

September 2011

This month, pray for the following individuals, their persecutors, their situations, their countries:

- Gao Zhisheng - August 15, 2006 was the fifth anniversary of Gao's disappearance. Initially, he was sentenced to 3 years of prison and 5 years of probation. He was first taken by police on. His "crime" was providing pro bono legal defense to persecuted Falun Gong practitioners, house church Christians, helpless government petitioners, peasants whose land was sold out from under them by local officials to real estate developers, and other victims of abuse of power by Chinese officials. Over the past five years he has disappeared into police detention no less than six times, and each time he was tortured. Each time that he has been kidnapped by the police, they have held him for a longer period. And each time, the torture has been worse.
- Youcef Nadarkhani – Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani is under the death sentence for apostasy. The Supreme Court upheld the death sentence as it is based upon fatwas of the Supreme Leader. However, they are asking the local court in Gilan to re-examine the case to determine if he was truly a Muslim and if so he must recant. If he does not he will be executed. The re-examination of the case will likely take place sometime this fall. In a recent letter, Youcef has urged fellow believers to remain faithful to Jesus Christ and the "Word of God" despite persecution.
- Somalia - The Islamist terrorist group al Shabab is intentionally starving Somali Christians in territory it controls. It's just the latest incident in the terror group's systematic efforts to eradicate all of Somalia's Christians. According to the International Christian Concern (ICC), al Shabab's intentional denial of humanitarian aid has resulted in the deliberate starvation of 18 Christians in the Somali cities of Afgoye, Baidawa, and Kismayo. As ICC spokesman Jonathan Racho said, "Any Somali that is suspected of being a Christian, or a friend of a Christian, does not receive any food aid."
- Shouwang Church in Beijing (as well as the entire House Church movement in China): Founded in 1993 in a home by a small group of believers, Shouwang's congregation now numbers over 1,000 of mostly urban, younger, and professional people. In April of this year, the Chinese government has been trying to shut this church down because it isn't registered and in fear of the "Jasmine Revolution" happening in the Middle East spreading. The crackdown began with the government taking away their meeting place and has intensified with most of the Pastoral Staff being detained. As members of Shouwang continued to hold outside services, they had been arrested and abused. Many have lost their jobs and their housing leases. The Church continues to try to hold outdoor meetings and have banded with other House Churches to try to negotiate with the government (to no avail).
- Southern Kordofan in Sudan: South Sudan last month broke away from Sudan to become the world's newest independent nation, but violence has persisted in Southern Kordofan, an oil-producing region. Representative Chris Smith, who heads the House Foreign Affairs subcommittee on Africa, said there were credible signs of systematic attacks by Sudan's Arab and Muslim forces against the largely Christian Nubian people. "There has been far too little interest shown, and there are no UN peacekeepers to help provide at least some semblance of protection. So the people are just being mowed down. We have another potential genocide -- certainly mass killing -- because of who they are, their ethnicity and their faith." Smith said.

- Nigeria: Concerns about the "silent killing" of Christians in Nigeria are being overlooked by the media and the Nigerian government. International Christian Concern (ICC) reports that Boko Haram has reportedly killed at least ten Christians in Maiduguri, Nigeria. Church leaders in the area say the radical Islamic group wants to implement sharia law and see Christianity destroyed.
- Pakistan: While espousing religious freedom for its citizenry, recent days have seen a marked increase in violence and discrimination against religious minorities and more moderate voices. The imprisonment and death sentence of Asia Bibi, a Christian mother and farm laborer, the murder of Salman Taseer, the Punjabi governor who had spoken out against the anti-blasphemy laws in his country, and the even more recently the abduction of his son, Shahbaz Taseer, are all just a few examples of this disturbing trend.
- In response, to the instances of violence and discrimination such as the cases cited above in Pakistan and in other countries, as well as the power vacuum caused by upheaval in nations such as Libya and Egypt, the House of Representatives recently passed by an overwhelming majority, H.R. 440, the "Near East and South Central Asia Religious Freedom Act of 2011." Now in the senate as S.1245, pray that this will pass in a similar fashion and that the U.S. will take a leading role in the promotion of religious freedom and the protection of vulnerable population around the world.
- Excellent news! After enduring a year of imprisonment, Vahik Abrahamian was released from prison in Iran, on August 29th and has now joined his family! An extended member of Abrahamian's family said that the whole family is rejoicing and expressed their gratitude first to God for His gracious protection and intervention and secondly to the Christian family worldwide who have not ceased praying and advocating on their behalf.
- United States: In August in Chicago, at least 14 members of a sex-trafficking ring were charged and will be prosecuted for "involuntary sexual servitude of a minor" and trafficking in persons for forced labor. The enslaved women and girls were controlled with beatings, death threats, and punishments, including being locked in the trunks of cars for hours. Some girls were as young as 12 and 13. And in a related issue, author Barry Estabrook documents in his book, *Tomatoland: How Modern Industrial Agriculture Destroyed Our Most Alluring Fruit*, questionable labor practices involved in how tomatoes are grown and picked and what amounts to what he calls slave labor, real slave labor still going on in Florida.