

## July 2013

*Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.*

—Leviticus 19:18

*He saves the needy from the sword in their mouth;  
he saves them from the clutches of the powerful.  
So the poor have hope,  
and injustice shuts its mouth.*

—Job 5: 15-16

**Pakistan**—This June 19 marked the fourth year of the arrest and ongoing ordeal of Asia Bibi, a Christian wife, mother, and farm-worker who was detained after a dispute with her coworkers about faith, and has remained in prison ever since. June also brought a sad and troubling development, as Asia was transferred to a prison five hours from her family, as opposed to the prison she has been in the past years, which is only one hour away. During this time, she and her family, especially her young daughters who are growing up without their mother there, have suffered through this separation. Asia reports being sick often and in a lot of pain. Additionally, all their lives have been in danger, and the governor of Punjab was assassinated for speaking out on her case. Persevere in prayer for this family, who has struggled a long time—pray that fear and sadness might be replaced with the comfort, courage, and peace of Christ. Pray for Pakistan, for the Christians and non-Christians there, that as a community they might find a way to live together with tolerance and safety for all. Pray for leaders with wisdom and integrity who can guide their country in this direction. (*Source: Voice of the Martyrs*)

**Burma/Myanmar**—Prayer last month included the plight of the Muslim Rohingya in Burma, a religious and ethnic minority that has suffered persecution and displacement within their own country, in what is being called an attempt at ethnic cleansing. Now United to End Genocide reports that the “refugee” camps in which the Rohingyas are being held are nothing short of prison camps, with no clean water, food, or medical care. Worse yet, they are not being allowed to leave. Pray for this evolving situation, which has taken a scary and dangerous turn—even as Burma’s government has made attempts to appear to be pursuing a more democratic course. Pray for the protection and preservation of these vulnerable individuals, and pray for the restoration of their basic human rights. (*Source: United to End Genocide*)

**Mexico**—Local authorities in Las Margaritas, Chiapas, Mexico, recently cut off municipal services to the homes of 26 Christian families, in an effort to coerce the families to desist all evangelistic activities. Beyond this, the authorities are demanding the equivalent of \$380 per family for the reinstatement of the services, and have not allowed the families to gather wood or water. Subsequently, the families had to flee their homes, as they did not have the basic necessities for survival. They believe much of the tension arose when these families chose not to support or participate in festivals that blend Catholicism and folk beliefs, involve a lot of alcohol and debauchery. Pray that these families might be restored to their homes and be provided with the basic services which are their right as community members. Pray that none of this would be contingent on participation in activities they are uncomfortable with or the payment of unjust fines. Pray for the community of Las Margaritas—for peace and justice for all its members. (*Source: Voice of the Martyrs*)

**South Africa**—Imprisoned for 27 years for leading one of the most courageous human rights campaigns and freedom movements in history, and finally becoming South Africa's first black

president, and then continuing to lead the country through a process of reconciliation and forgiveness, Nelson Mandela at 94 is now hospitalized with a lung infection that appears quite grave. We pray for his sustenance, even as we give thanks for the life of this Nobel Peace Prize winner, which was characterized by suffering and sacrifice on behalf of his fellow countrymen and those suffering injustice around the globe. We give thanks for the spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation that he modeled in such an exemplary way, and we pray that his loss will not leave a void of integrity and courage in South Africa, the African continent, and the world—but instead may his life inspire a new generation of leaders who will speak for what is right and have actions consistent with their words. May the Holy Spirit enable this. *(Source: BBC News)*

**China/Tibet**—A report released by Human Rights Watch has now thoroughly documented a mass relocation program implemented by the Chinese government since 2006 against rural Tibetans. An estimated 2.7 million rural Tibetans have been forced to move from their homes into concrete, roadside “planned” communities. While the premise for the program was to provide some Tibetans with better access to water, education, and medical care, it has also cut Tibetans off from traditional sources of income and their centuries-old villages. Many have been forced to pay their own relocation costs, leaving them with sizable debts, and families have been fractured. This social engineering, in conjunction with a consistent and pervasive anti-dissent measures, leave many observers skeptical about China's altruistic motives in this endeavor. Huge swaths of Tibet have been closed to foreign observers for years, as Tibetans have called for freedom and autonomy. Pray for the millions whose lives have been irrevocably disrupted by this forced move and who may also face greater financial struggles and increased monitoring and governmental control because of it. Pray for China, that somehow miraculously, it will abandon its authoritarian practices and pervasive human rights abuses, and choose a course establishing democracy, freedom, and a civil society for its people. *(Source: The New York Times; Human Rights Watch)*

**Sudan**—Since 2011, civilians in Sudan's Blue Nile state have been caught in the reckless crossfire between the Sudanese government and the Sudan People's Liberation Army-North (SPLA-N). Indeed, the government has actually used indiscriminate bombing and other means to “punish” the families and individuals living in this region now being controlled by SPLA-N, and as recently as this past month satellite images confirm the government's scorched-earth policy being enacted here. Also reports indicate ground assaults have claimed the lives of innocent children and have destroyed homes, villages, crops and vital infrastructure, including medical facilities. Now people are unable to tend crops, there are food shortages, and the Sudanese government has barred humanitarian aid to the region. Pray for the protection and sustenance of this vulnerable population. Pray for the removal of the corrupt regime of President al-Bashir. Pray that justice would be served through the International Criminal Court, which issued a warrant for his arrest in 2009. Pray for the more than 150,000 people displaced during this conflict, left without homes, livelihoods, and often suffering injury and the loss of loved ones. *(Source: Amnesty International)*

**Europe and Canada**—Amid ever-discouraging news, give praise for key developments in Canada and Europe in the cause of protecting religious freedom. In February, Canada established the Office of Religious Freedom as part of their Foreign Ministry and appointed Andrew Bennett as its new ambassador. Just recently, Bennett has begun international travel in his new capacity and has begun coordinating efforts with other similar offices in the United States and other countries, as well as NGOs working on behalf of religious freedom. A further encouraging sign is Ambassador Bennett's broader definition of religious freedom as not only the freedom to worship, but the freedom of religious expression in all aspects of life. Another positive development, the European Union adopted the Guidelines on Religious Freedom or Belief, which “outlines priority areas and operational tools for the

promotion of religious freedom, with the aim of equipping the EU to support individuals and communities who face infringements to this right.” This has been broadly welcomed as a useful tool to aid European countries in addressing violations at home and globally. *(Source: World; Christian Solidarity Worldwide)*