

September 2019 Prayer

I know that the Lord secures justice for the poor and upholds the cause of the needy.

—Psalm 140:12

Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.

—Isaiah 1:17

International—This month Amnesty International offered a reminder of the scale of injustice in our world with the following statistics: 122 countries tortured their citizens; 113 countries repressed their people's right to freedom of expression; 36 countries illegally sent refugees back to a country where their rights were at risk; prisoners of conscience were detained in 61 countries; armed groups committed abuses in 36 countries; and men, women, and children faced unfair trials in 55 percent of countries. Pray for the righteousness and justice of God to prevail around the globe. Pray that those who are blessed with freedom and power would act with integrity and intervene wherever able. Pray for world leaders who will rule with fairness and the well-being of all their citizens in mind. Pray for the protection and healing of and provision for vulnerable people. (*Source: Amnesty International*)

Algeria—Since November 2017 the Algerian government has engaged in a systematic attempt to close down Christian churches. At the end of August closure orders had been issued against two churches in Bejaia, and the police also attempted to close the Church of the Prince of Peace in Ighzer Amokrane. Christians occupying the church refused to leave. Representatives of l'Église Protestante d'Algérie (EPA), the legally recognized umbrella group of Protestant churches in Algeria, objected, saying any closure order should be issued by a court, not by regional authorities. But even EPA churches are being closed. We join Middle East Concern and Algerian believers praying that: "the EPA, church leaders and members will know the peace of Jesus, the wisdom of the Father and the guidance of the Holy Spirit as they deal with the continued pressure; that the meeting with the authorities on 28 August will contribute to ending the systematic campaign to close churches and limit Christians' freedom to worship in Bejaia; that regulations governing non-Muslim worship will be amended so that Christians will be able to worship freely in the whole country; and that those responsible for the orders to close the churches will know the conviction of the Holy Spirit, and the forgiveness and new life offered by Jesus." (*Source: Middle East Concern*)

Japan—With a quickly aging population and an acute labor shortage, Japan has devised plans to open their country to hundreds of thousands of migrant workers from countries such as China, Myanmar, Vietnam, and the Philippines to fill gaps in the service, construction, agriculture, and nursing sectors. However, instead of receiving the training and opportunity they are promised, workers arriving from these poorer countries are encountering grave exploitation at the hands of employment brokers and even huge multinational companies. One such example was a worker from Vietnam who paid over \$9,000 to be part of a training program to become skilled working with rebar, but was deceived and found himself being forced to removed radioactive waste from the Fukushima nuclear site without any protective gear. Many of these "trainees" are held in "debt-bondage" creating a virtual slave workforce, paid well below minimum wage, and unable to advocate for themselves as they do not know the language or legal system and have no resources to take legal action. Of the 1.3 million foreign workers in Japan, approximately 20 percent of them are victims of these "training" schemes, and are twice as likely to die from work-related causes than the rest of the population. Critics have said the Japanese government has not taken adequate action to address these deceptive labor brokerages' practices that result in the literal enslavement of thousands. Pray for the vulnerable and poor workers who immigrant

to do honest labor and find themselves abused and exploited instead. Pray that they be delivered from this unjust system. Pray for the Japanese government to move promptly and effectively to eliminate these illegal and inhumane practices and protect all those working within their borders. Pray for those who perpetrate these crimes that their consciences would be stirred to abandon the evil they pursue and seek to do good instead. (*Sources: BBC; NPR*)

Eritrea—June through August has seen an intensified crackdown on Christians by the government of Eritrea. Over 150 believers—some of them children—have been arrested in that timeframe, many being held in the brutal prison complex called Ashufera near the town of Hagaz. The complex consists of underground tunnels and is far from the main road, requiring visitors to walk more than 30 minutes to get to the entrance. Among those being persecuted in this most recent government action are 6 government employees, who were subjected to a mock trial where the judge demanded they recant their Christian faith. In response they answered, “We will not negotiate our faith and will continue to follow Jesus.” Pray for these persecuted believers whose futures are uncertain, but who are currently facing extreme oppression and violence. Continue to pray for the entire country of Eritrea, ruled by total oppression and in desperate need of the gospel. Pray for President Afwerki, who once was a freedom fighter and now has transformed his young country into “Africa’s North Korea.” Pray that the light and grace of Christ might penetrate his heart. (*Source: Open Doors*)

Mexico—An organized criminal group that kidnaps Cuban migrants for financial gain recently kidnapped Pastor Aarón Méndez Ruiz, after he blocked an attempt to kidnap several migrants seeking refuge at a shelter he runs in Nuevo Laredo. Those at the shelter are extremely worried both for the safety of Pastor Méndez Ruiz and for all who stay there. No word has been heard from Pastor Méndez Ruiz or the criminals, and no ransom has been demanded yet. In a similarly disturbing attack, Pastor Alfrery Líctor Cruz Canseco of Fraternidad Cristiana church in Oaxaca was shot and killed on Sunday 18 August following a Sunday service. This is another in a terrible string of attacks targeting religious leaders in Mexico. We join Christian Solidarity Worldwide in praying for the protection of the vulnerable and poor in Mexico, and for the religious leaders who try to serve them faithfully in an increasingly dangerous setting. Pray that the Holy Spirit will comfort Pastor Alfrery Líctor Cruz Canseco’s family, for the safe return of Pastor Méndez Ruiz, and that those responsible will be brought to justice. (*Source: Christian Solidarity Worldwide*)

Nepal—Married when she was just 14, Chenbagam came from an impoverished family and was from a Hindu background. Her husband had to go to Saudi Arabia to find work, and soon Chenbagam became quite ill. Chenbagam pursued various treatments, including the witch doctor, spending all the money her husband sent home on unsuccessful attempts to get well. A neighbor suggested she visit the local church, and as a last resort, Chenbagam agreed and miraculously experienced healing after church members prayed with her. Chenbagam began to follow Christ, but her husband refused to send support money when he found out. Now she is even more destitute and unable to provide food for her children. Yet she is firm that she cannot abandon her faith. Pray for this young woman that she will continue to be strong in her Savior and mature in her faith. Pray for the provision for her and her young children. Pray for a change of heart of her husband and that he might know the joy and peace of following Jesus. Pray for all believers in Nepal, who are often ostracized and persecuted for their faith. (*Source: Voice of the Martyrs*)

Myanmar—Since August 2017 the military of Myanmar has perpetrated a genocide against the Rohingya Muslims. Over 730,000 Rohingya have fled amid armed attacks, extrajudicial executions, rape and sexual violence, and human trafficking, perpetrated almost entirely by the military. Though not on the same scale as the Rohingya, Christians and other minorities have also been designated

“unwelcome groups” and forced into a stateless limbo in Rakhine state. Journalists and others who have spoken out against these atrocities have been arrested and detained. Chancellor Aung San Suu Kyi has basically ignored the situation and done a deplorable job of protecting minorities within Myanmar. The US State Department has named four individuals and their families in particular as perpetrators of “gross violations of human rights including extrajudicial killing in Rakhine state.” These individuals are Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing, Deputy Commander-in-Chief Soe Win, Brigadier General Than Oo, and Brigadier General Aung Aung. Pray for these individuals and their families, as well as Chancellor Aung San Suu Kyi that they might abandon this course of horrific violence and criminal activity against whole people groups and begin to govern with integrity and justice. Pray for those who have been displaced and unspeakably abused, that they might find comfort, healing, and protection. Pray that those in the international community with influence in the region might do all in their power to intervene in this genocide. Pray for peace and justice in Myanmar. (*Source: Jubilee Campaign*)

Pakistan—Christian women and girls are among Pakistan’s most vulnerable members of society. In many cases, Christian women and girls are considered soft targets for abuse and assault because they are a “double minority.” To the assailants, these victims follow the “wrong religion” and are members of the “weaker gender.” Pray for young Christian girls such as Saira Shoukat, age 15, who was sexually assaulted by two Muslim men, but it took the police a month to even file a report; for Suneha Sajid, a 14-year-old Christian girl, who was falsely accused of stealing gold to cover her employer’s sexual assault of her; and for Yasmeen Ashraf, age 15, and Muqadas Tufail, age 14, who were kidnapped and raped by three men as they were on their way to work as domestic servants. Another girl named Kanwal was abducted, raped, and forced to convert to Islam. Even after she was rescued, her family faced threats of violence if her brothers would not agree to convert to Islam. Pray for the protection of Christian families, especially Christian women. Pray for the restoration and healing of those who have suffered so horribly. Pray for those who commit such evil that they might repent and find the grace of Jesus. Pray for the country of Pakistan. (*Source: International Christian Concern*)

Kazakhstan—Numerous reports have documented increased restrictions on churches in Kazakhstan, with more than 100 cases of government harassment of believers between January and June, sometimes authorities showing up in the middle of the night, threatening individuals who do not cooperate, and denying registration for churches who are trying to follow the law. The Pew Research Center ranks Kazakhstan as third after China and the Maldives among countries with the most restrictions on religious groups. Pray for believers in this country that they would not give in to oppression and would continue to be a bold witness for Christ. Pray that the gospel would continue to spread and reach many despite the repressive efforts of the government. (*Source: Mission Network News*)

Saudi Arabia—Following last year’s lift of the ban on women driving, Saudi Arabia just granted women over 21 the right to apply for a passport and travel without permission of a male relative. They are also now allowed to register the births of their children, marriages, and divorces. They are still unable to marry or live on their own without permission of male relative. However, these newest developments mark a great improvement in the rights and lives of women in Saudi Arabia, and for that we give thanks, and continue to pray for the women of Saudi Arabia that they might find ultimate freedom in Jesus. (*Source: BBC*)