reason they have left my daughter in captivity is because she is a Christian.'

'All the other girls that were taken were Muslims, and they were all released. But my daughter ... refused to renounce her Christian faith.'



Pastor John Cao, who was engaged in cross-border missionary and charitable educational initiatives along the China-Myanmar border and was arrested and sentenced to seven years in prison in 2018 for 'organising illegal border crossings', was recently reunited with his family in hospital in China after nine years apart. Even after completing his sentence in 2024, various factors continued to keep him separated from his wife and children in the US, until this long-awaited reunion. Pastor Cao, who has prostate cancer, expressed deep gratitude to his wife, Jamie, for the sacrifice she had made for his missionary calling. 'I owe you too much love; I could never repay you in this lifetime,' he said.

PRAYER VIGIL IN NIGERIA ATTACKED

Three Christians were killed and 15 kidnapped in an attack on a church prayer vigil in western Nigeria's Kwara state in May.

The raid occurred in Ori-Oke Ajaiye, on the outskirts of Ekerin village in Ekiti County, at 8.30pm, said Adetoun Ejire-Adeyemi, spokesman for the Kwara State Police Command (KSPC).

'[KSPC] strongly condemns the gruesome attack, killing, and abduction of innocent worshippers by armed criminals,' Ejire-Adeyemi said.

'The incident was reported on May 24 by Pastor Adebayo Abiodun of Ijo Ajaye Ati Igbala, Ekerin village, who stated that while conducting a night vigil alongside members of his congregation at Ori-Oke Ijaye via Ekerin village, armed hoodlums invaded the prayer ground, firing sporadically, killing three persons while abducting 15 others to an unknown destination.'

This was the second time in six months that Ekiti County was targeted. In November, it was reported that gunmen had attacked the Christ Apostolic Church in Oke Isegun, Eruku, killing worshippers and abducting congregation members.

(Source: Christian Daily International-Morning Star News)

Iranian convert's forced disappearance

Christian convert Mary Mohammadi, who is a journalist and human rights defender, has been subjected to enforced disappearance since late February, Amnesty International has reported. According to an informed source, she had travelled from Tehran to Ahvaz in Khuzestan province, and was in contact with her family until around February 26 before communication ceased. The authorities have refused to disclose her fate or whereabouts to her family but, according to information gathered by Amnesty International, she was initially held in a Ministry of Intelligence detention facility in Ahvaz before being transferred to an undisclosed location in April. (Source: Amnesty International)

**SIGN UP
TO VoPC**



Listen to our latest podcasts



Light in the darkest places Join our CEO, Paul Robinson, and a dedicated group of supporters as they take on the Light Walk Challenge – climbing Scafell Pike with a 10-foot cross to raise awareness and support for persecuted Christians worldwide.

Salt and Light: The Church in Iran Inside Iran, protests are met with brutal crackdowns, yet something extraordinary is happening beneath the surface. In this powerful episode, our partner, Lazarus Yeghnazar, shares stories of courage, persecution, and a growing underground church. As fear of famine and further devastation looms, he calls for prayer, hope and attention. This is a story you will not forget.

From Prison to the Nations (Part 2). Sharif's Story of Persecution, Mission and Revival VoPC's Tom Hardie continues his conversation with 'Sharif', a former radicalised Muslim from a family of imams who encountered Christ while in prison.

We rejoin the story after his conversion, when Sharif was given an additional year behind bars on a charge of blasphemy, a sentence he calls 'the best year of my life'. From there, he describes the devastating fallout: his family's fury at his decision to follow Jesus, the burning of his documents, his disowning, the loss of inheritance, and even a fatwa permitting his killing. The threats that followed forced him into a life of constant movement.

Despite this, Sharif was later sent as a missionary to a Muslim-majority island, where he witnessed extraordinary provision and spiritual harvest in the face of persistent persecution.

He reflects on the tension between Indonesia's constitutional protections for religious freedom and the harsh realities on the ground – village-level hostility, church closures and burnings and ongoing legal pressure through hate-speech accusations.

Sharif closes by urging believers to pray for revival, courage and steadfastness for those enduring persecution today.

CHINESE COURT JAILS HOUSE CHURCH MEMBERS

A court in Suizhou in central China's Hubei province has issued verdicts against 31 members of a house church fellowship in one of the largest co-ordinated prosecutions of Christians in recent years. Details remain limited because authorities split the believers into numerous small cases involving one or two defendants, while information about the prosecutions has been tightly restricted. According to information obtained by ChinaAid, VoPC's partner, the harshest known sentence was four years in prison for Christian leader Song Yude, while the lightest known sentence was two years and four months.

'These are innocent Christians, not criminals,' said Bob Fu, president of ChinaAid. 'They are peaceful house church members who exercised their universally recognised rights to freedom of religion, worship, assembly and association.'

Among those sentenced in May was Yang Zhijin, a 77-year-old Christian from neighbouring Henan province. He received a first-instance sentence of three years and two months in prison and was fined 8,000 yuan (£875) on charges of 'using a cult organisation to undermine the implementation of the law'.

Authorities alleged that Yang participated in cross-provincial Christian fellowship activities, clergy training and efforts to help detained believers to secure legal representation. According to religious freedom advocates including ChinaAid, the case reflects increasingly broad use of cult-related charges against unregistered religious groups.

PAKISTAN POLICE ACCUSED OF JARANWALA FAILURE

Police in Pakistan have failed to comply with Supreme Court orders to arrest all suspects involved in the August 2023 attacks on churches and Christian homes in Jaranwala, Punjab province, a church leader has said.

Rev Khalid Mukhtar, whose house was among the properties destroyed in the violence, said authorities had made little progress despite a March 31 Supreme Court ruling directing police to arrest absconding suspects and ordering the Faisalabad anti-terrorism court to conclude the trials within six months. *'The Supreme Court directed the police to immediately arrest all absconding suspects and ordered the anti-terrorism*

Baptist leaders killed in troubled Indian state

Three Baptist ministers were killed and several others injured in an ambush in India's troubled Manipur state in May.

VoPC's partner in India expressed profound grief, anguish and solidarity following the deaths in Kangpokpi district on May 13.

According to information received from church leaders and reliable sources on the ground, the pastors, who belonged to the Thadou Baptist Association, were returning from a United Baptist Convention gathering in Churachandpur when they were ambushed while travelling towards Kangpokpi.

Credible reports confirm the deaths of Rev Dr Vumthang Sitlhou, Pastor Kaigoulun Lhouvum and Pastor Paougoulen Sitlhou. Among the injured were Rev S.M. Haopu Sitlhou, Rev Kaithang Singsit, Thangtinlen Sitlhou and Lungoumang Lhouvum.

Our partner said that the killing of unarmed church leaders returning from Christian fellowship and ministry was deeply disturbing. *'At a time when Manipur continues to endure pain, displacement, division, fear, and uncertainty, such violence further wounds communities already under immense strain.'*

Archbishop Joseph D'Souza, of the All India Christian Council, expressed his concern over the growing tensions between sections of the Kuki and Tangkhul Naga communities.

Manipur, in northeast India, was racked by communal violence in June 2023. However, church buildings remain destroyed and thousands of Christians are still displaced.



A mob attacked the Jaranwala Christian community in August 2023

court to conclude the trials within six months,' he said.

'Despite providing police with video and photographic evidence... there has been no meaningful progress in arrests.'

(Source: Christian Daily International-Morning Star News)





Bishop Mafuja said a number of his pastors experienced opposition

CHARLIE FRANK MEETS CHRISTIANS IN KENYA AND TANZANIA WHO, DESPITE REJECTION AND PERSECUTION, ARE SEEING GOD'S KINGDOM COME

Kenyan Somali Christians – even those born and raised in Kenya – expect to be ostracised. Those who come to faith often do so from a Muslim background and consequently face rejection, threats and violence from their families and communities.

Many flee persecution from the northeast of Kenya, where most Kenyan Somalis reside, to areas further south, but here too they face oppression.

They are viewed and treated as second-class citizens, with opportunities for employment and education limited as a result of their ethnicity. Official government documents such as ID cards, to which they have a constitutional right, are often denied or the process of obtaining one delayed.

Sadly, this bias spills over into indigenous Kenyan churches, which means Kenyan Somali believers face mistrust and stigmatisation among the very people who should be offering them love and acceptance.

All of this means that they can end up living in poverty and isolation, blighted by depression, the trauma of past experiences and the ever-present threats of harassment and violence.

The rejection of family, alongside the loss and denial of community, is felt especially keenly because of *ubuntu*, a concept that is fundamental to understanding several African cultures.

'BEAUTIFUL JOURNEY'

Within *ubuntu*, an individual can only be defined and understood through the wider context of their family and community – in stark contrast to Western individualism.

'I am because we are,' explains Voice of Persecuted Christians (VoPC) partner, 'Joseph'*. *'We are a family.'*

Thankfully Joseph and his team connect disparate Somali Christian families together, regardless of whether or not they are Kenyan, for fellowship and discipleship, thus fulfilling and restoring *ubuntu*.

The fellowship is fiercely practical; with the help of VoPC funding, Joseph's team helps families to establish micro-

**I AM BECAUSE
WE ARE. WE
ARE A FAMILY'**



Alif translates the Bible
into local languages

**“
I DON'T WANT
SOMEONE TO
LACK FOOD
BECAUSE
THEY FOLLOW
CHRIST”**

businesses, where others can be trained with the skills that will help them to earn a living.

Among those who have benefitted from this fellowship are 'Farah'* and 'Najma*', a young married couple who exemplify restored *ubuntu*.

Farah was raised in the Christian faith in Kenya by his mother, but their journey was a hard one. His mother came from a Muslim background and was ejected from the family home when her faith was discovered, along with Farah and his sister.

As a result, Farah grew up in poverty and with a sense of being stuck in two worlds – family and church – that

offered nothing but rejection.

When the scholarship Farah had prayed for was unjustly taken away from him, he reached a crossroads in his faith.

'Every struggle I had, I associated with Christianity,' he told us plainly. 'I was done [with faith].'

It was then that two of his uncles approached him and promised to pay for his education if he returned to Islam. They told him that every difficulty he had experienced in life was the fault of his mother's choices: *'You're a grown man now, you should make your own decisions,'* they told him.

However, as Farah listened to them, he realised that they were making this offer simply as a way of punishing his mother. He also knew he had to take a stand for what he believed in. *'It was no longer my mum's journey; it was my journey now.'*

He devoted himself to reading the Bible and listening attentively to sermons. Soon, he had recommitted his life to Christ. *'Growing up had many disappointments but the most important thing is that we have our salvation. There are challenges, there are disappointments, but God is always faithful.'*

When Najma met Farah, she was a Muslim but through his witness, and that of his mother, she gave her life to Christ.

'Meeting Farah was the highlight of my life,' she said. *'I have a man that appreciates me, who loves me.'* Her smile continued to grow as she described the effects of Christ in her life: *'Everything from my past disappears!'*

She had been working at her uncle's shop in Kenya when she became a Christian but he dismissed her when he discovered her new-found faith. However, this did not deter Najma: *'You cannot tell me to leave Christ,'* she told him.

Today, Farah is building a successful film and media business, whilst Najma runs a restaurant, both of them are using their work to advance the gospel and build up Somali believers in their faith.

Farah creates short gospel videos in Somali and trains other men within the community to help with their production, while Najma uses her restaurant to equip women who would otherwise have limited sources of income.

'If you're not a [Somali] Muslim, you have to go and beg and grovel for jobs,' Najma explained. 'I don't want someone to lack food because they follow Christ.'

Alongside work and raising their young family, Farah and Najma are keen to mentor other Somali believers.

Najma leads a group of Christian Somali women who battle with trauma and mental health. Together, they worship, read scripture and share prayer requests.

'When we come together [our struggles] just disappear and we have peace.'

SPIRITUAL CHANGE

Life has been difficult for Farah and Najma and there are no guarantees of an easier future. *'We have had to move a couple of times because of the materials we share; it is dangerous,'* Najma said.

They hope that they can remain where they are for the foreseeable future but having to move again will not dampen their faith. *'God really does answer prayers,' she said. 'It's [been] a beautiful journey.'*

'Alif'* was a proud Muslim, who decided that a local Kenyan pastor would be a good target for evangelism. Pretending to be interested in the Christian faith she went to his church and they began reading through the book of Galatians in the New Testament together.

When they came to Galatians 5:1 (*'It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery'*), she felt an emotional and spiritual heaviness lifting from her; physically and spiritually something changed.

However, rather than embrace this experience, she threw the Bible at the pastor and ran out of the room; she had been told that if she ever felt

'different' when meeting a Christian it was because of witchcraft.

However, in a dream that night, she saw the fruit of the Spirit, looking good and healthy, to her right, while to the left was only darkness. As she awoke she gave her life to Christ.

She could not say the name of Jesus at first because she had been so prejudiced against Him but she knew *'this God is loving'*.

Today, Alif translates the Bible into local languages. As she says: *'If one verse changed my life and showed me the truth, how much more [impact can it have] if I translate this Bible and take it to the community?'*

Alongside her translating work, she runs literacy classes for Muslims so she can give them a Bible in their own language.

Somali and Kenyan Christians have been martyred in Kenya, so Alif has to be careful whom she approaches and when. Yet, God has continually led people to her. *'He'll just do that!'* she said, beaming.

Many have come to faith but they have to remain secret believers for their own safety. Due to the danger, one group of women that Alif is mentoring meet all together only once a year. *'Pray that we continue to have a place where we can go and learn the word of God,'* she said.

DIRECT IMPACT

'Solomon'* fled from violence in Somalia to Kenya in the 1980s. Motivated by his faith, he now seeks to bless communities in Somalia by providing educational resources and medical supplies.

The work is both sensitive and dangerous. A close family member was assassinated because of Solomon's faith and another man was killed because of his connections to the project. However, Solomon is determined to continue.

Solomon's son, 'Moses'*, has lived in Kenya all his life but is still considered a refugee, making it hard to obtain work or education. Despite this, he has benefitted from a scholarship that



PRAY FOR CHRISTIANS IN EAST AFRICA

- For protection for Kenyan Somali believers and that they will be able to find meaningful fellowship. Pray too for Joseph and his team as they continue to seek out and build up these Christians
- That Farah and Najma's business ventures would provide them with the income their family needs, as well as helping to support the church; pray that their children would have access to good education and grow up to be faithful disciples of Christ
- For safety for Alif as she travels and meets secret believers, and that her ministry would bear much fruit
- For provision for Solomon and Ruth and their large family
- For Bishop Mafuja and his family, as he leads the Pwani diocese, and for the pastors and evangelists under his care
- That VoPC's new partnership with AICT would impact many lives
- For pastors and new believers in areas where the church is small and the cost of discipleship is high. Pray that their witness would lead to many more joining the family of faith



Pastor Ezekiel has ministered
in several communities

**THIS IS A CALLING
FROM GOD AND
THEREFORE GOD
IS WITH ME'**

VoPC helped to fund and is completing an internship.

After his first wife died, Solomon married 'Ruth'. Ruth is a Somali refugee who grew up as a Muslim in a camp for internally displaced people. She later came to faith but the pastor who was key in leading her to Christ was martyred in Garissa in northeast Kenya in 2013.

Today, Ruth runs a textiles micro-business that makes goods such as shirts and bags. Like Najma, she includes women from the Christian Somali community and making the

products serves as a form of trauma-healing, as well as giving the women skills and confidence. *'Many have never made anything or believe they can,'* said Ruth.

VoPC has had a direct impact on this microbusiness. Two motorbikes, for transporting products, and two sewing machines were purchased through its support.

The Kenyan Somali community is small and the opposition and barriers it faces are persistent and attritional yet their fellowship is growing, and ubuntu is flourishing.

'Whole families are learning with other whole families,' said Joseph, before continuing to share how he encourages new members of this fellowship: *'[I can say] come back to my home because now you have a big family!'*

REMOTE LOCATIONS

In a hot and humid upstairs corridor at a pastors' retreat in Tanzania, Pastor 'Joe'* passionately talked us through the challenges that persecuted Christians face in his country.

Joe is a senior minister in the African Inland Church of Tanzania (AICT), which is VoPC's new partner in Tanzania. AICT serves in both urban and rural locations and has a passion for taking the gospel to previously unreached areas.

Practically, this means pastors, evangelists and their families going to extremely remote locations where they are the only Christians among Muslim and animist locals. Persecution follows as people come to faith and the church starts to grow.

The persecution itself is diverse. A new believer may lose their job, their home, be rejected from their family, be denied medicine and medical care, receive daily harassment, threats of violence, or a combination of these.

As Joe said, the persecution is *'wide-ranging: spiritual, economic, social, relational, medical [and] physical.'*

Pastor 'Ezekiel'* has ministered in several rural Muslim communities for eight years. *'When Muslims start believing in Jesus, that's when persecution begins,'* he said.

He shared the story of an elderly woman who was ejected from the family home by her own son after she decided to follow Christ.

Using a financial gift from VoPC, the AICT was able to build her a new home – next door to her old one! This was done at her own request, so that she would be able to continue to witness to the son who had thrown her out.

PASTORS TARGETED

It is not just new believers who face persecution; ministers and their families do too.

Pastor 'Daniel'*, who ministers in Zanzibar, which is 90 per cent non-Christian, said that the pressure, hostility and abuse from the local community was constant. His family had been denied medicine and there had been attempts to stop worship services being held in his home. Poverty was an ever-present challenge for the family too and Daniel worried for his children and their faith.

How was he able to stand firm in such painful and challenging circumstances?

'This is a calling from God and therefore God is with me; He has not left me or forsaken me,' Daniel said. *'Secondly, as Philippians 4:13 says, it is the Lord who*



Pastor Daniel experiences constant hostility

strengthens us. Other pastors support us and are praying for us, and the AICT has been very supportive.'

Philipo Mafuja Magwano, bishop of the Pwani diocese, said a number of his pastors were experiencing opposition. However, he is grateful for VoPC's partnership with AICT. *'I can say now [with your support], we are able – through faith – to be the light of the world; we are the salt of the earth.'*

*Names changed to protect identities

A winning moment

Whilst every trip to visit our persecuted brothers and sisters is special, my recent trip to the AICT pastors' retreat in Tanzania reminded me of something it is so easy to forget when hearing stories of persecuted brothers and sisters.

To witness their love for each other and the fellowship they shared through suffering for the faith not only encouraged me; it increased my hope in Christ. Clearly, His power is at work in Tanzania.

However, at the end of the retreat, Bishop Mafuja reminded those present to trust in the Father to provide for their needs - and to avoid the temptations of gambling! It was an unexpected warning but, unprompted, a voice from the back of the hall asked the bishop if he had any good tips! The hall erupted with laughter.

It reminded me at that moment that we Christians are essentially a happy people; though we may face difficulties in life, even severe persecution, nothing can take away the joy we have in Christ.

Charlie Frank

PLEASE HELP OPPRESSED CHRISTIANS

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

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

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



WELCOME TO **VOICE** **OF PERSECUTED** **CHRISTIANS!**



The fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe changed the landscape of persecution; Richard Wurmbrand; the name and logo evolve



RELEASE INTERNATIONAL
voice 50 YEARS
of Persecuted Christians | 1968-2018

voice
OF PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS

RELEASE
INTERNATIONAL
ADOPTS NEW
NAME TO BETTER
REFLECT HEART
OF MINISTRY

You may have noticed that our logo has borne the strapline 'Voice of Persecuted Christians' for many years, quietly defining our ministry. Now, we are bringing it front and centre, because in the world today, the voice of persecuted Christians needs to be heard louder than ever.

HOW IT BEGAN

That voice was heard nearly 60 years ago in the extraordinary testimony of Romanian pastor Richard Wurmbrand, who spent 14 years in communist prisons for his faith, while remaining devoted to Christ.



When Richard was released from prison for the second time, a group of Norwegian Christians helped to secure his freedom. However, before leaving Romania, he met secretly with Rev Stuart Harris from the UK. Stuart later wrote of that meeting:

'We were appalled by the evidence of such bitter suffering – as a result of violent persecution and imprisonment. As we listened to the Wurmbrand story we felt that we could never be the same again.'

That encounter birthed a new ministry, dedicated to standing with Christians who were living and serving the gospel behind the Iron Curtain. It was named **Christian Mission to the Communist World**.

The logo reflected the calling: two hands clasped together – not in a casual handshake, but vertically, as if one person were reaching down to lift another up.

CHANGING WORLD

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the ministry focused largely on communist Eastern Europe.

However, the 1990s brought dramatic global change. Communist regimes collapsed, opening borders and easing restrictions. Yet persecution did not disappear. Instead, new threats emerged such as Islamic extremism. Christians in many parts of the world continued to face hostility, violence and discrimination.

In response to this new landscape, the ministry changed its name in 1994 to **Release International**. The first edition of a revised newsletter explained why:

'Release has a three-fold impact: (a) Release from physical bondage and suffering in Communist countries; (b) Release from the effects of past Communism in Eastern European countries, such as spiritual and physical deprivation; (c) Release from darkness into light – reflecting our evangelistic role of bringing people to Christ.'

During the next two decades, two strands of work became central. First, the UK-facing work: helping Christians and churches to understand persecution and to respond through prayer and generous giving. Secondly, the international work: building trusted relationships with Christian partners on the ground who were serving persecuted believers.

GROWING CLARITY

During this time, the logo changed only slightly, largely reflecting shifts in design. However, beneath the surface, something deeper was happening. Increasingly we recognised that the relationship between Christians in the UK and persecuted believers worldwide is not a one-way street. Yes, prayer and generous giving remain essential, but they belong within something richer: Christian fellowship in the one Body of Christ. Persecuted Christians are brothers and sisters whose faith has been refined through suffering and whose lives speak powerfully into our own.

As the ministry prepared to celebrate its 50th anniversary in 2018, this growing clarity found visible expression in a change to the logo. The word 'Voice', long present in the subtitle *Voice of Persecuted Christians*, moved to centre stage. *Release International* was still there, but in much smaller type. This was intentional. Our calling was being reinforced: to bring the first-person voice of persecuted Christians into the life of the UK Church. Their stories. Their faith. Their courage and joy in following Christ under pressure. When we truly listen to their voice, prayer is deepened, giving becomes personal and discipleship informed by their stories takes on new urgency.

When the anniversary year ended, the shape of the logo remained. Voice was now central — not just in design, but in identity.

NATURAL STEP

'*Release International: Voice of Persecuted Christians*' is quite a mouthful, however. And so, as the direction of travel has become increasingly clear, it has seemed that the natural next step now is to allow ***Voice of Persecuted Christians*** to have its full impact. Our logo remains essentially the same – but the small reference to Release International has gone.

What remains is clear and compelling: a commitment to being a voice of persecuted Christians. A voice that challenges, encourages and inspires biblical discipleship in the UK, while continuing to call Christians to *pray* and to *give* in response to persecution. As we listen

to their voice, we are encouraged to be faithful witnesses to Christ ourselves – and to call other Christians to express fellowship with those who suffer for the gospel. We remain committed to helping you to do just that.

As Paul Robinson, VoPC CEO, explains: *'What we do – and how we do it – has not changed. We remain committed to loving and serving persecuted Christians. Yet at the same time, we believe this ministry has something vital to offer the UK Church. As we truly hear the voice of persecuted Christians, their witness calls us to a deeper discipleship – to live Christ-centred lives, with a willingness to count the cost of serving Him and proclaiming the gospel, wherever we are.'*

Q&A

Q I already support you monthly via Direct Debit. Do I need to do anything?

A **No, your Direct Debit or Standing Order will remain unchanged.**

Q I want to send you a donation by cheque. Who do I make it out to?

A **Please make cheques payable to 'Voice of Persecuted Christians'.**

Q Are your contact details changing?

A **Our phone number will remain 01689 823491, and our general email address will be info@voiceopc.org**

Q Can I still use a Freepost envelope with Release International on it to send a donation?

A **Yes.**

Q Is your address changing?

A **No, it is still PO Box 54, Orpington, BR5 4RT.**

Q Do I need to update my will if I have decided to leave a legacy to Release International?

A **No, you do not need to change your will. Your legacy to help persecuted Christians will still come to us.**



Yohanes and Azieb run a laundry business to make ends meet

PREPARED FOR PERSECUTION

ON A RECENT TRIP TO ETHIOPIA, VOPC'S **NIAMH BREMNER** TALKED TO FORMER ERITREAN PRISONERS TO FIND OUT HOW THEY WERE ABLE TO SURVIVE YEARS OF MISTREATMENT

For years, Eritrean Christians imprisoned for their faith have been held in some of the harshest conditions imaginable – isolated desert camps, metal shipping containers and overcrowded cells where torture, disease and indefinite detention have been part of daily life.

Today, there are signs that the situation may be changing.

According to our partner, around 600 Christians were imprisoned in Eritrea in April last year. That number has now reportedly fallen to around 200 after a wave of releases during the past six months. Arrests have also reduced, with 43 Christians reportedly detained so far this year.

Yet church leaders remain cautious.

'We cannot say there is a change in the Government's policies,' our partner explained. 'We have seen periods of release before, and then the prisons filled up again.'

IF SECURITY CAME, WE HAD A CODEWORD AND EVERYBODY HID THEIR BIBLE!

For former detainees now rebuilding their lives in neighbouring Ethiopia, the scars of imprisonment remain. We met a number of them on a recent visit to Ethiopia.

The story of one couple began years earlier in Barentu, western Eritrea, where around 40 believers had gathered for prayer in a home.

*'Someone reported us,' Yohanes** recalled. He and his wife, *'Azieb'**, were detained alongside fellow Christians after the prayer meeting was raided.

'The security came and arrested all of us.'

Their youngest child, just 11 months old, was imprisoned with his mother because he had been brought to the gathering. Their two older children, aged five and seven, were left behind with relatives.

'For me, I was okay with the baby who was with me,' Azieb said. 'But it was very hard thinking about the two children I left at home.'

After six months, Azieb was released because of the baby, but Yohanes was transferred between prisons before eventually arriving at a remote desert

prison camp where many Christians have been held.

'It is a very hot place, isolated, with no medical care,' Yohanes said.

During his imprisonment, untreated ear problems caused him to lose much of his hearing.

PRESSURE TO SIGN

Christians imprisoned in Eritrea have often been pressured to sign documents renouncing their faith. They have spent years detained without trial.

One former female prisoner we spoke with, 'Kidān'*¹, who spent more than seven years in the camp, said prisoners were repeatedly asked whether they had *'changed their mind'* about their faith.

'Every two years they were asking us but we kept saying no,' she said.

Eventually she was released during the Covid-19 pandemic after officials told prisoners that their families were continually petitioning for their freedom.

Despite the harsh conditions, many former prisoners described remarkable resilience and solidarity among believers in the camps.

'At night we covered ourselves with bedsheets and used small torches to read our Bibles,' Yohanes said.

The Bibles had been smuggled into the prison.

'If security came, we had a codeword and everybody hid their Bible!'

Throughout the interviews, former prisoners repeatedly returned to one theme: preparation.

'We were prepared for persecution,' Yohanes explained. *'We had no choice because we were already living in that situation [before arrest].'*

In Eritrea, where only a handful of state-approved religious groups are recognised, evangelical Christians continue to face arrest, surveillance and harassment.

'Even if you stop attending prayer meetings, they can still come to your house,' Azieḅ said. *'So the best thing is to prepare yourself and keep trusting God.'*

When asked what Christians in the West can learn from persecuted



Kidān's taxi provides for the family

believers, her answer focused not on politics but on perseverance.

'Not only prison is persecution,' she said. *'People may reject you because of your faith wherever you are. You need to stay close to God and feed yourself with the Word of God every day.'*

Former prisoners also spoke about the surprising impact their faith had on prison guards and officials.

Kidān described how Christian prisoners cooked meals for guards despite years of ill-treatment. *'They asked us, "How can you treat us with kindness after everything we have done to you?"'* she said.

Yohanes said officers often noticed the conduct of Christian detainees.

'They told me, "You are a hard worker. Your only problem is your faith,"' he recalled.

Over time, many in the prison became curious about Christianity.

'Some of them decided to follow Christ,' he said. *'But because of fear they kept it secret.'*

Kidān says that even amid isolation and uncertainty, faith gave them hope.

'In Scripture it says, "Be faithful unto death"... So we were ready for anything.'

DOWN TO BUSINESS

For many, release from prison has not brought immediate stability.

Kidān returned home after seven years to find her husband deported to Ethiopia and her young son living with relatives.

'When I saw my son again, everything had changed,' she said. *'I left him when he was four years old. He was 12 when I met him again.'*

Eventually the family reunited in Ethiopia.

Today, many Eritrean Christian refugees in Ethiopia survive through small businesses supported by Voice of Persecuted Christians. Azieḅ and Yohanes now run a laundry business after receiving help to purchase an industrial washing machine capable of cleaning blankets and heavy items.

'Slowly we became popular in this area,' she said. *'Now we have many customers, so we are happy.'*

Kidān and her husband, 'Dawit'*², survive thanks to the provision of a three-wheeled bajaj (tuk-tuk) taxi.

'It pays our rent, our food, our son's education – everything,' Dawit said.

However, concerns remain for the many Christians still imprisoned inside Eritrea. Some senior pastors have now spent more than 20 years in detention. Others remain missing or isolated from their families.

One Christian prisoner named Samuel has reportedly spent eight years in detention, much of it being locked inside a shipping container. During this time, his elderly father, himself jailed for his faith, has died without seeing his son. Another believer, Azmera, was arrested at the age of 76 and spent a decade behind bars before dying shortly after his release.

Despite this, Eritrean Christians continue to speak not primarily about fear, but faith.

Yohanes reflected: *'When you are filled with God's Spirit and with His Word, you can face anything.'*

¹Names changed to protect identities.

Kidān featured in our latest appeal.



FINDING FOOD FOR THE SOUL AMONG THE PERSECUTED

REPRESSION OF THE CHURCH IN CENTRAL ASIA HAS NEVER STOPPED BUT NEITHER HAS THE WITNESS OF BELIEVERS. A SCOTTISH PASTOR, **MARK**, WHO RECENTLY TRAVELLED TO THE REGION WITH A VOPC WORKER, REFLECTS ON THE POWER OF THE FAITH HE ENCOUNTERED

‘We eat once a day – all day!’ That was one of the first things we heard from a church leader who would become our guide and translator for the trip. He was referring to his country’s great love of food and generous hospitality, but he could easily have been speaking of the spiritual fulfilment that we were to observe in the lives of so many believers.

We heard this phrase again as we sat in a service station, the halfway

point on a full day’s travel through the mountains. This, of course, involved eating more food, enjoying fellowship and hearing more testimonies of what God was doing in this country.

At this point my journey to Central Asia was only a few days old, but, in reality, it began during the Covid lockdown in June 2020. Release International, now Voice of Persecuted Christians, had published a series of videos from different regions of the world, with testimonies of persecuted believers and a brief outline of their various

Central Asia has had a history of severe persecution
Stock image: Collab Media



needs and prayer requests. My church had posted these videos on our group chat, we had prayed fervently for all that was shared, and God began to stir something in my own heart for Central Asia. One testimony of answered prayer from this region had a particular impact on me.

My love for this part of the world grew in the six years that followed to the point that I was now able to make a visit.

I was to witness firsthand the needs, challenges and inspiration of both individual believers and churches. I wanted to be an encouragement to them during my visit, but I did not fully appreciate the extent to which I would

“
THEIR
CURRENCY IS
ALWAYS FEAR’

be edified by their faith and example.

One pastor we met, who is church planting in an area that had no gospel presence until he arrived, has experienced regular interrogation from local police and government officials. He travelled a long distance to meet us, and we counted it a privilege not only to hear his story but also to pray for his situation.

He shared of an occasion when, after being arrested by officials and with his backpack taken from him, he had to explain why he had both a Bible and what you might describe as the Central Asian equivalent of a *Mission Praise* songbook. They opened the letter, pointed at a page which had several songs printed on it, and shouted at him: *‘What is this? Why do you have this?’* He simply replied: *‘This is my worship book; I sing songs of praise to Jesus!’*

The book remained open on the table as the questions kept coming, and then a thought came to his mind: *‘I don’t think anyone has ever sung a worship song in this room before!’* The officials were utterly bewildered when their questions were met with his joyful singing! He was released shortly afterwards without charge.

This pastor’s experience reminded me of verse 51 in Psalm 119: *‘The arrogant constantly ridicule me, but I do not turn away from your instruction.’*

FIRM CONVICTION

This area has had a history of severe persecution, including imprisonment and martyrdom, but, from the people we met and stories we heard, the primary forms currently experienced seem to be discrimination, isolation and intimidation. Unsurprisingly, the situation was most difficult for those seeking to make the greatest impact for God’s kingdom.

We met the widow of a pastor, now aged in her seventies, who still has frequent visits from the local police even though her husband died several years ago. He was killed by extremists because of his ministry. Inevitably, his martyrdom sent shockwaves through the small Christian community but, despite their fear, they have continued to shine the light of Christ.

Today, his wife remains a great



Mark’s journey to Central Asia began six years ago after watching a video about persecution in the region

encouragement to many believers across the country. As she sat with us in her small flat, burdened with a variety of health issues, she explained that, although the Government probably does not see her as a threat, officials continue to make her life uncomfortable. They regularly visit her as a reminder that they are watching her and that she will face severe consequences if she steps out of line. Their currency is always fear.

As we sat with this woman and heard of God’s faithfulness in her life through her many trials, we observed her Bible, proudly on display for any visitors who might wonder why she persists. This was not an act of defiance towards the authorities but an act of worship, a declaration that Christ will always be the final authority over her life.

Over the course of our trip, we met many believers of different generations and backgrounds, all of whom, like this widow, had suffered for their faith. Their experiences varied, but what united them all was a firm conviction that following Jesus was worth it.

My abiding memory is standing in a church and hearing the words of one of the older men to a 12-year-old boy. This man had suffered greatly for following Jesus. After a time of prayer, he put his hands on the boy’s shoulders, looked him in the eyes, and said: *‘There’s no greater privilege than to be a servant of the Word.’*



Stock photo : Zubair-works/unsplash

PEAK PERFORMERS



ON JUNE 14, a few days after *Voice* went to print, Paul Robinson, VoPC chief executive, and a band of brave supporters were due to climb England's highest peak, Scafell Pike, in the night to raise awareness of the suffering of persecuted Christians. They had been training hard and preparing not only to make it to the summit in darkness but also to carry with them a 10ft wooden cross weighing 35lbs. Taking a break from training just

before the climb, Paul said: *'This is going to be an amazing event. Not only is it an opportunity to highlight the suffering of our brothers and sisters but we'll also be raising much-needed funds to help them. I want to thank everyone who will be joining me as well as all those who have pledged to make a gift.'*

At the time of writing, more than £16,000 had been pledged in support of the Light Walk Challenge team. You can still make a gift at justgiving.com/campaign/lightwalkchallenge.



PROFOUND EVENING

A 'PROFOUNDLY HUMBLING, inspiring and encouraging evening' was just one of the comments following VoPC's evening event at the inaugural Rising Lights conference in Torquay at Easter.

A five-minute film, featuring several of the ministry's partners from around the world, was followed by a short Bible talk by VoPC's Kenneth Harrod and interviews with associates from Nigeria and Iran.

The conference, seen as a replacement to the popular Word Alive, was organised by the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches.



Nic successfully completed the 100km walk

Coast buster!

Supporter Nic from southwest London raised more than £5,500 for the work of VoPC by taking part in the Jurassic Coast Ultra Challenge in May. He completed the 100km walk in around 24 hours!

'I wanted to put myself well out of my comfort zone, to stand alongside those who daily are out of theirs through no fault of their own,' he said.

Focus on light at summer events

WE ARE looking forward to sharing the voice of persecuted Christians at several festivals and conferences this summer. In line with our wider theme of 'light in the darkest places' this year, our exhibition stand focuses on Christians who are shining the light of Jesus in the darkest places.

VoPC will be leading a lunchtime seminar in week 3 of the Keswick Convention, sharing a full programme of mini-seminars and family activities from our marquee at ReFuel and

serving delicious Hazaq coffee from a dedicated hut at New Wine. Look out for more details on our website and social media and, if you are attending any of the events listed below, do come and say hello at our stand. We would love to see you.

Keswick Portstewart July 4-10

Magnitude July 18-22

New Wine July 28-August 2

Keswick Convention Week 3

August 1-7

New Horizon August 1-7

ReFuel August 5-9

Bangor Worldwide August 17-19 & 22

Big Church Festival August 28-30



Congratulations and huge thanks to VoPC supporter Helen who completed the TTP Cambridge Half Marathon in March, raising £500 in sponsorship to help persecuted Christians.



FAREWELL AND THANKS

VOICE OF PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS is saying goodbye to Colin King (pictured), its former UK Director, after nearly 25 years of service.

Colin, who had taken on a separate role in the ministry for the past nine years after stepping down as head of UK operations, leaves VoPC this summer.

With a career in banking behind him, he started at what was Release International as UK Development Manager in 2002, assuming the title of UK Director shortly afterwards.

Paul Robinson, the ministry's CEO, said: 'We are so grateful to God for the huge contribution Colin has made to the work over many years, not just helping persecuted believers but also supporting staff and volunteers. He will be greatly missed by all of us.'

The Word, page 22



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:

Amy on 07933 313169

London & South:

Jonny on 07861 656269

Central England & Wales:

Allister on 07916 396178

Scotland & North of England:

James on 07434 894016



POWER OF THE WRITTEN WORD

CARDS AND LETTERS FROM VOPC SUPPORTERS BRING IMMENSE SPIRITUAL COMFORT TO THE DISTRESSED AND TRAUMATISED

During visits to projects supported by VoPC, team members frequently have the opportunity to hand out cards written by supporters in the UK to those who have suffered persecution for the faith.

These believers often feed back how meaningful it is to them to be remembered by brothers and sisters in this country.

At a church service in the village of Zike in Nigeria's Plateau state, just two months after a terrorist attack had claimed the lives of more than 50 Christians, a VoPC team distributed cards containing Scripture verses, which were written by supporters in the UK. Our partner, Rev Mark Mukan, described them to the congregation as 'very special gifts that were more precious than aid'.

A team member recalls: 'As we gave out the cards there was singing and rejoicing and praising of the Lord that brought us all to tears.'

Cards written to prisoners can also have a dramatic impact – not just on them but also on their guards.

One former prisoner in Iran said: 'We heard from our guards that 40 to 50 letters were coming each day ... this was something that gave us hope.' Another added: 'The guards who opened our letters read the Bible verses and were impacted ... they told us and mentioned some of the verses from the gospel.'

Paul Robinson, the CEO of VoPC, said: 'Writing a card or letter of encouragement to be given to a Christian who has suffered persecution or is still in prison for their faith may seem like a simple gesture but it can

Receiving letters from Christians in the UK is a huge encouragement to believers in Nigeria who have suffered persecution



have profound significance for the person who receives it; to know that they are not forgotten and are being prayed for by a Christian brother or sister in the UK. Even just hearing that someone has written to them can help to keep their faith strong.'

If you would like to write a card or letter that we can give to a believer, please send them to: Voice of Persecuted Christians, PO Box 54, Orpington, BR5 4RT.

To find out how to write specifically to prisoners of faith in our *Reach Out!* guide, which includes what can and what should not be included, visit the VoPC website, voiceopc.org.

Special day of prayer

CHRISTIANS who are shining 'light in the darkest places' will be VoPC's focus for this year's International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church (IDOP).

This year IDOP falls on Sunday, November 1, so please save the date and ask your church to add it to its diary.

As part of our IDOP resources, we will be providing a five-minute, downloadable video that congregations can use during their services. This will be available nearer the time (via our Vimeo platform).

The film will focus on the work of our ministry partner in Ethiopia and will tell some of the inspiring stories of new believers who face strong opposition from their community.

Other downloadable materials will be available on our website to help supporters to mark this special day of prayer.

If your church is unable to include IDOP in its programme for November 1, please feel free to choose another Sunday in the month.

- In November we will be welcoming Moti, VoPC's partner from Ethiopia, to the UK for a speaker tour. Moti, whose journey to ministry included an Ezekiel-like vision of dead bodies being raised to life after hearing the gospel proclaimed to them, will be talking about his inspiring work supporting persecuted believers. Watch out for details of dates and venues on our website, voiceopc.org, in the coming weeks.



VoPC supporter Mike was presented with a cheque by Councillor Frank Andrews, the outgoing Mayor of Fylde in Lancashire, following a number of mayoral fundraising events, including a charity ball, during the year. VoPC received just under £3,500 – one of three charities to benefit. Also pictured are the outgoing Mayoress, Ann Andrews (left), and Deputy Mayor, Councillor Cheryl Little.

INTRODUCING AMY

A VOLUNTEER with VoPC for the past 10 years has been appointed as the new Engagement Manager (EM) for Northern Ireland and Ireland.

Amy takes over from Stephen McIlroy, himself a former volunteer who held the post for several years.

'It is an absolute honour and privilege to be the new EM for Northern Ireland and Ireland,' she said.

'Over the past 10 years, I have been involved in various events, exhibitions and speaking engagements across the United Kingdom, raising the voice of our persecuted brothers and sisters, and it is now my delight to serve in a full-time capacity. It is literally a dream come true.'

She added: *'My deepest desire is that the challenge presented by our persecuted brothers and sisters would encourage us here in Northern Ireland and Ireland to live wholeheartedly for Jesus, and to serve His kingdom.'*

If you would like Amy to speak in your church, help you to organise a local fundraising event or would like her support in raising the voice of persecuted Christians in your area then please contact her on 07933 313169 or email amyb@voiceopc.org.

THE FIRE THAT REFINES THE BODY OF CHRIST

PERSECUTION MAY
HAVE CHANGED OVER
THE YEARS BUT IT WILL
NOT END UNTIL JESUS
RETURNS, WRITES

COLIN KING

Sudanese soldiers were determined to flush out the Christians from a field where they were hiding, so they set fire to it. Kamerino, just a boy, was terribly burned, but he survived.

It was the year 2000 and I was shown a shocking picture of Kamerino's little body and asked to write a response to this, demonstrating how I would encourage UK Christians to respond to persecution. So began my journey of 26 years with Release International (now Voice of Persecuted Christians). I sometimes think about Kamerino – and many others I have met since – wondering where they are and what their life is like today. The civil war in Sudan that killed so many in the name of Islamist *jihad* and displaced millions eventually came to an end and Sudan became two nations.

In May 2000 fighters from the militant group Laskar Jihad arrived in the Moluccan Islands of Indonesia, attacking Christians and their more moderate Muslim neighbours. The violence was horrifying, with villages destroyed and atrocities committed even against children and pregnant women.

Persecution continues in Sudan and Indonesia today but it is different in nature.

Places and events change, but persecution persists in varying forms, and it will continue until Christ's return.

We celebrate when persecution reduces or ceases in a particular place, but at Voice of Persecuted Christians we know that it is through the fire of persecution that the Body of Christ is refined. Our calling is to serve the suffering and give them a voice, not to attempt to end persecution.

The last of the beatitudes, '*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*' (Matt 5:10), is probably the least appreciated of all in the western church. However, it is the only one where Jesus elaborates on the core statement, as He goes on to say: '*Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you*' (Matt 5:11-12).

Persecution of God's children began in antiquity and consequential blessing is promised for Christians. Jesus emphasises this. The possibility of it ending during earth's existence isn't countenanced. And the apostle Paul's words to Timothy, '*Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted*' (2 Tim 3:12), is not disproved by the absence of violent conflict in our own nation, for even here those who speak Christian truth can be reviled.

But let's remember one thing. Jesus said, '*I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*' (Matt 16:18). The persecuted who glimpse hell today also testify to the glory of God's overcoming church now and forever.

“
**OUR CALLING IS
TO SERVE THE
SUFFERING AND GIVE
THEM A VOICE**”



INSPIRING FAITH

'You can mock me and beat me. I look at you with love. That is the miracle.'

Pastor Richard Wurmbrand was imprisoned for 14 years in communist Romania in the 1950s and 1960s. In 1968 he inspired the founding of Voice of Persecuted Christians, 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, Voice of Persecuted Christians 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 less Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations in that tax year it is 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 sufficient tax on your income and/or capital gains. If you receive the additional tax relief due to you, you must include all your Gift Aid donations on your Self Assessment tax return or ask the Revenue and Customs to adjust your tax code.

Name

Date

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 confirmation of the amount and date will be given to you at the time of the request. • If an error is made in the payment of your Direct Debit, by Voice of Persecuted Christians or your Bank or Building Society, 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 where Voice of Persecuted Christians 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 Voice of Persecuted Christians.

Please return to Voice of Persecuted Christians in the Freepost envelope provided (Release International ones are still valid). Or to **FREEPOST VOICE OF PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS**

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

Yes, I want to partner with Voice of Persecuted Christians

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 PREVIOUS PAGE. THIS FORM CANNOT BE POSTED WITHOUT THEM.

Please Pay Voice of Persecuted Christians 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.

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 Voice of Persecuted Christians 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 Voice of Persecuted Christians in your Will enables that support to continue.

To request a free legacy brochure please call us on 01689 823491, email info@voiceopc.org or use the enclosed response card.

voice
OF PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS

JULY – SEPTEMBER 2026

PRAYER SHIELD



JULY 2026

*Heavenly Father,
Thank you for the freedom
I have to worship You without
fear of oppression. Help
me to pray faithfully for
those Christians who face
severe consequences for
following You.*

*May they know Your wisdom
for every challenging
situation they face (James
1:5). Empower them to be
able to stand firm in their
faith and to be courageous
and strong (1Cor 16:13).*

*In Jesus's precious name I
pray.*

Amen

ERITREA

WEDNESDAY 1: Thank God that 260 Christians were released from prison earlier this year. However, many are being followed by the authorities, are interrogated on a monthly basis and are not free to meet with other believers. Pray that they will be able to manage life outside prison and find support to help them to recover from past trauma, as well as financial provision (former prisoners are not allowed to work).

THURSDAY 2: Praise God for former prisoner of faith Twen (pictured) and for the ministry God has given her since her release. Pray for strength and guidance as she decides which of the many opportunities to engage with now that she no longer lives in Eritrea.

FRIDAY 3: Please pray for physical and emotional healing for Mr K who has been in prison for ten years. Although spiritually strong he suffers from severe arthritis as well as carrying the pain of being disowned by his family.

SATURDAY 4: Please pray for grace and strength for our partners who serve persecuted believers. Not only do they face danger themselves but they have many demands on them, including being contacted day and night.

SUNDAY 5: Pray for the continued growth of the evangelical church both inside Eritrea and among the

VOICE
OF PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS



More than 700 Ukrainian churches have been destroyed by Russian forces since the invasion in 2022

diaspora. Pray particularly for remote rural areas in Eritrea where there is little gospel witness.

MONDAY 6: Please pray that 'B' – an ex-prisoner who is now trapped in an East African country – will find a safe place to live.

TUESDAY 7: Praise God for an increase in new believers, particularly among students, teachers and lecturers in Eritrea. Pray that they will be both wise and bold as they share the truth of the gospel with others.

UKRAINE

WEDNESDAY 8: Give thanks that more than 50 Ukrainian Christian leaders and ministry workers were able to attend a trauma-healing retreat run by our partners in Poland. Pray that they will have been refreshed, recharged and re-inspired to continue their

challenging ministry to and among those worst affected by the war with Russia.

THURSDAY 9: Pray for God's comfort for all Ukrainian and Russian Christians who are mourning the loss of loved ones due to the conflict. May they know God's peace in their hearts.

FRIDAY 10: Pray for protection for all involved in chaplaincy to and with the Ukrainian armed forces and their families. Pray that God will help them to promote and maintain Christian integrity and compassion despite all the horrors of war.

SATURDAY 11: Pray for believers supported directly by Voice of Persecuted Christians (whose names are withheld for security reasons) who, at great personal risk, minister on the frontline between Ukraine and Russia.

SUNDAY 12: Pray for the

congregations of the more than 700 Ukrainian churches destroyed by Russian forces. Despite this deliberate targeting of their faith and culture, pray that Ukrainian Christians will find ways and places to meet and worship God together.

MONDAY 13: Pray for protection for Christians being held either as prisoners of war or in Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine as a result of standing up for freedom.

TUESDAY 14: Thank God for the brave Christians in Russia who have denounced the conflict with Ukraine. Pray for their strength and protection.

INDIA

WEDNESDAY 15: Pray for wisdom and protection for our partner's teams and especially their senior leaders who are being monitored by the Indian authorities.

PRAYERSHIELD

THURSDAY 16: Pray for three children in the state of Odisha who are now in hiding after their parents were killed by neighbours as a result of their conversion to Christianity. The perpetrators believed that the couple's actions had brought curses upon their village.

FRIDAY 17: Pray for our partner's church workers in Rajasthan under increasing pressure from fundamentalist groups, who disrupt services and threaten believers with seeming impunity.

SATURDAY 18: Pray for our partner's many church workers who have been arrested on charges relating to anti-conversion laws. Many Hindu groups are pushing for harsh sentences despite little evidence of any crime being committed.

SUNDAY 19: A number of pastors connected to our partner have been physically beaten, not only by fundamentalist Hindu groups, but also by the police and prison staff. Pray that officials would act with integrity and treat all citizens fairly.

MONDAY 20: The state of Gujarat is poised to enact stricter anti-conversion laws with tougher penalties. Pray that the trend of ever more Indian states passing these laws would end and that the Supreme Court would take action to enforce the religious freedom that is enshrined in India's constitution.

TUESDAY 21: Thank God that the gospel continues to attract many people in India despite

the threat of persecution for those who embrace it. Pray for boldness and endurance for those who deliver the message.

IRAN

WEDNESDAY 22: Thank God that ministries collected supplies of food and other essential items before the conflict with the US. They have now been able to distribute these supplies to sustain local Christians.

THURSDAY 23: Pray for protection for Christian prisoners of faith. Conditions behind bars have worsened as a result of the war: food and other essentials are scarcer, contact with families outside is harder and Christian inmates may be subjected to harsher brutality by guards who see the conflict as a religious battle.

FRIDAY 24: Pray for God's guidance and leading for ministries as they decide how, where and when to best use their resources and when to risk travelling in and out of the country.

SATURDAY 25: Please pray for safety for our partner, 'A', who has returned to Iran after several years away.

SUNDAY 26: Pray for comfort for Iranian Christians who are mourning lost loved ones, whether from the brutal crackdowns of the regime or from the US and Israeli bombing.

MONDAY 27: Pray for the networks of house churches across Iran and the brave Christians who lead them,

despite all the pressures they face. Pray that they will stand firm in their faith and see lasting fruit.

TUESDAY 28: Pray for a change in attitude towards Christians in the Islamic regime and that followers of Christ would play a significant role in the rebuilding of the nation.

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

WEDNESDAY 29: The long-running conflict in eastern DRC is often forgotten but continues to create orphans and widows and cause untold suffering. Although complex and multifaceted it has a religious component to it and Christians who speak up for justice and against armed groups have been targeted, sometimes brutally. Pray for peace in this nation.

THURSDAY 30: With no functioning state apparatus in many communities, the church is all that local citizens have. Pray for Congolese pastors who are ministering amid great suffering and need, often at significant personal risk from Islamist militia.

FRIDAY 31: Pray for 'D', who is in hiding after speaking up against corruption and violence in eastern DRC. Pray for courage, wisdom and protection for all who speak God's truth there, and healing for all who have been traumatised by years of conflict.

AUGUST 2026

ALGERIA

SATURDAY 1: Pray for the re-opening of the more than 45 Protestant churches that have been closed by the Algerian Government, some since 2019. Even though a number have had court orders instructing their re-opening, local authorities have not complied.

SUNDAY 2: Pray for the 64 Algerian church leaders who have been prosecuted, usually for holding 'unauthorised worship'. Most now have suspended sentences awaiting appeal with the Supreme Court. Pray that they will be exonerated.

MONDAY 3: Pray for the lawyers working on pastors' cases and for the families of each of these church leaders, for whom this is a heavy burden.

TUESDAY 4: Pray for wisdom, guidance and protection for our partners in Algeria. Pray that God will help them to stand firm in their faith and inspire and encourage believers.

WEDNESDAY 5: Making a commitment to Christ in Algeria is not simple or easy. Pray for courage and wisdom for those contemplating this step of faith and for the believers who can support and encourage them.

THURSDAY 6: Pray for God's comfort for Algerian Christians living outside the country. Many face discrimination and are

discouraged by life where they are and the state of their homeland as well as separation from family.

FRIDAY 7: Pray that the Government and its Muslim leaders will stop seeing Christianity as a threat and instead welcome the benefits it can bring and seek ways to reduce divisions and promote religious harmony.

ETHIOPIA

SATURDAY 8: Pray that Bible-believing churches will continue to stay faithful to the gospel and that there would be an increase in church workers in the un-reached parts of the country.

SUNDAY 9: Praise God for the Christians in government positions and for freedom of religion in Ethiopia. Pray that this may continue and that Christian leaders would know how to respond to the growing pressure to conform to the Islamic agenda.

MONDAY 10: Pray for Sofia, who became a believer through a vision of Christ. From that first encounter with Jesus, and despite severe persecution from her family and community, Sofia has led many Muslims to faith.

TUESDAY 11: Praise God for the number of Muslim children who are coming to faith because of their parents' willingness to suffer for the gospel after converting.

WEDNESDAY 12: Praise God for the proliferation of underground churches and house groups among

Muslim people groups. These are places where new believers can be nurtured and disciplined without leaving their communities. Pray for wisdom for the leaders.

THURSDAY 13: Please pray for our partner's mission training school. Many of the students, who are former Muslims, have experienced persecution and rejection.

FRIDAY 14: Pray for 'Stafano', who was born into a Muslim home but became a believer in his late twenties. Stafano was attacked by a number of Muslims while preaching on the street but a few days later the leader of the group sought his forgiveness and came to faith in Christ.

BURKINA FASO

SATURDAY 15: Pray for the 1,500 displaced Christian children who are being supported through school by Voice of Persecuted Christians and our associate ministries. May God bless their academic studies but also help them to be accepted and make new friends.

SUNDAY 16: Pray for a project run by our partner to construct wells to improve water supply in large camps for the internally displaced. Importing parts into land-locked Burkina Faso is slow and complicated. Pray that these obstacles can be overcome.

MONDAY 17: Pray for widows such as 'Miriam' whose husband was killed by a landmine planted by one of



Rachelle rears pigs to provide for her family

the Islamist terror groups that are causing havoc across Burkina Faso. To be displaced and then to have to feed and raise children alone is a huge challenge for her.

TUESDAY 18: Thank God that our partner has been able to help Christian widows such as 'Rachelle' (pictured), who now rears pigs to provide for her and her five children. Pray for God's blessing on other widows who are receiving support through our partner project.

WEDNESDAY 19: Pray for displaced pastors, such as 'David', who have had to relocate their families and their ministries and start afresh. Thankfully they are now being supported with animals to rear and other livelihood initiatives. May God guide them in their new areas of ministry.

THURSDAY 20: Pray for protection for Pastor 'S' and his team as they travel around Burkina Faso meeting persecuted and displaced Christians and supporting them through livelihood

projects. Some roads are mined and others blocked by checkpoints.

FRIDAY 21: Pray for peace in Burkina Faso and for rights and justice for all its people. The military Government recently banned all political parties, and freedom of expression in areas such as faith and politics is being increasingly restricted.

EGYPT

SATURDAY 22: Regional conflict has led to significant increases in the price of basic commodities. This can have a significant impact on Christians living in rural areas of Upper Egypt who are already in a weak socio-economic position and can be disproportionately impacted. Pray that they will be able to endure this increase in hardship.

SUNDAY 23: Pray for our partners in rural areas of Upper Egypt as they support Christian families who are marginalised and struggle to earn enough to sustain themselves.

MONDAY 24: In rural parts of Upper Egypt women can often be the main source of income and support for their families, either because they are widows or their husbands work abroad. Pray for the work our partners do in helping these women practically and pastorally.

TUESDAY 25: Our partners, who have started meetings in remote parts of Egypt where there are no churches, are beginning to see

significant fruit. Pray that God will nurture the faith of those who attend.

WEDNESDAY 26: Pray that the gatherings our partners have started (see previous prayer) would be safe, welcoming and life-transforming spaces.

THURSDAY 27: Pray for Christian families in Upper Egypt living in homes without proper roofs. Life can be particularly challenging during rainy seasons. Thank God that our partners have been able to provide them with effective wooden or concrete roofs.

FRIDAY 28: Pray for protection for our partner ministry teams during home visits, which can often be to remote areas.

MAURITANIA

SATURDAY 29: Pray for provision and comfort for a pastor in southern Mauritania whose house has been attacked repeatedly.

SUNDAY 30: Pray for Christians who have become subject to a widespread hate campaign which has involved social boycotts and being forbidden from using community wells. Pray that God would meet their basic needs and for reconciliation with their communities.

MONDAY 31: Pray for church leaders facing severe persecution. Some have been attacked by men with swords and then charged over the very violence perpetrated against them.

SEPTEMBER 2026

IRAQ

TUESDAY 1: Ask for God's blessing on the ministry of two Iranian Christian families who are living with our partners in Erbil, the capital of the Kurdistan region of Iraq. Pray for guidance amid all the turmoil affecting both countries.

WEDNESDAY 2: Pray that the many Syrian Christian widows supported by our partner in Erbil would find hope and security in Christ despite all the challenges they have been through.

THURSDAY 3: Please pray for protection for our partners in Erbil: for their team and their families during this time of conflict in the Middle East.

FRIDAY 4: Pray for 'Ibrahim' and others like him who have suffered exclusion and even death threats for their faith in Christ. Although estranged from their families, may they find close relationships within their church fellowships.

SATURDAY 5: Pray for Rev Canon Faiz Jirjees and his assistant, Sinan, and their

ministry at St George's Church and clinic in Baghdad. May God protect them as they preach peace, reconciliation and hope in a divided and often violent society.

SUNDAY 6: Pray for the children who attend St George's Church school and the patients – from every religious background – who attend its clinic.

MONDAY 7: Pray that Christians across Iraq, especially those with influence, will not be tempted or pressured to leave but would stay and be living examples to all of Christ's love and care.

INDONESIA

TUESDAY 8: Pray for our partner, 'Sharif', who is instrumental in leading and training others for ministry. Ask God to protect him and his wife as they travel, both throughout the islands and internationally. May his advocacy work bear significant fruit. (See *Voice* podcasts, Feb and Mar 2026).

WEDNESDAY 9: Pray that the new believers who have been added to underground churches during the past few months would know a close walk with Jesus and how to witness to others.

THURSDAY 10: Please pray for 'Doto', who has been accused of blasphemy and hate speech. There is concern that he might be poisoned, tortured or killed. Pray that his attorneys would act with



wisdom and that accusations against him would be dropped.

FRIDAY 11: Please pray for Doto (see previous prayer) and the many other believers who have been accused of blasphemy and have been taken to the province of Aceh where *Sharia* (Islamic law) is in operation.

SATURDAY 12: Please pray for 'Ber' (see *Voice* magazine, April-June) as he leads many underground churches on Indonesian islands. He is regularly monitored and reported on. Pray for wisdom and protection as he oversees multiple gatherings.

"If one verse changed my life and showed me the truth, how much more so if I translate this Bible and take it to the community"

Alif



Ber, who leads a number of churches, is regularly monitored

of their families as they help persecuted believers to process trauma, build micro-businesses and grow in faith.

WEDNESDAY 16: Pray for 'Ruth' and the women whom she helps to make shirts and bags. As well as providing the women with an income, this activity helps them to process trauma.

THURSDAY 17: Pray for Kenyan Somalis who have started micro-businesses as basic opticians. These enterprises provide them with an income, serve the community and give them opportunities to share their faith.

FRIDAY 18: Pray for 'Alif', who evangelises in dangerous areas of Kenya. Those she leads to faith have to meet in secret and only sporadically. Pray for protection and fellowship for these new believers.

SATURDAY 19: Pray for Alif as she visits illiterate secret believers to read the Bible to them, teaches literacy and translates Scripture into local languages.

SUNDAY 20: Kenyan Somali Christians meet in whole family fellowship groups through our partners. Pray that these gatherings would serve to encourage them in their faith, help them to process trauma and form strong communities.

MONDAY 21: Pray for Christians 'Farah' and 'Najma', who have been persecuted themselves but help other believers struggling with

mental health and financial issues.

TANZANIA

TUESDAY 22: Pray that the African Inland Church of Tanzania (AICT), our new partner, would know God's guidance as it serves persecuted believers.

WEDNESDAY 23: Praise God for the dedication of AICT's Bishop Mafuja of the Pwani diocese. Pray that he would know God's wisdom, love and perseverance as he serves persecuted believers.

THURSDAY 24: Pray for the pastor of a church based in Zanzibar whose members have to attend secretly. Pray for safety and that the pastor's children would grow in faith even in the face of hostility.

FRIDAY 25: Pray for an elderly believer whose son threw her out of her home after she came to faith in Christ. She had a new home built close to her old one so that she could continue to share the gospel with her son.

SATURDAY 26: Hundreds of students from Muslim backgrounds are turning to Christ when they go to university. Revealing their new-found faith to their families can result in rejection so pray that they have wisdom in sharing their beliefs.

SUNDAY 27: Pray for AICT pastors and their families who are sharing the gospel

SUNDAY 13: Pray for the three-month mission school run by our partners which trains and equips Muslim-background believers for outreach. It is a time of healing, deliverance and fellowship with brothers and sisters in Christ.

MONDAY 14: Praise God for the many large churches in Indonesia and pray that they will continue to be Christ-like examples to their local communities.

KENYA

TUESDAY 15: Give thanks for our partners who are working with Kenyan Somalis. Pray for their safety and the wellbeing



Pray that Bishop Mafuja of the African Inland Church of Tanzania will know God's wisdom and guidance

in remote areas. As the church grows, they face pressure and persecution from local Muslims and animist believers.

MONDAY 28: Pray that Tanzanian Christians in rural areas who are denied medical care as a form of persecution would receive the help they need.

SOUTH SUDAN

TUESDAY 29: Pray for the Hai Baraka Pentecostal Church whose pastor, Lino Pasquale, was abducted and killed earlier this year. The church, which is near Juba, the capital, has been left 'heart-broken and in deep mourning' by his death.

WEDNESDAY 30: A Sudanese refugee, who came to faith in Christ while living in a camp near Juba, is facing death threats for converting. Pray for God's protection of 'A', whose family has disowned him and sanctioned his killing.

Lord Jesus

We pray for all those who are persecuting Christians. Come, Holy Spirit, to convince them of the truth of Jesus's divinity and convict them of their sin, so that, as with the Apostle Paul, it will become so hard for them to 'kick against the goads' that they yield to Christ as Lord and join His followers! (Acts 9:5 and 26:14)

Amen

Sources: Morning Star News; Voice of Persecuted Christians associate ministries, partners and contacts.

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 God to change lives.

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