

july august 2016

voice of persecuted christians

release



**Rejected by her family,
loved by God:**

a Laotian believer's journey
from suffering to joy

NEW
DVD



Welcome

by Paul Robinson, CEO

**Taking on
a challenge
of love,
sacrifice
and courage**

As you read this I, and a group of Release supporters, will be on the verge of undertaking a 400-foot abseil down the tallest permanent abseiling tower in the world! That's almost the height of the London Eye, and if it were in the capital I would be able to look down on Big Ben at a mere 316 feet!

If you are in the Northampton area on July 2 you may want to drop along to the National Abseil Centre to cheer us on.

A story of Godly courage

In my first week as CEO of Release, I met Obiora Ike, a pastor from Nigeria who told me how one evening some Islamist extremists came to his home seeking to kill him. They put a gun to his head to shoot him, but before they could, he asked them if he could kneel and pray.

Knowing this might be his last day on earth he prayed. Then suddenly something happened – his would-be assassins decided to leave saying they could not kill a man of God.

What Pastor Obiora did was very courageous. But, the thing that impressed me the most is the fact that he still lives in the same house and continues to witness faithfully for Christ, knowing that more assassins could be sent again at any time.

Supporting those who are suffering for their faith

During the past two years I have met many persecuted Christians like Pastor Obiora who have shared stories of their suffering and their joy of following Christ in adverse circumstances.

Often the people I met have been forced to flee their homes with nothing. Others have been thrown into prison for their faith. Many of them have endured many hardships or seen their loved ones being killed.

They are the people we help through our partners around the world by providing food, shelter, medicine, legal aid, trauma counselling, and pastoral care.

A gift of courage and a gift of love

The persecuted Christians we help face tough challenges on a daily basis. And, they need our help and our prayers.

That is why on July 2 I will be abseiling from the Northampton Tower to raise awareness and funds for persecuted Christians.

I love a challenge so I am looking forward to doing the abseil and to reaching my fundraising goal.

Please sponsor me today. Together we can help our brothers and sisters in Christ to rebuild their lives, grow strong in their faith and to share the good news. Thank you and God bless you.

Sponsor Paul at justgiving.com/fundraising/paul-robinson73



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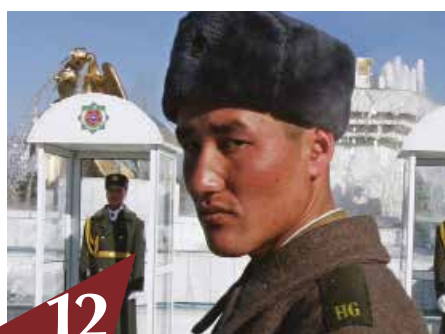
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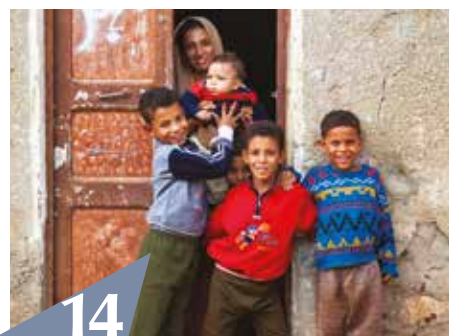
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release
INTERNATIONAL
voice of persecuted christians

Release helps Christians in the UK and Ireland to actively engage with their persecuted brothers and sisters around the world: praying with them, standing with them, helping them, and learning lessons of true Christian discipleship with them.

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Faith under fire

Christian families beaten by Hindu extremists

Hindu militants have attacked a number of families in India's central Chhattisgarh state.

In one village, 28 Christians including children were beaten and driven from their homes twice in two days.

Local Hindus in Katholi village had summoned the four families to a public meeting and demanded they recant their faith – but they refused.

During the first attack, six believers were badly injured and needed medical treatment. They returned to Katholi the next day, only to be beaten and thrown out again.

Meanwhile, 50 miles away in Sukma village, Hindu extremists subjected two Christians to a two-hour 'purification' ritual: one of them, known only as Jaisingh, was burned with heated coins. When the men refused to deny Christ, they were fined.

Between January and April, 49 incidents of organised attacks on Christians in Chhattisgarh state were reported.

Ask God to protect and strengthen Christians in Katholi and Sukma villages and throughout Chhattisgarh.

Seven Christian homes were looted and set on fire by militants in Minya province, Egypt. Photo: Reuters/Ahmed Aboulenein.

Elderly Egyptian woman assaulted



Seven Coptic families lost their homes and an elderly woman was stripped and beaten during an outbreak of sectarian violence in Upper Egypt on May 20, according to church sources.

Violence erupted in Al-Karm village, Minya province, following rumours of an alleged relationship between a local Christian man and a Muslim woman, reports Christian Solidarity Worldwide. The man fled the village after facing significant harassment and his family lodged a complaint at Abu Kourkas Police Station on May 19 after receiving threats.

The following day around 300 armed men attacked Christians in the village, looting and setting fire to seven homes causing £27,000 worth of damage, according to the Bishop of the Diocese of Minya.

During the attack, the man's elderly mother was stripped naked and dragged into the street where she was

beaten while her home was razed to the ground. Some reports indicate the beating only stopped when she managed to roll under a nearby vehicle, and another woman gave her clothing with which to cover herself.

The police arrested six men. The elderly mother was only able to report her own ordeal to the police five days later, as she initially found it too difficult to overcome her humiliation.

President Abdel-Fattah el-Sisi issued a statement ordering officials to hold the perpetrators to account, to preserve public order and to protect citizens and their property. He also instructed the governor of Minya province to coordinate with the armed forces to reconstruct the damaged property within a month at the state's expense.

Pray for healing for the elderly mother, and for protection for Christians in Minya province.

Christians flee after blasphemy accusations

Christians in Chak village, Punjab in Pakistan are living in fear after local Muslims accused one of them of blasphemy.

The allegations surfaced after Imran Masih's colleagues at the local health centre where he worked as a cleaner claimed he had been watching a controversial Christian preacher on his mobile. Friends of Imran say he is illiterate and could not have mastered the browser on his phone.

Angry local Muslims consulted Islamic scholars who issued a fatwa (Islamic decree) against Imran. When a local businessman placed a bounty on Imran's head, he fled from Chak. Muslims in the village then boycotted the 45 local Christian families, refusing to buy from or sell to them and threatened to attack their homes and churches. As a result, most fled the village.

Release partners are supporting the believers in Chak and have called on police to step up security to protect them.

Please pray for protection for Imran and his fellow Christians.

Jail threat for street evangelists in Nigeria

Legislation proposed by the Muslim governor of Kaduna state could see street evangelists fined and pastors sent to jail for up to two years for so-called 'offensive' preaching.

Christian leaders in Nigeria have voiced their concerns over the Religious Regulation Bill, proposed by Governor Nasir El-Rufai, which was sent to the state assembly last October. The Bill would also require clergy to obtain an annual preaching permit.

Church leaders fear that the proposed legislation, which would apply to all religions including Islam, is a ploy to stifle and persecute Christians under the guise of quelling extremists.

'The proposed law is in contravention of the Nigerian Constitution and shall inhibit the preaching of the gospel when it becomes operational,' said Rev George Dodo, Chairman of the Kaduna State Chapter of the Christian Association of Nigeria.

'We have reservations over the Bill and believe that it will curtail religious freedom of the people, particularly Christians in Kaduna state,' said another senior church leader.

Release's partner Stefanos Foundation believes that the legislation would set a dangerous precedent.

'Such a law is against the spirit of the Constitution of Nigeria which guarantees freedom of thought, conscience and religion,' said Director Mark Lipdo. 'That includes the right to manifest and propagate one's religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance.

'Furthermore, a state cannot justify breaching the Constitution by enacting a law under the pretence of combatting extremism. There are laws already which can be enforced to combat hate sermons.'

Please pray that the Bill does not become law, and that God will give wisdom to church leaders who oppose the legislation.

'Pray without ceasing'
(1 Thessalonians 5:17)



Photo: Vietnam Human Rights Defenders.

Vietnam: Please pray for prisoner's wife Tran Thi Hong (pictured) who was beaten and twice interrogated by police in May. When her 18-year-old son tried to intervene to save her, he was violently choked. She describes her situation as 'intolerable'. Her husband Nguyen Cong Chinh, a missionary pastor in the Central Highlands, is serving an 11-year sentence for allegedly 'undermining national security'. Pray that God will give peace and protection to this precious family.

Will you pray?

A prayer for the persecuted is the cry of a loving heart. It can change their world. It can open closed doors. It can turn 'enemies' to friends. It can calm fears and ease pain. It can restore hope and joy.

Join our praying community by using Prayer Shield and sign up to receive prayer alerts at: lovekillshate.org

Sources: Middle East Concern, Morning Star News, Release partners.



Pakistan

Pakistani women mourn the death of a family member after the devastating suicide bomb attack on Easter Sunday. Photo: AP/B.K. Bangash.

A time to heal

With your help Release's partners in Pakistan are supporting the victims of the Easter Sunday bombing in Lahore.

Thank you to everyone who has prayed for and given funds to help victims of the bomb attack on Christians in Pakistan at Easter.

The blast, which was targeted at Christians, killed 75, left more than 300 injured and has brought devastation to families. A Release ministry team that had just arrived in Lahore was able to give practical and prayer support.

Release supporter Frank described their visit to the park where the attack took place: 'We visited the playground

area where the bomb exploded,' he said. 'There were toys, broken glass, personal belongings and many shoes left abandoned. It was so sad to imagine a happy family day in the park turning to tragedy and chaos.'

The team visited many of the bereaved families, including some of the injured in hospital, and attended the funeral of one of the victims. They were also able to make a number of gifts to help families in their time of crisis.

'We did what we came to do — which was to encourage this unfairly-treated

Christian community, putting our arms around them and praying for them,' Frank said.

The team also conducted a Christian service for two families who had lost young family members in the blast.

'The amazing thing was when we came to comfort the families, the atmosphere was heavy,' said Frank. 'But when we were about to leave there was a sense of peace and quiet among the pain and brokenness. I believe that God's peace came over everyone there.'



Members of the team visited Saleem, a Christian man who within two weeks had to bury two of his daughters, both victims of the bombing.

‘When we arrived at his house we went upstairs and prayed for him,’ said Release’s team leader. ‘However, it was really hard to see him in such pain. At first we were all silent, just listening to him cry and watching him weep. Eventually I tried to console him by speaking of God’s love.

‘We prayed that God would mend this father’s broken heart.’

During their visit, the team from Release also met a number of persecuted believers whose lives are slowly being transformed for the better through the ministry of our partners.

One partner, for example, provides free legal services to Christians facing discrimination who cannot afford to pay for a legal defence. They also provide a safe house to help Christian girls who have suffered kidnapping and sexual abuse.

‘We met a 13-year-old Christian girl who had been kidnapped by two men, raped, and forced to convert

to Islam,’ said Release staff member Peter.

‘Thinking of what she’d suffered physically and psychologically as a very young woman was just devastating to me. Even now I find myself moved on her behalf because she deserves protection.’

‘Jesus told us that we would be killed’

Margreta is another victim of violence who has been helped by our partner. *‘She’d been doused in petrol by her husband and set on fire because she had converted to Christianity,’ said Peter. She was tremendously scarred — but miraculously she survived.*

‘One young Christian woman told me: “Jesus told us that we would be killed. But He also said not to fear people.”

‘I’m sure that most of us living in the UK and Ireland have never considered the possibility that we might be killed because we’re followers of Jesus. Yet here in Pakistan there are a growing number who have been killed because of their faith.

‘Our brothers and sisters in Pakistan are an inspiration for all of us, wherever we live.’

Sign our petition for Pakistan: see page 9.



Will you give today to help persecuted Christians in Pakistan?

Your gift can provide:

- Free legal advice for Christians facing discrimination or victimisation
- Safe accommodation for Christian girls who have been kidnapped and sexually abused
- Support for believers from a Muslim background
- Help for Christian prisoners and their families

Give using the enclosed form

Call: 01689 823491

Or give online: lovekillshate.org

Pray for the Middle East

Lord, we ask for Your mercy at this difficult time for the Middle East.

We ask for Your supernatural peace, healing and deliverance for all those forced from their homes as refugees.

Help us to forgive those who persecute us, just as You forgave those who crucified You.

Please empower Christians in the region with Your love, and provide for us so that we can support our persecuted brothers and sisters.

Let Your Kingdom
come and Your will be done.
In Jesus' name. Amen.

By a Release partner in the Middle East



Keep on praying

More prayer requests
from Release partners can
be found in the enclosed
Prayer Shield

Good News



Answered prayer: thank God that critically ill Iranian prisoner Maryam (Nasim) Naghash-Zargaran has been allowed out of prison to receive medical treatment. Please pray that this is successful. View her profile at releaseinternational.org/profiles.

Join our campaign to abolish blasphemy laws in Pakistan



1. Go to: change.org and search for 'Repeal Pakistan's blasphemy laws'
2. Sign the petition
3. Leave a comment if you wish
4. Share the petition with your Facebook friends directly from change.org.
5. If you wish to collect signatures in your church download the form from: releaseinternational.org/pakistan-petition

Sign today at change.org

Laos: Rejected for Christ



Our latest seven-minute DVD *Rejected for Christ* tells the moving stories of three converts in the Buddhist nation of Laos who are remaining strong in their faith, despite opposition - and shows how your support is helping to equip and encourage church leaders today.

Free to supporters, it's ideal for use in a prayer group or home group.

Call: 01689 823491



Watch now at
[youtube.com/
ReleaseInternational](http://youtube.com/ReleaseInternational)

Appeal for Pakistan raises £10,000

A big thank you to everyone who responded to our appeal to help Christians who suffered in the suicide bomb attack in Lahore, Pakistan, at Easter.

A number of you responded quickly to give more than £10,000 in total to support the bereaved and traumatised, as well as victims with long-term injuries. Shortly after the bombing, a Release ministry team visiting Pakistan was able to offer practical and prayer support to affected families (see page 6).

Be inspired by the real-life of persecuted Christians



**Wounded
for Jesus?**



**Suffering for
your faith?**



**Love those who
reject you?**

**Love those who
hate you?**



live testimonies

LOVE
KILLS
HATE

Photos may be stock images to protect those we serve.

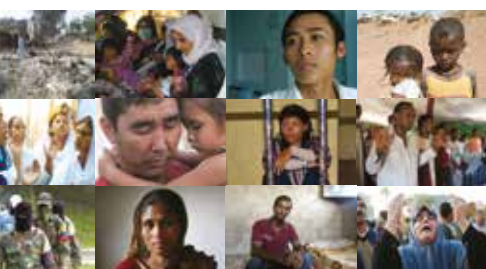


God is in
control?



Forgive your
enemies?

Discover their stories
and support them at:
LoveKillsHate.org



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Central Asia

Photo: AP/Burhan Ozbilici.

'The secret police are very much against us Christians,' said Turkmen pastor Mihail.

How courageous Christians are risking everything to share the gospel across Central Asia

• Pastor Mihail Turkmenistan

Pastor Mihail has a deep love for his nation of Turkmenistan. He became a Christian here after his mother brought a Bible from the Ukraine, and the whole family came to the Lord.

'Every year it is becoming more difficult to preach the Word of God and to serve the church,' he says. 'We have the right to assemble (but only in

a rented building), but often Christians are persecuted and intimidated by threats from the law-enforcement agencies.

'These agencies want to have full control, to know every move, where we go and every person we meet. It is almost impossible to gather together, even in private houses.

'The secret police are very much against us Christians, trying to find the weakest ones and intimidate them so they leave the church.'

For prayer and praise:

'Thank God, the year began with the blessings of God,' Pastor Mihail told us.

'We started the year with a three-day service, fasting and praying for revival in Turkmenistan and for the Government. Six people became Christians on the first Sunday morning service.

One woman came who was very ill. She had not walked for the past three years: as soon as she heard the Word of God she got up and started walking.'

'God is breaking through'

• Farzad and Elisa Tajikistan

Farzad, who is in his thirties, first heard the gospel from Christians who visited him while he was in prison. Now, several years after his release, he pastors a growing church with his wife Elisa, whom he met at Bible college.

'Farzad is in charge of several churches and house groups,' says our partner. 'Elisa is heading up a very fruitful children's ministry. Their congregation grew by 10 per cent — just in the past year.'

'His denomination is one of the largest in the country. The church organises holiday clubs and they invite children from Christian and Muslim families.'

It's working really well and helps to build a positive image of the church in the community.'

Farzad also supports believers in other areas. He told us recently: 'We try to visit Christians in remote villages, because they are very isolated and have few opportunities to have Christian fellowship. It's very difficult for them. They are often persecuted because of their faith.'

For prayer and praise:

'We've been praying for many years that God would work in the lives of young people. Praise God, we've seen a significant breakthrough,' said Farzad.



Library photo used to protect those we serve

'We have seen revival among our young people'

• Azad and Tara Afghanistan

Brother Azad came to Christ when he was 16 and quickly became an active church member in one of the central Asian nations. 'I loved being in the church,' he said.

He met his wife Tara at Bible college and together they continued to serve God in planting congregations. 'However, we had always had it on our hearts to go and live in Afghanistan — but there were always reasons why it was not possible to do so,' said Azad.

After several years of waiting, God finally fulfilled their dream.

'They have told us about people being baptised, people of different ages coming to know the Lord and home groups being set up, which they lead,' said our partner.

'We hear from Azad and Tara regularly and are in constant touch, but such information is extremely sensitive, because of their position.'

For prayer and praise:

'We had a big celebration attended by about 35 people,' said Azad. 'For our area that's a large number for one meeting. There were many healings, including a boy aged 11 who had diabetes. During that meeting the Lord touched the young people and I sensed that revival was beginning.'



Send a gift today to help these courageous Christians

- £10 can put Bibles into the hands of new believers
- £25 can enable key workers to provide pastoral support to Christians in remote areas
- £50 can support a Christian worker for two weeks

To send a cheque use the response form attached.

Give online at: lovekillshate.org
or call: **01689 823491**

Impact Report



Egypt



Library photo used to protect those we serve

Strength to Stand

Thanks to your support, our small network of Self Help Groups has really taken off in both Pakistan and Egypt in the past two years.

Release partners have been working in both Egypt and Pakistan with communities where poor or marginalised Christians face hostility and persecution. In these circumstances Christian girls and women are particularly vulnerable to abuse and violence.

At first, small community groups of women are established. At that point, many of them do not yet have a personal relationship with Jesus: they are being persecuted for His name, but without the comfort of knowing their Saviour.

‘Before I was involved I felt I was blind, but now I can see!’

These women initially meet with a facilitator, and take turns leading their group. They learn firstly that their identity is in Jesus Christ. Hina (not her real name), a facilitator in Egypt, told us:

‘Before I was involved I felt I was blind, but now I can see. I was empty, but now I am full!’

What is most inspiring is the way that these groups have evolved and been adapted by our partners to suit the context, the culture and the needs of the communities they serve.

‘After two years this has led us to rethink what to call these groups,’ said the manager of Release Women. ‘We have changed their name to Strength to Stand Groups or S2S. That’s because the ultimate goal is for the whole community to build resilience to persecution, so they can stand firm together in their faith in Jesus.’

Sonia (not her real name) is a member of a group in one of Cairo’s slums.

‘My brother and sister-in-law converted to Islam as a result of their ignorance and poverty,’ she said. ‘As a Christian family, we felt ashamed by this. But after I joined the group I could see how God uses difficult circumstances to reshape our lives.’

Find out more about Release’s ministry to women at releaseinternational.org/women.



Make an impact in Egypt

Your support today can help transform the lives of persecuted Christians in Egypt. Your gift:

- can further resource Strength to Stand women’s groups (see left), which are now reaching out to poor communities
- can give help to Christian victims of violence

To make a gift that shows how God’s love overcomes hate, please use the attached card.

SHOWING GOD'S LOVE TO THOSE WHO MIGHT KILL YOU



Encourage your church youth or student group to connect with the pain and passion of young Christians around the world who show how love can overcome hate.

Release Potential met 'Bella' (not her real name) on a past visit to Colombia, South America, where she lives in the heart of the jungle.

She lives with her mum and older brother Juan. Army militia and terrorist guerrillas are fighting for control of her region and her home is right on the border between the two groups.

She's been attacked by both forces and caught in the crossfire between them. Her family are the only Christians in the area. The guerrillas are opposed to the church: they have shot pastors, burnt church buildings and hounded Christians from their homes. So Bella and her family are in a very dangerous position.

But Bella loves Jesus, and because of Jesus she wants to love both the militia and guerrilla forces.



She believes that every person has been made in the image of God and deserves to be well-treated: even those who have threatened and attacked her.

'When I find young people,' said Bella, 'especially girls, who don't have clothes, or their clothes are in tatters, then I get some second-hand clothes for them and take them what they need. I keep my eyes open, and see where people are in need.'

Connect

Explore the grace, pain and passion of those who suffer in Persecution Uncovered.

This resource pack for young people and students has everything you need to run interactive sessions.

- Price: £10 including p&p.
- Order a copy at: releasepotential.org
- Or call: **01689 823491**



FOLLOW US

 Twitter  Facebook  YouTube  Releasepotential.org

Turning your church into a Prayer Powerhouse

In Acts Chapter 12 Luke provides an account of how King Herod tried to appease the Jews by executing James (v2) and by arresting Peter (v3) and plotting to have him executed also. But, King Herod's plans were thwarted by God's intervention (vv 7-10).

On this occasion God acted in response to the fervent prayers of His people (v5), yet when Peter went to meet his friends, they were astonished. They could scarcely believe that their prayers had been answered (vv 15-16).

But, there is more. For this story not only highlights the powerful relationship between prayer and God's actions — but it also shows how God acts towards those who oppose His purposes and try to exalt themselves (vv 17-24).

In a world where there is so much suffering and persecution, the good news is that God's good purposes will ultimately triumph over all those who oppose Him. What can we learn from Acts chapter 12?

There are two powerful lessons we can draw from this story that can have a huge impact on our understanding of God, on the power of prayer and

the triumph of the gospel in a time of immense persecution and suffering.

1. When the church prays fervently the cause of the gospel can triumph and God's enemies can be brought to nothing.
2. Although God's purposes cannot be thwarted by His enemies, God's servants, including every one of us, are not exempt from suffering and, even, from martyrdom.

King Herod and the Jews were directly responsible for James' death and for Peter's imprisonment. But there is something going on behind the scenes here. Satan was the one who was orchestrating these events. Satan's goal was to destroy the church while it was still in its infancy — and it continues to be his goal to this day.

Satan 'knows that his time is short' (Revelation 12:12) and so, unable to

get to Christ, he is making war 'on those who keep God's commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus' (Revelation 12:17).

This is the basic truth behind the persecution of Christians today. The world and the devil continue to persecute Jesus through His people (see Acts 9:4-5) just as Jesus said they would: 'If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also' (John 15:20).

The early Christians understood this, and that is why they knelt down and prayed fervently.

You and I today need to come to grips with this truth too and engage in fervent prayer for those who are being persecuted for their faith in faraway lands and closer to home.

- Download this sermon and more resources for your church from lovekillshate.org/great.
- Hold a special outdoors service this summer using our prayers, sermon notes, powerful short film and stories.
- Get your church to pray for persecuted Christians and send a special gift to Release International.

Prisoners of Faith



Show God's love by sending a card or letter to a Christian prisoner today

'Sending a card is really the least we can do,' says Marty, who leads a small prayer group in County Down, Northern Ireland.

Each month her group of around ten women meets to pray for Christians who are in prison because of their faith — and to send cards that will bring hope and encouragement.

Marty started the group in 2013 after taking part in a local Release Women conference. 'We use the regular Prisoner Profiles which come with a photograph of the prisoner we are praying for, which are really helpful,' she says.

'The women who take part are genuinely compassionate. This is something that anyone can do — we can all reach out like this to our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world.'

'We need to be crying and weeping for our persecuted family: so how can we not pray and send cards?' She adds: 'These believers have so much to teach us: we are really the privileged ones.'

Supporter Marion from Charlwood, Surrey, who is in her 80s, is also passionate about sending cards, which she makes herself. 'I cut out illustrations from books and old birthday cards, and always include a Bible verse and a short prayer,' she says.

'This is an important way of telling prisoners that they have not been forgotten. I pray that I will never tire of making these cards.'



SEND PAUL YOUR STAMPS

Supporter Paul White is continuing his marvellous work of selling franked UK and foreign stamps to help persecuted Christians. Please send your used stamps to: Paul White, 5 Raasay Gardens, Newton Mearns, Glasgow G77 6TH, making sure that you use the correct postage. If you include your email address Paul will acknowledge safe receipt of your stamps.

'REACH OUT!'

Writing letters or cards of encouragement to Christians imprisoned for their faith.

release
international
society of persecuted Christians

To write to a Christian prisoner

Call: 01689 823491 or

Email: ellie@releaseinternational.org

We'll send you everything you need by post or email

Invite a Release speaker to your church

To request a speaker for your church or fellowship group, please contact your nearest Development Manager:

Richard

North of England
Tel 07969 361557

Anthony

Central England & Wales
Tel 01234 271855

Andrew

South of England
Tel 07540 530153

Keith

Ireland
Tel 028 9334 0014

Simon

Scotland
Tel 07977 936554



Love
Kills
Hate

Always on the move

‘Micah’ (not his real name) is a Somali refugee living in Kenya. While death threats from extremists have forced him to keep moving home, he’s still committed to sharing the love of Christ with those around him.
By Release Development Manager Richard.

“It’s a wet morning in the rainy season in this large Kenyan city, and I’m weaving through the traffic on my way to meet Micah, a young Muslim-background believer from neighbouring Somalia.

He’s part of a small cell church which is supported by Release — and he’s agreed to share his story with me. He tells me that after he settled in Kenya, he contacted local Somali Christians through the internet. Some years previously he’d had a vision in his village during which the phrase ‘God-man’ kept repeating in his mind, and he was still searching for an explanation.

The believers gave him a copy of John’s gospel and Micah was intrigued to read how ‘the Word became flesh’ (John 1:14).

After further discussions Micah eventually gave his life to Jesus, and decided to share the news with his

Muslim family back in Somalia. They told him that he had shamed his whole clan, and one family member even offered him money to give up his new-found faith.

‘I love your supporters’

Although thankfully relations with his family have improved, he has now received death threats from Islamist extremists in Kenya who believe that any Somali who becomes a Christian deserves to die. So he has to move home often.

Despite this constant danger, he remains firm in his faith. Micah told me: ‘I will stand for what I believe — even if it means death.’

Like other believers from a Muslim background, I was struck by how Micah faced severe opposition right from the very start of his Christian walk: persecution is not restricted to mature believers. His faithful response

can only be attributed to God’s grace and strength at work in his life.

I told Micah that many Release supporters would pray for him, to help him through the danger and uncertainty he now faces.

‘I love your supporters,’ he told me. ‘Please pray that I grow spiritually and bear fruit for Jesus.’

Please Pray

- for protection for Micah, and that he will bear much spiritual fruit
- that Kenyan churches will welcome and support refugees from Somalia
- for Release partners as they support Somali Christians

Read more inspiring stories from our persecuted family at lovekillshate.org



**WILL YOU LOVE
THOSE WHO
ARE SUFFERING
BY SUPPORTING
THEM WITH A
MONTHLY GIFT?**

Complete the **Standing Order form** provided
or request one by calling: **01689 823491**

**'GOD WILL
JUDGE US NOT
ACCORDING
TO HOW
MUCH WE
ENDURED, BUT
HOW MUCH
WE COULD
LOVE.'**

Richard Wurmbrand, who
inspired the founding of
Release International

LOVE
KILLS
HATE

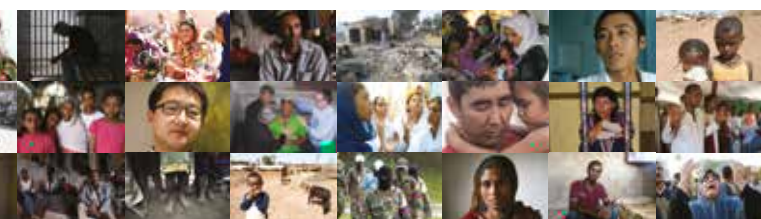


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prayershield

JULY-AUGUST 2016



People continue to come to Christ in China, despite mounting persecution of believers in some areas.

July 2016

Heavenly Father,

Thank you that your power is made perfect in my weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9). Lord, I pray that my brothers and sisters who are suffering persecution today will know that your glory shines through them as they stand firm in their faith. Please fill them afresh with your grace, your peace and your joy – so that others may come to know you through their witness.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

China

Friday 1: Thank God that our brother Zhang Kai was released from prison in April. The Christian human rights lawyer was arrested in August 2015 for defending churches in China.

Saturday 2: Pray for imprisoned pastor Yang Hua, who has reportedly been tortured in jail. The leader of Huoshi Church in Guiyang has been held since December on suspicion of 'divulging state secrets'.

Sunday 3: Pray for Huoshi Church, led by Pastor Yang Hua (above), which has been banned from meeting.

Members have been gathering in small groups, but many have been evicted from their premises.

Monday 4: Pray for the return of three church leaders who went missing in April, including Yang Jianwei, a pastor from Hebei province. Another pastor also disappeared in Hebei, and one in Fujian.

Tuesday 5: Pray for Pastor Li Jiangong whose wife, Ding Cuimei, died after being buried alive by a bulldozer crew sent to demolish their church in

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voice of persecuted christians

Zhumadian. They tried to block the bulldozer in protest – and were covered in soil.

Wednesday 6: Pray for an end to an official church demolition and cross removal campaign in Zhejiang province. Release partner China Aid reports that, by the end of 2015, more than 20 churches had been demolished and 1,300 crosses removed.

Thursday 7: Thank God for the release from prison of Gu 'Joseph' Yuese, leader of China's largest state-sanctioned church. Pastor Gu remains under 'residential surveillance' in Zhejiang, because of his protests against cross removals.

Syria

Friday 8: An estimated 500,000 Christians remain in Syria: two thirds of their population have left since the civil war began in 2011. Pray for strong fellowship and unity among those who remain.

Saturday 9: Pray for 'Yusuf' (pictured) whose son 'Faruq' was abducted by Islamist extremists in Damascus in 2014. Yusuf has also lost his home, his job and all his possessions – yet his faith remains strong.

Sunday 10: Three quarters of the Christian population in Aleppo have fled since 2011. The Christian area of Suleymaniye was badly

hit in April. The city's three cathedrals are almost completely destroyed.

Monday 11: Christian refugees from Syria report that persecution continues in refugee camps abroad. Those in Germany, for example, have faced religiously motivated abuse and violence.

Tuesday 12: Bishop Yohanna Ibrahim and Bishop Boulos Yaziji were abducted by armed militants near Aleppo in April 2013. They had been on their way to discuss the release of two pastors abducted in the February. Pray for the safe return of all four clergymen.

Wednesday 13: Pray for an end to the conflict in Syria and across the Middle East: pray that peace will be restored and the rule of law will be applied equally for all in every part of the region.

Thursday 14: Pray that God will convict the men and women of violence in countries such as Syria: pray that they will hear His voice and respond with repentance.

India

Friday 15: Hindu extremists in Uttar Pradesh tortured Joginder Gold, 30, for three hours, to try to force him to reconvert to Hinduism. They hanged him upside down from a tree then beat his feet.

Saturday 16: Extremists in Saidpur Garur, Jaunpur, attacked Pentecostal pastor Samuel Marikuda Joseph, punching, kicking and beating him with sticks. They demanded he stop holding worship services.

Sunday 17: Pastor Sumati Prakash, his wife Urmila and their son, Hemansu, 15, were hospitalised in Rajasthan state



Christians pray with 'Yusuf' (centre, right) whose son was abducted by Islamic extremists in Syria.

after being attacked by Hindu extremists.

Monday 18: Hindus in Katholi village in Chhattisgarh state attacked 28 Christians in April, driving them from their homes and setting their houses on fire. Some have since returned but are said to be living in fear.

Tuesday 19: Pray for two Christians in Dantewada district of Chhattisgarh who were forcibly 'purified' with Hindu rituals for two hours, including being burned with hot coins. When they refused to convert to Hinduism, they were fined.

Wednesday 20: Pray for Pastor Deenanath of Berseba Church in Karanji village, Chhattisgarh state, and his wife: they were doused in petrol in a bid to force them to convert as vandals attacked their church.

Thursday 21: Continue to pray that India's Hindu nationalist Government will take firm action against extremist attacks on minorities such as Christians.

Friday 22: Pray that Indian officials, including the police, will do more to protect the religious rights of minorities. Many Christians say police fail to respond with due diligence to attacks on their community.

Saturday 23: Please pray for all the people who will receive Bibles in different Indian languages distributed

through a Release-funded project. Praise God that His word never returns empty (Isaiah 55:11).

Nigeria

Sunday 24: Fulani militants killed and burned alive several Christians in an attack on four villages in Gashaka, Taraba state, in April. Homes and farms were also destroyed.

Monday 25: Under legislation proposed in northern Kaduna state, street evangelists would be fined and pastors guilty of 'offensive' preaching would be jailed for up to two years. Pray the Bill will be amended to uphold religious liberties.

Tuesday 26: Fulani herdsmen's attacks on Christians are extending into southern states. Three mainly Christian villages were attacked in Enugu in April, leaving at least 27 dead.

Wednesday 27: Christians in Nigeria continue to accuse security agencies of doing little to halt attacks on their communities. Pray that officials will take firm action to prevent further violence.

Thursday 28: Pray for the safe return of all the women and girls who have been abducted by Islamist militants, including Peace, teenage daughter of Regina (pictured). Thank God for the return in May of a girl seized from Chibok in 2014.

Friday 29: At least ten villages in the Agatu area of Benue state that were attacked by



Regina (right) longs for the return of her daughter, abducted during a Boko Haram raid on her village. Other relatives (shown) were badly injured.

Fulani herdsmen in February were still occupied in April. At least 500 people died in the attacks.

Saturday 30: Rev Aniako Celestine from St Joseph's Church Ukana in Enugu state was kidnapped by suspected Fulani herders in April. Pray for his safe return.

Sunday 31: Pray for the family of Pastor Iliya Anto from Kaduna city, whose body was found ten days after he was abducted in March. Two other pastors kidnapped with him were later released.

August 2016

North Korea

Monday 1: Thank God for the courage of North Korean defectors who risk their lives to return to their homeland to spread the Gospel. Pray that God will make them invisible to those trying to stop them.

Tuesday 2: Pray that more North Koreans will start to question the ruling regime's ideology, *juche* (self-reliance), and reach out to the one true God. Thank God that he always receives those who come to him.

Wednesday 3: Pray that God's word will touch the heart of all those who will pick up the Bibles and gospel verses which Release partners send into North Korea using durable helium balloons.

Thursday 4: Pray for the North Korean Christians receiving discipleship and vocational training through a Release-funded project designed to help them establish a new life in South Korea.

Friday 5: Release supports Christians who provide refuge and spiritual support to North Korean defectors as they make their way through China and other countries to South Korea. Ask God to protect defectors and their hosts.

Pakistan

Saturday 6: Pray that Pakistani officials, including police, will show greater commitment to upholding the rights of all citizens. All too often officials decline to register cases against those who attack Christians.

Sunday 7: A young Pakistani Christian woman called Marriam, aged 24, was abducted in May; she was dragged into a car as she walked down a street in Lahore. Pray she will be returned to her family.

Monday 8: The getaway car of Marriam's kidnappers (above) hit a young girl, resulting in serious injury to both her legs. Ask God to restore this young girl's body.

Tuesday 9: Pray for Christian Imran Masih who was accused of blasphemy by local Muslims in Chak, Punjab – after he allegedly watched a controversial Christian preacher on his mobile phone.

Wednesday 10: Pray for reconciliation between Christians and Muslims in Chak village (above) where a blasphemy row erupted recently. Police were deployed to restore calm.

*North Korean defectors
take communion.*



**'Only God can mend
this broken heart.'**

Saleem, who lost two daughters in the
Easter Sunday bomb attack in Lahore

Thursday 11: Please continue to pray for grieving families and survivors of the suicide bomb blast in Gulshan-e-Iqbal Park, Lahore, on Easter Sunday. Many of the injured face a long road to recovery.

Friday 12: Saleem lost his daughter Annie in the Easter Sunday bomb attack (above). His other daughter, Miriam, died later in hospital,

succumbing to injuries she suffered in the same attack.

Saturday 13: Please pray for justice for a young Christian couple – Shahzad Masih, and his wife, Shama – who died in 2014 after being beaten and burned in a brick kiln. The main suspect, the kiln's owner, was recently granted bail.

Sunday 14: Release partners in Pakistan – and across the world – often risk their own lives to support persecuted Christians and stand up for their rights. Please remember our partners in your prayers today.

Vietnam

Monday 15: Praise God for the release in May of Thaddeus Nguyen Van Ly, a

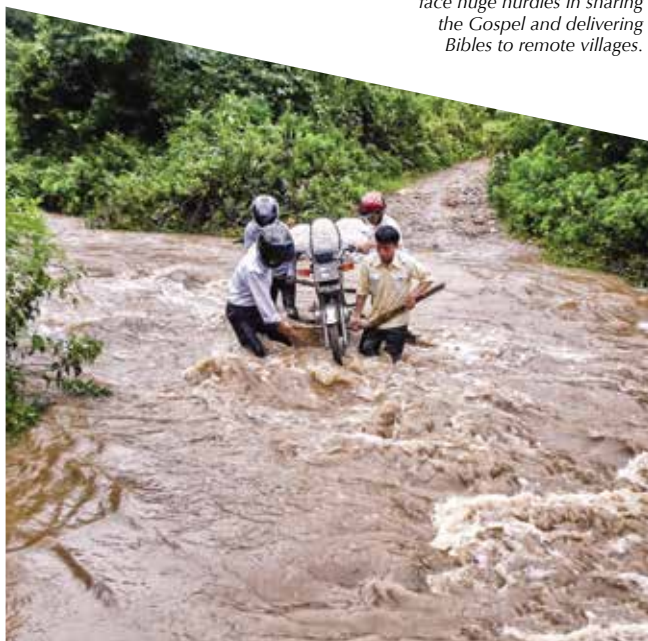
prominent pastor and human rights activist who had been sentenced to eight years in jail for 'slander and libel' against the state in 2007.

Tuesday 16: Release offers practical support for a number of Christian prisoners of faith and their families, enabling, for example, prison visits. Ask God to strengthen these families.

Wednesday 17: Pray for the release of Pastor Nguyen Cong Chinh, who is serving an 11-year prison sentence. He was jailed in 2012 for 'undermining national unity'.

Thursday 18: Tran Thi Hong, a Vietnamese activist and wife of Pastor Nguyen (above), says officials beat her for three hours in April – and again in May.

Front-line workers in Vietnam face huge hurdles in sharing the Gospel and delivering Bibles to remote villages.



Friday 19: Pray that God's word will reach even the most remote of Vietnam's communities, despite the huge physical hurdles evangelists (such as those pictured) sometimes face in getting Bibles to them.

Iran

Saturday 20: Evangelist and Christian convert Ebrahim Firouzi has been in jail since 2013. After completing one sentence in 2015, he was then sentenced to a further five years for 'acting against national security'.

Sunday 21: Pray for Yasser Mossayebzadeh, Saheb Fadaie and Mohammadreza Omid (Youhan), arrested in May in Rasht. Yasser and Saheb were later released on bail. All three were also briefly detained in 2015.

Monday 22: Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani was acquitted of apostasy on appeal in 2012 after receiving a death sentence in 2010. He and his wife Tina were briefly detained in May after a raid on their home where Yasser, Saheb and Mohammadreza (above) were arrested.

Tuesday 23: Fariborz Arazm, a Christian from a Muslim background, was arrested in Saveh in February. His family were not told where he was being held. He has previously served 18 months in jail for evangelism.



Christians in eastern Uganda, where a Release associate ministry is distributing Bibles, are facing mounting persecution.

Uganda

Wednesday 24: Ask God to strengthen and protect His people in eastern Uganda where attacks on Christians with a Muslim background are frequent. Pray they will put their total trust in the Lord (Proverbs 3:5).

Thursday 25: Pastor Micah Byamukama survived a knife attack but died five days later in May after his food was poisoned.

Friday 26: Muslims in Pallisa district beat and raped a young Christian woman for testifying that a mosque

leader had killed her father in January.

Saturday 27: Ntende Hawa's husband attacked her last year for becoming a Christian: she fled with her children to another village in Budaka district. When she met him in April to discuss child support, he tried to strangle her but she survived.

Sunday 28: Pray for a 13-year-old girl who was raped to punish her family for becoming Christians. The family fled their village in Budaka.

Monday 29: Relatives of Abdu Nsera, a high school graduate

in Jinja district, beat him after finding out he had left Islam to become a Christian. He fled when they burned down a house they had built for him.

Tuesday 30: Pray for the family of Laurence Maiso who was murdered at his home in Budaka district. Four days earlier, a local imam had issued a death threat to him and his wife.

Wednesday 31: Pray that officials in eastern Uganda will take firm action to halt the spread of extremism and violence against Christians.

Lord Jesus,

Thank you that you go before us: there is no pain we may experience that you have not felt. Thank you that you are with my brothers and sisters who are 'hard pressed on all sides' (2 Corinthians 4:8) just as you were.

Remind them, Lord, that you have already won the victory for them, on the cross. They are not defeated because you are their almighty King and Saviour: praise your name!

Amen.

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For more information on the countries where Release works, go to the 'Country profiles' page at releaseinternational.org

Sources: Asia News; China Aid; Christian Solidarity Worldwide; Middle East Concern; Morning Star News; Radio Free Asia; Release partners; VOM USA; World Watch Monitor.

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