

May 2012

Afghanistan—In Afghanistan, more than 400 women have been arrested and jailed for “moral crimes.” Most of these are related to fleeing unlawful forced marriages and/or domestic abuse. Some of the charges include *zina*, or sex outside of marriage, but closer investigation reveals that the majority of even these accusations were, in fact, the results of rape or forced prostitution. Pray for women and girls like Parwana, 19, who ran away after her husband and mother-in-law beat her. However, after being convicted of “moral crimes” for trying to escape the abuse, she was jailed. Her despairing response to her situation was, “If I knew about prison . . . I would have just jumped into the river and committed suicide.” Pray for the plight of all women in a country where women have little or no voice, rights, or protections. Pray that they might see a huge contrast in the love of Christ and His treatment of women. Pray for a judiciary that fails to protect at least half their citizenry, based only on their gender. Pray for the men, family members, and communities—most of whom are never prosecuted for their own crimes--who abuse these vulnerable women and girls. (Human Rights Watch)

Yemen—In the city of Taiz, on March 18, 2012, two men on a motorcycle approached the car of Joel Wesley Shrum, an American English teacher working for the non-profit, International Training Development Centre, and gunned him down. Text messages later indicated that the murderers claimed to be “holy warriors” who had killed a “senior missionary,” and al Qaeda has claimed responsibility. However, Shrum was working at a vocational institute that helped people with disabilities and was not considered a missionary. Pray for Joel Wesley Shrum's wife, Janelle, and his two young sons, that they might be comforted and upheld by their Heavenly Father during this horrific trauma. Pray for the gunmen that they might become convicted of the great wrong they have committed. Pray for the work of this important training center and all who work there, that their good work might not be deterred by this act of violence. Also of concern in Yemen is the practice of child marriage, where young girls are sometimes forced into marriage to older men by their families. There is no minimum age requirement for marriage in Yemen, and nearly half of all women marry before age 18, and some in rural areas marry as early as age eight. Pray for a ban on child marriage, so that these girls can continue their education and be protected from the emotional and physical health risks of such early marriages. Pray that human rights activists who are fighting for a legal minimum age requirement of 18 may be effective. (*New York Times*; *Voice of the Martyrs*; *Huffington Post*; *Human Rights Watch*)

China—Since 1979, China's One-Child Policy has resulted in the horrible practice of forced abortions. It is not uncommon for pregnant women to endure forced abortions by the state. As late as their ninth month of pregnancy, women have been dragged from their homes, restrained, and forcibly aborted. Getting pregnant without a birth permit is illegal in China, and as a result women endure unimaginable pain and loss. Please pray that laws would change in China, so that countless lives would be saved and women would escape this horrible crime and suffering. (Women's Right without Frontiers; ABC News)

Tibet—Tibetan filmmaker Dhondup Wangchen made a documentary giving voice to Tibetans' call for freedom from China and an end to human rights abuses at their hands. For this, he was arrested, tortured, and is serving a six-year prison sentence and being denied medical attention for some serious conditions from which he suffers, including Hepatitis B. His family has not been allowed to see Dhondup or find out accurate information about his health and general well-being. For years, Tibetans who speak out against the Chinese government or participate in peaceful protests have faced the same fate as Dhondup Wangchen—arrest, torture, and imprisonment. Many Tibetan protesters have recently resorted to setting themselves on fire. The Chinese government has only responded by more mass arrests and possible killings by security forces. Pray for Dhondup Wangchen and other oppressed Tibetans, who suffer extraordinarily for their freedom of expression. (*Amnesty International*)

Mali—Like many nations in Africa and the Middle East in recent days, March 2012 saw another government ousted from power in the West African nation, which borders Algeria and Ivory Coast. Unlike other countries involved in the Arab Spring, Mali's turmoil is not the result of popular uprising or calls for democracy, but a military revolt, which removed from power the elected president, Amadou Toumani Touré. Beyond this, Toumani Touré had not even planned to seek another term, in accordance with the law, and the nation was set to have more democratic elections this April. Yet low-ranking military officers, upset with the government's handling of a rebel conflict, led by the Tuareg rebels in the north, instigated the coup—which has now devolved into a nearly full-blown civil war. What is further alarming is that, though the Tuareg rebels claim to be secular Muslims, that have been closely linked with extreme jihadist groups such as al-Qaeda and Boko Haram. The flags of both these groups, and others, have now been raised in northern provinces won over by the Tuareg rebels. Rape, looting, and other war crimes are widely being reported. The climate is especially dangerous for Mali's Christian community, who have specifically been targeted and many of whom had fled from the north. Additionally, Christian humanitarian organizations and churches have been attacked and destroyed. The violence in general has made humanitarian efforts almost impossible. The ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) has committed to sending troops to Mali to oversee the restoration of civilian rule. Pray for this nation in turmoil, which is vulnerable to rule by dangerous and repressive forces. Pray for the population, who once enjoyed relative stability and democracy, and are now subject to extraordinary violence. Pray especially for the Christian community in this nation, that they might be protected, strengthened, and not without hope. Pray that their actions and responses within this time of conflict might be a witness to Christ's love. As always pray for those who perpetrate atrocities, that somehow they might find the redemption of Christ. (*New York Times; Voice of the Martyrs; Voice of America*)

International—This April, the World Bank appointed its next president—Jim Yong Kim, a 52-year-old medical doctor, educator, and current president of Dartmouth College. Kim also holds a doctorate in anthropology and was a co-founder of Partners in Health, one of the most innovative and effective health non-for-profits serving the extremely poor in Haiti, Peru, Rwanda, and other impoverished regions. Additionally, Kim (who was born in Seoul, South Korea, and moved to the US at the age of 5) has served as the president of the World Health Organization. Despite his extensive experience and expertise, and a proven record of concern and advocacy for the poor, Kim's nomination met with controversy, as some nations felt the nominee from the US had an unfair advantage. Pray that regardless of the divisive nature of his nomination, Kim will be able to quickly become an effective leader of this important organization tasked with addressing endemic and extreme poverty globally. Thank God that Jim Yong Kim is an individual who throughout his life has demonstrated a high level of integrity and concern for the “least of these,” and that someone with these characteristics is now going to be heading up this institution. Pray that this might be a time when the World Bank might even more tenaciously and efficiently tackle pervasive poverty and the resultant human rights issues that stem from it. (*The Guardian; Human Rights Watch*)

Sierra Leone/Liberia—We give thanks at the recent guilty verdict handed down from the International Court at the Hague, convicting former president of Liberia, Charles Taylor, for his role in war crimes—including rape, mass amputations, and conscription of child soldiers—committed in Sierra Leone in the 1990s. In Sierra Leone and around the globe, there is a sense that justice has been done—thank God for implanting the desire for justice in human hearts. Also, pray that this verdict sends a strong and clear message to other despots still in power, that human rights abuses and atrocities cannot be perpetrated with impunity. Thank God that in Christ we are assured that one day all injustice will cease. (*NPR; BBC; Associated Press*)

China—A secret document obtained by China Aid Association (CAA) details the Chinese government's plan to eradicate house churches within 10 years. The State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) issued the document in cooperation with the ministries of Public Security and Civil Affairs. According to CAA, phase one of the strategy involves a thorough investigation of house churches from January to June 2012. Phase two concentrates on "cleaning up" the house churches that have been investigated within two to three years, and phase three aims to eradicate the house churches within 10 years. Strategies for accomplishing these goals include incorporating house churches into government-sanctioned Three-Self churches; banning the words "house church" from all websites, media and documents; and implementing humane law-enforcement measures. CAA reports that persecution and suppression of house churches has risen by 20 percent this year. A house church pastor from Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, said, "The situation this year is especially tense." Pray for China's house churches as they proclaim the truth of the gospel. Pray that the Lord will strengthen them in the midst of persecution. (*Voice of the Martyrs*)

India—The long-awaited justice for the victims of the 2008 massacre in Orissa State in India has finally arrived with a first guilty verdict for those involved in the killings and violence. Kartik Paramenika, a leader of the 2008 massacre has been sentenced to life in prison for the murder of Ramesh Digal—a cook in the school where Paramenika was headmaster. Kartik led a mob to Petapanga village in 2008, where he killed Ramesh and burned his home. In addition to the life sentence, Kartik was also sentenced to five years for arson and was fined 5,000 rupees. Convictions are sometimes difficult to obtain in India because witnesses are often threatened and harassed. John Dayal, a member of the government of India's National Integration Council, said, "Justice remains the critical issue in Kandhamal, where a combination of circumstances, including lacunae [missing information] in investigations and coercion of witnesses, has resulted in a long series of acquittals. This conviction will help begin to rebuild faith in the judicial system. We must also congratulate the public prosecutor for securing this major success." Give thanks for another instance of justice prevailing in the face of great wrong. (*Voice of the Martyrs*)

Bangladesh—Pray for Christian converts in a discipleship program. They are taught to sew as a means of supporting themselves. The worst persecution for Christian converts often begins after they are baptized because baptism is seen as a formal declaration of faith. Many converts are disinherited, forced to leave their parents' homes and even expelled from their villages. Christians make up less than one percent of the population of Bangladesh, and believers are often harassed and beaten by neighbors and community members, and some have even had false criminal charges leveled against them in an effort to intimidate and dishearten them. Pray that they would remain steadfast in their faith and confident in their witness. Pray for the whole country of Bangladesh, one of the poorest nations on earth, where most of the population lives on less than \$1 a day and are plagued by routine natural disaster such as cyclones, tsunamis, and flooding. (*Voice of the Martyrs*)