

PERSECUTION



MAGAZINE

BOLD Believers

HOW THE GOSPEL THRIVES
UNDER PERSECUTION

INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN CONCERN

Contents

SEPTEMBER 2024

ON THE COVER

A Nigerian man walks along a street. Christians in the Middle Belt and northern Nigeria face intense levels of persecution and attacks from radical Islamic groups. Some even call it one of the most dangerous place to be a Christian.

Photo: Oluwaseun Ariyo / iStock

FEATURES

12

THE DANGEROUS ACT OF CUTTING HAIR

Risking Lives for Conversations of Faith

14

THE UNSTOPPABLE GOSPEL IN NORTH KOREA

The Underground Church in North Korea Thrives Despite Persecution

16

TWO WHEELS, ONE MISSION

Spreading the Gospel in Kenya with Motorbikes and Bibles

RECURRING

04 ICC NEWSROOM Your Source for Persecution News

06 WEST WATCH Issues Involving Christianity in the West

08 YOUR HANDS AND FEET ICC Projects Made Possible by Our Supporters

10 FRONT LINES OF MINISTRY A Deep Dive Into the Lives of Church Planters and Pastors

22 CROWNS OF COURAGE Highlighting Those Who Have Sacrificed Everything for Christ



@persecuted



@persecutionnews



@internationalchristianconcern



International Christian Concern

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.



© Copyright 2024 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.

2020 Pennsylvania Ave. NW #941 | Washington, DC 20006-5441



STAFF

Publisher Jeff King

Managing Editor Alex Finch

Editor and Designer Hannah Campbell

Supporting Those on the Front Lines of Our Faith

When you do persecution ministry for 20+ years you can get discouraged!

Speaking from experience, persecution ministry exposed me to the worst of humanity and all the evil and hatred bound up in the human heart. I saw Satan continually attack the church.

For so many years, I was discouraged. I knew our King and His Kingdom win in the end, but how could it be? I wondered that as I watched believers beaten, imprisoned, and murdered for their faith.

But over time, I began to see how God uses persecution to grow the church, and this has been going on for 2,000 years. I finally saw His strategy and the broad sweep of history of how his feeble church—made up of sheep among wolves—didn't just survive, but took more and more territory over time!

That is one of my favorite subjects to talk and write about. It's so invigorating to understand, but not only that, it's amazing to see it lived out in recent history and over the last two millennia.

Persecution happens on the front lines of the great spiritual battle we find ourselves in. Partnering with God to expand the church in the most dangerous places is one of the most important things International Christian Concern (ICC) does.

So, we won't back down and we will keep growing and evolving in our various approaches.

In Africa, we've equip evangelists who've been attacked with motorbikes and Bibles (a new take on our Bikes & Bibles program) to make them more effective. Through our radio partners, we broadcast Scripture and the love of Christ into North Korea.

There's so much more and you are about to read all about it. In the meantime, be encouraged! He and His church win in the end and are winning as we speak!

Thanks for being part of this amazing work and for your ongoing prayers and support for our persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ.

JEFF



Jeff King, President

International Christian Concern

Author: "The Whisper" (NEW!), "The Last

Words of the Martyrs," and "Islam Uncensored"

Postcast: Faith Under Fire

Recently Featured: The Christian Post, Fox

News Family and Friends, TBN, the Washington

Times/Higher Ground, Newsmax, Breitbart, The

Catholic Register, Charisma Magazine, Radio

Free Asia, Faithwire.com

Invite Jeff as a speaker to your church or event to share his engaging stories and lessons from the persecuted church.

Visit www.persecution.org/jeffking

ICC Newsroom

YOUR SOURCE FOR PERSECUTION NEWS



Court Sentences Christian Man to Death Nearly a Year after Jaranwala Riots

An anti-terrorism court in Sahiwal, Pakistan recently sentenced a Christian man to death for his alleged role in inciting the Jaranwala riots that occurred in August 2023.

Authorities arrested Ehsan Shan three days after thousands of Muslim men burned more than 200 homes and two dozen churches in the Christian community of Jaranwala. The riots started after locals claimed they saw two Christian men desecrating pages from a Quran. While Shan did not participate in the alleged blasphemy, the court found him guilty of sharing “hateful content” that blasphemed

Islam on social media. He allegedly posted footage of the desecrated Islamic text on TikTok.

After announcing the verdict, Judge Ziaullah Khan also sentenced Shan to 22 years in prison and fined him 1 million Pakistani rupees. Shan's lawyer, Khurram Shahzad, said he would appeal the verdict.

“This is what justice looks like in Pakistan,” an ICC staffer said. “Radical Muslims burn down dozens of homes and churches, and the only ‘justice’ being served is putting the Christians who called it out to death. The blasphemy law does not protect Islamic ideals; it kills Christians.”

After Several Months, Abducted Christian Girl Remains in Captivity

In February, Islamic extremists abducted two Christian siblings in Nigeria.

The two extremists abducted 7-year-old Isaac and 15-year-old Adanna from their grandmother's home.

Once in their custody, the kidnappers gave the children Islamic names. Isaac became Rashid, and Adanna became Fatima.

A police report was filed, and after some negotiations, Isaac was returned. His sister, however, was forced to marry a Muslim man and convert to Islam.

Adanna's attorney, Abishag Sambo, said Adanna was active in her church and loved singing in the choir before her abduction. Now, Sambo said she worries that Adanna is overwhelmed with fear.

Adanna's case is still unfolding, and despite many obstacles, Sambo continues to fight for her release. She perseveres, hoping that the teenage girl will soon be released.

**The children's names have been changed for their protection*



Six Lao Christians Arrested at Prayer Meeting

Authorities recently arrested a pastor and five Christians during the middle of a prayer gathering in Tahae village, Khammouane Province.

The village chief and security officials made the arrests on June 22 at Pastor Mum's house. Those arrested have been detained at Xaibouathong district prison. Human rights groups have stated that the village chief arrested the believers as part

of his efforts to crack down on the spread of Christianity in his village.

Since 2019, roughly 40 to 50 Christians have met at Mum's house for prayer, worship, and fellowship. The previous village chief was allegedly more tolerant of Christians living in the area, but the election of the current village chief, Lang, has led to more harassment toward Christians.

Son of Bihar Pastor Killed as He Slept at Home

In the middle of the night on July 7, Hindu extremists broke into the home of Pastor Sushil Kumar and killed his teenage son.

As Nilesh Kumar slept in the veranda of the home, in the Arwal district of the north Indian state of Bihar, the attackers broke his hands and strangled him to death. They then dragged the body of the pastor's only son outside and hung it from a nearby bamboo tree.

Local Hindu extremists had harassed the Kumar family for some time, verbally abusing them and pressuring them to abandon their faith in Christ. After Pastor Kumar filed several complaints with the police, members of local high-caste communities threatened to kill Nilesh. Although Christians are often attacked and even killed for their faith in India, such attacks are rare in Bihar.

 VISIT OUR WEBSITE,
PERSECUTION.ORG, FOR THE
LATEST NEWS



Armenian Christian Sentenced to 10 Years in Iranian Prison

After losing a court appeal in early June, Armenian Hakop Gochymayan received a 10-year prison sentence for allegedly participating in Christian activities in Iran.

According to Asia News, there was "no clear evidence" in the case, and Gochymayan was convicted using "a provision of ... [Iran's] Penal Code," which allows judges to decide cases based on assumptions rather than proof.

Gochymayan and his wife, Elisa Shahvadian, who is of Iranian descent and has family in Iran, were detained near Tehran in August 2023. Shahvadian was released on bond in October 2023; however, Gochymayan remains in Iran's notorious Evin Prison.



West Watch

ISSUES INVOLVING CHRISTIANITY IN THE WEST

Warsaw Mayor Attempts to Ban Crosses in Public Building

Warsaw Mayor Rafał Trzaskowski passed a new administrative rule banning the display of religious symbols in public buildings in the Polish capital. This rule, part of a larger set of standards intended to promote neutrality, targets the common practice of hanging crucifixes in state offices.

"Warsaw is the first city in Poland to adopt such a document," said Monika Beuth, spokeswoman for the mayor's office.

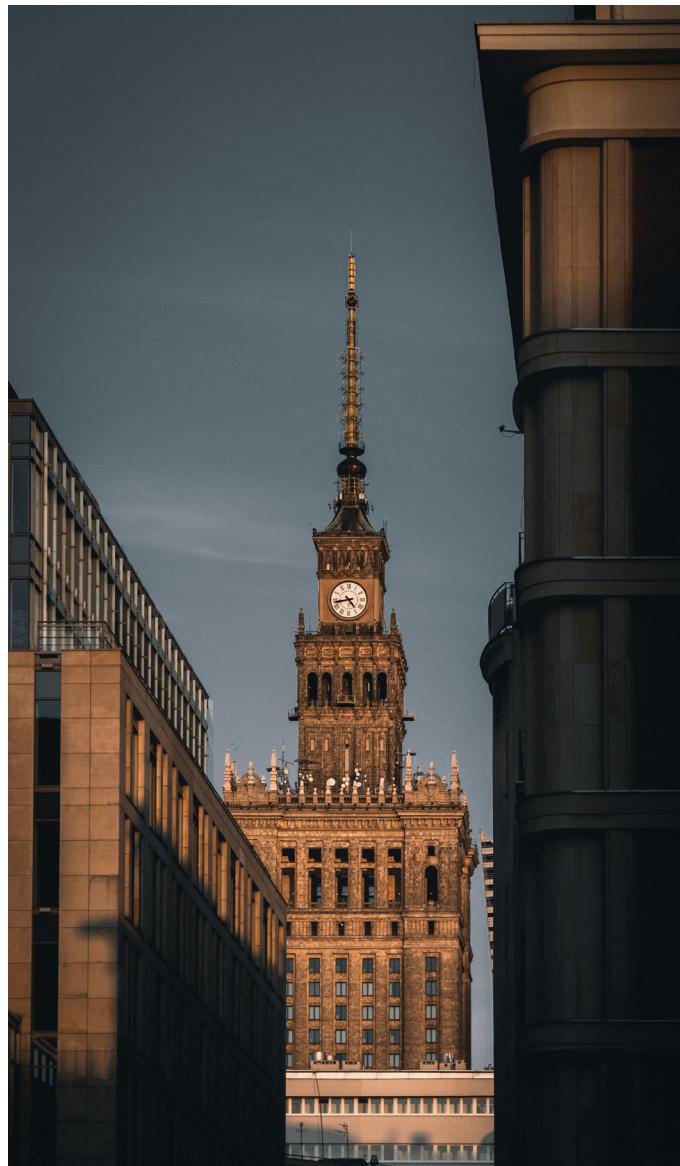
The new policy has roused strong feelings in the largely conservative Catholic country. During the Cold War, displaying religious symbols was similarly banned in government buildings while Poland was a member of the Soviet Union.

Following the announcement of the new rule, Polish politician Mariusz Błaszcak quoted a prominent priest on social media who was killed by the communist regime.

"There are invisible prisons ... of systems and regimes ... [that] not only destroy the body, but they reach further, they reach the soul, they reach deep into true freedom," he quoted.

"I think this decision is unnecessary," said Szymon Holownia, speaker of the Polish parliament. "I have found a large number of crosses on the walls of the Sejm. While I personally will not hang crosses in public offices, I don't think that today in Poland we need a war on whether crosses should be taken down from walls."

This is not the first time that debate over the displaying of crosses in public buildings has risen in Europe. In 2011, the European Court of Human Rights heard the case of Lautsi v. Italy, where a parent attempted to sue an Italian school to remove a crucifix from a public school. The court ruled that crosses in public schools were not a violation of European Union law, saying that "a crucifix on a wall is an essentially passive symbol and ... cannot be deemed to have an influence on pupils comparable to that of didactic speech or participation in religious activities."



THE CAPITOL DISPATCH
ADVOCACY ON THE PERSECUTED FRONT LINES
★ FROM INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN CONCERN ★

ICC UPDATE TO THOSE ON CAPITOL HILL

If you'd like to stay informed about ICC's advocacy work and policy recommendations, subscribe to our monthly newsletter, The Capitol Dispatch, at www.persecution.org/ICC-advocacy

20 Dead Following Attacks on Churches, Synagogues in Russia

An unknown group believed to be Islamic extremists attacked several churches, synagogues, and a police traffic stop on Sunday evening in Dagestan, Russia. The attack resulted in the death of at least 15 police officers and four civilians, including a 66-year-old Orthodox priest.

The attack occurred during the Orthodox festival of Pentecost. Russian authorities stated that the various buildings were set on fire with Molotov cocktails.

This attack comes after the ISIS-K attack on a concert venue on March 22 in Moscow, which claimed the lives of 145 people.

Home to more than 30 unique ethnic groups, Dagestan is a predominantly Muslim community with a small but ancient Jewish population. Dagestan has a history of extremism, with Russian forces fighting an Islamist insurgency in the early 2000s.

According to the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom's (USCIRF) 2022 Report, 71% of Russia's population is Orthodox Christian, 5% is Muslim, and 15%

claim no religious beliefs. Religious minorities face severe persecution from the government and other entities, including torture, prolonged detention, seizure of property, physical abuse, and several other atrocities. For these reasons, the U.S. government declared Russia as a Country of Particular Concern in 2021, 2022, and 2023. This designation is reserved for countries that commit the most egregious crimes based on religion.

As tensions rise with the global conflicts in Israel, Gaza, Ukraine, and Russia, religious minorities face scrutiny and a lack of security in Russia. Several news organizations, including the Russian media agency TASS, reported that international terrorists conducted the most recent attack. However, the head of the Republic of Dagestan, Sergei Melikov, implied that Ukraine was involved in the attack and that Dagestan is now directly involved in Russia war in Ukraine.

Dagestan authorities announced a three-day mourning period for the victims of the attack.

A CASE FOR NIGERIA'S COUNTRY OF PARTICULAR CONCERN STATUS
BY MCKENNA WENDY, INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN CONCERN



NIGERIA

A Case for CPC Status

This month, representatives from ICC's advocacy department toured Capitol Hill and met with several offices to discuss religious persecution in Nigeria. Despite USCIRF recommendation for the State Department to designate Nigeria as a CPC for 16 years, the State Department only designated Nigeria as such once in 2020. The tour ICC conducted aimed to highlight this disparity and encourage congressional accountability for the President and State Department to uphold the commitment they made through the International Religious Freedom Act.

In conjunction with the tour, ICC released a report outlining the concerning religious freedom conditions for Christians in Nigeria. ICC's report thoroughly examines Nigeria's glaring lack of religious freedom and makes the case for its CPC status.

IRF Secretariat Releases New Congressional Scorecard

The IRF Secretariat released its latest International Religious Freedom Congressional Scorecard last week. The scorecard seeks to provide a nonpartisan "summary of actions taken by Congress on issues related to international religious freedom."

The scorecard tracks the sponsorship and co-sponsorship of bills, resolutions, and amendments that support international religious freedom (IRF) and membership in international religious freedom-related caucuses. From this data, experts use a predetermined scale to assign a score and grade to each member of Congress.

The scorecard evaluated the 117th U.S. Congress, which was in session from Jan. 3, 2021, to Jan. 3, 2023. Overall, the highest-ranking member in Congress is Representative James McGovern of Massachusetts, scoring 36.

Representative McGovern has served the people of Massachusetts since 1997 and demonstrates a high value for human rights, especially religious freedom. Representative McGovern, a Democrat and professed Catholic, signed 18 pieces of legislation related to IRF during the 117th Congress.

Senator Marco Rubio of Florida achieved the second-highest score overall and the highest in the U.S. Senate with 31 points. Rubio, a Republican who has served as a Florida senator since 2011 and is a Roman Catholic, signed 16 pieces of legislation related to IRF during the 117th Congress.

In the key takeaway section of the scorecard report, the IRF Secretariat highlighted how "Congress introduced 58 items relating to freedom of belief, freedom of conscience, or religion during the 117th Congress. This activity represents a 36% decrease in the number of items introduced and scored in the 117th Congress versus the 116th Congress."

Despite this overall decrease, the continued demonstration of bipartisan support of international religious freedom through co-sponsorship and voting on IRF legislation in both bodies of Congress provides hope.

The scorecard provides a valuable method of evaluating Congress's efficacy in promoting and improving conditions of international religious freedom.



Your Hands and Feet

ICC PROJECTS MADE POSSIBLE BY OUR SUPPORTERS



Rebuilding Lives after Religious Violence in Kenya

AFRICA

On the night of July 12, 2023, in the majority-Christian village of Juhudi in Kenya's Lamu County, Maina Kariuki Githiga and his neighbors fell victim to a violent assault on their village.

Forced to flee and hide as houses were set ablaze and livestock stolen, Maina narrowly escaped before al-Shabab assailants reached his home.

Thankfully, Maina's wife and children were at an internally displaced persons (IDP) camp during the attack. However, two houses in Maina's homestead were burned, leaving his family displaced.

This attack, following another just 18 days earlier, was done at the hands of the Somali-based Islamist al-Shabab group, an ally of al-Qaida. Through its frequent attacks, al-Shabab has pushed for the Islamization of the Lamu region due to its proximity to Somalia. They target Christian men in the area,

like Maina, because they are the pillars of the community and leaders of faith in their homes.

When an International Christian Concern (ICC) staffer met with Maina and heard his story, they understood that he and his family desperately needed help. Because of your generosity, ICC addressed his family's immediate needs and provided a foundation for long-term recovery and self-sufficiency.

ICC relocated Maina and his family to a rental home. Maina said they can now "sleep well, eat well, and live without the fear of being attacked." The family also received necessities, including beds and groceries.

ICC also supplied Maina with a motorbike, enabling him to start a small business and regain financial independence. Maina's wife, a skilled tailor, also received funds to open a sewing shop, which will provide income for the family.

"Today, we thank the Lord for how He has been taking care of us," Maina said. "Thank you so much, ICC, for caring for us."

Training Pastors to Respond Well to Persecution

SOUTH ASIA

As anti-Christian sentiment increases among Hindu communities throughout India, pastors and other church leaders are enduring more persecution. International Christian Concern (ICC) has heard more reports of violence against Christians this year compared to last year. In response to this trend, ICC is empowering pastors and church leaders to endure persecution confidently and appropriately.

ICC's Persecution Response Training (PRT) reduces physical pain and property damage and helps mitigate persecution by training pastors to be proactive. Pastors and other church leaders are taught basic religious freedom laws, practical guidelines for handling persecution, and where to turn for help. More than 3,500 pastors and evangelists throughout India will have completed the training by the end of 2024.

"These teachings have proven to be immensely valuable in broadening our understanding and will greatly enhance our ministries," Pastor Pradip Singh said. "The trainings have offered us fresh perspectives and revelations, and I am excited to propose that similar seminars be organized in every church. Additionally, I have gained a deeper comprehension of the constitutional freedom of religion and received useful guidelines for spreading the gospel in India. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to ICC for providing this opportunity."



The Gift of Hope

MIDDLE EAST

Soon after Ahmed Saad left Islam to follow Jesus, he shared his faith with a Muslim woman he worked with. She put her trust in Christ, and eventually, they married and had a son. But when their son turned 1, Saad's wife decided to return to Islam and left him.

One day, as Saad continued to care for his son, he received a devastating diagnosis. He had developed kidney fibrosis. Doctors had to remove his left kidney. Following the surgery, Saad was unable to continue his job.

In need of income, Saad dreamed of buying a motorcycle and joining a local transportation company, but he had no money. Then, an International Christian Concern (ICC) staffer heard his story. When ICC presented Saad with a motorcycle, his eyes welled with tears. Suddenly, he could earn income to pay for his medications, rent, and bills and provide for his son.

"I would like to thank you for what you have done for me," Saad said. "I have been praying for my son, and my concern in life is to meet his needs. All the difficult things that I went through were like a test of my faith, especially after my wife left me and returned to Islam, but who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"



Front Lines of Ministry

A DEEP DIVE INTO THE LIVES OF CHURCH PLANTERS AND PASTORS

Preaching the Bread of Life Among Muslims

Peter, a missionary on a Muslim-majority island off the coast of Africa, knows too well the challenges that come with sharing the gospel in a Muslim country. After a group of radical Muslims destroyed his farm, he struggled to get food and money to pay his rent.

Missionaries who work among Muslims face challenges daily as they attempt to live a life that does not expose their kingdom work. For various reasons, they cannot take certain jobs — they also can't raise funds to support their work. They often suffer for the gospel and are unable to support themselves and their families financially.

Martin depends on his small farm for his daily needs and monthly bills. When the radical Muslims attacked his farm at night, they destroyed his crops. This left him unable to support himself and, therefore, unable to evangelize. After meeting with him, ICC gave Martin emergency aid to pay rent and buy food.

"Thank you, my brethren, for being part and parcel of preaching with me the precious Gospel of Christ Jesus our LORD to the

[people of this island] through your support and donations," he said after receiving the short-term aid. "May our LORD Jesus bless you more and more."

We knew that Peter needed something more sustainable to continue his mission on the island, so we helped him set up a small business making street food.

"I would like to thank you for helping me set up a chapatti-making business," Peter said. "This business will be a huge boost to my ministry here since through it I will be able to pay rent, buy food and clothing, as well as meeting other daily and monthly needs that a typical missionary has."

"My business spot would also be a tool to reach out to my customers through friendly conversations about how Christ — the living bread — is more satisfying than a chapatti. Such an environment will create opportunities for me to share the gospel in an unconventional manner, using the chapatti I make as an illustration of how Christ is the true giver of eternal life for those who trust in him." 





“My business spot would also be a tool to reach out to my customers through friendly conversions about how Christ — the living bread — is more satisfying than a chapatti. Such an environment will create opportunities for me to share the gospel in an unconventional manner, using the chapatti I make as an illustration of how Christ is the true giver of eternal life for those who trust in him.”

— PETER, MISSIONARY

THE DANGEROUS ACT

OF CUTTING HAIR





RISKING LIVES FOR CONVERSATIONS OF FAITH

BY ICC'S SOUTHEAST ASIA TEAM

In a well-lit, funky little barbershop in a large city of a predominantly Muslim country, barbers risk their lives every time they cut someone's hair. The danger isn't found in the styling of hair or the trimming of beards — it's found in the conversations that occur over the intermittent buzz of hair clippers and the steady stream of music.

A small local Christian ministry launched the barbershop a few years ago to share the love of Christ with local Muslims. The shop's owners and barbers are part of an intricate network of believers who conduct secret gatherings and Bible studies. They also seek to have intentional conversations about the gospel despite the real threat of danger to those involved.

An International Christian Concern (ICC) staff member recently visited the shop and received his own stylish haircut from one of the shop's several skilled barbers. As he sat in the barber chair, he overheard the hushed yet rich conversations about everything from the debate over whether Michael Jordan or LeBron James is the greatest basketball player of all time to the teachings of Jesus Christ.

"ICC has been blessed to partner with and support the local ministry that started this barbershop over the last few years," the staff member said. "We were also blessed to recently visit with the ministry staff, pop into the shop for a haircut, engage in the NBA 'G.O.A.T.' debate, and connect ICC's donors and supporters to brave ventures like this barbershop."

Even in the barbershop setting, any discussion of Jesus or the Bible instantly puts the business and the ministry behind it in danger. If locals were to uncover the purpose behind the barbershop, there would be consequences for everyone involved.

Christians who make their faith known in this country can expect persecution. Numerous believers have been beaten or kidnapped in recent years, and many church buildings have been destroyed. The preaching of the gospel is heavily restricted, and Bibles are kept from Christians. The situation is more dire for Muslims who leave Islam to follow Christ.

"We praise God for the large numbers of Muslims choosing to surrender their lives to Christ," an ICC staff member said. "But when they do become followers of Jesus, often they become victims of intolerance, discrimination, and violence in this nation."

Still, despite these known risks and dangers, more innovative and creative ministries, like this barbershop, are emerging in restricted nations to effectively share the gospel with all people.

Those who engage in dangerous ministry work reminded the ICC staff member of those who risked their safety for the sake of the gospel, according to Acts 15.

"These local missionaries and workers are similarly risking their lives in a dangerous environment," the ICC staff member said. "Praise God for the courage of these saints, and for their willingness to go and fulfill Christ's Commission from Matthew 28:19-20. Please pray for their efforts and pray for those involved in similar creative yet dangerous ministry for Christ globally." 

THE UNSTOPPABLE GOSPEL

In the shadow of the Kim regime's iron-fisted rule, where the mere possession of a Bible can lead to execution, the gospel of Jesus Christ remains an unstoppable force in North Korea.

Despite relentless efforts to extinguish Christianity (and any religion for that matter), brave souls like Illyong Ju, a North Korean defector, continue to spread the message of hope and resilience.

Illyong has witnessed firsthand the brutal persecution of Christians in North Korea. His family has been torn apart, with many members taken into political prison camps after their faith was discovered. Despite these harrowing experiences, Illyong remains hopeful for his homeland.

"The gospel is unstoppable," he declared, a belief that fuels his advocacy for North Korean Christians. "I feel an obligation to tell my story ... I hope that my testimony will contribute to informing the world of the oppression that North Korean people are suffering."

Despite their suffering, the underground church in North Korea continues to grow. Based on his experience, Illyong outlined three types of Christians in North Korea. The "Stump Believers" are faithful believers who've been Christians since before the regime's establishment and continue to secretly pass down their faith to their children. "Outside Recipients" are individuals who encounter Christianity while abroad, often in China, and return to North Korea, sometimes voluntarily and sometimes through forced repatriation, bringing the gospel with them. North Koreans who have come to know Jesus in North Korea, often through contact with outside recipients, and are fervently spreading the gospel are known as "Internal Acceptors."

Illyong shares that despite severe persecution,



IN NORTH KOREA

THE UNDERGROUND CHURCH
IN NORTH KOREA THRIVES
DESPITE PERSECUTION

the Bible has become known in North Korean markets as a “book of blessings.” This remarkable spread of faith highlights the resilience of North Korean Christians, who, like the 7,000 righteous who did not bow to Baal, stand firm against the regime’s oppression.

GOD'S WORK THROUGH ADVERSITY

At the end of 2023, up to 600 North Korean refugees were reportedly forcibly repatriated from China. These individuals endured intense interrogations and torture, and some were likely executed. However, Illyong believes that God is still at work, even in these dire circumstances. Among those repatriated are Christians (outside recipients) who will continue to spread the gospel, even while in prison.

“Despite the North Korean regime’s strong oppression, North Korean people achieved an amazing victory in the development of the marketplace,” Illyong said. This shift has weakened the regime’s control and opened new channels for spreading the gospel, particularly through

the younger “Jang Madang generation” and the emerging capitalist class, or “donju.”

Illyong dreams of a united Korean peninsula where Jesus is the only king. He urges Christians worldwide to join in spreading the gospel to North Korea through defectors, embracing a “One King, One Korea” movement.

In the face of unimaginable adversity, the faith of North Korean Christians shines brightly. Their unyielding commitment to the gospel, despite the regime’s efforts to silence them, is a testament to the unstoppable power of the gospel. 



TWO WHEELS ONE MISSION

SPREADING THE GOSPEL IN KENYA WITH MOTORBIKES AND BIBLES

International Christian Concern's (ICC) Bikes and Bibles initiative began as a dream to bring God's Word to people living in hard-to-reach areas. For years, ICC has supported and sent evangelists into heavily persecuted regions — and they've gone knowing the ever-present risks of beatings or even death.

In India, pastors and evangelists who've partnered with ICC throughout the past five years have bravely faced violence, embodying remarkable courage. These dedicated evangelists have distributed thousands of Bibles to local Christians who've never owned a Bible before. Their efforts have also led to the establishment of new churches, with evangelists using their bicycles to shepherd and support these growing congregations. The bikes have proven invaluable, enabling these evangelists to reach isolated villages, pastor their communities, and secure reliable work outside their villages, transforming both their spiritual and daily lives.

But India isn't the only country with determined evangelists working in rural areas. We've recently expanded our Bikes and Bibles program to Kenya. Despite Kenya's majority Christian population, Christians often face oppression and persecution in rural Muslim communities throughout the country. Al-Shabab and other Islamic extremist groups continue to grow in number and influence, posing a growing treat to Christians in the region.

ICC is now working with more than 10 evangelists to make their ministries more effective so they can shepherd more Christians and reach more nonbelievers with the gospel. Our model is the same: provide them with a motorbike and a stack of Bibles

so they can live out their God-given gifts of evangelism in their communities.

WITNESSING TRANSFORMATION IN MUSLIM COMMUNITIES

Moses, an evangelist ICC supports in Kenya, lives and serves in a predominantly Muslim community where people, especially the relative few local Christians, face many challenges.

He regularly visits the homes of both Muslims and Christians to teach them about the gospel and help them understand the truth of Jesus.

"As an evangelist serving in this Muslim-dominated community, my desire is to see the people of this area transformed and come to know Christ, living in peace with one another," he said. "It would bring me great happiness to witness the people of this area embracing the truth of Christ and experiencing transformation."

Even as a devoted husband and father, Moses visits these homes consistently to share the gospel with residents. The distance he must walk from his home to the villages where he conducts his outreach requires considerable time and energy. As a result, he returns

"MY DESIRE IS TO SEE THE PEOPLE OF THIS AREA TRANSFORMED AND COME TO KNOW CHRIST, LIVING IN PEACE WITH ONE ANOTHER."

—MOSES





"THE GOSPEL IS THE HOPE FOR ALL HUMANITY, AND SO MY DESIRE IS TO KEEP PREACHING TO ALL PEOPLE SO THAT THEY MAY KNOW CHRIST."

—DAVID

home late and is often unable to visit some villages due to a lack of time.

Moses goes beyond sharing the gospel. He lives it by serving and loving members of his community. He prays with and encourages villagers, teaching them the Word of God from Scripture to help their understanding and transformation. He also provides support and encouragement to secret believers in the area.

"I regularly visit the village and the homes of various individuals to fellowship with them, share the word of God, offer encouragement, and conduct Bible study sessions," he said. "These sessions involve studying Scripture in detail to help them grow in their understanding of the gospel and Christ."

Given the insecurities and challenges in the region, ICC provided Moses with a motorbike to help him have easier access to the villages and homes of the people he serves. He's now able to spread the gospel more effectively and return home earlier to spend time with his family.

ICC also provided Moses with Bibles to distribute to residents in the local language, making it easier for them to read and understand the Scriptures. New believers and those seeking spiritual growth now have access to God's Word in their daily lives.

REACHING MUSLIMS BEFORE THEY'RE RADICALIZED

"The area we are reaching is vast," said Samuel, who pastors a new church plant.

"We need brothers and sisters in Christ to help us to reach those frontiers."

The church that Samuel pastors still meets in a home — just like churches mentioned in the New Testament. Samuel is dedicated to reaching local Muslim tribal groups, mainly focusing on Bible studies with new believers and seekers. He hopes the gospel will continue to spread and bear fruit through his ministry.

"I have served as an evangelist and church elder from when I got born again in 1994," Samuel said. "I have been part of the leaders that planted and strengthened the churches around my town and in the villages. Many people are believing in Christ, including some

nominal Muslims. We need to reach out to them and lead them to Christ before the radical Muslims come and radicalize them."

Many families are scattered across different villages, some of which have not heard the gospel. New believers in these villages need to read or hear God's Word in their native language to help them grow spiritually. ICC provided Samuel with a motorbike and Bibles so that he could continue to evangelize in hard-to-reach areas.

SERVING THE LORD AT ANY COST

Dia pastors a new church in a Muslim dominated village in Kenya. A former Muslim, he previously taught the Quran and has a deep knowledge of both the Quran and the Bible. Like Samuel, his church meets in the homes of believers, reminiscent of the New Testament church. His church has 50 new believers, several of whom are children, from 15 families.

"I would rather die poor in Christ than serve any other Lord," Dia shared. "For me to die and to live is all for Christ."

Members of his church are passionate about serving the Lord. One member, a widow, lets the church use part of her land.

Dia walks long distances, sometimes at night, to meet with each house church.

**"GOD
FAITHFULLY
PROVIDES FOR
THOSE WHO
FAITHFULLY
SERVE HIM.
THAT IS WHAT
KEEPS ME
MOVING IN THE
MINISTRY."**

—REV. WILLIAMS

He sometimes borrows motorbikes from friends, but they charge him each time. ICC provided Dia with a motorbike to help him travel to each fellowship more efficiently. We also gave him Bibles to help him nurture the faith of new believers.

PREACHING THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE

David serves at a church in a rural Muslim-majority town that Dia's church planted. The church currently gathers at a primary school. Last year, thanks to the Lord's provisions, the church bought a piece of land. In recent months, its membership has grown to 60 believers, and it's expected to continue growing.

"I believe that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life and that life without Jesus is a futility," David said. "The gospel is the hope for all humanity, and so my desire is to keep preaching to all people so that they may know Christ."

David walks when he goes to minister to neighboring villages, so ICC provided him with a motorcycle to reach his congregation and even more seekers in the surrounding communities. We also provided Bibles in the local language so he can minister and preach the Word of God.

TO MAKE CHRIST KNOWN

Stephen is a pastor serving in a Muslim-dominated region with multiple challenges. He lives near a busy highway and encounters difficulties in conducting God's work, which includes reaching out to people in villages to spread the gospel, praying with believers and nonbelievers, and conducting Bible studies to help people deepen their understanding of Jesus.

"Serving the Muslim community, my desire is to share the love of Christ with them and make Christ known so they may be transformed and understand the truth about Christ and Christianity," the pastor said.

One major challenge he faces is a safe way to travel to evangelize. Walking poses significant risks due to the area's lack of proper security. ICC provided Stephen with a motorbike so he can travel more safely and spread the gospel more effectively.

"Additionally, I aim to provide Christian advice on living peacefully with one another, encouraging them to place their trust and hope in Christ alone," Pastor Stephen said. "I also conduct Bible study sessions and fellowship gatherings in their homes in the village through visitation."

Pastor Stephen interacts with secret believers and shares Bibles and other Christian literature to enhance his outreach efforts. These materials help people engage with the gospel more directly.

NOTHING CAN STOP GOD'S WORD

The Rev. William's church remained stagnant for two decades until he took over and started to plant churches in unreached areas throughout Kenya.

"We serve in an area where the gospel is opposed and under attack from the Muslims, but no matter the opposition, nothing can stop God's Word," William told an ICC staffer. "We wake up every day fully prepared to preach and suffer for the gospel."

Although Islam is spreading rapidly throughout the town, the church's missionaries are actively sharing the gospel. The need to reach the unreached with God's love is more urgent than ever.

ICC provided the Rev. William's church with a motorbike to help William and other evangelists reach villages where public transport is not available. We also provided the church with print and audio Bibles in the local languages.

"God faithfully provides for those who faithfully serve Him," Samuel said. "That is what keeps me moving in the ministry." 





“I Am the Worst”

A PRAYER FOR THE OPPRESSORS

Pray for the Persecutors

As followers of Christ, we are called to pray for those who persecute and oppress our fellow brothers and sisters. Jesus' teachings emphasize love and compassion, even toward those who harm us. In Matthew 5:44, Jesus instructs, "But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." This command challenges us to rise above the flesh's desire for revenge or resentment and instead seek the transformation of hearts through prayer.

This month, our focus is on those who share the gospel to the ends of the earth, even though they face beatings, torture, and even death. We pray for those who inflict this pain on them to try to stop the spread of the Word of God. We pray that their hearts would be softened, so that they might encounter the love and truth of Christ. We ask that God would place the oppressors in situations where they would be open to receiving the gospel.

In Acts 7:60, Stephen, the first martyr, exemplified this by praying for his persecutors even as he was being stoned: "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." His prayer reflects a deep trust in the Lord. As a body of believers, let's follow Stephen's example, interceding fervently for those who oppose Christianity, with the hope that God can turn persecutors into fellow believers.

"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' 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, for he wants everyone to put their faith in Christ and be saved (1 Timothy 2:4). He calls us to pray for our enemies, our oppressors.





MORE WAYS TO PRAY

Ministries in Dangerous Places

“Praise God for the courage of these saints and for their willingness to go and fulfill Christ’s Commission from Matthew 28:19-20. Please pray for their efforts and pray for those involved in similar creative yet dangerous ministry for Christ globally.”

— AN ICC STAFFER, READ MORE ON PAGE 12



Outreach Ministry Success

“My business spot would also be a tool to reach out to my customers through friendly conversations about how Christ — the living bread — is more satisfying than a chapati. Such an environment will create opportunities for me to share the gospel in an unconventional manner.”

— PETER, MISSIONARY READ MORE ON PAGE 10



The Spread of the Gospel

“The gospel is unstoppable. I feel an obligation to tell my story ... I hope that my testimony will contribute to informing the world of the oppression that North Korean people are suffering.”

— ILLYONG JU, DEFECTOR READ MORE ON PAGE 14

Evangelism and Discipleship

“Many people are believing in Christ, including some nominal Muslims. We need to reach out to them and lead them to Christ before the radical Muslims come and radicalize them.”

— PASTOR SAMUEL, READ MORE ON PAGE 16



Crowns of Courage

HIGHLIGHTING THOSE WHO HAVE SACRIFICED EVERYTHING FOR CHRIST

TILL DEATH DO US PART THE UNWAVERING DEVOTION OF TIMOTHY AND MAURA





Through the mountains and valleys of the Christian life, there are few greater blessings than a spouse who encourages you in the faith. This is perhaps no more important at any other time than in the final moments of one's life. Among the brave believers who have learned this lesson through the honor of martyrdom are saints Timothy and Maura.

In the late 3rd century, Timothy served as a reader in the church clergy as well as the keeper and copyist of Christian literature. Timothy was eventually brought before Governor Arian and ordered to turn in the books to be burned, but he refused.

The governor then subjected Timothy to torture so severe that the guards begged the governor to relent. It was at this point that the governor learned that Timothy had married a young woman named Maura only 20 days prior. Hoping to break Timothy's will, the governor also detained Maura. A battered and newly blind Timothy implored his wife not to fear the suffering but to follow him through the torture.

In full defiance of Governor Arian, Maura boldly proclaimed her faith in Christ and reassured her husband, "I am prepared to die with you."

The governor then ordered several gruesome forms of torture for Maura, yet she faced them gracefully and even thanked Arian for the opportunity to suffer for Christ. At one point, Maura was tossed into a cauldron of boiling water, but she appeared unbothered. Assuming the torturers had filled the cauldron with cold water in pity, the governor asked Maura to splash his hand with the water. Yet, when she did so, he cried out in pain as he burned his hand.

Despite the governor's best efforts, neither Timothy nor Maura would denounce their faith.

Seeing that the couple would remain steadfast to the end, the governor ordered their crucifixion. For an agonizing 10 days, Timothy and Maura hung on crosses facing each other until they were called into eternity.

It's difficult to imagine the anguish that Timothy and Maura endured both physically and emotionally as they witnessed each other's pain. Yet, they held fast to their faith with the encouragement that the pain would soon end and that better rewards awaited them. Though their marriage was brief, they had the distinct privilege of walking each other home to their beloved Savior. 

We'd love to hear from you!

WRITE TO US

INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN CONCERN
2020 PENNSYLVANIA AVE. NW #941
WASHINGTON, DC 20006-1846

EMAIL ICC@PERSECUTION.ORG

CALL 1-800-422-5441

We are Grateful for your
Financial Support

GIVE ONLINE AT

WWW.PERSECUTION.ORG/GIVE

GIVE BY MAIL

INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN CONCERN
P.O. BOX 268804
OKLAHOMA CITY, OK 73126-8804

GIVE BY PHONE 1-800-422-5441

Giving via Will

Plan now for a future gift to ICC by including a bequest provision in your will or revocable trust. Contact our office at 1-800-422-5441 for more details.


PERSECUTION.ORG
INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN CONCERN

