



THE VOICE OF THE MARTYRS
DIE STEM VAN DIE MARTELARE

January 2023

Obedient

at Any Cost

SALVATION FOR HER
HOUSEHOLD

MOVING AHEAD AT
ANY COST

CUBA'S "COUNTER-
REVOLUTIONARY CRIMINALS"

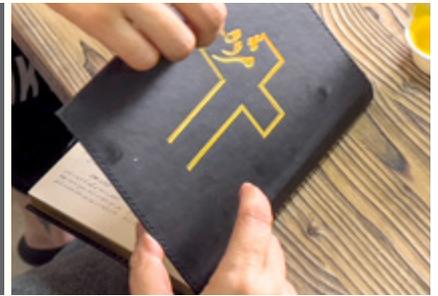


"Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them." Heb 13:3



1 Corinthians 12:24-26 - KJV

24. For our comely parts have no need; but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked: 25. That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. 26. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.



How long will our Christian brothers and sisters suffer alone?

Like the Old Testament prophet Elijah, today's persecuted Christians often face powerful persecutors alone. Elijah denounced Israel's wicked King Ahab after the king and his wife, Jezebel, led the Israelites to worship the false god Baal. In a dramatic confrontation on Mount Carmel, Elijah stood alone against hundreds of Baal's prophets. "I, even I only, remain a prophet of the LORD;" Elijah pronounced, "but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men." (1 Kings 18:22). Not one Israelite came to Elijah's aid.

Persecution is and always has been a regular occurrence for many in the body of Christ. But if it is normal in church history, why is responding to persecution exceptional? The issue is not whether faithful witnesses for Christ in places like Burkina Faso will face severe opposition, but whether they will become discouraged by having to do so alone.

Christians living in the world's most

difficult and dangerous places for our faith are, with us, members of one body — the body of our Lord. The suffering of any member of Christ's body must always be our concern. Leaving them without help discourages them and dishonours Christ. Scripture teaches that there should be "That there should be no schism in the body;" because its members care for one another: "And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it;" (1 Corinthians 12:25-26).

We must be resolved to rush to their aid. The correct response when a family member is being attacked is to do everything we can for them without hesitation. We immediately pray, go and help in whatever way possible. Persecuted Christians like Jamila, a Christian convert from Islam trapped in an abusive marriage, are not a statistic to discuss, a theoretical problem to solve or a cause to be championed. Jamila is our precious sister for eternity. If we understand what God

intends for the members of His family, we will hear the cry of persecuted Christians: "How long must we stand and suffer alone?" And our immediate response will be "Not long! We are on our way."

I have found that many sincere Christians in our nation have no knowledge of the persecuted members of our eternal family. And among those who know about the persecuted, most are unaware of the powerful ways we can support and encourage them. **Our prayers matter:** Persecuted Christians are greatly encouraged by knowing that we understand their plight and lift them up in prayer. **Our gifts matter:** They provide food, clothing, shelter and Bibles to our Christian family members in their time of greatest need. **And our voices matter:** Please consider the name of this newsletter a task that you can take upon yourself. Will you be *the voice of the martyrs*?

Salvation for You and Your Household



Jamila has lived in an abusive marriage for more than three decades. Raised as a Muslim, she was forced by her father into an arranged marriage with a harsh Muslim man. “I got married not because he was nice or good,” she said, “but because I had to.” From day one, Jamila’s husband viewed her more as a possession than a person, and before long he began to physically attack her.

Amid the continual beatings and threats, Jamila’s heart ached for goodness and truth. She had wrestled with questions about Islam for years, and when a Christian TV broadcast pointed her to the truth of Christ, Jamila found the answers she had been seeking. The faith in God that brought her peace, however, seemed only to intensify the violence in her home.

An Unlikely Upbringing

Though Jamila is a citizen of a Middle Eastern country, she was born in a Western nation, where her Muslim father was posted as a representative of his Arab government. After her mother

died, when Jamila was 5 years old, her father sent her to a Catholic boarding school. There, she was taught by nuns and required to attend chapel services that honoured Jesus Christ. And the seeds of those early lessons took root in her heart: Jesus Christ was real, and He loved her.

When Jamila turned 18, her father sent her back to the Middle East. Having lived in a Western nation all her life, she felt as if she had been dropped in a foreign country. She moved from one relative’s home to another, barely understanding the language and not at all the culture of her surroundings.

First Jamila was sent to an Arabic school to improve her language skills and gain the ability to read the Quran. Then she was sent to Saudi Arabia for Islamic religious training. “I had so many questions about Islam,” she said. “It is very clear in the Quran: hate Christians, hate Jewish people. I asked directly *why* that is written in the Quran. Why do you hate people? They ignored my questions. They didn’t give me the real answer.” Around that time, Jamila’s

▲ Jamila had questions about Jesus Christ as she studied the Quran during Islamic religious training. Today, she worships Him as her Saviour.

father pushed her into marriage with a Muslim man.

As she continued her Islamic training, Jamila heard an imam criticize Jesus Christ, saying things that didn’t agree with what she had learned in Catholic boarding school. “Why are these people saying such bad things about Jesus?” she wondered. She had been taught that Jesus Christ is loving, kind and good. She had learned that He was crucified, died and resurrected after three days, while Muslims deny that He even went to the cross.

Then, seven years ago during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, Jamila began to find answers to her many questions.

Finding the Answers

While studying in Saudi Arabia, Jamila

“The Lord stands up with me. I have seen His hand in all my life!”

had a dream in which she saw a light so bright that she couldn't open her eyes to see its source. When she returned home, she turned on the TV and began to search through satellite TV channels. As she came across Christian channels, her first impulse, trying to be a good Muslim, was to rush past them. But she felt as if something or someone was holding her hand, preventing her from pushing the button to move past the channel. She watched with interest as an evangelist challenged Islamic teachings and gave a clear presentation of the Gospel. Jamila, who had so many questions about Islam, was surprised to see someone openly asking similar questions on TV — and providing answers.

Wanting to find the answers on her own, Jamila began to compare the evangelist's teachings with those in the Quran and other books and on the internet. In the end, she did not find the

answers in Islam.

Determined to learn more about the Bible, and recalling the nuns and her childhood lessons, she headed for the local Catholic church. But when she got there, she was turned away by church leaders who feared that inviting a Muslim woman into their midst would cause problems. Then a friend helped Jamila connect with the pastor of an evangelical church. He gave her a Bible, and Jamila made the costly decision to read about Christ for herself.

Christ, Her Defender

Jamila's husband had been abusive since the first days of their marriage, but he began to treat her even more harshly after he learned that she was pursuing the truth about Christ. He provided food for their children but at times would not let her eat. When she was sick, he prevented her from getting treatment.

And the beatings continued. But Jamila felt that she had a defender in Jesus Christ.

“I went through the darkness of Islam between a husband and wife, how the husband sees his wife as a slave,” Jamila said. “My husband beat me for very small things. Any kind of thing, he would make a big issue and beat me. My husband and relatives threatened to kill me. I told them, ‘I don't care; do what you would like to do. I take Jesus as Saviour; He will protect me.’”

Since then, Jamila's grown children have stepped in, and she has seen God protect her. “The Lord never left me,” she said. “He was always with me. I faced some challenges, but the Lord reminded me how He has been with me.”

When asked why she stays in an abusive marriage, Jamila said, “I want to take care of my kids.” She is determined that her teenage daughters will not be forced into an abusive Muslim marriage, as she was.

For encouragement and hope, Jamila looks to Paul and Silas's promise to the Philippian jailer in Acts 16:31: “*And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.*” She is trusting in Christ for the salvation of her children and husband.

“I believe in this verse,” she said. “The Lord stands up with me. I have seen His hand in all my life!” ●



◀ Jamila joyfully trusts in God's promises as she prays for the salvation of her Muslim family members.

Moving Ahead

in the Shadow of Death

After Islamists kidnapped and murdered six Christians in Burkina Faso, family members and friends were encouraged through fellowship with the global body of Christ.

The day Mariam’s husband, Emmanuel, was killed will be seared into her memory forever.

Emmanuel lived and served as a church elder in the village of Sebba, Burkina Faso. For years, he had actively proclaimed the Gospel in the region surrounding his village and along the country’s borders with Niger and Mali.

Islamic militants from the self-proclaimed Islamic State (ISIS) and al-Qaida regularly launch attacks from those two nations in West Africa’s Sahara

Desert. And Christians in Burkina Faso have been a primary target of their attacks since April 2019, when Islamists attacked five churches and killed about 70 Christians.

Since then, more than 200 churches have reportedly closed in northern and eastern Burkina Faso because of security issues and the threat of further attacks, and as many as 10,000 Christians have fled their homes. While just over half of Burkina Faso’s population is Muslim, the militants seek to force everyone to

convert to Islam. And those who refuse face brutal consequences.

Elder Emmanuel’s Death

“Everywhere, you could see blood,” Mariam said of the site where militants killed her husband in front of her on a February day in 2020. “My oldest son kept wanting to come in to see his father,” she said, “to look at his face.”

Friends tried desperately to prevent him from entering the house, but he eventually forced his way inside. When

Pastor Armel’s wife (front center) and children remain firm in their faith following his abduction and murder.



the clothing covering Emmanuel's head was removed, Mariam's son saw that his father's skull had been split open.

In addition to killing Emmanuel, the militants stole everything of value, including the family's car. Mariam and her children were left with nothing but deep grief and trauma. "I have photos of the crime," Mariam's son said, "but they are so horrible I can't show the other children."

Pastor Armel Kidnapped

While Mariam's home was under attack, another group of Islamists attacked her pastor's home, not far away. Pastor Armel had celebrated his 20th anniversary as leader of a local church just a day earlier.

According to the pastor's son, Saidou, Pastor Armel had told his congregation during the anniversary celebration that he wanted them to "fight the good fight of faith," as he had been trying to do for two decades. He also acknowledged the growing pressure that he and all Christians faced from Islamic militants in the area. "I don't know if you will find me standing here next Sunday," he told them.

During a visit with friends on Monday, his day off, someone asked the pastor if he was well. "For the time being, I am," he said. His uncertain reply startled one of his daughters, who asked, "Why are you responding this way?"

"In life, everything can change in a minute," Pastor Armel said. And minutes later, it did.

A gang of Islamic militants suddenly entered Pastor Armel's home, threatening and robbing everyone present before forcing them out of the house. Then, the Islamists who had just killed Elder Emmanuel drove up in his vehicle. At gunpoint, the Islamists abducted Pastor Armel, several of his daughters, his brother and some other Christians, loading them in vehicles and driving them into the bush.

For three days, the militants tried to persuade the Christians to convert to Islam. At first, they provided food for the Christians and treated them with relative kindness, urging the young men to take up arms and join their Islamist insurgency. And they promised Pastor Armel that if he converted to Islam, they would reward him with a trip to Mali, where he could receive training to become one of their leaders. The Christians were forced to recite verses from the Quran, but they



refused to give in to their captors' demands to convert. "Not one of us here is going to become a Muslim," they said.

Though they remained firm in their faith, the Christians at times feared for their lives. In those moments, Pastor Armel reminded them of Psalm 23, saying, "*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil:*"

Eventually, the militants released the girls and some younger boys. After driving them a short distance away, they told them to start walking and not look back. As the group walked away, they heard six gunshots, equaling the number of remaining captives, including Pastor Armel.

The Aftermath

News of the murders devastated the Christian community of Sebba. One of Pastor Armel's sisters collapsed after learning that her brother had been killed, and she has struggled with grief ever since.

At the urging of friends, Elder Emmanuel's widow, Mariam, decided to leave Sebba with her nine children after

▲ Christians in Burkina Faso continue to follow Christ faithfully amid mounting pressure from Islamists.

hearing that the terrorists were planning to return. "They said they are coming back," she recalled, "that they weren't finished yet." Mariam's friends comforted her with the reminder that "when Jesus was a baby, He also had to flee because the ruler of the land wanted to kill Him."

When Front-Line Workers learned of Mariam's situation, they provided her and her children with basic necessities and housing in a safer location. Mariam and her family expressed gratitude for the help they received from the global body of Christ, and she said they are attending church every Sunday as they move forward with their lives.

"Give our blessing to all that contributed to support us," Mariam said. "We didn't know that there were persons very far, far, far from us who were praying for us. So when we knew this, this encouraged us. This reinforces our faith in God. We will keep moving ahead, even though Emmanuel is no longer with us." ●

Sledgehammers, Bulldozers and Imprisonments Can't Stop the Gospel

In Cuba, authorities often arrive without warning.

On 10 March, 2020, a group of men with sledgehammers appeared at Pastor David's church at 9am. "They wanted to demolish the church and everything inside," he said, "and they started smashing it with their 25-pound sledgehammers. They came at that hour when the church was closed, hoping that no one would try to stop them from destroying everything."

When the pastor and other church leaders learned what was happening,

they rushed to the site and managed to stop the wrecking crew before the roof could collapse. David was filled with emotion as he gazed in disbelief at the destroyed church building. "You can imagine the sadness that we all had," he explained, "after many years of sacrifice to be able to build a humble church and how they had unfairly demolished it."

Decades ago, Cuba's revolutionary leader, Fidel Castro, established an atheistic Communist government and vowed to drive religion from the

island. But Cuban church leaders say the opposite has happened. "It has been more than 60 years since Fidel said that," a church leader said, "but Christians are in Cuba, in many schools, in secret prison circles and in every municipality in Cuba. From east to west, north to south, Cuba is filled with the Gospel."

As knowledge of the Gospel increases in Cuba, however, so does government scrutiny.

After 17 years of worshipping together, Pastor Faustino's church of 100 members faced the same opposition in 2021 that David's church had experienced the previous year; the government sent a bulldozer to completely level the church building. Though the building was destroyed, church members continued to meet every day under a temporary roof at the church site, hoping to persuade the government to change its decision. Security officers confronted the Christians daily, pressuring them to leave, but the church members remained faithful despite running low on food and surviving mainly on rice husks.



◀ Pastors in Cuba are committed to preaching the Gospel and caring for Christ's followers despite Communist oppression.



Other Cuban pastors have faced even greater pressures. Two have been imprisoned for more than a year, and one has reportedly been tortured and treated like a “counterrevolutionary criminal.” Still, the Communist Party’s efforts to crush churches in Cuba with sledgehammers, bulldozers and imprisonments continue to fail.

All that remains of Pastor David’s church building is the roof, yet his congregation continues to gather for worship and fellowship. They meet on porches and in kitchens, in fields and under trees. And they baptize new Believers in cleaned-out pigsties. “Despite everything,” David said, “the

congregation continues to grow more and more.”

Another pastor, a widow who struggles to provide for her two teenage children, boldly defies authorities who regularly pressures her to stop her church activities. “I demand they show what law I have broken,” she said. Since the authorities have never cited a specific law, she continues her ministry work. Cuban Christians, like this faithful pastor, ask for prayer that they will continue to stand firm in their faith.

One Cuban pastor was told by a senior U.N. official that he could speak to the Pope, the president of the United States and Cuba’s leader on behalf of

▲ Cuban Christians continued their worship services after authorities nearly destroyed their church building.

Cuban Christians. “What would you like me to tell them to do for the church in Cuba?” the U.N. official asked.

The pastor replied that they do not want anything from the Pope, the president or Cuba’s leader. “We are not asking for persecution to be removed,” he told the official. “We just want people to pray that we remain faithful.” ●

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Proverbs 15:1-11 - KJV

1. A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger. 2. The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright: but the mouth of fools poureth out foolishness. 3. The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good. 4. A wholesome tongue is a tree of life: but perverseness therein is a breach in the spirit. 5. A fool despiseth his father’s instruction: but he that regardeth reproof is prudent. 6. In the house of the righteous is much treasure: but in the revenues of the wicked is trouble. 7. The lips of the wise disperse knowledge: but the heart of the foolish doeth not so. 8. The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD: but the prayer of the upright is his delight. 9. The way of the wicked is an abomination unto the LORD: but he loveth him that followeth after righteousness. 10. Correction is grievous unto him that forsaketh the way: and he that hateth reproof shall die. 11. Hell and destruction are before the LORD: how much more then the hearts of the children of men?

Where are they now?



» AIDA SKRIPNIKOVA from THE FORMER SOVIET UNION

Various VOM newsletters, 1970 – 1992

Aida Skripnikova was imprisoned for a total of four years in the Soviet Union (USSR) when she was in her 20s. Her crimes were receiving Bibles that were smuggled into the country and distributing information about Christians imprisoned for their faith by Communist authorities.

Earlier this year, Aida, now 82 and living in St. Petersburg, Russia, was visiting relatives in Ukraine when the war broke out. The city where she was staying was bombed and shelled for several consecutive days, causing the deaths of 54 people when a residential building was hit. In addition, the school in her relatives' neighbourhood and the largest supermarket in the city were destroyed. On one night of Aida's visit, air-raid sirens sounded five times, forcing her and her relatives to take shelter in the apartment building's basement — the only safe place to hide from Russian bombs and artillery shells.

For three weeks, utilities such as electricity, gas and water were disrupted. Aida said that throughout her stay, she remembered Psalm 91, specifically verse 1, which says, "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." VOM and other members of the body of Christ secured Aida's safe return to her home in St. Petersburg. Continue to pray for her as she serves as a faithful witness to Christ in Russia. ■

» DANJUMA from NIGERIA

October 2015 magazine

About eight years ago, Islamic insurgents attacked Danjuma's village, burning homes and killing Christians. When they saw Danjuma, who was 13 at the time, some of the attackers slashed his head with a machete, carved out his right eye, hacked at his left arm and left him for dead.

Later, as survivors dug graves for those who had been killed, they heard Danjuma crying and shouting. Upon seeing his horrible condition, they took him to the nearest hospital, where he was stabilized and treated.

Months after the attack, Danjuma told a Front-Line Worker that he had forgiven those who mutilated him and left him for dead. "I forgive them because they don't know what they are doing," he said, echoing the words of Christ on the cross. "If they had love, they wouldn't behave that way."

Danjuma has come a long way since the attack. After undergoing multiple surgeries and extensive rehabilitation, he enrolled in a school for the blind. And in 2020, his older brother, John, began caring for him.

John continues to provide for Danjuma's needs and study the Bible with him. He also helps his younger brother with school work. Because Danjuma had to learn how to read Braille, he essentially restarted his education. Through diligent work, Danjuma has now progressed to high school.

In July 2022, he attended his first Christian camp, centered around the theme "Sanctified." The VOM-sponsored retreat helps young adults from persecuted families understand the importance of living a pure, wholesome life. While at the camp, Danjuma rededicated his life to Christ and made many new friends. ■



Prayer Diary[®]

January/February 2023

JANUARY 2023

S 15	SRI LANKA	Pray that the next generation of Christian leaders will grow into biblical maturity.
M 16	ISRAEL	Pray that Islamist groups will be thwarted in their efforts to oppose Christian activities.
T 17	KENYA	Pray for village pastors receiving theological training for the first time.
W 18	MALDIVES	Pray for those working on written and audio translations of the Bible in the Divehi language.
T 19	MEXICO	Pray for the success of outreach activities for children in southern Mexico.
F 20	TAJIKISTAN	Praise the Lord for the growing number of Tajik Christians and pastors.
S 21	IRAQ	Pray that church leaders will have opportunities to reach refugees with the Gospel.
S 22	MALI	Pray that the Gospel will advance to people in unreached areas.
M 23	UAE*	Pray for Christians who have lost their jobs, homes and family relationships because of their faith.
T 24	TANZANIA	Pray that 72 young Christians ostracized by their families will find a home.
W 25	DJIBOUTI	Pray for the wisdom of Christians who share the Gospel with Muslims through social media.
T 26	VIETNAM	Pray that every tribe in Vietnam will include Christians and have Bibles in their language.
F 27	TUNISIA	Pray that local churches will be welcoming and wise as they evangelize.
S 28	BHUTAN	Pray for Christians as they attend public worship under threat of arrest.
S 29	YEMEN	Pray for the continued strong witness of a church that was raided by armed men.
M 30	LAOS	Pray that the Gospel will continue to spread among minority peoples.
T 31	TURKEY	Pray for foreign workers who face deportation if they are suspected of missions work.

FEBRUARY 2023

W 1	ETHIOPIA	Pray that church leaders will be united in Christ above other loyalties amid Ethiopia's conflict.
T 2	CHINA	Pray for unrestricted access to Bibles and Christian study aids.
F 3	PAKISTAN	Pray for the spiritual growth of children who hear the Gospel through Sunday school ministries.
S 4	ERITREA	Pray that Christians scattered by persecution will be instruments of the Gospel wherever they are.
S 5	MYANMAR	Pray that evangelistic efforts will be unhindered by political upheaval.
M 6	NIGER	Pray that new Believers will have Christian fellowship and grow in God's Word.
T 7	OMAN	Pray that Omanis who hear the Gospel will place their faith in Jesus Christ.
W 8	BHUTAN	Pray that Nepali and Indian Believers will share the Gospel with their Bhutanese neighbours.
T 9	AZERBAIJAN	Pray for revival as Christians rejoice in God's steadfast love (Psalm 85:6-7).
F 10	COMOROS	Pray that evangelists who receive motorbikes will be able to reach more people with the Gospel.
S 11	BANGLADESH	Pray that those taking Bibles and resources into rural areas will find passable roads.
S 12	NIGERIA	Pray for Rejoice, a 5-year-old girl who was kidnapped by militant Islamic Fulani.
M 13	MALAYSIA	Pray for the family of Pastor Raymond Koh who was abducted on this day in 2017.
T 14	TUNISIA	Pray that new Believers will be firmly established in their faith to prepare for coming persecution.
W 15	ISRAEL	Pray that Christians who have been rejected by their family will be comforted by Christ's love.
T 16	MEXICO	Pray for the successful distribution of Bibles in isolated communities this year.
F 17	SYRIA	Pray for Aaron and Khalil, two brothers whose farm was destroyed by ISIS attackers.
S 18	UAE*	Pray for Christian workers who are using their vocations to reach Muslims for Christ.

*UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

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