

March 2017 Prayer Items

*You keep him in perfect peace
whose mind is stayed on you,
because he trusts in you.*

--Isaiah 26:3

Pakistan—Mid-February a group of pharmacists and medical professionals were carrying out a peaceful demonstration in response to amendments by the government regarding the sale of drugs in Punjab province. During this peaceful civil protest, a Pakistani splinter group of the Taliban bombed the crowd killing at least 11 people and injuring dozens of others, including police officers. The attack was not even meant to target this group of medical professionals, but was used as retaliation for some Pakistani military operations. This follows a March 2016 bombing in a public park where at least 69 people, including children, were killed. Pray for the many people that are mourning the loss of family and friends, that they might find the comfort and peace of Christ even amid this tragedy. Pray for those who would take innocent life to further their unjust cause. Pray that they might understand the violence they commit is evil and not in any way justified by what they believe. Pray that they might find the love and grace of Christ. Pray for the country of Pakistan, for fair and just laws that govern not only the distribution of medications, but also all aspects of human rights, and the protection of all citizens, especially women and children. (*Source: BBC*)

Sudan—We rejoice with believers around the world at the announcement of the release of Czech Christian aid worker, Petr Jasek, who was given his freedom in February 2017. Jasek spent 446 days imprisoned under false allegations of espionage. Persevere in prayer for the two other men who were accused of conspiring with him, Pastor Hassan Abdelrahim Tawor and Abdulmonem Abdumawla, who also received very long prison sentences and remain imprisoned. Pray for the country of Sudan, where injustice and oppression are endemic and genocide has been used as a tool to control and intimidate the population. Pray that God would intervene mightily in this place of darkness and cruelty. Pray that He might awaken the consciences of the leaders of this country and bring freedom and justice to those oppressed there. Pray for the perseverance and sustenance of those who faithfully follow Christ amid this kind of persecution and for those who speak out for truth and human rights in this nation. (*Source: Christian Solidarity Worldwide; The Voice of the Martyrs*)

Cuba—Even with the opening of Cuba to tourist travel and the visit of President Obama to this historically closed nation, there is still reason to be concerned and vigilant in prayer for the church in this island nation. In 2016 numerous churches were seized or demolished by the government, and Christian leaders and pastors were threatened and harassed. Pray for leaders like Reverend Juan Carlos Velazquez, who has been threatened by the government with imprisonment if he does not give up leading his church. Pray also for nine other Christian church leaders in Cuba who were detained throughout 2016, including Mario Felix Leonart Harrison. We join with Christian Solidarity Worldwide, as they pray Isaiah 30:18-19 for Cuba: “Oh people of Zion, who live in Jerusalem, you will weep no more. He will be gracious if you ask for help. He will surely respond to the sounds of your cries.” (*Source: Christian Solidarity Worldwide*)

Pakistan—In the past year, Pakistan has begun a process of forced mass return of Afghan refugees back to Afghanistan through a process that is both unlawful and dangerous to this most vulnerable group of people. Human rights groups have expressed great alarm at Pakistan's actions, which have forced yearly 365,000 Afghan refugees back into their country which is dangerous, unstable, and will unnecessarily expose them to persecution. Human rights groups have also criticized the UN for not enforcing universally accepted laws and policies around refugee status and protections. Pray for these very vulnerable people fleeing from economic crisis, but more so war and violence. Pray that the Pakistani government would exhibit compassion and care for those seeking refuge legally in their country. Pray for the country of Afghanistan that it might find a new level of stability and be able to maintain protections and basic human rights for their population. Pray for God's peace and justice to reign in this troubled region. (*Source: Reuters*)

Iran—In August 2016, Christian converts Amin Nader Afshar, Hadi Askary, Ramiel Bet Tamraz, Mohammad Dehnavy, and Amir Sina Dashti were arrested while attending a picnic. They were not charged with any crime, despite weeks of interrogation. In October and November, Ramiel, Mohammad, and Amir all received conditional release after posting exorbitant bail, but Amin and Hadi remain imprisoned in Evin prison, unable to raise the unreasonably high bail set for them. This winter Amin and Hadi began a hunger strike to protest the set bail and the denial of necessary medical care. After the Head of the Attorney General and his deputy visited Evin Prison, Amin and Hadi were able to end their hunger strike, after promises that their cases would be looked in to. We join with Middle East Concern, praying that:

- a. Hadi will receive treatment for his kidney infection and will be restored to health
- b. the case against the people arrested at the Firuzkuh picnic will be heard, that Hadi and Amin will be released, and that the others will receive back their bail monies
- c. all officials involved will love mercy, act justly, learn about Jesus and choose to follow Him.” (Source: *Middle East Concern*)

Lebanon-- Hanan, a Syrian refugee woman living in a makeshift shelter in Lebanon has been meeting with Christians and reading the Bible since viewing the Jesus film. Her 80-year-old mother and other elderly women also watched the film, cried in response, and said they had never heard anything like the Gospel before. Praise God that these Sunni- background women are interested in Jesus, and pray that they would truly be born again. Praise God that He can bring light and joy in the midst of the darkness of the refugee crisis. (Source: *Voice of the Martyrs*)

Nigeria-- Seven Boko Haram militants blew themselves up near a refugee camp on the outskirts of Maiduguri. Many displaced people were crowding around trucks in order to return to their homes when the terrorists detonated their bombs, targeting this group of people who have already suffered much. Boko Haram is responsible for killing 15,000 people and forcing 2 million from their homes. The Northern Nigerian population is currently experiencing rampant starvation and unemployment because of the group's terrorism. Please pray for the thousands of Nigerians that do not have enough food for themselves and their children. Please pray for comfort for those who have lost loved ones in this bombing and other attacks. Pray for protection from Boko Haram and for the refugees to safely return home. (Source: *Reuters, The Guardian*)

Indonesia-- A church 60 kilometers from Jakarta was told that it could reopen its doors if it agrees to sharing its land with a Muslim mosque. The Protestant church had been shut down nine years ago due to opposition from the Muslim community. However, the new mayor believes that if the church were next to a mosque it would be more accepted. Please pray for this new opportunity to open its doors. Pray that the church would be a beacon of light in the neighborhood and that the proximity would foster friendship and evangelism between the new neighbors. (Source: *International Christian Concern*)

Egypt-- Please pray for Christians in Egypt as they face threats of execution. Four believers have been shot in the past three weeks, and a video calling for Christians to be put to death has been published. Christian residents say they feel they have nowhere else to go because their homes and employment are there in Egypt, yet they are fearful for their lives. Pray for discernment for them to see how God is guiding them and for protection over His people in Egypt. Pray that they would cling to Him and trust Him and place their very lives in His hands. May He be glorified and honored in this trial. (Source: *Middle East Concern*)

China-- Members of a house church were meeting for choir practice in a factory that was owned by a choir member when 50 policemen raided the building and arrested 22 people. Many were kept in prison for a month before being released, and Zhao Weiliang and Cheng Hongpeng were sentenced to four and three years in prison, respectively. Zhao, who has a wife and two young children and supports his elderly parents, was offered his freedom if he would have admitted that his beliefs were based on a cult. He refused, and is now behind bars. Pray for these men to stay faithful to Christ while suffering, to be a witness to others, and to show Christ to their persecutors. Pray also for encouragement, strength, and physical and financial help for their families as they suffer in their absence. (Source: *Voice of the Martyrs*)