

## STANDING IN THE GAP

for the Persecuted Church

JULY, 2017

Pakistan continued – or other forms of injustice against Christians. Conversely, the country's blasphemy laws are often abused for the purpose of targeting Christians. As a result, Christians in Pakistan have been unjustly fined, imprisoned, and even killed.

Please pray: that Christians will remain strong in faith  
that believers will be able to love their persecutors  
for justice when believers are injured or killed  
that more Christians will want to share the Gospel with their Muslim neighbors

### God Answers Prayer

Praise God for the return of Christina to her family after being abducted by ISIS from her mother's arms in Qaraqosh, Iraq in August 2014. The parents had heard that ISIS had 'put her in the care of a Christian woman also captured, and taken to Mosul, then 'married' to a fighter, then gave her to a Muslim family.'

When Iraqi special forces liberated a poor Mosul neighborhood, word reached them that their daughter was there. The family soon reached the area, retrieving on June 9 a shocked and speechless Christina who appeared healthy but at first did not recognize them. "Thanks to God, thanks to Jesus, we are so happy many people prayed for us," said Aida, her mother.

This is a moment for highlighting the relentless work of the Christian community on behalf of Iraq's displaced. Christian advocacy groups like Open doors followed Christina's case, reminding the rest of us to pray. Her family lives in a camp supported by church aid, mostly Catholic groups like Aid to the Church in Need, and Knights of Columbus. It receives no Iraqi, UN, EU, or US government assistance.

And there are the persecuted themselves whose perseverance and joy in their suffering is a daily testimony to us.

- from World Magazine, July 1, 2017

#### SOURCES:

CHURCH IN CHAINS; CHRISTIAN SOLIDARITY WORLDWIDE; CHRISTIAN TODAY; OPEN DOORS; PRISONER ALERT; RELEASE INTERNATIONAL; VOICE of the MARTYRS; WORLD MAGAZINE; WORLD WATCH MONITOR

1. **AFRICA** – pray for **Rev Reuben Ezemadu**, Coordinator of the Movement for African National Initiatives (MANI), a grassroots African initiative aimed at mobilizing African churches to send Africans as missionaries around the world. The increased attacks by Islamic groups happening weekly in Africa have dramatically affected the activities of MANI: "The violence constitutes a real challenge for churches and mission work," says Rev Reuben. "But on the other hand, people displaced by that insurgency can come to places where they can easily be reached by the Gospel." He continues, "The upsurge in attacks have made some Muslims detest their religion; as they come into contact with Christians, most of them are turning to Christ."
2. **NIGER** – continue praying for **Jeff Woodke**, an American Christian aid worker kidnapped last October. The kidnappers are thought to be connected to al-Qaida, but no one has heard whether Woodke is alive or dead. Woodke had worked in the region for nearly 30 years and was helping Tuareg and Fulani nomads overcome drought, disease, and educational challenges.
3. **EGYPT** - gunmen opened fire and killed at least 28 Coptic Orthodox Christians- some reports say up to 35- and wounded about 25 others; the Copts were traveling to Ascension Day services at the Monastery of St. Samuel in Minya, southern Egypt. A number of children were confirmed dead. Pray for God's protection on the Coptic Christians in Egypt.
4. **MALAYSIA** – continue to pray for **Pastor Raymond Koh** who was abducted by masked men near his home in February. The family suspects he may have been murdered because no ransom has been demanded. The police have been slow to investigate because they believe he was proselytizing Muslims.
5. **PHILIPPINES** – continue praying for **Father Teresito Suganob** still being held hostage by Islamist militants, as well as 200 other Christians being held and being used as human shields. Over 100 people have been killed since the Islamists entered the city of Marawi in May. "We are really in pain. The whole Catholic population is gathered in prayer throughout the country," said Bishop de la Pena.
6. **ERITREA** – pray for 100 Christians recently arrested by the Eritrean government as it stepped up its campaign against Christians. Continue praying for **Patriarch Antonios**, 90, who was arrested 10 years ago. His location is unknown and his family fears he is in poor health.
7. **TURKEY** – continue praying for **Pastor Andrew Brunson**. Comments in June from Turkish President Erdogan increased speculation that Turkey has been holding him since October in order to extract political concessions from the US.
8. **IRAQ** – praise God that Christina, an Iraqi Christian girl abducted by Islamic State in August 2014 has finally been reunited with her parents. (see more on last page).
9. **NORTH AFRICA** – pray for **Nasira**, a former Muslim who has a heart to bring Bibles to other countries, despite the risky nature as a single woman. She requests prayer for her and the women around her, that they stand strong in Him and His protection.
10. **COLOMBIA** – pray for **Federico**, who was an armed fighter committed to persecuting Christians. He ordered church closures and threatened pastors. When he got injured, he was miraculously given a Bible, and he learned to love the Word of God.
11. **SRI LANKA** – pray for Christians as there has been over 20 violent incidents recently against them. The recent attacks are blamed on a Buddhist nationalist organization called Bodu Bala Sena (BBS) or the 'Buddhist Power Force.'

12. **SRI LANKA** – pray for **Sampath**, a church leader in south-western Sri Lanka. After a Sunday morning worship service, a group of about 50 people, including Buddhist monks, forced entry into his church, the Christian Fellowship Church. The group threatened those still in the building, demanding that they stop holding services. Sampath's house was pelted with stones, which smashed the windows. Then he was hit with a pole.
13. **VIETNAM** – pray for **Pastor Nguyen Cong Chinh** who is serving an 11-year sentence for 'undermining national solidarity,' because of his religious activities with ethnic groups in the Central Highlands. He has been put in isolation in a cramped space for telling the US consular officials about his mistreatment.
14. **VIETNAM** – pray for Pastor Chinh's wife, **Tran Thi Hong**, a mother of 4, who was tortured, beaten and questioned at a police station for 2 months after she met with a US delegation on religious freedom in March. Vietnam has 83 prisoners of religious freedom behind bars.
15. **EGYPT** – pray for **Suzan Ashraf Rawy**,<sup>22</sup> who became the latest young Christian woman to go missing in Egypt. After leaving her home to walk to work, she never arrived at the Coptic Orthodox church where she is employed. Her family fears that she has been kidnapped, like many other young Christian women in Egypt. Her father said that the kidnappers have demanded a large sum of money and have threatened to kill her if it is not paid. Two other young Christian girls remain missing after being kidnapped earlier this year. Continue praying for **Rania Eed Fawzy**, 17, and **Hanan Adly Girgis**, 18.
16. **ERITREA** – pray for 22 more Christians arrested, bringing the total arrested since May to 120. Evangelicals and Pentecostals have been the primary targets.
17. **IRAQ** – pray for Chaldean Catholic Priest, **Father Thabet**, as he leads Christians returning to rebuild the city of Karamles, 30 km east of Mosul, which was liberated 6 months ago. He admits that sometimes he is afraid, wondering if IS will return one day. "It is our mission to live here in this place as Christians, the place of the root of Christianity," he says. "Without faith I do not have a reason to stay here. But I have faith, so I am here."
18. **PAKISTAN** – pray for **Hamid**, 36, his wife and 2 children, who have returned to their home village which is 99% Muslim, to share the Gospel after being educated in the US. He is continuing his education and working for a private institution to support his family and his studies. "My goal is to reach out to those who do not hear the message and also to train new workers and new followers," he said. "I get many opportunities to share the message."
19. **PAKISTAN** – pray for **Anam**, a young woman who works for a group assisting persecuted Christians. Pray also for **Rania**, 19, who works with Anam. These 2 women have endured difficult circumstances because of their Christian identity.
20. **PAKISTAN** – pray for **Walid** as he hands out SD cards that can be played on a cell phone making the Gospel accessible in new places.
21. **IRAQ** – pray for **Dawlat Abouna**, a deacon in St George's Church in Baghdad. He has a library in his home where he keeps documents tracing his Christian ancestry in Iraq to AD 1117. St George's worship services have continued despite the turmoil. "We have started two new groups here at the church – one to pray for our persecuted brothers in the north, and one to pray for our enemies," Dawlat said. The church continues to hold services despite bomb blasts. The members also continue to serve the community: Hundreds of mostly Muslim women line up to collect food parcels every month as part of one program.
22. **CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC** – pray for peace in the CAR as more than 100 people were killed in June, only a day after a peace agreement was signed by 13 of the country's 14 armed groups in Rome, brokered by the Catholic peace-building group Sant' Egidio.
23. **SUDAN** – pray for the **Sudanese Church of Christ** which has written an open letter to the government protesting the 'systematic violation of Christian religious freedoms', including the recent demolition of one of their churches in the Suba area of the capital, Khartoum. 25 other churches – ranging from Catholic to Coptic Orthodox, Presbyterian, and Pentecostal churches – have also been designated for demolition. The government claims they violate designated purposes for these plots of land.
24. **NIGERIA** – pray for the 10,000 boy soldiers taken by the Islamist militant group Boko Haram since their insurgency in Nigeria in 2009. A writer for the New York Times reported that the boys share stories of little food, brainwashing, drugs, killing and maiming.
25. **PAKISTAN** - pray for **Ashfaq Masih**, 28, a Pakistani bike shop owner who has been accused of blasphemy after telling one of his customers that Christians believe Jesus to have been the final prophet. He was arrested following these accusations.
26. **EGYPT** - pray for the **Coptic Community** in Saft el-Khirs, 180 km south of Cairo, which had their 3-story community center broken into and sealed off by police, and their furniture, rugs, and religious icons were lying in the street outside. No official explanation was given for the raid.
27. **PHILIPPINES** - continue praying for **Father Teresito** (July 5) who is still being held hostage with other parishioners by the Maute group. On June 23 as many as 100 Christians were still being held hostage. Also 500 civilians remain trapped in the city of Marawi where the fighting is concentrated. Conditions are dire; food and water are in short supply.
28. **NIGERIA** – pray for the new **Trauma Center** being built by Open Doors. It will be a residential center to help those needing intense treatment. This is similar to the facility built in Iraq to help the victims of the Islamic State group. "We have different kinds of trauma in Nigeria," said one of the counsellors. "We have Boko Haram. We have war. We have ethnic crises. We have religious crises. And everywhere people are traumatised." When the new Trauma Center opens, it will offer help to children and adults. Meanwhile, trained carers will continue to meet with women and children in their own communities.
29. **SYRIA** – pray for **Bassam Ishak**, a Syriac Christian with the Syriac National Council. When he was 11 years old, his family lost everything and was forced to leave the country. Now he has returned and is working for peace in Syria. "Without achieving the full rights of all minorities of Syria, no new Syria will emerge and no political actor will win," Ishak says.
30. **VIETNAM** – pray for Catholic activist **Peter Pham Minh Hoang** who has been expelled to France, citing his violation of laws and that he 'undermined national security.' He wasn't allowed to say good-bye to his wife or their daughter who both remain in Vietnam. His wife says, "I trust God completely. God chooses us to carry His cross on our shoulders. He will open other doors for us."
31. **PAKISTAN** – pray for Christians in Pakistan as they face harassment and discriminations on a daily basis. Most live in poverty and are at continual risk of abduction, beatings, or rape. In addition, they are routinely denied educational and job opportunities. Attacks on Christians occur all too frequently, whether mob attacks on Christian neighborhoods or suicide bombings of churches. And authorities rarely investigate reports of violence (continued on next page)