

March 2021 Prayer

But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.

—Hebrews 10: 32-36

Nigeria—Boko Haram terrorists recently killed 10 people by firing rocket-propelled grenades into a crowded area in Borno state. They fired near the university at 6 o'clock in the evening, and one of the grenades struck a playground where children were playing. It's still unclear if any children were killed. Because they were rocket-propelled, they were able to fire these bombs from a distance and were able to get through the city's defenses. And in another devastating attack at the end of February, hundreds of girls were abducted from the Government Secondary Jangebe School in Zamfara state—school records show at least 300 girls are missing. It is unclear to which group these armed belonged, but it is part of a disturbing pattern of violent targeting of the most innocent and vulnerable in Nigeria. Please pray that any more attempted attacks from these violent extremists would be thwarted. Pray for healing and comfort and protection for those affected by the blast. Pray for the safe return of these abducted children and for their protection while they are being held. And pray that Nigerians would call on the Lord for help and turn to Him. (*Source: BBC News; Associate Press*)

Ecuador—Numerous death threats and attacks have been made against members of a variety of human rights groups in Ecuador, especially the Mujeres Amazónicas (Amazonian Women) collective. All are peaceful groups who advocate for the fair treatment of workers, indigenous people, and the protection of the environment. Despite well-documented threats, attacks, harassment of organizations, and the stealing of information relating to the defense of imprisoned human rights advocates, the Ecuadorian government has consistently and repeatedly failed to act in any prompt, significant, or effective way—allowing perpetrators to act with impunity. This is consistent with their failure to follow up on human rights abuses committed during a national strike in October 2019, where undue force was documented but never prosecuted. Pray for the protection of these human rights defenders—mostly women—who are seeking to protect their communities, their livelihoods, and their lives, but who have faced violence and threats from powerful interests in their country. Pray that the Ecuadorian government will offer them basic protections and that they will diligently pursue justice for crimes committed against these women. (*Source: Amnesty International*)

Vietnam—Police officers recently broke into a women's Bible study in Hue province. Le thi Hoa, her adult daughters, and some neighbors met together in her home to pray and study the Bible. Another neighbor called the police while they were meeting to put a stop to it. The police officers and village authorities confiscated their Bibles and materials and prohibited them from meeting again. They were informed that theirs is a communist village, and it is illegal to practice Christianity or gather as believers. Praise God that Le thi Hoa and all of her daughters know Him and are reaching out to their neighbors. Please pray for a safe way for them to continue to gather and spread the Gospel. Pray that hostile neighbors would have softened hearts to hear the good news. Pray that God would blind the eyes of evil doers so the Christians there can continue to meet in secret safely. (*Source: International Christian Concern*)

China—In the ongoing and unrelenting persecution and genocide of the Uyghur, the recent testimony of survivor Tursunay Ziawudun has opened another window on the depth of cruelty and depravity of the oppression of this ethno-religious minority. Along with her testimony, there is evidence of forced sterilization, gang rape, and even torture such as being bitten all over her body while being raped. Additionally, the Uyghurs who are being detained and forced into slave labor are also being transferred against their will to factories around the country, making it difficult to track their whereabouts or to verify where forced labor is entering the supply chain. These are not gratuitous details, but necessary in understanding the extent of the atrocities, the need for all nations to recognize this as genocide, and for Western consumers to understand that items in their homes from companies like Apple, Nike, Zara, and many more have been tainted by the suffering and blood of these innocent people. Pray unceasingly for China, for the cessation of dealing with imagined threats to the state with the worst kind of oppression and violence. Pray for the Uyghur who are suffering unspeakably. Pray for justice and restitution for the persecuted in China. (*Source: BBC; Freedom United*)

Somalia—Eleven Christians, including a couple with their newborn baby, were arrested and are currently in custody for spreading Christianity in Somaliland. As a result, other Christians are fleeing in fear that all house churches are at risk. Please pray for those that are in custody to be safe and released soon, and that the baby would be given adequate care. Pray for the believers in this region to be strengthened with courage, hope, and perseverance as they face opposition and persecution and that their witness would be bold and effective. Pray, as well, that God would send His Spirit to convince the people of Somalia that they need a Savior and that the lost would turn to Christ. (*Source: Voice of the Martyrs*)

United States—Imagine enduring persecution, fearing for your life, and then having to leave your home and everything you know just to preserve your life. Then imagine that when you arrive at a new country seeking safety and protection, you are promptly put into detention. This is the case for asylum seekers to the United States, and what is worse is that the vast majority of them are put into privately run, for-profit prisons that are not subject to the same kind of oversight as state-run prisons. With profit as their primary motivation, the conditions in these prisons—where asylum seekers who have not committed a crime are held—are neglectful, harsh, and dangerous. As Amnesty International states: “Instead of detention, the norm should be that asylum-seekers and immigrants are allowed to live in the community, supported by sponsors, community-based services, and case management programs. These are proven, compassionate alternatives that are humane, support dignity, and facilitate compliance. They also save considerable government resources.” Pray that newly confirmed Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas will pursue a course for refugees that is both effective and humane. Pray that those who currently languish under deplorable conditions will be protected and supported and may one day soon find the new life of safety and freedom that all humans should have. (*Source: Amnesty International*)

Myanmar—After the military recently arrested civilian leader Suu Kyi and took control of the government, citizens began a peaceful protest in response. Although their protests were non-violent, including using pots and pans to express their discontentment, the military turned against them. Besides firing rubber bullets and tear gas, some members of the military also shot deadly bullets and killed three people and injured many others. Please pray for peace in this turbulent area of the world that has been trying for so many years to make democracy work. Pray that those that were injured or have lost loved ones will turn to Christ for comfort and healing. Pray for a spirit of repentance and reconciliation in this troubled area. (*Source: NPR; NBC*)

Pakistan—When Imran Ghafur was sentenced to prison ten years ago on false blasphemy charges (when a jealous neighbor lied and said he burned pages of the Koran), it was thought that he would never be released from prison. So despite enduring a decade's unfair imprisonment, Ghafur's family was overjoyed when on December 8, 2020, he was acquitted and then later released on Christmas Day. However, upon release, Imran Ghafur has had to go into hiding as a result of violent threats issued by extremists angry at the court's decision. Amid all this turmoil, Imran Ghafur's brother Naveen expressed gratitude for how Voice of the Martyrs has supported many through the additional strains of COVID, which has resulted in joblessness and hunger on top of the usual persecution. Pray for the safety of Imran as he embarks on a whole new kind of suffering for Christ. Give thanks for his release and for this positive action on the part of the Pakistani courts. Pray for the ongoing work of VOM and others who supply vital support to these persecuted believers. (*Source: Voice of the Martyrs*)

Qatar—As Qatar prepares for the World Cup, migrant workers from India, Bangladesh, Philippines, Kenya, and Nepal have been employed to build stadiums and other structures there. Tragically, over 6,500 of these workers have died from dehydration and heat exhaustion. They are housed in unsafe situations and work under extremely taxing conditions. They face abuse, forced labor, threats, and delayed and insufficient salaries. Because their passports are taken from them, they can not even leave to return home. And upon returning home, many of them have debts to repay for the cost of getting to Qatar in the first place. Please pray that God would bring deliverance and justice in this illegal and incredibly unjust situation. Pray that the vast amounts of money that go into the World Cup would be fairly distributed to those who toil under such difficult circumstances and that the authorities would hold employers accountable for their treatment of migrant workers. (*Source: The Guardian, Amnesty International*)

Syria, Sudan, and Yemen—Thousands have been displaced within Syria and Yemen due to years of violent conflict there, and Sudan—with challenges of its own—has absorbed many Ethiopians fleeing violence there. All those fleeing have faced the unimaginable challenges of losing their homes, livelihoods, possessions, and loved ones. And now living in tents under harsh, spartan conditions, they are facing floods that have swept communities away, contaminated clean water supplies, and increased the spread of disease. Pray for the least of these who suffer hardship upon hardship. Pray for miraculous care and provision. Pray that many around the world be moved to feed, clothe, and bring the cup of water that is the same as doing those things for Jesus himself. (*Source: Mercy Corps*)