

August 2018 Prayer Items

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

—Psalm 119:114

Nigeria—July 18 marked the 150th day of captivity for Leah Sharibu, one of 110 girls abducted by Boko Haram last February. In March, the government of Nigeria negotiated the release of the other girls who have since been returned to their homes. However, Leah was not among them as she refused to convert to Islam, thereby choosing to remain in captivity instead of being freed. Please pray that Boko Haram will relent, releasing her to the Nigerian government so that she can return to her family. Also, please pray that while in captivity, she will be strengthened and sustained both physically and spiritually and that efforts toward her release currently underway will be successful. (*Source: Christian Solidarity Worldwide*)

West Africa—Pastor Trevor and his wife Clarice, missionaries in West Africa, were recently forced to flee their village along with other Christians when Islamists overran it. The Islamists vowed to kill all Christians they found in the village and set about plundering and burning all Christian homes there. Pastor Trevor and Clarice relocated with other Christians to outside of the capital where they continue their ministry, however they have been marked for death and a bounty has been put on the head Pastor Trevor. While having managed to escape imminent danger, the threat remains very close, and Clarice has been experiencing sleeplessness and immobilizing anxiety attacks as a result. Please pray for peace in West Africa, that God will bring renewed peace and strength to Pastor Trevor and his wife Clarice, and that He will continue to use their ministry to bring the word of God to those who have not heard it. (*Source: Voice of the Martyrs*)

Iran—Yasser Mossayebzadeh, Mohammadreza Omid, and Saheb Fadaie were arrested in their homes on the evening of 24 July 2018 by Iranian officials. This comes following the arrest of their Pastor Yousef Nadarkhani on 22 July. On 6 July, the men were convicted of working with house churches in Iran and propagating “Zionist Christianity,” and Yousef and Mohammadreza were sentenced to an additional two years of internal exile in the south of Iran, far away from their families. The men’s arrests themselves were of a particularly aggressive variety which saw family members brutalized and Yousef and his son tasered despite offering no resistance. This was likely done in an effort to intimidate other Christians in the community, however reports out of Iran indicate strongly that the home churches remain resilient. Please pray that the Lord will strengthen those arrested and their families, that they and other religious minorities will be treated with respect and decency, and that the officials responsible for this persecution will be convicted of this injustice and turn to Christ instead. (*Source: Middle East Concern*)

Turkey—Pastor Andrew Brunson, an American pastor who has lived and worked in Turkey for over two decades has spent the past two years in prison there facing charges of providing support to terrorists (see May 2018 CAN newsletter). However, there may be room for renewed optimism as he has recently been removed from prison to house arrest based on deteriorating health. Additionally, his situation was raised at the US State Department’s first ever religious freedom ministerial at which his daughter, Jacqueline Funari spoke. The Trump administration has also threatened Turkey, a NATO ally, with sanctions to include shipments of the new F-35 Joint Strike Fighter aircraft. Brunson throughout his ordeal has maintained his innocence and has been used as a pawn by the Erdogan regime in order to force the US to hand over Fethullah Gulen whom they hold responsible for the 2016 coup attempt. Last week during his trial, former church members were brought forward by the prosecution making

ambiguous and unsubstantiated accusations against Brunson. When the judge asked him to respond to their testimony, Brunson stated plainly, “my faith teaches me to forgive, so I forgive those who testified against me.” Please pray for continued progress in the release of Pastor Brunson, that he will remain firm in his faith and regain his physical strength during house arrest. Please pray also that Turkish authorities will drop their false charges against him and be convicted of their injustice against Pastor Brunson. (Source: *Christianity Today*)

Uzbekistan—Open Doors this year has ranked Uzbekistan number 16 in its annual list of 50 countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian. Similarly, the US State Department once again named it as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) for its religious freedom violations every year since 2006. Yet there are indicators that things may be changing in the former Soviet republic. Members of the Uzbek government were present for the US State Department’s first ever Ministerial for the Advancement of Religious Freedom on 24 July as a signal of the country’s new commitment to religious freedom. While Uzbekistan has a history of religious freedom, following the breakup of the Soviet Union the Central-Asian country found itself in a difficult regional neighborhood, where the secular governance was threatened by Islamist ideologies. Further complicating matters was Uzbekistan’s complex mix of ethnicities and economic stagnation. This led to a unique blend of laws based partially on Russian law, Uzbek tradition, and practical security necessity. For instance, religious conversions are legal, but missionary work remains outlawed. Yet the Uzbek government remains committed to institutional reform allowing greater religious freedom and have initiated steps toward that end. Furthermore, while Uzbekistan is a majority Muslim country, most Uzbek Muslims adhere to Sufism, a mystical branch of Sunni Islam which has historically been far less prone to violent extremism than other branches of Sunni Islam. Taken together, there are numerous indicators that Uzbekistan is seeking to break the trend toward authoritarianism in the region through the establishment of a new model of religious freedom. Please pray for the continued opening of Uzbekistan to religious freedom that more will hear the message of Christ. Please pray for Christians in Uzbekistan as well, as they continue to face hardships for their faith, despite some of these encouraging signs. (Source: *Christianity Today*)

Wales—Over the past 18 months, 143 children have been rescued in Wales from human trafficking. The children range in ages from 2 to 17. Many are brought over illegally from other countries under the false promise of legitimate work in the UK, only to have their hopes dashed quickly upon their arrival. Most are brought over for purposes of sexual exploitation, while others are forced into indentured servitude or cannabis cultivation. Yet new efforts by the Welsh government and non-for-profit organizations are bringing this issue into focus for Welsh citizens, providing them with potential signs of trafficking to look out for. This collaboration between public- and private-sector organizations led to the creation of Manumit coffee shop which, in addition to other services, gives victims of trafficking not just a place to work, but the essential care they need to rebuild their lives. To date, Manumit has trained 11 victims of trafficking in barista skills. If sales continue, they are hoping to bring on two more survivors. Please pray for healing for the victims of this heinous practice, that those responsible will be brought to justice, and for increased vigilance against traffickers. (Source: *BBC*)

China—Persecution of Christians in China under the Xi regime has reached levels not seen since Mao’s Cultural Revolution. The new crackdowns have resulted in a record number of churches being closed and arrests of Christian leaders. This was recently evidenced by the raid on the Early Rain Covenant Church in southwestern Sichuan Province. According to China Aid, police violently arrested 17 people including the church’s pastor Wang Yi and his wife. Additionally, they have recorded 1,265 cases of persecution against churches and documented 223,000 cases of individual persecution. This is up dramatically from 2016 which saw 762 cases of persecution involving 48,00 individuals. Please pray for an end to this persecution, that Chinese Christians will be sustained and remain strong in their

faith, and that God would turn the hearts of the Chinese leaders directing this persecution. (Source: *Washington Times*)

Mozambique—While the northern half of Africa has historically been fertile ground for Islamist violence against Christians, the predominantly Christian southern half has been largely free of this type of violence. Yet recent attacks and beheadings in several countries have created worry of new Islamist threats in southeast Africa. In Mozambique alone, the Islamist group al-Sunna wa Jama'a has killed 39 people and displaced 1,000 in a recent spate of violence. The group is said to be influenced by the teachings of the radical cleric Sheik Aboud Rogo, who was killed in 2012 by suspected Kenyan government agents. They are largely financed by the illegal trade of ivory, timber, and rubies in Mozambique's border area. Please pray for peace in Mozambique and that those involved in the group would cease their violent activity. Also, pray that they would come to know Christ as their savior and that Christians in Mozambique would remain steadfast in their faith. (Source: *Open Doors*)

Eritrea—Thirty-five Christians in the east African country were recently released from prison according to sources. They had been in prison for belonging to unregistered churches, a grave offense under the totalitarian government. Eritrea only recognizes the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church, Sunni Islam, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church. While the release of these 35 individuals is welcome news, it must be remembered that last year alone, over 300 Christians were imprisoned for their faith, and as many as 3,000 total may be undergoing terrible persecution in prison camps. Eritrea under the authoritarian grip of Isaias Afwerki has consistently ranked high on Open Doors Watch List of countries where persecution of Christians is rampant. Please pray for those released as they begin their transition from prison life and heal from the hardships they have endured. Pray that the regime will loosen its hold on religious freedom and that those still in captivity for their faith will be released without delay. Pray particularly for President Afwerki, that he might repent of his oppression of his people, and most of all find salvation in Christ. (Source: *Premier*)

India—On 14 July, a church building was demolished in Sangameshwar, India, by Hindu radicals in an attempt to create a "Christian free" village. Sangameshwar is located approximately 80 miles north of Hyderabad in India's Telangana state and has been the scene of a marked increase in hostility toward Christian minorities. Christians here have noted an increase in social isolation, harassment, and violence against them in the past year. In the first two weeks of July of this year, International Christian Concern has documented 15 incidents of anti-Christian activity in the village. Please pray for the Christians in Sangameshwar and across India as a whole that they will remain a light to those who persecute them and be sustained under increasing social ostracization and persecution. (Source: *International Christian Concern*)