



Prayer for the Persecuted Church for March 17, 2023

Prayer for the Persecuted Church: Our Best Practices

- Our focus in this hour is on prayer for the global church, not ourselves or our local issues. We can talk and even pray for those other things after prayer meeting is over at 1:00 p.m.
- We strive to start our prayers by 12:10.
- We are blessed to have a growing number of praying people join us. Let's all offer short prayers throughout our prayer time, allowing time for everyone to pray out loud if they wish. We are blessed by prayers when we can hear them, but silent prayers from our people are as valued as spoken ones.
- Thank you for praying for the persecuted church.
- Bring your friends!

Pray for imprisoned or kidnapped Christians

CHRISTIANS IN PRISON: This list is only a sample: ALGERIA: Hamid Soudad; CAMBODIA: Theary Seng; CHINA: Pastors John Cao, Yan Hwa, Hu Shigen, Goa Zhisheng, Wang Yi and Qin Derfu, Hao Zhiwei, Zhang Shaojie, Li Juncai, Alimujiang Yimiti (Uyghur) Wang Shunping, Lian Xu Liang; ERITREA: Meron Gebreselasie, Mussia Ezas, Dr. Kifly Gebremeskel, Kidane Weldou Haile Nayzgi; INDIA: Pastor Sawan; IRAN: Joseph Shahbazian, **Yousef Nadarkhani RELEASED**, Homayoun & Sara, Milad Goudarzi, Alireza Nourmohammadi, **Yasser Mosayebzadeh RELEASED**; KAZAKHSTAN: Pastor Maximov; NORTH KOREA: Zhang Wen Shi 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 International Christian Concern

Over 36 People Murdered in Brutal ADF Attack

03/13/2023 DRC (ICC)

In the early hours of March 9, militants belonging to the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) attacked a village in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). At least 36 people were killed during the overnight attack. The attack was attributed to the ADF because no bullets were fired. Rather, villagers were trapped in their burning houses or murdered with machetes and hatchets.

- *HOW TO PRAY: Pray for peace and comfort for those who are grieving.*
- *Pray for healing for the injured and traumatized.*

- *Pray for an end to ADF-led violence throughout the DRC.*

Gaza Churches Struggle to Survive

03/08/2023 Gaza Strip (ICC)

Gaza's Christian community is struggling to survive after years of steady decline in numbers. Only an estimated 1,000 Christians remain in the Gaza Strip, an area of more than 2 million residents. Christians are exiting the territory due to several factors, including a squeezing Israeli blockade, economic woes, and pressures from radical Islamist factions in the Hamas-controlled territory.

- *HOW TO PRAY: Pray for strength and unity for the Christians who remain.*

- *Pray for them to shine the light of Christ in the region.*
- *Pray for connection for isolated believers in the Gaza Strip.*

14,000 Gather in Vietnam for Evangelism Event

03/06/2023 Vietnam (ICC)

Over 14,000 people in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, attended the Spring Love Festival hosted by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association from March 4-5. The event has made history as the first time the Communist Vietnamese government has given permission for an evangelistic outreach with a foreign speaker outside of a holiday.

- *HOW TO PRAY: Pray for the gospel to continue spreading in Vietnam.*
- *Praise God for the increased freedom to hold this conference.*
- *Pray for protection for Christian leaders in Southeast Asia.*

Militants Kill Christian Clergy in Nigeria

03/06/2023 Nigeria (ICC)

A clergyman with the Church of Christ in Nations, Reverend Musa Hyok, was killed on March 4 alongside two of his sons, following his public preaching about the election. The attackers are reported to have been Muslim Fulani militants in Riyom Local Government Area in the Middle Belt's Plateau State. On election day, four Christians were killed by Fulani militants in Benue State.

- *HOW TO PRAY: Pray for healing and peace for the affected family.*
- *Pray for post-election violence in Nigeria to quickly cease.*
- *Pray for Nigeria's leaders to come to know the love of Christ.*

*From Voice of the Martyrs
icommittopray.com*

Mar. 16, 2023 | Eritrea

Eritrean Christians Imprisoned for Decades

Eritrea is governed by a totalitarian regime that seeks to control every aspect of life. In 2002, the government outlawed every form of religion except Islam, Orthodox Christianity, Roman Catholicism and the Lutheran Church. All other religious groups are illegal, and the government maintains control of approved churches. Many Christians have been arrested without warning, and imprisoned Christians are not given a trial or allowed to see their families. Conditions inside these prisons are some of the harshest in the world. Some 200 to 250 believers are believed to remain in prison, though it is unclear if all are still alive. Christian prisoners are provided meager rations and often held in shipping containers in extreme desert conditions for years. Several Eritrean Christian leaders, like Haile Nayzgi, have been imprisoned since 2004.

Mar. 16, 2023 | India

Pressure Increasing on Tamilnadu Churches

In Tamilnadu, the number of persecution events rose dramatically in 2022. Pastors and evangelists have been chased away from villages, beaten, and robbed. Many churches conducted in rented buildings are being forced to close by Hindu radicals pressuring property owners. Because of this, Christian congregations have been scattered, and pastors who have dedicated themselves to full-time ministry are struggling to support their families.

- *They are praying for the ability to purchase land where church buildings can be constructed so that they are not dependent on renting space for worship services.*
- *They are also seeking prayer for their families through difficult financial challenges.*

Mar. 16, 2023 | Laos

Family, Village Drive Away Christians

On April 4, 2022, Lerm and his wife, Dow, accepted Christ and started to attend church. A few months later, Dow's father, who was the head of a nearby village in their province in northern Laos, found out and demanded that they renounce Christ. When they refused, he used his influence to have them evicted from their village and took away the income and food supplies they usually earned from farm work. Lerm asked his own father to take them in but was rejected because his father feared losing his government job. Lerm, Dow, and their children lost everything when they were evicted. They now live in a temporary hut on the land of another Christian brother, but their faith has remained strong.

From Voice of the Martyrs

Global Prayer Guide

CUBA

OVERVIEW:

Despite the change in leadership in 2018, churches in Cuba face unrelenting pressure from the government, which remains committed to communism's atheistic ideology and views churches as a threat to the revolution begun by Che Guevara and Fidel Castro in the 1950s. Cubans are poor, and the government seeks to control every aspect of their lives. In April 2021, Miguel Diaz-Canel was announced as Raul Castro's successor as first secretary of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party — the first time the country has been governed by someone other than a Castro since the revolution. Then in July 2021, Cubans protested their deteriorating living conditions and called for an end to dictatorship.

MAJOR RELIGION:

Most Cubans are atheists. A significant number of Cubans engage in superstitious and spiritist practices, including the Afro-Cuban religion of Santeria. 11 percent are evangelical Christians.

PERSECUTOR:

The government persecutes Christians.

WHAT IT MEANS TO FOLLOW CHRIST IN CUBA:

Unlike the overt violence Christians faced during the Communist Cuban Revolution, more subtle methods of persecution are now used by the Cuban government, largely out of concern for its global reputation. Christian leaders are often summoned by government officials for questioning or detained up to 48 hours to pressure them, and churches are demolished by hired gangs so the government can deny responsibility. Legal church buildings are seized, and no new church buildings have been legally built in the country since the revolution. Many believers meet in illegal house churches, often extensions of the pastor's home or shaded structures in the backyard of a family's home. Churches continue to grow through active evangelistic activity, but some believers have never owned a Bible because of government oppression. Though no Christians are known to be imprisoned in Cuba, many are closely watched and are effectively under house arrest. In addition, Christians are often denied jobs and educational opportunities.

ACCESS TO BIBLES:

Though great strides have been made in Bible distribution, access remains restricted. In 2017, Cuba allowed the purchase and sale of Bibles only to members of the ecumenical Protestant church organization, but most Christian literature remains illegal. There are no Christian bookstores in Cuba. There is a shortage of Bibles, which even when available can cost a third of a worker's monthly income.

VOM WORK:

VOM distributes Bibles and supports discipleship and evangelism. One of the most effective ways VOM supports persecuted Christians is through a vast prayer network. Public prayer, which embarrasses the Cuban government before the world, has led to the release of some detained pastors.

PRAYER REQUESTS:

- *Pray for the believers who will receive Bibles this year.*
- *Pray that those opposed to the gospel will be powerless to stop its advance.*
- *Pray that churches closed by civil authorities will be allowed to reopen.*
- *Pray for Christians who are held for interrogation, harassed or fined.*
- *Pray for successful Bible distributions, which are difficult and often illegal.*
- *Pray for church leaders, pastors and Christians facing government harassment.*
- *Pray for persecutors within the Communist Party who attack and hate the church.*

From the Barnabas Aid Prayer Journal:

FRIDAY 17

Widely regarded as a tropical paradise, the **Maldives** – a group of islands in the Indian Ocean – is also one of the most repressive Muslim-majority countries in the world. The country's constitution states that “no law contrary to any tenet of Islam shall be enacted in the Maldives.” All non-Muslim worship is forbidden, whether carried out by visitors (most often holiday-makers or migrant workers), or by Maldivian citizens who the constitution assumes will be Muslim. Despite this assumption, there are a few indigenous converts who must live as secret believers or face reprisals both from the state and from their family and former friends.

- *Pray for these Muslim-background believers, asking that the Lord will be especially close to them in their isolation, through His Holy Spirit, the Comforter (John 15:26).*

SATURDAY 18

Pray earnestly for the release of **Hans-Joachim Lohre**, a German church minister, who was abducted by suspected Islamists in Mali's capital city, Bamako. At the time of writing two people have been arrested, but the minister, who has lived in Mali for around 30 years, has not been found. In recent years several church leaders and other Christians have been abducted by jihadists. Malian Christians report that the government treats them as equals, and that many Muslim leaders teach against Islamist extremism. Jihadi terrorism remains a danger, however, in Mali and in neighboring countries.

- *Pray that the Lord will restrain those who threaten the safety of His children.*

SUNDAY 19

- *Lord Jesus, we cry out to You for the encouragement and strength needed by those You have called to shepherd Your sheep. Please empower pastors and teachers with wisdom to make the knowledge they have acquired effective in building Your Church, especially those facing persecution and struggling in desperate poverty. Bless and sustain those who share the Good News. Give them fertile fields to sow the Word of God, knowing that You always lead Your servants in triumph in Christ Jesus. (2 Corinthians 2:14)*

MONDAY 20

Christians – and moderate Muslims – in **northern Mozambique** have suffered for several years ongoing jihadi violence, with almost 6,000 people killed between October 2017 and December 2022. Now Islamists have demanded that Christians and Jews begin to pay a jizya tax as a sign of their dhimmi status – that is, their status as “People of the Book” who are subject to their Islamic conquerors. An announcement from Islamic State Mozambique declared that Christians and Jews must either

convert to Islam, pay the tax, or be killed. The announcement also stated that Muslims who refuse to join the jihadi cause will be killed.

- *Pray for our brothers and sisters, and all those who want peace, that the threats of Islamists will come to nothing.*

TUESDAY 21

Lift up in prayer **Christians in Myanmar** who are being denied aid by the Myanmar military (Tatmadaw). In some areas, including Kayah and Shan states, military roadblocks have been used to prevent aid from reaching people – many of them Christians – who have been displaced from their homes by the ongoing violence. It is also alleged that the Myanmar authorities have refused to distribute international aid in Christian-majority Chin State.

- *Ask that the Lord will provide for His people despite the opposition they face. Give thanks that Barnabas-funded aid is reaching displaced Christians, and pray that this will continue.*

WEDNESDAY 22

Pray for the protection of **Christians in Muslim-majority Niger** who comprise about 0.4% of the population, as the surge in Islamist terrorism in the Sahel region makes them especially vulnerable. The 2022 Global Terrorism Index attributed 588 deaths in Niger to terrorists, the highest in a decade. Tillaberi province, where most churches are situated, suffered the majority of the killings.

In the deadliest assault, gunmen from Islamic State West Africa Province stormed into a Tillaberi village on motorbikes, killing 70 civilians. Pray for an end to Islamist violence in Niger and the Lord's provision for Christians uprooted by the crisis in this already desperately poor country.

THURSDAY 23

In the last seven years more than 10,000 Christians have lost their lives to the perpetual

Islamist violence that afflicts communities in **northern and Middle Belt Nigeria** – and Barnabas-funded aid for displaced Christians in Myanmar. The full total could be much higher than that. Only a few months ago, at least 39 believers were killed in attacks in Kaduna State. It was reported that six entire families were wiped out in the violence. “People are being killed every day and property destroyed,” said a church leader in the region. “We must be consistent in seeking the presence of the Almighty in what is happening in Southern Kaduna. It is only God's intervention that can turn the ugly situation into a united and peaceful area.”

- *Join with our Nigerian brothers and sisters in praying for peace.*

Open Doors Prayer Calendar

Pakistan

16. Christians make up only around 1.8% of the population in Pakistan, but in a predominantly Muslim country, this small number of Christians is not well tolerated. Christian girls are abducted, abused and forcefully converted to Islam. Pray for protection for women who suffer domestic violence and girls who are forced into early marriages.

India

17. Increasing numbers of states in India have implemented anti-conversion laws, which are designed to stop Hindus being forcibly converted to other religions. However, these laws are often used as an excuse to harass and intimidate Christians. Pray for a change of narrative around Indian identity so that the culture becomes more accepting of minority faiths.

18. Sadly, many Indian Christians experience social exclusion in their communities, discrimination in the workplace, and have false accusations and rumors spread about them. Understandably, this is difficult for many believers. Pray that God will draw close to downtrodden Christians and ask that acceptance and kindness will sweep across India.

Saudi Arabia

19. Conversion from Islam to Christianity is unacceptable under Islamic law, many Christian converts live as secret believers. Despite the risks, the small number of Saudi Christians is slowly increasing, and boldly sharing their faith on the internet and Christian satellite TV channels. Thank God that isolated secret believers find ways to connect with other believers online.

Syria

20. Years of conflict and extremism in Syria have created an environment in which sexual violence is commonplace. Women and girls from minority groups are particularly vulnerable and may be subjected to abduction, sexual harassment and rape. Pray that the perpetrators will repent from these evil practices and that sexual violence will be eradicated in Syria.

21. With your support, Centres of Hope have been established in Syria. These centres are restoring optimism to war-weary people and helping them to see a brighter future. Pray for ongoing financial provision and that the workers will be reenergised to give support and compassion to those in need.

Iraq

22. Iraq is home to a number of traditional Orthodox and Catholic churches, but all are seriously affected by intolerance, discrimination and persecution from local leaders, government authorities and Islamic extremist groups. Pray for more cooperation between Christian denominations and more understanding towards Christians from their communities and local leaders.

23. In central and southern Iraq, many Christians choose not to display their faith in public to avoid harassment or discrimination at work, university or when trying to cross checkpoints. Pray that one day, religious freedom will be widespread in Iraq.

From Open Doors

02 March 2023

Pastor Nadarkhani among several Christian prisoners released in Iran

Many of you have been praying for Pastor Nadarkhani, who has been in prison since 2017 for involvement in a house church. Praise God he has been released! However, your prayers continue to be needed for him, as well as other Iranians who remain in prison for their faith.

There is encouraging news to report from Iran, with the release of several Christian prisoners, including Pastor Yousef Nadarkhani who has been imprisoned for nearly five years.

Pastor Nadarkhani is the last to be released of four Christian converts sentenced to ten years in prison in 2017 for house church activities. After their sentences were reduced at a retrial in 2020, Youhan Omid and Yasser Mossayebzadeh were released in 2022 and 2021 respectively. Last month, Zaman Fadaie (known as Saheb) was released (on 9 February), and this was followed by Pastor Nadarkhani's release (26 February).

The pastor told Article 18 that he was 'happy to be released and at home after nearly five years in prison' and 'very grateful for all those who prayed for me and remembered me while I was in prison'. He added, "All I endured was small in comparison with what Christ has done for us."

However, your prayers continue to be needed because Pastor Nadarkhani – who, since 2006, has repeatedly been harassed, arrested and imprisoned for his Christian activities – still faces flogging and two years living in exile on the other side of Iran.

In February 2021, a UN report said Nadarkhani had been the victim of 'religiously motivated persecution' and that his detention was unlawful.

Deeper change needed

The releases of Pastor Nadarkhani and Zaman Fadaie are among a wave of pardons by the Iranian regime as it marks the 44th anniversary of the Islamic Republic. Two other Christians, Mehdi Rokhparvar and Moslem Rahimi, were also released last month.

This is good news and follows the acquittal last year of nine Christians who faced the prospect of five years in prison. In late 2021, the Iranian Supreme Court decreed that belonging to a house church was not a criminal offence. However, despite this, Christians continue to face oppression for expression their faith, with many believers still facing charges and imprisonment.

As Article 18's latest annual report says, "Such pardons, while welcome, do not address the original injustice of their sentencing and imprisonment, and the government continues to regard rights and freedoms guaranteed in international law as crimes, including the right to freely adopt a religion of one's choice, and to manifest one's faith in community with others."

The head of one of the world's largest persecution watchdogs has called for a shift in strategy to protect Christians in Afghanistan.

President and CEO of Global Christian Relief David Curry says there's an urgent need to help get Christians solidified and stabilised in the country.

He indicated that may require Christians operating from inside the strictly Islamic nation.

He said there was a need to build the Church and build Christian influence there in the name of Jesus.

Dr. Curry said the Taliban cannot be allowed to continue its draconian, medieval rule.

He noted that girls can't go to school, women can't hold jobs and all female faces are covered.

He accused the Taliban of "extreme, bizarre and brutal punishments" against anyone who challenges Islam or its rule.

The Global Christian Relief boss says that's left the nation in total chaos.

"Christians and religious minorities within Afghanistan face enormous persecution," Dr. Curry conceded while noting that many believers have escaped and left.

"The Christians who remain are underground or on the run, and we can't just look at this cut-and-run strategy as a long-term solution," he explained.

He encouraged believers everywhere to pray for persecuted Christians stuck in Taliban-controlled areas.

Faithwire reports Dr. Curry kept returning to his call to build up the church there.

"A lot is going on that's both brutal and bizarre. And we need to do everything we can to strengthen the church," he stated.

He believes the US has a central role to play in that respect by calling out the Taliban government and adding Afghanistan to the State Department's Countries of Particular Concern list — a designation targeting nations restricting religious freedom or complicit in violations of it.

Release International, a UK-based group monitoring Christian persecution, believes Christianity could exponentially expand in Afghanistan.

Despite noting "the persecution of Christians is continuing unabated," it observed that "there are early signs that the Christian faith could be growing among Afghans despite — or because of — violent persecution."

Shoaib Ebadi, president of Square One World Media, a Christian media organisation, told the Voice of the Martyrs the chaos could lead young people to seek other options, like Christianity.

"They are eager to hear about new things because their way of life that has continued for centuries has not brought peace or forgiveness, and the people are not prospering," Mr. Ebadi noted.

"It's always fighting and revenge. They are questioning everything: their own faith, their past, their present, their future."