



THE Voice OF THE Martyrs

October 2021



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“Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them.” Heb 13:3

FROM THE FIELD

IRAN: Receiving the Book with All the Answers

Tala came to faith in Christ last year, but she was afraid to tell her family. In Iran, where it is illegal to leave Islam, Christian converts often face charges of “acting against national security” as well as potential imprisonment.

But recently, Tala came upon a surprising sight: her brother reading a Bible and her sister working on a crossword puzzle in a Christian magazine. Christian workers had secretly delivered the Bible and Christian magazine to the home of Tala’s family, and her siblings were interested in the materials.

“My sister was asking questions on how to solve the crossword,” Tala said. “When I asked them how they are answering the crossword puzzle questions, they pointed to the Bible and said, ‘This book has the answers to all the questions.’”

Encouraged by their interest, Tala asked workers at a Christian ministry for advice on how to start talking to her family. “Pray for them to find Jesus and that God will use you for that,” they told her.

The Iranian government seeks to silence any witness for Christ, but VOM continues to support strategies such as Bible distributions and sharing the Gospel through various media outlets. Through these efforts, Christian workers are able to connect with many Iranians, such as Tala’s siblings, who might otherwise never hear the Gospel.

“Iranian youth are always running away from religious affiliation, and approaching them can be challenging,” a Front-Line Worker said. “Because of the newsletter, we have ... many youths who are connected with us, and many of them joined our small groups. Keep praying for all families inside Iran who are looking for answers about real love and a relationship with God.”



Iranians are hearing the Gospel through various media outlets and Bible distributions.

INDONESIA: Suicide Bombers Attack Church on Palm Sunday

Suicide bombers attacked the Hati Yesus Maha Kudus church in Makassar as its Palm Sunday service ended on the morning of Sunday, 28 March. An Islamic extremist couple on a motorcycle attempted to enter the front gate of the church parking lot, but a security guard grew suspicious when he noticed the woman was dressed in traditional Muslim clothing. He stopped them just before the bomb exploded.



The Islamists who attacked this church in March were members of a terrorist organization that has carried out a number of attacks on churches since its founding in 2015.

Thankfully, relatively few worshipers were present that morning because of coronavirus precautions. No deaths were reported, but 19 church members were injured in the blast. The Indonesian government is providing help to those injured in the bombing.

The suicide bombers were members of an Islamist group called Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD), which has carried out numerous attacks on churches since its formation in 2015. VOM previously helped respond to the needs of those injured in the group’s May 2018 bombing of three churches in Surabaya that killed at least 13 people. Extremist groups are growing rapidly across Indonesia, sometimes targeting Christians as they seek to establish an Islamic caliphate governed by Sharia, or Islamic law. “JAD has been growing rapidly and created many underground cells that have fought secretly,” a VOM worker said. “They have dreamed and fought for Indonesia to become an Islamic state ... either using violence or through Islamic proselytism.”

Our Indonesian brothers and sisters in Christ continue to worship and share their faith despite hostility from those trying to silence their witness. “Christians in Indonesia have not responded to these attacks with violence, but rather with love and forgiveness,” said VOM’s regional director for Asia Pacific.



Reaching the Yao people with the Gospel is difficult because leaving Islam is considered a rejection of the tribe. Pray that new Believers will be well-grounded in God's Word as they face persecution.

MALAWI: Opposition Increasing as Muslims Turn to Christ

While persecution is not common in Malawi, Believers among the Yao people are often ostracized by their families and physically assaulted for their faith in Christ. Despite this opposition, Christians in Malawi are standing firm in faith.

The Yao are a tribal group who inhabit an area including south-eastern Malawi, north-western Mozambique and southern Tanzania. They are predominantly Muslim, and Islam is a fundamental part of their culture. "To convert from Islam, especially to Christianity, is seen as denying your whole tribe," said VOM's field leader for the region. "With this ideal in place, efforts to spread the Gospel among the Yao have proved to be difficult."

Still, the kingdom of God is growing in a remarkable way among the Yao. "We have seen an unusual move of the Holy Spirit in the Yao land, as Muslims are putting their trust in Christ in large numbers in 2020 and 2021," a Front-Line Worker

said. "It's amazing to see how it has occurred not only in one family, one village or one community, but in an entire tribal group. A people group that once was considered unreachable is now experiencing one of the greatest Gospel movements in all of Africa."

But this movement of Yao Muslims turning to Christ has also drawn negative attention. Muslim groups throughout Malawi are mobilizing to persuade Christian converts to return to Islam, and new Believers are being threatened with death if they refuse to renounce their Christian faith. In addition, Muslim extremist groups are proselytizing in five strategic locations throughout Malawi.

"They have declared this a fight," the Front-Line Worker said, "and they are asking every Muslim to take this seriously because their territory has been invaded by Christianity. I am not afraid at all. The fire of the Gospel has been lit in the Yao land, and no gates of hell will stop it."

MYANMAR: Pastor Accused of Denigrating Buddhism

A pastor in Myanmar has been fighting an extended legal battle since being accused in 2018 of denigrating Buddhism. Aung Tun Oo was accused by two radical Mahbahtah monks of speaking against Buddhism at a Buddhist school. During a Christmas programme, Pastor Aung Tun Oo gave a presentation on the meaning of Christ's earthly birth, death and resurrection. Although he did not mention Buddhism in the presentation, several Buddhist monks took offense and reported him to authorities. The Mahbahtah monks are members of the Wirathu sect, the most dangerous terrorist group in Myanmar.

Aung Tun Oo has been summoned to court 64 times since the case was filed. "The judge and his colleagues know very well that the accusation against me is groundless and on the basis of my faith in Christ," Aung Tun Oo said, "but they all procrastinate to execute justice in favor of me."

VOM has provided support for the pastor and his family during the long legal battle. "It is at times very discouraging for us," Aung Tun Oo said. "But whenever we are discouraged, the Lord reminds us that it is not because of our foolishness or for doing anything wrong that we are facing this legal issue. It is for preaching the Gospel and obediently following God's command."

Pray that the judge will rule justly and not yield to pressure from the radical monks.



While Pastor Aung Tun Oo is discouraged at times by the long legal battles, he remains encouraged in the Lord, knowing he is suffering for his Christian witness.



Pray for Sa and other new Believers in Laos who are rejected by family members after placing their faith in Christ.

LAOS: Teenager Disowned for Following Christ

Sa became a Christian after several conversations about Christ with her high school classmate, Peng. The peace she found in Christ, however, caused hostility from her parents at home.

When the 15-year-old's parents learned that she had become a Christian and was attending church, they yelled at her for following the "religion of foreigners." They warned her repeatedly to stop following Christ, but Sa remained firm in her faith. Then, last November, her parents threw all of her clothes out of the house and told her to "go live with the Christians."

Sa moved in with Peng and her mother after her parents kicked her out. "Peng's mother is a widow and poor, yet she has the open heart to take Sa in," a VOM worker said. "Please pray for her."

Sa's village has a history of persecuting Christians, and many Believers have been forced to leave because of their Christian faith. "The head of the village and the villagers do not like Christians," a VOM worker said. Many Laotians try to stop Christian worship in their villages because they view Christianity as a Western religion that will only cause adversity.

MYANMAR: Lingering Effects of Imprisonment

A Christian leader in Shan state, Myanmar, continues to suffer the effects of a long imprisonment after being targeted by communist separatists. In 2018, the United Wa State Army (UWSA) arrested at least 120 pastors, including Aikhun Plot, and many other Christians in the region. For most of his imprisonment, Aikhun was restrained by a steel shackle and chain on one ankle, causing excruciating pain and bone damage. He also contracted a skin disease while in prison.



Members of this church were expelled from their villages for worshipping Jesus.

Although his skin condition has improved with treatment since his release, Aikhun still has severe pain in his leg. The pastor was recently named principal of a Bible college and is eager to take on his new responsibilities. "Pray for God's wisdom and guidance for him and his family so he would be able to preside and lead the college effectively for the glory of God and His kingdom expansion," a VOM worker in Myanmar said.

Another pastor, Ai Khun Mhawm, is also struggling with chronic pain after an eight-month imprisonment under the UWSA. Like Aikhun Plot, Ai Khun Mhawm was restrained by a heavy chain around his leg and has been receiving treatment since his release. His wife's health is also poor.

The Wa self-administered division, within north-eastern Myanmar's Shan state, is not subject to Myanmar's central government, and the ruling United Wa State Party (communist) is heavily influenced by the Chinese Communist Party. In 2018, the UWSA launched a religious-cleansing campaign throughout the region, banning churches and religious instruction. And today, "worship, public prayer, singing Gospel songs and sharing the Gospel are strictly prohibited in the Wa region," a VOM worker said.

Another pastor affected by the 2018 religious cleansing, Ciat San, was sitting in prison when his church building and home were demolished by a UWSA bulldozer. His home has since been replaced, but not the church. Ciat San is still closely watched by authorities, so when he visits church members in their homes, he prays and "sings" hymns with them silently. "Everything in silence," the VOM worker said.



Thousands fled from advancing Islamist insurgents, who specifically targeted Christians and left destroyed villages in their wake.

MOZAMBIQUE: Thousands Displaced

Islamic insurgents seeking to establish a caliphate in eastern Africa have rendered life in Mozambique's northern coastal regions extremely difficult for Christians. While Islamists have been active in the Cabo Delgado region since 2017, attacks in 2021 have displaced 820,000 people. The displaced have taken shelter with family members who live in safer areas or in refugee camps, where conditions are crowded and food and basic necessities are in short supply.

The Islamist insurgency has affected many, and the situation for Christians is especially dire. Christian workers in the area say Islamists have burned churches and beheaded Christians as well as destroyed schools, clinics and police stations. "VOM has helped provide displaced Christians with emergency food relief and audio Bibles in their native languages," a VOM worker said. "The audio Bibles not only serve to encourage these Believers in their faith but also equip them to share the Gospel with Muslims who have been displaced."



Listen to VOM Radio host Todd Nettleton talk with Will Hart about the situation in Mozambique at VOMRadio.net/Mozambique.



Small groups of Iranian Believers meet in private homes for worship. If discovered, they face possible detentions, fines and long imprisonments.

IRAN: Arrests, a Canceled Adoption and Exile

Life for Christian converts remains especially challenging in Iran as the entire country suffers from effects of the global pandemic. In coordinated actions throughout the country, intelligence agents from Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corp (IRGC) arrested 12 Christians on 30 June and 1 July. The agents first raided the home of a recent Christian convert in western Tehran, arresting six of the approximately 30 Christians present. The agents then went to the homes of three other Christian converts and arrested each of them. The following morning, three more Christians were arrested in the city of Malayer. Local Christians believe the raids were coordinated with the help of an informant who had infiltrated the group in previous months.

In the city of Bushehr, a Christian couple who had nearly finalized the adoption of a baby were arrested at a house-church meeting and later informed that their adoption had been nullified. Sam and Maryam began the adoption of a 3-month-old girl, Lydia, at a local orphanage some time ago. Six months after she became part of their family, intelligence agents arrested Sam and Maryam, who were soon released on bail and charged with "propaganda against the regime."

More than a year after the couple began the adoption, a

court determined that they are not eligible to adopt Lydia because she was born a Muslim and they are Christians. In addition, Lydia has significant health issues, including a heart defect and digestive problems, and the court noted that if Lydia were returned to the orphanage, "there is zero possibility" of her being placed with another family. The court further noted that Lydia's birth mother, a nurse, is uniquely equipped to provide care for her. Heartbroken, Sam and Maryam are now waiting to hear if they will be ordered to return Lydia to the orphanage.

Christian convert Ebrahim Firouzi, released in October 2019 after a six-year imprisonment, is now in internal exile 1,000 miles from his home. Following his release, Ebrahim was given just two weeks at home before being ordered into exile for nearly three years.

He now faces new, additional charges of "insulting the sacred" and "propaganda against the state through promoting the Christian faith"; if convicted, he could face five to six more years in prison. Authorities have harassed Ebrahim continually during his term in exile, even confiscating his cellphone and laptop.

Where Are They Now? Pakistan

MARRIAM AND SARA,

The Legacy of a Former Persecutor

Marriam's husband, Paulus, used to beat Christians. But after he became a follower of Jesus Christ, he suffered similar beatings from his own family members, who resented him for leaving Islam. Paulus suffered repeated beatings until 2016, when injuries from an especially severe beating led to his death.

Marriam faced multiple hardships after Paulus's death. She was the sole provider for her family, and her daughter, Sara, had extensive eye damage as a result of being dropped by her father as an infant when he was attacked by relatives. "After my husband's death," Marriam said, "I worried how I would cover my daughter's academic expenses, and as a single parent, how I would manage everything."

Marriam received a rickshaw that she can use as a taxi to support her family, and VOM helped provide medical treatment and a glass eye for Sara so she could regain the confidence to go back to school.

Marriam has continued the work of her husband by visiting families in nearby areas to offer prayer. "One Muslim lady named Yasmin requested me to visit her for prayer," she said. "I prayed for them, and they were healed in the name of Jesus Christ. They were surprised and glorified God."

Pray that this family will come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, and continue to pray for Marriam and Sara.



Marriam and her daughter, Sara



Despite suffering severe persecution for his Christian witness, Hamza holds joyfully to his hope in Christ.

HAMZA,

Christian Beaten for Leading Muslim to Christ

Hamza, who grew up in a Christian family indebted to a brick-kiln owner, didn't experience persecution until he brought a Muslim to church. The kiln owner had no problem with Hamza attending church, but their relationship changed drastically when Hamza took a Muslim coworker to church and the man came to faith in Christ. Shortly after that, the kiln owner met Hamza at the entrance to his church and beat him so badly that his shoulder was broken. Despite the injury and his treatment by the owner, Hamza continued to work toward paying off his debts.

In 2017, Hamza was sold to another brick-kiln owner and continued to work to pay off his debt to the previous owner. But persecution from the previous owner did not stop. In September 2019, two men on a motorcycle stopped Hamza as he was walking home from the market and beat him again. Hamza said they were acting on orders from his former owner.

On 30 November, 2020, Hamza was able to pay off his debt to the brick-kiln owner with help from VOM. He and his family also received a rickshaw that they can use to start a taxi service. "Hamza was happy and thankful to the team for their help," a VOM worker said.

Hamza said that despite his difficult life, he has never lost hope in Jesus Christ. "He has answered my prayers and now blessed me with a wonderful gift," he said.

Continue to pray for Hamza and his family. Although free from debt, they will face ongoing discrimination in Pakistan, where Christians are a small minority.

THE POLICE CAPTAIN'S CAP

A Bible Smuggling Story

By Merv Knight

An aging man boarded a bus in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, with a long journey ahead of him — possibly a 12-hour ride. In his hands, he clutched a box of about 30 Bibles that he was taking to tribal Christians in the highlands. As he looked for a seat on the crowded bus, he pondered how he would get through the many checkpoints along the way without his precious goods being discovered.

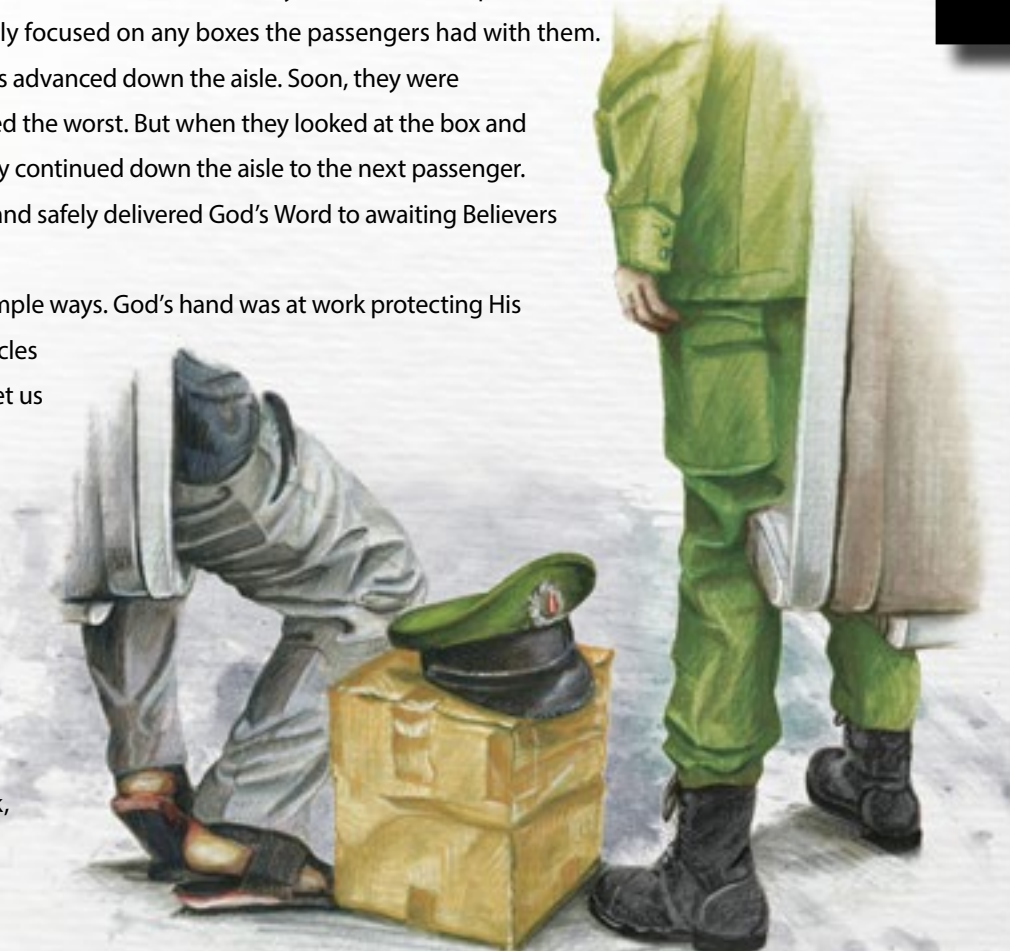
After finding an empty seat along the aisle, he sat down and placed the box of Bibles on the floor against his leg. A police captain who had followed him onto the bus then took the seat across the aisle from him, casually removed his hat and placed it on the man's box.

As the bus coughed and sputtered its way down the road, the man occasionally glanced down at his precious cargo, wondering if he would succeed in delivering it to his destination. All too soon, they reached a checkpoint. Police officers boarded the bus to check a few ID cards, but they were especially focused on any boxes the passengers had with them.

The man's heart skipped a beat as the officers advanced down the aisle. Soon, they were standing by his box of Bibles, and he expected the worst. But when they looked at the box and saw the police captain's cap resting on it, they continued down the aisle to the next passenger. Eventually, the man reached his destination and safely delivered God's Word to awaiting Believers in the highlands.

Miracles occur in different and sometimes simple ways. God's hand was at work protecting His precious Word. When we think about it, miracles happen often. In the rush and bustle of life, let us not fail to recognize God's hand, lest we miss the blessing.

Merv Knight has been serving the persecuted for more than 50 years. A VOM board member and co-founder of Voice of the Martyrs – Australia, he is also the Wurmbbrand Historian and author of the book Richard Wurmbbrand: The Man and His Work, (NOT AVAILABLE IN SOUTH AFRICA).



Prayer Diary[®]

October/November 2021

OCTOBER

S 17	MAURITANIA	Pray that Christians who worship in secret will connect with other Believers for fellowship.
M 18	MOROCCO	Pray for King Mohammed VI and other government leaders.
T 19	IRAN	Pray that the children of Christian families will stand strong while attending Muslim schools.
W 20	CHINA	Pray that Christians will bring the love and truth of Christ to a dying world.
T 21	NORTH KOREA	Pray for the success of Bible-smuggling efforts by air and sea.
F 22	PAKISTAN	Pray that all Christians will have their own copy of the Bible.
S 23	CAMEROON	Pray for local churches that care for and encourage persecuted Christians in the north.
S 24	DJIBOUTI	Pray for the continued spread of the Gospel among the Afar people.
M 25	IRAQ	Pray that house-church members will be strengthened through persecution.
T 26	MYANMAR	Pray for peace, specifically in areas affected by the recent Rohingya and Arakan conflicts.
W 27	TUNISIA	Pray for unity and collaboration among Tunisian churches.
T 28	LEBANON	Pray for pastors, churches and Christians living amid economic and civil disorder.
F 29	YEMEN	Pray for peace and unity in this war-torn country.
S 30	ALGERIA	Pray for those who hear the Gospel through social media evangelism.
S 31	LAOS	Pray for the 49 people groups with 200 ethnic subgroups in Laos.

NOVEMBER

M 1	IRAN	Pray for Muslims who are leaving Islam and accepting Christ.
T 2	TUNISIA	Pray for the house-churches throughout Tunisia.
W 3	CUBA	Pray that God's Word will reach the most remote areas of the island.
T 4	UNITED ARAB EMIRATES	Pray that those reading the Scriptures in secret will come to know Jesus Christ.
F 5	PAKISTAN	Pray for outreach efforts to minority groups like Hindus and Shiite Muslims.
S 6	BANGLADESH	Pray for the encouragement of Christians who are often the only Believers in their village.
S 7	KUWAIT	Pray that those receiving Bibles will come to know Jesus through God's Word.
M 8	CHINA	Pray that members of Early Rain Church will find peace amid ongoing persecution.
T 9	LEBANON	Pray that churches will become more united and cooperative for the sake of the Gospel.
W 10	KAZAKHSTAN	Pray for wisdom to spread the Good News at all times.
T 11	DJIBOUTI	Pray for continued stability so persecuted Believers from surrounding nations can take refuge in Djibouti.
F 12	BURKINA FASO	Pray that God will bring peace and restoration to Burkina Faso.
S 13	NORTH KOREA	Pray that VOM's radio broadcast in the North Korean dialect will reach many with the Gospel.

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CMI | P. O. Box 7157, Primrose Hill, 1417 South Africa | Office Cell: 076-022-3336 (8am-5pm)
Email: cmi@vomsa.org | Website: www.persecutionsa.org | Facebook@cmivomsa | Instagram@cmi - vomsa

Executive Director: Mr Ashley Illman - Direct Cell: 083 457 4164

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