

October 2024 Prayer

My God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge, my savior; you save me from violence.

—2 Samuel 22:3

Israel/Gaza—International new reports from Gaza have focused on the perspectives of Jews and Muslims as the conflict between Israel and Hamas has raged on for the past year. However, International Christian Concern (ICC) has shared that among the 40,000 Palestinians who have died in the conflict are Christian believers. Indisputably, those who have survived the bombardment of Gaza have endured intense fighting in the streets, airstrikes that have destroyed homes and businesses, starvation, immense psychological trauma, and mass displacement. All are suffering tremendously, but the small remaining Christian population also faces additional challenges. Many have had to hide their faith due to persecution and discrimination from all those around them. When they have sought refuge in churches, they have been bombed. As ICC has reported: “An Orthodox church suffered damage from a strike that killed more than 20 Christians. Bombs also damaged a Baptist church building. Numerous homes of Christians have also been destroyed. Believers who remain in church buildings are now enduring hunger and trauma, like others in Gaza, and food and other necessities are only getting scarcer.” And when Christians flee to other countries in the region, they continue to face the same kind of persecution because of their faith. Pray for an end to the violence and hostilities that are destroying a region. Pray that despite their small numbers (the estimate of remaining Christians is around 900), believers in Gaza will display a hope that others find compelling, that they will be able to demonstrate the love and grace of Jesus, and that they will be divinely provided for and protected. Pray for all who are suffering on all sides of this conflict and that the God of peace will restore the region, and many might come to know peace not just in their streets but within their own souls.

(International Christian Concern)

North Korea—Gospel radio messages are now being broadcast into North Korea twice a day. Although they could be sent to a political prison camp if caught, many are risking their lives to listen and receive information and news from outside. Many are hungry for the truth of the Gospel in the midst of their suffering. One man who recently escaped said that the church is growing in North Korea. Praise God for this news of hope. Pray that the Bible, which many there call, “the book of blessings,” would be available and safely accessible. Pray that many would turn to Christ and that the oppressive government would grant freedom for Christians. Pray that those in power now would be replaced by just rulers. *(Source: International Christian Concern)*

Vietnam—The family and friends of five Catholic and six Protestant believers who have been imprisoned for their faith—some since 2011—have raised the alarm that they have lost contact with these prisoners, who appear to have gone missing. The 11 Christians were originally arrested for “undermining national unity policy” and “distributing propaganda against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam” and “abusing democratic freedoms to infringe the interests of the State.” One Hmong believer was imprisoned because he attended an unsanctioned church, and another church leader was jailed for refusing to close his church down. All these believers were given sentences of three to five years—some of which were custodial

sentences and some only meant to be probation. Yet all have served a decade or more before now being disappeared. Pray for the safety of these believers. Pray that family and friends will get answers and the whereabouts of their loved ones will be revealed. Pray for the country of Vietnam, which has remained adamantly opposed to religious freedom and other essential human rights. Pray Vietnam would experience a massive transformation, respect and protect the rights of their citizens, and that many would come to know complete and true freedom in Christ. (Source: CSW)

Pakistan—There are roughly 20,000 brick kilns in Pakistan with up to 4 million people working in them as bonded slaves. Although slavery is illegal, the government ignores and accepts this situation. Kiln owners offer loans of money to impoverished and needy people (many of them Christians) who may have an unexpected medical bill or a need for food during the rainy season. Then they have to pay it back, along with very high interest, by working in the kilns. The fees take all their money so they are essentially trapped in slavery, forced to make hundreds of bricks per day. Many of them are entire families who have been stuck in this cycle for a decade or longer. Less than 2% of the population is Christian, so they are targeted and marginalized, kept from lucrative jobs, and often of the lowest caste. They also tend to be the ones who become enslaved in the kilns out of dire financial need. Please pray for this community who is so trapped to find grace and justice and a way out of this slavery. Pray that the kiln owners would feel convicted and offer freedom and fair wages. Pray for the believers to cling to Christ in their suffering, and pray that they would be a witness to unbelievers around them. (Source: *Global Christian Relief*)

Iran—Give thanks to the Lord for the release and acquittal of 62-year-old Armenian-Iranian pastor Anoshavan Avedian. In August 2020, Pastor Avedian was arrested with two other Christians at a private Christian meeting Narmak, North Tehran, when it was raided by intelligence agents. After being sentenced to 10 years in prison by Judge Iman Afshari, head of the 26th Branch of the Revolutionary Court of Tehran, he began serving his sentence in Evin Prison in September 2023. Praise God that a year later, Branch 21 of the Appeal Court of Tehran acquitted him of the charge of “propaganda contrary to and disturbing to the holy religion of Islam.” Even as we give thanks for Pastor Avedian’s freedom, continue to pray for the other believers in Evin prison and for the Church in Iran—for strength, protection, comfort, peace, and a strong and beautiful witness to those around them. (Source: *Middle East Concern*)

Sierra Leone—Georgieta grew up in an area that practices the occult, even human sacrifice, and where demons are worshipped. When she became a Christian, her family threw her out of the home when she refused to worship demons with them, so a pastor’s family welcomed her in. When Georgieta’s father became seriously ill, her family decided to sacrifice her in hopes that it would save her father’s life. Thankfully, she escaped, but when her father died, her family blamed her. Her mother then attacked her in anger, attempting once again to kill her. Georgieta survived the attack and fled to another town where she is now in hiding with other Christians. Praise God for how He protected her. Pray for her continued safety and for God to provide a long-term, safe living situation. Pray also for her family to be freed from the slavery of sin and lies of the evil one. (Source: *Voice of the Martyrs*)

Europe/Italy/Libya—Despite well-documented evidence of human rights abuses, including forced labor, sexual violence, and extortion by the Libyan Coast Guard (LCG) and in Libyan detention centers, the European Union has poured millions of euros into a new Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre which will strengthen Libya’s efforts to intercept and detain migrants at sea, imprisoning them in a system of exploitation, modern slavery, and abuse. Meanwhile genuine humanitarian efforts have been actively thwarted as rescue boats of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF [Doctors without Borders]) have been detained multiple times by Italian authorities for alleged non-compliance with LCG instructions during a rescue operation. The Italian prime minister recently addressed the UN General Assembly calling for an international effort to end modern slavery, and Italian courts have never ruled in favor of disembarkation of rescue ships in Libya because they are not considered safe port. And yet Italy and the EU have turned a blind eye to the abuses and exploitation of Libya if it means migrants do not reach European borders. Pray for the protection of some of the most vulnerable people whose lives are threatened in their home countries. Pray that the EU will address migrant issues with humanity and compassion and stop facilitating the enslavement of people in Libya. (*Source: Freedom United*)

Mexico—The group of over 150 Protestant Christians who had been forced to leave their village last April have recently been allowed to return. The village leaders had cut off the electricity and water to their homes and vandalized their church. While they were living in makeshift situations, they were also drinking river water and many of the children became sick. A new municipal government which took over in September chose to prioritize this case and came up with an agreement with village leaders. Water and electricity have been reconnected to their homes, and the families were able to return. Praise God that the government intervened and helped to uphold freedom of religion. Please pray that these indigenous communities who often don’t follow the laws of the land would be law abiding and respectful to the Christian community in their midst. Pray also that the believers would reach out in love to their community and spread the fragrance of Christ. Pray that God would continue to turn this ugly situation to good, bring true reconciliation, and would use it for the saving of many souls. (*Source: Christian Solidarity Worldwide*)

El Salvador—In March 2022, President Nayib Bukele declared a state of emergency as part of a “war on gangs” in El Salvador. So far over 3,000 children have been detained in indiscriminate sweeps, and then have been subjected to all kinds of abuse—including overcrowded, unsanitary cells, guards refusing to protect child prisoners from beatings from other inmates, and coerced false confessions. Some kids brought in only for a police “interview” have remained in custody for years. This is a double victimization, because gangs often target for recruitment youths from areas of pervasive poverty and lack of education and opportunity—often threatening kids with violence against them or family members if they do not cooperate. As stated in a Human Rights Watch report, “The Attorney General’s Office should prioritize prosecuting high-level gang leaders most responsible for abuses and investigating human rights violations, including child recruitment, while the courts should ensure that children are tried in specialized juvenile courts and protected from abuse and coercion.” Pray for the children of El Salvador—especially the poor and struggling—who are twice victimized by violent gangs and then the wrongful and abusive detention by the government. Pray for their protection and freedom. Pray that efforts to tackle the huge problem of gangs and drugs would be focused on the real organizers and perpetrators

instead of young people, many of whom are not even involved with gangs. Pray for the end of violence and the upholding of justice in El Salvador. Pray that wealthy countries which create the demand for these drugs and fuel the cycles of crime would vigilantly address these issues within their own borders. (Source: *Human Rights Watch*)

Nigeria—In Northern Nigeria, Salisu Bala turned from his Muslim faith to Jesus Christ after having dreams about Jesus and talking to a Christian friend. He began reading the Bible and attending church. When his parents discovered this, they locked him in a room without food or water until he would renounce his new faith in Christ. After four days, when he thought he was on the verge of death but still wouldn't renounce Christ, his Muslim friend broke into the room to rescue him. He is now in hiding with a pastor who is helping 70 other Muslims background believers. Salisu is not afraid of death, he says, but he is concerned for his parents. Pray that their blind eyes would see the truth of Jesus and turn from darkness to light. Pray that Salisu and others like him in Northern Nigeria would continue to stand firm in their faith and that God would protect them from persecution. (Source: *International Christian Concern*)