

July 2012

India—We celebrate the freedom of 42 men, women, and children—comprised of eight families—who had been living as slaves working in a brick kiln near Chennai, India, until last May. At the end of June, 25 more people—two of whom were 7-year-old children—enslaved in a rock quarry, and then 30 more individuals enslaved at a rice mill. All this amazing work was accomplished through a training program implemented through the International Justice Mission (IJM), which focuses on educating and empowering government officials to find and emancipate local people who are suffering forced servitude. Since 2010, IJM has trained over 1,000 officials in Chennai for this work. Praise God for the commitment of the IJM staff and local government officials in carrying out this life-saving, life-transforming work. Praise God for the freedom of all these men, women, and children. Pray for the continued effectiveness of this important ministry. Pray for God's blessing and care for these freed individuals, that they would adjust and flourish, and most of all come to know the freedom that can only be found in Christ. (*International Justice Mission*)

Pakistan—Pray for journalists in Pakistan, who attempt to report truthfully and accurately, yet do so at the risk of their very lives. Journalists are threatened by a number of groups, including al Qaeda, the Taliban, criminal gangs, and security forces, however, what is perhaps more disturbing is the evidence of possible complicity of the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). Despite evidence of their involvement in the abduction and murder of Pakistani investigative journalist Saleem Shahzad more than a year ago, this powerful agency has yet to be investigated. Since that time, not only have numerous journalists received death threats, but journalist Murtaza Razvi was murdered this past April. Without the investigation of ISI, any number of groups can threaten, intimidate, and even murder with impunity those who are reporting the truth of what is occurring in their country. Pray for the protection and vigilance of journalists in Pakistan, that they might continue to pursue the truth and report it accurately despite the danger they face. Pray for the truth to be revealed and justice enforced in the murder case of Saleem Shahzad and Murtaza Ravi. Pray also that their families and colleagues might be comforted. And most of all, pray for Pakistan, where many do not experience safety or freedom, because they are women, or Christians, or reporters, or another marginalized group. (*Amnesty International*)

Nigeria—Continue in vigilant prayer for Nigeria, which is stilled reeling amid bombings of Christian churches and government buildings, as well as violence against the Christian minority in the north. While the extremist group, Boko Haram, has claimed responsibility for many of the attacks, there is evidence that other groups are also perpetrating violence to heighten religious tensions in this already conflicted and divided country. According to information released by Boko Haram, the group planned to make June the “bloodiest campaign ever.” As a result, many of the churches which were once crowded with worshipers on a Sunday morning are all but empty recently. Pray for the cities of Jos and Damaturu, and for the states of Plateau, Kano, Kaduna, Yobe and Gombe, where much of the violence has occurred. Pray for the Christian community in Nigeria that they will be comforted and strengthened amid such persecution. Pray for a genuine and incomprehensible spirit of forgiveness to infuse the Nigerian Church. Pray for Christian leaders such as Father John Sixtus Okonkwo, priest at Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Abuja, who has said, “We do not preach a gospel of retaliation, we preach peace.” Pray that this may be the overriding message coming from Nigerian Christians, and pray that it will be a message that transforms the hearts and minds of Boko Haram members, and all those who seek to persecute and murder those who do not believe as they do. (*Christian Solidarity Worldwide; Reuters*)

Iran—Praise God for the release of Mehdi “Petros” Foroutan, who was released from prison this June.

He had served nearly a year, after being charged with “crimes against national security,” a charge solely related to his Christian faith. Despite the good news, Mehdi “Petros” Foroutan will undoubtedly continue to face persecution within his community and from the government. Even as we give thanks for his release, pray for his ability to remain strong in his faith and witness. Persevere in prayer also for those who have not yet been released and who are imprisoned solely for their faith, such as Youcef Nadarkhani and Behnam Irani. Praise God that both men remain strong in their faith, and pray that God will continue to uphold them physically and spiritually—as well as the many others like them, whose names and situations are unknown to us but not to the Father. (*Voice of the Martyrs*)

United States—In a recent and troubling development, sections covering religious freedom were not included in the Country Reports on Human Rights, released annually by the U.S. State Department. Up until now, status of religious freedom was included for each country—and now even vital information related to the plight of Christians and other religious minorities in the Middle East throughout the events of the Arab Spring remains unmentioned. This also seems to be part of a disturbing trend, where religious freedom in general has not garnered proportionate attention from the current U.S. administration as other human rights issues. This has extended to the allocation of resources to various issues, with religious freedom receiving a disproportionately small distribution of resources. Pray for President Obama and his administration that they might become persuaded of the necessity for the United States to remain vigilant and vocal on all issues of human rights around the globe. Pray that religious freedom would be seen as every bit as relevant and important a human rights issue as others, and that awareness of the great abuses perpetrated against religious freedom might be increased as opposed to being downplayed in our media and culture at large. Pray for the Church in the West, that we would remain faithful, active, and prayerful on behalf of all who suffer abuse at the hands of others, including those who suffer for their faith. (*CNS News*)

Burma/Myanmar—Sectarian violence has broken out in northwestern Myanmar (Burma) between Muslim Rohingyas and ethnic Rakhine Buddhists, leading to several deaths and the displacement of over 30,000 people and the burning of over 2,500 homes. Now tens of thousands are in refugee camps in need of food, water, and shelter. Rohingyas are a generally ostracized group living on the Myanmar/Bangladesh border in abject conditions and not officially recognized by the government—though the current situation may change this. Tension has existed between the two groups for years, but the recent upheaval was the result of a gang rape and murder of a Buddhist woman, which was blamed on Muslims, leading to a reprisal killing of ten Muslims by a Buddhist mob. Things have escalated from there. All this comes at a delicate time, when after 50 years of totalitarian reign and rampant human rights abuses, the government of Myanmar is finally making significant moves toward reform. Pray for peace to be established among these two groups and that provisions would reach them. Pray that this violence would not jeopardize the movement toward reform and democracy in Myanmar/Burma. Pray that many would find the peace of Christ amid the chaos and conflict. (*Reuters*)

Indonesia—The Filadelfia Church in Bekasi, a Batak Christian Protestant Church (HKBP), has faced constant harassment and violence from local Muslim extremists, who regularly gather to block church members access to their church, despite Indonesian laws which ostensibly protect their rights to gather and worship. Yet, the only response from local officials has been to encourage the church to move. Additionally, 16 churches were forcibly closed in Aceh Province after allegations that they were not legally registered. Church leaders were given only two weeks warning, demanding they dismantle. All the believers have petitioned the government to uphold the law, protect Christians from extremists and allow them freedom to assemble. Pray that those beaten, threatened, and harassed would not be

discouraged, but that God would grant them peace and wisdom in knowing how to respond under these very difficult conditions. Pray that despite closures, the Church would grow in Indonesia. Pray for the salvation of those oppressing believers and obstructing Christian worship. (*Voice of the Martyrs*)

Sudan—Pray for Mohammed Khidir Khalil, a Sudanese man who converted to Christianity from Islam, and eventually fled with his wife and two children to Egypt to avoid hostilities due to his faith in his homeland. Though his wife was not a Christian, she began to attend church with Khalil in Egypt, until recently when her mother came from Sudan for a visit and returned to Sudan with Khalil's wife and children. Khalil has already experienced complete rejection from his family, including his father threatening to shoot and kill him for his conversion. Now his wife is attempting to divorce him, and the court has blocked him from visiting his children. During this time, Khalil has remained in Sudan, has become an English teacher, and has begun literacy and cultural heritage programs for Nobiin children—one of the ethnic groups living in the Nubian region of Sudan. Khalil needs much prayer for comfort and support as he continues to fight to be able to see his children, and faces the potential permanent loss of them. Pray for his safety as he still experiences persecution, and as he appeals his divorce and the removal of his children, he could face prosecution for apostasy because of his conversion, and even a death sentence. Khalil has been gladly sharing the gospel and has encountered more persecution due to it. Pray that he will continue on all these fronts trusting in Christ and feeling his peace. (*Open Doors*)

Egypt—Egypt has been the scene of incredible turmoil throughout the Arab Spring, as the population has sought greater freedom and democracy after decades of the repressive Mubarak regime. However, the situation for many minorities, especially Christians, has become dangerously worse. Now with the election of the Muslim Brotherhood candidate, Mohammed Morsi, the situation for believers continues to be tenuous. Though Morsi has vowed to be a president for all Egyptians—even resigning from the Muslim Brotherhood and promising to be moderate. How sincere Morsi is in these reassurances and to what extent he will even be able to create a society of tolerance and equity remains to be seen. Continue to pray for believers in Egypt, especially as the vast majority have fled and those remaining are a sharply persecuted minority. Pray for President Morsi that his tenure might mark the inauguration of a more democratic and tolerant Egypt, and that he might govern with wisdom and integrity. (*Voice of the Martyrs; The Guardian*)

Bahrain—Pray for the immediate release of 11-year-old Ali Hassan, who was playing outside his house with his friends, when security forces accused the children of being a part of a protest happening nearby, threatened to shoot them, and then arrested Ali Hassan. While the other children managed to escape, Ali was taken into custody and held, alone and afraid, for 23 days without being allowed to see a lawyer. Ali remains in custody and has been charged with participating in an “illegal gathering” and “disturbing the security” of Bahrain. The arrest of this child is just a small picture of the pervasive and overwhelming repression with which the Bahraini government has responded to their population's call for democracy. Many more have faced imprisonment, torture, and death. Pray for this nation in upheaval and for their threatened population. Pray that Ali Hassan might be freed and recover fully from this traumatic experience. Pray that he and others would find true and total freedom in Christ. (*Amnesty International*)