

CHANGEMAKERS

release
POTENTIAL

RISE UP

PART ONE: WHAT IS PERSECUTION?

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A situation where people are persistently and systematically inflicted with grave or serious suffering or harm and deprived of (or significantly threatened with deprivation of) their basic human rights because of a difference (race, religion, nationality, political opinion, membership of a particular social group) that the persecutor will not tolerate.

Christians have always experienced persecution. The New Testament is has many references to persecution and how we as a church should stand with and for those who are suffering because they know Jesus Christ. But what is persecution? Who is being persecuted today and what should you and I do about it?

Some examples e.g.:

Religious nationalism (to be Indian is to be Hindu)

Islamic extremism: state persecution, communal violence and terrorist attack.

Totalitarian insecurity

Secular intolerance

To see the toughest countries in which to be a Christian: Look at the map provided.

WATCH A VIDEO: Bruised not broken or Hear the story Sri Lanka on releasepotential.org

BUT NOT CRUSHED

John works in Muslim communities in Egypt sharing the love of Jesus to anyone he encounters. 'Before revolution I tried for 7 years to give someone, anyone, a Bible. But no one would accept such a gift. No one wanted to know about Jesus. After revolution life is much more dangerous for Christians, life in Egypt is hard and we have no protection. But in one month alone seven Muslims have given their hearts and lives to Jesus.

RISE UP TAKE ACTION

Think about what you could be doing to share the love and grace of Jesus with others. Are there circumstances or issues that put you off taking action? Pray for wisdom and courage to overcome them so that they don't overcome you and prevent you from partnering with God in furthering His kingdom.

NORTH AFRICA

Pray for indigenous Christians who form a tiny minority in the Islamic nations of North Africa. Open Christian witness is often not possible, and many believers, most in secret.

EGYPT

Christians in Egypt, who have been treated as second-class citizens and discriminated against in the areas of employment and education, face attacks from extremist elements. Pray especially for believers from a Muslim background, who are under the greatest pressure.

ALGERIA

In 2006 the government passed a presidential order that requires all non-Muslim groups to register and be officially approved in order to operate. Pray for wisdom for church leaders.

NIGERIA

12 northern states have imposed strict Sharia (Islamic) law, and Christians face ongoing civil conflict in Plateau state. Pray for believers who have lost loved ones in the violence.

SUDAN

Following the formation of an independent South Sudan in July 2011, proposed implementation of Sharia (Islamic) law in the North will make life worse for the Christian minority already facing oppression there.

COLOMBIA

Pray for evangelical Christians and pastors who face violence from paramilitary groups and those behind the huge trade in illegal drugs. Pray especially for churches in rebel-controlled areas.

IRAQ

The conflict in Iraq has caused many thousands of Christians to flee, most heading for Syria, Jordan and Turkey. Those who remain have faced kidnapping and murder.

CENTRAL ASIA

Pray for Christians who continue to face persecution in a number of states within the former Soviet Union. Pressure comes from both 'old guard' communists, and Islamic extremists.

IRAN

In this unique Islamic republic clerics wield ultimate political control. Open Christian witness to Muslims is banned, and government spies monitor Christian groups. Pray that the church will remain strong.

CHINA

Despite the growth of China's free market economy, religious freedoms remain severely curtailed. Pray for the unregistered, 'illegal' churches which continue to grow.



AFGHANISTAN

Pray for the tiny Christian church which faces many pressures, including opposition from the hard-line Islamic Taliban, and continuing economic and political instability.

NORTH KOREA

All Christian activity is forbidden, and being caught with a Bible can lead to execution in this repressive state. Pray especially for the estimated thousands of believers imprisoned in labour camps.



LAOS

Religious groups must gain state approval for evangelism, printing religious literature, and raising or building places of worship. Pray that the government will ease restrictions on the church.

PHILIPPINES

Christians living in areas with significant influence from Muslim and Marxist guerrilla organisations have faced threats, kidnapping and death.

VIETNAM

The communist regime claims to uphold religious freedoms, yet continues to repress unregistered churches. Pray especially for believers among the Hmong and Montagnard people groups, who face the most intense persecution.

BURMA

The military junta rules Burma with an iron fist, and maintains control over all religious activity. Pray for the spread of God's Word - it is illegal to print or import Bibles in indigenous languages.



SRI LANKA

In recent years militant Buddhists, who feel threatened by the growth of Christianity, have encouraged the destruction of churches, and attacks against individuals. Ask God to protect churches, and especially in remote rural areas.

INDIA

Pray for all Christians and church leaders who have suffered violence at the hands of Hindu militants, who want a Hindu-only India. Several states have introduced the destruction of churches, and conversion laws. Pray these will not be used against Christians.

INDONESIA

Christians are marginalised in society, face legal obstructions to establishing churches and have been physically attacked when gathering to worship.



ERITREA

The autocratic government has closed evangelical and Pentecostal churches, and imprisoned and tortured leaders and believers. Pray for the many Christians being detained.

SAUDI ARABIA

Pray for the church in Saudi Arabia, where all religions other than Islam are forbidden. Anyone involved in evangelism, or who converts to a Muslim, faces jail, reputation or execution.

MALDIVES

This holiday destination in the Indian Ocean is one of the least evangelised nations on earth. There is a legal ban against any religion other than Sunni Islam. Pray that Christians have wisdom as they practice their faith.



PART TWO: RISE UP

PERPLEXED....

Suffering always seems to bring questions. Why me and not them? Why does God allow this? What should I do? What can I do?

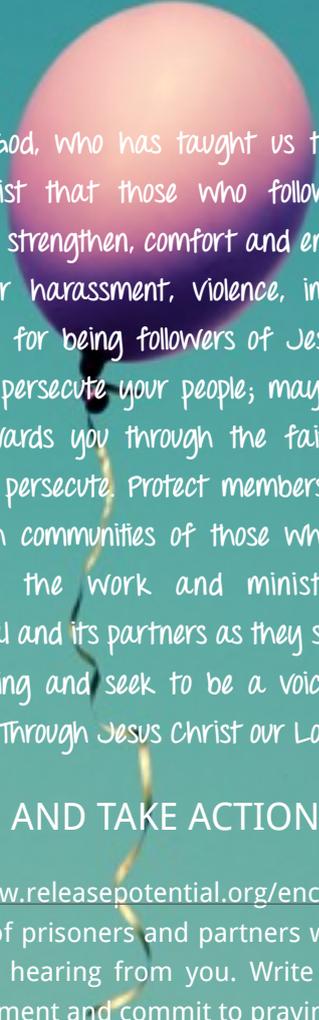
Costly discipleship is complicated and messy. How do you balance of grace and judgement, forgiveness and justice, protection of oneself and compassion towards one's enemies?

BUT NOT ABANDONED.

We, the church, are described as being one family. One family that spans continents and millennia. When someone in our family is hurting our Father looks to His children to share his heart to comfort and reassure them that they are not alone, that they will never be abandoned. When we stand with the persecuted, pray for them, write to them, campaign on their behalf, we become the answer to the prayer..."My God where are you?"

Watch the Hibila video at releasepotential.org

PRAY



Almighty God, who has taught us through your son Jesus Christ that those who follow Him may be persecuted; strengthen, comfort and encourage all those who suffer harassment, violence, imprisonment and even death for being followers of Jesus. We pray for those who persecute your people; may their hearts be turned towards you through the faithful witness of those they persecute. Protect members of the families and church communities of those who are persecuted and bless the work and ministry of Release International and its partners as they support those who are suffering and seek to be a voice for persecuted Christians. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

RISE UP AND TAKE ACTION

Go to www.releasepotential.org/encourage/ for the latest list of prisoners and partners who would really appreciate hearing from you. Write them a card of encouragement and commit to praying for them.