

October 2021 Prayer

They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.

—Isaiah 2:4

Malaysia—Pastor Raymond Koh has been missing for more than 4 years after being forcibly abducted in February 2017. In April 2019 the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia determined that this forcible act was committed by the Special Branch of the Malaysian police. His wife Susanna, daughter Esther, and son Jonathan have no idea why he was disappeared, but the suspicion is that it was because of his humanitarian work among the poor, homeless, drug addicts, single moms, and those suffering from HIV/AIDS. He often told his children to “waste time” on people, and he was widely described by family and friends and one of the most caring people. The Malaysian government promised to investigate, but has yet to reveal any details about Pastor Koh’s disappearance or his fate. Around the world each year thousands of people are disappeared by state forces due to their human rights work, their faith, or other activity that is thought to make a government look bad. Pray that the Lord, who knows the whereabouts and fate of each of these missing people will hold them in His hand and sustain them through whatever trials they face. Pray for the comfort and sustenance of family who live with the unbearable unknown, such as Susanna, Esther, and Jonathan Koh. Pray that the Malaysian government will live up to their responsibility and provide a proper, useful investigation rather than cover up their corrupt and illegal actions. Pray for the protection of Christians in the nation where they and their work are largely unwelcome. (*Sources: CSW; Open Doors*)

Cuba—This past summer unprecedented large-scale protests across Cuba as citizens called on the government to address food and medicine shortages, long power outages, worsening inflation, and the poor handling of coronavirus pandemic. On July 11, 2021, numerous religious leaders were detained by Cuban police forces while participating in peaceful protests. Pastor Lorenzo Rosales Fajardo and his 17-year-old son, David, were among those arrested. While David was released after 6 days in jail, Pastor Lorenzo remains imprisoned and faces false charges that, if convicted, could mean 3 to 20 years in jail. His wife, Maridilegnis, brings food to the prison, but she has not been able to see her husband in all this time. They have only been allowed a few 3-minute phone calls. The conditions in the maximum-security prisons where David was held incommunicado and where Pastor Lorenzo remains are horrendous. Pray that this unjust incarceration will not continue for Pastor Lorenzo and other religious leaders being held for merely calling for freedom in their country and care for all their fellow citizens. Pray for the strengthening of those suffering imprisonment on false charges, and for their family members persevering while they are apart. Pray for all who suffer under tremendous challenges in Cuba, without adequate supplies of basic needs. Pray for the Cuban government to govern with integrity and respect. (*Sources: BBC; CSW*)

Iran—Morteza Mashhoudkari, Ahmad Sarparast, and Ayoub Poor-Rezazade were arrested for sharing their faith, charged, and sent to prison. Morteza and Ahmad were recently released on bail, but Ayoub’s whereabouts are unknown. Iranian intelligence told his family that he was sent to the same prison as the other two believers, but they say that he was never there. Please pray for his protection and safety, and pray that his family would be comforted and at peace. Pray that he will be returned to his family soon. In addition, pray for all three men to be released from their charges. (*Source: Middle East Concern*)

Eritrea—Pastor Girmay Araya and Pastor Samuel Okbamichael, who are both retired pastors in their mid-seventies, were arrested in July and have not been released. Some believe they are being held in metal shipping containers. According to the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for

Human Rights (OHCHR), “inmates are subjected to total darkness, which increases their suffering. A torture chamber made of concrete is reportedly located at the back of the containers. [One] detainee... was interrogated and tortured four nights per week for two months. Individuals who are arrested for religious reasons are systematically subjected to ill-treatment and torture. It is common practice to coerce renunciation of faith.” In light of such troubling conditions, please fervently pray that these two pastors will be protected and released soon. (*Source: International Christian Concern*)

European Union—In direct violation of its human rights obligations, as ruled by the European Court of Human Rights in 2012 of Italy’s pushback against migrants, the EU has cooperated with and supported detention systems for asylum-seekers that are violent, corrupt, and perpetrators of human rights violations—the very injustices these people are trying to escape. The EU has routinely sent asylum seekers to Libya, where rape of women has been documented along with the molestation of boys and girls. The EU financially supports the Libyan Coastguard that monitors the waters between North Africa and Europe, is known for its abusive and callous treatment of migrants, including the willful capsizing of vessels in the Mediterranean. Just a little more than a half-century ago, Europe was the source of the world’s refugees, and currently developed nations in Europe (and in the United States) have lifestyles and economies that are under girded by vulnerable and desperate people who provide both cheap labor and a scapegoat for complex societal ills. Pray for compassion, integrity, and justice as the EU handles the enormous challenge of displaced populations. Pray for the hearts and minds of individuals who would violate women, men, and children who have cannot protect themselves. Pray for an awaking of conscious in these perpetrators. (*Sources: Freedom United; Amnesty International*)

Laos—Twenty-one Christians were evicted from their homes in Southern Laos last year because they would not renounce their faith in Jesus. After they left, their homes were destroyed, and they survived in tents in the forest. They have since been allowed to return, but have no homes to which they can return. Legally, the authorities were obligated to rebuild their homes for them, but they have refused to do so. Please pray that these five families will find means to rebuild their houses or that the local authorities would follow through with their applications. Please pray for this group of Christians that, like Jesus, have nowhere to lay their heads. Pray for endurance, patience, and protection. Although religious freedom is granted in Laos, rural areas rarely guarantee it, so pray also for believers in this country to experience greater freedoms. (*Source: Radio Free Asia*)

Pakistan—Being a Christian in Pakistan today is extremely difficult, as persecution and injustice are rampant. For example, Tabita Gill is facing the death sentence right now because of cruel and false accusations against her. Last January, she reminded a colleague at the hospital that they were not supposed to take money from patients, and angry coworkers tied her up and beat her and later accused her of blasphemy. Accusers are not required to present evidence in Pakistan so this blasphemy law has been abused countless times. Undesirable and often filthy sanitation jobs are reserved for Christians and other non-Muslims, so 90% of all sanitation workers are Christians, even though they make up less than 2% of the population. Every year, on average, 1000 Hindu and Christian girls and young women are abducted, forcefully converted, and forcefully married. Although child marriages are against the law, they use religious reasons to excuse this and get away with it. Even children are taught to be intolerant of non-Muslims. One fourth-grade Christian boy was simply drinking from a water fountain in school one day, and he was targeted by teachers and ridiculed and harassed. He is considered untouchable as a Christian and is not permitted to use even a drinking fountain. Please pray for these brothers and sisters in Pakistan as they endure such horrible maltreatment. (*Source: International Christian Concern*)

Nigeria—After a young man who had left Islam attacked and killed his brother’s wife, a local Christian leader was targeted. The man was not attending a church or a mosque, and his religious faith is unknown. He turned himself in to the police, and local Muslims were angered and assumed that he had left Islam for Christianity. Reverend Yohanna Shuaibu of New Life Church evacuated school children when he feared an attack, but a mob attacked him in his home with a machete, and he died the next day. His family and the school children were able to escape, but the attackers burnt down their home, church, and the Christian school. Please pray for healing for this family and community after the tragic and traumatic death of their husband, father, and pastor. Pray that the Lord would provide a home and church and school for them. Pray that the perpetrators would be brought to justice and would recognize their wrong and turn to Christ. (*Source: Christian Solidarity Worldwide*)

Australia—An Australia couple were sentenced to 8 and 6 years in jail after being convicted of enslaving and abusing an Indian woman, who came to do domestic work for the family. The victim had to leave school in India at the age of 6, worked in the fields and did menial work at building sites at 12, was married with 4 children when she was widowed very young and plummeted into desperate poverty. While working for the couple, the woman was beaten with frozen chickens and hot tea and food thrown at her. She had to work 23 hours a day and was given \$3.36 a day for pay. She was not allowed to return to her family in India. It was only when she was admitted to the hospital after collapsing from malnutrition, sepsis, and untreated diabetes that her plight was discovered—despite repeated pleas from her children in India seeking intervention by Australian officials to determine her whereabouts. Give thanks that this slavery was discovered and prosecuted. Pray for the hearts of the Australian couple, who have thus far shown no remorse. Pray that systems in Australia and similar countries would be in a continual process of improvement and reform in an effort to better protect vulnerable people from human trafficking. Pray that world governments would ratify the Domestic Workers Convention to protect all domestic workers from exploitation and abuse. (*Sources: The Guardian; Freedom United*)

International—By the end of 2020, 82.4 million people had been forcibly displaced from their home, a number that has doubled since 2010, and is the highest it has ever been in history. These large numbers of displaced and suffering people can be linked to the phenomenon of “fragile states”—regions particularly hit by disasters, economic crises, violent conflict, and social upheaval. These social conditions also result in weak governance and disrupted public services, like education, health, and clean water. Over 26 million of these displaced people were refugees—half of them, children. So while numbers and statistics can begin to feel remote and faceless, our Father in heaven knows and loves each of those millions of faces fleeing ethnic, political, and religious persecution; the millions who live on less than \$1.90 a day; the millions who are victims of atrocities perpetrated by man, and then suffer earthquakes and hurricanes; the millions who do not have access to even the most basic of human essentials like clean water, appropriate clothing, safe shelter. Join World Vision in praying for the protection and provision for fragile states like Haiti, Afghanistan, Myanmar, Democratic Republic of Congo, Syria, South Sudan, and Venezuela. Join them in these specific prayer requests:

- Pray for the children in the worst of all worlds. Pray that God’s grace is over them when they must endure hardship, destitution, and unspeakable violence.
- Pray for the world’s extreme poor — those who are the poorest materially and socially, but also spiritually. May they inherit the kingdom of heaven and show us the way.
- Pray for women, whose powerful voices and energies are restricted in fragile states and beyond. May their persistence in the face of adversity prevail to help bring peace and happiness to their children, families and communities.
- Pray for World Vision, that our global ministry in fragile states will not falter. Pray that World Vision is used to its fullest extent in line with God’s will, where we are most needed.

(Sources: World Vision; UNHRC)