

February 2012

Burma—For years many around the world have watched and prayed for Burma, since the repressive and mysterious military junta took power in a coup d'etat in 1962. We praise God that in recent months the Burmese government has taken a significant and unprecedented change of course, releasing approximately 600 political prisoners, many of whom had been serving life sentences and had not seen their spouses and children for years. The population has suffered for decades from widespread human rights abuses, including extreme repression of religion, and an under-developed economy. Continue in vigilant prayer for this country that the encouraging events might become an ongoing trend toward increased freedom and protection of the citizens of Burma. Pray for Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and other international leaders as they interact with the government of Burma, that world leaders would be steadfast in their pressure. Pray for free elections in the very near future and the release of all others being held unjustly for their beliefs. Pray that as freedom increases more people might have access to the gospel. (*The Guardian*)

Saudi Arabia—International Christian Concern reported the recent imprisonment of 35 Christians, who have been meeting secretly in homes. The Christian church is almost unheard of in Saudi Arabia, where religious freedom is severely repressed. The only place Christians can worship is in private homes, and they run a grave risk for doing so. One of the 35 recently arrested said they had been called non-believers, animals, and supporters of America, and they have lacked adequate medical attention as well. A prisoner also reported that the male prisoners had been more severely abused while detained. Pray for the strength, courage, and protection for these 35 imprisoned believers. Pray that their responses and actions might be testimony even to those around them in prison. Pray for comfort, protection, and support for family members, who are now separated from their loved ones, and who also now face the threat of being detained themselves. (*International Christian Concern*)

China—CAN has followed the plight of the continually harassed and persecuted Linfen and Shouwang Churches in China—their buildings razed, permits denied, and many imprisoned. Now in an additionally stunning incident, Chinese officials arrested and tortured a Chinese-Canadian businesswoman, Jenny Chen, who visited Shouwang Church in Beijing and the Linfen house church in Shanxi province after her reports of their suffering. Ms. Chen, who is in her 50s, went with her daughter to support other believers, and they witnessed police blocking worshipers from attending Christmas Day services at Jindeng Church established by the Linfen house church. Chen and her daughter were followed by police and threatened at various times. In light of this, Ms. Chen put her daughter on a return flight to the U.S., but she herself was kidnapped days later and held without food or water for two days. She was threatened with ten years' imprisonment for “selling state secrets.” Due to her harsh treatment, she developed pneumonia and was sent to the hospital, which refused her treatment because she had no money. This provided the excuse for her to go home to get money, at which point she caught a cab directly to the Beijing Airport and boarded a plane for Los Angeles on January 16. Pray for the physical and emotional recovery of Jenny Chen. Praise God for her courage to support believers in China and document some of their suffering. Pray that she and others will continue to be a voice calling for justice for Christians in China. Pray that the blatant abuse of an individual residing in a Western country might call attention to the total disregard for all human rights by the Chinese government.

Malaysia—To be Christian in Malaysia has become increasingly difficult, where according to the constitution, to be Malay means being a Sunni Muslim. Converts face extreme persecution, such as the case of Jon, who was abducted and taken to an “Islamic Purification Center”—camps enclosed with barbed-wire fences, where attempts are made through torture and ill-treatment to convert people back

to Islam. Jon was beaten repeatedly with bamboo poles, forced to sit on ice naked, and kicked for days. When he still refused to recant his beliefs, he was finally released to the local police, and church members paid his bond. Other Malay converts find even day-to-day life interfered with. Yerima and his wife were merely trying to bring their newborn daughter home from the hospital when they were stopped by hospital staff indicating that they needed to be married in an Islamic ceremony before officials would release their daughter to them, because Yerima's wife is a Christian and the state does not recognize Yerima's conversion. Yerima and his wife pretended to cooperate to get their daughter, but then they fled before being forced to participate in the wedding ceremony. They had to abandon their home, and now they are considered fugitives, living in constant fear of being arrested and imprisoned. The circumstances are no different for ethnic Malays living in the countryside. Arshad found this to be true after meeting a Chinese evangelist who told him about Christ. In response to his new faith, Arshad began to share the gospel himself and was quickly under attack from Islamists and ostracized by his own ethnic group. He had to flee and live in a tent he made by the river, while Islamists set animal traps for him, and villagers smashed his motorcycle. Arshad has been repeatedly assaulted while sharing the gospel. All these believers ask for prayer for protection of their families and Yerima hopes for a legal resolution to his religious identity situation. Pray for these and other Malay Christians to remain courageous and to not be discouraged. Pray that their efforts to share Christ with others will not fall on deaf ears. Pray for all believers in Malaysia, that they will remain strong in their faith, rely on Christ to sustain them physically, emotionally, and spiritually, and to withstand the pressure to deny Him. (*Voice of the Martyrs*)

United States/Egypt—While the citizens of the United States watched months ago with hope as Egyptians called for freedom and toppled the repressive regime, concern has now grown as those who have seized power are proving to be no less repressive or violent. Many of the men and women who risked their lives to fight Mubarak, now face tear gas and bullets propelled at them by the very people that were placed in power in the name of democracy and freedom. What is even more disturbing is that many of those weapons are made in the United States and sold to Egypt by the U.S. government. CAN is joining Amnesty International in calling on the U.S. State Department to make sure that no more U.S.-made weapons reach Egypt or other regimes intent on suppressing freedom of expression through violence against their own populations. Pray for the people of Egypt, Syria, Libya, Bahrain, and other nations currently experiencing upheaval, pray for peace, for freedom, and for the protection for those speaking up for justice. Pray for Christians in these regions, who have always been a repressed minority, but now in many cases face greater danger and oppression. Pray for leaders in the United States and other nations with influence in the region, that they will diligently seek what is right and good rather than solely self-interest. Pray for those who have found themselves in power, even those who have chosen to abuse and exploit that power, that they might change course and pursue freedom and justice themselves. (*Amnesty International*)

China—In January, the Chinese government confirmed once again that Gao Zhisheng is still alive. This was done by indicating that Gao Zhisheng had been sentenced to three further years of prison for “violating probation”—a highly ironic development considering Gao Zhisheng has been in detention for over 1,000 days. Thank God that Gao Zhisheng appears to still be alive. Continue in vigilant prayer for freedom and justice in his case. Pray for his sustenance and comfort in the most dire of circumstances. Pray for his physical and spiritual well-being and healing as he has endured the most horrific torture and abuse. Pray also for Geng He, Gao's wife, and their two children, who have suffered horribly at the situation of their husband and father. Pray that Gao's brother will be able to visit him and that the world's focus on Gao's case will not wane but increase in determination to pressure the Chinese government to rectify the grave wrongs they have perpetrated against Gao Zhisheng. (*China Aid*)

Lithuania—Deimante Kedyte is seven years old. She lives with her aunt, a judge in Lithuania, because her father was murdered after Deimante testified in court that her mother repeatedly sold her, forcing Deimante—from the age of five—into sexual activity with high-ranking Lithuanian government officials, for “lots of money.” Now, the Lithuanian judicial system is trying to force Deimante to return to her mother! Make Way Partners embarked on a campaign calling on the president of Lithuania to ensure Deimante remains with her aunt and is not sent back to her mother. Pray for the protection, restoration, and healing of this young girl. Give thanks for this aunt, who courageously advocated for this little girl, despite the high level of officials involved in her abuse. Pray for protection for the aunt as well. Pray for Deimante's mother and those to whom she sold her child, that they all might be convicted of the horrific wrongs they have perpetrated, repent of their evil actions, and find Christ.

Guatemala—Norm Cruz, a human rights defender in Guatemala and founder of Survivors' Foundation (Fundación Sobrevivientes), has faced continuous death threats and attacks since 2008 related to her work defending women in Guatemala and seeking justice in cases of violence against women. She and now her family have also received threats specifically related to the legal assistance provided by Survivors' Foundation in the case of a young girl who was raped in 2004. Up to this time, the Guatemalan government has done nothing to ensure the safety of Norma Cruz, her family, or others who work defending human rights, or those they protect. Pray that the Guatemalan government will investigate the threats against Norma Cruz, offer her adequate protection, and implement justice for women who are victims of violence. Pray that Norma Cruz and other human rights workers in Guatemala would be safe and their work for justice might succeed. Pray for the women and girls who have suffered from the rampant and systematic rape and violence endemic in their country—pray for their healing and that they might find comfort in Christ to recover from their ordeals.

Nigeria—In a series of attacks in the Nigerian city of Kano, the extremist group Boko Haram has murdered more than 150. The group, which has identified its goals as overthrowing the Nigerian government and establishing an Islamic state, is responsible for multiple bombings on January 20 that targeted police stations, passport offices, and immigration centers, killing many civilians, both Muslim and Christian. The group has directly targeted Christian churches, including another violent spree of bombings on Christmas Day. Pray for Nigeria and its government, that peace can be established and maintained and that justice will be sought and administered. Pray for the families and friends of victims of all these senseless acts of violence, that they might find peace, healing, and comfort. Pray for Christians in the area as they deal with fear and intimidation, pray for their courage and peace. Pray that they might exhibit a spirit of forgiveness, rather than vengeance and retaliation. (*BBC*)

International—As persecuted believers continue to persevere in their suffering, we should persevere in our watchful prayer on their behalf. Continue to pray for Asia Bibi (Pakistan), wife, mother, and farm laborer imprisoned after a dispute with coworkers about Jesus and Islam, and is facing the death sentence; for Youcef Nadarkhani (Iran), husband, father, and pastor accused of apostasy and sentenced to death for protesting the mandatory teaching of the Koran to his sons in school; Li Ying (China), journalist and house church leader, imprisoned since 2001 and serving a 15-year sentence for her part in publishing an underground church magazine; Haile Nayzgi, Kidane Weldou, and Dr. Kiflu Gebremeskel (Eritrea), pastors and evangelists imprisoned since 2004 and 2005 in horrific conditions in this tiny African nation, which is one of the worst state persecutors of Christians; and Imran Ghafur (Pakistan), a Christian businessman arrested in July 2009 and sentenced to life in prison in January 2011 for allegedly damaging pages of the Koran, a charge he denies. Pray that they and their families would not be discouraged, despite the longevity and intensity of their trials, and that their lives would be a witness to the love and truth of Christ. (*Prisoner Alert*)