

April 2017 Prayer Items

Learn to do right; seek justice.

Defend the oppressed.

Take up the cause of the fatherless;

plead the case of the widow.

—Isaiah 1:17

International—Something we must be aware of: 20 million people may starve to death in the next 6 months as famine takes hold in South Sudan, Northern Nigeria, Yemen, and Somalia. Additionally, it is estimated that in Southern Africa, where normal drought was gravely exacerbated by El Nino, approximately 60 million people will have been affected by this crisis, 40 million of them in 13 countries experiencing food insecurity by March 2017. This humanitarian crisis, which may be the largest since WWII, has also been heightened by years of conflict and oppression in many of these countries. Another fact: Americans throw away approximately 40 percent of the food we purchase, and it appears that the US is poised to cut back aid to Africa in the coming days. Pray for this region and pray for those in the developing world to act with compassion and integrity. Pray for the work of organizations like World Vision who work tirelessly to combat malnutrition and starvation around the globe, and pray for creative, innovative, and effective solutions, such as irrigation system and the Lehlalela Pig Growers' Project, which have literally sustained lives. (*Source: World Vision*)

India—In a disturbing crackdown on foreign aid, India announced last month that is revoking Compassion International's right to work and provide relief for thousands within their borders. Compassion International has often ranked as the single largest provider of foreign aid to country, but due to accusations of trying to convert Indian citizens, the organization is being shut down and other similar non-profits fear they will be next. Once again, misguided "nationalism" is promoted at the expense of the innocent, the voiceless, and the powerless. Pray for India, for 145,000 orphans there, and thousands of future children who won't be supported financially or spiritually. Pray for the great intervention and provision of the One who is Father to the fatherless, who cares for the widow and the orphan. (*Source: The New York Times*)

Pakistan—Though the plight of believers in Pakistan continues to be a real concern and struggle, a positive development last month is reason for encouragement, hope, and gratitude. The British Pakistani Christian Association was investigating the abduction and gang-rape of two Christian teenagers from the impoverished community of Jaranwala. The girls, who are sisters, were vulnerable, because they, like all others in the community, have no sanitation facilities and must go out into the fields to relieve themselves. Not only is this dangerous, but it leads to contamination and disease of water supply—which primarily consists of muddy puddles that many drink from directly. BPCA through this investigation began looking for simple ways to improve the circumstances of these people. They approached Pakistan's High Commission in London, the First Minister of which was aware of demonstrations in London on behalf of imprisoned Christian Asia Bibi. As a result of meetings with BPCA and the First Minister, ten restroom facilities were built for the enslaved community of Jaranwala, which will directly benefit at least 100 Christian families, improving the physical safety and health for all. Give thanks to God for this positive action, for relief it provides these suffering families and for the potential positive direction it seems to indicate. Pray fervently for the country of Pakistan, for the poor, the enslaved, and for persecuted believers there. Pray for the physical, spiritual, and emotional healing of the two sisters who were so brutally attacked. Pray that God would bring beauty from ashes, and trouble the hearts of those who committed this vile crime. Pray for ongoing improvement of the treatment of Christians in this region, and persevere in prayer for Asia Bibi, nearing a decade in prison for her faith. Let's pray this is the beginning of softening hearts and open minds in Pakistan. (*Sources: Fox News; Christian Post*)

Turkey—The Turkish government is bursting at its seams with the millions of refugees who have streamed into their country attempting to reach other parts of Europe. Those who have been halted in their journey and are now stuck in camps in Turkey face dire conditions and possible starvation. The situation certainly would stretch the ingenuity and resources of any host government, and it would make sense in light of this crisis, the Turkish government would welcome any assistance. Unbelievably, though, the Turkish government has revoked permission for Mercy Corps, a Christian emergency relief organization, to operate within their country. Mercy Corps should be winning awards for the life saving assistance it's provided there over the past 5 years. Pray for compassion and common sense to prevail. Pray for stability in Turkey. President Erdogan has cracked down harshly in the past year, depriving Turkish citizens of freedoms previously long enjoyed and arresting many teachers and those thought not to be in support of the government. Pray for hope, provision, protection, and salvation for the refugees, and of course, a way out of that miserable situation to a peaceful, new, self-supporting, welcoming life. (*Sources: The Mercy Corps; The Atlantic Monthly*)

Uzbekistan—It is largely unknown to the most of the world that each year during the cotton harvest, the government of Uzbekistan establishes a pervasive state-run slave labor operation. However, human rights activist Elena Urlaeva is working both to ensure that it is no longer a little known practice, and that it is a practice that is soon to be abandoned. For these efforts, Urlaeva has faced detention, imprisonment, forcible drugging, assault, and torture. Most recently, she was forcibly detained in a psychiatric ward for 23 days. We give thanks that she was released at the end of March and we pray that her work exposing forced labor, endemic torture, and violations of housing rights. Pray for this country that uses violence and repression to control its population and deprive citizens of basic rights and protections, and where no one exempt—children, teachers, doctors, and all kinds of laborers and professionals are annually forced into slavery in the country's cotton fields. Pray for the protection of Elena Urlaeva, for the success of her efforts, and for those who have influence in the West to use diplomatic and financial means to encourage the Uzbek government of right treatment of their entire population. (*Sources: The International Labor Forum; Human Rights Watch*)

China-- Please pray for the many Christian leaders that undergo persecution today in China. Peng Ming, a Christian political prisoner, has died of suspicious causes after spending ten years in prison, separated from his family. Pray for comfort and help for his mourning family. Jiang Tianyong, a prominent human rights activist who has worked on Gao Zhisheng's case has been missing since November. Please pray that the Lord would strengthen his faith and protect him. Gu Yuese, the former pastor of China's largest state church, was recently re-arrested. He had been removed from his position as pastor and falsely accused of embezzling large funds in 2016. This came shortly after the pastor publicly opposed the government's policy of removing crosses from churches. Pray for Pastor Yuese to continue to stand up for Christ and to have a fruitful impact on those he encounters in prison. Pray for his protection and early release. May the Lord continue to grow His church in this difficult nation. (*Source: Christian Solidarity Worldwide*)

Vietnam--Rev Nguyễn Trung Tôn, a priest and activist who promotes democracy and has spent two years in prison for his work, and his colleague, Rev Nguyễn Việt Tú, were abducted from an airport and pushed into a waiting van by people who are believed to be working for the police. They were then driven to a forest where they were stripped, robbed and beaten with a metal bar. Thankfully, they survived the attack and were found by a local resident. Please pray for their healing, both physical and emotional, after this traumatic experience. Pray for their further protection and for the safety of all those in Vietnam, where religious freedom is supposedly guaranteed and yet clearly it is being suppressed and punished. (*Source: International Christian Concern*)

Kazakhstan-- Pastor and Muslim convert Bakhytzhhan Kashkumbaev was arrested and sentenced to prison for his faith in this country where citizens are expected to be Muslims and any hint of proselytizing is illegal. While serving 10 years in prison, he was temporarily transferred to the dark

basement of a psychiatric ward where he was locked up with murderers. Although he was terrified, the pastor began to see his violent cell mates with compassion, prayed for them and shared the Gospel with them. He ended up leading almost 100 men to Christ during his nine months in that ward. *(Source: Voice of the Martyrs)*

Eritrea-- Dr. Berhane was imprisoned for his faith for eleven months in Eritrea and was recently released. Praise God for his protection. He described the situation in the prison. He says that prisoners fight and guards are cruel, but the prisoners become like family because they are always together. In any given day, a seemingly random number of names are called to be taken away to be executed. Because of this constant fear, many are hungry for the Gospel. Dr. Berhane says that people are more free to worship in prison than out of confinement, and although Bibles are confiscated when found, Christians are able to smuggle them in. Praise God for His mighty work in what seems to be such a bleak and hopeless situation. Please pray for Christian brothers Dr. Kiflu Gebremeskel, Kidane Weldou, Haile Nayzgi, and many unknown others who are still in the high security Asmara prison. Pray for their Christian witness and their safety. *(Source: Voice of the Martyrs)*