

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL

OCT-DEC 2021

voice

of Persecuted Christians

**HELPING
BELIEVERS
IN FLIGHT**



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



Welcome

by Paul Robinson, CEO

A global surge of refugees

Many of us will have been touched in recent weeks by the harrowing images and stories of Afghan men, women and children who have been desperate to flee their country. Such turmoil and distress, no doubt, has broken our hearts and prompted many prayers for God's merciful intervention.

According to the latest report from the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), the number of people forcibly displaced by war, violence and persecution has reached an unprecedented level.

The UN estimates that at the end of 2020, 82 million people were forcibly displaced globally – double the number displaced in 2011.¹ This is a disturbing trend.

Since many of our partners minister first-hand to persecuted Christians who are fleeing persecution and conflict, we know that these dear believers often will have experienced extreme suffering and deprivation. Not only have they been forced to leave their homes and communities – with only the minimum of personal possessions – but today they face an uncertain future.

In this edition of *Voice*, we focus on just a few of the many displaced persecuted believers who

have been given practical help and pastoral care – thanks to your fantastic support.

Nahal, a Christian widow from Afrin, **Syria**, as well as her young son, received food parcels from our partner after fleeing for their lives to Kurdistan, northern **Iraq** (see page 6). In time, she also benefited from vocational training arranged by our partner and learned how to sew.

'This encouraged me to find work and meet the financial needs of my family,' she said. In addition Nahal joined a discipleship group to strengthen her Christian faith. *'That was crucial for me.'*

Partners in **Lebanon** (see page 14) have been sharing God's love with Christian refugees from Syria and Iraq. Recently one of the families told our partner: *'My family and I thank you for your faithfulness in distributing food every month – especially during the lockdown. We were in darkness and you showed us the way into the light.'*

Your support has also enabled us to provide aid and training to persecuted believers from **Eritrea**, now further displaced by the conflict in Tigray, northern **Ethiopia** (see page 10).

Thank you so much for your gifts and prayers.



¹ Global Trends: Forced displacement in 2020, UNHCR, 2021

To encourage prayer for persecuted Christians in flight, please ask if you can display our centre-page pullout on your church noticeboard.

Faith under fire



Fulani militants attack town

Pray for the traumatised community of Miango near Jos, Plateau state, which suffered a devastating attack by armed Fulani militants in August. Around 50 people were killed – and many more injured. About 300 homes, two churches and an orphanage were destroyed, and more than 20,000 residents were displaced as a result. Thank God that our partner was able to offer support.

**Sign up to
Release**



Desperate Afghans wait near Kabul airport, hoping to escape before the Taliban takeover.

Keep praying for Afghanistan

Following the rapid takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban in August, Release called for prayer for the country's long-suffering Christians – and is lobbying for safe passage for Christian refugees whose lives could be at risk.

'God's work is not over in Afghanistan,' said our CEO Paul Robinson. 'We intend to continue working with the underground church there.'

As *Voice* went to press, news from Afghan Christians on the ground was mixed, as the country emerged into a new normality. Some described a return to order – others a growing fear.

'Many believers are talking about life going on almost as normal,' said Paul, 'while others are extremely troubled by the takeover and fearful for their lives as followers of Christ, wondering if someone will denounce them.'

One contact told us: *'The situation is dire. We've seen the Taliban in the past and we know what they do.'* A Christian father called us to say: *'I came to Christ a year ago. The lives of my eight-year-old daughter and my own are in danger.'* One 16-year-old girl said: *'People are terrified. Everyone is afraid and scared of the Taliban. I'm crying out to God right now. Please help us.'*

Please pray

- **that our Afghan brothers and sisters will experience the peace of Jesus with them, guiding them and offering them reassurance**
- **for our partners as they minister to Afghans everyday via online, radio and phone connections.**
- **that our efforts to secure safe refuge for those who are fleeing will meet with success**

Listen to our latest podcasts



Faith recalibration Dr Andy Bannister – apologist, evangelist and Director of the Solas Centre for Public Christianity – discusses how to deal with the difficult questions of suffering and evil, how persecuted Christians can help us grow in our faith, and why we must be honest about the differences between Christianity and Islam.

Faith in the face of extremism We talk to Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali, former Bishop of Rochester and President of the Oxford Centre for Training, Research, Advocacy and Dialogue. We discuss his own background in Islamic culture, his thoughts on the recent growth of radical Islam, the current situation for Christians in Pakistan, and the concerning new wave of violence against Christians in parts of Africa.

Servant with a purpose Guest host Kenneth speaks to Jim Shannon, MP for Strangford and Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Freedom of Religion or Belief at Westminster. Jim discusses his concern for religious freedom and describes the progress in implementing the recommendations outlined in the Bishop of Truro's important 2019 report on the global persecution of Christians.

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



Gao Zhisheng in 2009.

'I have run out of tears,' says Gao's wife

On the fourth anniversary of the disappearance of prominent Chinese Christian lawyer Gao Zhisheng (pictured), his wife Geng He called on the Chinese authorities to confirm what has happened to her husband.

'During the past four years that Gao Zhisheng has been abducted, I have never heard his voice. No person nor any unit has verified that he is still alive,' she wrote.

'In the past 16 years, Chinese Communist Party (CCP) officials – the darkest and most shameless authorities in the world – have completely torn down and deliberately destroyed our "average" family. Even today, I still insist that Gao Zhisheng stuck to his conscience while working as an attorney. He exposed the anti-human crimes the CCP committed.

'One of our daughters, whom CCP police

insulted and beat, has not yet fully healed from the trauma. Our five-year-old child, who has not seen her dad since his disappearance, has to look at photos to recall what he looks like. Gao Zhisheng's older sister jumped into a river and committed suicide after the CCP abducted him three years earlier.

'Today, after four years – 1,460 days in total – I have run out of tears. At one time, I believed that the malicious CCP had murdered Gao Zhisheng. Now, however, I know that I should not give up. I still just want someone in the Party to answer my phone call – and tell me my husband is still alive.'

• Please pray for God's comfort and strength for Geng He and her two children – and that the authorities will provide information about her missing husband.

Bishop of Truro report – two years on

Progress has been made in implementing the recommendations in the Bishop of Truro's report on the persecution of Christians worldwide, the government said recently.

Two years after the report, to which Release contributed information, MPs and Christian leaders were told that 18 of the 22 recommendations have been – or are in the process of being – implemented.

The original review was commissioned by the then Foreign Secretary, Jeremy Hunt, to map the extent and nature of the global persecution of Christians; to assess the quality of the response of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and to make recommendations for changes in both policy and practice.

Listen to MP Jim Shannon discuss the Bishop of Truro's report at releaseinternational.org/podcast.

• Pray that the report's recommendations are fully implemented.

RUNNING FOR THEIR LIVES

Thanks to your support, Release partner Jamal continues to help Christian refugees living in Kurdistan, northern Iraq. Some families have even managed to return to their homes.

Nahal, a Christian widow, lived with her young son in the city of Afrin, northern Syria, during the civil war.

'When Turkish forces invaded Afrin District in January 2018, we were under attack for three months,' she recalls. 'Conditions were really harsh. We saw dead bodies on the streets, which were left for days, and we suffered power cuts, contaminated water and lack of food.'

'One night, after the city was encircled entirely, there was just one route left to escape through areas controlled by the Syrian regime – but the road was very dangerous. So my son and I packed

our bags, and with a miracle from the Lord, we fled the city.'

In fact, on that day Nahal and her son joined an estimated 10,000 people who were running for their lives.

'We were forced to wait at a crossing, along with another Christian family. Then a bomb attack forced the defending Kurdish forces to leave their position – and suddenly the road ahead of us became clear. Eventually we managed to get to a Syrian-controlled town about 20 km away, where we stayed with a family.'

'Soon we found a smuggler to take

us to another city. However, even there, I was still afraid that terrible things could happen to us. Militants were attacking Christian and Yazidi families – and we could easily be killed, or kidnapped for ransom. Conditions in the city were deteriorating and my health was suffering.'

'We managed to travel to the autonomous Kurdistan Region in northern Iraq, hoping to find better treatment and assistance. We went to Erbil, the capital, and settled in. Our situation was not good because of the high cost of living and the lack of job opportunities. But we never lost hope – since God is always for us.'

'After a while, we were introduced by some Christian brothers and sisters to an organisation that provides all kinds of services to assist refugees.'

After their long, painful and dangerous



Release partner Jamal distributes aid to refugees in Kurdistan, northern Iraq.

journey, Nahal and her son had finally reached Release's partner, Hand of Help.

'Children, adults, the elderly – all refugees deserve the right to be treated as valued human beings,' said Hand of Help founder Jamal.

'We provide support to refugees and internally displaced people from Iraq and Syria who have fled their homes and now live in poverty. Many have lost family members and cannot provide for their children.'

'We provide food packages, housing, education and vocational training to hundreds of refugee families fleeing war and persecution,' said Jamal. 'While Covid-19 has limited our movement, it has not stopped us from getting supplies to the needy in our region.'

Jamal and his team gave food parcels to Nahal and her son, and later vocational training, so Nahal could learn to sew. *'This encouraged me to find work and meet the financial needs of my family,'* she said. In addition Nahal joined a discipleship group to strengthen her Christian faith. *'That was crucial for me, to know more about the Lord.'*

Nasser's story

Syrian refugee Nasser and his family have also benefited thanks to your support.

In 2012 he, his wife and three children fled from the city of Homs – one of the key battlegrounds in the uprising against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. During the war thousands in the region were killed, and the city bombed to devastation.

'I fled with my family to the capital Damascus, which was the safest place at the time. We left everything behind and took refuge there,' he said. While this was a huge upheaval for the family, Nasser in retrospect can see God's hand at work – even at times of crisis.

Nasser had struggled with Christianity for many years. *'In my childhood I grew up in a Christian orphanage, and we had to go to church every day before school. Whenever*

I went to see my grandmother, she would explain to me about our heavenly Father and His love and care. She told me stories from the Bible and how God provides for our food, clothing, and all our needs.

'As an adult, however, I blamed God for having a difficult life as a child. My grandmother had said He was my heavenly Father – but I did not experience this because I had lost my own father.'

'One day in Damascus I was in conversation with a friend. I told him that I did not believe in God. But he started to talk about God's love for me, and invited me to his church in the city. He insisted, and in the end I decided to go with him.'

'During the service, the pastor talked about the father heart of God – and how God accepts us. He explained that we are all sinners and separated from God. These words really affected me, and here my life took a new turn.'

'I devoted my life to God's service. I prayed and invited new brothers to the church. Every day I used to go out early to distribute Bibles to displaced people from other parts of Syria. Some of them accepted the Lord Jesus as their Saviour.'

'Then the security situation in Syria became worse, and because of my evangelistic activities, I did not feel

HELPING CHRISTIANS IN FLIGHT



The city of Homs suffered terrible devastation during the Syrian civil war.

safe anymore. So my whole family was forced to move again – this time to the north of Iraq.'

The family soon made contact with Jamal, who provided them with food, shelter and pastoral care.

'We were also invited to join a course about discipleship and spiritual growth,' said Nasser. 'We needed that since we were going through difficult circumstances.' He also received training to become an electrician, hoping to become self-supporting in the future.

'I cannot forget the significant role of this organisation and its positive impact on my life and indeed my whole family. We pray that the Lord will bless the work of this ministry, as they help displaced families spiritually and practically. May all the glory and honour be to our God.'

Returning home

While much of Jamal's ministry to date has been focused on helping refugees survive their ordeal, he is delighted in recent months to have helped a few families to return to their homes in Qaraqosh on the Nineveh Plains, some 60km west of Erbil.

This city had been captured by Islamic

State (IS) in 2014, forcing most of the population to flee. During their occupation they destroyed many buildings – especially Christian sites. After IS were driven from the town in October 2016, it slowly became possible for displaced families to return to their homes – if they were still standing.

When Nader, a gentle, elderly man tried to return to Qaraqosh with his son and daughter, he was shocked to find their home uninhabitable.

'This horrible news was almost too much for him to bear,' said Jamal. 'Nevertheless, he determined to do the best they could, and started to rebuild their home, which was severely dilapidated.'

'However, this task was too much for them: the family had few resources, and Nader was becoming quite weak and finding it difficult to walk.'

'We thank God that we were able to help them to complete rebuilding and refurbishing their home, and to repaint and replaster the brick work. Soon the house was looking better than ever – and Nader and his family were so appreciative!'

Thanks to your support, Release was also able to help Mazen, his wife and



Your support helped to rebuild this home for a Christian family in Qaraqosh.

two young daughters to return to their home – also in Qaraqosh.

'When they went back to the city, the girls didn't even recognise their home,' said Jamal. 'It had been badly damaged and burnt after a rocket exploded close by. We stepped in and fixed the doors, walls and floors, re-decorated the house and made the house a home again, and a place of safety.'

Mazen told Jamal: *'Now we and our children can start our life again. I would like to thank you and everybody who made it possible for us to return home.'*



MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN KURDISTAN

Forthcoming online speaker tour

Please pray

- for the thousands of Christian families from Syria and Iraq still living in Kurdistan
- thank God for all those who have been able to return home, such as Nader and Mazen and their families
- that God will give His strength and resources to Jamal and his team as they continue to care for refugees



We're delighted that our partner Jamal will be speaking to supporters online over four evenings from November 1-4. Don't miss this unique opportunity to hear the latest news from Jamal first hand. For more details, see page 21.

PLEASE HELP PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS IN FLIGHT

Persecution and conflict continue to force Christians to leave their homes and flee as refugees.

These precious believers and their families need your prayers and gifts to survive – and to rebuild their lives. Many live in poverty and face an uncertain future.

Your gift could provide:

- food parcels for vulnerable families
- pastoral care and Christian discipleship
- vocational training to help believers start small businesses

To make a gift please use the enclosed form, call 01689 823491 or give online at releaseinternational.org.



Stock photo

Eritrean refugees in crisis

One of the UN refugee camps in Tigray, northern Ethiopia, where for many years Release has supported persecuted Christians from Eritrea. Photo: Reuters/Tiksa Negeri.

Thousands of persecuted Christians from Eritrea – who were previously settled in refugee camps in northern Ethiopia – have been forcibly displaced by the conflict in Tigray. Your support is making a real difference.

In recent weeks some 30 young girls and women joyfully celebrated their graduation from various vocational training courses in their new home, Ethiopia's capital Addis Ababa.

There were many smiles on their faces as they received their hard-won certificates – delight at having completed training that will equip them to work and earn a living – but in their hearts many of these Eritrean Christian refugees carry deep pain.

They have known the trauma of leaving behind family and all that they held dear in Eritrea, crossing into a new country where the future was uncertain, and then living in a refugee camp sometimes for years not knowing how and when they would ever leave.

Then they had to flee again when the Eritrean army alongside Ethiopian forces attacked their camps in the

Tigray area of northern Ethiopia as part of an offensive against rebel fighters last November.

Thankfully many of the Christian refugees managed to escape from the camps in Tigray when the fighting started – although some were taken captive by the Eritrean army.

There are currently around 400 Christian refugee households in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa. Mostly young women and children, they receive training in skills such as cooking, accounting, tailoring and beauty care for 3-6 months, all of which is funded by Release – thanks to your generous support. So far over 150 people have been trained – a fantastic achievement by our partner.

The situation in Tigray itself continues to threaten the lives of

Christian refugees supported by Release who live in four UN camps near the border with Eritrea.

In July our partner reported that one camp was at severe risk – and running desperately short of food and other supplies. A bridge across the river to the north that could have facilitated escape had been destroyed, to the south the fighting was getting ever closer, while to the east and west there is only uninhabitable terrain.

At the time of writing we received news that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had managed to get food supplies through to the refugee camp and was trying to relocate inhabitants to a secure place.

However, the situation continues to be unstable with food likely to last a few weeks at best.



Dr Berhane
Asmelash

'The situation in Ethiopia is getting worse generally,' Release partner Dr Berhane Asmelash said.

'Despite being overrun to start with, the Tigrayans retreated to the mountains in June where they regrouped, recruited fighters and trained, and then launched a devastating counterattack which forced the Ethiopian army out of Tigray. They are now in Ethiopia and it's currently just Ethiopian militia that are fighting the Tigrayan advance as the army has collapsed.'

The Ethiopian Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed, launched the offensive against the region with support from Eritrea towards the end of last year. Soldiers attacked several UN refugee camps, causing extensive damage, including the camp at Shimelba, where Release has supported Eritrean Christian refugees for many years.

Dr Asmelash said hundreds had been killed – including many Christians from Eritrea.

'In the remaining areas where the fighting continues tens of thousands are dying'

Others fled to Sudan or Addis Ababa or were taken captive. However, he is confident that most taken prisoner have since been released. There were 25,000 in the camps before the fighting started.

Tigray no longer has any food coming in from outside, so fighters are trying to create safe corridors to Djibouti and Sudan to facilitate the movement of supplies. Inside the region 70 per cent of it is peaceful – but in the remaining areas where the fighting continues tens of thousands are dying. These include local Ethiopian farmers who have been corralled into fighting by the Ethiopian authorities, despite a lack of any military training.

However, Dr Asmelash is quietly optimistic that the fighting will soon come to an end.

Both Eritrea and Ethiopia have been weakened by the conflict – an estimated 34,000 Ethiopian troops have been killed and 8,000 are currently prisoners of war – and as the Ethiopian government is on the brink of collapse it will have to



Hundreds of Eritrean Christian refugees have been displaced to Ethiopia's capital Addis Ababa following the war in Tigray.

agree to demands for peace by the international community.

In spite of this, there are urgent needs for prayer.

PLEASE PRAY

- That refugees in the camps caught up in the conflict between the opposing forces would get food and other supplies – and ultimately get to a safe location.
- For an end to the fighting in Tigray and for peace for the whole region including Ethiopia.
- That the Ethiopian Prime Minister would permanently unblock access for supplies into Tigray so that refugees can be helped, including those supported by Release.
- For telephone communications in Tigray to be restored so that Release can communicate effectively with contacts in the region.
- That banks will open again so that funds to help refugees can be easily accessed.

The testimony of Eritrean partner Dr Berhane Asmelash features in a new book, available from Release early next year.

Changing lives – thanks to your support

Two sisters Ababa and Selam were displaced from one of the Tigray refugee camps six months ago. Both of them were struggling to support themselves when they joined a hairstyling course run through our partner.

As a result they qualified as professional hairstylists, and have now opened their own hair salon at their house – and are making enough money to support themselves.

Another Eritrean woman, a young single mother, was struggling to earn enough to be able to feed herself and her daughter when she attended another one of the courses.

Three months later she qualified as a beautician and now earns better wages and sends her daughter to school.

'Before she was doing manual work such as cleaning and washing clothes by hand, which paid little, but now she is getting paid well and the work is less tiring,' said our partner.

Names have been changed.

PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS IN

FLIGHT



SYRIA: An estimated 700,000 Christians have fled following years of civil war and persecution. Many now live in refugee camps in neighbouring states.

IRAN: The authorities harass and imprison the leaders of underground churches – forcing a number to seek refuge in neighbouring Turkey.

UKRAINE



TURKEY



SYRIA



KURDISTAN

LEBANON

IRAQ



IRAN

JORDAN

EGYPT

IRAQ: Up to 90 per cent of the Christian population have left the country since the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003. Instability and violence cause many to remain displaced in Kurdistan (pictured).



NIGERIA: Jihadists continue to wage war against believers in north and central Nigeria. Thousands have been killed and hundreds of thousands now live in camps for displaced people.



BURKINA FASO

NIGERIA

CAMEROON

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

SUDAN

ERITREA

ERITREA: Persecution, forced conscription and economic misery have driven many thousands of Christians into refugee camps in Ethiopia and Sudan.



SOUTH SUDAN

ETHIOPIA



SOMALIA

KENYA

SOMALIA: Three million Somalis are displaced inside the country. Persecution by al-Shabaab militants has driven Christians into Kenya.

ETHIOPIA: Conflict in Tigray forced tens of thousands of people – including persecuted Christians from Eritrea – to flee to Sudan. Many remain displaced within Ethiopia.

People movements in-country and to other countries



Release partner has provided help

Map shows selected movements of Christians displaced by war and persecution.

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL
voice
of Persecuted Christians

RIGHT

'Persecution, war and violence have forced hundreds of thousands of Christians to flee as refugees. Your help is saving and rebuilding lives.' Release CEO Paul Robinson

AFGHANISTAN:

Christians – a tiny minority – fear that persecution will increase under the restored Taliban regime.



NORTH KOREA:

Practising faith is forbidden. Some Christians have defected and live under cover in China – or make the dangerous journey to South Korea.



NORTH KOREA



SOUTH KOREA

AFGHANISTAN

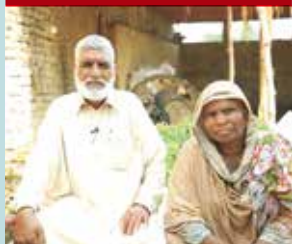
CHINA

PAKISTAN



PAKISTAN:

Christians live as second-class citizens. Some who have been accused of blasphemy or threatened with violence have fled to Thailand and other countries.



THAILAND



MALAYSIA



SRI LANKA

The UN estimates that at the end of 2020 82 million people were forcibly displaced globally – double the number displaced in 2011.¹

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Stock photo

¹ Global Trends: Forced displacement in 2020, UNHCR, 2021.



Release partner Heart for Lebanon distributes food parcels to Christian refugees.

Sharing God's love

Christian refugees from Syria living in Lebanon face both severe economic crisis – worsened by last year's devastating port explosion – and the Covid-19 pandemic. Release partners are helping families to survive – and to find new hope and strength in Christ.

Around 1.5 million Syrian refugees live in Lebanon today – more than one in four of the population – and more per capita than any other country in the world.

Fleeing war and persecution, these refugees must also contend with increasing economic hardship, compounded by the continuing Covid-19 pandemic. Some 80 per cent of Syrian refugees lack any legal status – and most live in extreme poverty.

Rashid, for example, fled from Syria four years ago with his family after extremists attacked his town and attempted to take over the local police station. During prolonged gun battles they had to lie on their bathroom floor for days at a time, leaving his

wife and children terrified.

His youngest son, now 16, suffers from diabetes – which Rashid believes was brought on by these traumatic experiences.

'The extremists also stole bombmaking materials from shops and threatened to kill any witnesses,' said Rashid. 'We were barely able to survive.'

Today Rashid and his family live in one room of a residential block, which they clean each day in lieu of paying rent. They don't have a regular income – but are dependent on tips they receive from residents. Given Lebanon's current financial crisis, Rashid is grateful that his family has somewhere to live.

The country's economy has deteriorated rapidly in the past two years – exacerbated by the chemical blast in the capital's port which killed more than 200 people in August 2020.

Unemployment is estimated to be over 30 per cent of the labour force – and all people have suffered high inflation after a dramatic devaluation of the local currency.

'Despite these hardships, we're thankful we can live in Lebanon as refugees,' said Rashid.

Release's partner Heart for Lebanon has been giving the family a food parcel every month – part of their aid programme which supports 200 Syrian refugee families. Each package includes cooking oil, rice, lentils, pasta, pulses and tinned goods. Families are also given a large bag of cleaning and hygiene products, such as washing powder, soap and disinfectant.

Ramona and her extended family have also benefited from the aid programme. Her husband, a farm worker on a minimum wage, cannot afford to pay rent – so they and their children share accommodation with her mother and two sisters. The monthly food parcels have helped the whole family to survive. Earlier this year Ramona began to attend a Bible

'I was emotionally lost, distressed and lonely. Then I started hearing about God's love and His purpose in my life.'

study organised by our partner – and is now a committed member of the group.

'God has changed my life through these lessons,' said Ramona. 'At first, I was emotionally lost, distressed and lonely. Then I started hearing about God's love and His purpose in my life.'

She says that now she feels much happier, more peaceful and more confident – and that her change of heart has helped relationships with all her family. *'I am overwhelmed with joy and thankfulness, for everything seems different – even with my family,'* she added.

Recently one of the refugee families being helped by our partner sent them a voice message to express their gratitude.

'My family and I thank you for your faithfulness in distributing food every month – especially during the lockdown,' said Elias. *'We were in darkness and you showed us the way*

into the light. Thank you for bringing God's Word simply and clearly.

'We appreciate your hard work to support us physically and spiritually and we pray that God will keep you safe in the midst of this pandemic.'

Your support also enables another Release partner to share God's love with refugees in Lebanon. Part of their ministry is to develop outreach and discipleship teams – which include leaders who have emerged from the refugee community.

'We are thrilled day after day to see how lives are being transformed'

'The main purpose is to reach out to people with the love of Christ, to help those who have taken a step in faith to grow spiritually, to lead Bible study groups, and to meet the needs of people physically and emotionally,' said our partner.

'It is very important to bring together new believers so they are able to learn from each other by sharing their experiences. Through the discipleship training, they get to know what it is to live a Christlike life. Loving people, caring for others, is not just words.

Our people are learning how to connect with others on a daily basis, to reflect God's love towards them and to show them what true compassion is.

'We are thrilled day after day to see how lives are being transformed by the love they receive and through the message of the gospel.'

Names have been changed.

LEBANON



Population: 5.3 million

Capital: Beirut

Government type: Parliamentary republic

Religion: Muslim 61%, Christian 34%, Druze 5%

Sources: World Factbook.



The port of Beirut was devastated by a chemical explosion in August 2020.

IDOP
2021

International Day of Prayer

FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

SUNDAY
NOV 7

releaseinternational.org/idop



Help generate a global wave of prayer by taking part in this year's online International Day of Prayer (IDOP) for the persecuted church.

Release, Open Doors and CSW invite you and your church to take part in our special social media event on Sunday, November 7. Please join us for what promises to be an inspiring evening of prayer and worship between 7.30pm-8.30pm.

This live streamed event will feature contributions from the three organisations, including the latest testimonies of persecuted Christians from around the world.

'At this time of global crisis, persecuted believers need our prayers more than ever'

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

'At this time of global crisis, persecuted believers need our prayers more than ever,' says Release CEO Paul Robinson. 'Please take part if you can.'

Online resources

If you or your church want to promote prayer for persecuted Christians throughout November, please use our free resources listed here and opposite – ideal for your own online meeting or prayer event.

You can watch a video of last year's IDOP event at releaseinternational.org/idop.

**PRAY FOR
PERSECUTED
CHRISTIANS
IN FLIGHT**



Download our new PowerPoint from releaseinternational.org/idop, which includes topical prayer points for persecuted believers displaced by conflict and persecution – as well as a corporate prayer – ideal for use in a church meeting or prayer group.

BIBLE THOUGHTS



Audio clips

Release speakers explore what God's word says about persecution.

THE GOD WHO SEES Release's Chioma reflects on the story of Hagar in Genesis chapter 16 to show how God sees the injustice experienced by His people – and calls us to do the same. *4m.*

OUR REFUGE, STRENGTH AND EVER-PRESENT HELP Psalm 46 reveals who God is – and reminds us that in times of uncertainty, fear and worry, God's presence and peace are with His people, reflects Imtiaz. *5m.*

COMMITMENT TO THE GOSPEL

In Acts chapter 4 the church calls out to God for courage to preach the gospel – and God answers. Pray that our persecuted brothers and sisters will receive the same boldness and grace, says Kenneth. *4m.*

WHAT A PRIVILEGED PEOPLE WE ARE

Release's Stephen reflects on how the Apostle Peter encouraged persecuted Christians scattered across Asia Minor to focus on their hope in Jesus – the salvation that the Old Testament prophets so eagerly awaited. *5m.*

Listen to these and other audio Bible reflections at releaseinternational.org/lockdown.



COPING WITH PERSECUTION AND THE PANDEMIC

Release International is privileged to work with some amazing partners around the world. These short videos describe how persecuted Christians continue to be affected by the pandemic – and how they have learned to deal with the wider problems of sustained persecution.

NIGERIA: **MARK LIPDO**

Extreme violence against Christians in northern and central Nigeria continues. Militant groups have recently adopted the tactic of targeting prominent Christian leaders for kidnap and murder. Release partner Mark Lipdo explains how Covid-19 is currently impacting his work – and how we should respond to the persecution of our brothers and sisters with prayer and advocacy. *6m.*

ERITREA: **DR BERNHANE ASMELASH**



Christians have suffered under authoritarian government and strict religious control in Eritrea for two decades. Thousands have spent time in prison while many more have been forced to flee. Dr Bernhane Asmelash

describes their situation – including the crisis currently being faced by thousands of displaced refugees in Tigray, northern Ethiopia. *7m.*

SOUTHEAST ASIA: **PETER**

In parts of Southeast Asia Christians face strong opposition because of their faith. Our partner Peter explains the particular challenges faced by women who profess faith in Jesus. He also shows how his ministry is helping – and how the Covid-19 pandemic is currently impacting his work. *6m.*

CENTRAL ASIA: **PAVEL**

In remote parts of Central Asia people are hearing the gospel for the first time. Partner 'Pavel', not his real name, and voiced by an actor, describes the experiences of his network of pastors and Christian workers across the region. From difficulties with church registration

and spiritual attack, to 18,000km mission trips, Pavel asks us to pray that his work for the Lord in Central Asia will bear fruit. *5m.*

INDIA: **KUMAR SWAMY**

In several states, anti-conversion laws are restricting the freedom of Christians in India to express faith in Jesus and to share the gospel with their neighbours. In an atmosphere of growing nationalism there is a danger that these laws could be extended across India. Kumar Swamy talks about the current impact of Covid-19 in India, the general oppression that Christians experience – and the work that our partner AICC (All India Christian Council) is doing to help. *7m.*



PAKISTAN: **AFZAL MASIH**

In Pakistan Christians are a marginalised minority who daily carry the burden of poverty and oppression. Watch partner Rev Afzal Masih describe their situation – including the particular problem of abduction and forced conversion. He also explains how his village transformation project is helping and how the Covid-19 pandemic is currently impacting Pakistan. *6m.*



Watch these and more at releaseinternational.org/lockdown

YouTube ReleaseInternational

SUBSCRIBE TO GET OUR LATEST VIDEOS

Good News

Karen raises £900 to help brick-kiln families in Pakistan

Well done to supporter Karen who walked 32 miles in one day to raise more than £900 to help oppressed Christian families in **Pakistan**.

'In 2012 I visited the brick kilns in Pakistan,' she said. 'I met Christians who were trapped in bonded labour. When the rainy season comes, or because of illness or hunger, they are often unable to earn money – so families obtain loans from their landlords.'



These exploited families find they can never repay their debts. *'The landlords lie to them about the amount still owed and, because the people are not educated, they are powerless to dispute this,'* she said.

'However, partners of Release International are on the ground supporting families, and giving them an education.'

DRIVE-IN CHURCH!



Abbey Presbyterian Church in Monkstown, County Antrim, Northern Ireland, recently held their Sunday service outdoors – but with members staying in their cars.

The congregation of 80 – spread across 30 cars – wanted to highlight the plight of those who have no church building or have to meet in secret. The church has previously taken part many times in our former Great Outdoors Church Service.

'It was both an honour and a privilege to be a voice in Monkstown for our persecuted brothers and sisters around the world,' said church volunteer David. 'I trust the Lord will use both our outdoor service on Sunday and any future gatherings to testify for the persecuted church.'

SOMALI CHRISTIANS RELEASED FROM JAIL



We thank God that in August a regional court in Hargeisa, Somaliland, northern **Somalia**, dismissed all charges against Christian couple Mohamed and Hamdi, who had been held since January on charges of spreading Christianity and apostasy under Sharia (Islamic law). They were released immediately – along with others similarly charged.

The couple had been arrested with their new-born baby – and Hamdi was allowed to keep her child with her in prison. Please pray for protection and good health for this precious family.

**NEW
DRAMA**

JOIN THE TOUR!



The exciting new drama tour If Prison Walls Could Speak was launched in September – don't miss this unique opportunity to host a performance in your own church, this year or next.

We're delighted that after many months of hard work and creative inspiration, the innovative one-man multimedia drama from Artless Theatre Company began its UK tour in September.

Featuring immersive video and sound, the show (one hour 40 mins including interval) tells the story of Release associate Petr Jasek, who, in 2015, was jailed for his work aiding persecuted Christians in Sudan. The play is a compelling testimony to God's faithfulness and the unstoppable nature of His Kingdom.

Please discuss with your church leaders about hosting a performance. Email Laura at lhayes@releaseinternational.org to request our **free information pack** which gives full details of what is required.

Artless provides lighting, sound and raised staging that can fit most church layouts. Publicity materials, including personalised A3 posters, will also be provided for churches to promote their event – as well as resources from Release.

More than 30 churches throughout the UK have booked to host performances in 2021 and 2022. Don't miss out!

CAN YOU VOLUNTEER?

We need volunteers to help at some of the venues listed here. Please email us at info@releaseinternational.org if you are able to help.

CONFIRMED DATES

To book a performance at your church, or to find a show in your region, see releaseinternational.org/artless.

2021

**Sun Sept 26 St Mark's Church,
KENNINGTON SE11 5SW**

**Wed Sept 29 7.30pm All Saints Church,
HAMPTON TW12 3RG**

**Fri Oct 15 7.30pm ROMFORD Evangelical
Free Church RM1 2RT**

**Sun Oct 17 Church of The Good Shepherd,
ROMFORD RM7 8HD**

**Fri Oct 29 St Stephen's Church,
NORWICH NR2 1QP**

**Fri Nov 12 Central Baptist Church,
CHELMSFORD CM1 1LN**

Sat Nov 13 SUTTON Baptist Church SM1 1SN

2022

NORTHERN IRELAND	Jan 24-30
WEST MIDLANDS	Feb 7-20
NORTH EAST	Mar 7-13
SOUTH WEST	May 9-22
WALES	June 6-12
SOUTH (East/West Sussex, Hampshire, Surrey)	June 20-26
EAST MIDLANDS	July 11-17
SCOTLAND	Aug 1-11
NORTH WEST	Sept 12-25
LONDON (within M25)	Oct 17-23
OXFORD & BUCKS	Oct 31-Nov 6

Latest confirmed list as *Voice* went to print. Further details at releaseinternational.org/artless. Dates and locations may be subject to change.

FUNDRAISING

Retired vicar Robert de Berry is undertaking a massive sponsored bike ride for persecuted Christians in 2022 – and needs your help.



'To be a bike pilgrim'

From May 14 to June 25, Robert and accompanying cyclists will ride from North Foreland Point Lighthouse, Kent, to Land's End, Cornwall – and back.

Robert will speak in local churches to raise awareness and encourage prayer for persecuted Christians – and aims to raise £250,000 through sponsorship. He hopes to achieve this by recruiting ten whole journey riders each raising £3,000 or more, and ten stage riders each day, each raising £500 or more. The money will be divided equally between Release International and CSW.

'We are encouraged that so many people have already enthusiastically agreed to help and



to join us on the ride for a day – or even the whole distance,' says Robert. 'I invite you to do what you can to help us get support and encouragement to persecuted Christians.'

PLEASE HELP

We need supporters willing to help Robert achieve his spectacular goal. You could:

- Join the bike pilgrimage for just a day or more
- Offer to be a support driver, taking riders' luggage from point to point
- Offer an evening meal or B&B to one of the riders when they visit your town

If you'd like to take part, please register your interest at releaseinternational.org/bikepilgrims.

Robert's route



MAY 14 North Foreland Point Lighthouse – **15** Canterbury – **16** Maidstone Baptist Church – **17** Orpington Christ Church – **18** Sevenoaks St Nicholas Church; Tunbridge Wells St Peter's Church – **19** Redhill Baptist Church; Cheam Baptist Church – **20** Dorking – **21** Godalming St John the Baptist, Godalming – **22** Godalming St John the Baptist, Wonersh; Cranleigh Baptist Church – **23** Winchester – **24** Salisbury St Paul's – **25** Sherborne Reborne Community Church – **26** Taunton – **27** Barnstaple Holy Trinity Church – **28** Bude Oceans Community Church – **30** Newquay New Wave Church – **31** Crowlas Methodist Church – **JUNE 5** Penzance Team Ministry – **6** Truro Methodist Church (day conference) & Truro Cathedral (evening prayer meeting) **7** St Austell Holy Trinity Church – **8** Plymouth St Matthias Church – **9** Exeter St Mark's Church – **10** Seaton Crossroad Centre; Axminster Weycroft Hall – **11** Dorchester Community Church – **13** Bournemouth – **14** Southampton Christ Church; Lighthouse International Church – **15** Portsmouth Christ Church Portsdown – **16** Chichester – **17** Worthing – **18** Brighton – **20** Eastbourne Holy Trinity Church – **21** Hastings – **22** Ashford – **23** Folkestone – **24** Margate St Philip's Church – **25** North Foreland Point Lighthouse.



Jamal's online speaking tour 2021

This **November** we are excited to host a series of **live** online meetings with Release partner Jamal (see page 6) who cares for Christian refugees in northern Iraq.

This is a unique opportunity to hear first-hand how your prayers and gifts are transforming lives in Iraq today.

Jamal is the founder of our partner Hand of Help, a Christian ministry working in the Kurdistan area of northern Iraq to support Christians fleeing conflict and persecution in

Syria and Iraq. His vital ministry provides aid, spiritual discipleship and vocational training to desperately needy Christians.

'We thank God for Release which has enabled us to help Christian refugees in northern Iraq since 2014,' he says. 'Thank you so much for your support, for encouragement and for standing with us.'

Jamal will be talking about the latest challenges facing persecuted Christians in Iraq – including the Covid-19



pandemic. 'While Covid-19 has limited our movement, it has not stopped us from getting supplies to the needy in our region,' he says.

Jamal will speak online, over four nights, at the beginning of November. The event will follow the pattern of previous popular online meetings we have staged with partners over the past year.

We provide a regional focus each evening, involving local Release staff – although you can attend any of the meetings you wish. Booking will be through Eventbrite (eventbrite.co.uk).

Monday, November 1
Northern Ireland

Tuesday, November 2
Scotland

Wednesday, November 3
Wales

Thursday, November 4
England

Check the latest information at releaseinternational.org/events.

INVITE A RELEASE SPEAKER

Our team of experienced speakers are available to join your church or online meeting to help you support and pray for persecuted Christians. They would love to hear from you!

Ireland: Stephen on 028 9334 0014 or 07933 313169

London & South: Chioma on 07861 656269

Midlands & North: James on 07434 894016

Scotland: James on 07434 894016

Wales & West of England: Paul on 07861 651139



Soon after his conversion, the Apostle Paul relied on fellow believers to survive, reflects Kenneth Harrod, Release's Head of Content and Theology.

When our family need us most

I remember thinking the sadness was etched into his face. I was talking to Daniel, who was now living as a refugee. He had fled from his village in northern Nigeria after an attack by Boko Haram terrorists.

His three sons had been shot dead. His father had been beheaded. His wife abducted. But on top of incomprehensible grief, he had himself been forced to flee, leaving everything behind.

At the beginning of his Christian life the Apostle Paul had also fled, in the face of opposition. Acts chapter 9 marks a dramatic about-turn for the Pharisee Saul – who became the Apostle Paul. On the road to Damascus the arch-persecutor is confronted by the risen Lord Jesus – confronted, convicted and converted.

'Paul learns that a faithful witness to Christ may incite the world's hatred'

He who had opposed Christ, now proclaimed Christ. He who had persecuted Christ's followers was now persecuted himself.

In Damascus, instead of arresting Christians, Paul preached that Jesus was the Christ. And when a plot to kill him became known, we read: 'his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket' (Acts 9:25; ESV). How dramatic! It sounds like a scene from an action movie.

He has a similar experience in Jerusalem: after preaching the gospel, there is a plot to kill him – but he

narrowly escapes, assisted by his friends (Acts 9:26-30).

In other words, at the very beginning of his walk with Christ, Paul learns that a faithful witness to Christ may incite the world's hatred – and that **those who suffer for Christ need the help of Christ's family.**

'If we had family living somewhere where there was a disaster we would naturally want to know if they were OK'

We know that in our world today there are Christians who have been forced to flee because of their faith in Christ, whether it is Christians such as Daniel in Nigeria, Christians in Iraq who have fled north to Kurdistan, or Christians in Eritrea who have fled over the border and are living as refugees in Ethiopia.

Mercifully in the UK and Ireland we are unlikely to experience what it is like to flee, leaving behind virtually all that we have; be it the necessities of life, or our treasured possessions.

But if we had family, living or holidaying somewhere where there was a disaster – perhaps an earthquake, or a major fire – we would naturally want to know if they were OK and, moreover, if there was anything we could do to help them. Well, Christians who are forced to flee *are* our family – and partners of Release provide care for such destitute family members.

In his time of need the Apostle Paul experienced the support of his Christian family. We will never know how comfortable that basket was – but we can be sure Paul was thankful there were Christians prepared to lower it.

INSPIRING FAITH



'Jesus told us to walk the extra mile. He never promised that this would give us success in our enterprises, but only that we would become perfect in love. This is enough.'

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.



International Day of Prayer

FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH 2021

ONLINE

Sunday, Nov 7

7.30pm-8.30pm tbc via Eventbrite
releaseinternational.org/idop

Join Release International, Open Doors and CSW for an exciting social media event of prayer and worship, featuring the latest testimony from persecuted Christians around the world. Please save the date and tell your friends and church leaders.

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

IF PRISON WALLS COULD SPEAK



A true story of resilience, espionage and faith from the heart of the persecuted church.


Don't miss the exciting one-man multimedia performance by Artless Theatre Company which goes on tour in the UK this September - and into 2022 (see page 19).

Featuring immersive video and sound, the drama is based on the story of Release associate Petr Jasek who was imprisoned in Sudan.

To book a performance at your church, or to find a show in your region, see releaseinternational.org/artless.



RELEASE INTERNATIONAL
Voice
of Persecuted Christians



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.

Your support enables Release's partners to provide prayerful, pastoral and practical help to persecuted Christians in over 25 countries. Including a gift to Release International in your Will enables that support to continue.

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

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL

Voice
of Persecuted Christians



Making a difference in Kurdistan

'We thank God for Release which has enabled us to help Christian refugees in northern Iraq since 2014. Thank you so much for your support, for encouragement and for standing with us.'

Jamal, founder of Release partner Hand of Help.

Hear the latest news from Jamal when he speaks to supporters online over four evenings from November 1-4. Find out more at releaseinternational.org/events.

releaseinternational.org

prayershield

October–December 2021



Release partners continue to support refugees who have lived in camps in Kurdistan for several years.

OCTOBER 2021

*Eternal God,
Thank You, Lord, that Your
'goodness and unfailing love
will pursue me all the days
of my life' (Psalm 23:6, NLT).
Your loving kindness never
ends.*

*I pray that my persecuted
brothers and sisters will know
that Your love for them is
the same love You expressed
in Your covenant with Your
people thousands of years ago.*

*Thank You that bond is
unbreakable; Your love
endures forever.*

*In Jesus' name,
Amen*

IRAQ

FRIDAY 1: Continue to pray for Christians in Kurdistan who have lived in displacement camps for years. Pray that God will open a way for them to resettle in safety and rebuild their lives.

SATURDAY 2: Please pray for Release partners as they support Iraqi and Syrian refugees in Kurdistan, providing food, money for rent and training, as well as spiritual support.

SUNDAY 3: Fifteen refugee believers recently finished a four-month sewing course, facilitated by Release partners. Pray that God will cause their small businesses to prosper.

**'He will call on me, and
I will answer him; I will
be with him in trouble,
I will deliver him and
honour him.'**

Psalm 91:15

MONDAY 4: Thank God that Release partners recently repaired the homes of five Christian families in Qaraqosh (also known as Bakhdida). Pray for these families as they return to this mainly Christian area of Iraq.

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL
voice
of Persecuted Christians

MYANMAR

TUESDAY 5: Please pray that God will encourage and sustain His people in Myanmar amid continued unrest and violence since the military coup in February.

WEDNESDAY 6: The military in Myanmar have reportedly destroyed places of worship since they seized power. Pray for new homes for displaced congregations – and wisdom for their leaders.

THURSDAY 7: Thank God for the determination of believers such as Paing (pictured). A former Buddhist monk, he now shares the gospel in Buddhist villages, despite suffering intense persecution over the years.

FRIDAY 8: Pray that Christian communities in Myanmar will find strength in unity and stand firm in their faith.

CHINA

SATURDAY 9: Pray for the Early Rain Covenant Church in Chengdu, Sichuan province, as authorities continue to attempt to shut down this unregistered church.

SUNDAY 10: Early Rain Covenant Church's minister Wu Wuqing and his family have been under virtual house arrest since June. Their home is being guarded and visitors turned away. Pray for their release.

MONDAY 11: Pray for Liao Qiang and his family, members of Early Rain Covenant Church, who have fled to the US where they are now seeking asylum.



Paing, a former Buddhist monk, now shares the gospel in villages in Myanmar.

TUESDAY 12: Pray for Zhao Weikai of the Xuncheng Reformed Church in Taiyuan, Shanxi province, and his wife Li Xin. They were arrested in July and Pastor Zhao was later charged with 'illegal holding of materials promoting terrorism and extremism'.

WEDNESDAY 13: Pray for Pastor Pan Yongguang and 60 other members of Shenzen Reformed Holy Church who fled persecution as members of an 'illegal' church in China and have resettled in South Korea.

THURSDAY 14: Pray for the bereaved family whose funeral service in Guiyang was raided by state officials in July. Prayer, worship and Bible readings were banned and Christian symbols removed.

FRIDAY 15: Continue to pray for American-Chinese Pastor John Cao who is serving a seven-year prison sentence in Kunming city in connection with his charitable work in Myanmar and his faith. His request for a Bible and a visit from his mother were recently denied.

SATURDAY 16: Pastor Zhang Shaojie of Nanle County Christian Church has been transferred to a different prison in Henan, seven years into his 12-year sentence. Please ask God to protect and encourage him.

SUNDAY 17: Pray for Christian women Ju Dianghong and Liang Qin who are currently serving prison sentences of 13 and ten years respectively for 'cult activity'. They are detained in a remote facility in Yunnan province more than 1,000 miles from Ju's home town.

UGANDA

MONDAY 18: Pray for Najira whose Muslim father beat her and forced her to drink mosquito repellent when he learnt that she had left Islam and her abusive husband. She was unconscious for three days but recovered and is now in hiding.

TUESDAY 19: Pray for Harriet in eastern Uganda whose brother attacked her recently after discovering she was a Christian. He was arrested but has since threatened to kill her.

WEDNESDAY 20: Harriet (see yesterday) had kept her faith a secret from her brother for more than 20 years. Pray for encouragement and courage for God's people in Uganda – and worldwide – who dare not speak His name.

THURSDAY 21: Pastor Yolonim Oduchu from Pallisa district died after being poisoned, allegedly by locals upset by his plans to build a church. Pray for his widow, Mary, and eight children.

FRIDAY 22: Pray for the family and friends of Tabiruka Tefiiri, 20, from Kubuku district who was killed after converting to Christianity. His father was charged with manslaughter, not murder, because he 'acted out of anger'.

SATURDAY 23: Uganda's constitution and law provide for religious freedom, including the right to convert from one faith to another. Pray that religious rights will be upheld across the country.

NIGERIA

SUNDAY 24: Please join us in praying for the safe return of the many Christians who have been kidnapped in Nigeria. Nigerian newspaper *Vanguard* reports that 2,371 Nigerians were abducted in the first half of 2021.

MONDAY 25: Among those kidnapped in Kaduna state recently were more than 140 children abducted from Bethel Baptist High School in Kaduna city in July. Thank God that 28 students were later released

and about six others escaped: pray the rest will be freed soon.

TUESDAY 26: Pray that the Nigerian Government will recognise its responsibility to protect all its citizens, including Christians, and take decisive action to end kidnappings.

WEDNESDAY 27: Pray for the safe return of Christian doctor Solomon Nidiamaka who was kidnapped from a hospital in Ugwolawo, Kogi state, in July.

THURSDAY 28: Fulani militants killed Celina Ishaku's son two years after murdering her husband. Then, at the boy's funeral, they attacked mourners, killing three youths. Ask God to surround Celina and her community with His love and comfort.

FRIDAY 29: Fulani militants killed Pastor Danlami Yakwoi from Tawari, Kogi state, two weeks after they kidnapped him in July, along with his two sons and his nephew. One of his sons was released after a ransom was paid.

SATURDAY 30: Thirty-three Christians were killed in Fulani militant raids on villages in southern Kaduna in early July. Pray for the bereaved, including Manasseh Adamu who lost eight relatives in Warkan village.

SUNDAY 31: Several churches and many homes were destroyed in the raids in southern Kaduna (above). Pray that these communities will be united in their resolve to stand against fear and violence.

NOVEMBER 2021

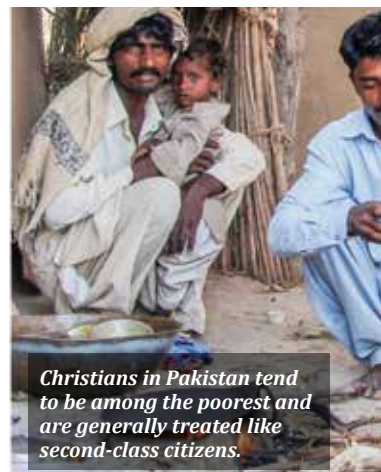
PAKISTAN

MONDAY 1: Please pray for Zafar Bhatti and his wife, Nawab. An appeal court in Rawalpindi upheld his life sentence for blasphemy in June. He continues to deny the charge.

TUESDAY 2: Christians with a Muslim background are a particular target for extremists in Pakistan. Pray they will have a steadfast faith and receive strong biblical teaching.

WEDNESDAY 3: Pray for the safe return of a 14-year-old Christian from Faisalabad who was abducted in July. Her family say they have been sent images of documents confirming her conversion to Islam and her marriage.

THURSDAY 4: Pray for Riaz Gill who was beaten and received death threats from colleagues after being promoted at the medical centre where he works in Karachi. The persecution



Christians in Pakistan tend to be among the poorest and are generally treated like second-class citizens.

has continued even though Riaz has resigned from his new position.

FRIDAY 5: Thank God for the acquittal of Shafqat Emmanuel and his wife, Shagufta Kausar, after seven years on death row for alleged blasphemy.

SATURDAY 6: Please pray for Asif who was given a death sentence in 2020 over blasphemous texts sent from a SIM card which he had lost. The prisoners he shares a cell with dislike him reading the Bible.

VIETNAM

SUNDAY 7: As we stand in solidarity with persecuted Christians on the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church (IDOP) today, let's pray that our brothers and sisters in Vietnam and globally will know they are not forgotten – by their church family or by their Father in heaven.



MONDAY 8: Pray for an evangelical church in Ho Chi Minh City, which officials blamed for a local outbreak of Covid. Pastor Vo Xuan Loan, who was hospitalised with Covid along with her husband and two children, was publicly accused of spreading the virus after making a trip to Hanoi.

TUESDAY 9: Vietnam's evangelical community has faced nationwide opposition after the media focus on Pastor Vo's church (above). Pray that Vietnamese people will recognise the political agenda behind this attempt to smear the church's name.

WEDNESDAY 10: Pray for wisdom and direction for Christian leaders (see above) throughout the country as they respond to this wave of opposition.

AFGHANISTAN

THURSDAY 11: Pray for the Christian community in Afghanistan after the recent Taliban takeover. It is expected that extremists across the region will become emboldened, leading to an increase in persecution of the church.

FRIDAY 12: Christians in Afghanistan, a tiny minority, are said to be fearful of further persecution. Christians already risked betrayal, even from relatives, before the Taliban came to power. Ask God to protect His people in this troubled nation.

SATURDAY 13: Many Afghan Christians are fleeing to Pakistan – but here too Islamist extremists have a strong presence. Ask God to protect and provide for them.

SUNDAY 14: Please pray for Release partners who are providing radio broadcasts in local Afghan languages, Christian literature and discipleship materials for new believers. Ask God to protect their ministry.

ALGERIA

MONDAY 15: Pray for the congregations of three churches in the Oran area which were sealed by Algerian authorities in July. Sixteen churches have been forcibly shut since 2017.

TUESDAY 16: Pray for the overcoming faith of the Algerian church. One church leader said church closures have 'helped the Algerian church to free itself from fear. Even through this persecution, we have many opportunities to testify in police stations, courts, and in many other places'.

WEDNESDAY 17: Pray for 'Ahmed' who was recently sentenced to six months in prison for church activities intended to 'undermine the faith of a Muslim'. Ahmed has suffered years of persecution and the breakdown of his marriage since he came to Christ.

THURSDAY 18: Pray for an end to the government campaign to close churches in Algeria. Pray that churches will be



Christians in India stage a silent protest outside a police station after radical Hindus beat a Christian, killing her unborn child.

able to reopen soon and renew their witness to their communities.

INDIA

FRIDAY 19: Pray for Christians in India as they endure increasing persecution, and pray that their faithful witness will draw many others to Christ.

SATURDAY 20: Several states in India have recently passed new, stricter 'anti-conversion' legislation. Ask God to strengthen His people in India as the legislation has emboldened Hindu radicals to abuse the laws and persecute Christians with impunity.

SUNDAY 21: Pray for believers in a village in Madhya Pradesh, where radical Hindus raided a prayer meeting, beating a pastor and several church members. Extremists kicked Lila Bhai in the stomach, killing her unborn son.

MONDAY 22: When Lila's church (see yesterday) tried to register a case with police, their complaint was rejected – even after a silent protest outside the police station (pictured). Pray for justice: Release associate ministries are helping them pursue the case in court.

TUESDAY 23: Pray for Pastor Subash's congregation in Karnataka state who were beaten by extremists during a 45-minute attack. Police filed charges against Pastor Subash for 'forced conversion' at the extremists' insistence.

WEDNESDAY 24: Pray for a 23-year-old Christian, Anamika Gautam, who was beaten with clubs and metal rods, and her life threatened because she shared her faith with a Hindu in Mansura, Uttar Pradesh.

THURSDAY 25: The father of Anamika (above), her brother and neighbours

who rescued her from her attackers, were later falsely accused of abuse by a female neighbour. Pray that justice and truth will prevail.

FRIDAY 26: Praise God that the church in the area of Uttar Pradesh where Anamika (above) lives is growing rapidly. Pray for those coming to faith who are harassed daily by extremists.

SATURDAY 27: Pray for a full recovery, both physical and spiritual, for a family in Ludhiana district, Punjab, who were brutally beaten because they had turned to Christ. A 24-year-old woman was strangled but survived.

SUNDAY 28: Thank God that a Release partner has been able to provide financial and practical help for ten Christian families who were expelled from their village in Odisha state and forced to live in the jungle. Pray God will provide homes for them.

MONDAY 29: Pray for Pastor Sanjay Kumar Kharati and his family who were beaten and threatened by police in Uttarakhand. The family have since fled the area. They were summoned for questioning about 'breaching Covid protocols' but interrogated over alleged forced conversions.

TUESDAY 30: Pray for the 50 members of Pastor Sanjay's church (above). They too have been told to abandon their faith or face being ostracised.

DECEMBER 2021

LAOS

WEDNESDAY 1: Pray for Gate and his family (pictured) who were expelled from their village in Laos after they became Christians. He has been denied permission to build a home on land he owns in a nearby village. Release associate ministries are supporting them.

THURSDAY 2: Pray for the many Lao Christians who are persecuted by relatives or village officials who believe that Christians will offend the animistic spirits of their tribal religions. Believers are often expelled from their homes or villages.

FRIDAY 3: Pray that God will raise up strong Bible teachers across Laos. There are many house churches but few trained pastors.

SATURDAY 4: Pray that God's word will spread across Laos, despite restrictions. Bibles are not sold in book shops and the Government restricts distributions of Bibles and Christian literature.

BURKINA FASO

SUNDAY 5: Ask God to protect Christians in Burkina Faso, who are believed to be on a jihadist hitlist. Release partners say extremists are targeting places of worship and religious leaders.

MONDAY 6: Groups affiliated with *al-Qaeda* and Islamic



Gate and his wife in Laos receive encouragement from a Christian support worker.

State have been gaining ground in the Sahel region. Pray that God will frustrate their plans and ambitions.

TUESDAY 7: Churches in the north of Burkina Faso are reportedly being forced to close their doors and meet in secret. Pray that they will know God's peace and His presence.

WEDNESDAY 8: Pray for the thousands of Christians in Burkina Faso displaced by the violence. Thank God Release partners have been able to provide food, water and hygiene supplies.

THURSDAY 9: Pray for ten-year-old 'Philip' whose father, Pastor 'Daniel', was stabbed to death by extremists. The family had fled their village – but Daniel returned to find

food and was ambushed by jihadists lying in wait.

FRIDAY 10: More than 130 people were killed in a night-time raid by jihadists on Yagha village. Pray that God will bind up the broken-hearted in this community.

SATURDAY 11: Pray for the many children in Burkina Faso who have been out of school for three years, due to conflict and Covid. Our partners have supplied school fees and school kits to enable more than 400 displaced children to resume their education.

IRAN

SUNDAY 12: Pray for Homayoun Zhavah and his wife, Sara Admadi, who have been sentenced to two and eight years in prison respectively for their house church activities.

Homayoun is said to suffer from advanced Parkinson's Disease: Sara is his carer.

MONDAY 13: Thank God for the witness of Hamed Ashouri who is serving a ten-month prison sentence in Karaj for 'propaganda against the regime'. 'I'm thankful for the persecution and thank God that Jesus Christ counted me worthy to choose me as his child,' he says.

TUESDAY 14: Reza Zaeemi is serving a nine-month sentence in the same prison as Hamed (above) for 'promoting evangelical Christianity'. Pray that God will be his strength and guide in prison.

WEDNESDAY 15: Please pray for the many other Christians currently serving time in Iranian prisons because of their faith in Jesus.

SOMALILAND

THURSDAY 16: Pray for strength, wisdom and courage for believers in Somaliland who have been shaken by a number of high-profile trials involving Christians with a Muslim background.

FRIDAY 17: Pray for Mohamed, Hamdi and others who were charged with apostasy, offences against the state religion (Islam) and inciting others to disobey laws relating to public order. They were detained in January.

SATURDAY 18: Pray for a Christian couple who were

deported from Somaliland to Somalia for converting from Islam and engaging in 'evangelism'. Pray for them as they resettle in a safer third nation.

SUNDAY 19: Many believers from Somaliland have reportedly fled abroad in the past year, concerned by recent persecution of converts from Islam. Pray for wisdom for them as they decide if and when to return.

MONDAY 20: Pray that recent trials involving Christians will not be used to further embed *Sharia* (Islamic law) in Somaliland. Pray that they will rather serve to highlight the need for greater religious freedom.

ERITREA

TUESDAY 21: Pray for more than 100 Christian prisoners believed to be behind bars in state jails in Eritrea. Pray they will be a powerful witness to their fellow inmates.

WEDNESDAY 22: Thank God for the recent release of scores of prisoners of faith in the first half of this year. Please pray for another mass release of prisoners soon.

THURSDAY 23: Ask God to relieve the suffering of people in the Tigray region of Ethiopia, who include many Eritrean Christian refugees. Eritrea has joined forces with Ethiopia in attacking 'rebels': many civilians have been caught in the crossfire.

PRAYERS FOR CHRISTMAS

CHRISTMAS EVE: As we prepare to celebrate the coming of the Lord with eager expectation at Christmas, let's pray that our persecuted brothers and sisters – in Eritrea and worldwide – will wait on Him and be reassured of His promises today.

CHRISTMAS DAY: As we celebrate the birth of Jesus, please pray that He will flood with His peace and His joy those who suffer for His name's sake.

BOXING DAY: Pray over our persecuted brothers and sisters in Eritrea and worldwide today, that the Lord 'will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways' (Psalm 91:11).

COLOMBIA

MONDAY 27: Pray for 'Rolo', a former communist guerrilla who now risks his life to distribute Bibles in areas of Colombia controlled by guerrilla and paramilitary groups (red zones). He has been beaten and tortured – but remains determined to spread the gospel.

TUESDAY 28: Some guerrillas oppose the church due to their atheistic communist ideology: others oppose it because of its stand against their criminal activities. Pray that many more guerrillas will come to Christ, as Rolo (above) did.



*Transporting
Bibles into
Colombia's 'red
zones' means
entering very
remote and
dangerous areas.*

WEDNESDAY 29: Ask God to protect church leaders speaking out against corruption and poverty in Colombia. A number of social activists have been killed in recent months.

THURSDAY 30: Please pray for unity in the Colombian church. Pray that God's people will present a unified voice

for peace – and an answer to the nation's many social problems.

FRIDAY 31: On the eve of a new year, let's ask God to plant fresh hope in the hearts of our persecuted family and remind them that He is with them always, 'to the very end of the age' (Matthew 28:20).

Lord Jesus,

Thank You for the powerful witness and overcoming faith of my persecuted brothers and sisters who are not ashamed of the gospel.

May they know, Lord, that the 'Spirit of glory and of God' rests upon them in their suffering (1 Peter 4:14).

Forgive me, Lord, when I hesitate to speak of You, when I choose not to be salt and light. Help me to be worthy of Your name.

Amen

Sources: BBC; China Aid; Early Rain Covenant Church; International Christian Concern; Middle East Concern; Morning Star News; Release partners and contacts; Reuters: *Vanguard*; VOM Canada; VOM Poland; 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.

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