

mar apr 2017

voice of persecuted christians

release

**BEATEN
AND
JAILED
- BUT NOT
BROKEN**

News, stories and prayer requests
from persecuted Christians worldwide



Welcome

by Paul Robinson, CEO

Praying for persecutors

In Matthew 5:44 Jesus tells his listeners to love their enemies and **'pray for those who persecute you'**. There are many ways to show forgiveness, but praying for your persecutors must surely be one of them.

It's what Jesus Himself did on the cross and what Stephen did as he was about to be martyred in Acts 7:60. Did Stephen's prayer lead directly to the conversion of the zealot Saul who was watching on and who would later become the Apostle Paul? We may never know for sure this side of eternity, but undoubtedly it would have played a part.

And if Stephen had refused to appeal for those about to stone him, would Saul have been converted as he was? Again only God knows the answer. But if it did lead to his conversion, we have Stephen's prayer to thank for the early spread of Christianity to the Gentiles.

In Sri Lanka today another believer is also responding to Jesus' command. His name is Pastor Priyantha and you can read his story on page 12.

Despite being attacked, his family threatened and having his church destroyed, this pastor says about his persecutors: *'I know they are still angry with me, but I pray for them.'*

What an amazing response; one that is not uncommon among those we meet.

Their faithfulness in following Jesus's command is inspiring for us but also leads me to wonder what will be the impact on their society because of their prayers for their persecutors. What 'Sauls' will find Jesus as a result? What communities in Sri Lanka will be changed?

But what relevance does this have for us, here in the UK and Ireland, who don't experience the same levels of persecution as our brothers and sisters around the world?

Well, it is vital that we pray for those who persecute our Christian family. We are part of the same Body of Christ with whom Jesus identifies completely – in Saul's conversion on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:4) Jesus confronts him with: 'Why do you persecute *me*?' not 'Why do you persecute *my people*?' (my emphasis).

If Jesus identifies so intimately with His followers, then we must too.

Wherever the Body of Christ, of which we are an interconnected part, is being persecuted, we must respond likewise – praying for persecutors as well as the persecuted.

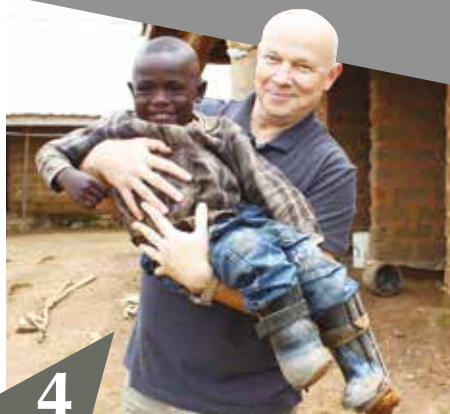
Do something special

That's why this year we are focusing the **Great Outdoors Church Service** (see page 17 and back page) on praying for those who attack Christians, whether in the UK and Ireland or overseas. It is the same Jesus who is being persecuted and who commands us to pray for those responsible. So this May 21, as well as praying for our persecuted family, let's remember the persecutors. Who knows, your prayers might just lead to the conversion of a 21st Century 'Saul'.



Find out more about the Great Outdoors Church Service on Sunday, May 21, at lovekillshate.org.

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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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[releaseinternational](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC...)

FAITH UNDER FIRE



Pastor banned from holding meetings

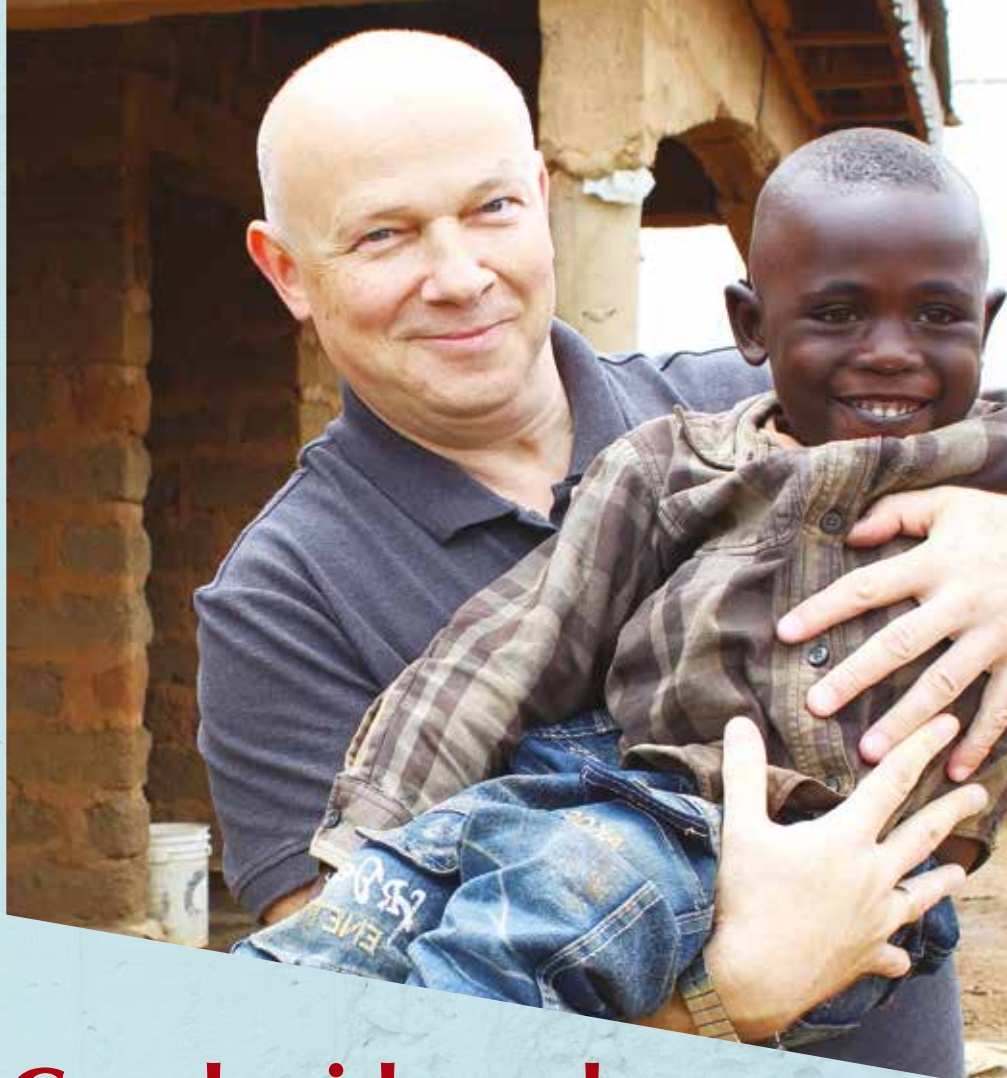
Pastor Hamid Shabanov (pictured) from north Azerbaijan has been banned from holding church meetings – yet again.

The Baptist leader has been told his church is illegal because it's not registered, even though he's been trying to register it for 20 years.

In the latest assault on his church's religious freedom, police raided a prayer meeting at Pastor Hamid's home and held those present for several hours, including children.

Hamid and another church member were later formally charged with holding an illegal meeting, convicted and issued with a fine.

• ***Please pray for Pastor Hamid and his church as they consider how to respond to this latest ban.***



Czech aid worker given life sentence

A Czech Christian aid worker has been sentenced to life in prison for spying, which in Sudan's system means at least 20 years behind bars. His real 'crime' was to help a student who had been badly injured at a demonstration.

Petr Jašek, who is in his mid-50s, was sentenced in Khartoum in January.

Two co-defendants were also sentenced to a total of 12 years each for helping Petr Jašek. They were Sudanese nationals Rev Hassan Abduraheem and Abdulmonem Abdumawla.

'We are very shocked by the ruling,' said our Chief Executive Paul Robinson. 'Sentencing aid workers for spying highlights the growing hostility in Sudan towards Christians and the church – as does the severity of the sentence.'

'The Government is already demolishing churches. Release calls on Sudan to respect the rights of Christians and others and to release these men, whose only crime was compassion.'

Petr Jašek and the others were accused of funding rebel movements in areas such as South Kordofan and Darfur. The charges arose after an act of compassion towards a student from Darfur who was badly burnt during a protest in 2013. All three men are appealing against these punitive sentences.

• ***Pray that God will comfort and strengthen Petr and the others so they will not lose heart. Ask God for wisdom for the legal team and that their appeal will be successful.***



Clockwise from left: Petr Jašek, Abdulmonem Abdumawla and Rev Hassan Abduraheem.

Inset photos: World Watch Monitor and MEC.

Christian leader still detained



Pakistani Christian leader Aslam Pervaiz Sahotra has been detained in jail awaiting bail since March 2015 when Taliban suicide bombers attacked two churches in Youhanabad, Lahore, leaving 16 dead and over 100 injured.

Following the attack, two Muslims were killed by a mob in retaliation — leading to the arrest of hundreds of Christians in the area. While most have been released, Mr Aslam Sahotra remains in prison as a suspect. He has suffered ill health during his detention.

The Pakistan Christian Congress in January appealed to the Government for his release, after his family received death threats and demands for money.

• *Pray that he will be released soon, along with other Christians awaiting bail.*

FREE ANDREW

Please write to the Turkish authorities to ask for the release of imprisoned pastor Andrew Brunson.



US pastor Andrew Brunson (pictured) has been behind bars in western Turkey since October 2016 – because officials suspect he's a 'terrorist'. In fact, he and his wife, Norine, love Turkey and have served its people for the past 23 years.

Their nightmare began when they were summoned to Turkey's Interior Ministry. They thought they were being called to a meeting to discuss their application for permanent residency. Instead, they were arrested and detained.

Norine was released after two weeks, but Andrew was charged with having links to the Gülen movement which the Government blames for last year's attempted coup. More than 40,000

people were arrested on suspicion of involvement in the failed plot. However, Christian leaders fear that the Turkish authorities are taking advantage of current insecurity to clamp down on Christianity.

PRAY

• **Ask God to protect, encourage and strengthen Andrew while he is in prison. Pray that Andrew will be released immediately so that he and Norine can continue their ministry.**

WRITE

• **Please write to Turkey's Minister of Interior to ask for Andrew's release using the sample letter and contact address given at releaseinternational.org/free-andrew.**



Norine Brunson stands outside the detention centre where her husband has been held since last October.

Prisoners of Faith email alert

Receive the latest news of Christians who have been imprisoned for their faith by requesting our free monthly Prisoners of Faith email alert.

Call: 01689 823491 or use the attached card.



EGYPT

FINDING FAITH IN UNEXPECTED PLACES

Our S2S groups are transforming the lives of needy Christian women, some of whom work as rubbish-pickers in Cairo's 'garbage city'

Your prayers and gifts are enabling vulnerable Christian women to find their true identity in Christ — and to forgive those who persecute them. By Release's Jack Norman.

The Apostle Paul once described believers as fragile 'jars of clay' which yet, incredibly, contained 'the light of the knowledge of the glory of God' (2 Corinthians 4:6-7).

Sometimes I know how cracked and weak I can be, but I also know, by God's grace, the marvellous treasure that this 'jar of clay' holds!

On my recent visits to Egypt I have been amazed by the strength of the church which has survived nearly two millennia: keeping the flame of faith burning despite pressure and persecution from the beginning.

At times I forget that despite the heroic stories of faith I hear from persecuted believers, they all, like me, carry their treasure in lives that need from time to time to be strengthened, even rebuilt.

On my last visit to Cairo, I was privileged to visit the predominantly

Christian 'garbage city' on the edge of the capital. God challenged me from Psalm 113 to know that even though I feel powerless at times, He is the God who sits above the heavens, and who actually stoops down to the earth:

'He raises the poor from the dust, and lifts the needy from the ash heap; He seats them with princes, with the princes of His people. He settles the childless woman in her home as a happy mother of children. Praise the Lord' (Psalm 113:7-9).

We can confidently put our trust in God who engages with the world and the people He created.

I saw this first-hand in the Strength to Stand (S2S) groups which, thanks to your prayers and gifts, are enabling poor Christian families to stand firm in the face of continuing persecution.

In the words of one of the facilitators I met, these groups are helping to

'immunise' believers against the lure of Islam.

This word immunise may sound strange, but some Christian girls are being groomed by young Muslim men from an early age with the promise of marriage and a better life. Since the majority of Christians in Egypt live in poverty, this is a powerful enticement.

The S2S groups are having a powerful impact: helping these young women grow in their sense of self-worth and in understanding their Christian faith. This makes the lure of a 'better life' less attractive and equips them to resist these approaches.

As you can read opposite, God is also using these groups to enable His people to love and pray for their persecutors in powerful ways. As Jesus Himself said:

'Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you' (Matthew 5:44).

See page 18 for Archbishop Ben Kwashi's reflection on praying for our enemies.

'I TRY TO FORGIVE'

Thanks to the generosity of supporters like you, Release's Strength to Stand groups are strengthening poor Christian women in Egypt through the power of the gospel.



Stock photo

As a result of practical training and encouragement, lives are being transformed.

'I try to forgive the people who oppress or do bad things to me,' said young mother Salama, a member of one of the S2S groups. 'I can at least

pray for them, even if I cannot do anything else.'

Another mother, Nanu, said: 'Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, God is always beside me. He turns these fearful things into good things.'

All names have been changed. Stock photos have been used to protect those we serve.

As our Release Women Programme Manager explained: 'Lives are being changed and faith is growing because women recognise their worth in Jesus. They then go on to share what they have learnt with their families and communities.'

 **ReleaseWomen**

#LoveKillsHate



Photo: Reuters/
Asmaa Waguih.

WILL YOU HELP PERSECUTED CHRISTIAN WOMEN?

Your gift could help to set up more Strength to Stand (S2S) groups in Egypt – and transform the lives of even more Christian women, their families and communities.

Release's S2S groups provide practical training and discipleship so that vulnerable Christian women realise their identity in Christ, and are empowered to serve Him. Members of S2S groups learn together how to love and forgive those who oppress them, and work together to overcome their problems.

'We've been really excited to see how these small groups have taken off,' said our Release Women Programme Manager. 'Their needs are very great and we have requests to start more groups.'

Please make a gift today by using the attached card, by calling 01689 823491 or at releaseinternational.org.



Read more testimonies from Egypt by requesting the latest edition of Release Women's newsletter *Embrace*. Call 01689 823491 or use the attached card.

Together we can help Egyptian believers to overcome hatred with love.

A PRAYER for Egypt



**Request our free DVD
about persecuted Christians
in Egypt by using the
attached card**

Lord, You are King of creation,
You rule over all the nations,
Your name alone is exalted.

Break through in power
in Egypt today!
Let there be a rich harvest
of new believers
who are passionate for You.

Please protect all Christian
ministries and churches,
give wisdom and insight
to Your people
and restrain those who would
cause them harm.

We pray for unity in
the Body of Christ
and for the anointing of
Your Holy Spirit
to revive our nation.

Lord, let Your name
be exalted. Amen.



By a Release partner in Egypt

GOOD NEWS



OVERWHELMED BY YOUR LOVE!

Release volunteer Phil (pictured) was overwhelmed to receive hundreds of cards in the run-up to Christmas – to be forwarded with your love to partners and Christian prisoners of faith around the world. Most of the cards included Bible verses, prayers and short encouraging messages, and many had been hand-crafted. ‘Thank you so much for sharing your love in this way,’ said Phil.

PRISONER TOLD: YOU CAN HAVE A BIBLE, JUST READ IT QUIETLY!



Zhang
Shaojie

We’re glad to report two recent breakthroughs for Christian prisoners of faith.

Bob Fu of our partner China Aid told us that **Pastor Zhang Shaojie**, who is serving a 12-year jail sentence, has now been permitted to have a copy of the Bible. The only condition is that he has to read it quietly! He is also delighted that his wife has been allowed to visit him once a month.



Samir
Chamek

And Algerian prisoner of faith **Samir Chamek**, a 33-year-old theatre actor, has had his original five-year term reduced to one year, following appeal. He was detained in 2016 after cartoons of Mohammed, the prophet of Islam, had been shared on his Facebook page.

Thank you for praying for prisoners of faith.



YOUR CHANCE TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE: Glasgow to Edinburgh Cycling Challenge

James, our Development Manager for Scotland, is looking for at least ten cyclists to join him for a sponsored ride from Glasgow to Edinburgh on Saturday, May 27.

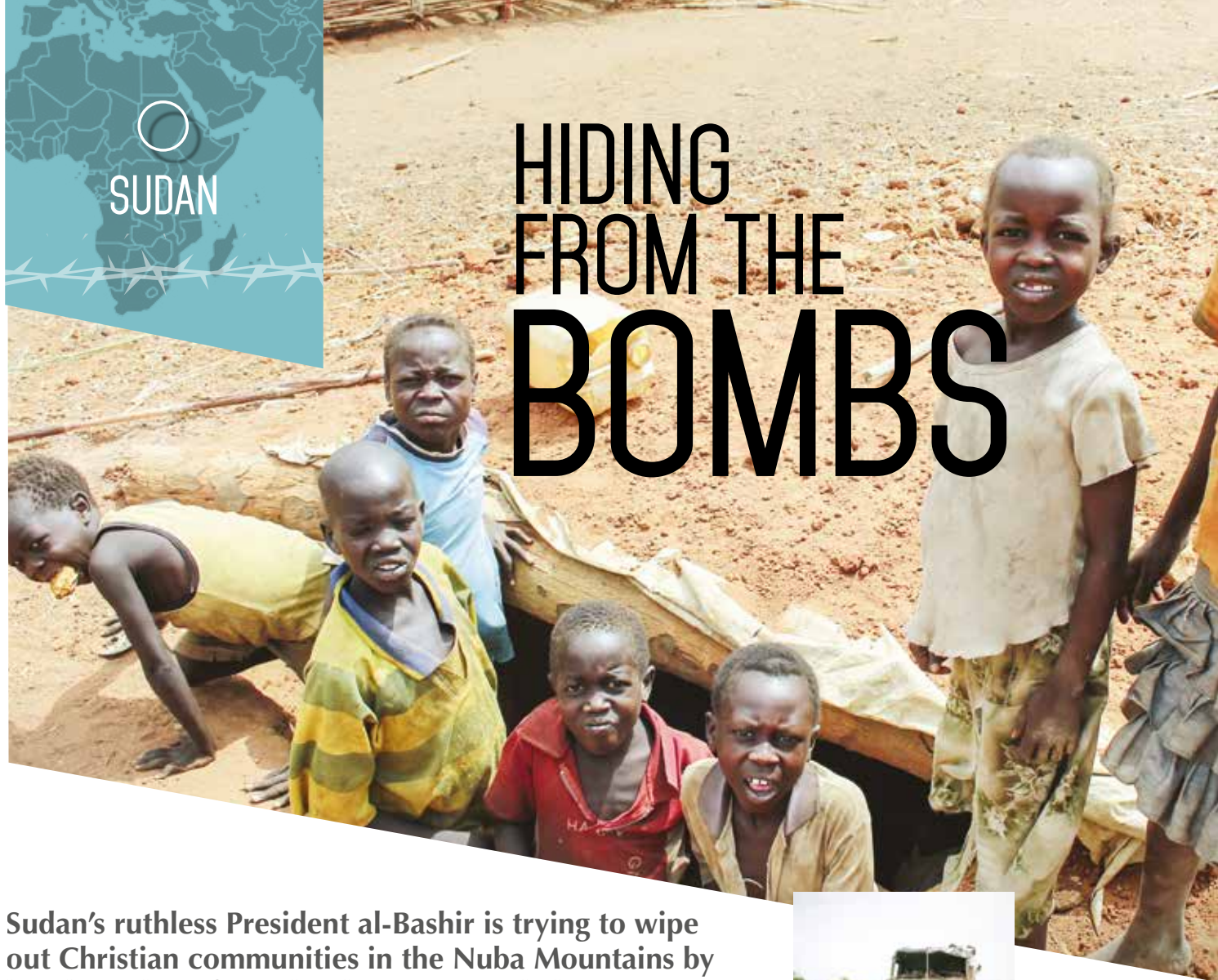
‘Participants can choose to cycle for a particular country where persecution is an issue,’ said James. ‘They can also wear a T-shirt with a picture of the country’s flag.’

He’s hoping that each person could raise £200 to support persecuted Christians. ‘And we’ll have one main break, when we can spend some time praying.’

Find out more by emailing jfraser@releaseinternational.org or by calling him on 07977 936554.



HIDING FROM THE BOMBS



Sudan's ruthless President al-Bashir is trying to wipe out Christian communities in the Nuba Mountains by bombing them from the skies. You can help to sustain our persecuted family by providing medicines, action packs and Bibles.

In Sudan, Christians in the Nuba Mountains of South Kordofan face both poverty and armed conflict.

The Sudanese military regularly bombs Christian communities there using Antonov bombers – part of their campaign to eliminate all Christian villages, churches, hospitals and schools in the region.

Crude bomb shelters (pictured) have been constructed outside schools to protect the children when the bombers approach.

Sudan's President Omar Hassan al-Bashir — who came to power in a military coup in 1989 — has a reputation for ruthlessness. He made history in 2009 when he became the first sitting head of state to be indicted by the International Criminal

Court for his personal involvement and approval of war crimes, including genocide, in Darfur.

Our partner Voice of the Martyrs has for many years supported beleaguered Christian communities in the Nuba Mountains by distributing bulk quantities of medicines, action packs and Bibles.

Near-impossible conditions

Yet for half the year torrential monsoon rains and almost impassable roads make this a huge task. During the rainy season, it can take days of digging to get trucks through the muddy roads to their destination.

But it is worth all the effort. One of our partner's field leaders told us about a pastor who rode nine

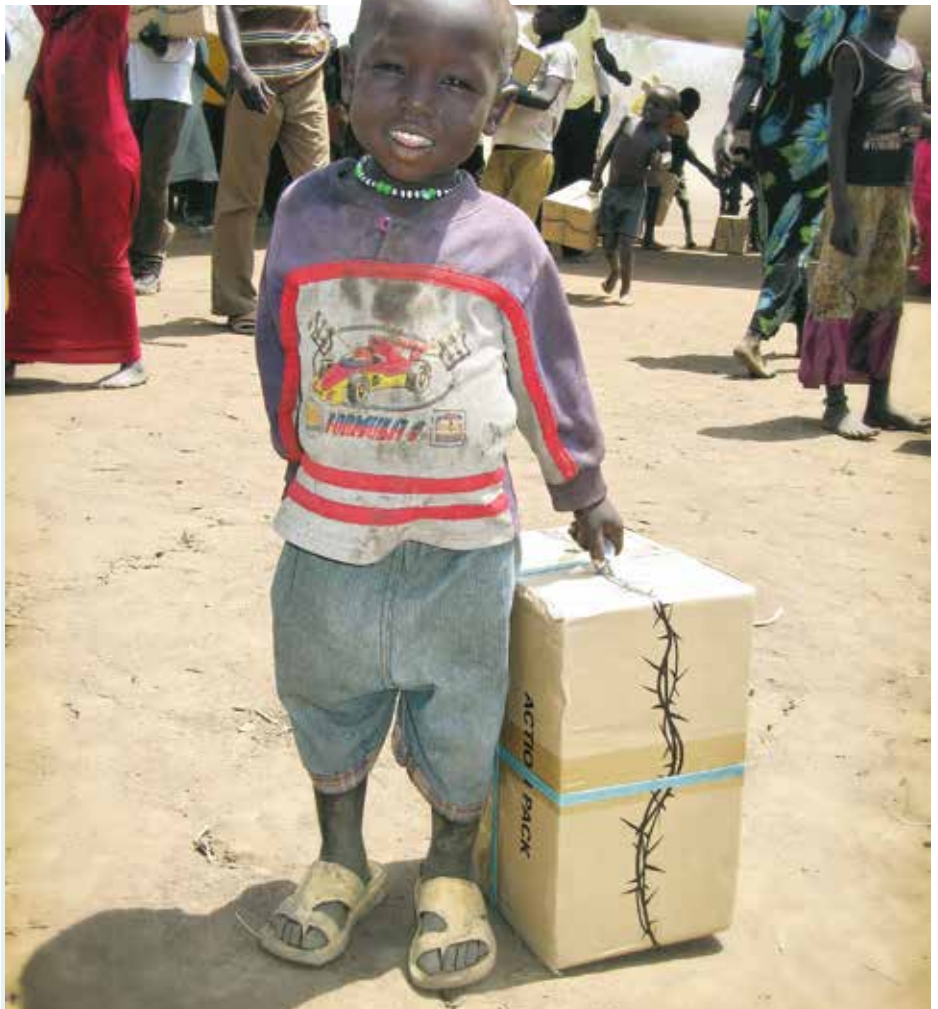


For half the year, monsoon rains and rutted roads make distributing aid almost impossible.

hours by donkey to attend a pastors' conference in the region and to get Bibles for his congregation.

'I'm thankful to this organisation for this conference and for the gift of Bibles in our own languages,' the pastor said. 'Most of us don't have Bibles, and you could find a church having only one Bible for the pastor. Now we have more that we can share with believers.'

• Ask God to protect Christian families in Sudan's Nuba Mountains who endure regular bomb attacks. Pray too for the safe distribution of medicines, action packs and Bibles.



SUDAN

Population: 36.7 million

Capital: Khartoum

Government type:
Presidential republic

Religion: Muslim 90 per cent;
Christian 5 per cent; other 5 per cent

PLEASE HELP PROVIDE MEDICINES, ACTION PACKS AND BIBLES

Will you make a gift today to provide essential medicines, action packs of vital supplies and Bibles for our suffering family in the Nuba Mountains?

Your gift will be used to help hard-pressed Christian families, and tangibly demonstrate that they have not been forgotten.

- £10 could provide much-needed Bibles for persecuted Christians.
- £25 could pay for an action pack for a Christian family, including a mosquito net, clothes, cooking utensils, soap and more.
- £50 could help buy essential medicines for primary health clinics serving both Christians and others. Many of the government hospitals and clinics lack basic medical supplies.

Your support is vital. Please show your love for our persecuted family by:

- Using the attached card
- Calling: 01689 823491
- Giving online at releaseinternational.org



'I FORGIVE'

Militants attacked Pastor Priyantha, threatened his wife and children, and destroyed his church. Instead of hating his attackers, he has chosen to forgive them and pray for them.

'One Sunday morning a group of Buddhist monks and local people interrupted our church service,' said Pastor Priyantha, who leads a small congregation in rural Sri Lanka.

'They started throwing chairs around and tearing up our Bibles. I tried to reason with them. In the end I kneeled in front of the altar and prayed: "Lord, take this situation into Your hands."

'One of them hit me on the head with the guitar and I fell on the ground. My boys saw this and were terrified. Later they burnt down my church and threatened me and my family, telling us to leave the village.'

Despite these terrible events, this courageous pastor and his wife chose to stay in the village to continue to preach the gospel.

'We have been through a lot,' said his wife. 'But I believe that God has brought us this far and He will not forsake us.'

Priyantha added: *'I have forgiven the monks and the villagers who caused so much trouble and pain to us. I know they are still angry with me, but I pray for them.'*

• **Pray that God will protect Pastor Priyantha and his family as they continue to serve Him.**

**LOVE
KILLS
HATE**

Watch the moving testimony of Pastor Priyantha and his family in our new 4-minute video *Love Kills Hate in Sri Lanka*.

Watch it now at  youtube.com/releaseinternational

PLEASE GIVE US YOUR FEEDBACK ON THE FILM

Please let us know 1) What you liked/disliked about it. 2) Whether you watched it, or will watch it, on your own, in a home group or prayer meeting and/or as part of a church service. 3) Has it encouraged you to respond in a) prayer b) giving? 4) Would you also require it as a download and/or a DVD version? Please email your response to info@releaseinternational.org. Thanks for taking the time to respond. It is much appreciated and will help us to improve our video production.

CHRISTIANS TARGETED IN SRI LANKA

**SELECTED
INCIDENTS**

NOV-DEC 2016

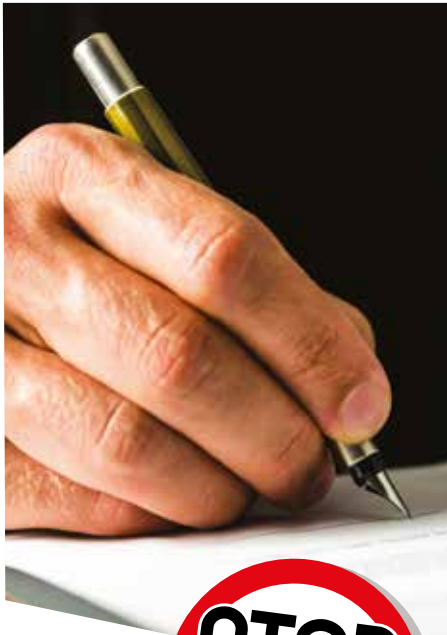
NOV 14 During a religious festival a Buddhist monk falsely accuses the pastor of a church in Polonnaruwa district, using obscene language. The next day a mob attacks the pastor's home with stones.

NOV 26 A pastor in Jaffna district receives a legal letter denying building approval for his church. He is told to obtain permission from the Ministry of Buddha Sasana and Religious Affairs. However, Sri Lankan law requires no such approval.

DEC 7 An Assemblies of God pastor in Polonnaruwa district is officially questioned about his worship activities and false allegations that he was unethically converting villagers. Later the Divisional Secretary accuses the pastor of breaching the peace and tells him to leave the area. One villager threatens to kill the pastor.

DEC 7 A Buddhist leader in Gampaha district asks local police to stop Christians meeting in their home for prayer. The officer-in-charge says they can continue, if they do not disturb the peace.

Source: Release partner.



SIGN THE PETITION

A non-legislative directive from the Sri Lankan Government, known as Circular 2008, is being used to discriminate against Christians and to close churches and prayer meetings.

Our partner has asked Release supporters in the UK and Ireland to petition the Sri Lankan Government to cancel the Circular.

We want to collect as many signatures as we can by April 30, and present these to the Sri Lankan High Commission in London.

'Signing the petition, and asking others in your church to sign, will pressurise the Government to take effective steps,' says our partner.

The Sri Lanka petition is enclosed with this magazine; it can also be downloaded from releaseinternational.org.



This church in Paharaiya, north-western Sri Lanka, was destroyed by a mob in January. Photo: World Watch Monitor.

YOUR OPPORTUNITY TO SUPPORT PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS IN SRI LANKA

Believers in Sri Lanka face pressure from both militant Buddhists and local authorities who are trying to stamp out Christianity by closing churches and prayer meetings.

Courageous Christians such as Pastor Priyantha and his family (see opposite) need our prayers and support so they can continue to share the gospel.

'We have been through a lot,' said his wife. 'But I believe that God has brought us this far and He will not forsake us.'

Your gift can help persecuted Christians in Sri Lanka by providing:

- free legal advice for pastors
- education for vulnerable Christian children
- special camps for teaching and encouragement

Please make a gift today by using the attached card, by calling 01689 823491 or at releaseinternational.org.



Despite being attacked, Raju is committed to sharing the gospel of Jesus.



BEATEN AND JAILED

– BUT NOT BROKEN

The experience of young Indian Christian Raju challenges us to think of what following Jesus really means.

Raju, aged 23, was converted in his teens and first got involved in gospel outreach four years ago. When several members of his family were converted, people in his village began to notice.

One evening last year, after a service in his church, a group of about 50 Hindu extremists caught him and took him to the central market place where they beat him severely.

DETAINED

Then they called the police and accused him of fraudulently converting people. He was kept in a

police cell for three days before being released.

When asked how others might pray for him, Raju's immediate response was: 'Pray that I will win many more souls for Jesus!'

And when a Release staff member met him a few months later he radiated a godly joy.

'I am privileged to suffer for Christ,' he said. 'It's an honour.'

Raju is determined to continue telling people about Jesus: 'because I know God loves me.'

NEW RESOURCES FOR LENT

Keep your eyes peeled for our new Lent initiative, which you can find at releasepotential.org/lent.



INTERNATIONAL MISSIONS TRIP 2017

We have limited spaces available for our 2017 international missions trip. For more information:

- call 01689 823491
- email us at potential@releaseinternational.org

'IT'S CERTAINLY NOT BORING!'

Says our latest Change Maker, first-year theology student Amy from Northern Ireland.

As part of my course at uni, I have to volunteer for four hours a week in a Christian organisation or church. I thought and prayed long and hard about what I should do.

I chose Release, as I had no previous understanding of persecuted Christians. I had some knowledge of persecution from studying Religious Studies at A-level, but this was something I really wanted to learn more about.

The Change Makers mentoring programme has given me the opportunity to engage with young people, do talks in schools and churches, organise publicity and fundraising events, take part in church weekends, and meet people who are passionate about supporting persecuted Christians.

I'd be lying if I said this programme didn't stretch or challenge me – it certainly hasn't been boring!

One of the things that touched me the most was meeting Pastor Tandin, from Bhutan, who told me how much he appreciated the cards and letters he'd received from Release supporters when he was



Student Amy (right) spreads the word about Release Potential at her Christian Union.

in prison. This helped me see the reality of persecution – and how even just sending a card can make such a difference.

When I hear stories of people being beaten or killed, my heart is deeply challenged to remember that this is **real**. And that this is happening simply because of their faith in Jesus Christ.

If I were in their country, I'd be persecuted for standing for Jesus or even writing this right now.

I'm really looking forward to meeting persecuted brothers and sisters overseas, and to support them. This is something that I will be doing this summer and I am very excited. It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity!

If you're a young person or student aged 17-23, Change Makers could be amazing for you too. The programme gives you unique opportunities to develop skills and grow in discipleship to be more like Jesus. So I challenge you: find out more today! ➡

HELP YOUNG PEOPLE IN YOUR CHURCH REACH THEIR TRUE POTENTIAL

Our Change Makers resources have had a revamp: a new year, a new look!

Change Makers is our unique 12-month flexible mentoring course for young people aged 17-23 years old. The course enables each Change Maker to learn from the powerful experiences of persecuted Christians — and understand how to help our persecuted family through fundraising, prayer, mission, support and campaigning.

Get hold of our new materials by calling 01689 823491 or from releasepotential.org.

Please also consider giving details of the Change Makers programme to your youth leader, or young people and students who might be interested.



FOLLOW US



Twitter @RPConnection



Facebook



YouTube



releasepotential.org

IMPACT REPORT: IRAQ

Your gifts are being used to help displaced Christian families in northern Iraq.

'TOUCHED BY YOUR LOVE'

Thanks to your generous support of our Christmas appeal, we are able to help desperate Christian families survive the harsh winter conditions in northern Iraq.

Our recent Christmas appeal raised more than £14,000 to provide food and other aid to displaced families in Kurdistan, many of whom have fled for their lives from Islamic State (IS) terrorists.

Previously, a mother, Samira, told us how she had fled with her four young children from the town of Qaraqosh when IS attacked. After a hazardous journey — during which she almost lost two of her children — she reached Erbil in Iraqi Kurdistan and was able to receive help from our partner 'Majed' (not his real name).

'The toys we gave to the children put a great smile on their faces'

Since then, thanks to your gifts, Majed has been able to help 400 displaced families by providing rice, sugar, oil,

lentils and tinned food. He was also able to give 100 children toys as Christmas presents.

Your support brought joy

'The toys we gave to the children put a great smile on their faces,' said Majed. 'They had footballs to kick, which brought joy to the camp.'

'Many people were so pleased to receive your help and were touched by your love.'

In addition the authorities gave Majed permission to distribute 1,000 Bibles and other Christian literature to displaced families. *'The church is growing,'* he said. *'By seeing practical help they saw God's love.'*

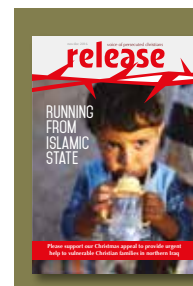
The authorities have also noted his compassionate ministry, and have thanked him for his hard work and love.

Food aid is distributed to displaced families.



'Now we have regular meetings to discuss ways of helping refugees,' said Majed.

• Thank God for the way that Majed has been able to help these hundreds of displaced families. Please pray that God will enable them to return to their homes soon.



Our Christmas appeal highlighted the plight of Christian families in Iraq who left everything to flee from Islamic State terrorists.

GREAT OUTDOORS CHURCH SERVICE

Sunday, May 21, 2017

release
&
your church



Show solidarity with persecuted Christians by holding a Sunday meeting in the open air.

This is an important way of identifying with Christians around the world whose church buildings have been closed or destroyed by those opposed to the gospel.

We suggest you meet outside on Sunday, May 21, 2017 — but feel free to choose another Sunday if you wish.

Stories, prayers, sermon notes and more can be downloaded from lovekillshate.org.

Please talk to your church leaders and make the most of this opportunity to pray for and support persecuted Christians.

**Invite
a Release speaker
to your church**

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

Ben

North of England
Tel 07969 361557

Geoff

Central England & Wales
Tel 01234 271855

Kenneth

South of England
Tel 07540 530153

Stephen

Ireland
Tel 028 9334 0014

James

Scotland
Tel 07977 936554

Kate

(Release Women)
Tel 01689 823491

FAITHFUL TRUSTEES



Geoff Alexander

Two men of God who faithfully served Release as members of the Board of Trustees for many years died in December.

Geoff Alexander became a committee member of what was then Christian Mission to the Communist World (CMCW) in 1977. In 1980 he joined the Board and continued to serve for the next 36 years.



Bob Brian

Bob Brian joined the CMCW committee in 1973 and served as Treasurer before being appointed Chairman in 1979; a post he held until 1996.

Both men became involved through their personal links with Rev W. Stuart Harris, who established the mission in 1968. Together they helped to guide the ministry during its restructuring following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and collapse of communism in Europe.

New direction

CMCW, which had focused on persecution under communism, then broadened its vision to serve persecuted Christians worldwide, later changing its name to Release International.

'We honour the contributions of both men,' said Release CEO Paul Robinson. 'They faithfully served both God and persecuted Christians, laying firm foundations for our ministry today.'

THE WORD

Rt Rev Benjamin Kwashi,
Archbishop of Jos,
Nigeria, reflects on how
God asks His people to
pray the impossible.



Photo: Andrew Boyd.

'PRAY FOR THOSE WHO PERSECUTE YOU'

'You have heard that it was said, "Love your neighbour and hate your enemy." But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of Your Father in heaven.' (Matthew 5:43-45)

Jesus commanded his disciples to love their enemies and to pray for their persecutors as His divine strategy.

It may not look practically workable in the face of clear evil, wickedness and outright persecution. However, the strategy of Jesus remains the **only** way to win – both now and in the end.

Jesus knows that it is not possible for us alone to confront systematic persecution, which may have the full support of the state apparatus, and win.

My experience has shown that whenever a persecuted people make the attempt at self-defence they are likely to be arrested by the same state apparatus that should have provided their security in the first place.

There is no chance of winning or of justice for the persecuted: the persecuted always stand to lose. So therefore: 'Pray for those who persecute you'.

For example, King Jehoshaphat was once faced with a difficult battle situation after Judah was invaded, which he had no hope of winning (2 Chronicles 20). So, admitting his own weakness, he prayed:

'We have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you' (2 Chronicles 20:12).

'The battle is not yours, but God's'

God then spoke through Jahaziel to encourage both Jehoshaphat and the whole assembly of Judah:

'Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's' (v15).

During the battle itself Jehoshaphat 'appointed men to sing to the Lord and to praise him for the splendour of his holiness as they went out at the head of the army' (v21).

God Himself fought on behalf of Jehoshaphat and his army, setting ambushes against the enemy, who then turned against one another. Israel did not record any casualty: the Lord did everything!

We can see how those who put their trust in God do not see shame.

Praying for those who persecute us may look weak, feeble and helpless – but that is precisely **when** God works. He is aroused by our humility, helplessness and vulnerability. He hears the prayers of the persecuted.

God is not absent from the persecuted. In fact, prayer in these circumstances is the only option, it is the only lifeline and only means of hope.

The persecuted church is the only church that wins all its battles on its knees.

The Apostle Paul was converted through the prayer of Stephen, the first Christian martyr. The church grew, increased in number and spread throughout the world – despite the persecution that lasted for hundreds of years.

Persecution cannot kill the church, but a lack of praying Christians can.

Where there is fervent prayer, there is less grumbling, complaining, faithlessness and hopelessness. The great reward for praying cannot be compared to the crushing pains of persecution.

Persecutors of Christians will never have the last word because we know that Jesus has won the victory.

LOVE
KILLS
HATE

LOVING YOUR ENEMIES

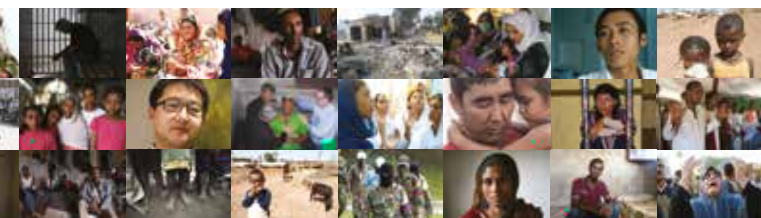
One Sunday morning a mob of 20 villagers, as well as some Buddhist monks, interrupted Pastor Priyantha's church service. They beat him up and threatened to kill him.

Pastor Priyantha is fighting back with the only weapon he knows how to use: **love**.

He forgave his attackers and is continuing to share the good news of Jesus with those who persecute him.

Will you help persecuted pastors such as Priyantha to love their enemies by sending a gift to Release today?

Use the attached card | Call: 01689 823491 | Give online at releaseinternational.org



GREAT OUTDOORS CHURCH SERVICE

Photo: Al Gordon

LOCKED OUT: Members of the GKI Yasmin church in Bogor, Indonesia, have been forced to hold outdoor meetings ever since their building was closed by the authorities in 2010.

SUNDAY, MAY 21, 2017*

Stand with persecuted Christians by holding your Sunday service in the open air.

Download stories, prayers, sermon notes and more from lovekillshate.org.

* or any Sunday of your choice

