



Prayer for the Persecuted Church for July 15, 2022

Pray for imprisoned or kidnapped Christians

CHRISTIANS IN PRISON: *This list is only a sample: ALGERIA: Hamid Soudad; CHINA: Pastors John Cao, Yan Hwa, Hu Shigen, Goa Zhisheng, Wang Yi and Qin Derfu, Hao Zhiwei, Zhang Shaojie, Li Juncai, Alimujiang Yimiti (Uyghur); IRAN: Naser Navard Goltapeh, Yousef Nadarkhani, Sabeh Fadaee, Homayoun & Sara, Milad Goudarzi, Alireza Nourmohammadi; KAZAKHSTAN: Pastor Maximov; PAKISTAN: Zafar Bhatti; VIETNAM: Nguyen Nang Tinh, Nguyen Trung Ton*

KIDNAPPED VICTIMS: *Raymond Koh, Gilbert Biswas, Ken Elliot, Jeff Woodke, Leah Sharibu, (and hundreds of children), Sarah Atef, Joshua Hilmya & wife Ruth Sitepu, Hormoz Diril (in Turkey)*

From ICC:

<https://bit.ly/3uJcOu0>

Christian Woman Assaulted with a Sickle in Egypt

07/07/22 Egypt (ICC)

Last month, a Muslim radical brutally attacked a Christian woman in Egypt, Mona Wafdi Marzouk, nearly killing her. One morning as she was walking to her family's farm to help her father, who was in poor health, the attacker ambushed her and began to strangle her. He then proceeded to grab a sickle, and he attempted to slash her to death. Thankfully, she survived the brutal attack.

- *HOW TO PRAY: Pray for Mona's physical and emotional healing following this attack.*
- *Pray for the perpetrator to be held accountable.*
- *Pray for him to come to know the love of Christ.*

Christians Fear Violence in Bangladesh

07/05/22 Bangladesh (ICC)

On July 3, the Tripura Welfare Association in Bangladesh organized a human chain to protest a recent terrorist attack in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Hundreds marched in the streets to demand justice for the victims'

families. The attack took place on June 21, with members of the Kuki-Chin National Front firing indiscriminately at civilians and striking them with melee weapons.

- *HOW TO PRAY: Pray for peace throughout this region.*
- *Pray for the voices of these protesters to be heard.*
- *Pray for healing for those who lost loved ones in this recent attack.*

Over 700 Catholic Priests Protest Violence in Nigeria

07/06/22 Nigeria (ICC)

More than 700 priests gathered last week to protest the violence against Christians in Nigeria. The group was gathered for the funeral of a fellow priest, Father Vitus Borogo, who was killed in Kaduna State on June 25. The priests' emphasis was to call out the Nigerian government for its lack of response to the persecution and its inability to protect the community from the ongoing violence.

- *HOW TO PRAY: Pray for the Nigerian government to be spurred to action.*
- *Pray for protection for Christian leaders in Nigeria.*
- *Pray for an end to religiously motivated violence in this region.*

Underground Priest in China Asked to Join Official Church

07/01/22 China (ICC)

An underground Catholic church in China's Hebei province is facing the risk of being demolished for refusing to join the state-sanctioned official church. Although his church still stands today, Bishop Dong alleges that the government will send workers to demolish his church soon. He added that he is being monitored at the moment, yet he is not afraid.

- **HOW TO PRAY:** Pray for protection for Bishop Dong and his congregation.
- Pray for their building not to be demolished.
- Pray for greater religious freedom throughout China.

From Voice of the Martyrs

<https://www.icommittoprayer.com>

Jul. 14, 2022 | Cuba

Congregation Remains Faithful Despite Oppression

Pastor David Walter Fis leads a Baptist church in Cuba that has experienced ongoing harassment from government authorities. First, state security officials demolished their church building. When the congregation continued gathering, officials placed restraining orders on Pastor Fis and the congregation. Despite the government's attempts to silence their witness, the church has continued to grow, meeting in the homes of church members or in fields, and members recently celebrated the baptism of new believers.

- Praise God for this congregation's commitment to follow Christ amid Communist oppression.

Pray that their faithful witness will continue to lead others into closer fellowship with Christ.

Jul. 14, 2022 | Mozambique

Christian Teenager Enslaved by ISIS

Evodia, age 14, and her mother were captured in 2021 when Palma, a town in the Cabo Delgado province, was overrun by ISIS terrorists. Her attackers killed her brother in front of her because of their Christian faith; she was then tortured and forced to become a prostitute. She and her mother spent eight months living in the bush with their ISIS captors before escaping.

- Pray for Evodia and her mother to experience God's healing comfort as they recover from their abduction, and thank God that they escaped.

From Voice of the Martyrs Global Prayer Guide

<https://bit.ly/3AN8HH8>

Global Prayer Guide

COUNTRY FOCUS: OMAN

OVERVIEW:

The Sultanate of Oman is less restrictive than its neighbors on the Arabian Peninsula. There are a limited number of church buildings, and the few Omani Christians in the country usually meet covertly and only carefully discuss their faith because of the risk of persecution from family, community and government.

MAJOR RELIGION:

Nearly all Omanis are Muslims, including around 70 percent Ibadi Muslims, with the remainder a mix of Sunni and Shiite Muslims.

PERSECUTOR:

Family members and communities pressure those who convert from Islam to Christianity, and the government intervenes if Christian converts become well known or are viewed as a source of shame in their community.

WHAT IT MEANS TO FOLLOW CHRIST IN OMAN:

Leaving Islam is not a criminal act in

Oman, but Christian converts can face legal challenges in several other ways. There are so few Omani believers and the risk of persecution is so high that Christian converts must meet in small groups and use caution in sharing their faith. Foreign Christians are permitted to meet, but they are not allowed to meet in homes or to evangelize other Omanis.

ACCESS TO BIBLES:

The government allows the Bible Society to sell Bibles and Christian literature to foreigners inside the country, but not to Omanis. There is only one Christian bookstore, in Oman's capital, but Omanis can easily access digital and audio Bibles online.

VOM WORK:

VOM provides Christian materials to workers for distribution inside the country and helps with the training of local believers in evangelism and discipleship.

PRAYER REQUESTS:

- *Pray for the encouragement and boldness of local believers worshiping in isolation.*
- *Pray for Saleh and his family, who were forced to leave because of their faith.*
- *Pray that missionaries in Oman will continue to share God's love with boldness and zeal.*
- *Pray that Muslim seekers will come to Christ after reading distributed Bibles and Scripture portions.*
- *Pray for the protection of Omani Christians.*

Prayer Calendar from Barnabas Aid

<https://bit.ly/3caP41n>

Friday 15 July 2022

An Iranian-Armenian pastor Anooshavan Avedian was sentenced to ten years in prison for running a Farsi (Persian)-speaking "house church" in Tehran. He was also sentenced to serve a further ten years of "deprivation

of social rights" (e.g. severe restrictions on employment) when released. Two members of the church, Abbas Soori and Maryam Mohammadi, both Farsi-speaking converts, were also sentenced to ten years' deprivation of rights, but their sentences were overturned on appeal. The Iranian authorities permit Armenian-language Christian worship, but not worship in Farsi, the national language, as Farsi-speaking Christians are converts from Islam. Give thanks for the successful appeals of Abbas and Maryam.

- *Pray that the Lord will strengthen Pastor Anooshavan.*
- *Ask that the Iranian authorities will soften their stance to allow Farsi-speaking believers to worship freely.*

Saturday 16 July 2022

Turkish attitudes towards Armenian Christians appear to be softening. An Armenian Christian, who often travels to Turkey for work, reports that on his travels Turks have told him, "I am so sorry for what my people did to your people." Between 1893 and 1923 some 1.5 million Armenians were killed in the Ottoman Empire in a policy of extermination of Christian minorities.

- *Pray that a more peaceful and tolerant attitude will prevail, including within the government of Turkey, and that this will encompass not just Armenian Christians but Turkish Christians who have converted from Islam.*

Sunday 17 July 2022

- *Sovereign Lord, we lift up Your Church in Turkey, a land from which 78 foreign pastors have been deported since the beginning of 2019.*
- *We ask that the trust of Your people in Turkey in Your resourcefulness and provision will be undiminished, even when they face the loss of their church leaders.*

- *We pray that You will both intervene to stop deportations and raise up strong Turkish pastors. We ask in the Name of the Good Shepherd, our Lord Jesus Christ (John 10:11).*

Monday 18 July 2022

The persecution of ethnic-minority Christians by the Myanmar military (Tatmadaw) continues unabated. Chin, Kachin and Karen believers are among those who have suffered marginalization and violence over the course of many decades. Their situation has worsened since the 2021 coup that restored direct military rule over the country, to the extent that a recent report has likened their treatment to the genocide perpetrated by the Tatmadaw against the Muslim-majority Rohingya.

- *Ask that the faith of the Lord's flock will be sustained, even in the face of such deadly opposition.*

Tuesday 19 July 2022

"It's so sad," said a Christian woman. "I was in tears when I saw smoke coming out from my village as my house was also burned down." She was one of thousands of Christians who fled the latest attack on the historic Myanmar Christian village of Chaung Yeo in the Sagaing Region. At least 320 out of the village's 350 homes were burned in the raid on 20 May. Two months earlier soldiers shot dead a 55-year-old man and his son as they tried to flee a previous Tatmadaw attack on the village in which ten homes were burned down and the church pulpit set on fire.

- *Pray for protection for God's people in the region who patiently endure persecution by the Tatmadaw (Revelation 14:12).*

Wednesday 20 July 2022

In the 12 months to the end of March 2022, Barnabas Aid gave practical support to around 26,000 Myanmar Christians. Believers are forced from their homes because of attacks

by the Tatmadaw, which has even launched airstrikes and artillery bombardments against IDP (internally displaced persons) camps. The annual rainy season (June-October) brings further challenges, but our project partners travel by motorbike or on foot to distribute rice to IDPs in remote, flood-prone areas.

- *Pray that the Lord will guide Barnabas partners seeking to distribute aid across unforgiving terrain.*
- *Ask that He will provide for Christian IDPs within Myanmar, and refugees who have crossed over into Thailand, India and Bangladesh.*

Thursday 21 July 2022

Seng Aloun, a Christian widow, is struggling to raise her children alone. The family of 12 were driven from their village in southern Laos after an arson attack on their home in February. This incident followed attacks on her deceased husband's coffin in December 2021 by local Buddhists angered at the family's practice of a "foreign" religion.

- *Pray that the authorities will act on repeated promises to find the arsonists, cease their harassment of Seng Aloun and her children and concentrate their efforts on finding them a permanent home.*

From the U.S. State Department

<https://bit.ly/3Rxo0rW>

Russia's "Filtration" Operations, Forced Disappearances, and Mass Deportations of Ukrainian Citizens

07/13/2022 09:14 AM EDT

Antony J. Blinken, Secretary of State

On the eve of the Ukraine Accountability Conference, the United States calls on Russia to immediately halt its systematic "filtration" operations and forced deportations in Russian-controlled and held areas of Ukraine. The unlawful transfer and deportation of protected persons is a grave breach of the Fourth Geneva

Convention on the protection of civilians and is a war crime. Russian authorities must release those detained and allow Ukrainian citizens forcibly removed or coerced into leaving their country the ability to promptly and safely return home. We call on Russia to provide outside independent observers access to so-called “filtration” facilities and to forced deportation relocation areas in Russia.

Estimates from a variety of sources, including the Russian government, indicate that Russian authorities have interrogated, detained, and forcibly deported between 900,000 and 1.6 million Ukrainian citizens, including 260,000 children, from their homes to Russia – often to isolated regions in the Far East. Moscow’s actions appear pre-meditated and draw immediate historical comparisons to Russian “filtration” operations in Chechnya and other areas. President Putin’s “filtration” operations are separating families, confiscating Ukrainian passports, and issuing Russian passports in an apparent effort to change the demographic makeup of parts of Ukraine.

Reports also indicate Russian authorities are deliberately separating Ukrainian children from their parents and abducting others from orphanages before putting them up for adoption inside Russia. Eyewitnesses and survivors of “filtration” operations, detentions, and forced deportations report frequent threats, harassment, and incidents of torture by Russian security forces. During this process, Russian authorities also reportedly capture and store biometric and personal data, subject civilians to invasive searches and interrogations and coerce Ukrainian citizens into signing agreements to stay in Russia, hindering their ability to freely return home.

Evidence is mounting that Russian authorities are also reportedly detaining or disappearing thousands of Ukrainian civilians who do not pass “filtration.” Those detained or “filtered out” include Ukrainians deemed threatening because of their potential affiliation with the Ukrainian army, territorial defense forces, media, government, and civil society groups. Eyewitnesses, survivors, and Ukraine’s General Prosecutor have reported that Russian authorities have transported tens of thousands of people to detention facilities

inside Russian-controlled Donetsk, where many are reportedly tortured. There are reports that some individuals targeted for “filtration” have been summarily executed, consistent with evidence of Russian atrocities committed in Bucha, Mariupol, and other locations in Ukraine.

President Putin and his government will not be able to engage in these systematic abuses with impunity. Accountability is imperative. This is why we are supporting Ukrainian and international authorities’ efforts to collect, document, and preserve evidence of atrocities. Together, we are dedicated to holding perpetrators of war crimes and other atrocities accountable.

The United States and our partners will not be silent. Ukraine and its citizens deserve justice.

From Christianity Today

The British Are Coming: UK Takes Religious Freedom Torch from US

London ministerial and DC summit highlight trans-Atlantic commitment by governments and NGOs to freedom of religion or belief.

JAYSON CASPER |

JULY 13, 2022 06:00 AM

The epicenter of advocacy for international religious freedom (IRF) has crossed the pond. Last week, the United Kingdom hosted the first in-person government ministerial on the issue to be held outside the United States.

Under the Trump administration, the US State Department inaugurated the Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom in 2018. Reconvened in Washington in 2019, the following year the event moved to Poland which was forced to conduct proceedings online due to COVID-19. Pandemic distractions prevented Brazil from hosting the ministerial in 2021, but civil society and religious groups rallied to organize an IRF Summit in DC instead.

In 2020, 27 nations seized the ministerials’ momentum to create the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance (IRFBA), centered around Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

Declaring that “everyone has freedom to believe or not believe, to change faith, to meet alone for prayer or corporately for worship,” IRFBA has since grown to include 36 countries, an additional five national “friends,” and two observers—including the UN-designated special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief (FoRB), the preferred terminology for IRF in Europe.

As IRFBA chair, the UK hosted the Ministerial Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief on July 5–6 in London.

“Millions of people are being deprived an education or a job or a home or access to justice or liberty, even to life itself,” said Fiona Bruce, the UK prime minister’s special envoy for FoRB, “simply on account of what they believe.”

The UK demonstrated leadership on the issue in 2020, when as chair of the Group of Seven—a political forum of the world’s leading democratic economies—Britain secured the first-ever mention of FoRB as a priority within the G7 official communique.

“The ministerial helped create a heightened global consciousness on FoRB, a cornerstone of all human rights,” said Godfrey Yogarajah, ambassador for religious freedom for the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA). “Where FoRB is violated, all other human rights suffer.”

Hosted at the Queen Elizabeth II Center in Parliament Square, the 2022 ministerial’s remarks were delivered by Prince Charles of Wales and Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby. Chief rabbi Ephraim Mirvis spoke on behalf of Britain’s Jews.

Regional foreign minister Tarik Ahmed, a Muslim, delivered a statement welcoming to the ministerial 500 delegates from more than 100 countries. Sources told CT the UK did an exceptional job integrating the dozens of civil society and religious groups into the official proceedings.

With better coordination—and a wider berth from Americans’ July 4 observance of Independence Day—attendance might have been even larger.

Only a few days before the UK ministerial, the

second IRF Summit again invited advocates to Washington. More than 1,000 delegates gathered at a DC hotel, representing more than 40 faith traditions. With IRF being one of the few issues to transcend the American political divide, video remarks were delivered by Secretary of State Antony Blinken and his predecessor Mike Pompeo as well as by Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (D) and Senator Marco Rubio (R).

IRF Summit executive director Peter Burns said the second gathering wanted to do more than recreate past collaboration. Beyond the many plenary sessions and niche side events, a civil society congress was created and an authors’ track organized to promote topical resources. NBA player Enes Kanter Freedom received an IRF advocacy award and auctioned off his size 16 shoes.

The UK ministerial was a “huge step forward,” said Burns, who served as special assistant to Ambassador Sam Brownback when his IRF office hosted the State Department ministerials.

“Going on the road was always the dream,” said Burns. “Long considered the orphan of human rights issues, concern for religious freedom is finally forcing itself into the international system.”

Bruce, appointed to her envoy position in 2020, apologized via video that she could not attend the DC summit in person due to final preparations for the London ministerial mere days away. But the UK had been “inspired” by the American efforts, and Foreign Secretary Liz Truss paid homage—while noting British seniority.

Calling out abuses in China, Nigeria, and Afghanistan, she cited the Magna Carta and Franklin Roosevelt—whose wife Eleanor was a chief UDHR author—as champions of FoRB.

“Authoritarians and oppressors feel threatened by the freedom of religion or belief, fearing it will encourage people to think freely and question their authority,” she said. “We cannot allow them to win.”

Civil society advocates pledged to hold her and other friendly governments accountable. All attendees were asked to sign a petition for their countries to appoint a FoRB envoy or

special ambassador, adequately resourced to ensure national commitment.

Following the gathering, the European Union designated an Italian professor and former MP, Mario Mauro, as its third envoy after a 10-month vacancy.

“Religious freedom must be a central plank of all governments’ domestic and diplomatic policies,” said Danny Webster, director of advocacy for the UK Evangelical Alliance. “But words can only ever mean so much until they are backed up by substantial action and long-term commitment.”

Such sentiments were frequent at both gatherings.

“Religion is the one entity that can stand up to government, that government cannot subdue,” Brownback said at the DC event. “This is a friendship summit—pick a project and work together.”

There were several to choose from.

Wade Kusack, senior fellow for Central Asia at the Institute for Global Engagement, participated with Kazakh politicians at both meetings. He touted the nine cities in Kazakhstan hosting religious freedom roundtables, as well as reforms in the once-derided nation.

The IRF summit was a bottom-up approach, while the UK ministerial was top-down. Both are necessary, he said, but the latter can open doors.

“The blending of government and civil society provides a platform for cross-sectoral relationships,” said Kusack. “It was a great opportunity for foreign officials to gain meaningful and non-threatening exposure to the FoRB world.”

Taking advantage for the first time was Attalaki, a Tunisian human rights organization founded by evangelical Christians. They spoke with dignitaries about the National Charter for Peaceful Coexistence, signed in February with many of Tunisia’s religious groups, including

Sufis, Shiites, and Jews. The three-year, non-official document was observed by the North African nation’s Ministry of Religious Affairs, which earlier created a department for minority religions.

“Countries showing improvement have governments who are engaged, but also robust civil society activities,” said Nadine Maenza, former chair of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF). “All countries in IRFBA should work together in a super strategic way to incentivize the others.”

Neither Kazakhstan nor Tunisia are members.

The “broad statement” of the UK ministerial was signed by 30 nations. Of note, it did not follow the civil society pledge to appoint special IRF envoys. And there was a distinct orientation: Only three non-Western nations (Israel, Japan, and Kenya) and two Muslim-majority nations (Albania and Bosnia) affixed their signatures.

And there was some sentiment that a unique role existed for two trans-Atlantic hosts. One panel convened in Westminster Abbey queried how the “special relationship” between the US and the UK could advance religious freedom around the globe.

Speakers included Brownback; Rehman Chisti, the former UK special envoy for FoRB; and Philip Mounstephen, the Bishop of Truro whose 21 religious freedom recommendations to the UK government—published in 2019 and evaluated last April—were welcomed by Truss in her opening speech.

Maenza said her closest international partners are mostly from the UK.

Michael Nazir-Ali, the former Anglican Bishop of Rochester and now a prelate to Pope Francis, asserted an even closer bond. English and American commitments to religious freedom developed organically, he said, producing the Magna Carta and the

Bill of Rights. Too many continentals, however, are heirs of the “radical Enlightenment.”

While “mere reason” can be contested, a mindfulness to tradition has provided a basic of cooperation across the swath of civilizational heritage, he said.

“The European idea is pure rationalism, from which they try to derive human dignity,” said Nazir-Ali. “Our organic tradition comes from the Christian faith.”

The result of the former is a truncation of religious values and culture, he said, which the Anglo-Saxon idea can help overcome. But without it is confusion.

Is FoRB an abstract value, or the protection of individual conscience and community belief—public and private? Muslim nations might better participate, he said, if a robust commitment to religious freedom is encouraged from within their faith. (The 2019 ministerial explored “human dignity” as a potential avenue.)

Among the demonstrable unity of advocates were clear points of divergence. Yasonna Laoly, Indonesia’s minister of law and human rights, argued at the IRF summit in favor of his Southeast Asian nation’s blasphemy laws. He was preceded on the DC mainstage by President Alejandro Giammattei of Guatemala, who complained of Western criticism—including from the State Department—for his nation’s pro-life commitments.

And alongside the ministerial’s broad statement were seven other documents of thematic concern. The one advocating for “diverse sexual orientations or gender identities” garnished 22 signatures—with the US absent—before it was removed from the official list.

Overall, however, sources praised the success of both events.

“You can’t find another stage in DC shared by the Family Research Council, the Aspen Institute, Meta, and BYU Law,”

said Burns. “This just doesn’t happen, but it can when it comes to international religious freedom—because we can all agree on this fundamental human right.”

As the epicenter moves from Washington to Warsaw to London to Brazil in 2023, sources celebrated the demonstration of diverse commitment. And in keeping with the increasingly blended IRF world, last week the United Nations appointed Nazila Ghanea as its new FoRB special rapporteur.

A professor of international human rights law at Britain’s Oxford University, Ghanea is an Iranian citizen with a focus on the oft-oppressed Bahá’i religious minority.

“It is wonderful moving the ministerial around the world, giving other countries the opportunity to lead on religious freedom,” said Maenza, now president of the newly-formed IRF Secretariat overseeing 26 roundtable groups around the world.

“This is not an American or a British right, but a global cause.”