

Prayer for the Persecuted Church

May 4, 2018

From International Christian Concern
https://pages.e2ma.net/pages/1806612/7925?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_content=newsbites&utm_campaign=Persecution%20Digest%20Weekly%20Email

Nigerian Bishops Call for Change in Leadership

5/1/18 Nigeria (World Watch Monitor)

Thirty armed men, believed to be Fulani militants, killed 19 people while storming a Catholic church in Benue state. Priests Joseph Gor and Felix Tyolaha were among those massacred. In response to the attack, the Nigeria House of Representatives summoned President Buhari, and passed a vote of no confidence in the country's service chiefs and security advisors.

- How to Pray: Pray for the Nigerian government to develop strategies to protect Christians in the region. Pray for discernment for churches and authorities and for them to find refuge in the midst of attacks. Pray for the restoration of crops, property, and worship centers that have been destroyed.

North Korean Defectors Send USB Sticks Home

5/1/18 North Korea (Channel News Asia)

Defectors have been throwing hundreds of bottles into the sea. Hoping to share a picture of freedom with North Koreans, they have filled these bottles with food, cash, medicine, and USB sticks containing movies, current affairs programs, and music videos. It is reported that many of these bottles are discovered by North Korean fishing boats.

- How to Pray: Pray for the people of North and South Korea to come to a relationship with Jesus Christ. Pray for wisdom for all authorities making decisions affecting these countries. Pray for protection and provision for defectors who have fled their homes.

Thousands Rally for Displaced Persons in Myanmar

5/1/18 Myanmar (Radio Free Asia)

In recent clashes between the national army and the Kachin Independence Army, thousands of civilians have been displaced. The latest fighting

stranded 2,000 villagers. Approximately 5,000 people protested in the capital to demand rescue for those driven from their homes. Many of those displaced from their homes have found refuge in local churches.

- How to Pray: Pray for God's protection and presence to bring comfort, provision, and refuge to escaping civilians. Pray for God's peace and discernment for authorities as they make decisions. Pray for wisdom and justice to reign and end the long-running conflict in Myanmar.

Two Churches Destroyed in Police Search

4/30/18 Kenya (Citizen)

While searching for criminals in Kisiriri village, armed officers allegedly burned down two churches and several houses during the operations. Pastor Thomas Nasikei also accused officers of taking valuable church equipment. County Police said that security personnel were deployed to the village after two people were shot by armed raiders.

- How to Pray: Pray for God's peace to reign over anger and fear in the face of loss. Pray that those who have done wrong will be brought to justice. Pray for the restoration of property and fellowship for those who have experienced loss.

From Voice of the Martyrs
<http://www.icommittoprayer.com>

May. 03, 2018 | Bangladesh

Local Muslims Angered by Literature Distribution to Children

When a Christian group distributed literature to children in a Bangladeshi village, Muslims blamed a local church. After receiving complaints about Muslim children being evangelized, police said Christians are allowed to talk about their faith only with other adults and that no one under 20 is allowed to convert to another religion. The church responded with a letter stating that they do not support controversial activities and were not affiliated with the group that distributed the literature. The leader of that group has gone into hiding due to the intense anti-Christian sentiment. Pray for resolution between community members and church members.

May. 03, 2018 | Turkey

Pray for Haddad and Other New Believers

Haddad, a former Muslim, placed his faith in Christ recently after an elderly woman prayed for him at a bus station. His search for truth began with the woman's simple prayer that God would guide him to salvation. He first abandoned Islamic fanaticism and thoughts of terrorism after listening to apologetic programs on the Arabic Christian television station Al Hayat. Later, after deciding to follow Jesus, he got involved in a church without his family and friends knowing. Last year, however, his mother found Christian books and a Bible in his room and realized he had converted to Christianity. Haddad's family beat him so badly that his leg was broken, and he also sustained injuries to his head and shoulders. After recovering, Haddad fled the country. Pray that Haddad and other new believers will grow in faith and have opportunities to share their faith with their families. Pray for reconciliation between Haddad and his family.

May. 03, 2018 | China

Christians in Henan Monitored by Government Officials

A Christian in the Zhoukou area of Henan province said that under new government restrictions, area churches are required to sing the Chinese national anthem at the beginning of each service and a nationalistic song titled "No Communist Party, No New China" at the end of service. Local authorities also issued an order forbidding anyone under 18 from entering a church. The Christian said officials recently walked around the neighborhood and removed ceramic tiles with inscriptions like "Emmanuel" or "God so loved the world." They even walked into his mother's bedroom and tore down a painting. Government authorities attend every Sunday service to ensure that no crosses larger than 3 feet are displayed. And if they see children in attendance, they will close down the church. "At this challenging period," the Christian said, "many believers are afraid to come to church." Pray for churches in Henan, and pray for the unity and wisdom of believers when dealing with authorities.

<https://www.opendoorsusa.org>

May 4 | MALI

- Sory* was threatened by Islamists when they heard about his work at a church in Djalloube, central Mali. He immediately fled into the forest, later rejoining his family. But his children are still traumatized. Pray with Sory and his family for safety and healing.

May 5 | VIETNAM

- The first convert in his village, Vang Atu began to share his newfound faith, eventually starting a house church. Since then, he and his family have endured severe persecution. Come alongside the Atu family, praying that God would be near to them in this uncertain time.

May 6 | IRAQ

- Church leaders working to provide for the needs of refugees that have returned to their homes are feeling overwhelmed by all the suffering they witness. Pray that these leaders could find emotional respite and carve out time for rest and their families.

May 7 | BANGLADESH

- Pray with more than half a million Rohingya who have fled into Bangladesh after genocidal attacks that killed 6,700. Through the work we do, we know that many Rohingya are Muslim Background Believers (MBBs). Pray that many more would come to know Jesus through the testimonies of MBBs.

May 8 | SYRIA

- A report concludes that the return of Syrian refugees to their homes would require safety from militant groups and response to years of religious persecution. Pray with refugees as they wait for these critical factors.

May 9 | JORDAN

- Pray with refugee youth in Jordan. Pray that God would raise up leaders to see the need for more schools for refugees.

May 10 | ETHIOPIA

- Over the last five years, Sube* has used her theological training she received through Open Doors to train more than 100 evangelists, pastors and elders. Please pray with Sube as she seeks to open training centers amid persecution.

North Korea-US talks: Who are North Korea's American detainees?

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-43983719>

Three Americans detained in North Korea have been relocated to a Pyongyang hotel and are receiving good food and medical care, reports say. The three may be released as a gesture of good will, amid preparations for a meeting between leader Kim Jong-un and US President Donald Trump.

Their release, however, did not take place on Thursday as Mr Trump's legal aide Rudy Giuliani indicated it would.

The White House has reacted cautiously to the reports.

"We can't confirm the validity of any of the reports currently out about their release, but we certainly would see this as a sign of good will if North Korea were to release the three Americans" ahead of the summit, press secretary Sarah Sanders told reporters on Thursday.

The US is "fighting very diligently" for their freedom, Mr Trump has said.

On Wednesday, he told his followers on Twitter to "stay tuned!" for news.

"As everybody is aware, the past Administration has long been asking for three hostages to be released from a North Korean Labor camp, but to no avail," he wrote.

Two of the detainees were jailed in 2017, after Mr Trump became president.

Reports the prisoners would be released originated from Choi Sung-ryong, a South Korean activist with contacts in the North.

Here's what we know about the three men.

Kim Hak-song

Kim Hak-song worked at the Pyongyang University of Science and Technology (PUST) and was held on suspicion of "hostile acts" on 6 May 2017. He was reportedly detained while in Pyongyang Station.

The university, which mostly teaches the children of North Korea's elite, was founded in 2010 by a Korean-American Christian entrepreneur, with much of the costs funded by US and South Korea Christian charities.

Several foreign lecturers are thought to teach there.

Kim Hak-song had previously described himself as a Christian missionary who intended to start an experimental farm at PUST, Reuters news agency reported, citing an online post by Mr Kim.

He is, reports say, an ethnic Korean born just across the North Korean border in China who emigrated to the US in the 1990s. He is said to have gone on to

study agriculture in Yanbian, a Chinese prefecture which borders North Korea, before moving to Pyongyang.

Kim Sang-duk/Tony Kim

Two weeks before Kim Hak-song was arrested, Kim Sang-duk - also known as Tony Kim - was detained on espionage charges.

He was trying to leave the country after spending a month working at PUST. South Korean media said he was 55 and had been involved in humanitarian work in the North.

"Some officials at PUST told me his arrest was not related to his work at PUST," the chancellor of the university, Chan-Mo Park, told Reuters news agency.

"He had been involved with some other activities outside PUST, such as helping an orphanage."

Mr Kim studied accounting at two American universities and had worked as an accountant in the US for more than a decade, his Facebook page says.

He had also taught in Yanbian.

Kim Dong-chul

A South Korea-born US citizen, Kim Dong-chul is a pastor in his early 60s.

He was detained in 2015 on spying charges and sentenced to 10 years' hard labour in 2016.

Before his trial, he was presented at a government-arranged press conference, where he apparently confessed to stealing military secrets in collusion with South Korea - a claim rejected by Seoul.

In an interview with CNN in January 2016, Mr Kim said he lived in Fairfax, Virginia.

He said he used to run a trading and hotel services company in Rason, a special economic zone near the border zone in north-east North Korea.

He told CNN he had left a wife and two daughters behind in China, but had had no contact with them since his detention.

Asia Bibi's appeal finally will be heard in Pakistan's Supreme Court

By Lyndsey Koh May 1, 2018

<https://www.mnnonline.org/news/asia-bibi-s-appeal-finally-will-be-heard-in-pakistans-supreme-court/>

Pakistan (MNN) — After years of silence on Asia Bibi's case, there is finally a new development. The

Chief Justice of Pakistan has agreed to hear Bibi's appeal.

Bibi was arrested back in 2009 and charged with blasphemy after a dispute at work with some Muslim women. She was convicted of blasphemy the following year and sentenced to death.

The Lahore High Court upheld Bibi's death sentence in 2014. Her execution was stayed by the Supreme Court a year later. Bibi made a final appeal, but her hearing has been continually pushed off as she languishes on death row.

According to The Express Tribune, Chief Justice of Pakistan Mian Saqib Nisar said to Bibi's attorney, Saiful Malook, "Your appeal in Aasia Bibi [case] is going to be fixed soon as I myself will preside [over] the bench."

Bruce Allen with FMI says there is hope that Bibi's appeal may be heard as early as this summer.

"No date has been fixed yet, but that is good news that we could be coming near to the end of this legal battle on behalf of Asia Bibi."

This latest development once again draws international attention to Bibi's ongoing and controversial case. While political leaders and humanitarian organizations call for Bibi's release, violent mobs in Pakistan protest her release.

Allen says, "In the case of Asia Bibi, even if the Supreme Court acquits her,...she is not safe on the streets of Pakistan. There are people who have it in their mind to kill her if she ever leaves prison."

Bibi conveyed a message through her family asking Christians around the world to join in a day fasting and prayer last Friday.

"It is giving her great emotional support to know that her brothers and sisters in Christ around the world are praying for her, are advocating on her behalf and trying to keep international attention focused on the case."

The blasphemy law is often used as a hammer wielded to satisfy personal grudges in Pakistan. Christians especially are disproportionately targeted by these blasphemy accusations.

Another blasphemy case we are following is that of Ahmed, an influential laborer for Christ in Pakistan. Both he and his attorney have been attacked in court and the trial continues despite multiple affirmations that the charges against Ahmed are baseless.

Allen says, for Christians in Pakistan, "It's very wearying for them. I know several who say, 'When we see the attacks — whether they are the legal attacks where cases go to court like

Asia Bibi or other types of just physical attacks in society, acid being thrown on people because of their faith — we see these things happening and it can just weigh us down and be very discouraging if that's what we end up focusing on."

For Asia Bibi, for Ahmed, and for all persecuted Christians in Pakistan, please lift them up in unified prayer as our brothers and sisters in Christ.

"Pray for their perseverance. In the book of Hebrews, we are told to remember those in prison as if it were us. What would we want people to be remembering on our behalf when they are interceding for us? So pray for their perseverance, that they would hold up not just under physical difficulties, but the emotional difficulty — the loneliness that's there, the separation from family, the physical separation from the people who are praying for you and would want to give you hugs and encouragement."

Specifically, for Asia Bibi, Allen asks, "We want to pray for [her] attorneys [and] their families who are also undergoing this struggle.... Pray for their emotional stability [and] their wisdom in anticipating what next steps need to be taken because there could be so many different contingencies."

REGARDING ANDREW BRUNSON (from Facebook):

Norine wrote this urgent plea for prayer this morning and I thank you ahead of time for praying for both Andrew and Norine who has the weight of all of this on her shoulders:

I saw Andrew today and he was doing better at the Buca prison. His prayer request to you is that he have a good witness at his next hearing on May 7.

In the meantime, we are scrambling to get some things done on the legal side as the time to the hearing has been very short. We need those who have the information to be eager to help, we need to find a way for something where there seems to be no way, and we need people to move on things quickly. I'm sorry to be so vague, but the Lord knows exactly what we need.

Also, pray for protection for the lawyer and for the Spirit of the Lord to be upon him:

And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.