

nov dec 2017

voice of persecuted christians

release

HELEN BERHANE CALLS FOR FREEDOM

FOR ERITREAN
PRISONERS
OF FAITH

Pray 173



Welcome

by Paul Robinson, CEO

Will you pray for persecuted Christians?

The Bible records many wonderful examples of prayer which can help to guide our own intercession.

Particularly striking for me is the account of corporate prayer by the early Christians in Acts chapter four.

Already the believers in Jerusalem were experiencing persecution at the hands of the Jewish authorities, which had imprisoned the apostles Peter and John and then forbidden them from teaching or speaking in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:18).

Today, of course, as you can read in this magazine, many Christians in restricted nations continue to face similar pressures.

Upon the release of Peter and John, the church immediately unites together in prayer and declares the sovereignty of God over all of His creation:

‘They raised their voices together in prayer to God. “Sovereign Lord,” they said, “You made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them.”’ (Acts 4:24)

Because of this central truth, they could also declare with confidence that the plot to crucify Jesus was not defeat, as it appeared to many, but actually part of God’s sovereign plan: ‘They did what Your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.’ (Acts 4:28)

Then their prayer turns to specific, heart-felt requests to God, asking Him to act with great urgency and power:

‘Now, Lord ... enable Your servants to speak Your word with great boldness. Stretch out Your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of Your holy servant Jesus.’ (verses 29-30)

During November we are asking supporters and their churches to take part in the International Day of Prayer (IDOP) for persecuted Christians and to pray with similar confidence and urgency.

This year the UK Religious Liberty Commission, of which Release is a member, is asking Christians to set aside the whole month to pray, not just one day.

Please join us in crying out to God that Christian prisoners of faith in Eritrea might be released from prison. All are being held without trial, often in the most appalling conditions. Some 173 have been incarcerated for more than ten years, with many suffering torture because of their faith in Jesus (see page 12).

Taking this prayer in Acts as our guide, let us, like the early believers, unite together to call upon God to act urgently, stretching out His hand of power to release these precious brothers and sisters for His glory.

Next year we will be commemorating the 50th anniversary of Release (see page 19), and prayer has been very much at the core of our ministry since our founding.

Pastor Richard Wurmbbrand, whose personal experience of persecution in communist Romania inspired the foundation of our ministry, constantly pleaded to Western Christians not to abandon their persecuted family.

Praying regularly and urgently is one of the most important ways we can remember persecuted believers.

Former Eritrean prisoner of faith Helen Berhane addresses our recent conference (see page 16). Photo: Andrew Boyd.



See page 12 for how you can pray for persecuted Christians in Eritrea.

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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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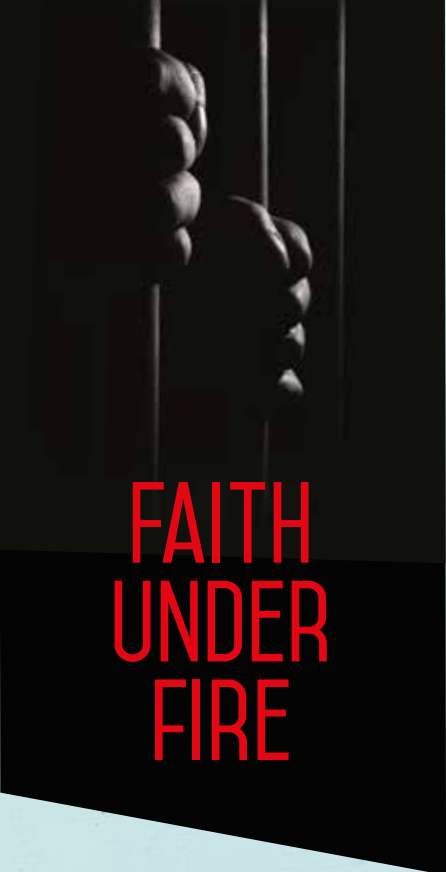
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FAITH UNDER FIRE

Young Christian in Pakistan suffers brutal attack

Eighteen-year-old 'Alian' (not his real name) suffered a brutal sexual assault – but local police in Pakistan seemed reluctant to investigate.

The Christian teenager was beaten, stripped, gang-raped and forcibly converted to Islam – and left unconscious.

Release contacts who are supporting Alian and his family say it was a Muslim friend who lured him to an isolated place on false pretences.

When Alian was found after the attack, he was taken to hospital, where he was threatened and told to remain silent, according to his family. Police initially dismissed his rape allegations, but have since arrested several suspects but appear to be pressuring the family to drop the case.

• ***Please pray that God will heal and restore Alian and that those responsible would be brought to justice.***



Fulani massacre 20

Fulani herdsmen in central Nigeria's Plateau state massacred 20 Christians, including children, in an apparent reprisal attack.

Police reportedly said the attack was an act of vengeance after the discovery of a slain and beheaded Fulani boy who was a resident of Ancha village, Miango District in the Bassa Local Government Area.

But a local Christian claimed that the area's terrified residents were at a loss to explain why they were targeted, as

the murder of the boy took place in another village.

'The village where they claim one of them was killed over a year ago is not part of our village, and we have never had any misunderstanding with them in the past,' said John Bulus, church secretary of Salama Baptist Church-Ancha, which lost 19 members in the massacre.

• ***Please pray that God will bring comfort and strength to the families of those massacred.***

Kenyan believers murdered by al Shabaab

Three Christians in eastern Kenya were called out of their beds in the night – only to be murdered on their doorsteps.

Villagers from Bobo in Lamu County were badly shaken after al Shabaab extremists slit the throats of three men, Guchu, Jared and Joseph – because they were Christians.

Militants reportedly abducted a few local people then forced them to reveal the names of Christians in Bobo and identify where they lived. One of

these men, a Christian named Hillary, was also later killed.

After the murders, many villagers fled their homes and took refuge in the bush or the nearby village of Hindi.

Christians in Lamu have been regular targets for extremist violence. In August, for example, four Christians were killed in Kasala Kairu town.

• ***Please pray for the families of all four men killed, asking God to comfort them and provide for their needs.***

Christians in Plateau state, Nigeria, continue to face violent attacks from Fulani militants.



Iranian believers to face charges

Iranian Christians request renewed prayer for Eskandar Rezaei and Soroush Saraei, believers who have faced enormous pressure during the past five years.

Eskandar was arrested in July at his home in Lar where several hundred New Testaments were discovered and confiscated. He is being held at Adel-Aabad prison, Shiraz (pictured). Soroush was also arrested in July, and was initially held at the intelligence offices before being transferred to Adel-Aabad prison.

Both Eskander and Soroush have been verbally charged with 'acting against national security'. Soroush faces an additional charge of forgery for issuing letters as the pastor of the Church of Shiraz for students seeking exemption from Islamic studies classes. They are to attend court hearings soon to face these new charges.

• *Pray that God will give peace and wisdom to Eskandar and Soroush.*



A cross caught fire when officials in China's central Henan province attempted to remove it from a church in Nanyang, reports Release partner China Aid.

The removal comes in the wake of a year-long campaign in Zhejiang province during which officials attempted to remove all church crosses in the region.

Photo: China Aid.

WORSHIP SERVICES BANNED FOR THREE MONTHS

Courts in Kazakhstan have banned two churches from all activities, including meeting for worship, for three months.

A court fined and banned New Life Protestant Church in Oskemen – because church members sang religious songs at a summer camp. The church has appealed to East Kazakhstan Regional Court.

Asked what would happen if the ban enters into legal force and church members continue to meet for worship, a state religious affairs official said: 'We'll fine them again'.

A court in Almaty fined the Protestant Source of Life Church and banned it for three months because it was meeting in a venue away from its registered address – even though the church said that they had informed the authorities.

• *Pray that God will continue to build His church in Kazakhstan.*

CHRISTMAS PROJECT

Will you help Iraqi refugees this Christmas?

Photo: Reuters.

Many Christians have fled Iraq because of persecution – often with only the clothes on their back. Some of them are being cared for by our partner ministry in Lebanon and this Christmas they need our help and our prayers.

Release's **Tom Hardie** recently travelled to Lebanon where he met Ayad, an Iraqi Christian whose daughter was seriously injured in a bomb attack outside their home.

Ayad's story of suffering and perseverance

Ayad is animated as he tells me about the family's trials in Iraq and their subsequent journey to Lebanon. They have suffered a great deal, but as I looked into his eyes I could see a joyful spirit brimming with love for Jesus.

His home now is a small, sparsely furnished apartment that he shares with his wife and children. In fact there are more children than rooms, so it is difficult to move around the place.

In typical Middle Eastern fashion we are greeted with excitement and small cups of dark, strong coffee, while inquisitive children hover by the door, catching our eye before disappearing.

Ayad's story begins in 2007 when a simple wave to passing US troops in Baghdad marked him and his family out to local Islamist militants.

Shortly afterwards a bomb exploded outside the family home and his daughter, who was only four years old at the time, was caught in the blast. She was severely injured.

'Her leg was hanging by its skin,' he told us, 'but we couldn't get her to hospital for two days because it was so dangerous outside.'

Eventually the little girl was operated on. *'It was a miracle,'* recalls Ayad. *'The doctor did a scan after the operation and was astonished because the leg was totally healed – it was completely healthy!'*

The family's joy was short-lived, however.

Being identified as Christians meant there would be no security. Unlike other factions in Iraq, Christians have no armed backers to protect them, so in due course militants visited the family and threatened them.

'You are Christians, wicked people. We will slaughter you if you don't leave,' they said.



The family had no option but to uproot and head for the Kurdistan Region in northern Iraq, considered by many as a safe haven for Christians. It was there that they were dealt another blow: Ayad's wife, Nada, suffered a fall and broke five vertebrae in her back.

'The doctor couldn't mend her as she has weak bones,' he explained. 'They sent X-rays to Erbil and told us it would cost \$13,000 to carry out an operation, but we had no money.'

Ayad recounts praying to God in desperation. *'I prayed and said to God, "I have only Jesus".'*

Later that day the pastor of his church called him to say that he wanted to hold the church service at their home, to which Ayad agreed. *'When the pastor came over he knelt down by my wife who was on the bed, unable to move, and prayed in Jesus' name. After he prayed, Nada sat up and exclaimed "It's like fire on my back. I want to move".*

'So she stood up and started walking!'

Scans of Nada's spine were later taken and sent to the doctor who would have carried out the operation. Ayad smiled, adding: *'He said there was nothing wrong!'*

*Ayad (right)
with his
daughter and
wife Nada.*



FROM DESPAIR TO HOPE

Ayad, Nada and their daughter are one of 200 Christian refugee families who are being helped by Release's Christian partner in Lebanon.

Every month each family receives a basic food package, including cooking oil, rice, lentils, pasta, pulses and tinned goods. In addition they are given a large bag of cleaning and hygiene products, such as washing powder, soap and disinfectant.

Spiritual needs

'After families have been given practical care in the form of basic goods, we work to address their emotional and spiritual needs,' said our partner.

'We do this through regular home visits, monthly spiritual programmes, and children's activities – building lasting and authentic relationships and helping us to share the love of Christ.

'We want to lead the families from despair to hope.

'Please pray for these families as they continue to cope with life as refugees here in Lebanon and with the physical, emotional, and financial strains this brings.'

Your opportunity to transform lives



By sending a gift of £20 or more today you can bring hope and help to Christians who have been forced to flee for their lives to Lebanon.

- **£20** can pay for Christian materials and a home visit to a refugee family of 5-7 people
- **£50** can buy a monthly food and hygiene package for a refugee family
- **£100** can pay for food packages for three months for a refugee family

Our partner also provides each family with pastoral care and spiritual discipleship in the name of Jesus.

HOW TO GIVE:

- **Give using the attached card**
- **Give online at releaseinternational.org**
- **Call: 01689 823491**

Prayer for Lebanon

God we praise You,
for You are our almighty God.

We pray to see lives changed and
communities transformed.

Please by Your Holy Spirit show Your way
to every person we serve. May they see
that you are the only God.

We pray that You will open eyes, minds
and hearts so that many will believe
in You.

Our desire is to glorify Your name among
the many refugees in Lebanon: may they
see You through us. Give us the courage
to be always like Christ.

We pray for protection for our staff as
well as the refugees we serve.

In Jesus name,
Amen.

By a Release partner in Lebanon

**Please use this prayer in your
church or housegroup.**

GOOD NEWS



SRI LANKA PETITION PRESENTED TO HIGH COMMISSION

Release CEO Paul Robinson (pictured) recently presented our Stop the Circular petition to the Sri Lankan High Commission in London.

The petition, signed by 13,500 people, calls on the Sri Lankan Government to cancel a circular which has been misused by local authorities against believers.

'Circular 2008 continues to serve as a discriminatory tool used by government officials against churches, prayer meetings and Christian families,' said our partner the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka.

'We are extremely grateful to Release for taking on the campaign and for submitting the petition – this effort will prove crucial to create awareness. Each of your signatures and names mattered. Thank you all.'

Photo: Morning Star News.



NEPALI CHRISTIANS RELEASED FROM JAIL

We thank God that four Christians in Nepal sentenced to five years in prison on false charges of witchcraft and violence were released in September after a high court annulled their convictions.

Lali Pun, Bimkali Budha, Suk Lal Pariyar and Ganga Pariyar had been convicted after praying for a mentally-troubled woman – even though the woman testified that she was not mistreated and had been healed by the prayer.



KEEP SENDING THOSE STAMPS!

Supporter Paul White is continuing his marvellous work of selling franked UK and foreign stamps to raise funds 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.



HOW DO YOU SOLVE A PROBLEM LIKE **NORTH KOREA?**

While North Korea seems bent on driving the world towards nuclear conflict, Dr Eric Foley of Release partner Voice of the Martyrs, Korea, explains how the missile crisis can become a call to prayer for persecuted Christians.

I North Korea is following a predictable and understandable script in order to advance its missile programme as far as possible, before international sanctions or actions can suspend it.

It wants quickly to complete the testing phase of its nuclear programme so all the sanctions can

be bunched together. So why not launch several missiles, do a couple of nuclear tests, get where you need to be and then offer to stop these tests as a worthless bargaining chip?

North Korea may be evil, but it is not crazy. Kim Jong-Un has got the world's attention without mobilising a single soldier.

The general media makes one of two mistakes. They assume Kim is a puppet controlled by powerful interests, or a one-man dictator who holds the fate of the nation in his hands. Neither is correct.

The North Korean state is not a one-man state. There has always been a small group of very powerful people in North Korea, of whom the Kim family is the head. So, it's not as simple as removing Kim Jong-Un.

'North Korea doesn't just persecute Christians – it executes them'



Release partner Dr Eric Foley, who was interviewed by Release's Andrew Boyd.

The notion of taking him out in a surgical strike, then watching North Korea just fold into South Korea is vain imagination.

People have wondered whether the present situation makes things worse for Christians in North Korea. But how could things get any worse?

North Korea doesn't just persecute Christians – it executes them.

Christianity is not punished as religion, but as sedition – conspiracy

against the state. No Christian activity is tolerated in North Korea, other than bodies operated by the state for propaganda purposes. State surveillance of Christians in North Korea has never been higher.

Reliably, we can say that there are 100,000 Christians in North Korea. About 30,000 are in concentration camps, where they are executed unceremoniously after the last little bit of labour has been wrung out of them.

Things have always been this bad, because North Korea sees Christianity as an offshoot of American imperialism and associates Christians with the United States.

The North Korean crisis, which now extends to the West, should remind us that our brothers and sisters there have faced these conditions for decades.

The international community may be on a knife's edge right now, but to be a Christian in North Korea is to live on that knife's edge.

So when those missiles are pointed towards the West, should we simply pray that things are returned to the way they were before? No! Because the way they were before means that our brothers and sisters will continue to experience horrendous levels of torture and imprisonment for the sake of their faith.

The focus of the world should not simply be to restore a situation that is stable for us but unacceptable for Christians. We should pray that the Lord uses the present conditions to make it possible for the first time for Christians in North Korea to practise their faith without recrimination.

Call to repent

These missiles should remind us how little attention we pay to North Korean Christians. We need to repent and say, 'Lord, forgive us for not being more attentive to our brothers and sisters in the most persecuting country on earth.'

Let us remember those believers who have lived in constant danger for more than 70 years.

And we should pray for North Korea's leaders the way North Korea's underground Christians pray.

I have never encountered a North Korean Christian who has prayed for the regime to be overthrown – never. Not once in 15 years. Underground Christians are praying that Kim Jong-Un will come to know Christ.

Perhaps North Korean Christians know better than the rest of us, that it is not a change of government that will bring peace, but the entry of the Prince of Peace into our hearts.

We should follow their lead and pray not for regime change, but for a change of the heart of the regime. **;**

PLEASE PRAY

- for the Holy Spirit to comfort all North Korean believers who are enduring imprisonment, forced labour and torture
- for wisdom for leaders of the underground church inside North Korea
- that God will change the heart of President Kim Jong-Un



NORTH KOREA

Population: 25.3 million

Capital: Pyongyang

Government type:
Totalitarian dictatorship

Christian population:
100,000 (estimated)

Pray 173

HELP FREE ERITREAN PRISONERS OF FAITH

Use our free materials to pray for Eritrea during this year's International Day of Prayer (IDOP) for the persecuted church.

It's not too late for you and your church to join one of the world's largest prayer events and help to create a huge wave of intercession for our persecuted brothers and sisters inside repressive Eritrea.

Since 2002 the authoritarian regime of President Isaias Afewerki has closed all Evangelical and Pentecostal churches, and has imprisoned thousands of believers.

As part of this year's IDOP, we are calling on supporters to join our #Pray173 campaign to pray urgently for the immediate release of all Christian prisoners of faith in Eritrea, including the 173 who have been detained in appalling conditions for more than 10 years.

IDOP takes place in the UK and Ireland on **Sunday, November 19** – although this year the UK Religious Liberty Commission is calling on churches to dedicate the whole of November to pray for persecuted believers.



The Commission has produced a one-minute video *One Month, One Church, One Prayer* which you can watch at youtube.com/releaseinternational.



A Long Way From Home (9-minute DVD) features the moving testimonies of Eritrean Christians who are now living in refugee camps in northern Ethiopia and shows how your support is helping them today.

FREE RESOURCES

To help you organise a prayer event in your church or prayer group, we've produced these free resources:

Our **PowerPoint presentation** gives brief background information, a corporate prayer and prayer points for individual prisoners. Download from releaseinternational.org/pray173.

Commit to praying for persecuted Christians in Eritrea by using our **Prayer Pledge card**, which also includes a card you can send to the Eritrean authorities to ask for the urgent release of all Christian prisoners of faith. Download from releaseinternational.org/pray173.



Our attractive A2 **World Prayer Map** includes prayer points for persecuted Christians around the world.

Call: 01689 823491 or email info@releaseinternational.org to request Prayer Pledge cards, *A Long Way from Home* DVD and the World Prayer Map for your IDOP event.

HOW TO REMEMBER PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS

by Release's Jack Norman

As we began the #Pray173 campaign to pray for long-term prisoners of faith in Eritrea I wondered how I could remember them according to the instruction in Hebrews 13:3, 'as if I was in prison with them'. How could this work in practice?

Perhaps, I thought, it could be as simple as this: denying myself something that I take for granted.

We may think of fasting in our Christian lives, but for prisoners of faith in Eritrea and around the world they may be forced into fasting as part of their punishment.

The next day I decided to miss lunch – not a big deal you might think – but it was a start and meant that I was thinking about them and remembering to pray for them.

What about other things they may be denied while in prison, freedoms we take for granted such as watching television, or visiting some of our favourite people or places?

From time to time we can also choose to remember persecuted Christians by denying ourselves these things as well.

MORE DVDS TO HELP YOU PRAY

While our main focus for this year's IDOP is Eritrea, you may wish to pray for persecuted Christians in other nations.

These DVDs are free to supporters and include brief topical prayer points relating to different countries. Call 01689 823491 or email us at info@releaseinternational.org to request one today.



NIGERIA

Archbishop Ben Kwashi shares his insights on current challenges facing believers in northern and central Nigeria in our 6-minute film *No Fear*, which you can order free of charge, or watch at youtube.com/releaseinternational.



LAOS

Rejected for Christ (7 min) tells the moving stories of three converts in the Buddhist nation of Laos who are remaining strong in their faith, despite opposition and rejection.



TANZANIA

The Gathering Storm – Tanzania (10 min) features the accounts of believers who are experiencing a new wave of attacks by Islamists, partly prompted by the spiritual 'fire' burning in a number of churches.



KENYA

The Gathering Storm – Kenya (7 min) reports on how the militant group al-Shabaab is targeting Christians.



IRAN/TURKEY

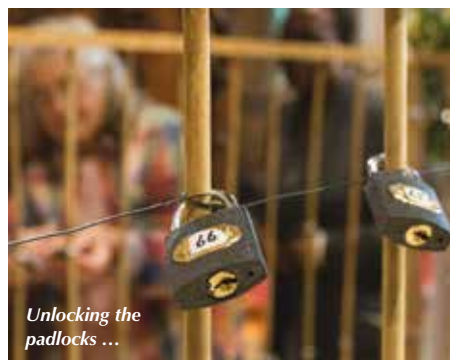
Scattered (10 min) reports on how Christian refugees from Iran have established a thriving church in Turkey and are reaching out to their community. Contains testimonies of church leaders.

Check out our other informative resources at releaseinternational.org/estore



Conference ‘unlocks’ freedom for Christian prisoners in Eritrea

In a symbolic act, Release Women’s recent conference witnessed the removal of more than 170 padlocks from a wooden cage – a call for freedom for Christian prisoners of faith in Eritrea, reports Andrew Boyd.



Unlocking the padlocks ...

‘Eritrea today is one vast prison,’ said Release’s Kate Ward, organiser of the conference.

Entitled *Love Never Fails*, the event was held at St Michael’s Church, Chester Square, London, in October, and marked the 10th anniversary of our Release Women ministry.

Keynote speaker Helen Berhane recounted her experience of being

jailed and tortured for her faith. The gospel singer was thrown into a steel shipping container with no toilet or ventilation. Packed like sardines, the prisoners baked by day and survived the freezing desert nights by huddling together to keep warm.

Inspired by the story of Paul and Silas in the Book of Acts, Helen encouraged herself and her fellow prisoners by singing and speaking about Jesus.

To try to stop her, Helen’s guards took her out and beat her with a baton until she was nearly dead. They told her, ‘*Helen, we know you are teaching prisoners about Jesus, but now you are teaching the guards, too. You must stop.*’

Helen told her torturer: ‘*I will love you to the end.*’ And when her abuser finally gave up trying to break her,



Helen Berhane

she told him: ‘*You have done your job. We have both done our job. We are doing OK.*’

Helen said, ‘*I’m not afraid of those who come to attack us. I pray for them to know Jesus.*’

Be a voice

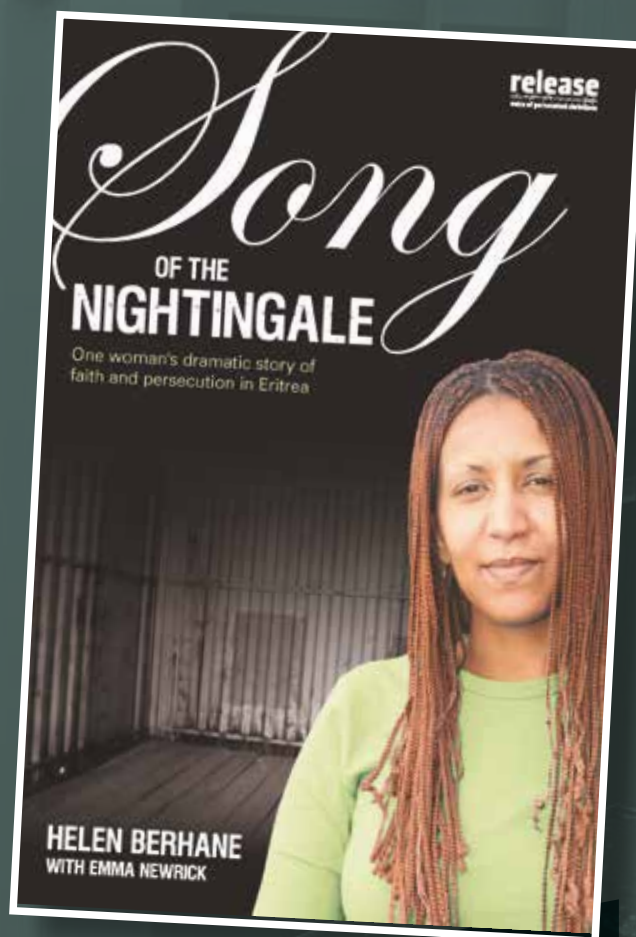
‘Eventually, they sent me home because they didn’t want me to die in prison. Now I travel to be a voice for the voiceless.’

Helen Berhane is now in exile in Denmark. She later wrote in her biography, *Song of the Nightingale*: ‘*If I could sing in prison, imagine what you could do for God’s glory with your freedom.*’

See page 12 for details of our #Pray173 campaign for Eritrea, and the back page for how you can order a copy of Helen’s inspiring testimony *Song of the Nightingale*.

INSPIRING STORY OF TRIUMPHANT FAITH

Eritrean gospel singer Helen Berhane tells the inspiring story of how she was detained for two years because of her Christian faith. Despite brutal beatings and abuse, Helen was able to show Christ's love to her persecutors. A remarkable account of triumphant faith.



Order today for £8 (including P&P) using the attached card, or call: 01689 823491.

release
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BECOME A CHANGE MAKER

You too could be a Change Maker like Hannah! Are you a student (or know one), aged 17-23, who is passionate about praying for and serving persecuted Christians? And passionate about social justice and transformation?

Then please check out our Change Makers mentoring programme at releasepotential.org/change-makers-2017.

'THE BEST EXPERIENCE OF MY LIFE'

Hannah says her visit to Southeast Asia was life-changing!

Change Maker Hannah reports on her amazing visit to meet persecuted Christians in Southeast Asia.

During our trip we met a lot of Christians, who were so on fire for God despite the challenges they face on a daily basis. Many of them were so passionate about spreading the gospel and radiating Christ! Some of them had family who were addicted to drugs, parents who didn't want them because

they are Christians and sick family members. But this doesn't hinder them! They love God so much and they have so little, but they know that God is all they need. This experience put me to shame. I felt ashamed of how much I had that I didn't appreciate and I was ashamed of the freedom I have that I'm

not thankful for; I thank God for this life-changing experience. But it didn't end there!

We visited a hospital and there was a man who had just given his life to Jesus! It's incredible to see how God worked through a bad circumstance to bring people to Him! It was so moving because I have never seen spiritual warfare so physically. One half of the room were giving their lives to the bad spirits and the other half had given their life to Jesus!

This trip gave us all a taste of how Christians live every day; and it gave me a new appreciation for the religious freedom we have in the UK and Ireland! This trip was amazing and we saw God at work in so many ways! Going to Southeast Asia was the best experience of my life. God really changed me and I am so thankful! ,

ORIGAMI STARS

As we decorate our trees and prepare our homes for Christmas, please make a bit of extra room, in your heart and your home, for another person to join you in the festivities. Our decorative Origami Stars each hold the picture and story of a family or an individual who has suffered persecution for their faith in Christ (for example, see pages 6-7). By downloading, making and displaying these star-decorations you are standing in solidarity with your brothers and sisters and remembering their struggles at a time when it is easy to become preoccupied with our own comfort. A great activity for groups (home groups, youth groups, Christian Unions, craft fairs, etc) and individuals. Why not try something different this year and send these stars instead of Christmas cards? Or maybe urge your church to adorn their tree with these reminders of our brothers and sisters who are steadfast and pursue Jesus whatever the cost. Visit www.releasepotential.org/christmas

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POTENTIAL**



SMART-IE IDEA IS SWEET SUCCESS

Siloam Baptist Church, Swansea, found a creative way of raising funds for persecuted Christians by using empty Smarties tubes to collect 20p coins.

In fact their idea proved so popular that they were able to raise a sweet £800 to provide Bibles for our persecuted family.

'I purchased Smarties in their tubes and handed them out to members and friends of the church,' said church representative Janet (pictured). 'One Smarties tube filled with 20p coins is worth £12.'

'We are so richly blessed with an abundance of Bibles that we wanted to pass on this blessing to our persecuted family.'

MUSICAL EVENING RAISES FUNDS TO THE TUNE OF £912

'At Woodlands Evangelical Church in Derby we are blessed with an abundance of very competent musicians including pianists, orchestral players and vocalists,' said church representative Glenys.

They agreed to perform a concert to raise funds for Release, featuring a variety of music from classical to jazz – along with some amusing readings – so there was something for everyone.

'We had a buffet supper and everyone thoroughly enjoyed the evening,' said Glenys. 'Many were already asking if this could be an annual event.'

'It was well worth the effort since we raised £912 for Release. I trust it will inspire others to do something similar.'

Thank you to our volunteers Janet and Glenys and their churches for these fantastic efforts which will directly benefit our persecuted Christian family. If you have creative ideas for fundraising that you'd like to share, please email us at info@releaseinternational.org.

JOIN OUR TEAM

Release depends on a terrific team of church representatives who keep their churches informed about the needs of persecuted Christians around the world. If you feel that God is calling you to serve in this way, our Volunteer Co-ordinator Gene would love to hear from you.

Call: 01689 823491 or email info@releaseinternational.org.

release & your church



Invite a Release speaker to your church

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

Anthony

Central England & Wales
01234 271855

Ben

North of England
07969 361557

Imtiaz

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THE WORD

‘Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.’ Luke 6:37

Release partner Magid shares how God’s grace is enabling Iraqi refugees who have lost everything to forgive their persecutors.

POWER TO FORGIVE

Abu Marrym lived in Bakhdida, near Mosul in northern Iraq. Three years ago he fled from Islamic State terrorists with his wife and two daughters, aged nine and ten years old.

They had to leave everything, apart from a plastic bag filled with a few of their clothes. The family walked for many miles trying to find a car or other vehicle to take them to a safe place to spend the night.

Abu told me how he was confused and scared. He looked at his wife and children with tears in his eyes, asking God what they had done to deserve this.

‘We have never done anything bad to these people, but they drove us from our home,’ he said.

It took them six hours of walking before they found safety.

By the grace of God, after all the trouble and persecution they had gone through, they eventually arrived in Erbil, in the Kurdistan region of northern Iraq. There they were guided to a refugee camp.

Answered prayer

Living in a tent, the family endured cold winters and scorching heat for three years. All the time Abu prayed to God, asking that his family could one day go back home.

Then, just recently, the Lord answered his prayer and Abu and his family returned to their house after it had

been recaptured from Islamic State. What he saw brought tears to his eyes.

Everything had been destroyed by fire. He went in to look for any photos or belongings that might have survived. All he could find in the midst of the rubble was a cross that used to hang on the wall, and his Bible, now in tatters.

He and his wife sat in one of the rooms and they started praying together, with their two young girls, asking God to forgive the people who had destroyed their home and thanking Him that they were alive and healthy.

God gave them the grace they needed at that moment to forgive their persecutors.

Jesus says in Luke 6:37: ‘Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.’

That act of forgiveness released them from bitterness and judgment.

In fact now this very same couple have joined our team and are now taking the gospel to communities which have persecuted Christians. God has enabled them to love those who oppose them and to share the message of forgiveness with them.

Please pray

Please will you pray that God will help Abu Marrym and his family to rebuild their lives – and to keep living in the power of forgiveness.

INSPIRING FAITH



‘Christians, while suffering at the hands of enemies, love them. They can do so because they have before their eyes the great innocent Sufferer – Jesus.’

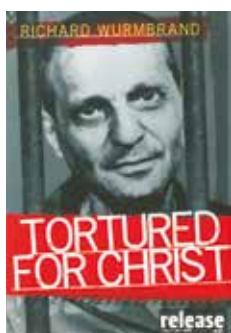
Pastor Richard Wurmbrand was imprisoned for 14 years in communist Romania in the 1950s and 1960s. In 1968 he inspired the founding of Release, which today continues his ministry to serve persecuted Christians around the world in the name of Jesus.

FIFTIETH
ANNIVERSARY

DON'T ABANDON THEM!

Richard Wurmbrand's
passionate plea on behalf
of persecuted Christians
remains as vital as ever.

Next year marks the 50th anniversary of Release – the ministry inspired by Romanian pastor Richard Wurmbrand who in the 1950s and 1960s was imprisoned and tortured because of his Christian faith.



That experience, powerfully recorded in Richard's autobiography *Tortured for Christ*, urged a generation of believers throughout the UK and Ireland to support their persecuted Christian family around the world.

Throughout 2018 we will be remembering his passionate plea, 'Don't abandon them!' through a variety of local and national events – with plenty of opportunities for you and your church to take part. Details will be given in following editions of this magazine.

We will be remembering the eight pleas that Richard made on behalf of persecuted Christians (see right).



WURMBRAND'S EIGHT PLEAS ON BEHALF OF PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS:



PLEA 1: Give us the **tools** we need.



PLEA 2: **Protest** publicly.



PLEA 3: **Pray** for persecutors, that they may be saved.



PLEA 4: **Bibles** are urgently needed.



PLEA 5: **Support** the fruitful, secret ministry of persecuted Christians.



PLEA 6: Broadcast the **gospel**.



PLEA 7: Help Christians in **prison**, those who are martyred and their families.



PLEA 8: **Ask** your church leaders what is being done to help your persecuted brothers and sisters.

Details of our 50th Anniversary activities and events will be given in this magazine and on our website releaseinternational.org.

50
YEARS
1968-2018

LEAVE A LEGACY OF LOVE

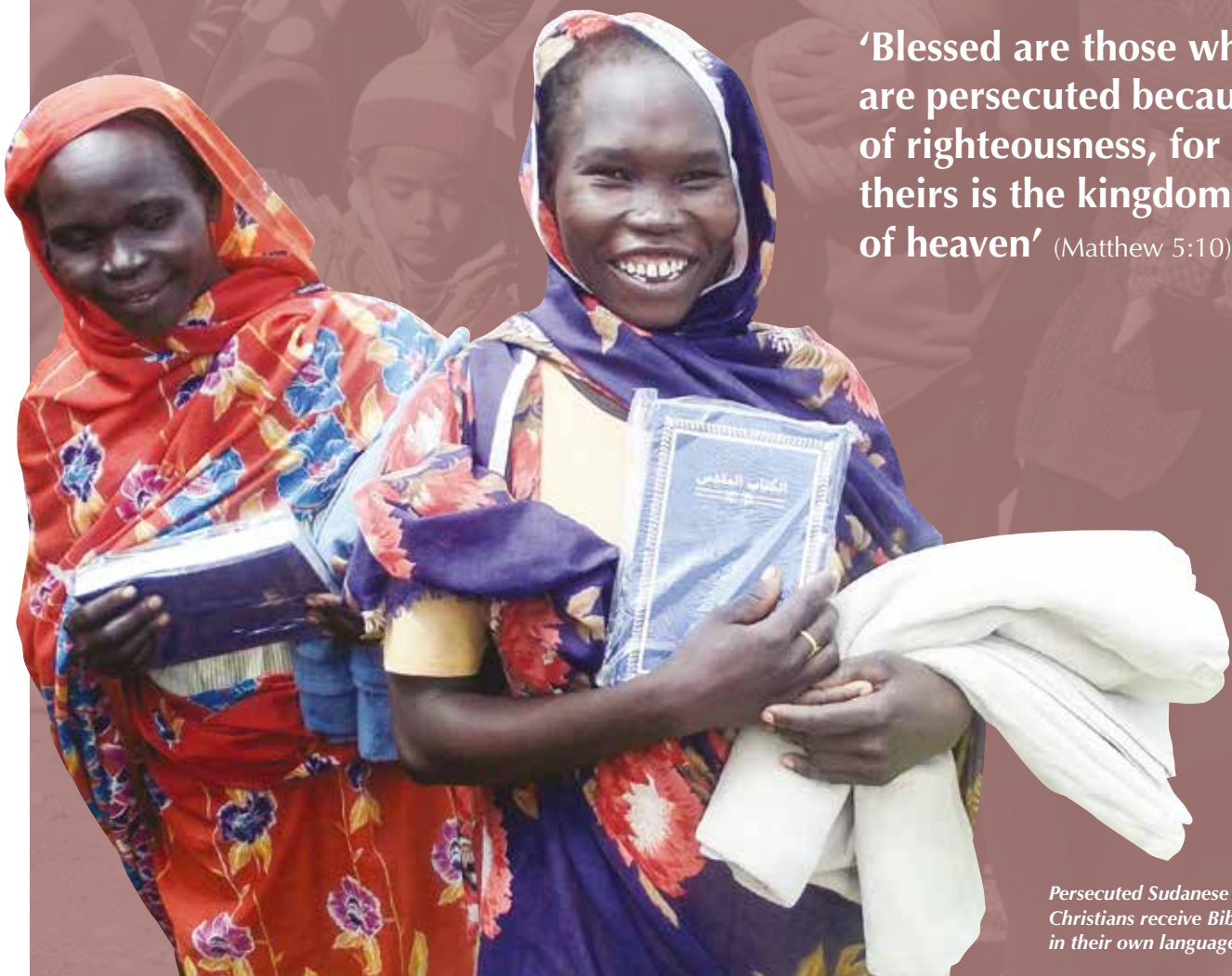
release
INTERNATIONAL
voice of persecuted christians

Remembering those who are persecuted in your Will is vital to help Release International continue supporting Christian families in need worldwide.

If you are thinking about making or updating your Will, please contact Paul Jones to request our legacy brochure, or to discuss how your legacy could be used.

Telephone: 01689 823491 or email: pjones@releaseinternational.org

**'Blessed are those who
are persecuted because
of righteousness, for
theirs is the kingdom
of heaven'** (Matthew 5:10)



*Persecuted Sudanese
Christians receive Bibles
in their own language.*

PRAYERSHIELD

NOV / DEC 2017



NOVEMBER 2017

INDIA

Heavenly Father,

Thank you for sending your precious Son, Jesus, to drive away the darkness in our world and spread the light of your unfailing love.

Please strengthen my brothers and sisters who are suffering for your name's sake. Remind them, Lord, that they are your ambassadors, that through their witness you are calling out to the lost, inviting them to be reconciled and restored to you (2 Corinthians 5:20).

Renew their vision, loving Father, light their path and overwhelm them with your love.

Amen

WEDNESDAY 1: Praise God for the courage of Pastor 'Joseph' and his friend 'Walter': they continue to share the gospel even after they were beaten by a 50-strong mob. Arrested on suspicion of 'forcible conversion', they led several people to Christ in custody.

THURSDAY 2: Praise God for 90-year-old 'Jatya' who has continued to evangelise in his Indian village despite suffering severe beatings on eight occasions.

FRIDAY 3: Extremists raided a house-church service which Pastor Harjot Singh Sethi was leading in Dabli Rathan village, Rajasthan state, and beat him with steel rods and

sticks. Apparently intimidated, police arrested only a few of the attackers.

SATURDAY 4: Pray for Christians in Jharkhand state which recently became the sixth in India to adopt an 'anti-conversion' law.

SUNDAY 5: Alphons Kannanthanam from Kerala recently became the first Christian MP to be appointed to Narendra Modi's cabinet. Pray that God will use Alphons to speak up for religious freedoms and to uphold the values of His kingdom.

MONDAY 6: Christians in India believe the Government has tried to devalue Christmas by establishing 'Good Governance Day' on December 25 to mark the birthday of a former prime minister and BJP leader. Pray in faith that increasing numbers of Indians will celebrate Jesus' birth, and that publicity over this move will actually make Indians more aware of Jesus Christ.

NORTH KOREA

TUESDAY 7: Our brothers and sisters in North Korea live under a regime which considers their faith an act of sedition. Pray that they will see God's love and faithfulness even in small, everyday things.

'FROM THE END OF THE EARTH I CALL TO YOU WHEN MY HEART IS FAINT. LEAD ME TO THE ROCK THAT IS HIGHER THAN I.'

PSALM 61:2

WEDNESDAY 8: Release partner Dr Eric Foley says that state surveillance of Christians in North Korea has never been higher. Pray that our North Korean family will know true freedom in Christ through the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:17).

THURSDAY 9: Dr Eric Foley believes that almost a third of the 100,000 Christians in North Korea are in

concentration camps. Pray that God will strengthen His people – and set them free.

FRIDAY 10: Praise God that North Koreans are giving their lives to Him, fully aware of the cost. Many have never known life without persecution.

SATURDAY 11: North Korea has been engaged in dangerous sabre-rattling with nations such as the US. Pray that God uses this international crisis for His glory, to make it possible for North Korean Christians to worship freely.

SUNDAY 12: Stand with North Korea's underground Christians in praying that their country's leader, Kim Jong-Un, will come to know Christ.

EGYPT

MONDAY 13: Continue to pray for the many Coptic Christian young women who have been kidnapped, forcibly converted to Islam and married to Muslims. Kidnappers are reportedly paid for each woman they seize. Such abductions are reportedly at an all-time high.

TUESDAY 14: 'Mary', aged 16, was kidnapped from Balansora, Minya province, in June by a young man she was dating. Thank God that police found her after 90 days and restored her to her family.

WEDNESDAY 15: Thank God that Christians in Ezbat Al-Forn village in Minya have

been able to reopen their church after it was forced to close 'for security reasons' following complaints from local Muslims in August.

THURSDAY 16: Police provided security for fear of reprisals from locals when the church in Ezbat Al-Forn reopened (above). Praise God that some local Muslims visited the church to congratulate them on reopening.

FRIDAY 17: Pray for our brothers and sisters in Minya province, the scene of many sectarian attacks in Egypt in recent years. Many churches have been closed. About 70 villages and hamlets in Minya have no church or place for Christian worship.

SATURDAY 18: Pray for improved relations between Christians and Muslims in Ezbat El-Sheikh Nageim village in Minya. Muslims rioted after two Christians were accused of 'insulting Islam' in social media comments about a bus attack in which 28 Copts died.

ERITREA

SUNDAY 19: On the International Day of Prayer (IDOP) for the persecuted church, let's pray that our precious brothers and sisters in Eritrea and around the world will be comforted and encouraged to know they are becoming more like Jesus by sharing in His suffering.

MONDAY 20: Praise God for the way that persecuted Christians like gospel singer Helen Berhane (pictured) who have fled from Eritrea are using their testimony to spread awareness of persecution and challenge the Western church to greater boldness in spreading the good news.

TUESDAY 21: There are now an estimated 400 prisoners of faith in Eritrea. Numbers have increased sharply in recent months, due to a crackdown on churches which began in May. More than 50 children were left without one or more parents as a result of mass arrests.

WEDNESDAY 22: Ask God to give a fresh revelation of His unfailing love and faithfulness to the many prisoners of faith being held in inhumane conditions in Eritrea's prisons. One of the prisoners arrested in May,

Fikadu Debesay from Adi Quala, has already died in custody.

THURSDAY 23: The church in Eritrea has been under intense pressure since 2002. Pray that God will multiply His people in this East African nation, and raise up strong and wise leaders for them.

FRIDAY 24: Please continue to pray for President Isaias Afewerki, that God will touch his heart and bring him to repentance. He is originally from Eritrea's mainly Christian highlands.

PAKISTAN

SATURDAY 25: Ask God to sustain and strengthen His people in Pakistan, amid severe persecution and relentless discrimination. Pray in faith that Pakistan will start to champion and uphold religious liberties.

SUNDAY 26: Pray for justice for 18-year-old 'Alian' from Punjab who suffered a brutal sexual assault. Local police were reluctant to investigate and allegedly tried to pressure Alian and his family to drop the case.

MONDAY 27: Sharoon Masih, 17, was killed on his second day at secondary school – apparently after classmates objected to him drinking from a glass used by Muslim students. Sharoon was the only Christian in his class. Ask God to comfort his family.

TUESDAY 28: Ask the Holy Spirit to touch the hearts of Sharoon's classmates, their parents and teachers, and all in the community affected by his death. Pray that they will reject extremism and intolerance.

WEDNESDAY 29: 'Simon', a teenager from Punjab who scraped together a living by recycling discarded objects, was attacked, tortured and arrested after a fellow recycler who bore him a grudge made false accusations of 'blasphemy' against him. Pray for Simon's release and his protection.

THURSDAY 30: Pray for Nadeem Masih, 24, from Gujrat, Punjab, who has been sentenced to death for 'blasphemy' after being convicted of sending messages defaming Islam's prophet, Mohammad. His friends say he has been falsely accused.

Former prisoner of faith Helen Berhane from Eritrea uses her testimony to mobilise the church.





Elizabeth Tumba and family are rebuilding their lives after a Boko Haram attack.

DECEMBER 2017 NIGERIA

FRIDAY 1: Ask God to bind up Nigeria's broken-hearted. Elizabeth Tumba (pictured with her children) lost everything when *Boko Haram* destroyed her home and murdered her husband. The family are receiving support from a Release associate ministry.

SATURDAY 2: Pray for wisdom and firm resolve for the Government in restoring peace to Nigeria's Middle Belt where mainly Muslim Hausa-Fulani herdsman regularly attack Christians.

SUNDAY 3: Pray that peace will be restored to Jos, capital of central Plateau state, after inter-religious violence broke out in September. Conflict between Christian Igbo and Hausa Muslims in south-east

Nigeria reportedly inspired attacks on Christians in Jos.

MONDAY 4: Pray for the release of Pastor 'Bulus', a Christian Fulani who turned his back on Islam. Angered by his conversion, his family made false accusations of theft against him, which landed him in jail.

CHINA

TUESDAY 5: Chinese officials recently launched a crackdown on churches across the country, banning worship in unregistered churches and trying to stop Christianity being taught to children. Pray that our family in China will remain steadfast in their faith.

WEDNESDAY 6: In Guangzhou, Guangdong province, police visited members of unregistered

churches in their homes to warn them not to attend worship services. Pray for wisdom for these Christians.

THURSDAY 7: In Wenzhou, Zhejiang province, children have been banned from attending church and congregations ordered to cancel all activities involving teenagers.

FRIDAY 8: Churches in Henan were forbidden to organise young people's summer camps. State-approved churches there now have to seek approval for all large-scale religious activities.

SATURDAY 9: Members of a house church in Ezhou, Hubei province, were recently beaten by government-hired thugs. The church has been meeting outdoors since January when officials confiscated its chairs.

SUNDAY 10: Ask God to protect Christians in Jiangsu province who have been investigated over their connections to churches overseas.

MONDAY 11: Chinese officials barred Pastor Wang Yi from travelling to Hong Kong to attend a Christian training conference in September. Pray that God will make a way for Chinese Christians to attend such gatherings: travel restrictions are tightening.

TUESDAY 12: Pastors Su Tianfu and Yang Hua were refused a hearing to contest a £800,000 fine against

Huoshi Church in Guizhou, for receiving 'illegal income' through members' giving. Yang is in jail for 'divulging state secrets'; Su faces the same charge.

WEDNESDAY 13: Pray for justice for Christian Bai Fengju and his family from Henan: an official recently threatened to have them killed if they harvested crops in their field. Part of their land was forcibly confiscated last year to build a road leading to a Buddhist temple.

SUDAN

THURSDAY 14: Government officials have ordered elders in the Sudanese Church of Christ (SCOC) to hand over the church leadership to a government-appointed committee. Their aim is apparently to sell off church property. Pray both these plans will be thwarted.

FRIDAY 15: Seven SCOC church leaders in Omdurman were arrested and held for

several hours, before being released on bail. Their arrests have been linked to their refusal to hand over church leadership to the government's committee

SATURDAY 16: Among the church leaders arrested in Omdurman recently was Pastor Kowa Shamaal, who was previously arrested and charged alongside Czech aid worker Petr Jasek. Kowa now faces new charges, including 'spying'.

SUNDAY 17: Mahjoub Abotrin, an elder of the Sudanese Church of Christ SCOC in Omdurman, was taken in for questioning in September. Pray for wisdom and courage for him and his colleagues.

MONDAY 18: Continue to pray for Christians in the Nuba Mountains area in southern Sudan (see photo). Release contacts report that churches continue to meet for worship, despite continued bombardments by the Sudanese military.

TUESDAY 19: Praise God for the words of Pastor Matta who works in the Nuba Mountains and who says: 'Because of persecution, because of hatred, it made more Muslims... open to hear the gospel.'

IRAQI CHRISTIANS

WEDNESDAY 20: Pray for the many Christians who have fled Iraq because of persecution and who are now being cared for by Release's partner ministry in Lebanon. Most have poor living conditions and rely on handouts.

THURSDAY 21: Ayad's daughter was seriously injured in a bomb attack, probably targeting their Christian home in Iraq. Militants' threats forced them to flee to Kurdistan and they now live in Lebanon. Praise God for the way he has filled this family with His joy (see *Release*, pages 6-7).

FRIDAY 22: Ayad's wife, Nada, had a fall and broke five vertebrae in her back in Kurdistan (above). Praise God, that when their church gathered in their home to pray for her, she was healed.

SATURDAY 23: Dhia and his wife, Najran, (pictured overleaf) escaped two car bomb attacks outside their shop in Baghdad. He believes he was the target because he is a Christian. Thank God for His protection over this family, who now live in Lebanon.



Christians in Sudan's Nuba Mountains continue their worship, despite the threat of attack.

PRAYERS FOR CHRISTMAS

CHRISTMAS EVE: Pray that the suffering of our Christian brothers and sisters, including our Iraqi family, will reveal more of Jesus to their communities. Pray that the light of Jesus shining through them will draw many to Him.

CHRISTMAS DAY: As we celebrate the birth of Jesus and the new life we have in Him, let's pray that our persecuted family will be filled with Christ's love, joy and peace.

BOXING DAY: Pray that God will make 'all grace abound' to our persecuted family so that they will have all they need for every circumstance and 'abound in every good work' (2 Corinthians 9:8, ESV).

WEDNESDAY 27: Praise God for the way that Iraqi refugees' faith has grown strong through persecution. Thank God for the freedom that refugees are now enjoying in Lebanon where they can study His word.

THURSDAY 28: Pray for the persecuted families who will receive food, medicines and toiletries through Release's Christmas appeal for refugees. Pray especially that they will know God's love and faithfulness through Release's local partner.

FRIDAY 29: Praise God that, through His grace, He is enabling Iraqi refugees who have lost everything to forgive their persecutors. Abu Marrym and his family fled Bakhdida, near Mosul, for Kurdistan, three years ago (see *Release*, page 18). God has helped them forgive those who destroyed their home.

SATURDAY 30: Abu and his wife now work with our local partner in Kurdistan taking the gospel to communities which have persecuted Christians. Pray that their powerful witness, forgiveness and grace will change hard hearts.

SUNDAY 31: The only Christians who remain in many parts of Iraq are the poor and elderly. On the eve of a new year, let's pray that Christian refugees across the Middle East will return home soon.



Iraqi refugees Dhia and Najran enjoy a letter of encouragement from a Release supporter.

Dear Lord,

Thank you that you are with my persecuted brothers and sisters and you never forsake them.

Your eyes 'range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed' to you (2 Corinthians 16:9).

Give courage to those who are afraid, hope to those who cannot see a future and peace to those who mourn. May they find true freedom and joy in you, Lord.

Amen

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Names in inverted commas have been changed to protect identities.

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