

June 2013

But when they were oppressed they cried out to you. From heaven you heard them, and in your great compassion you gave them deliverers, who rescued them from the hand of their enemies.

--Nehemiah 9: 27b

*Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save,
nor his ear too dull to hear.*

--Isaiah 59: 1

India—Please pray for Monah Soren and his family and Rabi Narayan Marandi and his family who became Christians in Orissa, India, in February and are now experiencing persecution. Both families decided to stop participating and contributing to the local temple because they are now believers in Jesus, and villagers formed a mob and raided Monah's house. They then beat Rabi and drove both families out of town. The police will not help them, and they are staying in a nearby village. Please pray that they will not be attacked again, and pray for fellowship and support for these new believers. (Source: *Persecution Update India*)

Nigeria—In May a report was released by Human Rights Watch detailing an intentional attack on a fishing village, Baga, in northern Nigeria by the military. It appears that this was an act of retribution after violence in the area carried out by Boko Haram extremists claimed the life of one of the soldiers. It is reported that over 2,000 homes were destroyed by fire after they were doused with gasoline, and more than 200 civilians were killed. This contradicts the military's account that only 30 homes were destroyed. However, satellite images of the village corroborate the report by locals and Human Rights Watch. Despite official denial of this event, there was an encouraging response by Nigeria's president, stating that this must be further investigated. Pray for the many families affected by this tragedy—those who lost homes, possessions, and most important, loved ones. Pray for healing and comfort, and the provision of physical needs. Pray for the government's integrity as this incident is investigated, and pray for the military at large as they are engaged in an ongoing, difficult battle against extremist violence in Nigeria. Pray that despite the enormous challenges of this kind of work, that they will operate with honor, and take seriously their role of protecting the population. Pray for Nigeria as a whole, where violent factions have been perpetrating atrocities for several years now—pray for peace, security, and continued freedom. (Source: *The New York Times; Human Rights Watch*)

China—A year ago, 200 policemen raided a small gathering of a house church, arrested 50 believers there, and then filed criminal charges of “cult activity” against eight of them. Now a year later, seven of those eight have been sentenced to prison terms—despite an independent investigation by China Aid that revealed none had participated in any criminal or illegal activity. Pray for Han Hai, a 60-year-old, who received a seven and one-half year sentence; Hu Linpo, 49 and from Singapore, given a seven-year sentence; Yang Lianbing, 23, given a three-year sentence; Zhang Mian, the owner of the residence where the raid took place and who received a four-year sentence; Cao Xia, a woman in her 50s, given a three-and-a-half-year sentence; and Wang En and Li Dan, both females in their 20s, who each received three-year sentences. Pray for their sustenance during their incarceration, for the peace and comfort of Christ to be felt throughout their ordeal, and for their continued witness both inside and outside of prison. Pray for their families, as they are separated from their loved ones and have very real concerns about their well-being. Pray that their sentences may be appealed, which has not yet been determined, and then resources will be provided for the high costs of appealing, and ultimately for the success of these appeals. (Source: *China Aid Association*)

Uganda—Since Christmas Eve, 2011, Gospel of Life Church in Kampala, Uganda, and its pastor, Umar Mulinde, have been under serious threat from extremists in the area. Despite growing up Muslim and the son of an Islamic teacher, Umar became a Christian later in life and pastored the Gospel of Life Church, whose congregation has grown to over 1,000. While Umar has been blessed by being able to remain close to his own family, others in the area were not as tolerant of his choice to follow Christ. On Christmas Eve, 2011, Umar was severely burned on his face and back, and lost his right eye, when a man threw acid on him and shouted, “Allah Akbar!” Umar's injuries were so extensive, there was no adequate care in Uganda, so he was sent to Israel to begin a process of six reconstructive surgeries. During that time, his family received threatening letters saying they “are not finished with you yet . . . don't think you survived us.” They also indicate that they know that Umar's wife and six children are still in Uganda. The letters have continued to arrive even recently, and in February, Gospel of Life Church was attacked, but without injury as the attackers spilled their acid on the church's veranda before they could throw it on believers gathered there for prayer. Pray for the healing of Pastor Umar and the protection of his vulnerable family. Pray for the Gospel of Life Church, its members and leaders, who are all quite shaken by the attack on Pastor Umar and the ongoing threats. Pray they will know the peace which transcends understanding, that their faith would remain steadfast, and that the church in Uganda, which has been growing steadily for the past 20 years, would stand strong and remain loving in the face of all opposition. (*Source: The Voice of the Martyrs*)

Ethiopia—Journalist, activist, and long-time critic of the Ethiopian government, Eskinder Nega's 18-year prison sentence was just upheld by the country's Supreme Court under the vague and broadly applied national anti-terrorism laws. Despite no connections to terrorist groups and a history of articles that only call for peaceful change and greater freedom of speech within Ethiopia, Eskinder Nega has been previously incarcerated eight times and was banned from publishing in any media in Ethiopia. These most recent accusations and subsequent sentence have been widely decried by numerous human rights organizations, members of the European Parliament, and the UN. Nega, a 43-year-old husband and father, has a visa that would permit him to live in the United States, and he has family in Maryland, however, this courageous activist has chosen to remain in Ethiopia to continue to be a voice for democracy and freedom within its borders. Sadly, the United States has chosen to remain silent on this unjust imprisonment because of its relationship to Ethiopia as anti-terrorism allies. Pray for the freedom of this advocate for human rights and freedom of speech, expression, and belief. Pray for the protection of his wife and son. Pray for the leaders of Ethiopia to act with integrity in the case of Eskinder Nega, as well as improving human rights within Ethiopia. Pray that Secretary of State, John Kerry, will use the power and influence of his position to intervene on behalf of Eskinder Nega and other political prisoners in Ethiopia. (*Source: WBEZ Worldview; Freedom Now*)

Iran—On May 21, an Armenian pastor of an Assemblies of God church in Tehran, Robert Asserian, was arrested while leading a prayer meeting at the church. Earlier his home was raided, and his computer and other items were confiscated. There is increased pressure within Iran for against Assemblies of God churches, despite the fact that they are recognized by the state. They are being threatened with closure if they do not stop all activity in Farsi. After Pastor Asserian's arrest, the church in Tehran put a notice on its door that it was closed. This all follows the December 2011 arrest and imprisonment of Pastor Farhad, his wife Shahnaz, and two others, Davoud and Naser—all of the Assemblies of God church in Ahvaz, Iran. All four received a year's sentence, but the Iranian authorities have indicated they will release these four, along with Pastor Asserian, if the church will refrain from all activities in Farsi. Pray that all those incarcerated will know the loving peace and presence of Christ throughout this time. Pray also for their families and church members, who fear for them and live under the threat of persecution themselves. Pray that church leaders will have wisdom and be guided by the Holy Spirit as they make decisions that will affect both the lives of these

imprisoned believers, but also their community. Pray for government officials to act justly and with mercy. (Source: *Middle East Concern*)

United States—Even as Big Oil companies were expounding the virtues of greater transparency in Sydney, Australia, some of those same companies—including Exxon, Mobil, BP, Chevron, and Shell—are currently suing the United States Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) to thwart the enforcement of the very law which would require that of them in their global dealings. Around the world in countries that are rich in natural resources, huge percentages of the population live on less than \$2. This law would require Big Oil companies to disclose payments they make to foreign governments—in effect, stopping the personal enrichment of executives and individual government leaders, and give the poorest of the poor necessary tools and information to fight endemic corruption and poverty. Pray that this suit will be unsuccessful, that the SEC will uphold this law with conviction and integrity, that oil executives and foreign world leaders will be convicted of the gross injustice of their practices and pursue of honesty and fairness as they pursue their business endeavors. (Source: *Oxfam*)

Myanmar/Burma—Human rights groups, Islamic leaders, and Burmese opposition leader, Aung San Suu Kyi have expressed grave concern about government authorities reinstating a two-child restriction for Muslim Rohingya families, an ethnic minority in the west of the country. The two-child policy is not applied to Buddhist families and is part of an ongoing program of discrimination against the Rohingya minority. It also follows spates of violence against this community, which comprises only 4 percent of the population. Additionally, they are discriminated against in a variety of ways, including permits required to travel outside of their villages and permission to marry. It is unclear what measures will be taken to enforce the two-child policy, but it is certain that children who exceed the quota will at least be “blacklisted,” that is, denied a birth certificate, education, the right to marry, and the right to travel. Pray for the protection of unborn children in Myanmar, and the protection of this vulnerable population—especially children born who exceed the family quota and who will face even more extreme discrimination than others in their ethnic group. Pray that violence against this people group, such as the raids on their villages by Buddhist locals with machetes, will be ended and positive community relations would be developed in this region. Pray for the fragile efforts toward democracy in this nation that has struggled under a repressive military regime for decades. Pray for the light of Christ to reach this troubled region. (Source: *The Wall Street Journal*)

Bahrain—Though it is a violation of international law, Bahrain has made a practice incarcerating juveniles in adult prisons. In fact, the Convention on the Rights of the Child considers the imprisonment of a minor a last resort, yet children as young as 15 years old have been jailed with adult men, making them far more vulnerable to abuse and having their legal rights violated. In all cases, this is a grossly unjust practice, however, it is all the more grievous as many of the children are there for “political” crimes. Pray for the Bahraini minors, Jihad Sadeq Aziz Salman and Ebrahim Ahmed Radi al-Moqdad, aged 16 and 17 respectively, who were arrested after being present at an anti-government protest. Both boys were sentenced to ten years, though they were refused access to family or lawyers in the days after their arrest, were beaten, and their families were not allowed in the courtroom when the verdict was read. From their arrest throughout their trial, the boys were held in an adult prison prior to being convicted of any crime. Beyond this, it is also common for minors in adult prisons to face other extreme treatment, such as solitary confinement. Pray for the protection of children and their rights in this oppressive regime. Pray for the many children—some of whom may be innocent or guilty of non-violent crimes—in adult prisons. Pray for an added measure of protection for them. Pray that the government of Bahrain will recognize the cruel and unjust nature of this practice, and value their citizens more than maintaining absolute power and control. Pray for the efforts of human rights

organizations who work diligently to expose these atrocities. Pray for their perseverance and success. (Source: *Amnesty International*)

Uzbekistan—Many believers in Uzbekistan are denied opportunities for employment because of their faith. This makes basic survival almost unmanageable. Give thanks for organizations that help support believers in practical ways, such as giving sewing machines to Christian women in Uzbekistan so they have a means to provide for their families. Pray that this will enable them to at least feel on secure material footing, as they face others forms of persecution and discrimination. Pray that through this they are able to remain in their homes and their country and offer a strong witness to their communities. (Source: *The Voice of the Martyrs*)