

June 2019 Prayer Items

*Woe to the city of oppressors,
rebellious and defiled!
She obeys no one,
she accepts no correction.
She does not trust in the Lord,
she does not draw near to her God.
Her officials within her
are roaring lions;
her rulers are evening wolves,
who leave nothing for the morning.
Her prophets are unprincipled;
they are treacherous people.
Her priests profane the sanctuary
and do violence to the law.
The Lord within her is righteous;
he does no wrong.
Morning by morning he dispenses his justice,
and every new day he does not fail,
yet the unrighteous know no shame.*
—Zephaniah 3: 1-5

Ramallah, West Bank—On 25 April 2019, a Christian woman was involved in a minor car accident with the son of a prominent Palestinian official. After filing a complaint with Palestinian police, a group of 30 armed militants began terrorizing the Christian community there, throwing Molotov Cocktails and firing rifles in the air. The police were called but only arrived three hours later, leading many to believe that Christians are not afforded the same protections as their Muslim neighbors. No one was injured, but there was significant property damage. At a subsequent reconciliation meeting, members of the Christian community met with some of those responsible for the attack and the Palestinian official and his son. While their apology led to the complaint being withdrawn, there remains a great deal of uncertainty among Christians there regarding their personal security. Please pray for the safety of Christians living in the Palestinian West Bank, as well as for those who persecute them. Pray that believers will continue to be courageous in their faith and to display the grace and forgiveness of Christ. (*Source: Middle East Concern*)

Great Britain—A British report ordered by Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt has concluded that persecution of Christians has reached “near genocidal” levels in parts of the world, particularly the middle east. It also found that Christians were the most persecuted group worldwide. The report further stated that “‘is at risk of disappearing’ in some parts of the world, pointing to figures which claimed Christians in Palestine represent less than 1.5% of the population, while in Iraq they had fallen from 1.5 million before 2003 to less than 120,000.” The Foreign Secretary called for the review after outcry grew over the treatment of Asia Bibi in Pakistan, who faced death threats for blasphemy despite her acquittal. Mr. Hunt believes the report has awoken many in the West who have been previously silent on the issue, something he attributes to an atmosphere of political correctness. The review is scheduled to publish its final findings over the summer. Please pray that those in the West will be driven to action to stop these atrocities and for the continued existence of Christians in the middle east. (*Source: BBC*)

China—Despite rampant persecution of Christians in China, new estimates indicate that the church there continues to grow rapidly. These new estimates from *The Economist* and Operation World place the number of Christians in China at over 100 million, a significant increase from 2010 estimates that placed the number at between 30-67 million. Most Christians in China are forced to practice their faith in secret and in underground churches due to the atheist Communist government’s hostility toward Christianity. Please pray that God will continue to grow His Church in the face of such hostility toward His Word and followers. (Source: *International Christian Concern*)

Pakistan—Asia Bibi, the Pakistani woman accused and subsequently acquitted of blasphemy in Pakistan has finally been allowed to leave the country where she faced continual threats on her life. She left Pakistan for Canada in early May 2019, and her departure was only announced after the fact. While she has finally been reunited with her family after her incarceration in 2009, many Christians in Pakistan remain concerned for their own safety as Islamists may turn their ire toward them instead. Please offer thanks to God for Asia Bibi’s release from Pakistan and pray for the safety of Christians who live under the threat of Pakistan’s blasphemy laws. (Source: *International Christian Concern*)

China/Pakistan—A new form of human trafficking has recently been uncovered in which Christian girls in Pakistan are being effectively sold to men in China as forced brides. Chinese “brokers” are routinely spotted outside of churches in Pakistan seeking young girls to marry Chinese men. They tell the parents that the men are wealthy Christian converts, are paid a sum of money and told that their daughters will be married into wealth. It is not until later that they find out that the men are often abusive, live in poorer isolated parts of China, and there exists a huge language barrier. The demand for brides in China has been fueled by that country’s one-child policy which has led to gender-based selective abortion and a subsequent gender imbalance of huge proportions. Please pray that governments in both countries will work to bring an end to this practice. (Source: *Associated Press*)

United States/Iran—US lawmakers met this month with clergy and individuals who had endured captivity in Iran’s notorious Evin Prison to discuss religious persecution in Iran. Among those notably present were Maryam Rostampour and Marziyeh Amirizadeh, two Iranian Christian women who were imprisoned for their faith. The pair had met at a Christian conference in Turkey where they converted to Christianity from Islam, a punishable offense in the Islamic Republic. They were undaunted however, and upon returning to Iran, immediately began sharing the Gospel and distributing 20,000 New Testaments. The two were arrested by Iranian officials in 2009 and sent to Evin prison where they spent 259 days in captivity. Although they were living in abhorrent conditions, they found themselves imprisoned with many of the “unwanted” of Iranian society, including prostitutes and those with no one left in life to support them. At this point, Maryam and Marziyeh stopped praying for their release and began praying that God would use them to reach these marginalized individuals. They reportedly led many to Christ. Word of their compassion and commitment to helping others eventually reached outside of the prison and soon the Iranian regime began receiving pressure from Pope Benedict, Amnesty International, the UN, and other concerned groups and individuals. Ultimately though, they credit release to their Savior. “Today, we give all the glory to Jesus who saved us from the Iranian government,” Amirizadeh said. “We believe we are free and alive today because of Jesus’s power and his miracle.” After being released in Turkey, they were then granted asylum in the United States, where they live today and continue their work on behalf of Christians in Iran who are still undergoing persecution. They also work for the continued spread of the Gospel there. Please pray that God will continue use individuals like Maryam and Marziyeh and for the continued spread of the Gospel in Iran. (Source: *Breitbart*)

Thailand/Australia/United States—An international pedophile ring was recently uncovered which led to the freeing of 50 children who were being sex trafficked. The arrests were made in Australia, Thailand, and the US and were the result of an international effort to bring down the ring which reportedly was centered around a dark website that has 63,000 users worldwide. Operation Blackwrist was launched after Interpol detected photos of 11 boys under the age of 13 being abused. Among those arrested were the website's administrators Montri Salangam in Thailand and Ruecha Tokputza in Australia. Salangam, who abused one of his own nephews was sentenced to 146 years in prison and Tokputza, a pre-school teacher, received 40 years of prison. The youngest of their victims was identified as a 15 month old. At sentencing, Judge Liesl Chapman told the defendant, "you are a child's worst nightmare, you are every parent's horror, you are a menace to the community." The identities of others arrested have not yet been released, but authorities noted that a number of them were living in the United States and in positions of public trust. Please pray for healing for the victims and that those responsible for these heinous acts will continue to be brought to justice. (*Source: BBC*)

Burkina Faso—A priest and five others were killed by gunmen during a mass service in the African country on 12 May 2019. The attackers, who numbered between 20-30, then burned the church to the ground. While it is unclear who exactly was behind the attack, Islamist attacks against non-Muslims have been on the rise for years in Burkina Faso. In April, Islamists targeted a church in Silgadji, killing six Protestant worshipers and another attack on a Catholic church left four dead. French special forces recently freed four westerners who had been kidnapped by Islamists. During the raid, two French special forces soldiers died, but the hostages were all rescued. Burkina Faso is among the G5 Sahel which includes Chad, Mauritania, Niger, and Mali who, along with France, have formed a regional force to combat the growing Islamist threat. France had 4,500 troops in the area supporting these efforts. Please pray for Christians in the region who are under constant threat and that the Islamist threat here will be dealt a decisive blow. (*Source: BBC*)

Egypt—In an effort launched by American-Copts, June 1st will be recognized as World Coptic Day in an effort to raise international awareness of the plight of Coptic Christians in Egypt. Copts are a distinct ethnic group in Egypt, being the descendants of ancient Egyptians and are therefore distinct from Arab Egyptians. Copts are also overwhelmingly Christian and were among the first to accept Christianity. Recent years have seen a spike in attacks against Copts in Egypt which include the 2017 Palm Sunday Church bombing that killed 45 and wounded over 100 others. Last November, Islamists opened fire on two buses full of Copts who were on a pilgrimage to an ancient monastery, killing seven. Numerous other events have threatened the very existence of the Coptic community in Egypt who are estimated to make up about 10 percent of Egypt's population. Please pray for the Copts, that the Egyptian government will lend effective protections to them, and that they, like many Christians in the middle east, will not cease to exist. (*Source: National Review*)