

St Thomas's Fellowship

Release International (voice of persecuted Christians) works in over 30 countries of the world where Christians face persecution for their Christian faith. Richard Wurmbrand came to the West and told us of modern day persecution in communist block countries. Of course today persecution exists in Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist and communist countries.

Richard a Romanian Pastor served 14yrs in Prison for his Christian faith, three of these years were spent in solitary confinement. Richard when in solitary confinement preached to himself every day when he heard footsteps. When Richard eventually was released from solitary confinement and was allowed to enter the main part of the prison he met a man who had committed a terrible crime who said he was a Christian. Richard asked him how he could commit such a crime if he was a Christian. The man replied that every day when he queued for the toilet a 'nutter' in solitary confinement preached and he was converted. Richard said "I am that 'nutter'". This story reminds us that God can and will use us in all circumstances.

Release International is founded on the verse in Hebrews 13 v3 "Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoner, and those ill-treated as if you yourselves were suffering" God has called men and woman of faith to serve him in prison, in the torture chamber where ever men and women are who need to hear the gospel of Christ.

Pakistan

In Pakistan Christians face severe opposition from neighbours, militant extremist groups and the government. They have to endure many things including imprisonment, torture, and death.

The misuse of the 295 blasphemy law by neighbours and reinforced by the state puts many in prison.

The 295 A. Blasphemy against Islam

The 295 B. Blasphemies against the Quran.

The 295 C. Blasphemy against Mohammad

Prison for these Christians is not a safe place, as they can be killed by fellow prisoners.

Since the deaths of Governor Salman Tesar who was a Muslim, and Minorities Minister Shahbaz Bhatti who was a Christian, the Reform of the Blasphemy Law has been halted. The deaths of these two men brought bad publicity for the country. There are many more Christians on the extremist's death list. One is a partner of Release International, a lawyer who takes up the causes of those falsely accused and imprisoned under the law. He and other lawyers put themselves at great risk.

In August this year Salman Tesar's son was kidnapped and as of yet no ransom has been demanded and we do not know where he is being kept. Salman's daughter has spoken out against the government and the Blasphemy Law.

Shahbaz Bhatti's brother Paul was appointed this year as special advisor on religious minorities to the prime minister. Following this in July a ministry of national harmony was formed., this ministry will have oversight for protecting religious minorities at a national level. In August the national President Zardari celebrated national minority's

day and committed his government to support the protection of minority religious rights. We are pleased with this but we must continue to pray, as many Christians are still facing discrimination, imprisonment, torture and death.

Two men were killed in March outside a Salvation Army service; one of the dead a young married man only 25 years old had been a road sweeper who supported his wife, parents, and siblings. The other was a married man and a father of six.

Rape and forced marriages are of great concern for Christian women.

In August, a girl escaped her captors after being held captive for a year. During her ordeal the girl was physically and mentally tortured. In hospital she was found to have suffered internal damage. This girl and her family are now in hiding as they have filed a complaint against her captors.

A nurse has filed a complaint that she was held at gunpoint and raped by an accounts officer at the hospital where she works. She further states that an accomplice filmed the rape and when she refused to recant her faith or agree to marriage the rapist came to her home and showed her parents and family the tape of the rape. The family decided not to be intimidated and chose to suffer any shame that would be incurred in their culture and not give their daughter in marriage to this man.
Pray for our family in Christ that they will not feel discouraged

The country is now experiencing more flooding, reported to be worse than last time. Pray for the people of Pakistan and for those who would help them during this time. Pray in particular for the Christians that they too would receive aid. Last time of flooding Release's Partner received death threats, which continued until September this year, for helping the Christians affected by the flooding.

Please Pray also for those in Christian leadership as many get death threats on a regular basis, that they would be strong and feel the presence of God very near.

Sri Lanka

Many Pakistani Christians flee to Sri Lanka to escape persecution as no visa is needed for entering Sri Lanka from Pakistan.

Sri Lankan Christians also suffer persecution. and the aftermath of the civil war which lasted 25 years.

The civil war in the North of the country has left many dead and great humanitarian needs. Many have returned home to live in tents, others have found that their lands have been confiscated by the government. Agriculture is the main source of income but land mines prevent agricultural work at the moment. Land mines have also been placed in drinking wells. Conditions for those returning are very hard.

Social and moral problems exist; the purity of the culture has been targeted with the kidnapping and rape of young Tamil girls, paedophilia, and drink and drugs. In the South of the country Christians suffer much persecution in this so called 'island paradise' with its sun stretched beaches.

Release International and her partner organise "Shalom Camps", Peace camps for those who are suffering much persecution. A weekend at the camp takes the form of worship, Christian teaching to encourage and help those being persecuted to stand in

faith, and teaching on legal issues to help those being persecuted to use the law to their advantage. It also provides an opportunity to meet with others and share, a safe place for children to learn and play.

One pastor we met told us how they had been hounded out of their church building, on a Sunday; a mob would gather throw stones, intimidate and threaten the Christians when they arrived for worship. During worship windows would be smashed. The church then met in homes again because folks were threatened and some became so afraid that they stopped attending worship. The Pastor himself has moved 13 times in four years as his landlords are threatened and ask that he and his family leave. The pastor a young man of 27 years old is married with two young children, who show great signs of stress. Every night a mob surrounds their home with shouts for the pastor to come out “so we can kill you” and this young man knows to go out and reason will most certainly mean his death. Instead with his wife and family he prays until the mob disappears.

Another pastor, whose church meets in homes as they do not have a church building, has found himself under great pressure to stop preaching the gospel. He is married with children one a new born baby. His elder child was not allowed to attend the local school because of his Christian witness. One day elders in his church received a phone call from four people who wished to speak with the pastor allegedly wanting to learn more about the Christian Faith. The pastor and the elders went to meet with these four people and were attacked, it had been a trap. A mob surrounded them. The elders suffered minor injuries and managed to escape, but the pastor, who was the real target was so badly beaten that he lost his hearing in both ears. He and his family continue to walk with the saviour in these difficult times.

In many countries of the world Christians suffer severe discrimination and persecution, sometimes even martyrdom for the gospels sake, please remember our brothers and sisters in prayer.

Linda Oxburgh