

## August 2013

*Ah, Sovereign Lord, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you.*

—Jeremiah 32:17

*You are my refuge and my shield; I have put my hope in your word.*

—Psalm 119:114

**Egypt**—The Church in Egypt has watched with some hope, and then with growing concern, the recent events in their country, which have led to the removal of President Morsi by the military. Despite protests by the general population against President Morsi, the resultant violence was what was feared by many within and outside of Egypt, including believers there. To compound the difficulty, Mohammad Badie, “Supreme Guide” of the Muslim Brotherhood, claimed that Christians were a part of a conspiracy to ouster President Morsi. Many Christians have been hurt or killed in the violence that has followed. Early July saw several attacks against Christians in the region, including the shooting death of Father Mina Cheroubim, a Coptic Orthodox priest in el-Arish, North Sinai; an attack on the homes of believers in Nag Hassan, where four believers were killed, 16 homes and businesses destroyed, and many injured; and a similar attack in Delga, Minya province, where the home of a Catholic priest was looted and set ablaze. Additionally, at least 91 women were sexually assaulted by mobs during the protests and ensuing violence, further demonstrating that women are another targeted people group in this troubled region. Pray for the safety, peace, and reconciliation of all people within Egypt. Pray for believers there, as they face an uncertain fate during this tumultuous time—pray that they would face all these events with grace and with the peace that transcends understanding. Pray that the rule of law would win out in this nation, that leaders would be installed who act with integrity and justice for all their citizens, and that Egypt would be a place where freedom and security would flourish. (*Source: Middle East Concern; New York Times; Human Rights Watch*)

**Azerbaijan**—Pastor Zaur Balaev was imprisoned in 2007 after false accusations and on the basis of testimony that witnesses later said they were forced by the police to give. We gave thanks when he was released in 2008 after the help of Voice of the Martyrs fieldworkers and international outcry. Despite this positive development, Pastor Balaev and his family again need pray as his wife Nunuka just passed away after a long battle with cancer. Pray for the comfort and peace of Christ for this family as they mourn this huge loss. Give thanks for their continued faithful work for Christ despite imprisonment, harassment, and now personal tragedy. (*Source: The Voice of the Martyrs*)

**Vietnam**—A young couple, who are subsistence farmers and the parents of three boys, recently converted from Buddhism to Christianity. After only a month, however, the couple was confronted by local authorities, beaten with sticks—the wife struck on the face—and threatened with confiscation of their land if they do not return to Buddhism. Without their land, they would have no means of supporting themselves. They are fearful of beatings and other consequences, and though their pastor is trying to help them, he lives 15 miles away and is limited in what he is able to do for them. Pray for this family who are trying to pursue life with Christ, but who have suffered more persecution in one month of faith than many believers experience in a lifetime. (*Source: The Voice of the Martyrs*)

**International**—Through years of field research, global education, and advocacy, the jewelry manufacturing and related businesses have made incremental but significant steps toward addressing the human rights abuses that have become endemic in the industry—including slave and child labor under dangerous and appalling conditions. Decades of unregulated and illegal sources of precious

gems, metals, and minerals have destroyed lives, communities, and financed brutal conflicts around the globe. Now another draft of the Code of Practices of the Responsible Jewelry Council is in the process of final review. Pray for this process, as its outcome will largely determine whether this is just a weak and ineffectual document that merely gives lip-service to ethical sourcing of these materials, or if it will become an effective instrument in reforming this industry and holding it to international human rights and legal standards. Give thanks that diligent NGOs, such as Human Rights Watch, have been invited into this process, but also pray that this Code of Practice will not be diluted and will be instrumental in changing the destiny and longterm protection of those most exploited by this industry, such as children and indigenous communities. *(Source: Human Rights Watch)*

**Eritrea**—Shortly after their four-month mandatory military training, 39 Christian high school students (11 of them girls) were arrested for their faith. The students were beaten, subjected to hard labor, and denied sufficient food and water. They also have been threatened with long prison sentences and denial of access to university education if they do not renounce their Christian faith. Pray for these courageous young people, who are enduring current hardship and risking their futures for the sake of Christ. Pray they would remain steadfast in their confidence of a better, eternal future. Pray for the approximately 1,200 more Christian prisoners in Eritrea—some children and the elderly—who continue to languish under some of the harshest conditions in the world. Pray for the leadership of this young nation, that they might turn from this extreme repression and lead with equity and integrity. *(Source: International Christian Concern; Open Doors)*

**United States**—Originally incarcerated for armed robbery, Herman Wallace has spent more than four decades in solitary confinement—23 hours a day in a 6' x 9' cell—in Louisiana's infamous Angola Prison, where he spoke out against the conditions and racial inequalities there. Though no evidence links him to the incident, he was later charged, along with two other men, in the death of a prison guard. However, many believe the accusation was a result of Wallace's work exposing the abuses in Angola. Now 71 years old, dying of liver cancer, and having more than paid for the crime of armed robbery, Herman Wallace may have only one last chance for a few moments of freedom. *(Source: Amnesty International)*

**Iran**—Eight believers in Iran, who have been facing a legal ordeal since being arrested in October of 2012 at prayer gatherings, were convicted and sentenced on July 16. Seven of the believers have been free on bail since shortly after their arrests, and will remain free as they appeal their sentences, which range from 1 to 6 years. However, one prisoner has remained in custody this entire time. Pray that they will all persevere through this trial, that they will hold fast to their faith, and be a strong witness in all circumstances. Pray also for the more than 20 other Christians currently imprisoned in Iran for their faith, including Pastor Saeed—a U.S. citizen who has been detained since September 2012. Give thanks that the medical treatment for internal bleeding that Pastor Saeed had been denied has finally been given to him at a hospital in Tehran. *(Source: Middle East Concern)*

**China**—Lacheng Ren and Wenxi Li, two Christians involved in starting a Christian bookstore in Taiyuan, were arrested for setting up an “illegal business” at the end of June—despite having all the proper registrations. They both were sentenced to prison—Lacheng Ren, five years, and Wenxi Li, two. Wenxi Li was only an employee of a different Christian bookstore in Beijing and had merely traveled to Taiyuan to help find a location for the new bookstore. Lacheng Ren was only sponsoring it. Initially, those establishing the bookstore encountered opposition from local police, who raided the store and were quoted as shouting, “Don’t you dare bring Christian culture here. This is our turf.” Wenxi Li was later called to the police station to supposedly pick up the \$6,000-worth of books and materials that had been confiscated from the store, but instead he was arrested on the spot. Lacheng Ren was arrested at

his home shortly after. Since that time, Wenxi Li's wife and children have also suffered harassment and threats. His wife fears greatly for the safety of their children. Pray for the preservation of these Christian men as they endure imprisonment and for the vital work they initiated with this bookstore. Pray that the confiscated materials might reach people who need them most. Pray for the physical safety and the mental peace of these men and their families. (*Source: The Voice of the Martyrs*)

**International**—Some of the most underprivileged children in the world live in Uganda, the Philippines, Cambodia, Albania, and Nicaragua, where World Vision asked these kids to describe “the life they aspire to live.” Their hopes for education, care of creation and the natural resources that sustain their families, freedom from violence and armed conflict, and families that can remain intact are simple, yet can seem unattainable. Pray God's truth and promises into some stark realities that these children face: 300 million children globally are forced to work, rather than go to school; efforts just to survive, such as deforestation for firewood and clearing land for unsustainable farming, can have devastating longterm consequences for the world's poorest families; a record 28.8 million people, many of them children, were displaced by armed conflict in 2012; and a global child death-rate of nearly 19,000 *per day* robs families of the joy of being intact. Pray that families will both value education and have the means to support themselves without the necessity of children working; pray that reforestation and other efforts to rejuvenate natural resources will continue to be pursued and successful; pray for God's love and peace to replace conflict and violence; and pray that the international community will act with urgency and efficiency to reduce preventable child deaths, especially those related to lack of clean water, food, and healthcare. Pray that the Church around the world will be responsive to the call and direction of the Holy Spirit, will be at the forefront of the enacting these good works, and that God would be glorified. (*Source: World Vision*)

**North Korea**—July 27 marked the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the Korean War, and it represents six decades of the North Korean people existing under one of the most severely oppressive regimes in history. Christian Solidarity Worldwide is marking this anniversary with a call for greater international pressure to address the human right atrocities perpetrated by the North Korean government. Pray for the more than 200,000 political prisoners suffering from extreme malnutrition, beatings, torture, and rape at the five political camps around North Korea. Pray for the population at large, who have fared only somewhat better, as they live in a climate of complete government control, famine, flooding, lack of electricity, and infrastructure. Give thanks that after pressure from Christian Solidarity Worldwide and 40 other human rights organizations, the UN Human Rights Council in March 2013 established a Commission of Inquiry “to investigate the systematic, widespread and grave violations of human rights” in North Korea. Pray that another initiative for the BBC World Service to produce radio broadcasts for North Korea has been pursued enthusiastically. Pray that the resources for this endeavor would be forthcoming. Pray that China, Laos, and other transit countries for North Korean defectors would formally recognize such persons as refugees, rather than repatriating them to certain imprisonment, and likely, death. Pray for the growing number of believers in North Korea, who continue in a faith that could cost them their lives. Pray that each day they have a sense of the grace of God and the better promise of eternity. (*Source: Christian Solidarity Worldwide*)