

PERSECUTION

BRICK BY BRICK

CHRISTIAN FAMILIES ARE TRAPPED IN PAKISTAN'S BRICK KILNS FOR GENERATIONS. WE'RE HELPING THEM BREAK THE CYCLE.



INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN CONCERN

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JUNE 2024

ON THE COVER

A woman stacks one of the hundreds of bricks she must make every day in one of Pakistan's brick kilns. These kilns rely on the age-old, physically demanding practice of making bricks by hand. Christian families are often forced to work in these poor conditions. iStock / D. Talukdar

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OUR MISSION: Since 1996, ICC has served the global persecuted church through a three-pronged approach of advocacy, awareness, and assistance. ICC exists to bandage the wounds of persecuted Christians and to build the church in the toughest parts of the world.

DONATIONS: 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 their gifts. Occasionally, a situation will arise where a project is no longer viable. ICC will redirect those donated funds to one of our other funds that is most similar to the donor's original wishes.



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Rescue Pakistan!

Modern day slavery ... what else do you call it? In Pakistan, as an uneducated Christian, there are often three main job choices:

- Street sweeper
- Sewer worker, where the waste of the city flows
- Brick kiln worker, where you are enslaved by your debt and can never break free

All of these are menial jobs at the bottom rung of society and several of these jobs cannot be filled by Muslims (these jobs are for the slaves only).

Christians suffer terrible job and educational discrimination (by design) and remain trapped as semi-slaves to their captors.

To help, some organizations pay the debts of the brick kiln workers to rescue them. This is done sincerely but it enriches the owners of the brick kilns. It merely creates the illusion of saving believers, but the Christians end up going back to work in the kilns, as it's all they know!

We've worked in Pakistan for 20 plus years and have seen all the tricks! So, here's what we do! We only work with those whose debts have been paid.

We then give them a simple readymade business that will work regardless of their skills or entrepreneurial ability to keep them out of the kilns for good. We've seen families have great success with giving them motorized rickshaws that they use as taxis or business delivery services.

We are committed to ending the slavery of believers in Pakistan and are incredibly grateful for your partnership in this life-changing ministry!

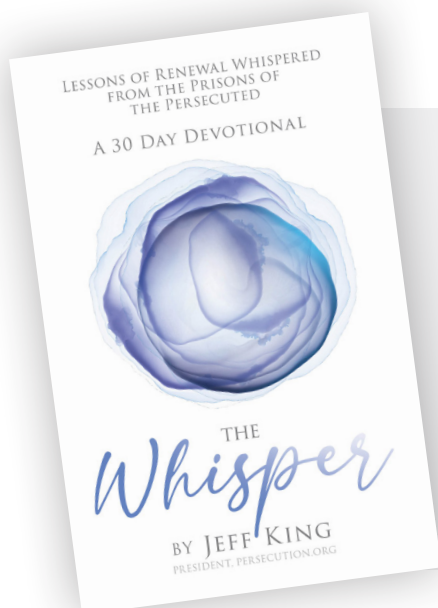
JEFF



Jeff King, President

International Christian Concern

Author: *The Whisper (NEW!)*, *The Last Words of the Martyrs*, and *Islam Uncensored*



Discover the Life-Changing Lessons of the Persecuted

ICC President and author Jeff King has released his third book, *The Whisper*. In this 30-day devotional, King presents stories of persecuted believers and unpacks their spiritual wisdom as they walk with the Lord through trials and triumphs. How are they able to endure such suffering and remain joyful in the Lord? What lessons can we learn from them?

Visit www.persecution.org/books

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ICC Newsroom

YOUR SOURCE FOR PERSECUTION NEWS



BREAKING NEWS

ADF Militants Attack Village Midday, Kill at Least Seven People

At least seven people were killed on Tuesday, April 2, as members of the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) carried out a midday attack on the village of Mangodumu, located in Mangina, Beni territory, in DRC's North Kivu province.

Nicaise Kyora, president of the youth parliament of Mangina, confirmed the deaths, adding that others were taken hostage, and the local Christian health center had been looted and set on fire.

"The rebels entered Mangina without being noticed," Kyora explained. "It was at the Ballon roundabout that it crackled with bullets in the air. At least seven people were killed, including a woman.

After the ADFs went to the [health] center of Mangodumu, which they looted before burning it down, some nurses were taken hostage."

In recent times, the ADF has violently targeted Christian hospitals and churches in DRC to disrupt peace and stability in the region. One such devastating incident occurred at the CECA 20 (Evangelical Community of Central Africa) hospital of Mangodumu, where the ADF militants set the facility on fire, leading to considerable damage and chaos. Tragically, some nurses working at the hospital also went missing following this attack.

Tensions Remain as Negotiations Stall over the Armenia-Azerbaijan Border

Tensions in the South Caucasus remain high as negotiations stall over the disputed territory along the Armenia-Azerbaijan border. Despite the ethnic-Armenian forces within the Nagorno-Karabakh/Artsakh region surrendering to the Azerbaijani military in September 2023, a formal peace treaty between Baku and Yerevan has not yet been finalized.

On March 16, Azerbaijani officials demanded that Yerevan cede four villages near the Gazakh region in the former's northwest and the Tavush region in the latter's northeast. Baku also claims four other villages — three of which are within Armenian territory in the north and the fourth in Armenian territory in the south.

Azerbaijanis inhabited these eight villages before Armenia took control of the territory during the first armed conflict in the late 1980s/early 1990s.



State in Heart of India Sees Highest Number of Attacks Against Christians

The Central Indian state of Chhattisgarh tops the list of Indian states with the highest number of attacks against Christians so far this year, according to a press release from United Christian Forum (UCF).

A total of 161 incidents of violence against Christians were reported from January through March 15 via the helpline of the New Delhi-based civil society organization, which focuses on Christians in India. Of this number, 47 incidents of violence and discrimination were reported from Chhattisgarh.

Across India, there were 70 incidents of violence against Christians in January, followed by 62 incidents in February, according to the press release. Another 29 incidents occurred during the first 15 days of March.

The incidents include a wide range of violence, including attacks on churches and prayer meetings, physical assaults, harassment, ostracization, limiting access to community resources, and false allegations, particularly those pertaining to “forced conversions.”

Al-Shabab Kills Christians During Multiple Attacks in Kenya

During the morning of Tuesday, April 9, suspected al-Shabab members killed a farmer in Bobo, Hindi, a Christian village in Kenya that the Islamic extremist group attacked in 2022.

Later that afternoon, the militants barricaded a road in the Milihoi area in Lamu County, a route between Mpeketoni and Hindi they travel often. They shot two travelers and set several vehicles on fire.

Lamu West Deputy County Commissioner Gabriel Kioni confirmed the attack and

stated that only one person had died and that two people suffered minor injuries.

Security officers responded quickly to the attack and pursued the extremists but were unable to apprehend them. After additional security officers arrived, vehicles traveling through Lamu were stopped and inspected.

“We spent the night awake and alert since we know that the terrorists like attacking during or at the end of the holy month of Ramadan,” an ICC staffer said.



U.S. Officials Voice Concern for Vietnamese Religious Freedom Advocates

The U.S. State Department expressed deep concerns for the ongoing harassment, persecution, and convictions of Vietnamese religious freedom advocates, in an April 1 statement.

In the release, the State Department addressed the case of Protestant missionary Y Krec Bya, who received a 13-year sentence for allegedly “sabotaging national unity” in Vietnam.

International Christian Concern has highlighted several of these cases in recent years, particularly regarding ethnic minority Christian groups like the Montagnards.

The State Department is calling for the release of these prisoners and for the ruling Vietnamese Party to respect freedom of association, assembly, and religion.



West Watch

ISSUES INVOLVING CHRISTIANITY IN THE WEST

Scotland Passes Bill Outlawing Hate Speech, Effectively Limiting the Rights of Religious Groups

On April 1, the Scottish Parliament officially passed the Hate Crime and Public Order Act, which creates restrictions punishing hate speech. The act, which received mass criticism in Scotland, defines the offense as a person either behaving “in a manner that a reasonable person would consider to be threatening, abusive or insulting, or communicat[ing] to another person material that a reasonable person would consider to be threatening.”

Once the legal counsel meets this portion of the offense, they must prove that the offender either intended to “stir up hatred against a group of persons based on the group being defined by reference to race, color, nationality, or ethnic or national origins” or “a reasonable person would consider the behavior or the communication of the material to be likely to result in hatred being stirred up against such a group.”

While the limits defined by the bill may seem extreme and unreasonable, other countries with Hate Speech laws, such as the United Kingdom and others across the European Union, have prosecuted Christians for voicing their opinions regarding issues of gender or sexuality. While many would not perceive the actions as threatening or harmful, others continually express personal offense they take by the words of others. While no bill is perfect, the Hate Crime and Public Order Act does provide the right to freedom of expression guaranteed by the European Convention on Human Rights, which protects “ideas that offend, shock, or disturb.”

Protection of human rights and freedom of speech is a top priority for many Western democracies, including the United States. However, with continued advances toward broadening the definitions and punishments for hate speech, the West is experiencing a deterioration in the practice of freedom of thought, conscience, and speech.



NCAA Women's Coach Criticized for Sharing Her Beliefs

The Freedom From Religion Foundation publicly criticized the University of South Carolina for the statements made by Dawn Staley, head coach of the University's women's basketball team. Staley, a devout Christian, frequently makes bold statements about the provisions of God when interviewed about the team's performance. In a recent interview after the team's win in the final four, Staley said, “If you don't believe in God, something's wrong with you.” In response to these words and Staley's continued

profession of her faith, Co-President of FFRF, Annie Lauri Gaylor, told reporters that; “Coach Staley is coercing her students to adopt religion even beyond the ‘pray to play’ notion. Her insults to all those who don't believe in her particular religion cannot be countenanced by a public university.” Following the FFRF's public call for the University to regulate Staley's statements, Staley posted on social media platform X (formerly Twitter), “If you're a nonbeliever, it wasn't for you. Wish you well with your beliefs.”



What Putin's Re-Election Means for Christians

President Vladimir Putin of Russia was re-elected on March 15 for his fifth presidential term. Ruling for nearly a quarter-century, Putin received 87% of the vote in the election.

Once Putin reaches the end of his fifth term, he will be the longest-serving Russian leader since Catherine the Great, who ruled in the 18th century. Generally, religious freedom issues in Russia do not significantly affect the largest Christian denomination present in the country. Approximately 71% of Russia's population identifies as Orthodox Christians, which is Putin's professed religion. While Orthodoxy is one religion protected under the constitution, the government simultaneously prohibits violating public order and extremist activity, which are not defined.

Religious groups that typically endure government persecution include Protestants and Roman Catholics. NGO groups have reported several attacks on protestant churches and confiscations of religious literature. Russian officials frequently arrest missionaries for "illegal" work, including the recent arrest of a South Korean Christian missionary.

Additionally, religious persecution of Ukrainians remains high during the time of war between the two countries. Several NGOs reported the detention and deaths of specifically protestant civilians in the city of Mariupol in March of 2022.

Despite the legal freedom of religion protected in the constitution, actions that the Putin regime interprets as criticism have resulted in severe punishment. The continued suppression of all freedoms, including freedom of religion, is expected because of the new election. Despite Putin's claim as the protector of Christianity, the limitations placed on Russian citizens to act on free will limit the scope of human free will generally.



H.R.3012

North Korean Human Rights Reauthorization Act of 2023

The reauthorization of the North Korean Human Rights Act of 2004, originally introduced by Rep. Young Kim of California, discusses several issues of the perpetuation of human rights issues, including that of religious freedom. Under subsection 10 of the "Findings" portion of the bill, it says, "North Korea continues to bar freedom of religion and persecute religious minorities, especially Christians. Eyewitnesses report that Christians in North Korea have been tortured, forcibly detained, and even executed for possessing a Bible or professing Christianity." The recognition and continued emphasis on issues of religious freedom in North Korea by Rep. Kim highlights the atrocities against Christians particularly. In place since 2004, the reauthorization of the North Korean Human Rights Act would express grave concern on behalf of the United States and enforce the continued fight against the oppressive regime currently active in North Korea.



Your Hands and Feet

ICC PROJECTS MADE POSSIBLE BY OUR SUPPORTERS



The Promise of Living Water

AFRICA

Rufinah met her husband, Boniface, years ago in a Kenyan town near the Somalia border. Boniface, a water-drilling machine assistant operator, worked tirelessly to help more people access safe drinking water in Somalia.

On Sept. 30, 2022, al-Shabab killed Boniface, three of his friends, and four nonlocal Christians at a water drilling site. Rufinah, who was pregnant at the time, was left devastated. Soon, she delivered their baby and started raising the sweet boy on her own.

Without any means to financially support herself or her son, Rufinah soon fell into despair. But then she became friends with an International Christian Concern (ICC) staff member. ICC provided Rufinah with materials to open a shop to sell household goods. Rufinah can now provide for herself and her son, ensuring a more secure path for their family.

“I am immensely grateful for ICC’s unwavering support and kindness,” Rufinah said. “They’ve been like guardian angels to us by providing hope and encouragement during our darkest days. Thank you, ICC, for your compassion and generosity. You’ve given us the strength to face the future with hope and optimism.”

We praise God that following the loss of Boniface, the man who provided water for so many, the Lord has brought living water to the lives of Rufinah and her son. It is a reminder of Christ’s words in John 4:14: “But whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

We praise God that the Lord so clearly provided for Rufinah in her time of need, proving his omnipotence and faithfulness.



A Father's Love

MIDDLE EAST

Benjamin suffers from a disability that makes it very difficult for him to find work, and often resorts to begging on the streets. A few years ago, his wife had an affair with a Muslim neighbor, and she eventually divorced Benjamin and married the neighbor. Benjamin refused to let the children live with their mother and convert to Islam but was forced to move and rent a new apartment that he struggles to pay. ICC helped set him up with a small grocery store to generate a living for his family and pay rent.

Benjamin was overwhelmed with tears while thanking God for his gifts to the family. He told us, "God looked at my broken heart and sympathized with me, and I am not sad for what my wife did and I forgive her. All I care about is raising my children in fear of God. Please remember my family in your prayers."

His mother cried and said, "Benjamin is a good man and he suffered a lot because of his wife, and there are still many challenges ahead of him in raising his children. Thank you for the support you gave him."

Our staff implementing the project said that although he is very poor and disabled, he refused to abandon his children and leave them with their mother. "My children were born Christians and will remain Christians. And I will do whatever it takes to protect them," Benjamin said. "I lost my wife, but I would rather die than abandon my children."

Benjamin will also be able to send his children to school with the extra income, saying, "I am so grateful. I hope my project will succeed and my children, especially my eldest daughter, will be able to overcome the trauma she experienced because of her mother. Pray for my children to know Jesus."

Mary's Testimony of Faith Amid Grief

AFRICA

Last August, al-Shabab militants ambushed Kaingu who was on his way to deliver goods to Lamu. He was cross-examined and killed as soon as the terrorists discovered he was a Christian.

"This was a great loss to us as a young family and we wished that he could be with us longer," said his widow, Mary. "But we strongly believe that the Lord has His plans that cannot be thwarted. He does whatever glorifies him and what builds us in faith."

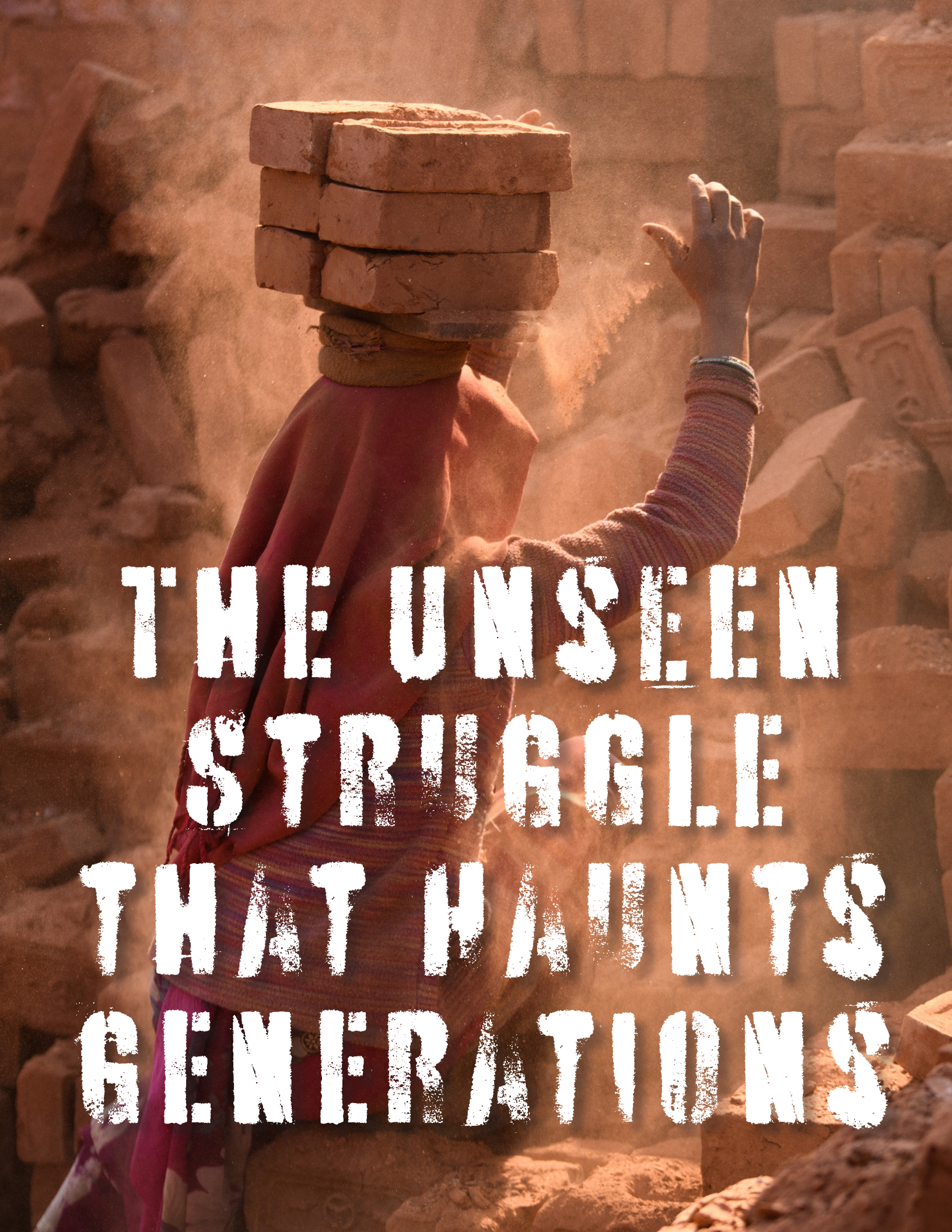
Kaingu was a long-distance driver who used to take goods to different part of the Kenyan coast and known to be a trustworthy and dedicated worker.

"We have got no complaints to God since He doesn't sin. We

"WE STRONGLY BELIEVE THAT THE LORD HAS HIS PLANS THAT CANNOT BE THWARTED. HE DOES WHATEVER GLORIFIES HIM AND WHAT BUILDS US IN FAITH." — MARY, WIDOW

have been praying for strength to cope with this loss and we are seeing Him answer our prayers. We thank you for the food aid and financial assistance you have given us."

ICC provided Mary and her two daughters with clothing, rent, food, and money to start her own small business.

A person is seen from behind, carrying a heavy stack of bricks on their head. They are wearing a red shawl and a striped long-sleeved shirt. The person is walking through a dusty, rubble-filled environment, with their right hand raised. The background is filled with piles of bricks and dust, creating a somber and laborious atmosphere.

THE UNSEEN STRUGGLE THAT HAUNTS GENERATIONS



**CHRISTIANS IN
PAKISTAN ARE
OFTEN FORCED
INTO THE
BACKBREAKING
WORK OF
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A SYSTEM OF
GREED KEEPS
THEIR FAMILIES
TRAPPED FOR
GENERATIONS.**

BY ICC'S SOUTH ASIA TEAM

In the heart of Pakistan, where diversity is celebrated and cultural richness flows through the veins of its people, a sinister reality lies hidden, a reality that strikes at the core of humanity. Hundreds of thousands of families have endured generations of servitude within the unforgiving bounds of the brick kilns. Let us journey into the shadows of their existence, where despair and exploitation intertwine, leaving behind scars that time cannot heal.

Amid the breathtaking tapestry of Pakistan's cultural diversity and linguistic richness lies a heart-wrenching tale of suffering and struggle that often goes unnoticed. In the shadows of urban areas, where the roar of progress deafens the cries of the marginalized, the brick kiln workers of Pakistan toil in a relentless cycle of despair.



Pakistan boasts a mix of 512 ethnic groups and 74 language groups, a reflection of its vibrant soul. Amid this diversity, however, lies a dark tale of around 20,000 brick kilns that dot the landscape, predominantly congregating near urban areas. Within the blazing heart of these kilns, 4.5 million souls toil, producing a staggering 1,000 bricks each day for a mere pittance of 960 rupees (\$3.50). The kilns blaze at temperatures reaching a scorching 2,012 degrees Fahrenheit.

These brick kiln laborers, often unseen and unheard, are among the most marginalized and vulnerable in Pakistan. Lacking skills and resources, they labor under dire conditions, deprived of necessities such as healthcare, education, and sanitation.

Their grueling workdays, which can total 12 agonizing hours, yield meager wages, sometimes as low as 700 rupees (\$2.52) per day. Temporary shelters, their only refuge, offer scant ventilation and expose them to the threat of fires and accidents.

A CYCLE OF DEBT AND DESPAIR

A seemingly innocuous loan sets in motion a cycle of bondage that clenches generations in its cruel grip. The workers, ensnared in this web of exploitation, are kept in shadows, their accounts hidden from their eyes. For these millions who suffer, hopelessness stretches before them.

Debt spirals like a storm gathering momentum, swallowing families whole.

Illnesses, inclement weather, deaths, marriages, and births — the very fabric of life — force these workers into the jaws of this insidious trap. Falling sick or bearing a child becomes an iron chain, tethering them to the kilns until debts are repaid. To add to the challenges, they are unable to work during the rainy season which can last months, setting them further back with the debts they accumulate during this time while they are out of work.

High interest loans, corrupt officials, surreptitious deductions, and doctored accounts cripple these laborers further, while their already desperate living conditions degrade even further. An agonizing helplessness blankets them as debts escalate year after year. Families torn apart, lives shattered — some surrender, paying the ultimate price of despair through suicide.

A GENERATION HELD CAPTIVE

The Global Slavery Index bears witness to an alarming truth — nearly 90% of these workers are ensnared in forced labor. Even though it's illegal to employ those younger than 16, almost 70% of bonded laborers in Pakistan are children, robbed of their innocence and potential. These young souls trade classrooms for kilns, their education sacrificed on the altar of servitude.

Remote brick kilns, hidden away in Pakistan's rural heart, elude scrutiny and regulation, festering in obscurity. Workers live in squalor, the very soil they manipulate to mold bricks giving rise to skin diseases. Billowing smoke releases toxic fumes, triggering asthma, tuberculosis, and a grim array of afflictions. Kiln owners, joined by corrupt officials, keep these workers shackled, wielding the law as a weapon against those they oppress.

THE CHILDREN OF KILNS: A STOLEN FUTURE

Innocence shattered, childhoods stolen, the children of these kilns live lives robbed of the most basic rights. No church, no Sunday school, no formal education — instead, they inherit the skill of brickmaking.



They lack toys, their laughter silenced as they endure a life denied its natural course. Opportunities for growth are luxuries.

Child labor thrives in this unforgiving environment, with the International Labour Organization estimating a grim reality — 4.2 million children in Pakistan, hands that should hold pencils, instead wield tools of toil at the kilns. A relentless cycle of labor, lasting up to 16 hours a day, steals their youth, leaving them with paltry earnings, sometimes as little as 300 rupees (\$1.08).

A GLIMMER OF HOPE AMID THE ASHES

Pakistan's Supreme Court's voice has recognized the rights of brick kiln workers, but change is still elusive. Only a handful of kilns have embraced environment-friendly technology, while the majority cling to outdated practices, driven by fear of financial upheaval. The zigzag technology's promise of efficiency and eco-friendliness, like an oasis in the desert, holds potential, yet much work remains to be done.

Brick kiln workers continue to suffer, hidden beneath layers of injustice, their stories eclipsed by the enormity of their struggle. Their tears mingle with the sweat that molds the bricks that build cities. It's a call to action, a plea to shatter these chains of bondage, to let their stories kindle a fire that ignites change, so that future generations no longer bear the yoke of cruelty. 🕯️





The Gift of New Life

Rickshaws provide a way out of indentured servitude.

BY ICC'S SOUTH ASIA TEAM

When Christians are freed from the bondage of working in Pakistan's brick kilns, they often don't have the skills they need to support themselves — let alone their families — outside of the kilns. For many, brick kilns are the only life they've ever known.

Everything changes with the gift of an auto-rickshaw, and International Christian Concern (ICC) has given — and continues to give through its Community Development fund — new, dependable rickshaws to Christian families recently freed from the brick kilns.

"Driving a rickshaw is the most lucrative occupation for these people," an ICC staff member said. "So many of them know nothing beyond the kilns and as a result, have little to no skills beyond making bricks, but everyone can drive a rickshaw. You don't need a degree, you don't need special training, you don't even need a license. Everyone uses rickshaws in Pakistan to either transport themselves or goods. You can make your own hours, be flexible in where you work, and make a sustainable living depending on how many trips you take. For the first time, these people are in control of their lives. They decide when, where, and how much they work, not a landowner who abuses them and their family."

THANKFUL RECIPIENTS

Rickshaws, tuk tuks, or "chingchi" as they're often called in Pakistan, are the most common form of transportation in the South Asia. The small, colorful two- or three-wheeled vehicles are often decorated to reflect the personality of the driver and the local culture. The decorations are as much a personal expression as they are an attempt to catch the eye of potential customers.

In Pakistan, it is common to see rickshaws adorned with Islamic art. Bold Christians will decorate their rickshaws with a cross or a picture of Jesus Christ.

Christians in Pakistan are often called "churha," a derogatory term reserved for low caste sanitation workers. If believers aren't working in one of Pakistan's brick kilns, they are often working another poorly paid job in the sanitation industry, including sewage workers or street sweepers.

Becoming a rickshaw driver isn't always an easy financial move. Drivers often rent rickshaws, the cost of which cuts into their daily earnings. Those who receive their own rickshaw from ICC, however, can take home their full earnings and adequately provide their families with adequate food and education.

In late 2023, ICC distributed rickshaws to Christians and their families in Pakistan.

When Abdul received his new rickshaw, he couldn't believe it.

"We are pleasantly surprised to have a new rickshaw," he said. "It will turn our financial situation and fortune. We feel so blessed that our Christian brothers and sisters are worrying for our lives. God has transformed our lives while coming us to the stage where we are able to start the new business."

After leaving the brick kiln, Wasim had long had a dream of owning his own rickshaw. When an ICC staff member handed him the keys to one, he smiled with gratitude.

"It's like a dream coming true," he said. "We were hopeless to think of getting out of the brick kiln work and especially starting a new business. May God help you the way you helped us."

Ibrahim and his family are grateful for getting out of the brick kilns. They shared with ICC how they worked in bad conditions and were unable to work during Pakistan's long rainy season. Now they can earn income year-round.

"It's a super privilege to have rickshaw for our livelihood," he said. "Now our family will earn good (income), and we will accelerate financially. May God bless you abundantly."

A LASTING DIFFERENCE

Christians who receive rickshaws from ICC are not only able to provide for their families, but they're also free from worrying about having to return to the brick kilns just to survive.

In their newfound freedom, previous beneficiaries of rickshaws have used the drive time to share the gospel with their passengers. Some do even more with their rickshaw income.

"We saw how they were profitable and poured into their community while earning a dependable and sustainable income for their family," the ICC staff member said of other rickshaw recipients. "A welcome surprise was that these beneficiaries were evangelizing to their patrons and using some of their income to build new churches. This was not necessarily intended when the projects were approved but will now be an added factor in the proposal process."✝

"We feel so blessed that our Christian brothers and sisters are worrying for our lives. God has transformed our lives while coming us to the stage where we are able to start the new business."

— ABDUL, FORMER BRICK KILN WORKER





Hidden Realities

Exploring the Lives of Women Laborers in Pakistan's Brick Kilns

BY HANNAH CAMPBELL

Amid the steady hum of chatter exists a silent symphony of suffering where women toil day and night to meet not only their brick quota, but their growing family's needs. Yet, as they labor every day to support their families in unforgiving heat, their own well-being fades into the background.

During what should be a beautiful and life-giving time for expecting mothers, these women consistently lack access to proper healthcare during their pregnancies. With each family working at the kilns averaging seven to nine children, women are constantly pregnant. But the emphasis for these mothers is placed on brick output — and their quota doesn't decrease when they're pregnant. Due to this, women's health suffers, and babies, if they live to full term, are often born with health complications.



Meera, Rani, Ayesha, and the Dia Ama (left to right) at one of the brick kilns ICC visited. Each woman shared their stories of loss and hardship throughout their lives at the kilns.

ICC developed a comprehensive plan to address major issues at the brick kilns and is creating successful livelihood projects to keep families out of the kilns once their debts are paid off. One area of focus is women's health.

During our last visit to one of the kilns, we met and interviewed women to hear their experiences to better inform our work. The issue was glaring — women at the brick kilns don't possess the proper knowledge to take care of themselves, which can lead to devastating outcomes.

Maya is 19 years old and has spent the past 14 years working at the brick kilns. Since age 5, she has been immersed in the grueling work of forming bricks with her family.

"The harsh weather and the conditions increase the risk of heat strokes due to the direct heat exposure, both from the sun and from the fiery kiln," she shared with ICC. Heat strokes and dehydration are frequent issues for many in this

environment.

But it's not just the physical labor that weighs her down. Maya began menstruating at the age of 14 and used an unsanitary cloth, which has led to recurring health issues throughout the years. Each month she endures cramps that are amplified by the heat and physical labor, yet she must endure the pain and continue to meet her daily brick quota.

Girls often experience their first menstrual cycle while they are working at the kilns, and because they're not in school, they don't learn sanitary methods to address their monthly needs. The topic is often too taboo to discuss with family, so these young girls are left to take care of their health on their own.

For Meera, another young woman working at the kiln, her pregnancy journey turned into tragedy because of medical misinformation. She was eight

months pregnant with her first boy, and despite this, she was still working alongside everyone else forming bricks.

A community midwife known as the Dia Ama visited Meera and gave her medicine to alleviate her pregnancy pains. However, the "medicine" that she took inadvertently led to the miscarriage of her son shortly after.


The demand of the job coupled with the pains of pregnancy and the lack of basic medical knowledge led to the tragic loss of Meera's son. Mother at the kilns also don't have an adequate diet while they're pregnant or nursing, which leads to malnutrition.

Rani, a mother of nine, juggles working at the kiln and caring for her youngest daughter, whose health issues are the result of poor nutrition during pregnancy.

In many cases, women deliver babies in unsanitary conditions, surrounded

by disease-carrying bugs. Sometimes, the needs of childbirth demand professional medical attention. But due to the proximity of some kilns from cities, the proper medical attention may be out of reach — especially if it's an emergency.

Ayesha was midway through her workday when she went into labor. She was taken home, and the Dia Ama arrived to help during labor and delivery. After several hours with no progression, the Dia Ama recommended that Ayesha's husband take her to the hospital. But when they arrived, it was too late — her baby was stillborn. She now lives with chronic uterine pain as a daily reminder of her heartbreaking loss.

The stories from each of these women underscore a sobering reality: the women of Pakistan's brick kilns are naïve to the complex challenges and risks that extend far beyond their daily labor. The lack of access to proper healthcare, paired with limited awareness and education amplifies their vulnerabilities, leaving the women susceptible to preventable tragedies during pregnancy. 



A few brick kiln families ICC staff met with to better understand the situation for women's health. ICC is working on medical care packages for these women and girls.





“I Am the Worst”

A PRAYER FOR THE OPPRESSORS

INTRODUCING

“I Am the Worst”

“I am the worst” is how the Apostle Paul described himself to his young protégé, Timothy. Paul said he was a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a violent man who had Christians put into prison and killed. Yet the greatest apostle met Jesus on a road to Damascus.

“I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief,” wrote Paul. “The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 1:14).”

If the Lord can change Paul’s heart, he can work in the lives of any oppressor. While we see daily the evil atrocities committed by persecutors, we know that they, like Paul, are deceived and act in unbelief. The Lord knows their hearts and draws them to himself in many ways. He wants everyone to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4). He also tells us to love our enemies and pray for our persecutors (Matthew 5:44).

“Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom *I am the worst*. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life. Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

– 1 TIMOTHY 1:15-17

THIS MONTH:

JOIN US IN PRAYING FOR THE

Brick Kiln Owners

Predatory brick kiln owners use their position of power to keep Christians and other marginalized groups entrapped in generations of brick kiln work to continue to make a profit. We know that the Lord despises leaders who abuse their positions of power (Proverbs 14:31). In this issue we highlighted the atrocious conditions many Christians face while working at brick kilns. We pray for the Lord’s miraculous intervention in the lives and hearts of brick kiln workers and to use their positions of power to treat their workers with dignity and kindness. We pray that they discover the truth in Jesus and are drawn, like Paul, to him as only Christ can do.



MORE WAYS TO PRAY

The Children of the Kilns

“The children of these kilns live lives robbed of the most basic rights. No church, no Sunday school, no formal education — instead, they inherit the skill of brick making.”

— ICC STAFFER IN PAKISTAN, PAGE 12

Small Business Success

“Driving a rickshaw is the most lucrative occupation for these people. So many of them know nothing beyond the kilns and as a result, have little to no skills beyond making bricks, but everyone can drive a rickshaw ... For the first time, these people are in control of their lives. They decide when, where, and how much they work, not a landowner who abuses them and their family.”

— ICC STAFFER IN PAKISTAN, PAGE 14

Endurance and Working Conditions

“The harsh weather at the conditions increase the risk of heat strokes due to the direct heat exposure, both from the sun and from the fiery kiln.”

— MAYA, 19, BRICK KILN WORKER, PAGE 18

Women's Health

“The lack of access to proper healthcare, paired with limited awareness and education amplifies their vulnerabilities, leaving the women susceptible to preventable tragedies during pregnancy.”

— ICC STAFFER WHO VISITED THE KILNS, PAGE 18



Crowns of Courage

HIGHLIGHTING THOSE WHO HAVE SACRIFICED EVERYTHING FOR CHRIST

THE MARTYR'S SMILE WANG ZHIMING'S IMPACT ON CHRISTIANITY IN CHINA

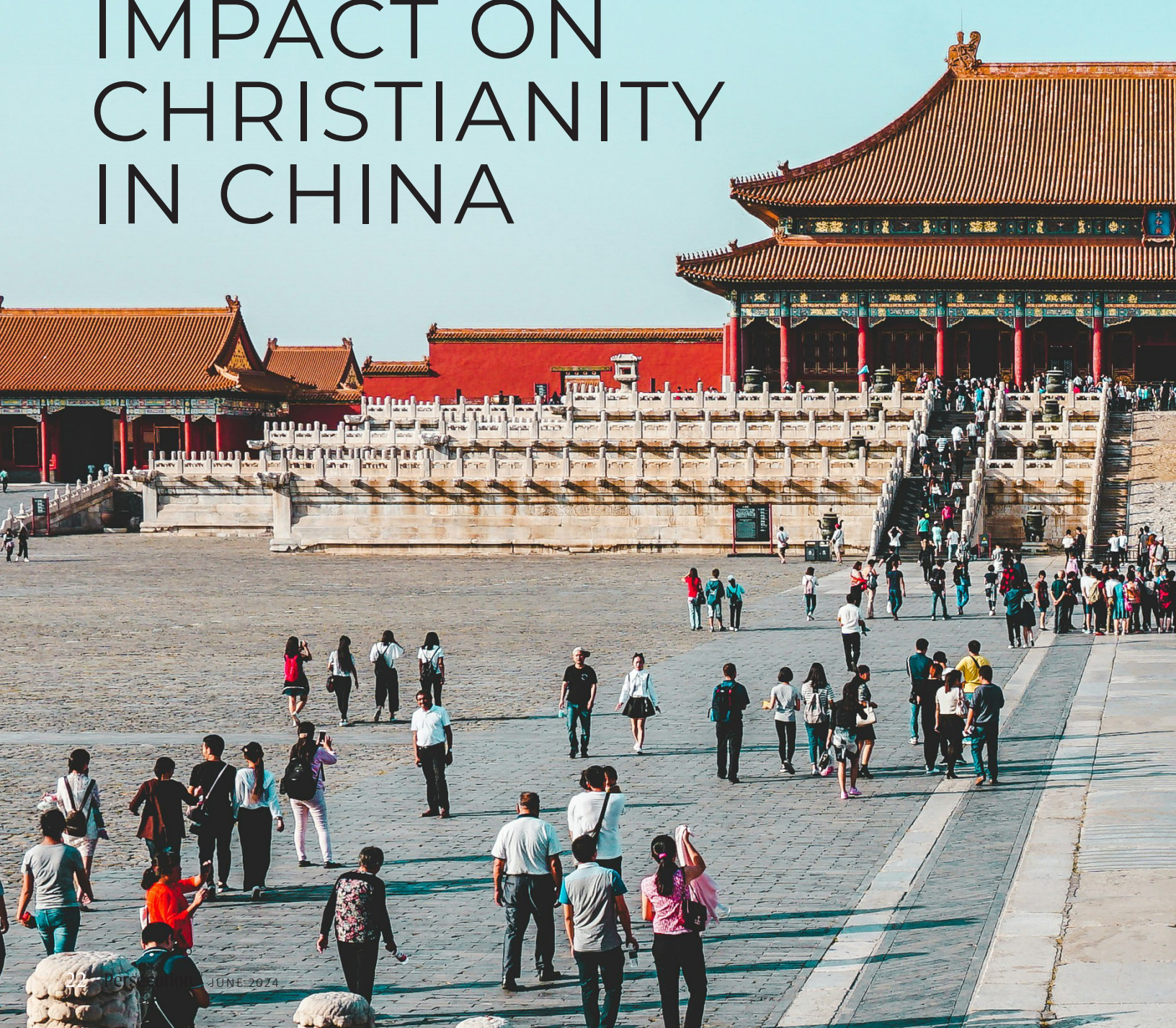


Photo: Two of Wang Zhiming's sons became pastors after his death: Wang Zhonglin (left) and Wang Zisheng.



Around the world, tyrannical governments view the growth of Christianity as a threat to their power. Flexing their figurative muscles, they crack down on Christian leaders in an attempt to squash revival and scare off potential new converts.

For many decades, this has been the case in China. Yet, due to the courage and faithfulness of Christian leaders like Wang Zhiming across the nation, the gospel continues to spread.

In early adulthood, Wang worked as a teacher at a local church school for the Miao people. He later accepted a preaching position and started overseeing several Miao churches in the region.

Ultimately, it was his ordination as a pastor that led to attention from the authorities during a time when threats from the Communist Party against Christians were quickly driving missionaries out of the nation. In 1954, he was arrested for "not repenting and continuing to engage in religious espionage activities," and spent two years in prison.

During the next 15 years, authorities attempted to mold Wang into a pseudo-religious leader who professed loyalty to Mao Zedong. Yet, despite the mounting pressure, Wang held fast to his Christian

beliefs and took his ministry efforts underground.


He was eventually arrested again in 1969, which led to multiple years of horrific abuse in Wuding County Detention Center. In one instance, he was asked, "Do you trust Mao Zedong or Jesus?" Standing firm, he boldly declared, "I believe in Jesus," which resulted in a period of severe torture.

In late December of 1973, Wang was sentenced to death. He was paraded through the streets after a public trial that tens of thousands of people attended. As his execution approached, onlookers saw no ounce of fear on his face. Rather, he smiled before the crowd, knowing that his reward in eternity was just around the corner.

Despite the government's crackdown on believers in this period, including Wang's own family, Miao Christians held fast to their faith, inspired partly by the testimony of their faithful pastor. Today, the once tiny population of Christians in the region has exploded by tens of thousands.

While these Christians know that their journey of faith will not likely be an easy one, like Wang, they have peace knowing that their true treasure awaits them in eternity. ✝

Background Photo: The Forbidden City, Beijing. Photo by Li Tianhui



We'd love to hear from you!

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