

*"The Lord works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed."*

*- Psalm 103:6*

**Iran**—The end of 2015 has brought news for rejoicing with many believers in Iran, with the release in recent weeks of several Christians imprisoned for their faith. Farshid Fathi was part of a group arrested on December 26, 2010, and has served five years for "membership in a Christian organization" and other charges related to his faith. However, on December 21, 2015, he was released—two years early. Additionally, Suroush Saraie, Mehdi Ameruni, Seyed Bijan Farokhpour Haghigi, and Eskander Rezai were released this fall and winter from Adel Abad Prison in Shiraz, Iran. All had been arrested after a raid of a prayer meeting in October 2012. We give great thanks and praise for the release of all these believers and pray for their full healing and adjustment after their ordeals in prison. We pray for the continued sustenance and perseverance of each of them and all their friends and family. Continue to pray for Mohammad (Vahid) Roghangir and Massoud Rezai, who were part of the raid in October but have not been released. Pray for all believers in Iran, including the approximately 100 who are in prison for their faith, that all will find the peace and comfort of the Holy Spirit, continue to be strong and courageous in their witness, and experience the protection and provision of God. (*Source: Middle East Concern*)

**Syria**—Praise God that the church in Syria is still vibrant. Despite the fact that the churches and Bibles have been confiscated and burned, the body of Christ is still meeting and functioning. It is described as an "internally displaced church" and many new believers are joining this mobile church daily. Please pray that their physical needs would be met, as many are hungry and cold. Pray that the church would continue to be a life line to the community as it provides aid to those that are malnourished and homeless. Pray also for courage in the face of persecution and protection from their persecutors. (*Source: Open Doors*)

**International**—In 2004 a network of nuns was established to begin a low-key infiltration of brothels in an effort to rescue women and children from the sex slave trade. Since that time, Talith Kum (the name of the group, which in Aramaic means, "child arise") has expanded to approximately 1,100 nuns working in more than 80 countries, completely under the radar of traffickers and even local police and authorities—citing their distrust of all these institutions, in some cases, even male clergy. The chairman of this group, John Studzinski, an investment banker and philanthropist, was quoted as saying, "I'm not trying to be sensational but I'm trying to underscore the fact that this is a world that has lost innocence . . . where dark forces are active." Pray for the success of the work of these courageous women. Pray for their continued protection as they are continually at risk themselves. Pray for the freedom and restoration of the estimated 73 million people currently enslaved around the globe, 70 percent of whom are female and more than half under the age of 16. (*Source: Huffington Post*)

**Vietnam**—Human rights activist Nguyen Van Dai was arrested at his house in December for "spreading propaganda against the state". This Christian brother is now being held and will likely have to serve a long prison sentence as he has in the past. Pastor and human rights defender Nguyen Trung Ton was also arrested recently and awaits his sentence. Please pray for these men to receive a just outcome and that God would grant them courage and perseverance. Pray that Vietnam would allow freedom for human rights and would exercise justice. (*Source: Christian Solidarity Worldwide*)

**Kenya**—A bus traveling from Nairobi to Madera, Kenya, in mid-December was stopped by a group of terrorists, an all too common occurrence in recent days in this region. What happened next was both remarkable and encouraging. As the terrorists began to attempt to sort the group between Muslims and Christians, the Muslim passengers would not separate but rather protected the other passengers they knew to be Christians. Some Muslim women gave additional head scarves to Christian women to quickly cover their heads, and other passengers said, “If you want to kill us, kill us. There are no Christians here.” In the face of others willing to take great personal risk to protect innocent life—true martyrdom—the terrorists backed down. Only one Christian, who attempted to run from the scene, was killed. Praise God for the protection of this whole group and for the tremendous courage and moral fortitude of the Muslim passengers who stood up for what is right. Pray for those who choose to terrorize others that they might be convicted of the evil of what they are doing and turn from darkness to light. Pray for peace, protection, and light to prevail in this dangerous and troubled region. (*Source: Fox News*)

**Tanzania**—Seven churches have recently been burned down in northwestern Tanzania. Pastors believe that Muslims in the area are trying to prevent the spread of Christianity. Please pray that the church members would not become discouraged and lose heart, but that they would continue to meet together. Pray that God would provide materials to rebuild their churches. In addition, pray that He would give them Christ-like love and forgiveness for those that persecute them so that unbelievers would be drawn to the love of Christ. (*Source: Voice of the Martyrs*)

**Iraq**—After decades of war and turmoil, ten of thousands of Iraqis now face the terror of ISIS attacks in Qaraqosh, Iraq. The most vulnerable among those fleeing are Iraqi Christians, who are less able to resettle in neighboring Muslim countries. Most have ended up in refugee camps, and about 560 of these have taken refuge with Father Douglas Bazi at Mar Elia Chaldean Catholic Church in Erbil, Iraq. On December 10, however, over 100 Christian refugees from this group were given a new opportunity for safety and to build new lives, when American couple Joseph and Michele Assad, former counter-terrorism agents, partnered with Father Douglas Bazi to rescue, transport, and resettle these families to Slovakia. They cite much anxiety over logistics and other difficulties, but also praise the compassionate and welcoming response of Slovakia despite recent global fear surrounding the resettlement of refugees. “We are so proud of Slovakia. They were very courageous to make this decision and it wasn’t an easy one to make, yet they did. . . . We hope other countries will have similar courage,” Michele Assad was quoted as saying. Joseph Assad, who understands firsthand about fleeing religious persecution as a Christian immigrant from Egypt, said they were “very confident” they were not rescuing anyone who could be a terrorist. “These people have been vetted,” he said. “We know 100 percent they are not extremists and that they were desperate, they were vulnerable, and they were in need. . . . I tell people, ‘don’t be afraid of refugees.’ There is a way to show compassion and do it intelligently. We can show this compassion. So I think there’s a whole lot more that we can do.” Give thanks for the rescue of all 149 Iraqi refugees, 62 of whom are children. Praise for their protection and sustenance to bring them this far through their ordeal, and pray for continued provision and restoration as they embark on their new lives in Slovakia. Give thanks for the courage and hospitality of Slovakia in welcoming these families, and for the difficult and generous work of the Assads and Father Douglas Bazi. Continue to pray for the tens of thousands of innocent people—Christians and otherwise—who are displaced and endangered by war and terror. Pray for those who terrorize and perpetrate violence on others. (*Source: ABC News*)

**Egypt**—A 26-year old mother of two, Marwa Ahme, was killed for converting from Islam to Christianity. She had received threats in the past after marrying a Christian man and had been in hiding, but her uncle found her and killed her. Marwa had a young son and daughter. Please pray for comfort and help for her surviving husband and children. Pray that her uncle would come to justice, recognize his sin, and turn to Christ. (*Source: International Christian Concern*)

**North Korea**—After being detained in North Korea since January 2015, Hyeon-Soo Lim, pastor of Light Korean Presbyterian Church in suburban Toronto, escaped the death penalty but has been sentenced to life in prison. The 60-year-old pastor of South Korean descent has made hundreds of humanitarian trips to North Korea and his church in Toronto has been involved in this work for 20 years, including overseeing a nursing home and orphanage there. However, on this most recent trip, Pastor Hyeon-Soo Lim was arrested and accused of “trying to use religion to destroy the North Korean system,” among other charges. In a press conference, Pastor Lim read an apparent “confession” from a script, stating that “the worst crime I committed was to rashly defame and insult the highest dignity and the system of the republic.” His home church finds this highly unlikely, considering the pastor’s familiarity with the culture and language of North Korea and his character as a person. Detaining foreign Christians is not a new practice for North Korea, however, accusing them of attempting to set up a theocracy is a new development. Pray for the perseverance of Pastor Hyeon-Soo Lim. Pray that he would be sustained physically and spiritually as he continues through this ordeal and that he might be released soon. Pray that his suffering for Christ and for others will be a powerful testimony to guards, prisoners, and even the North Korean government. Pray all this as well for all the 70,000 Christians in prison in North Korea, including South Korean Baptist missionary Kim Jong-Uk, given a life sentence in June for allegedly working with underground churches. Continue to pray for the North Korean government. (*Source: Christianity Today*)