

***God is our refuge and strength,
A very present help in trouble.
Therefore will we not fear, though the earth do change,
And though the mountains be shaken into the heart of the seas.
Psalm 46:1-2***

Colombia—After decades of violent conflict, with human rights abuses perpetrated by both sides, a promising peace agreement has been signed between the Colombian government and FARC rebels. However, numbers of people, including Christians, are not entirely pleased with the agreement, feeling that the agreement does not serve justice for the past crimes and abuses. Fifty years of violent hostility have led to conflicted emotions around this, but we join with Voice of the Martyrs and others as we pray for peace, forgiveness, and restoration in Colombia. Pray especially for believers in Colombia to be agents of grace in this very difficult transition. Pray for healing in this country and for the government to protect the basic rights and freedoms of all their citizens, and to govern with integrity. (Source: *Voice of the Martyrs*)

Sudan—In keeping with its consistent record of extraordinary injustice and total disregard for basic human rights, the Sudanese government has wrongly imprisoned Czech journalist Petr Jasek and Sudanese nationals Pastor Hassan Abdel Rahim and Darfur activist Abdel-Moneim Abdel-Mawla. Now in a stunning miscarriage of justice, a Sudanese court has sentenced Jasek with life imprisonment for espionage and inciting religious hatred, as well as sentencing the other two men to 12 years in prison for “criminally aiding” Jasek. The Czech government has already reacted, calling the ruling groundless and without evidence. Pray that the Czech foreign minister would have success negotiating on behalf of Jasek and that all three men would be released. Pray that other Western nations would speak out against this gross injustice. Pray that these three men would be held up by the Holy Spirit and sustained through this ordeal, that their families would be comforted, and that they all would take refuge in the Lord, that He would be their rock and their strong deliverer. Pray that many see the light of Christ through the ordeal of these men who were working for good in this dark place. (Source: *The Persecution Project*)

Bangladesh—Fifty-two percent of girls in Bangladesh marry before the age of 18, despite a 1929 law prohibiting this. The law has done little to deter this practice, because of its weak penalties and rare enforcement, thus leaving over half the female population under-educated and vulnerable to domestic violence, both of which have been proven to be closely related to child marriage. While it is a worldwide problem, Bangladesh is one of the worst perpetrators of child marriage, and a recent law proposed to address this issue may in fact be a setback. Now up for review, The Child Marriage Restraint Act of 2016, despite providing for harsher punishments and stricter enforcement, also has a provision for child marriage in “special cases.” Many fear this will be a well-exploited loophole, especially in rural areas. Pray for the refining of this law, as well as its enforcement, to ensure no young girls are forced into lives of no opportunity or promise, and which in many cases is paramount to slavery. Pray for parents who because of financial and societal stress feel they have no option but to sell their daughters into these horrible situations. Pray for the protection of these girls whose minds and bodies are not prepared for the role of wife, especially to men who are often old enough to be their fathers. Pray that the government and society of Bangladesh will swiftly and effectively bring an end to this practice. (Source: Girlsnotbrides.org)

Turkey—“In the past journalists were killed in Turkey. This government is killing journalism in its entirety.” So one Turkish journalist described the situation in Turkey after the coup attempt of July 15, 2016. Since that time President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the Turkish government have used state of emergency decrees to shut down 29 publishing houses and approximately 140 media outlets, including TV stations, newspapers, radio stations, and magazines. This has left over 2,500 media

workers and journalists unemployed. What is worse, however, is that arrest warrants have been issued for more than 100 journalists, in addition to passports being revoked and press accreditations cancelled. More troubling is the use of emergency decrees allows the government to bypass the parliament and the Turkish court system. Ironically, the court system is also being used to suppress reporting on government issues by using terrorism laws against journalists, harassing them with repeated arrests and prolonged incarcerations even during protracted court proceedings. Journalists attempting to cover the Kurdish separatist issue have also faced increasing threats of physical violence and attacks. Pray for journalists and other activists who risk safety and security to report the truth in an oppressive environment. Pray for President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the Turkish government that they might abandon practices of repression and oppression and rule with justice and integrity for all their citizens. Pray that Turkey can continue to be a country of relative peace and one of increased freedoms. Pray that it becomes a place where the truth is valued, and even more so, where the truth of Christ can be shared. *(Source: Human Rights Watch)*

Ukraine—Sadly after some months of relative calm, fighting has erupted again between government forces in eastern Ukraine and Russian-backed separatists. What is deeply troubling are the many civilian lives at risk on both sides of the line of contact. Amid dealing with challenges of no electricity or water, civilians are also facing the indiscriminate fire of Grad rockets being used by both sides. The laws of war which apply to the Ukrainian government and the separatists dictate that civilian harm cannot be disproportionate to military gain. Additionally, all parties in a conflict are to do their utmost to minimize civilian losses. Yet by their very nature, Grad missiles are designed to maximize collateral damage, firing 40 rockets at one time that are unguided and can land anywhere within approximately 54,000 square meters—or the area of 7 1/2 football fields. Beyond this each contains over 3,000 fragments that can kill and maim for a radius of 28 meters. Basically this weapon is almost impossible to use without causing unnecessary civilian casualties, and yet reports from the area indicate its extensive use by both Ukrainian government forces and the Russian-backed separatists in densely populated areas, taking the lives of numerous civilians, including children. We pray not only for peace in this region and for a reasonable resolution to this dispute, but for the protection of civilians, their homes, schools, businesses, and other infrastructure. We pray that both parties to this conflict would engage at least according to the international laws of war. Pray for the comfort and healing of the thousands of innocent lives trapped in this disputed territory. *(Source: Human Rights Watch)*

Burma-- Airstrikes and attacks between government troops and an ethnic armed group forced 2,000 internally-displaced-people from the predominately-Christian Kachin ethnic group to flee their refugee camp at the end of December. These people have already lost so much, and now they are removed from any source of aid. The fighting had been going on for three months, and had escalated recently with mortar shells. Pray for these trapped people who say they can neither go forward, where there is more fighting, nor back to the unsafe camps. Pray that God would truly be their refuge in this time of distress. *(Source: International Christian Concern)*

Morocco/France-- Two missionaries in France met a Muslim man visiting from Morocco and shared the Gospel with him. He was thrilled to receive his own copy of the Gospel of John because he was not permitted to own one in Morocco. Praise God for this encounter, and pray that this Moroccan man will turn to Christ for salvation. Pray that he might even become a witness to others in his own country. Indeed, pray that the Word of God would be available to those in Morocco who are seeking truth. *(Source: Jews for Jesus)*

Sri Lanka-- Praise God that just days after Buddhist monks bombed a Sri Lankan church, Christians gathered amongst the roofless ruins for Sunday school and a worship service. Praise God for their courage and devotion to Him. The attackers had written "the church is no more" on the burnt church building, and yet our Sri Lankan brothers and sisters are boldly demonstrating that the body of Christ

is, instead, strong and vibrant. Please pray for further protection and further growth. Pray also that the perpetrators' blind eyes will be opened, see the truth of Christ, and accept His gracious free gift of salvation. *(Source: Voice of the Martyrs)*

North Korea-- Thousands of poor people, including teenagers and 11- and 12-year-old children, are clearing dozens of miles of icy mountain roads with sticks and cheap shovels at a fancy ski resort in Masikryong, which only a select few elite can even afford. This child labor and brutal contrast of social status is typical across all of North Korea. Please pray that this corrupt and wicked regime that allows such child labor, not to mention unimaginable persecution and human rights abuses, would be completely removed from power. Pray that the people, with the power of God's mighty hand, would find courage, unity, and opportunity to overthrow their government. Pray for a new era of freedom in this country where the masses have suffered untold atrocities. And pray fervently that the Lord would show many hurting and deceived people there that He alone is the great King and Savior. *(Source: NBC News)*

Iraq-- Please pray for Abu Ali who was forced with his family from his city of Mosul and now lives in a camp in Northern Iraq. Of the 6,000 displaced people in the camp, his family are the only Christians, and they encounter regular persecution. His son is bullied, they are all harassed, their Bibles have been taken away, and one store refuses to sell to them. Pray for their protection. Praise God that despite the difficulty, Abu and his wife refuse to stay quiet about their faith. They boldly share the Gospel with their neighbors and invite them to worship with them. Four people have come to Christ, and one of them, Faris, was beaten until he was unconscious and had broken ribs. Instead of retaliating, these believers choose to forgive and pray for those that persecute them, feeling sorry for those that don't know Christ. Pray that they would continue to be a light in this very dark place and that the Lord would bring salvation to many. *(Source: Voice of the Martyrs)*