

February 2019 Prayer

For the word of the Lord is right and true; he is faithful in all he does. The Lord loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of his unfailing love.

—Psalm 33: 4-5

Cuba—“Pray for the Cuban church, because we are under strong attack.” That is the prayer request of a ministry worker in Cuba, where buildings are being demolished and Christians have been attacked and threatened. The persecution has increased since believers in Cuba have voiced their opposition to the Cuban government’s proposal to legalize gay marriage. Pastors in the country believe the government is using drones as surveillance on their sermons and activities. Pray that believers in Cuba would be strong in their faith, loving and generous in their witness, and protected by their Heavenly Father as they continue to follow Him. Pray that the Cuban government would miraculously embrace freedom for all their citizens, as well as freedom of religion and speech. (*Source: The Voice of the Martyrs*)

China—The US has levelled \$250 billion in trade tariffs against China in an attempt to address unfair trade practices, and yet the Trump administration--much like the Obama administration and the European Union--has done nothing to address the unlawful detainment of somewhere between 800,000 and 2 million Uyghur, Kazakhs, and other Chinese Muslims into internment camps in the western Xinjiang region. Many of these people are simply disappeared and families continue to search for them, though these camps are remote, isolated, and highly guarded. Called “re-education” centers, Muslims—and similarly Christians—are forced to renounce their faith and face torture as part of their re-education. Despite calls for the US to levy sanctions against China and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo’s own declaration that China has committed “awful abuses” in these case, no western government has taken action against China. As NPR commentator Scott Simon observes: “China is America's largest creditor: it holds more than a trillion dollars in U.S. Treasury securities. Look down at whatever you're wearing, carrying, riding in or working on right now. American businesses get rich relying on Chinese workers who earn low wages to produce our clothing, mobile phones, building materials, and dazzling new tech devices.” And Saudi Arabia and other Muslim nations where China heavily invests are also “strangely silent.” Pray for the Muslims, Christians, and other minorities persecuted, abducted, and tortured in China—that they might be protected and preserved until they are freed. Pray for the sustenance and comfort of the families who are missing loved ones. Pray that many would find the light and love of Christ through these ordeals. Pray for this powerful yet repressive nation that those in power would turn away from fear and pursue a path of truth, freedom, and integrity for all their people. (*Source: NPR*)

Iraq—Over recent years most of the Christians from the Nineveh plains have been forced to flee amid the violence that made them particular targets. The government has been trying to force them to return to these ancestral villages, though most are trying to avoid this due to continued insecurity and threats of violence. One such case was at the beginning of December when Shabak members of the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), an Iraqi Shi’a ethnic group, gathered in front of the Syrian Catholic “St George” church in Bartella, began taking photographs and then began shooting off automatic rifles, claiming it was for a wedding—a practice that is actually illegal. When the priest asked them what they were doing

and asked them to leave, they got confrontational and pointed a gun in his face. A similar incident happened at another Syrian Catholic church in the region about the same time as well. Join Middle East Concern and Iraqi believers in praying for “the leaders of the church in Iraq, to know the Lord's peace, wisdom and guidance in the face of ongoing pressures; for Iraqi Christians, to stand strong and be bold, in facing continued intimidations and threats; for protection for Fr. Benoka, other Church leaders and all Christians in the Nineveh plain; for the authorities to investigate these shootings and bring the perpetrators to justice; or for more tolerance in the Iraqi society, and an end to the intimidations and infringement on Christian villages, creating an atmosphere that would encourage Christians to return to their villages.”
(Source: *Middle East Concern*)

India—One of the many tragedies of women caught in the sex trade is that it places their children at great risk and exposes them to things they should never have to know about, let alone at such young ages. Pray for the work of Jubilee Homes and Bombay Teen Project, who are partnering to provide homes for the children of sex workers, where the children can live in a safe environment, while still maintaining relationships with their mothers. Through this, too, many mothers are rescued from this work and come to faith in Christ. Pray that this work would continue to grow unimpeded by those who run these businesses and those who use them. Pray for the ongoing protection of vulnerable children, for all who choose to follow Jesus, that they would find an opportunity for improved lives, and that these cycles of poverty, hardship, and exploitation would be ended. (Source: *Jubilee Campaign*)

Laos—Though legally Laotians are guaranteed freedom of religion and speech by their constitution, Christians experience frequent persecution and discrimination, especially from local leaders who ignore the rule of law. Such was the case on December 29th when three pastors were arrested during an evening service and brought in for questioning. Hours later, the police returned, destroyed the church's worship platform and sound equipment, as well as arresting four other church members. Eventually, all were released days later, but undoubtedly this community of believers has been shaken by this event. Pray that their trust in the Lord would be unwavering and that many would see Christ in their lives. Pray that the local police who carried out this miscarriage of justice would be held accountable for their actions, and more important, that they would be convicted in their hearts about the injustice they have committed and their own need for repentance and Christ's forgiveness. Pray that the Laotian government would do more to protect their citizens and uphold the laws of their country. (Source: *The Voice of the Martyrs*)

Cambodia—In recent years, the Cambodian government has passed legislation to more severely prosecute and punish acid attacks that leave victims tragically wounded and permanently disfigured. However, according to a report by Human Rights Watch, the actual implementation of these laws, including government-provided free medical treatment for victims, has been minimal at best—often never happens at all. Almost none of the doctors interviewed for the report were aware that the victims were entitled to free treatment, so on top of a horrific injury and future stigma, these attack victims also face financial hardships. Pray that this barbaric practice would be eradicated here and around the globe. Pray that governments such as Cambodia would vigorously prosecute perpetrators and would provide the care they have promised to these vulnerable people. And finally pray for the victims of

these attacks that they might heal in body, mind, and spirit and understand the unwavering truth that they are the beautiful and beloved creation of our Heavenly Father. (Source: BBC)

Mexico—Mexico remains one of the most dangerous places to be a priest. Last year, 10 priests were murdered and more than 26 priests have been murdered in the past 6 years. Most of these are because they are targets of organized crime, but the police and government's lack of response and prosecution of these crimes points to larger systemic issues of pervasive corruption. Many of these priests contribute to the forming of public opinion and speaking out for human rights—issues that both organized crime and the government have direct interest in thwarting. Most recently Father Cervera Millán was pulled from his car and shot by two unidentified men on December 13th 2018. When he reported the attack to police he was told they didn't have the resources to investigate. A member of the Sierra Norte de Veracruz Project, a group “which promotes human rights, cultural identity and public health, among other issues,” Father Millán remains at risk for speaking out for his community as his faith calls him to do. The Project has “founded the radio station ‘La voz campesina’ to strengthen freedom of expression, access to information, cultural diversity, and awareness of human rights.” It is believed that the situation is just as dire for Protestant religious leaders, but it is less well documented. (Source: *Christian Solidarity Worldwide*)

Iran—Amnesty International has released a report detailing an abysmal year in Iran of harsh repression, torture, and arbitrary detention of ethnic and religious minorities, political dissidents, and peaceful protesters. Some of the abuses documented include: the arrest of over 7,000 political dissidents; the flogging of Mohammad Hossein Sodagar, a journalist and member of Iran's large Azerbaijani ethnic minority; the killing of 26 protesters, nine of whom died in custody; the arrest and abuse of at least 112 women for the act of peaceful protest by removing their headscarves; the arrest, torture, and subsequent imprisonment 467 teachers, truck drivers, factory workers, and other laborers advocating for worker rights; and the rounding up of hundreds of Sufis, Christians, Ba'hai members, ethnic Arabs, Turkmen, Azerbaijanis, Baluchis, and Kurds. Indeed, as Amnesty International has called it, 2018 is a “year of shame” for Iran. Pray for all those persecuted in Iran, where even the smallest calls for justice or freedom will result in the severest oppression. Pray for the Iranian government that they might grow weary of ruling by fear and violence, and seek justice and integrity. (Source: *The Independent*)

Eritrea—Though Eritrea has been guilty of perpetrating almost every human rights abuse imaginable, this tiny African nation was recently given a seat on the UN's Human Rights Council (HRC). Ironically, Daniela Kravetz was just appointed Special Rapporteur for Eritrea. This is a voluntary role for an expert to report to the UN and conduct independent research regarding the actions and practices of a given nation. Pray for Ms Kravetz as she embarks on this vital work, and pray for UN member states to hold Eritrea (and for that matter, China and other human rights abusers) responsible for their policies and actions. Pray for Christian Solidarity Worldwide, as they seek to work with the UN to bring issues of human rights, religious freedom, and atrocities to light in the international community and hold nations accountable. (Source: *Christian Solidarity Worldwide*)

International—The top 10 countries with the worst rates of child marriage according to World Vision are: Niger, with 76 percent girls married before the age of 18; Central African Republic,

with 68 percent; Chad, 67 percent; Bangladesh, 59 percent; Mali, 52 percent; South Sudan, 52 percent; Burkina Faso, 52 percent; Guinea, 51 percent; Mozambique, 48 percent; and India, 47 percent. What this means in terms of human impact is that more than 650 million girls worldwide were married before age 18, setting them up for a life of hardship, a lack of education, and a significantly greater likelihood to be victims of domestic violence. They tend to come from impoverished backgrounds and are at high risk for complications and death in childbirth. Pray for girls who have already found themselves in these precarious situations, pray for their protection and that their husbands and families will help them flourish despite this poor start. Pray that these countries—most of which have actually outlawed the practice of child marriage—will do more to protect young girls and that this archaic and dangerous practice will be eradicated. (*Source: World Vision*)