

October 2016 Prayer Items

This month we have a special opportunity to focus on the work of Middle East Concern, an amazing organization devoted to assisting victims of persecution; challenging unjust laws, attitudes, and policies; and equipping Christians to face persecution in the Middle East and North Africa. This October, our prayer will also be focused on specific requests shared by MEC on behalf of believers from this region difficult and volatile region.

“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

—Matthew 5: 11-12

Turkey—On 28th September Middle East Concern issued a prayer request after the First Criminal Court of Malatya in Turkey issued a verdict in the Malatya Zirve murder trial related to the killing of three Christians in Malatya in 2007. The five perpetrators - caught red-handed at the crime scene - were handed three consecutive life sentences, but to the dismay of the relatives of the victims and the wider Christian community, they were not arrested pending the review of the verdict by a higher court. However, citing fears that the perpetrators may flee Turkey, the prosecutor Burhanettin Olgun requested their arrest and on the evening of 29th September they were arrested.

Christians in Turkey are grateful for this development and request continued prayers that:

- a. the motivation and the masterminds behind these murders will be revealed
- b. the review process of the verdict will proceed smoothly, and the guilty verdict will be upheld

Iran—Friends of Christian prisoner Maryam Naghash Zargaran report that her medical leave has been cancelled and she has returned to Evin Prison in Tehran. Maryam was arrested in January 2013 in connection with her work on an orphanage with the Christian ex-prisoner Saeed Abedini. She was charged with "acting against national security" and was sentenced to four years' imprisonment, which she started serving on 15th July 2013 in the women's ward of Evin Prison. A request for a re-trial was refused. Maryam, who was previously granted medical furlough for a range of health issues in June 2016, started a hunger strike on 5th July to demand her immediate and unconditional release in view of the inadequate treatment for a variety of health issues. She ended the hunger strike at the request of her family at the beginning of August. Maryam's health deteriorated considerably during the hunger strike, her blood pressure dropped, she had pains and numbness in her feet and suffered psychological issues as a consequence of her imprisonment. Prison officials examined Maryam on 20th July and provided a medical report confirming the seriousness of her condition, but her demand for release was denied at that time by an Iranian court at the request of the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence (MOIS). Prison authorities allowed Maryam to go home to receive medical treatment at the end of August, but on conditions that Maryam felt unable to comply with, resulting in the cancellation of her furlough from prison. Maryam returned to Evin on 17th September.

Those close to Maryam understand that she was unable to receive adequate medical treatment during the medical furlough. They request our prayers that:

- a. Maryam will know God's encouragement, recovery and strengthening
- b. the Lord will also encourage and support Maryam's family
- c. Maryam will be released unconditionally from prison
- d. God will move the Iranian authorities and officials to love mercy and act justly

Iran—Iranian Christians request prayer for four Christian converts from Muslim backgrounds who have been charged with action against national security. Three are due to appear in Rasht Court tomorrow (10th September) to face additional charges related to their Christian activities. Yaser Mosibzadeh, Saheb Fadayee and Mohammad Reza Omid, known as "Youhan," were arrested at a house church gathering on 13th May and charged with "action against national security." They were released on bail after several weeks in detention. Their pastor Yousef Nadarkhani and his wife Fatemeh (Tina) Pasandideh were arrested at the same time but were not detained. However, Yousef was also later charged with "action against national security." All four are awaiting a summons to answer these charges in the Revolutionary Court. In addition, Yaser, Saheb and Mohammed Reza face charges related to consumption of alcohol, for drinking wine during a communion service. It is presently unclear if Yousef will also be summoned to Rasht Court tomorrow (10th September) on the same charges. If found guilty, they are likely to receive a sentence of flogging. In 2012 Mohammed Reza was one of a group of four Christians who were convicted of the same charge (consumption of alcohol) and sentenced to 80 lashes each. He received the punishment in November 2012. Drinking alcohol is not illegal for Christians, but under applicable Islamic law it is prohibited for Muslims. The charges brought against Christian converts reflect the state view that a Muslim cannot change his / her religion.

Iranian Christians request prayer that:

- a) the charges of "acting against national security" will be dropped
- b) Yaser, Saheb and Mohammed Reza will have their Christian faith recognised and will be acquitted of these new charges that apply to Muslims
- c) Yousef Nadarkhani will not face similar charges of drinking communion wine
- d) God will give His peace to the men and their families, and that they will not be anxious
- e) all officials involved will love mercy, act justly, learn about Jesus and choose to follow Him

Algeria—During August Middle East Concern issued prayer requests for Slimane Bouhafis (49), an Algerian Christian man who on 6th August was convicted of blasphemy against Islam and its Prophet. He was fined heavily and sentenced to five years' imprisonment - the maximum punishment. L'Église Protestante d'Algérie (the EPA, the Protestant Church of Algeria) has filed an appeal against the verdict with the help of the Algerian League for Human Rights (the LADDH). The appeal court hearing was on 30th August. The verdict was announced on 6th September. Slimane Bouhafis was sentenced to

three years' imprisonment. The LADDH have stated that they will do everything possible to achieve Slimane's release. An appeal will be made to the supreme court.

Please pray:

- a. that Slimane, his family and his church will experience the peace of Jesus and the comfort of the Holy Spirit at this very difficult time
- b. that Slimane's appeal to the supreme court will be successful, and that he will be acquitted of all charges
- c. for his health - Slimane suffers from gout, and there are concerns that his condition may deteriorate as a result of this ordeal and the conditions in prison
- d. for an end to the ongoing intimidation of Christians by the authorities, and that the fundamental right to religious freedom will be respected for all Algerians

Iran—Iranian Christians are concerned by a wave of raids on house churches this month and request prayer for those who have been arrested. According to the Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA), armed security agents raided a house church gathered for worship on 12th August in Isfahan. The agents confiscated a number of books, pamphlets and satellite TV reception equipment and arrested eleven people: Amin Ahanin, Mohammad Alyasi, Fatemeh Amini, Edmund Khachaturian, Mohammad Malek Khatai, Mohsen Khoobyari, Arash Qodsi, Hamed Sepidkar, Samaneh Shahbazi-Far, Maryam Zonubi and one other (identity not yet confirmed). The families were unable to find where they had been taken, despite asking law enforcement and the Revolutionary Court. It is also reported that a house church in Sanandaj in west Iran was raided on 17th August and that nine people were arrested. Further raids on house churches were reported in the north of Iran in Qaemshahr and Amol. A total of seventeen people were arrested and are assumed to remain detained. Verification and further details are being sought regarding these raids on house churches.

Family and friends are concerned for the safety of those who have been arrested and detained. Prayer is requested that:

- a. those arrested and detained will know God's strength and love, that they will answer their interrogators with patience and wisdom, and that they will be released soon
- b. the families and friends of those detained will know the Lord's strength, peace, protection and support
- c. the Iranian authorities will stop raiding house churches and arresting the members
- d. all prisoners in Iran will be treated with respect and dignity as beings created in the image of God
- e. all officials involved will love mercy, act justly, learn about Jesus and choose to follow Him

Sudan—Since mid-December Sudan has been detaining three Sudanese Christians. Abdulmonem Abdumawla Issa Abdumawla (a believer from a Muslim background from the Darfur area) was detained on 17th December, 2015. The next day two pastors from the Sudan Church of Christ were

detained, Kuwa Shamal Abazmam Kurri and Hassan Abduraheem Kodi Taour. Kuwa Shamal was released after three days but re-arrested on 24th May. They were detained and investigated by the National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS). In mid-May their case was handed to the General Prosecutor's office. On 4th August, 2016 the prosecutor sent their case to the court and the detainees appeared at the Bahri Criminal Court for a pro-forma hearing. The date for the next hearing was set for 14th August 2016. The official charges are not yet known but earlier the NISS had indicated they will be prosecuted for crimes against the state. On 1st August, 2016 the authorities informed church leaders of the scheduled demolition within 72 hours of three churches in the Hajj Yousef area of Khartoum, belonging to the Baptist Church and the Sudan Church of Christ. The churches are resisting the scheduled demolition through the courts and at the time of writing none of the churches has been demolished.

Sudanese Christians ask for prayer:

- a. that the detained church leaders will know the Lord's strength, comfort and wisdom during their ordeal
- b. for a fair judicial process, and that they will be acquitted of all charges
- c. that other church leaders will know the Lord's peace in the face of the increasing pressure against churches and that the scheduled church demolitions will be prevented
- d. that all officials involved will love mercy, act justly, learn about Jesus and choose to follow Him