An ICC Investigation:

The Terror Factory

A Series on the Exploding Iranian Church Despite the Government’s Imprisonment, Torture, and Murder of Its Christian Citizens
FEATURE
14 | The Terror Factory
ICC investigation exposes Iranian judges attempting to destroy the Iranian Church.

FEATURE
16 | Transforming Lives Through ICC’s Hope House
Hope House serves Egypt’s beleaguered Christian community by providing education to children.

FEATURE
18 | A House Divided
As Muslim extremists work their way into Uganda from neighboring countries, Christians face backlash within their communities.

INITIATIVE
20 | To the Ends of the Earth
ICC’s Bibles and Bikes initiative is bringing the Gospel’s radical and liberating message to the ends of the earth in rural India.

FEATURE
22 | ICC Launches New Ambassador Program
Tell your community about Christian persecution through ICC’s new volunteer ambassador program.

Regular Features

3 Letter from the President
A few words from ICC’s president, Jeff King, on the tragedy our brothers and sisters in Iran face, and ICC’s work there.

4 World News
A snapshot of the persecution that impacts our brothers and sisters daily, in every corner of the world.

8 Your Dollars at Work
Learn how your gifts are providing comfort, relief, Bibles, education and vocational training to the persecuted.

12 Fund Spotlight
Learn how the Suffering Wives and Children fund brings tangible relief and long-term aid to persecuted families.
Our recent work in Iran has really captured my heart. You see, so much of our work is defensive; in responding to persecution, we are “playing defense.”

Don’t get me wrong, caring for victims is our essential purpose. Bandaging victims is both fulfilling and rewarding. However, it can be frustrating to witness governments continually crush Christians without consequence.

Any time we can fight back or work to move communities forward (as with our Hope House program), I get excited!

On page 14, you will find the first article in our series on Iran. The story of Iran really moves me. Satan is throwing all his weight against the Church through the court system in Iran; but the more he seeks to destroy the Church, the more it grows! It’s an incredible story, to be followed by more stories about Iran in the months to come.

ICC has a chance at fighting the terror apparatus that the Iranian government has built.

Our investigation recently revealed the identities of key judges used by the state to falsely imprison and torture Christians. That’s great news, because ICC can now leverage Washington’s power to go after these human rights abusers through an existing international legal framework. These individual judges have been hiding in the dark, shielded by the state, while sentencing Christians to long, harsh prison sentences, involving torture and murder.

We have submitted detailed reports of the judges’ crimes to the U.S. government and will know in approximately six months if the government will take further action.

My constant prayer at ICC is, “Lord, use us beyond our small imaginations. Make us into a tool that fits Your hand so that we can bring relief to Your hurting people.”

Would you pray that with us? Thank you for partnering with us. Together, we are a small tribe in the Western Church. We have awoken to the pain of our brothers and sisters overseas. The tears of our Lord for His bride have rolled off His cheek onto ours, and we will never be the same. We can’t go back to our former ignorance. So we cry out, “Use us, Lord.”

So let’s keep crying out to Him to use us to bring relief to His imprisoned, but oh so beautiful, bride.

As always, your donations will be used efficiently, effectively, and ethically.

Jeff King
President
International Christian Concern

“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.”

- Isaiah 58:6-8
Jakarta’s Christian Former Governor Released from Prison

1 | INDONESIA On January 24, former Jakarta governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, an ethnic Chinese Christian politician, was released from prison after serving nearly two years on blasphemy charges. The former governor, commonly known as “Ahok,” walked free from Mako Brimob detention center, where his son Nicholas Sean greeted him.

The former governor was sentenced to two years in prison in 2017 after a highly edited video of one of his speeches on the campaign trail surfaced. The video was manipulated to make it appear as though he was insulting Islam and he was sentenced on May 9 following a controversial, high-profile trial. Despite minimal evidence, judges issued a harsher sentence than the prosecution team even recommended.

The verdict called into question Indonesia’s claimed religious freedom. This issue should be of interest in the April presidential election. Although this case has received the most media attention, there are many others who have been victimized by false allegations of blasphemy in Indonesia.

In a letter to his supporters that was shared on Twitter, the former governor urged his supporters to refer to him by his Indonesian initials, “BTP,” instead of the Hakka nickname “Ahok.” He also gave thanks to God, expressing that he was grateful to have lost the election and spent time in prison because he believes that he would have become “more arrogant [and] ruder” otherwise.

His lawyer, Teguh Samudera, said that BTP plans to venture into the oil industry next. He also plans to host a talk show and fulfill several previously arranged speaking engagements in New Zealand, Japan, and Europe.

Indian Christians Hold Silent Protest Against Attack on Christian School

2 | INDIA On January 22, members of the Yuva Sena, the youth wing of a Hindu radical group called the Shiv Sena, attacked Holy Cross Convent High School. The extremists broke into the school building, while chanting slogans against the school and its leadership. The attackers then proceeded to ransack the school, breaking windows and destroying Christian symbols that they encountered.

In response to the incident, approximately 3,500 Christians gathered in the city of Kolhapur, located in India’s Maharashtra state, on January 29. The crowd held a silent rally to protest against the attack on the school, as well as the increased attacks spreading throughout India. Those who participated in the rally also called on the authorities to bring justice to those responsible for the school attack.

Unfortunately, attacks on Christian facilities have become increasingly common in India in recent years. Since 2014, attacks on Christian individuals and institutions have drastically increased. In 2014, the Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI) documented 147 incidents of anti-Christian violence. In 2017, EFI documented 351 violent attacks, more than doubling the number of incidents in a span of only three years. Until the Indian government takes stronger action to combat this campaign of violence, attacks of this nature will only continue to grow in frequency and severity.
Ambush on Christians in Plateau State Leaves One Dead and One Injured

4 | NIGERIA On January 19, Fulani militants attacked two Christians as they were travelling home from a friend’s house. The militants shot at the two men, Alayos Vincent and Dung Vwos, around 7:00 in the evening. Mr. Vincent was severely injured and rushed to a nearby hospital, but unfortunately Mr. Vwos died at the scene of the ambush. Although the motive for the shooting is not yet clear, the attack took place as part of a continuing campaign of Fulani-led violence directed toward Christian communities. Sadly, the Nigerian government has continued to turn a blind eye to the thousands of people killed by Fulani attacks in recent years.

Kuwaiti Cleric Calls for Violence Towards Christians

5 | KUWAIT During a recent weekly fatwa session, Kuwaiti Islamic cleric Othman al-Khamis called on his followers to kill apostates. The cleric, who has a lengthy history of anti-Christian hate speech, asserted that apostates have committed a crime by leaving Islam and therefore deserve punishment. While defamation against Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, and the publication of material deemed offensive to religious groups, is technically prohibited in Kuwait, Islam is the official state religion and the country has a small Christian population. Many Christians throughout Kuwait report censoring their speech and behavior in order to avoid conflict with the religious majority.

Pakistan’s Supreme Court Confirms Asia Bibi’s Acquittal

6 | PAKISTAN On January 29, the Supreme Court of Pakistan confirmed the acquittal of Asia Bibi, a Christian woman sentenced to death for alleged blasphemy. Bibi’s case arose in 2009 following a dispute with her Muslim coworkers. Bibi’s coworkers grew angry when Bibi, a Christian whom they considered unclean, drank from the same water bowl as them. An argument ensued and the coworkers later reported to a local cleric that Bibi had blasphemed against Muhammad.

In response to this recent confirmation, Sajid Christopher, president of Human Friends Organization, told ICC, “Justice and truth [have] prevailed. Our hats are off to the judges. Asia is completely free now.”

At the time of writing, media reports indicate that Bibi remains in Pakistan while she awaits asylum elsewhere.

President Buhari Secures Re-election in Nigeria

3 | NIGERIA Muhammadu Buhari was re-elected on February 23, despite all of his failed promises in his first term. In 2015, he promised to increase security and end Boko Haram. As of now, neither has happened. Adversely, Boko Haram has regained strength, conducting increased large-scale attacks on communities in late 2018. They have pushed the Nigerian military off of bases, killed hundreds, and gained renewed strength and resources.

Similarly, Fulani militants have yet to be held accountable for attacks they conducted in 2018, during which nearly 2,000 people were killed. No Christian villages or lands that were stolen have been returned to their rightful owners. No government aid was given to Christian communities or families left devastated by continued violent attacks, despite billions of dollars in aid being given to the Muslim communities in northeastern Nigeria.

With this re-election, many Christians are concerned that they will have another four bloody years without justice or protection. Buhari must protect all of Nigeria’s citizens, including Christians, and must hold all those who commit these crimes accountable.
Egyptian Authorities Close Four Churches

1 | EGYPT Authorities recently closed four churches in different villages across Upper Egypt within a span of four and a half weeks. In each of these cases, the churches were seeking official recognition before they were targeted by hardline Islamic extremists. Once the mobs attacked the churches, the police denied the congregations of their right to publicly worship and closed the churches, giving in to the demands of the mobs.

A local priest, Father Sami, told ICC, “What happened frightened us. I am a priest and it is possible for the police to cuff me if the extremist neighboring Muslims protest or gathered in front of my church. Things are getting worse, but let us pray to make God keep us in peace.”

At the time of writing, authorities have taken no formal action against the attackers of these four churches. Rather, in one instance, the police arrested the church’s leaders and brought them to the police station in a car meant for carrying animals and garbage.

Ironically, the closures came only a week after President Fatah al-Sisi presented a new cathedral as a “gift” to Egypt’s Christian community. While many viewed the new church as a positive step forward, others criticized President al-Sisi for building a new church in a location where few Christians live, while other churches are suffering and closing because of restrictions enforced by his government.

Series of Attacks on Christians in Uganda Leaves Community in Fear

2 | UGANDA Two attacks in eastern Uganda have left the local Christian community in a state of fear. According to Morning Star News, in October of last year, a gang of Muslim villagers tore down a church led by a Muslim-background believer. It is suspected that the gang attacked because of the Muslim-background believer’s success in reaching the local Muslim population. Then, in December, a Christian woman was severely beaten only 15 miles away for holding Christian prayers in her home. When the woman refused to stop praying to Jesus, defying the demands of her attackers, they beat her with sticks, which led to injuries requiring hospitalization.

Residents Rally to Demand Church Closure in Indonesia

3 | INDONESIA On January 13, the masses gathered in Medan Labuhan Subdistrict in Indonesia’s North Sumatra to protest against a house that was allegedly converted into a place of worship for Bethel Indonesia Church. Video footage of the incident depicted protestors surrounding Pastor Jans Fransman Saragih’s home just prior to the Sunday service. The crowd proceeded to push and yell at church members, calling on them to shut down.

In response to the incident, one of the church members shared on social media, “We didn’t do things that were prohibited. Where is justice in this country? Where is our religious tolerance? God is with us.”

The head of the Medan Ministry of Religion Office confirmed that the house did not have permission to operate as a church, according to government regulations. However, it is very difficult for non-Muslim religious groups to obtain the necessary permits to construct places of worship in the predominantly Muslim nation. Although it is an ongoing debate, Christian leaders continue to call for changes to legislation regarding the obstacles that churches face while trying to obtain permits.

“Where is justice in this country? Where is our religious tolerance?”
Terrorist Bombing of Cathedral Kills at Least 20

4 | THE PHILIPPINES On January 27, two bombs detonated at a Catholic cathedral, killing at least 20 people and injuring more than 100 others. The first bomb exploded inside the church during Sunday Mass, while the second exploded shortly after on the church’s doorstep as security personnel rushed to the scene. On February 4, the Philippine National Police chief announced that the main suspect behind the attacks, along with several others involved, surrendered to the authorities following an intense manhunt operation.

Chinese Christians Forced to Choose Between Welfare Benefits or Belief

6 | CHINA According to Bitter Winter magazine, many elderly Christians in China have been forced to choose between their beliefs or their social benefits. Several elderly Christians in Henan province were reportedly approached by local officials, asking them to remove religious items from their homes and replace them with portraits of President Xi Jinping or Chairman Mao Zedong. The demand was made under the condition that if they were to comply, they would continue receiving welfare benefits.

One 60-year-old woman reported that the visiting deputy mayor and other officials visited her house and destroyed all of the Christian symbols in her home. Another believer in Yanjin County reported that local officials discovered that she was attending church gatherings and photographed her doing so. They then told her to abandon her beliefs, otherwise they would revoke her minimum living subsidy.

Five Christian Women Arrested in Iran

5 | IRAN As part of an ongoing crackdown on Christians in Iran, five Christian women who converted from Islam were recently arrested in Iran. While the identities of four of the women remain undisclosed, the fifth is a 65-year-old woman named Ruhsari Kamberi, who was arrested by intelligence officials in her home. She was later charged with “acting against national security,” and the prosecutor forced her to visit an Islamic leader who offered her the option to convert back to Islam.
Bringing Bibles to Laos

Laos is a communist country in Southeast Asia and Christians in the underground church community often face persecution for their faith. Unless you belong to a church that is registered with the government, it is difficult to obtain a Bible in Laos. Sadly, in many villages, members of officially registered churches persecute those from the house church movement.

ICC has connected with numerous house churches that have requested a total of 20,000 Lao Bibles for 2019 through 2020. With the help of generous donors, ICC printed and shipped the Bibles from Europe to a nearby Southeast Asian country for distribution.

Meanwhile, a new believer in northern Laos and his wife were struggling to maintain her health. She recently suffered from a stroke and was paralyzed, leaving her with poor vision and limited mobility.

After sharing the Word of God and praying for healing, we received a phone call from him and he stated that he was so grateful that we prayed and gave him a Bible. He said his wife was able to move part of her body and can now see much clearer.

It is a rare occurrence that he, as a military leader in a communist country, turned to Christ, as they are often demoted or pressured to leave the service if they don’t renounce Christ. On his own accord, he removed and torched the idols in his home. Now the couple is carrying out the Great Commission by praying for the sick and spreading the Gospel in their village. His wife has received many testimonies of people in her village being delivered, healed, and set free.
Winter Blankets for New Converts

**Suffering Wives & Children**

ICC has connected with a local pastor in Egypt who ministers in a neighborhood that has become a secret safe haven for Muslim-background believers (MBBs) who have fled their homes because of persecution. All of these believers have faced intense persecution because of their conversion from Islam. Their lives are at risk if they return home or if their location is discovered. They are currently living in desperate conditions, in small, unfurnished rooms where they sleep on hard paper boards on the floor. Most of them are day laborers with an unstable source of meager income, leaving most with little to no money.

ICC’s Regional Manager for the Middle East met with the local pastor who explained how the MBBs are suffering because of the drop in temperature. We provided him with the funds necessary to purchase blankets for 31 of the neediest MBBs. All of the blankets were made of a thick material created for both warmth and comfort.

Many cried upon receiving their blankets, while others hugged the pastor. Some even shouted, “God is so good!”

Relief Project for Pastor in India

**Underground Pastors**

Pastor Mukunda is an evangelist who ministers among five different villages in India. Last June, Pastor Mukunda was brutally beaten and hospitalized for praying with friends.

ICC immediately responded by covering the cost of his medical treatment. As he recovered, we also purchased a sewing machine and accessories for the family to develop a small sewing shop, groceries for two months, and clothing for his family.

Pastor Mukunda said, “Persecution is like [a] blessing for me. Everybody does not get this privilege, to suffer for His name sake. I am very happy to receive this assistance. [Until] now, everybody asked about the incident, but did not help. I needed money to buy medicines and [do] medical checkups. While I was wondering from where I will get help, God sent the help from where I never expected. With your approach, we are extremely encouraged to stand for the Lord Jesus Christ at any cost. I thank ICC from the bottom of my heart.”
Your Dollars at Work

School Fees for al-Shabaab Victim

Medical Care for Trinity in Indonesia

Rebuilding Iraq: School Well Construction

The terrorist group al-Shabaab attacked Garissa University in April of 2015. The gunmen killed 148 students and wounded approximately 80 others. The terrorists separated the students by religion, releasing the Muslims, while proceeding to murder the Christians.

Rachael was among the students attacked for her faith. She suffered seven gunshot wounds to her chest, leg, and back that rendered her unable to walk despite multiple surgeries. Against all worldly logic and human nature, she has forgiven her persecutors.

Her family was faced with a pile of medical bills from local and international hospitals. Because of this, they were unable to fully pay for her college tuition. ICC stepped in to pay for a portion of her tuition so that she could finish her degree in Counseling Psychology and relieve some of the financial burden on her family.

A church in Indonesia experienced a bombing in 2016 that killed one child and left several others injured. The attacker intended to cause more damage; however, his bomb detonated in an area where the church’s toddlers were playing instead.

Trinity was four years old when she was severely burned by the explosion and endured psychological trauma. As a result of her injuries, Trinity’s family has had to travel to China for medical treatment because the local hospitals were unable to meet all of her needs. ICC provided the funds for airfare to China so that this little girl could find healing and hope. Trinity’s mother expressed, “I thank God because His mercy endureth...God put love in everyone’s heart to take care of us.”

ISIS invaded Qaraqosh in 2014, resulting in the displacement of most of the Christians living in the area. Families are beginning to return home now that the city has been liberated from ISIS. However, returning to the city is a challenge because much of the city’s infrastructure was destroyed during the invasion.

Clean water is a major concern for the inhabitants. Currently, water is sourced from Mosul, but it is dirty and inconsistent. Additionally, officials in Mosul will cut off water in Qaraqosh first if there is a shortage. We helped develop a well at a local school in Qaraqosh that can serve both the student population of over 200 and the broader community. Hope is being renewed among believers throughout Qaraqosh as their hometown is slowly being restored.
ICC Rescues a Widow Fired for Refusing to Convert and Marry a Muslim

Zaima, a recent widow with little income to feed her children, was forced to take on her husband’s job as a temporary sanitary worker at a government facility. Soon after, Zaima was fired from her position. She was accused of demanding a permanent position and various other incentives, but the reality is far more sinister. Zaima reported that an officer at her job pressured her to convert to Islam and marry him. When she refused and held fast to her Christian faith, she was fired, leaving her without a source of income to provide for her children.

ICC joined hands with local partners to develop a small business for Zaima so that she can earn a sustainable living in a safe environment. We helped develop a small firewood business for Zaima by providing her with two trolleys of firewood, an electric scale, a wood cutter, other accessories, and a rented shop. This simple, yet effective, business model will allow Zaima to regain a source of income in a dignified manner.

Zaima shared, “I never hoped or expected to get so much in life. It is God’s providence. He has listened to my cry.” After expressing her thanks to those who made this business possible, she continued, “I shall make use of the opportunity to prosper and grow in life. We shall be a happy family now.”
In cases of persecution, one of the most common effects is a loss of income. When a family’s breadwinner is injured, imprisoned, or killed, the family is forced to deal with the reality of finding a new source of income. Worse still, the families in these situations often live in countries that make it difficult for Christians to obtain jobs. ICC developed the Suffering Wives and Children fund to assist families that have been devastated by persecution by supporting them in tangible ways, while preserving their dignity.

In Egypt, a Christian woman named Nawal was widowed after her husband was killed when his bus, headed toward the Monastery of St. Samuel, was attacked. With three young children, including one with medical concerns, Nawal was left to care for the family on her own.

ICC stepped in to help this young family get back on their feet financially. ICC provided Nawal with seven sheep for her to raise and sell to support her family. The money that she earns will enable her to buy more sheep, and...
Livestock businesses are an effective and sustainable way of helping persecuted families recover financially.

Above: ICC often provides food aid and other tangible necessities when persecuted families need immediate relief.

continue the livestock business as a sustainable source of income. Although we cannot erase the pain of loss, these efforts will lift the financial burden from the shoulders of this grieving family.

In addition to business assistance, ICC also helps persecuted families by providing immediate relief. In India, a Christian father named Samuel was accused and imprisoned on false charges of burning a Hindu home. As Samuel was also his family’s breadwinner, they have had to adjust to their new circumstances and seek a new source of income while he is in jail.

During this season of transition, ICC joined hands with the family to provide for their immediate needs. We delivered one month’s supply of basic necessities such as rice, wheat powder, spices, and toiletries. Samuel’s wife shared, “We had faced so many troubles for following Jesus in the last couple of years, but in every trouble God helped us to overcome… I am so thankful for ICC and all those who are standing with me during this troubling time.”

ICC has partnered with Christian communities all over the world to support families that have been affected by the sting of persecution. However, this work would not be possible without the generous support of donors.

If you would like to donate to support persecuted families or learn more about ICC’s Suffering Wives & Children fund, please visit www.persecution.org or give us a call at 1-800-ICC-5441.
When Ayatollah Khomeini and his band of radical Islamists took over Iran in 1979, fundamentalist Islamic theology infiltrated every nook and cranny of Iran.

By design, Islam is more than a religion. It is an ideology that, when fused together with statecraft, has the potential to impact all aspects of life for Iranians – especially Iranian Christians.

In Iran, any practice that contradicts Islam is regarded as a national security threat, punished severely by the court system.

Legal Oppression in Iran

Revolutionary courts were created to guard against all threats to Islam. These courts have evolved into a well-oiled machine of oppression that operates with impunity under state protection. The courts are closely intertwined with the Intelligence Ministry. Judges have at their disposal Revolutionary Guards (secret police) and a network of prisons used to torture and interrogate Christians.

“If you recant and repent, you’ll go to jail. And if you don’t, you’ll be killed.” said Dr. Mike Ansari from Heart4Iran, an Iranian Christian ministry. The penal code lacks guidance for the judiciary regarding Muslim converts. Christians may be looking at large fines, detention, lengthy prison sentences, or even execution under Islamic Sharia law.

The sentences of Christian converts are left up to the interpretation of the judge and may be founded on anything – the judge’s mood that day, what he had for breakfast, his interpretation of Sharia law, or his level of hatred toward Christianity.
Judge Mashallah Ahmadzadeh

Judge Mashallah Ahmadzadeh (JMA) is one of Iran’s top human rights abusers.

JMA is a trained Islamic clergyman who was hand-selected by the Judicial Chief for the position. His desire to crush the Church has earned him notoriety—and promotion. Many Christians have passed through his court into the prison system. He has used the full power of the state in his quest to crush the Iranian Church and force Christians to recant.

Amin Naderi, a Muslim-background believer, was a target of JMA. Naderi was arrested in 2016 when secret police raided a garden party attended by 17 Christians. For months after his arrest, his status was unknown. Eventually, he was discovered to be detained in Evin Prison. The authorities were hiding him in a ward which, by Iran’s own laws, he should not have been kept in.

Naderi would later publicly ask the authorities, “If we (Christians) are actually what you say we are and we have insulted your religious beliefs and if your judicial process from the time of arrest to interrogation and court sessions were all lawful, then why are you hiding us from people?”

Naderi’s stay in Evin Prison took a significant toll on his health. Over the next year, Naderi’s court case was pending before JMA. His false witness majorly contributed to Naderi’s treatment in prison. He was aware of the interrogations, the medical abuse, and the psychological impact, and he continued to testify against Naderi.

“I haven’t done anything wrong and have been deprived of basic needs,” said Naderi in an open letter. “However, I’ve always prayed for you to be fair and just. Not only did you not stick to any of your promises you gave in the court, in front of the pastor, my family, and all the people who were present, you hated me more and more every day.”

JMA sought to crush Naderi. He sentenced him to 10 years in prison for “violating national security,” including an additional five-year prison sentence for “insulting Islamic sanctities.” Naderi earned the extra sentence by posting to Facebook about the price of chicken with a Quranic style of writing. Naderi is currently appealing his sentence and has been temporarily released from prison.

Meanwhile, JMA continues with his attacks on the Church. It’s impossible to know the exact number of Christians who have suffered at his hands, but dozens are believed to be currently facing charges in his court.

Evin Prison: The Engine of Church Growth

Two hundred and fifty Christians like Naderi have been swallowed up and (some) spit out by Evin Prison, the most notorious prison in Iran. As reports of horrific suffering under abominable conditions surface, the Church may be tempted to hysteria. After all, the Church is the primary target of the Iranian court system. However, Church growth in Iran has been expanding alongside, in spite of, and perhaps because of government persecution. God has thwarted Satan’s attempts to use the Iranian court system for evil. Iranian Christians have been converting from Islam by the thousands! Evin Prison does not spell out death for the Church in Iran; it’s the engine of Church growth.

ICC Taking Action

ICC is calling on the United States government to hold the Iranian court system accountable for its cruel injustice. For the past year, ICC has been compiling records on Christians who have endured unjust and violent abuse within Evin Prison. ICC submitted detailed documents tracing the abuse of Christian prisoners for further review by the U.S. Department of Treasury. Should this human rights abuse be taken seriously by the U.S. government, the judges’ actions and travel power will be severely limited under the Global Magnitsky Act.

ICC will soon be releasing more information in an exclusive series on Iran, featuring stories from victims, descriptions of Evin Prison, and information regarding the plight of the greater Church in Iran.
If I could [have] but one privilege in my life, it would be this,” said Kirollos*, International Christian Concern’s Hope House Center Coordinator.

We started Hope House because we wanted to break the cycle of persecution and change persecuted communities. Most of our ministry to the persecuted exists to bandage the victims. That work will never end for us or any organization focused on persecution.

Yet, we wanted to change the dynamic on the ground so that Christian communities would move forward and out of persecution. Much of persecution is tied to generational poverty that’s linked to job discrimination, poor education, and lack of access to capital. So we focus on those factors.

Three years later, Egypt’s Hope House has exceeded our expectations.

Our core focus is on education for the next generation. For efficiency, we didn’t want to start schools (very expensive and long-term). Therefore, we focused on after-school programs centered on learning English, proper Arabic, math, and computer skills. Underlying all of this, we build up the students spiritually.

With well over 100 students regularly attending last year, Hope House is having a real impact on the lives of many children.

Seven-year-old Jesse is one of the many students currently thriving at Hope House. Jesse’s father is forced to travel to Kuwait for work to provide for Jesse’s mother and two sisters, a sad result of Egypt’s shrinking job market. Left alone in Upper Egypt, the family of Christian women faces constant pressure from their hardline Muslim neighbors.

Hope House has given Jesse wings, enabling her to look past the social stigma against Christians and dream big for the future that awaits. “I have learned how to read and write better,” she said. She is one of the best performing students in her grade and aspires to become a doctor when she grows up.

Jesse’s story is consistent with many other students attending Hope House. “We try to [help] students to have dreams, and to love education,” explained Kirollos.

It is challenging. Culture tells these Christian children that they will forever be second-class citizens, and that dreams have no place in their lives. The educational system is substandard and leaves students unprepared for modern life.

Hope House is constantly adapting to reflect the needs of each class of students. “There are a lot of students who don’t read or write well,” said Kirollos. “We started using a new teaching method that depends on vocalization of the alphabet. [Now], we have some students in the first and second primary who can read and write very well.” As a second primary student, Jesse is one of many students who has excelled through this tailored educational approach.

Mariam is another student who has greatly benefited through Hope House. “I don’t like my [official] school as I can’t understand the lessons which are being taught by the teachers...”

“We try to [help] students to have dreams, and to love education.”
– KIROLOS, HOPE HOUSE CENTER COORDINATOR
there,” she shared with ICC. “[Hope House] here is good. I feel that I understand everything that is being taught to me.”

Amin, another student, echoed this feeling. “At [Hope House], if I don’t understand any information during the explanation of any lesson, I can ask the teacher and he clearly reinterprets it many times until I understand it very well. But at my [official] school, the teachers don’t do that.”

With so many students in need, Hope House is a constant bustle of activity. Students constantly whirl between Arabic, English, computer, and math classes.

Hope House also has a program that serves illiterate women, many of whom are mothers of the students. Microfinance loans are available to the mothers and fathers of the children, giving the parents the chance to start their own businesses. Hope House is actively building up an entire Christian community, giving Christians the tools and capital they need to thrive in an otherwise hostile country.

Without Hope House, many of these beneficiaries would be stuck in a cycle of generational poverty and limited opportunity, perpetuated by a culture of religious discrimination. It is for this reason that Kirolos counts Hope House as his life’s greatest privilege.

*Name changed for security*
An Outcast in Uganda*

“No burial rites for you, a kaffir [infidel],” a Muslim villager said to Muhammad Gusolo, his words laced with scorn. In Uganda, burial rites are a society’s way of mourning the dead and properly placing the body into the grave. The removal of this rite was just one of many threats that Gusolo received from his friends and family in the first few weeks after launching his Christian ministry in his hometown, the Masaba village of Uganda.

After Muhammad Gusolo accepted Jesus as his savior in late 2017, God placed a burden on his heart to share the Gospel with his friends and family in his Muslim village. Initially, Gusolo’s conversion to Christianity was not met with pushback in the community. He continued to tend to his banana plantation and provided for his wife and six children, all under the age of ten.

This changed when Gusolo opened the doors of his home to study the Word of God in October 2018. Gusolo’s Bible study not only rocked the boat in the village – it tipped it over and threats began pouring in.

Even Gusolo’s family treated him like a criminal. His father, Mujenya Gusolo Zibail, grimly informed him that he would not receive his inheritance or be welcomed back onto the family land. The action of moving his faith from private to public threatened the local religious leaders, and Gusolo became a target.
These were not empty threats. On December 7, a mosque leader turned a mob on Gusolo’s banana plantation, destroying it. Gusolo fled from the village the next morning, terrified for his life. Even his Muslim wife refused to join him. She stayed behind in the village with Gusolo’s father, but he kicked her out a few weeks later when he caught the children singing Christian songs.

“My wife and children also turned against me,” Gusolo said. “I am a very frustrated man with no family. After being ostracized from my community, I have appealed for help to the government administration, but this has fallen on deaf ears. I am very far from my family and reside in a lonely environment in another village.”

Despite these dire circumstances, Gusolo is placing his faith in a heavenly inheritance, trusting God to provide, but he feels very alone.

* Original reporting by Morning Star News

**Extremists Infiltrate Uganda**

Gusolo is not the only Christian to be ostracized from his community in Uganda.

To the average outsider, Uganda does not look like the typical persecution site. Uganda’s religious makeup is primarily Christian; out of 42 million people in Uganda, only 15% are Muslim.

However, a Muslim extremist group from the Congo known as the Alliance of Democratic Forces (ADF) has reportedly infiltrated Uganda to start a propaganda campaign. The campaign is specifically geared toward generating anti-Christian sentiment across the nation. So far, it’s working.

This change has amped up persecution in Uganda, with reports of attacks spreading across the nation. The UN reports that most ADF members are Islamists seeking to establish Sharia law in Uganda.

**Taking in the Refugees**

The Ugandan Church is providing refuge for exposed converts in the absence of government intervention. ICC recently travelled to Uganda and met with several pastors who were hosting hundreds of Muslim-background believers. Our team travelled through villages in western and eastern Uganda, listening to stories of persecuted believers.

Ayub’s mother was poisoned for converting from Islam to Christianity in 2011; his father chased him and his siblings from their home. They were eventually adopted by Christian families.

Another believer, Dorcas, and her children were chased away by her Muslim husband after they accepted Christ and started going to an evangelical church. The whole family has changed their names to avoid being identified by sheikh assassins.

Bwambare and Mumbere’s father was poisoned by Muslim friends following his conversion. Their Muslim mother deserted them and married her late husband’s friend.

Pastor Stephen’s house was burned by the local Muslim community for preaching the Gospel and taking in two Muslim-background believers after they were threatened.

Tom was stoned by Muslims during open air evangelism.

The testimonies are seemingly endless, but we must not forget that there are real people behind these stories. Though the future for Christians in Uganda is under threat, the Church is helping new converts with shelter and training.

International Christian Concern is teaming up with local churches and individuals to provide assistance and raise awareness about the plight of Christians in Uganda. As 2019 progresses, stay tuned to learn more about ICC’s upcoming initiatives in Uganda.
By William Stark

India is truly a nation of nations. Currently home to over 1.2 billion people, the United Nations estimates that India will become the world’s most populated nation by 2022. Despite its international prominence, India is also still home to literally millions of unreached communities just waiting to hear the Gospel’s radical and liberating message for the first time.

What’s limiting the Gospel’s reach in India? Persecution is definitely a factor. Radical Hindu nationalists and discriminatory laws written by their political leaders limiting religious conversion play an active role in restricting the Gospel’s reach.

However, the Kingdom is expanding through Indian evangelists and church planters who are willing to walk for days to reach and disciple the unreached.

In November of last year, ICC asked its donors to empower these dedicated evangelists to birth 6,000 new churches in India’s unreached regions through our “Bibles and Bikes” campaign.

Pastor Samson is one of the pastors we supported through this campaign. He comes from a low caste family in India’s Odisha state. “Before my salvation, I did not have any goal in my life,” Pastor Samson shared. “I was involved in all kinds of bad habits like smoking, drinking, and gambling. My parents were not happy to have me as a son.”

“One day I became very sick, but God sent a pastor to pray over me and I was healed,” Pastor Samson continued. “After that, I found the goal for my life.”

“After five years of training, I started to do outreach ministry,” Pastor Samson explained. “God gave me a vision to do ministry in places where no Christian has ever gone before. But, I had a problem. Reaching these interior villages was very difficult as I could hardly ever find any means of transportation.”

“For one particular village, I would have to walk seven to eight kilometers,” Pastor Samson recalled. “Sometimes, when I would get tired, I would try to get a lift from local drivers. Once, a driver stopped and asked me [where I was going]. I told him, ‘I am coming to preach about Jesus Christ.’ Without a word, he started up [the] vehicle and left.”

“I tried again to get a lift and another driver picked me up,” Pastor Samson said. “On the way, however, he asked me about the purpose of my visit. When I told him that I was a preacher and was coming to preach about Christianity, he suddenly stopped, kicked me off of his motorcycle, and yelled at me. This has happened to me three other times.”

“Due to this challenge, I began praying for transportation of my own,” Pastor Samson said. “After just a couple of months, [ICC provided me with] a bicycle for free! I was taken by surprise and joy filled my heart.”

“With this bicycle, I can visit the unreached villages anytime and with increased frequency.”

- PASTOR SAMSON

Samson’s story is just one of the thousands of stories of hope and victory that have come from the Bibles and Bikes campaign. ICC’s Bibles and Bikes campaign will ultimately provide 1,000 church planters and evangelists with their own bikes and 100 Bibles each.

By investing only $200 in them, we double or triple their effectiveness!

Our goal was to raise $200,000 and, so far, the response to the Bibles and Bikes initiative has been huge! At the time of writing (February 2019), ICC has raised over $100,000 and equipped 240 evangelists hailing from eight of India’s 29 states.

While these statistics represent an impressive start, they do not truly communicate the impact that this initiative is having on the ground.

We still need to raise $100,000, so if the Lord moves your heart, please join us as we spread life to India.

Learn More and Donate: https://www.persecution.org/bibles-bikes/

God’s ministry without any hindrance.”

With just $200, we can empower passionate evangelists like Pastor Samson, giving them their own means of transportation and 100 copies of the Word of God. The meaningful support is already having a deep impact in India’s rural regions, helping to bring the Gospel to the ends of the earth.
Left: Pastor Samson receives his new bicycle from ICC.

Right: An evangelist holds a Bible that was purchased as part of the Bibles and Bikes initiative.

Bottom: This bicycle purchased for Pastor Samson allows him to more effectively minister to unreached communities in India’s Odisha state.
ICC LAUNCHES NEW AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

Are you passionate about the persecuted Church?
Do you want to serve your suffering brothers and sisters in Christ?
Then join ICC’s new volunteer ambassador program!
Raising Our Voice

Religious persecution is a worldwide problem, spanning hundreds of miles, thousands of cultures, and millions of people. Yet the cries of our suffering brothers and sisters in Christ often go unheard by the Western Church. The persecuted are silenced by their governments, denied access to media outlets, limited technologically, or misrepresented as threats. The persecuted Church needs your help to expand its voice to the West.

ICC’s Volunteers

ICC has nearly 200 active volunteers across 37 states and 30 countries who represent the persecuted Church in a variety of ways. They attend awareness and advocacy events, distribute literature, pray for the Church, volunteer at ICC’s headquarters, and speak at events.

One of ICC’s faithful volunteers, Scott, serves the persecuted by sharing Persecution magazine with his church from the pulpit each month. He encourages the church to pray for the highlighted country, group, or cause and encourages them to subscribe to ICC’s magazine to bring awareness to those who “share our faith, but not our freedom.”

In March, Scott hosted two North Korean defectors at his church in New York. The testimonies of these two women were “heartbreaking and inspirational.” Scott says, “We are commanded numerous times in the New Testament to remember and pray for our persecuted brothers and sisters around the world. Being part of a free nation where Christian resources are in abundance and churches [are] on every street corner, we are obligated to help in a [multitude] of ways, including giving, supporting, advocating, writing letters of encouragement, and speaking on behalf of persecuted Christians.”

Another volunteer, Sunday, still remembers his experience with ICC in 2015. He keyed in reports about insurgency in Nigeria for ICC and watched as they later developed into petitions.

He says, “The Bible calls us to be a voice for the voiceless in Psalm 82. As Christians, we are called to take a stand for our persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ. Hebrews 13:3 says, ‘Continue to remember those in prison…’ We are to be a voice to the downtrodden and persecuted. We are like their eyes to the world.”

Another one of ICC’s volunteers, Pastor Vandi, has tirelessly educated the citizens of Sierra Leone about persecuted Christians all over the world. He developed a ministry to raise awareness about persecution throughout local schools, churches, colleges, and police facilities.

Pastor Vandi says, “The pain of the persecuted brothers and sisters can never be distant, since we are called to be one body in Christ Jesus…Since our brothers and sisters around the world are passing through horrible suffering daily, I felt their sufferings as a part of the body.”

Ambassadors: Our New Volunteer Program

If you care about ministry to the persecuted, you know that most of the Western Church is asleep on the issue since it’s not spoken of in the press.

That’s where you come in. We want to help you to become an ambassador for God’s persecuted Church by joining our new volunteer ambassador program.

We want to train and equip you to defend the persecuted Church and to be an ambassador on their behalf in your circle of influence, whether at church, among friends and family, or on social media.

Participants in our Ambassador program will be the first to hear about ICC’s new initiatives and projects overseas with the persecuted Church. ICC will provide you with free materials, including exclusive stories, prayer guides, literature, and more.

We want you to gather with like-minded believers where you can meet the persecuted, ICC leaders, and your fellow ambassadors from around the world.

We will be launching the Ambassador program mid-year 2019, so please sign up now if you are interested. Signing up means you have an interest, not that you are committed, so please go to www.persecution.org/take-action/volunteer and fill out an application today.
International Christian Concern (ICC) is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) (all donations tax-deductible). ICC makes every effort to honor donor wishes in regards to gifts. Occasionally, situations arise where a project is no longer viable. ICC will then redirect those donated funds to the fund most similar to the donor’s original wishes. ICC uses 7.5 percent of each restricted donation to carry out the mission of its segregated funds.

© Copyright 2019 ICC, Washington, D.C., USA. All rights reserved. Permission to reproduce all or part of this publication is granted provided attribution is given to ICC as the source.