

January 2023 Prayer

She gave this name to the Lord who spoke to her: “You are the God who sees me,” for she said, “I have now seen the One who sees me.”

—Genesis 16:13-14

But for me it is good to be near God; I have made the Lord GOD my refuge, that I may tell of all your works.

—Psalm 73:28

Nigeria—On November 24, 2022 dozens of people from two groups of Christians—one group on their way to a wedding and the other on their way to a funeral—were abducted by Fulani herdsmen. Some were brutally beaten until the point of death when they couldn’t walk fast enough. About 14 people have been recovered, but most remain in captivity. And this follows a string of attacks throughout the summer and fall. In fact, this year has seen huge increases in attacks and murders of Christians in Nigeria. According to Open Doors, Nigeria led the world in the highest number of abductions and murders of Christians, and trails only China in number of attacks on churches. Amid this increase in violence and persecution, the United States inexplicably took Nigeria off the list of Countries of Concern in 2021 and did not add them back in 2022. Additionally, the Nigeria government seems indifferent or unable to effectively address this persecution. Pray for the protection of those who are still captive and for their safe return. Pray for peace, comfort, and strength for those abducted and their family and loved ones who are distraught with worry. Pray for all believers in Nigeria that they would remain strong in faith and love in the face of such horrific persecution. Pray that the Nigerian and United States governments act with integrity and justice and put an end to these atrocities. (*Sources: CBN News; Open Doors; Morningstar News; Christianity Today*)

Spain/Morocco—On June 24, 2022, at least 37 black people were killed and hundreds injured as they tried to cross the border from Morocco to Melilla, Spain, and were met with extraordinary violence from both Spanish and Moroccan forces as migrants exercised the internationally recognized legal right for a migrant to approach and cross a country border to claim asylum. A BBC investigation revealed that Moroccan forces dragged asylum seekers back from Spain, a legally contested practice called “pushbacks.” Additionally, asylum seekers were severely beaten, subjected to rubber bullets and tears gas, crushed and trampled. Migrants in camps had also been threatened with violence and the use of “real bullets” in the days leading up to the June 24 massacre. More than 6 months later, there has been no official governmental investigation into the incident, even by Spanish authorities, despite evidence that much of the massacre occurred on Spanish soil. No justice has been pursued for those who lost their lives. In fact, bodies were piled and buried prior to an investigation. Pray for truth to be revealed and for justice for those who were killed or injured. Pray for a spirit of grace toward those asylum seekers and for peace and order in the processing of refugees. (*Sources: BBC; Amnesty International*)

Pakistan—Jubilee Campaign in collaboration with Voice of Justice recently released a report on the epidemic of child brides/coerced marriage/forced conversions of underage girls—primarily from Christian and Hindu families—to Muslim men often twice their age or older. The report reveals that all levels of society are complicit, from police who refuse to investigate the kidnapping of young girls to judges and officials who accept forged birth certificates and fake documents of conversion, despite victims’ families providing contradictory evidence. Pray for young girls such as Zarvia Parvaiz, a thirteen-year-old Christian girl abducted as the second wife of a 37-year-old Muslim man Imran Shahzad. Zarvia was continuously forced to ingest mind-altering drugs, was raped and sodomized, was beaten and forced to do menial labor, and was starved and punished with electrocution and burning by both Shahzad and his wife. Praise God that Zarvia was finally rescued, but continue to pray for restoration and healing from this horrific ordeal. And pray for the countless number of young girls and their families who are victims of this vile criminal activity. Pray that the truth of Christ would penetrate this darkness, bring perpetrators to repentance, and free the vulnerable. (*Source: Jubilee Campaign*)

European Union—Praise God that after a year vacancy and numerous calls from the international community and the European Parliament to fill that position, a new Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the EU was appointed this December. Belgian diplomat Baron Frans van Daele was confirmed

to serve in this important position. Pray for Baron van Daele that he will act effectively and with integrity to help promote greater religious freedom and human rights around the globe in all the places where the European Union has influence. Pray that God will greatly bless the work of this important office. (*Source: Christian Solidarity Worldwide*)

Sri Lanka—Since being relocated from Pasikuda after the 2004 tsunami, Pastor Srikanth has been effectively sharing the gospel in his new village, leading many to Christ over the years. However, beginning in 2019, Hindu locals began to oppose Pastor Srikanth's work, calling the police, appearing armed themselves and leveling death threats. They have pressured Sri Lankan authorities to threaten to take away Pastor Srikanth's home, and most recently a mob attacked Pastor Srikanth's church on a Sunday morning, seriously injuring many Christian converts. While the police filed charges against the attackers, they also filed charges against Pastor Srikanth. Pray for comfort and courage for Pastor Srikanth, his family, and the community of believers in their village. Pray that the gospel would continue to be shared and the church would grow. Pray for those who are persecuting Pastor Srikanth and the church that they, too, would come to know the joy and salvation of Christ and stop oppressing believers. Pray for Sri Lankan authorities to act justly and to prosecute those who commit violence and to protect rather than prosecute innocent people like Pastor Srikanth. (*Source: Voice of the Martyrs*)

Zimbabwe—Joana Mamombe, Cecilia Chimberi and Netsai Marova, all members of the Movement for Democratic Change Alliance, participated in peaceful protests in 2020 highlighting the escalating poverty of Zimbabwe's poor and vulnerable during COVID lockdowns in their country. As a result, they were abducted by State Security forces, who then tortured the women and sexually assaulted them. Further, trumped up charges were brought against them in an attempt to quell their allegations of assault, claiming the women participate in "illegal" demonstrations. Not only have these women not received justice for these attacks, they were rearrested in 2021 in an ongoing broader campaign of harassment and corruption on the part of the Zimbabwean government to crush dissent and distract the population from actual concerns of severe food shortages and governmental failures. Pray for the protection of these women, for justice for them, and for their physical, emotional, and mental healing. Pray for the government to abandon heavy-handed oppression and rule with integrity and in the best interests of their whole population. Pray for the protection of peaceful protesters who hold leaders accountable for their actions. (*Sources: Amnesty International; Voice of America*)

Afghanistan—Join Open Doors in praying for Afghanistan, which continues to suffer greatly under the rule of the Taliban. Most recently women—who are some of the most ill-treated and vulnerable under the regime—have been denied the ability to attend college. However, the range and magnitude of oppression and suffering is great. Pray especially for Christians in Afghanistan, who in addition to facing the same repressive rule as others, face additional persecution for being believers. Since the Taliban has taken power, Christians have been abducted, have lost their livelihoods, and face violence. Beyond this a severe drought has decimate food supplies, and an estimated 22.8 million Afghans face starvation—while many countries have pulled aid because they do not recognize the Taliban as legitimate. Pray for the protection of believers, of women, of the poor, starving and vulnerable in Afghanistan. Pray for miraculous provision of food and shelter. Pray that Christians there would be filled with supernatural compassion and forgiveness for their persecutors. Pray for the Taliban—most of whom are ethnically Pashtun, the largest unreached people group in the world—that many would recognize the cruelty and futility of their means of exerting control, and even more so, that many would find the love and grace of Jesus. (*Source: Open Doors; Amnesty International*)

Iran—For participating in peaceful protests, Vahid Afkari was arrested in 2020, tortured, and held in solitary confinement ever since. His brother Navid was executed. In similar acts of escalating oppression, Iran publicly hanged two men from cranes for alleged crimes stemming from their involvement in protests against the government. The AP describes this cruel and unusual punishment: "Typically, those condemned are alive as the crane lifts them off their feet, hanging by a rope and struggling to breathe before they asphyxiate or their neck breaks." In all cases, many aspects of due legal process were denied, and prisoners were executed within as little as a month after arrest, denied choice of legal representation, with convictions coming from secret tribunals. An estimated 500 prisoners currently face death sentences in Iran—and the current spate of arrests and executions come in the wake of a crackdown against protests after the death of Mahsa Amini—the 22-year-old woman

killed by the morality police for not wearing a sufficient head covering. Nearly 500 people have been killed during the protests, over 18,000 have been detained as a result, and dozens of protesters have been convicted of capital offenses in closed-door proceedings. Pray for the immediate cessation of this cruel and unjust crackdown against peaceful dissenters. Pray for the loved ones who mourn the loss of family and friends unjustly imprisoned and possibly executed. Pray for freedom, justice, and more importantly, for the light of Christ to prevail in Iran. Pray for those who enact such illegal and barbaric practices. (*Sources: The Guardian; The Associated Press; Amnesty International*)

Uganda—Despite 82 percent of the population of Uganda being officially Christian, believers there still face persecution, including potential violence from extremists. Simolya Latifu, a 47-year-old Christian convert from Molu village in the Kibuku District, was murdered this past July as he was leaving an evening worship service. The alleged assailants, Ali Buyinza, Muhammad Kamunyani and Jamada Walyomba, were heard by witnesses of the attack to be accusing Latifu of “leading Muslims to Christ,” then hitting him on the head with a sword. Many believers came to mourn the death of their brother in Christ, and some did retaliate by setting the homes of the three alleged assailants on fire. Pray for safety and courage for believers in the region—pray that they would trust in the Lord and meet persecution with grace and forgiveness rather than retaliation. Pray for those who attack and persecute those who believe differently from them, that they would turn from evil and pursue good. Pray that many would find Jesus and that the peace of Christ would reign in Uganda. (*Source: CBN News*)

International—As we start 2023 we also give thanks to God for the many ways that through His mercy compassion prevailed, justice won, and people reflected His goodness. Here are just a few: UNICEF reported that 80 percent of mothers worldwide delivered their babies with the aid of a doctor, nurse, or midwife resulting in substantially fewer maternal deaths and the promise of a vibrant future for millions of babies. Running water—essential for the clean and effective care of patients—has been newly provided to many clinics in Niger, and a \$79 million grant will bring clean running water to over 700 schools and communities in Ethiopia over the next 5 years. With famine and drought causing hunger crises around the globe, and especially in Africa, the international development community and the UN were able to ship millions of tons of wheat from Ukraine to hunger hotspots—despite the invasion from Russia. Over the past 10 years, 89 percent of the severely malnourished children treated with emergency nutrition from World Vision were spared from imminent death and recovered. The Big Dream Project in Kenya successfully combated the practice of female genital mutilation, reduced financial incentives for child marriage, and empowered girls with education and life-skills training. Approximately 20,000 Syrian refugee children living in camps in Jordan were reached with education provided through the partnership between 10 organizations—allowing these children to have a future and lift themselves out of poverty. In the past year, over 15,000 pastors and youth leaders were equipped to help their own communities through World Vision training programs that address both spiritual and physical provision, helping to keep children from harm, change dependency mindsets, and bring biblical application to family struggles. Pastors supported by World Vision in Honduras are effectively bringing the gospel to gang-controlled communities and bringing many vulnerable people to Christ. Over 15,000 children living with disabilities in the developing world have been reached with key supports—such as wheelchairs and specialized equipment. In places where disabilities most often result in increased poverty, now these children are flourishing and finding opportunities for bright futures for themselves. Praise God for all these acts of goodness and grace—just the tip of the iceberg of His lovingkindness to people, despite our rebellion, injustice, and sin. (*Source: World Vision*)