

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL

OCT-DEC 2020

voice

of Persecuted Christians



**HELPING
NIGERIA'S
STRUGGLING
BELIEVERS**

*News, stories and prayer requests
from persecuted Christians around the world*



Welcome

by Paul Robinson, CEO

**Thank you for
your support
during these
difficult times**

There is no doubt that today the Covid-19 pandemic has increased the pressures facing our persecuted family in many restricted nations

In some cases, we know that repressive governments have deliberately exploited the crisis to further attack Christian churches.

That's why we really appreciate your continued giving and praying during these difficult days. In particular, as you can read on page 20, your fantastic response to our recent appeal has meant that persecuted believers – in a number of desperate situations – have been given vital help.

As one partner in Ethiopia told us: 'May the grace of the Lord multiply in you. We want to thank you for all your support.'

In this edition we focus on the specific needs of the families of Christian martyrs in nations such as **Nigeria** (page 6), **Sri Lanka** (page 10) and **India** (page 12) – and how your support is making a real difference in the name of Jesus.

Now, more than ever, persecuted believers need our prayers – so please encourage your church and friends to take part in this year's **International Day of Prayer for the persecuted church (IDOP)**, the focus of which this year is an exciting, live social media event on November 15 (see page 18).



Please check out the enclosed catalogue of our Christmas cards and gifts – every order directly benefits persecuted Christians.

Christmas 2020
www.releaseinternational.org

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL
VOICE
of Persecuted Christians



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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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Registered with
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Faith under fire



Remember Alimujiang

Uyghur Christian Alimujiang Yimiti was sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment for allegedly leaking 'state secrets to a foreign individual' in August 2009. The conviction was based on two private conversations between Alimujiang and an American friend – but there was no evidence to suggest these included sensitive information. Alimujiang is a peace-loving and upstanding Uyghur Chinese citizen. Formerly a follower of Islam, he has been a Christian since 1995.

• **Please keep praying for Alimujiang's release from prison.**

**Sign up to
Release**



Continuing pressure on China's Early Rain Church



Pastor Wang Yi and his wife Jiang Rong.

Jiang Rong, wife of Early Rain Covenant Church founder Wang Yi, remains under house arrest – despite being freed from prison on bail last June.

The couple were arrested in December 2018, along with some 100 church members – and their church building in Chengdu, Sichuan, confiscated. One year later Pastor Wang was sentenced to nine years' imprisonment for alleged

'subversion of state power' and 'illegal business operations'.

Today Jiang Rong continues to be kept under house arrest with her young son Joshua, who is reportedly being taken daily by police car to a Communist Party school for 're-education' – brainwashing.

According to a contact of Release: *'Jiang Rong has been isolated from the world, the Chinese authorities have barred her from interacting with her family, brothers and sisters of the church, and friends.'* This isolation is causing her considerable distress.

Read more about China's underground church on page 14.

• **Pray that Jiang Rong will soon be released from house arrest, and that her husband will be freed from prison.**



Hong Kong restrictions will impact mainland churches

The Chinese Government's new national security legislation, imposed on semi-autonomous Hong Kong in June, is likely to lead to increasing restrictions on the underground church in mainland China, warns Release's partner Bob Fu of China Aid.

'There are 1,400 churches in Hong Kong, which has been a real hub to support persecuted churches in China,' he said. 'After the National Security Law, all this will be in danger – certainly there won't be any Bible smuggling from Hong Kong.'

Bob Fu also fears that the future of many theological colleges in Hong Kong, which to date have provided extensive training to Christians in both underground and state-sanctioned churches throughout China, will now be in jeopardy.

The new security law will also severely restrict charitable activities of Christian organisations and denominations in Hong Kong – especially where this has relied on help from agencies outside China. Such support, viewed by the Government as 'collusion' with foreign powers, is likely to be curtailed, he says.

• **Pray for Christians and Christian organisations in Hong Kong as they cope with these new government restrictions.**

Listen to Susanna, wife of abducted pastor Raymond Koh



Don't miss out on our latest audio podcasts:

- **Malaysia** (23 mins) Podcast host Sarah speaks to **Susanna**, wife of Pastor Raymond Koh who was abducted in February 2017. Listen in to find out what kind of man Raymond is, what happened to him and how Susanna has learned to show grace towards those responsible for his abduction. See page 21 for details of our online petition to **Release Raymond**.
- **Iran** (23 mins) Hear the powerful testimony of former prisoner of faith **Ebrahim Firouzi**, currently serving an extended period of internal exile in south-east Iran.
- **Sudan** (26 mins) **Petr Jasek** of our associate ministry Voice of the Martyrs USA recalls his 445 days' imprisonment in Sudan in 2016-17 – sometimes alongside hardened ISIS terrorists. See details of Petr's inspiring new book *Imprisoned with ISIS* on page 23.

Our topical *Voice* podcasts are available from releaseinternational.org/ podcast or via your favourite podcast app.

BIBLE MINISTRY TO NORTH KOREA UNDER THREAT



Since the early years of Release, our associate ministry Voice of the Martyrs Korea, based in Seoul, has been sending helium-filled balloons containing Bible portions into neighbouring North Korea – one of the most repressive nations in the world.

In recent years this unique ministry has become more sophisticated, using large weather balloons (pictured), complete with GPS tracking and computer modelling, to ensure that they reached their intended destination.

'We stand accused in our own country as criminals'

However, these efforts have now become a point of contention with leaders of the South Korean Government who are seeking to appease demands from the

dictatorial regime of Kim Jong Un in North Korea.



Dr Eric Foley

The Rev Drs Eric and Hyun Sook Foley are the co-founders of Voice of the Martyrs Korea. Eric is currently facing possible criminal charges and VOMK itself is under

government investigation, solely due to the balloon-launching work.

The Foleys recently wrote: *'We stand accused in our own country as criminals, and we do so alongside our North Korean Christian brothers and sisters.'*

• **Please pray for the Foleys and VOM Korea at this difficult time and that this important Bible ministry will be able to continue.**

Christian prisoners released in Eritrea

There are reports from Eritrea that the government has released 26 Christian prisoners of faith, and hopes are rising that more could follow.

A trusted contact of Release International says the government has just set free 26 prisoners, most of whom have been behind bars for more than ten years. They have yet to be named. There are believed to be 19 men and seven women, who were jailed at Mai Serwa prison, close to the capital Asmara. They were released on Thursday September 3.

There are indications that other Christian prisoners at the jail have been informed they could soon be released. This follows the release of 22 Methodist prisoners in July from another prison, mainly women and children.

There are believed to be around 500 Christian prisoners of faith in Eritrea, many imprisoned for indefinite terms under appalling conditions.

'Our prayers are that this may signal a change of heart in a regime which outlawed many churches in 2002 and has been persecuting and imprisoning Christians ever since,' said Release Chief Executive Paul Robinson.

• **Please pray that more Christian prisoners in Eritrea will be released soon.**



Nigeria: the killings continue

Covid-19 may have stopped much of the world in its tracks, but in Nigeria's north and central-belt areas Islamist militants continue to attack and kill Christians. Release's Kenneth Harrod spoke to one of our partners there who helps care for survivors.



Pastor Matthew Tagwi was martyred in April.

Back in January the recently ordained Matthew Tagwi was posted to Nsah village in Plateau state to begin his pastoral ministry. With him was his 27-year-old pregnant wife Rose and their two daughters, Joy, aged three, and Esther, six.

Three months later, on April 6, Rose travelled to Kwall for her monthly antenatal check-up. When she said farewell to her husband, it was the last time she saw him.

That day a group of militant Fulani herdsmen attacked the village.

Matthew was one of those shot dead. Because of Covid-19 restrictions – and fears of Fulani herdsmen returning – he was buried the following day. Rose, whose uncle travelled to Kwall to break the tragic news to her, was not even able to attend the funeral.

Abah Yoki, aged 65, survived the attack, although two of his sons were killed. He described to our partner what happened that evening. Standing outside his home at about 7.30pm, and seeing some movement in the bushes around his house, he

cried out, 'Who is there?', at which point gunshots rang out. Abah fell to the ground.

'I laid down quietly as the Fulani, about ten of them, speaking in Fulfulde, went into my house. They shot dead two of my sons, Aduh (who was 30) and Ishaku (aged 11);' he said. 'Then they headed straight to Pastor Matthew Tagwi's house. They called him out and I heard more gunshots. Then the men came back to where I was lying and walked away into the darkness.'



Joseph Maza, 80, lost his wife, son and brother when militants attacked his community in April.

'I am pained, pained to my soul'

Two days later Fulani militants attacked another community, Ntiriku, about 15 kilometres west of Jos, the Plateau state capital. After the attack, our partner spoke to 80-year-old Joseph Maza, who was deep in grief.

'I am pained, pained to my soul. My wife and son and brother were killed last night.' Joseph then stood up and walked away, shaking his head and trying to conceal his tears. He said no more. *'In this community it is cultural for an older man not to cry in public,'* our partner told me.

It has been estimated that over the past two decades Islamist Fulani herdsmen have killed as many as 19,000 people in Nigeria.

So far this year, despite lockdowns and curfews imposed in response to the pandemic, more than 300 Christians



Villagers mourn in Ntiriku, Plateau state.

have been killed in Kaduna state and another 100 in parts of Plateau state. The last week of July and beginning of August alone saw attacks on 17 villages, which left more than 75 people dead, and a further 5,000 displaced from their homes.

Our partner commented: *'We have seen well-planned, well-orchestrated, systematic attacks on Christian communities that have nothing to do with a fight for grazing lands.'*

'These attacks are driven by an Islamist ideology, aimed at destroying "the infidels" and, in many places, displacing them from their communities, while the Government, by design or omission, turns a blind eye to the carnage.'

'The politically-correct narrative – which is easier for the international community to swallow, and which suits the Nigerian Government well – is to blame desertification and climate change.'

He added: *'We ask for prayers for the persecuted churches and for pastors who are faced with the challenge of working to prove God's love in these tragedies, while they equally try to stay alive.'*



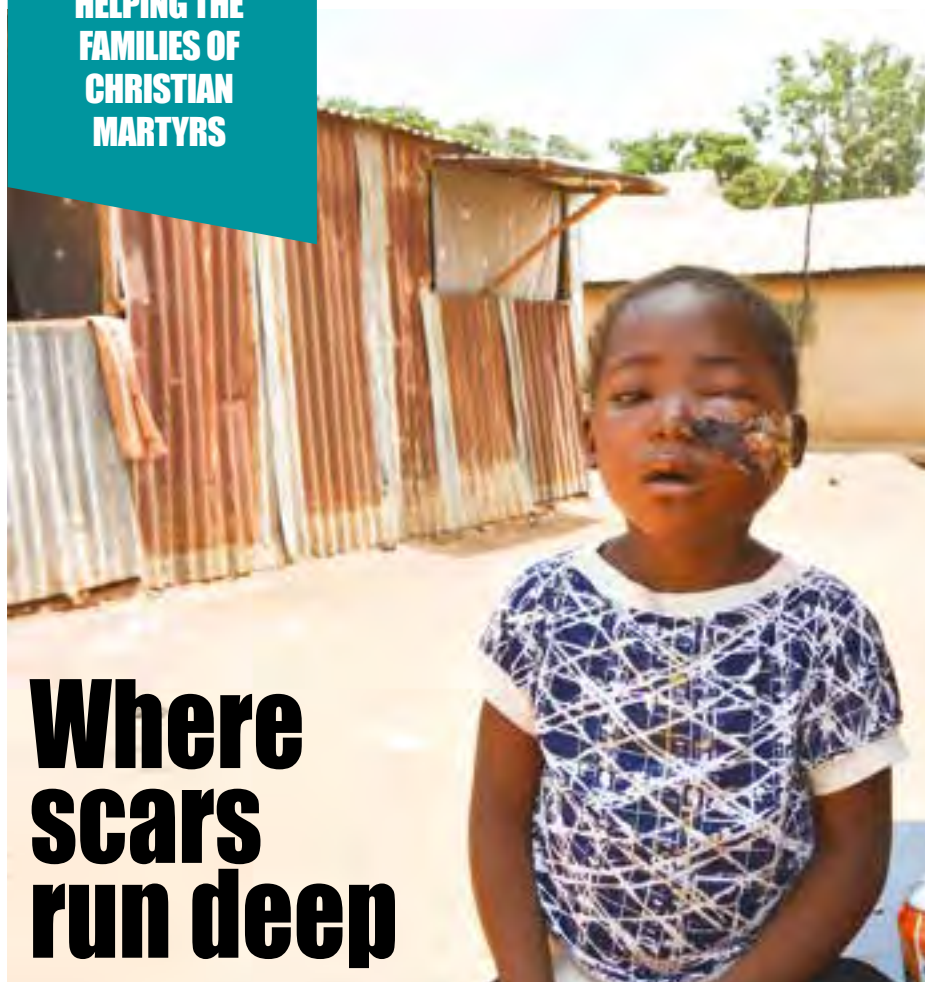
Rose, widow of Pastor Matthew.

Signs of hope

Rose Tagwi, suddenly a pastor's widow, has since given birth to her third daughter. She named her Patience because, she said, she is determined to wait patiently on the Lord for His strength and to see His purpose in her loss.

Responding to the martyrdom of her husband she said: *'The evil men think killing a pastor will stop the gospel. Nothing will stop the gospel of Christ.'*

'My prayer is that his killers will get to know the Jesus I know. I do forgive them and will pray that the Lord saves their souls.'



Where scars run deep

The on-going violent attacks on Christian communities in Nigeria leave lasting scars – both physical and emotional.

Stella, who is about five years old, was rescued last year from a village in southern Kaduna state, barely clinging to life, after an overnight attack by militant Fulani herdsmen. She had been struck in the face with a machete.

Our partner, who is now looking after Stella, said: *'How she survived through the night with the deep machete cut, from the bridge of her nose to the back of her ear, can only be described as a miracle.'*

It is reckoned that about 71 people were killed in the attack. Many died in hospital from their wounds. Around 259 houses were destroyed.

Our partner continued: *'When I met Stella two days after the attack, blood was still coming out of her right ear. The wound was stitched just enough to stop most of the bleeding.'*

'Stella said the Fulani killed her father and grandparents. She mimicked the sound of the gunshot, raising her arm

to demonstrate holding a rifle and then swung her arm to demonstrate the cutting with a machete and how she, too, was struck on her face. She didn't remember anything more.'

No one knew what happened to Stella's mother. Many charred bodies were found in burnt-out buildings and it was assumed that her mother was among them.

Our partner was able to have Stella transferred to a larger hospital in Jos for treatment. She has since started school, but the past lives with her.

'The new challenge is that sometimes children taunt her for the scar on her face,' our partner said.

Find out more about the pressures facing Christians in Nigeria from key partner Hassan John, who will be speaking live online to Release supporters in November. See page 21 for details.



Population: 214 million

Capital: Abuja

Government: Federal presidential republic

Religion: Christian 51%, Muslim 45%, Other 4%

Sources: World Factbook, Operation World.

RELEASE'S MINISTRY IN NIGERIA



Release has helped persecuted Christians in Nigeria by providing:

- training and help for persecuted pastors
- care and counselling for the victims of trauma
- support for families displaced by violence
- support for the families of martyrs



Please help the families of Christian martyrs

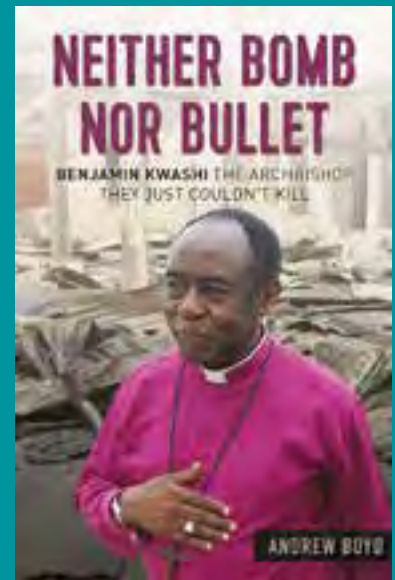
In Nigeria and around the world Release supports the families of those martyred for their faith in Jesus Christ. At times of violent attack and crisis, your gift can show persecuted believers that they are not on their own.

Your gift can be used to provide:

- practical support: the death of the breadwinner often leaves families struggling to survive
- livelihood support: enabling families to start small businesses to earn an income
- pastoral care and encouragement

Please make a gift today: your support can make all the difference to a vulnerable Christian family.

- use the attached card
- give securely online at releaseinternational.org
- call: 01689 823491



'Three times they've tried to kill me. They've come close. But each time just makes me more determined to live my life to the full for Jesus.'

This engaging biography of our partner Archbishop Benjamin Kwashi, by Release's Andrew Boyd, draws us right into the battle raging today for the heart of Nigeria. Highly recommended.

Neither Bomb nor Bullet costs £13 (including P&P) and can be ordered using the enclosed form, from releaseinternational.org or by calling 01689 823491.



'WE CAN AND MUST HELP THEM'

Pastor Richard Wurmbrand, who inspired the founding of Release in 1968, witnessed the horrors of imprisonment, torture and killing of Christians in communist Romania during the 1950s and 1960s.

After his release from jail in 1965, he wrote: *'More martyrs are being made all the time. Though they go to their graves and to their reward, their families live in horribly tragic conditions. We can and must help them.'*

Richard's powerful vision to support persecuted Christians around the world – including the families of Christian martyrs – remains at the heart of Release's ministry today.



BOMB VICTIMS NEED OUR PRAYERS

More than 250 people were killed and 500 injured when militants bombed churches and luxury hotels in Sri Lanka at Easter 2019. Survivors of the attacks are making steady progress, but still need our prayers, writes Release's Linda.

Like us in the UK and Ireland, Sri Lanka has been in lockdown due to Covid-19.

Despite this, our partner is working hard for our family in Christ. Their aim is to equip the church, advocate for justice and peace, and build resilient Christian communities.

While in lockdown we missed being able to celebrate Easter in our churches. In Sri Lanka, however, Easter is also the time when many

recall the devastating bomb attacks on three churches in 2019.

Thanks to your ongoing support, our partner is able to continue to help many Christians whose lives have been devastated by the bombings.

Medical care in Sri Lanka is very limited, so our partners have helped to pay for many urgent medical needs – including life-saving surgery.

Sara, for example, was teaching in the Sunday school at Zion Church,

Batticaloa, when the explosion happened. She was hit in the head by several shards of metal, which narrowly missed her brain. She suffered damage to her skull, which required plastic surgery, and was paralysed on her right side.

While surgeons were able to remove six of these shards, a few pieces remain. With financial support from our partner, Sara has received continuing medical treatment, including physiotherapy to help restore some mobility. Though she cannot talk, Sara is able to recognise people. Her family continues to pray for further healing

The bomb attack on Zion Church also devastated the family of Anika and her brother Rohan, both members of the Sunday school. The children lost both their mother and father – while

A mourner remembers those who lost their lives in the bomb attacks of Easter 2019. Photo: Reuters/Athit Perawongmetha.



Anika herself suffered severe injury to her leg, and was blinded in both eyes. However, doctors believe that one eye could be operated on in the future.

Today both children have been adopted by their aunt, who is very thankful for the practical and financial support given by our partner.

Your support has also helped Eshan, who suffered severe burns to his face and hands, as well as shrapnel wounds to his head and lungs. Our partner helped to pay for his medical expenses after the attack when he was in hospital for more than 30 days.

Today, on occasion, Eshan still experiences great pain from fragments which remain inside him. Thankfully though, recent surgery



St. Sebastian Church, Negombo, was bombed at Easter 2019. Reuters/Athit Perawongmetha.

has removed some of the shrapnel, and surgeons managed to perform a skin graft on his face. He continues to visit a clinic in the capital Colombo once a month.

‘Our dear brothers and sisters in Sri Lanka rely heavily on the support and prayer that we give them’

Release’s partner has also been able to assist by buying medical items not provided by the state. I recall one struggling family I met on my last visit: the father had given up his work to care for his wife and 10-year-old son, both victims of the blasts, who were having to use colostomy bags. However, without money to buy new ones, the family were washing the bags for re-use. Thankfully our partner was able to buy new supplies.

Your support has also helped some bomb victims to receive prosthetic limbs, which otherwise they could not afford.

Last year’s attacks also severely affected the income of many Christian families – especially if the main breadwinner was killed or injured. Release provided funds to supply vulnerable families with dry rations, rice, spices and nutrition packs for children.

Livelihood grants have helped families to buy sewing machines, poultry and other items, enabling them to start small businesses and generate income.

Help with schooling

Your support has also enabled the children of persecuted Christians to go to school. Our partner provides scholarships for children from low-income families, and has helped parents overcome discrimination where schools have refused entry to Christian children. Grants have also been given to help children who suffered post-traumatic stress after the bomb attacks.

I know that our dear brothers and sisters in Sri Lanka rely heavily on our support and prayers. They respond with immense gratitude and thankfulness to God and in faith they endure their circumstances with grace and dignity. They pray for their persecutors, and demonstrate a spirit of love, peace and forgiveness.

Please continue to pray for these precious members of our global family. 🙏

PLEASE PRAY

Please pray for all the families who have suffered as a result of the Easter 2019 bomb attacks, including:

- Sara, who still receives treatment for her injuries
- Anika and Rohan, orphaned by the attack on Zion Church
- Eshan, as he recovers from severe burns and other injuries



Population: 22.9 million

Capital: Colombo

Government: Presidential republic

Religion: Buddhist 70%, Hindu 13%, Muslim 9%, Christian 8% (Evangelicals 1%)

Sources: Operation World, World Factbook.

Names have been changed.

No peace

during the pandemic



Violent attacks on Christians in India have been increasing during the Covid-19 pandemic, reports Release's Kenneth Harrod.

Pastor Balwinder Bhatti had spent a joyful evening leading a prayer meeting in the house of one of his small congregations. At about 9pm he headed home to his young family. He never got there.

On the way Pastor Balwinder, who was 40, was intercepted by a group of Hindu extremists. They attacked him, beat him and then stabbed him to death.

For three years Balwinder had been pastoring an independent church in Zira, a town in India's northern Punjab state. According to Release's partner in India he had been threatened many times by Hindu extremists, who repeatedly called



Thanks to your support, Pastor Balwinder's family has received financial help and food aid.

on him to stop his gospel ministry. Undeterred, he ignored the threats and continued to follow his calling. Pastor Balwinder and his wife Nisha, 39, had a family of five children, aged between five and 13 years old. They were from a very poor background. 'After her husband was killed [Nisha] was left helpless, very much worried about her children's future,' said our partner, who provided

financial support and food aid.

Balwinder's killing was among a spate of martyrdoms in India in recent months. 'There has been an increase in physical violence during the Covid-19 pandemic: six murders, and a number of physical attacks that have left pastors and church members injured,' our partner said.

'In the past it was always the allegation of converting people – now the spreading of the virus is given as a reason.' At the same time, helping victims and their families has become more challenging, because of the pandemic. 'It has become more difficult in the interior villages. Help reaches later and victims may go through much difficulty before they get support.'

Pastor Munshi Devu Tado and his wife Jaini became Christians three years ago. From the moment they came



Pastor
Munshi and
his wife
Jaini. Photo:
Morning Star
News.

to faith, members of their extended family as well as some of their neighbours attempted to persuade them to renounce Christ and return to Hinduism. But they remained firm.

'Munshi was abducted, taken into a jungle area and shot dead'

Munshi then began sharing the gospel in the village in Maharashtra state where they lived. On two occasions Hindu extremists warned him to stop. Eventually he left the main village and built a small house on nearby agricultural land that he owned. From there he began running Christian worship services.

One Friday afternoon, after a time of prayer and fasting with his small flock of believers, Munshi was abducted by a group of Hindu extremists. He was taken into a jungle area about two kilometres away, and shot dead.

Following his killing, Munshi's wife Jaini fled from the village with her three daughters and son – all aged between two and nine years old. She took refuge in the home of a Christian family in a nearby village. Her family, and her late husband's family have prevented her from returning home.

In recent months pastors who have sought to visit needy church members have been accused of spreading

Covid-19. However, said our partner, no such accusation is levelled at Hindus – including the much-publicised laying of a foundation stone at a new temple to the Hindu deity Ram in Uttar Pradesh in August.

Courageous teenager

In the summer we reported on our website the killing of Christian teenager Samaru Madkani in Odisha state. His was one of just three families in their village who had come to faith, through the gospel outreach of a local church. When the pastor stopped visiting to conduct services – because of repeated threats – Samaru, just 16 years old, took it upon himself



Samaru, 16

to lead church meetings.

He and two other Christians were abducted from their homes during the night, and taken into a mountainous area.

While the two older men managed to escape, Samaru was slaughtered, his body mutilated and buried. When his remains were eventually found, our partner provided a van so the impoverished family could properly dispose of his body.

After Release partners reported the murder to police, four men were arrested. Our partners continue to support all three families, and have helped them to relocate for their safety.

'They had received threats several times from the radicals to stop worshipping Jesus Christ, but they are firm in their faith,' said our partner.

RELEASE'S MINISTRY IN INDIA



Food is distributed to a bereaved family.

Thanks to your gifts, Release helps persecuted Christians in India by providing:

- financial and practical help for victims of attacks
- financial support for the families of martyrs
- legal help and advice
- Bibles and Christian literature for outreach and discipleship



Population: 1.3 billion

Capital: New Delhi

Government: Federal parliamentary republic

Religion: Hindu 74%, Muslim 14%, Christian 6%, other 6%

Sources: Operation World, World Factbook.



PLEASE PRAY

- that God will comfort all these families who have suffered loss
- for justice for believers who have been attacked and killed
- for courage and wisdom for Christian leaders facing persecution

CHINA

Pastors say 'Thank You'



Photo: China Aid.

Your support has enabled leaders in China's underground (unregistered) churches to continue their vital gospel ministries – despite the Covid-19 pandemic and increasing persecution by the Government.

Release partner Bob Fu of China Aid recently told us how the Chinese Government is exploiting Covid-19 to increase restrictions on underground believers.

'The Chinese Government is trying every way to take advantage of the virus, by increasing the crackdown against Christian churches,' he said.

'It has accelerated particular campaigns, such as the forced demolition of crosses, even those of government-sanctioned churches.'

In February tough new rules controlling religion came into effect, targeting online church services and prayer meetings.

However, thanks to your generous giving, Release has been able to support the pastors of one particular local church network for several years. We recently received several warm letters of personal thanks from these leaders. Some extracts are given here.

We have been praying and struggling while performing our ministerial duties. But God knows our predicament and shows mercy for our hardship and sufferings. Through your kind help and support, we have got encouragement and assurance for our life and service.

With the peace and joy God has given us and your loving material support, we will face the hardship and stress lying ahead. We trust that in the near future we will become blessings for many – just like you have been for us.

Pastor Li

During the pandemic we cannot gather, so we have turned to online Bible studies, calling on all families to read the Bible. At the moment over 40 families are participating in Bible reading.

We hope more families will join us and benefit from this. We also ask you to pray for us so that the church will stand firm and strong during this pandemic. Once again, thanks for your kind help.

Pastor Chao

Even though the environment is not good, we give thanks to the Lord who has shut a window but opened a wide gate for us. Physical onsite worship has stopped, but online worship has flourished.

I am very grateful to receive your kindness and help. Thanks to the Lord for your love. May God bless you abundantly.

Pastor Kang

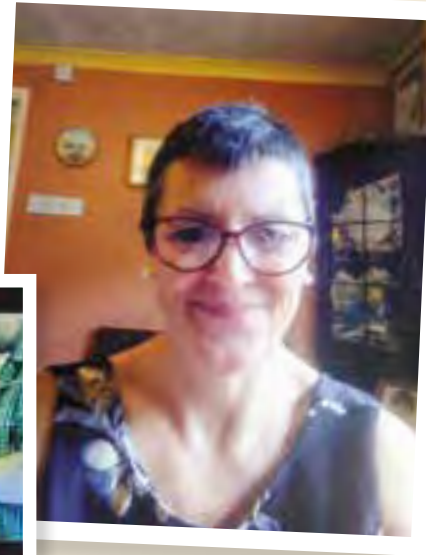
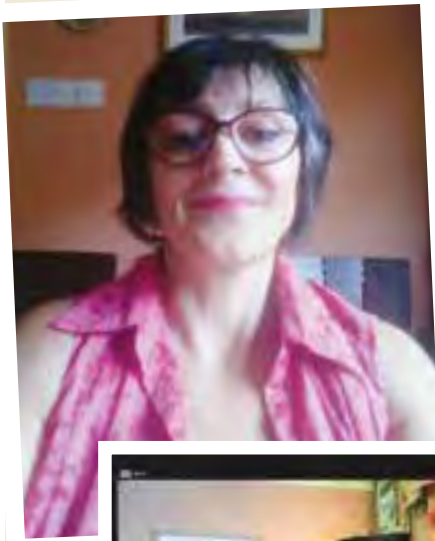
**FIND OUT MORE
ON YOUTUBE**

Hear more from Bob Fu about persecuted Christians in China on our YouTube channel



releaseinternational

Good News



Zoom coffee morning and sponsored haircut raise £2,000

Well done to Release volunteers Helen and Alison from Swansea who recently used Zoom, the online meeting platform, to hold a coffee morning focusing on our Strength to Stand groups in Egypt and Pakistan.

At this time of Covid-19 restrictions, friends and family were invited to gather round Zoom with their own drinks and snacks. The event included guest speakers, as well as Development Manager Paul. Participants were encouraged to wear hats, with prizes awarded for the most interesting.

Helen (pictured) bravely allowed her husband to get out his hair clippers for a sponsored haircut – streamed live on Facebook – which together with the donations from the coffee morning raised nearly £2,000. Thanks to everyone who took part in this cutting-edge creative event!



- **Information about our Strength to Stand groups, which support vulnerable Christian women in Egypt and Pakistan, is given regularly in *Embrace*, the newsletter of our Release Women ministry. Request your free copy using the enclosed form or call: 01689 823491.**

Sudan: apostasy law abolished

Sudanese Christians celebrated in July when the country's Sovereign Council abolished the long-standing apostasy law, which carried a death penalty for anyone leaving Islam.

It is hoped that the Government's adoption of the new Fundamental Rights and Freedoms Act marks an important step forward in protecting the rights of Christians in Sudan.

We thank God for this significant answer to prayer.

Pastor Victor and Shamiram escape from Iran



Iranian Pastor Victor Bet Tamraz (previously sentenced to ten years' imprisonment for his Christian activities) and his wife Shamiram (who received a five-year term) were told in July that their appeal had been rejected by the Iranian authorities. The appeal process had taken more than two years.

However, we thank God that before they could be taken into custody, the couple managed to flee the country to a safe location. Please pray for Pastor Victor and Shamiram as they consider their future.

PRESSING ON

How your support is aiding vulnerable persecuted Christians in Sudan's war-torn and impoverished Nuba Mountains

Getting God's Word – and urgent medical supplies – into the hands of persecuted Christians in war-ravaged parts of Sudan has been an enormous challenge for Release partners over many years.

The remote Nuba Mountains, South Kordofan – home to Sudan's largest Christian minority outside the capital, Khartoum – is one area that has posed significant logistical challenges.

In 2011 the brutal regime of then President Omar al-Bashir launched a military campaign in the region to crush the rebel Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North.

When this campaign soon floundered, the Sudanese Government began aerial bombings of civilian areas – dropping thousands of bombs on

hospitals, schools, marketplaces and churches – leaving many hundreds dead and injured.

The Government in 2011 also expelled all humanitarian organisations from the region, and imposed a blockade on all aid – causing terrible suffering to the one million or so Nuba people.

While President al-Bashir was deposed by a coup in April 2019, the area remains desperately poor and in need of help.

With little infrastructure, distributing aid and Bibles to Christians in these areas can require arduous transport by truck – and even by small airplanes.

A field leader of our associate ministry Voice of the Martyrs (VOM)



Former President Omar al-Bashir.

USA told us that last year was especially challenging because of severe flooding. 'Some of the places that used to be roads had standing water up to the neck level,' he said. 'Even trucks were unable to move for about four weeks.'

In light of these challenges, receiving a shipment of print Bibles and medical aid in this sometimes



inaccessible area is a lifeline for our brothers and sisters in Christ who live there.

'For the hundreds of churches spread over the embattled Nuba Mountains, these Bibles are like reinforcements in a major battle,' said a VOM field worker.

Urgent health needs

Dr Ahmed is based in the region and is highly respected because of his many years of medical service.

'In June 2011, the war had started and I was there,' he said. 'Arab militia started firing on us. They killed children, they killed women, elders, even the students. Everybody. Because they wanted to force us to be Arab, and Muslim.'

While his experience and skill could enable him to work anywhere in the world, he chose during the war years to stay and serve his people.

'When the bombardments came, that



Sudanese Christians in the Nuba Mountains receive Bibles.

motivated me to help others. No one forced me to stay,' he said. 'Nuba is my identity. That's why I'm here.'

Dr Ahmed recalls how one day during the war he was drinking coffee at a little shop in his village when people began pointing up to the sky. Seconds later, a government Antonov plane bombed the marketplace, with the first bomb striking just metres away.

He was miraculously spared, but suffered 17 small shrapnel wounds. Despite this he went immediately to hospital to begin treating the wounded, including six pregnant women who miscarried during the attack.

After successive military campaigns have destroyed this region's infrastructure, the health needs are enormous.

Much of his work is centred at the Gigaiba Referral Hospital, which serves the medical needs of more than half the population of the Nuba Mountains. A new maternity ward at the hospital now provides in-patient treatment to as many as 60 mothers and babies at a time – and construction work continues on new facilities.

'A lot of my patients, they come to me here because here the treatment is free,' he said. Sometimes people will walk up to two days to get to the hospital.

After successive military campaigns have destroyed this region's infrastructure, the health needs are enormous.

Med packs

That's why Release is partnering with our associate ministry VOM USA to help to distribute much-needed medical supplies to vulnerable communities in the coming months.

Your continuing support will help to provide thousands of urgently needed family med packs and hygiene kits for the people of the Nuba Mountains. These packs contain soap, bandages, gauze, medical tape, toothbrushes and female hygiene products – all of which are in very limited supply.



Med packs are a lifeline for vulnerable families in the Nuba Mountains.

PLEASE PRAY

Please pray for the people of Sudan's remote Nuba Mountains who have endured so much in recent years. Pray for the effective distribution of our med packs and hygiene kits in the coming months.



Population: 45.6 million

Capital: Khartoum

Government: Transitional military council

Religion: Muslim 91%, Christian 5%, Folk Religions 3%, Other 1%

Sources: Pew Research Centre, World Factbook.

International Day of Prayer

**FOR THE PERSECUTED
CHURCH
SUNDAY,
NOVEMBER 15**

NEW

For the first time, the focus of this year's International Day of Prayer for the persecuted church (IDOP) will be an exciting social media event. Don't miss out!

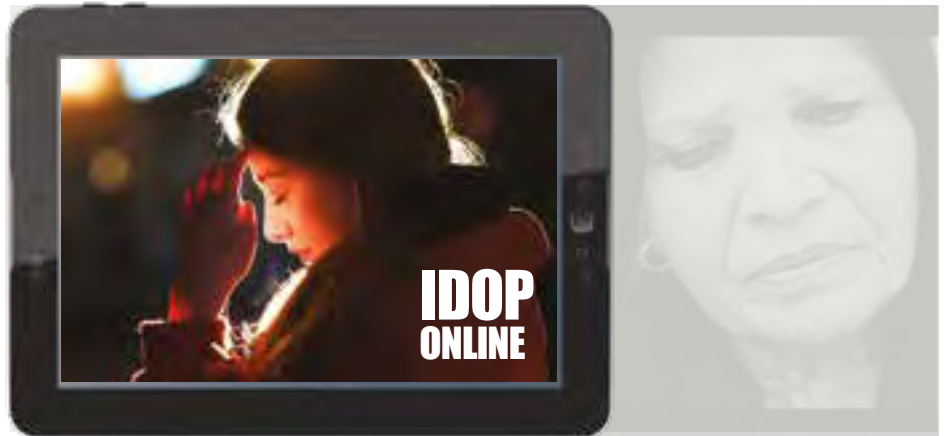
This year, due to the Covid-19 restrictions, we will be teaming up with our friends at Open Doors and CSW for a special online social media event on Sunday, November 15. Please join us for what promises to be a fantastic evening of prayer and worship between 7.30pm-8.30pm.

The live streamed event will feature testimonies from persecuted Christians in **Nigeria, India and China.**

Please make a note of the date, tell your friends and church leaders and check out releaseinternational.org/idop for further details nearer the event.

Online resources

To promote prayer for persecuted Christians **throughout November**, please use our free resources listed here – ideal for your own online meeting or prayer event.



PRAY FOR NIGERIA POWERPOINT

**PRAY FOR
NIGERIA**

Download our new PowerPoint from releaseinternational.org/idop. In northern and central Nigeria believers continue to be attacked by Fulani militants (see page 6) – and ask for our continuing prayers.

THREE-MINUTE FILMS

Watch these powerful, personal stories of persecuted believers – and be inspired by how God has sustained them. From releaseinternational.org/lockdown.



CENTRAL ASIA: UNDERGROUND Nearly three decades after the fall of communism, Christians are still being persecuted for their faith in some of the former Soviet republics.



ERITREA: HELEN'S SONG Gospel singer Helen Berhane describes how she found strength to survive imprisonment and torture for refusing to deny Christ.



PAKISTAN: FALSELY ACCUSED How Pastor Zafar Bhatti was sentenced to life in prison for blasphemy – and how Release partners are helping him and his wife Nawab.



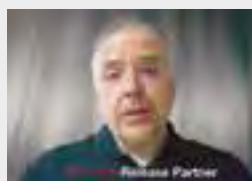
TORTURED FOR CHRIST An extract from the dramatised film about courageous Romanian pastor Richard Wurmbrand, who inspired the founding of Release in 1968.

UNDER PRESSURE FROM THE PANDEMIC

Release partners have asked for prayer as they continue to serve persecuted Christians throughout the Covid-19 crisis. Check out these short video streams at releaseinternational.org/lockdown.



CHINA Christians in China are facing yet more repression at the hands of the authorities. Even online preaching has been banned, reports Bob Fu of our partner China Aid.



NORTH KOREA Inside this highly repressive state, underground Christians may actually know very little about the true impact of the virus in their country.



EGYPT Ruth and Anna and their team distribute food parcels and serve marginalised Christians in Upper Egypt, where the impact of the virus has been heart-breaking.



PAKISTAN Waseem describes how his ministry is reaching out to distribute food and practical support to the families of Christian prisoners and struggling brick kiln workers.



INDIA Kumar Swamy of the All India Christian Council describes the impact of the crisis. 'We need prayer for the persecuted church in India,' he says.



ReleaseInternational

SUBSCRIBE TO GET OUR LATEST VIDEOS



FREE AT LAST

After drinking water from the same cup as Muslim women, Christian Asia Bibi was sentenced to death in Pakistan in 2010 on charges of blasphemy.

For nine long years, she endured prison until her acquittal in 2019. Throughout Asia refused to renounce her faith in Jesus.

Don't miss this remarkable story of unwavering devotion.

Order *Free at Last* (paperback) for £10 including P&P by using the enclosed form or call: 01689 823491.

REACHING OUT



Thanks to your generous response to our recent appeal, persecuted Christians have received much-needed extra help during the Covid-19 pandemic.

'Covid-19 is having a devastating impact on the lives of many poor Christians,' said Release CEO Paul Robinson. 'In places hostile to the faith Christians are experiencing increased hardship.'

Your support has directly benefited persecuted Christians in these ways:



ETHIOPIA

Food for Eritrean refugees

For believers fleeing persecution in repressive Eritrea, lockdown meant they could be barred from refugee camps in Ethiopia and unable to get support from the United Nations. Release partners gave warning that some of these Christian refugees now

face continuing discrimination.

Your support provided Christian refugees in Ethiopia with urgent supplies such as vegetable oil, rice, pasta, wheat flour, chickpea flour, potatoes, onions – as well as hand sanitiser.

'May the grace of the Lord multiply in you. We want to thank you for all your support,' said our partner.

EGYPT

Aid for vulnerable Christians

Coronavirus has made the situation for persecuted Christians in Egypt much worse. Our partners on the ground have worked tirelessly to provide emergency packages of food and non-food items to isolated Christian families in Upper Egypt and in the poorest areas of the capital Cairo.

PAKISTAN

Vital help for Muslim-background believers

In Pakistan our partners reported worsening conditions for Christians due to the pandemic, particularly in the city of Lahore in Punjab province.

Your support provided emergency food supplies and other essentials – aiming in particular to help Christians who have come to faith from a Muslim background. They often face intense persecution, are subject to death threats and are under the constant fear of abuse and violence.

TURKEY

Supporting displaced families

In the past decade our partners have assisted persecuted believers who have escaped from Iran into Turkey as refugees seeking asylum. Others, including those from Afghanistan, have become Christians after arriving in Turkey. However, there is no right to work – and little state help.

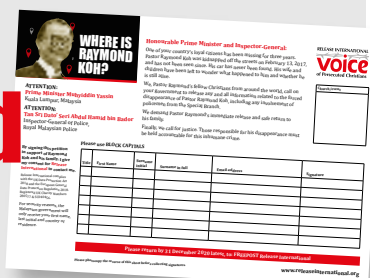
The Covid-19 epidemic has drastically reduced employment opportunities, leaving vulnerable families exposed to hunger – and possible eviction from their homes.

Your giving enabled displaced families to receive food and payment of utilities to help them weather the immediate crisis.

On behalf of our persecuted family, thank you so much for your continuing support.

ONLINE SPEAKER TOUR IN NOVEMBER

Release Raymond petition



Thank you to everyone who has been collecting signatures for our current petition calling on the Malaysian Government to release all information related to the disappearance of Pastor Raymond Koh – who was abducted in a military-style operation in February 2017.

Please return all completed forms to our office by **OCTOBER 15**.

If you haven't already signed – it's not too late to use our **online petition** at releaseinternational.org/releaseraymond.

Hear Pastor Koh's wife Susanna in our Voice podcast at releaseinternational.org/podcast (see page 5).



Hassan John, one of Release's partners in Nigeria, will be speaking at a series of live, online meetings around the UK in November.

Hassan, who works alongside the Archbishop of Jos, Ben Kwashi, has been supporting pastors in

the north east of Nigeria, equipping and training them to reach out to their communities with the gospel.

Covid-19 restrictions mean that Hassan is unlikely to be able to visit the UK – so we are planning these **ticket-only** online events for supporters:

- **Monday, November 2 – Wales supporters**
- **Tuesday, November 3 – Scotland supporters**
- **Wednesday, November 4 – England supporters**
- **Thursday, November 5 – Northern Ireland supporters plus public live stream on Facebook and YouTube**

The events are free but donations are very welcome. See releaseinternational.org/events for how to book.

INVITE A RELEASE SPEAKER

Our experienced speakers are available to join your online church meeting to help you support and pray for persecuted Christians:



Ireland: Stephen on 028 9334 0014

London: Imtiaz on 07395 425507

Midlands & North: Kenneth on 07375 516408

Scotland: James on 07434 894016

South: Kenneth on 07375 516408

Wales & W Midlands: Paul on 07747 535588

Or call 01689 823491

THE WORD

The victory of Jesus on the cross enables us to face persecution with deep assurance, reflects Release partner Hassan John.

WHO SHALL SEPARATE US?

Often I go to villages in central and north-eastern Nigeria to talk to and pray with victims of gruesome attacks by Boko Haram terrorists and Fulani militants. Sometimes I attend hurried funerals, with families not having time to mourn and properly bury their dead. In these terrible circumstances, the words of the Apostle Paul to the Romans come powerfully to mind:

'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?' (Romans 8:35, ESV).

The reality is almost overwhelming, as I stand by the mass graves of women and children, many charred beyond recognition, burned alive in their homes. Yet the politically correct explanation is to blame climate change – and the movement of people in search of grazing land – for these atrocities.

Ridiculed and scandalised

In our post-modern world, belief in God is often deemed primitive and speaking out about Christ is hate speech. To passionately love and teach about Jesus Christ is deemed dangerous even in many academic institutions where pursuit of truth and knowledge should be sacrosanct. Science is replacing God and political correctness the Scriptures. Christians may be seen but not be heard outside the confines of the church, which is continually ridiculed and scandalised with every opportunity.

Paul, however, reiterates the truth of God's revelation: *'No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us'* (Romans 8:37, ESV).

He points out the truth of God's power over sin and death and also our victory through Jesus Christ.

'For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Romans 8:38-39, ESV).

Paul reminds and assures us all that we are already victors in this fight for our souls because Jesus has already won the battle and the war on the cross.

His love and His light are greater than any hatred, and, more than this – He has given us the opportunity to carry His light into a dark and cynical world. What a privilege!

The overwhelming love of Christ, demonstrated by that bloodied, pierced body on the cross more than 2,000 years ago is still the symbol of our

victory through His resurrection from the grave.

We know, therefore, despite the current persecution of believers in different nations, that He who made the universe is not only our Saviour, Lord and King – but also our friend.

His love and His light are greater than any hatred, and, more than this – He has given us the opportunity to carry His light into a dark and cynical world. What a privilege!

Church of Scotland minister James Stewart once said that Christ *'did not conquer in spite of the dark mystery of evil. He conquered through it.'*

So, while we see the evil around us, we have the strong assurance that *'in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us'* (Romans 8:37, ESV).

Hassan John is a Release partner in Nigeria who works closely with the Archbishop of Jos, Benjamin Kwashi.

See page 21 for details of his online speaking tour.

INSPIRING FAITH



'Cross near cross, grave near grave – this is how the church conquers. Patient suffering will make you, too, a victor.'

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.



IMPRISONED WITH ISIS

It was supposed to be a four-day visit to Sudan. It turned into a 445-day imprisonment, sometimes alongside hardened ISIS fighters.

Don't miss the inspiring new book by Petr Jasek of our associate ministry, Voice of the Martyrs USA.

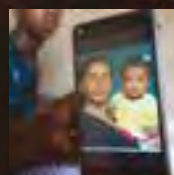
Order the hardback today for £15 (including p&p) using the enclosed form, at releaseinternational.org or by calling 01689 823491.

THE DAY OF THE CHRISTIAN MARTYR

Tuesday, June 29, 2021

Release invites you and your church to join us next year in remembering modern-day Christian martyrs on June 29, 2021.

A FREE resource pack will be available in due course.



☎ 01689 823491 🌐 releaseinternational.org/martyrs

✉ martyrsday@releaseinternational.org

🐦 #IWillNotAbandonThem



Will you leave a legacy of enduring faith and love?

A legacy gift to Release International can be a natural continuation of your commitment to sharing God's love and compassion with persecuted Christians around the world.

For 50 years, your generous gifts have enabled Christians to stand strong in their faith in the face of persecution. With your support, Release's partners are providing prayerful, pastoral and practical help to persecuted Christians in over 25 countries.

By including a gift to Release International in your Will you can enable that support to continue.

To request a free legacy brochure please call us on **01689 823491** or email info@releaseinternational.org

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL
Voice
of Persecuted Christians

International Day of Prayer for the persecuted church 2020



**Sunday,
November 15,
7.30pm-8.30pm**

Join Release, Open Doors and CSW for an exciting social media event of prayer and worship, featuring testimony from China, India and Nigeria.

Save the date and tell your friends and church leaders.

See releaseinternational.org/idop for free resources and the latest details.

prayershield

October–December 2020

Displaced and vulnerable Nigerians receive emergency food aid provided by Release associate ministries.



OCTOBER 2020

Heavenly Father,

Lord of all, I praise Your mighty name. Justice is Yours.

Remember my brothers and sisters whose rights are trampled upon because they dare to own Your name. Deliver justice to them quickly, Lord (Luke 18:7-8).

Everlasting King, please help our persecuted family to be gracious in the face of opposition, knowing that You are their defender. May their persecutors come to know You too, Lord – so that mercy will triumph over judgement.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

NIGERIA

THURSDAY 1: Please ask God to provide for the many displaced Christians in Nigeria (see photo) whose situation has been made even more precarious by the Covid-19 pandemic. Release and its associate ministries have provided food aid to these vulnerable communities.

FRIDAY 2: Nearly 40 Christians were killed in northern Kaduna state in August alone. They included father-of-nine Bulus Joseph who stood up to the attackers to allow his wife and children to escape. They too were attacked but survived.

SATURDAY 3: By August, an estimated 50,000 Christians had been displaced from

more than 100 villages now occupied by armed Fulani militants in southern Kaduna. Ask God to protect and provide for them.

SUNDAY 4: Pray for the families of five-year-old Joel and Pastor Shamah Kuyet Ishaya, both killed by militants in Zikpak, southern Kaduna, recently; 11 other Christians were wounded.

MONDAY 5: Pray for a Baptist community in Agbadu-Daruwana village in Kogi state where Fulani militants killed 14 Christians in July.

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL
voice
of Persecuted Christians

One man lost 13 relatives, including his wife, mother, brother and all his children.

TUESDAY 6: Please pray for villagers of Agbadu-Daruwana (above) who all fled their homes immediately after the July attack. Pray that they will be able to return home in safety soon.

WEDNESDAY 7: Pray for the more than 550 Christians who have sought refuge at a displacement camp in Zonkwa Town Camp, Kaduna. Many are from Gora Gan village where militants killed 11 people in July.

THURSDAY 8: Ask God to comfort and provide for the family of Rev Bulus Bayi who was shot dead in June as he worked on his farm in Sabon Gari Gusawa village, southern Kaduna.

FRIDAY 9: Fulani herdsmen killed 18 Christian guests, mostly young men, during a wedding reception in Kukum Daji, Kaduna, in July; more than 30 others were injured. Pray God's peace and comfort for everyone who has been affected by this atrocity.

SATURDAY 10: Ask God to touch the hearts of Fulani militants so they will turn their back on violence and work instead for peace and restoration in communities.

IRAQ

SUNDAY 11: Please pray for Christian families displaced by Turkish bombardments and incursions into Zakho district, northern Iraq. Turkey

is targeting Kurdish fighters, whom it considers terrorists, in areas where many Christians live.

MONDAY 12: Only about 40 per cent of Christians who were internally displaced during the Islamic State incursion have returned to their villages. Pray that they will be able to return home in safety.

TUESDAY 13: Iranian-backed militias are still operating in Iraq and seeking to change the demography in areas they control, replacing Christians with Shia Muslims. Pray that they will be ousted and security restored.

WEDNESDAY 14: Pray for the continued presence of Christians in Iraq, despite the many pressures on those who choose to remain and on those who have returned.

THURSDAY 15: Pray for peace in this region. Ask God to give His people authority and favour so they will become respected members of the new communities being formed.

SUDAN

FRIDAY 16: Praise God for a series of legal reforms in Sudan that have fuelled hope of greater religious freedom for non-Muslims. One is the repeal of apostasy laws for those leaving Islam.

SATURDAY 17: Radical Muslims have protested in the Khartoum area and called for 'holy war' against the transitional Government for scrapping *Sharia*

(Islamic law) provisions and decriminalising apostasy. Pray that reformists will hold fast to plans to increase religious liberty.

SUNDAY 18: Justice Minister Nasredeen Abdulbari has vowed to 'drop all the laws violating human rights in Sudan'. Pray that he and his Government will stay true to their word and safeguard the rights of non-Muslims.

MONDAY 19: Continue to pray that the state will return to the church property confiscated during the former regime of President Omar al-Bashir.

TUESDAY 20: Please continue to pray for our Christian family in Sudan who still face opposition from their neighbours and officials. Pray that religious freedoms will continue to grow.

WEDNESDAY 21: Pray for several Christians recently attacked in the Al-Jerif East area of Khartoum following calls from mosque leaders to rid their 'Muslim area' of South Sudanese Christians.

THURSDAY 22: Pray for the family of South Sudanese Christian Mariel Bang who was stabbed to death in Omdurman by men shouting '*Allahu Akbar* [God is greater]'. Mariel had four children. Four other Christians were injured, one seriously.

INDIA

FRIDAY 23: Pray that state and national governments in India will take firm steps to



Gornath is greeted by family and friends upon his unexpected release from prison in India last year.

protect vulnerable Christian communities and uphold religious rights for all citizens. Recent months have seen a spate of religiously motivated murders.

SATURDAY 24: Pray for the family of 'Sunita' in Jharkhand state who was murdered by men who had raped her daughter three times. When they tried to do so again, she stood up to them – and paid with her life.

SUNDAY 25: Sunita's daughter (above) was one of several young Christian girls to have been raped. A local church leader says Hindu extremists consider Christians soft targets and deliberately seek them out. Pray for justice and protection for these girls.

MONDAY 26: Samaru, aged just 16, was stoned to death by extremists who objected to

the teenager leading a church in his village in Odisha. The previous pastor had been forced out. Pray that Samaru's legacy will be many people turning to Christ.

TUESDAY 27: A tribal group persuaded Maoist militants to kill Pastor Munshi Devu Tado after he led 15 families to Christ in Maharashtra state. Ask God to provide for and protect Munshi's family.

WEDNESDAY 28: In Chhattisgarh state, Bajjo Bai Mandavi, a widow who had suffered persecution for refusing to renounce Jesus, was found dead just outside her village recently. Pray that her neighbours will be moved by her strong witness.

THURSDAY 29: Pray for three Christian families in Devkupli Para, Chhattisgarh, who have recently returned home to farm their land after fleeing in May. They had received death threats for refusing to worship tribal gods.

FRIDAY 30: Pray for the seven Christians falsely accused of murdering a Hindu extremist in Odisha in 2008: the death triggered the Kandhamal riots in which at least 39 Christians died. The seven, including Gornath (pictured), were jailed until a Maoist was convicted of the killing in 2019.

SATURDAY 31: Ask God to comfort and encourage our partners in India, AICC: the team recently lost a valued member, Sagay, to a heart attack.

NOVEMBER 2020

PAKISTAN

SUNDAY 1: Pray for believers from a Muslim background in Pakistan whom the pandemic has hit particularly hard. Rejected by relatives, they have been denied the only form of social security available in Pakistan: family support. Many have gone hungry.

MONDAY 2: Ask God to touch the heart of a Muslim cleric who recently called for all Christians to be expelled from Pakistan.

TUESDAY 3: Pray for a 14-year-old girl who was kidnapped last October, forcibly converted to Islam, and married to her kidnapper. She is reportedly pregnant and confined to a single room. Her parents are taking legal action to secure her release.

WEDNESDAY 4: Please pray for another 14-year-old who escaped her Muslim husband only to be returned to him by order of the Lahore High Court. Her husband insists she is 18 and married willingly: her family says she was kidnapped and abused.

THURSDAY 5: Pray for the many other young girls in Pakistan who are facing similar situations to the 14-year-olds above; ask God to protect them.

FRIDAY 6: Pakistan's Senate has introduced a Bill proposing ten years in prison and a stiff fine for forcing someone to change religion

for marriage. The focus of the Bill is forced conversion generally: Christians fear it could be used against them. Pray that this Bill, if passed into law, will be fairly implemented.

SATURDAY 7: Pray for Asif who lost his job as a popular supervisor at a garment factory for refusing to convert to Islam and is currently in hiding after receiving death threats.

SUNDAY 8: Pray that Pakistan's government officials and military leaders will defend the constitutional rights of Christians and other minority groups.

MONDAY 9: Pray for the protection of Pakistani Christians and ask God to give them the grace, wisdom and favour to be able to live peaceably with their neighbours.

INDONESIA

TUESDAY 10: Several long-established churches have been forced to close due to pressure from Islamist groups. Pray that their members will find fresh ways to enjoy fellowship.

WEDNESDAY 11: Pray for the Indonesia Bethel Church whose building permit has been revoked by the mayor of Tanjung Pinang on Bintan Island. He had previously seemed supportive of the church.

THURSDAY 12: Pray for members of the Pillar Asih Protestant Church in Bekasi City who had been using an

empty building for worship until Muslim neighbours persuaded police to stop the meetings.

FRIDAY 13: On Bangka Island, in northern Indonesia, protesters stopped the construction of a church building that had been approved five months earlier. Pray that building work can resume.

SATURDAY 14: Police, local officials, neighbours and Muslim clerics interrupted services at a church in Central Java. Now neighbours have put up posters calling on the Government to close it. Pray for wisdom for church leaders.

SUNDAY 15: On this, the International Day of Prayer for the persecuted church (IDOP), ask God to lift the head (Psalm 3:3) all of those who mourn, those who are imprisoned, fearful or facing injustice, for His name's sake, in Indonesia and worldwide.

MONDAY 16: Please stand with Indonesian Christians in praying for their oppressors.

TUESDAY 17: Many congregations continue to worship in church courtyards or the streets in front of their closed churches. Praise God for their bold witness and indomitable spirit.

CENTRAL ASIA

WEDNESDAY 18: Pray for Christians in Central Asia: in some parts of the region, they are viewed as extremists. They may receive massive fines and be detained for 'illegal religious gatherings'.

THURSDAY 19: Ask God to protect the family of Pastor Bakhrom and his wife, Gulnora (pictured with their children): the Tajik pastor was imprisoned for two-and-a-half years until December 2019 for his 'extremist' views. The Government has now threatened to revoke the Tajik residency permits of their two sons who are currently studying abroad.

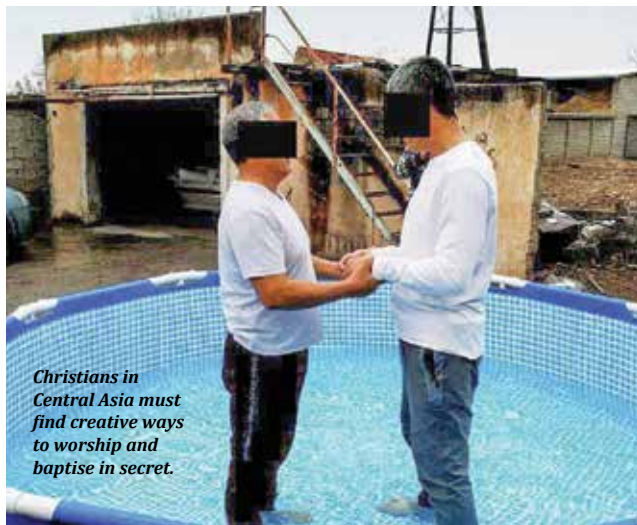
Pastor Bakhrom was jailed in Tajikistan from 2017 to 2019, leaving his wife, Gulnora, and three children to manage on their own.



FRIDAY 20: Pray that God will inspire Christians in Central Asia to find creative ways to worship and enjoy fellowship. Praise God that an inflatable swimming pool (pictured) allows one church to conduct baptisms on private land.

SATURDAY 21: Pray for leaders of the Grace Presbyterian Church in Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan: officials have ordered the confiscation of their building but their compensation offer is very low.

SUNDAY 22: Pray for Agape Pentecostal Church whose new place of worship is being constructed on the same site as Grace Presbyterian (previous prayer). Officials have now ordered building work to stop.



Christians in Central Asia must find creative ways to worship and baptise in secret.

MONDAY 23: Pray that Kazakh authorities will stop harassing unregistered church communities.

TUESDAY 24: Pray that believers in Central Asia will be creative and effective in ministering the gospel despite opposition.

ERITREA

WEDNESDAY 25: Rising food prices have meant that the families of prisoners of faith in Eritrea have struggled to make ends meet. Ask God to provide for them and their loved ones in jail.

THURSDAY 26: Thirty Christian guests were arrested at a wedding in the capital Asmara in June and sent to a prison camp. Pray for their release.

FRIDAY 27: Fifteen Christians were arrested in Eritrea in April: they too were sent

to a prison camp. Ask God to sustain them and their families, and pray they will be reunited.

SATURDAY 28: Please pray for the many believers currently behind bars in Eritrea: some of them have already endured many years of inhumane treatment in appalling conditions.

SUNDAY 29: Pray for 'John' and 'Genet', a married couple who have each spent time in harsh prisons for their faith. Thank God that our ministry partner has provided food and shelter for them through their local church – and they now have a child.

MONDAY 30: Ask God to strengthen His church in Eritrea. The country is home to more than 100,000 evangelical believers. Pray that the Holy Spirit will move among and through them powerfully.



DECEMBER 2020

IRAN

TUESDAY 1: Pray for the release of nine Christians arrested in co-ordinated raids in Tehran and two nearby cities in July.

WEDNESDAY 2: Pray for seven Christian converts arrested in Bushehr last year who were given harsh sentences in July. The four men, Sam, Sasan, Habib and Pooriya were jailed; Maryam, Marjan and Fatemeh were fined.

THURSDAY 3: Christians in Iran are concerned that legislation recently approved by Parliament could mean more arrests and harsher sentences for religious minorities. Pray this legislation will not be implemented.

FRIDAY 4: Please pray for four Christians from Rasht recently given prison sentences, ranging from two to five years, for being part of a house church: Ramin Hassanpour and his wife, Saeede Sajadpour; Hadi Rahimi and Sakine Behjati.

SATURDAY 5: Pray for a change of heart among Iranian officials, that they will start to see Christians as good citizens, not as opponents.

SUNDAY 6: Pray for Pastor Victor Bet Tamraz and his wife Shamiram Issavi Khabizeh who recently lost their appeal against ten and five-year prison sentences

respectively. However, the couple have been able to leave Iran: ask God to protect and provide for them.

MONDAY 7: Pray for renewed strength for Christian convert Ismaeil Maghrebinejad, aged 65, who must serve two years in jail after losing his appeal against convictions of being a member of 'a group hostile to the regime' and 'propaganda against the state'.

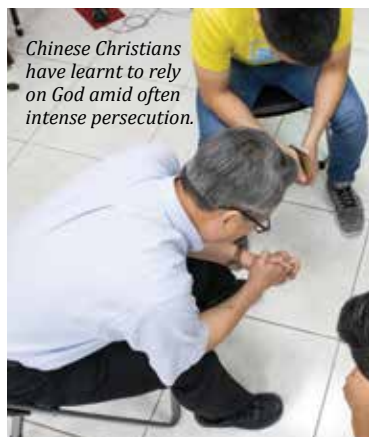
TUESDAY 8: Ask God to equip all His people behind bars in Iran to be powerful witnesses to their fellow prisoners and prison workers.

CHINA

WEDNESDAY 9: Pray for Christians across at least five provinces who were recently forced to replace Christian imagery with portraits of President Xi Jinping – or forfeit social welfare benefits they rely on.

THURSDAY 10: In Hunan province, officials recently sentenced Chen Wensheng to ten days in administrative detention for 'illegal evangelism' on the street. Pray that God will water the seeds that Chen has sown.

FRIDAY 11: Surveillance at state-registered Three-Self churches is being stepped up, as the authorities try to regulate religious belief



Chinese Christians have learnt to rely on God amid often intense persecution.

using technologies such as facial recognition. Pray that the gospel will spread nevertheless.

SATURDAY 12: Pray for the family of Chinese Bishop James Su Zhimin who disappeared 17 years ago after being accused of 'unregistered' religious activities. Officials are now pressing the church to replace him, prompting fears Bishop Su has died.

SUNDAY 13: Pray for churches in Zhejiang and Anhui states whose crosses have been removed this year. In Anhui, 250 government-approved churches were stripped of their crosses in the first four months of 2020 alone.

MONDAY 14: Please pray for Joshua, the young son of imprisoned Pastor Wang Yi of the Early Rain Covenant Church. Joshua is reportedly being taken daily by police car to a Communist Party school for 're-education' – or brainwashing – probably



in retaliation for his father standing firm in his faith in jail. Pray too for Joshua's mother, Jiang Rong, who is under constant surveillance.

TUESDAY 15: Pray for members of dozens of state-approved Three-Self churches reported to have been 'voluntarily' converted into cultural centres promoting socialist principles, including the Flowing Stream Church in Jiangsu.

WEDNESDAY 16: In October 2019, Beizhouzhuang Church was shut down, then members were told to donate their building to the community as a cultural centre. Pray that this injustice will be put right.

THURSDAY 17: Pray for members of Bible Reformed Church in Guangzhou whom officials accused of 'spreading evil religion' during a raid on their Bible study in August. Three Christians, including Pastor Yang Jun, were questioned.

FRIDAY 18: Continue to pray for development worker and pastor John Cao, serving a seven-year sentence. He was detained in 2017 after crossing into China from Myanmar.

UGANDA

SATURDAY 19: Pray for Dragule and his family in Uganda (pictured on next page). He used to sing the call to prayer at a mosque but he now uses an audio Bible to share the gospel with neighbours.

SUNDAY 20: Pray that God will protect Christians in Muslim areas of eastern Uganda. Pray that they will stand firm in their faith and lead many to Jesus.

MONDAY 21: Pray for the families of Pastor Peter Kyakulaga and a member of his church, Tuule Mumbya, who were drowned by extremists from Lugonyola village in east Uganda. Their attackers objected to them inviting people to church.

TUESDAY 22: Thank God for the bold faith of Christians from Kaliro district, including Peter and Tuule (above), who would cross Lake Kyoga to go fishing and, when they met other fishermen, would invite them to Christian meetings.

WEDNESDAY 23: Ask God to protect a former sheikh (Muslim teacher) in eastern Uganda who secretly became a Christian on Christmas Day. When villagers found out recently, they beat his wife, who also converted, and set their house on fire.

PRAYERS FOR CHRISTMAS

CHRISTMAS EVE: Please stand with us in asking God to encourage and strengthen the faith of our Christian family in Uganda – and across the world. Please ask God to protect church services and celebrations this week.

CHRISTMAS DAY: As we celebrate Jesus' birth and thank God for His wonderful gift of unshakeable love, let's pray that our persecuted family worldwide will have a fresh revelation of just how much He loves them (Ephesians 3:18).

BOXING DAY: Let's remember those who are in prison or separated from their loved ones at Christmas as a punishment for following Christ. Pray that God's word will comfort and sustain them, and pray they will have opportunities to share the gospel with others.

SUNDAY 27: Pray for teenagers 'Shamil' and 'Joshua' who became followers of Christ despite their Muslim father's objections and beatings.

MONDAY 28: Pray for a Christian with a Muslim background in Kasasira who was beaten by hard-liners for refusing to deny Christ.



Dragule and his family are passionate about sharing the gospel with their neighbours in Uganda.

TUESDAY 29: Rehema began listening to Christian radio during a business trip with her father, a sheikh, and subsequently became a Christian. Her father beat her then began to burn her until an aunt rescued her. Pray for Rehema's safety and recovery.

WEDNESDAY 30: Ask God to heal 23-year-old Ahmad in eastern Uganda who was badly beaten

by relatives for leaving Islam. His cousin, Jalilu, 20, was also attacked and died of his injuries.

THURSDAY 31: Uganda's constitution provides for religious freedom: pray that its authorities will uphold this freedom. Pray that 2021 will herald an exciting era of church growth globally.

Sources: Aid to the Church in Need; China Aid; Forum 18; International Christian Concern; Middle East Concern; Mission Network News; Morning Star News; Release partners and contacts; VOM Canada; VOM Korea; VOM USA.

Names in inverted commas have been changed to protect identities.

While we do not provide financial support to every Christian mentioned in *Prayer Shield*, we believe in the power of prayer to change lives.

Lord Jesus,

Thank You for being our firm foundation, our cornerstone.

Build us all together as church, Lord, and help us to keep You at the centre so that we will indeed become 'God's dwelling place' (Ephesians 2:22).

Help my persecuted brothers and sisters to live in You as You live in them through the Spirit (1 John 4:13).

Amen

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