

March 2012

International—This past February 12, marked the 10-year anniversary of the UN treaty that made 18 the legal minimum age for conscription into an army or direct involvement in an armed conflict. Indeed, only 10 years ago, it was legal under international law to force children to become soldiers. We thank God for how much progress has been made in deterring this grievous practice: since the treaty was signed, the number of armed conflicts in which children are combatants dropped from 30 to 15, and countries like the United States—who initially opposed the treaty—now refuse military aid to and will impose sanctions on countries that persist in the practice. And yet, the practice continues around the world in countries like Sri Lanka, Burma, Yemen, Democratic Republic of Congo, Colombia, Sudan, and many others—even using children as young as 7 as suicide bombers. Continue to pray for the eradication of this practice, for the prosecution of those who actively seek to involve boys and girls in violent conflict, and for the awakening of consciences around the globe to help deter and prevent the recruitment of child soldiers. Pray for those innocent ones who, without choice or power, are forced into terrifying and violent situations, torn from family, and who suffer all kinds of abuse in the process. Pray for their restoration and healing—pray that a whole generation of children in various countries will not be destroyed because of their childhood was robbed from them. (*Human Rights Watch*)

South Sudan/Sudan—After seventeen years of bitter conflict and civil war, South Sudan officially split from Sudan and became the world's newest country. The world rejoiced with South Sudan and its newly attained autonomy, but now vigilant prayer is needed again as an intense dispute over oil resources in South Sudan threaten to undo this fragile peace. Indeed, Khartoum, the Sudanese capital, has seized oil, claiming it as revenue for South Sudan using their pipelines. This on top of genocidal incursions by the Sudanese forces into the Nuba Mountains (a region forced to stay under the control of Sudan when the South voted for independence) to slaughter thousands of people, and the continuing aftermath of Khartoum's systematic genocide in Darfur reveal the ruthless self-interest of Khartoum and its leader, Omar al-Bashir. Pray that the conflict over a resource like oil would not escalate into another regional war. Pray for the deliverance and protection of the inhabitants of South Kordofan and the Nuba Mountains, as innocent civilians—many of whom are Christians—are being relentlessly shelled and attacked by government forces. Pray that President al-Bashir might become convicted of the atrocities he has perpetrated for decades, and seek the forgiveness and redemption only Christ can offer. Pray for wisdom for South Sudanese President Salva Kiir. (*Voice of America*)

Iran—On February 8, 10 Christians were arrested while gathered for prayer at a house church in Iran. They were taken in a police vehicle to an unknown location. Please pray for safety for these believers, and that they would be released soon. Pray also for peace and comfort for their families while they are detained. It is believed that some of these individuals have been arrested before by the Iranian security forces, who see them as a threat to national security and claim they are spying for the West. These arrests also follow a trend of church closures, especially those which held services in Farsi. Continue also to pray for Youcef Nadarkhani, the Iranian pastor who has been held since 2009 for opposing the mandatory teaching of the Koran to his young sons in the public school, and who is facing the death penalty for apostasy. He has been asked to recant his faith at least 4 times, and each time he has refused. On February 22, it was disclosed that a final order of execution had been handed down in his case. We earnestly intercede on behalf of Youcef Nadarkhani. (*Mohabat News; American Center for Law and Justice*)

Burma—We rejoiced last month when the government of Burma made several encouraging moves toward freedom and justice with the release of many political prisoners. Yet the need to persevere in prayer for this troubled nation remains. In the northern region of Burma, in Kachin state, a civil conflict

has continued to rage, displacing and endangering thousands, creating a flood of refugees along the Chinese-Burmese border. Of the estimated 40,000 refugees gathered here, approximately 25,000 are Burmese Christians belonging to the Jingpo minority group. In the face of this humanitarian crisis, the local Chinese government is refusing to help, but the numerous Chinese house churches in the area have responded with as much aid as they are able to provide. Pray for these vulnerable people, fleeing from armed conflict only to face the harsh deprivation of refugee camps. Thank God for the willingness of the Chinese house churches to help those less fortunate than themselves, pray that He will provide for all the refugees' needs through these believers, and that their compassionate response will be a witness to the Burmese and Chinese in the area. (*China Aid Association*)

Syria—Though violence has been mounting for months while the population has cried for freedom, it appears the atrocities have reached a new high—more than 7,500 people have been killed, and there are credible reports that approximately 100 people are dying a day, including many women and children. U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton recently was quoted as saying that a case could be made for attributing war-criminal status to Syria's entrenched leader, President Bashar al-Assad. We remain steadfast in prayer for this nation in turmoil and for a leader who so blithely massacres his own people to retain personal power. Pray for the thousands who are suffering amid the chaos, for those who are mourning the loss of loved ones, and for those who are in danger. Pray for the western journalists and others who have put themselves in danger so that the world might be aware of the atrocities being perpetrated on the Syrian people. Pray that the light of Christ might enter this dark situation. (*Huffington Post; Sydney Morning Herald*)

Vietnam—**Father Nguyen Van Ly, a Catholic priest in Hue, Vietnam, was arrested and given an 8-year sentence in 2007 for distributing materials deemed “harmful to the state.” During the first three years he served, there was great concern for his health, and after suffering three debilitating strokes while in prison, he was eventually released on medical parole. However, after only 16 months of convalescing and rehabilitation, the Vietnamese government has re-arrested** Father Nguyen Van Ly and is demanding he serve the rest of his sentence. Pray for the sustenance and healing of this faithful priest, that he might feel the Lord's presence, comfort, and strength wherever he may end his days—even as we pray for his release. Pray that the way in which he endures might prove a powerful witness to those around him. (*Voice of the Martyrs*)

International—More than seven years ago, the first handful of believers who gathered as a CAN group prayed that night for Li Ying of China—a Christian journalist already serving a 15-year prison term for her part in an underground church magazine. It is with great joy that these many years later, we receive the news that she has finally been freed. We rejoice that she knew of all the cards of encouragement that were being sent to her, though she was not allowed to have them. And we thank our Heavenly Father that she reports their arrival improved her situation. We also give thanks for the release of Ilmurad Nurliev, a pastor in Turkmenistan wrongly accused of extracting money from three individuals; and for the release of Y Wo Nie, a Vietnamese pastor, who served nearly eight years in prison for leading a protest calling for greater religious freedom in his country. Pray for the each of these individuals, giving thanks for their lives and faithful witness. Pray that they would continue in the Christian life and work with boldness and security. (*PrisonerAlert.com*)

Tunisia/Libya/Egypt—The desperate act of a fruit vendor in Tunisia—who set himself on fire after being harassed by police and having his goods and cart confiscated—set off the chain of events and civil unrest that has since been known as the “Arab Spring.” The repercussions of the toppling of these regimes is still reverberating throughout North Africa and the Middle East. Clearly the desire for justice, implanted in imperfect human souls, reflects the image of One who is perfectly just. Yet, in

each of these situations, it is unclear, if not doubtful, that greater freedom and justice will be achieved. Pray for the leaders of these new governments, that they would rule with integrity and fairness. Pray for the vulnerable populations, some of whom have become more vulnerable in these destabilized nations—especially minorities such as women, children, Christians, and certain ethnic groups. Pray that the changes in leadership might lead to an openness to the gospel.

Iran—On May 2011, Behnam Irani, a 41-year-old pastor from Kraj, Iran, was arrested and later sentenced to one year for “crimes against national security,” which were, in fact, related to his Christian faith. However, when he began serving his sentence, he was informed his sentence would in actuality be five years. Now, it is reported that Behnam Irani's health is deteriorating, and he is particularly suffering from an intestinal disorder. This is especially troubling because there is a family history of intestinal cancer, of which his brother died. Behnam Irani is not receiving adequate medical attention, and the notoriously horrid conditions of Iranian prisons are further exacerbating his poor health. Pray for this pastor, for his strength, healing, and well-being—both physical and spiritual. Pray also for his family, who are incredibly worried about Behnam. Pray they sense God's comfort and peace throughout this time, and that Behnam and his family would all be able to trust Him even in these circumstances. (*Voice of the Martyrs*)

North Korea/China—China has also been the place of refuge sought recently by North Korean defectors. On February 14, 2012, the detention and possible repatriation of dozens of North Koreans seeking asylum in China became international news. It appears Chinese officials worked in conjunction with North Korea in an effort to locate and arrest these individuals. Their situation is extremely difficult: if they are repatriated, they will most certainly face execution, and even if they are not, their family members will very likely be punished and even imprisoned. Kim Jong-un, who only months ago succeeded his father Kim Jong-il, as absolute ruler of North Korea, was quoted as saying that “if these people are sent back they will face death and three generations of their family members will be executed or face unimaginably horrible punishment.” Pray for the lives and safety of each of these defectors—and pray fervently for the families they left behind. Pray that the Chinese government will adhere to international norms in handling of refugees and those seeking asylum. And finally, pray for Kim Jong-un, that as he embarks on ruling North Korea, he will choose a different, more open and tolerant course than his father. Pray that he, North Korean officials, and Chinese leaders might encounter Christ and be changed. (*LiNK [Liberty in North Korea]*)