

# release

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## 2011 OVERVIEW

Help us face the challenges ahead

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## A DAUGHTER'S PLEA

for missing Chinese lawyer Gao Zhisheng

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## WHAT A YEAR!

release:potential celebrates non-stop action

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**PAKISTAN HOPE AND HEALING**

# Strong together

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international  
voice of persecuted christians

# 2011: The challenges ahead

Looking back to 2010, we celebrate and give thanks for answers to prayer and notable highlights, such as our campaign for Pakistan Let Justice Flow.

Looking forward into 2011 we identify a number of urgent situations around the world, and invite you to continue supporting persecuted Christians through your campaigning, praying and giving.

**PAKISTAN**  
**CAMPAIGN COLLECTS 45,000**  
**SIGNATURES IN 2010**

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ACTION



Your support for our campaign has helped 'Let Justice Flow' for Pakistan's Christian community, including these pupils at a Christian school run by one of Release's partners.

In May 2010 we launched our campaign to support persecuted Christians in Pakistan: Let Justice Flow.

We're delighted to report, as *Release* magazine went to press, that we have received a total of 45,000 signatures calling on Pakistan to protect religious freedoms for the Christian minority in that country. Thank you so much to everyone who took part.

Release CEO Andy Dipper and patron Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali will deliver the petition to the Pakistan High Commission in London on January 13, when they will also meet the High Commissioner. Please pray that the petition and this meeting will have a significant impact in improving religious freedom for Christians in Pakistan.

We are also pleased that so many of our supporters took part in our special Day of Prayer for Pakistan on October 3, 2010, with many making use of our new DVD *Cry Justice* (see page 10).

While many individual Christians continue to face persecution and discrimination of different kinds in Pakistan, including violent attacks by militants, we have also been encouraged by a number of positive reports in 2010. These included:

- The release on bail in November 2010 of Yousaf Masih, Suria Bibi and their son-in-law Zahid Masih, who had been accused of blasphemy. Release's partner helped bring reconciliation with the complainant.
- The release on bail in November 2010 of Munir Masih, husband of blasphemy accused Ruqqiya Bibi.
- The acquittal of Christian woman Rubina Bibi, accused of blasphemy, in August 2010, after the judge in Gujranwala ruled that the authorities had pressured her into making a false confession. •

## 2011 CAMPAIGN TO FOCUS ON NORTH KOREA



Release's campaign for 2011 will focus on North Korea, considered by many to be the most repressive nation on earth.

Citizens are

obliged by law to display in their homes portraits of the late Kim Il Sung, North Korea's first leader, and his son, current ruler Kim Jong Il (pictured). Having faith in someone apart from the leader is seen as highly subversive.

All Christian meetings, Christian literature and Bibles are banned – forcing all believers to meet secretly, at great personal risk to themselves.

Many Christians have been sent to death camps as political prisoners and subjected to brutal treatment in appalling conditions. Entire families are known to have been imprisoned if just one member is found to be a Christian.

The number of Christians in North Korea is unknown. Before the Communists came to power, there were said to be 300,000 believers and the capital Pyongyang was known as 'Asia's Jerusalem' because of the strong influence of Christianity.

The BBC estimates that 'up to 30,000 North Koreans may practise Christianity secretly in their homes'. A Release partner believes that the number could be as high as 100,000.

Given the increasing tensions between North and South Korea, which in 2010 included the sinking by North Korea of a South Korean naval ship in March, and a rocket attack by the North on a South Korean island in November, the campaign will be a timely opportunity for both prayer and advocacy to support persecuted Christians.

Details of the new campaign will be given in the next edition of *Release*.

**ERITREA** GOVERNOR ORDERS PURGE BEFORE CHRISTMAS

The outlook for evangelical Christians in Eritrea appears to be getting worse. Eritrean security forces in the south have started a new, vigorous campaign of persecution against evangelical and pentecostal Christians. This follows a meeting in October 2010, when the governor of the southern province, Mustafa Nur Hussein, ordered an end-of-year purge against Christians.

One of the raids by the authorities uncovered a list of underground church members in the towns of Dekemhare, Mendefera and Dbarwa and smaller villages in the area. Security forces are now using this list to pursue every known believer and their families. To date around 40 men and women have been taken to prison and the search for others is continuing.

According to our partner Release-Eritrea, 3,000 Christians and church leaders have been imprisoned without trial in Eritrea. However, the number of committed Christians continues to grow in spite of the ongoing repression. •



Alem was imprisoned for three years in Mai Serwa military camp, Eritrea, because of his Christian activities. He was held in a metal shipping container, beaten with a plastic baton, and subjected to mindless hard labour.

**CHINA** INCREASING PERSECUTION



During 2010 the levels of persecution against the unregistered Christian house church movement by the Chinese Government increased to even more significant levels.

It seems likely that as the number of house churches continues to grow, the more the Government will want to exercise control on what it views as a threat to its authority. The serious persecution directed against the Shanxi Linfen Fushan and Shuozhou churches in 2009 showed the Government's determination to suppress large and influential churches, as well

Members of the Linfen Fushan church network were attacked by police and government officials as they slept on the construction site of their new church building. Photo: China Aid.

as their strategy to intimidate, arrest and imprison individual pastors and Christian leaders across the whole of China.

The authorities continue to monitor statements and communication from Chinese citizens, both Christian and non-Christian alike. In fact anyone who maintains any contact with those outside China and who seeks to inform the rest of the world about what is happening inside the country runs the risk of arrest and long-term detention under the apparent catch-all charge of subversion or undermining the State. •

**IRAN**

**KHAMENEI CONCERNED BY GROWTH OF HOUSE CHURCHES**

On October 19, 2010, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of Iran and former President, gave a speech describing how Islam is being undermined. He noted that young Muslims are being separated from the pure principles of Islamic faith by distractions, differing philosophies, and religions – including the 'network of house churches'.

The growth of the church has been noted by both Christians and the Iranian Government. The fact that Khamenei took special care to target the network of house churches is telling.

The concern is that local officials will receive this statement as permission and encouragement to increase the level of surveillance, intimidation and persecution directed at house church Christians, and Muslim converts in particular.

The church in Iran has suffered intense persecution over recent years with many key pastors and Christian leaders arrested and imprisoned even within the past 12 months. This trend seems set to continue in 2011.

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women

## LOOKING FORWARD TO 2011

So what lies ahead in 2011 in Pakistan for our Christian family? We continue to support and pray for Christian women and their families who are persecuted as a result of Pakistan's notorious blasphemy laws. We thank God that a number of precious Christian women were released on bail from prison at the end of 2010 (see page 2).

In 2011 we plan to send a Release:women ministry team to Pakistan to spend time teaching, sharing, training and learning from Christian sisters who face persecution – and so be able to encourage and build up our persecuted family.

**Your marvellous response proved to be an enormous encouragement to the work and ministry in Pakistan and to Release:women in particular.**



Your support will enable a Release ministry team to pray for and encourage Christian women in Pakistan.



**Noureen was badly injured when militants attacked her village, but today she is physically and spiritually restored, and is learning to sew at a skills centre supported by Release. Photo: SLMP.**

In 2010 we asked you to support our appeal for Pakistan. Despite the growing UK recession, you responded faithfully to give a total of £34,500 during the year. Your marvellous response proved to be an enormous encouragement to the work and ministry in Pakistan and to Release:women in particular.

As a result Release:women has been able to set plans in place to initiate a new international project, the first of its kind for us. In August 2010 a ministry team visit to Pakistan included two women with a specific brief to pray with and to interview Christian women to assess their needs.

This information has been key in helping to start a new project with a Release partner. This will specifically address the need to empower Christian women socially, economically and spiritually. A potential project manager has been identified, and we hope to report on progress during 2011.

The needs of the Community Action Programme High School for Girls were also highlighted in the appeal and your response has led to £7,500 a year being set up in standing orders for the school.

This ensures that girls not only receive an education, but their future holds more opportunities for employment and living less vulnerable lives as Christian women in environments that can lead to abuse and violation. Thank you to everyone who continues to share in this work by giving through standing orders.

### PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL HEALING

You may remember the young Christian woman Noureen who was injured in a horrendous assault in 2009. She received burns when she was attacked with acid by a Muslim mob ransacking her village.

Noureen is now physically healed, and has been restored psychologically and spiritually. She is active in her community, and has learned to sew at a new skills centre initiated by our partner Sharing Life Ministries, Pakistan.

She continues to live as a young woman of God who understands the words of Peter in his first letter: 'In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials...' (1 Peter 1:6). •



Wurim Gyang Yakubu, 17, was deeply affected by the massacre in his village in Nigeria, and took part in a trauma-healing workshop supported by Release. Photos: Stefanos Foundation.

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## 'PRAY FOR US'

Following the workshop Wurim Gyang Yakubu, aged 17, said: 'The massacre has affected me greatly; I used to be interested in school but now I am just going through the motions. Please pray for those who lost their loved ones and their properties, and also for God's grace for us.'

Release:potential is committing to the long-term support and investment into the situation in Nigeria and to our partners, such as the Stefanos Foundation.

As these young people begin their journey towards healing and restoration, release:potential is committed to journeying with them.

As we look forward to the challenges of 2011, please pray for Christians in Plateau State and Release's partners who work there. •

## 2010 HEALING THE WOUNDS OF TRAUMA

As news of persecution comes in from around the world, Release's partners engage with Christians suffering extreme hardships, providing them with essential support.

For young people, trauma can be especially difficult to deal with, as it is often the support networks of parents and extended family that have been destroyed by the acts of persecution.

In March 2010 more than 500 Christians died as extremist mobs attacked three villages near Jos in Plateau State, Nigeria. Men, women and children were killed as an estimated 400 assailants descended on the villages in the early hours of March 7.

Release's partner, the Stefanos Foundation, has been supporting the survivors as they attempt to rebuild their lives: physically, mentally and spiritually.

For the young people of the villages, processing what has happened to their parents, their friends and their communities is an essential part of their healing process.

The Stefanos Foundation ran trauma-healing workshops, working with young people aged between 12 and 23, counselling them through issues of grief, anger, and abandonment using biblical teaching and the process of forgiveness.

Some of the young people witnessed horrific scenes and are now having to deal with the aftermath of such violent attacks.

### Fear of further attacks is widespread in the area

Gyang Yohanna, aged 17, said: 'The death of my mum and my sister was a painful experience for me. I watched as they were brutally murdered. I miss my mum's care for me. My older sister was my closest friend. We used to study together, helping each other at school. I miss them both.'

Fear of further attacks is widespread in the area, as rumours that the mobs will return circulate. The Stefanos Foundation, local churches and other Christian agencies are working hard to encourage responses of peace and forgiveness by the Christian communities, in the face of violence and injustice.

**'Please pray for those who lost their loved ones and their properties, and also for God's grace for us.'**

## 2011 PRAY FOR NIGERIA

- that the local, state and federal governments would act justly and wisely for all concerned
- that communities would be reconciled, and relationships healed
- pray against retaliation and revenge, that the message of grace and forgiveness would prevail
- pray that the church would be strengthened and that Nigeria would know Jesus as both Saviour and Comforter



Release's partner the Stefanos Foundation organised a workshop to help young people receive healing for trauma after three communities were brutally attacked by militants in March 2010.

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## PRAYER

Prayer is at the heart of Release's ministry – and we are enormously thankful that so many of our supporters pray regularly for our partners, projects and staff. We cannot survive without your prayers!



Church leader Nguyen Van Ly, pictured here at his trial in 2007, was released from prison five years early. Photo: Reuters.

## ANSWERS TO PRAYER 2010

In 2010 we saw many answers to prayer, including the following:

**IRAN:** At the beginning of March 2010 we asked you to pray for the release of Rev Wilson Issavi, leader of the Assyrian Evangelical Church in Karmanshah, who had 'disappeared' after state security officers arrested him in February. He was released after posting bail on March 28.

**PAKISTAN:** Your fantastic response to our appeal for Pakistan in 2010 was an answer

to prayer. Your gifts enabled us to keep on funding our partner Community Action Programme. Their schools for the children of poor Christian families continue to provide an excellent education, and lives are being changed (see page 4).

**VIETNAM:** In March 2010 human rights activist and church leader Nguyen Van Ly was released from prison, five years before the end of his sentence. In 2009 he suffered two strokes that left him partly paralysed. He had been sentenced to eight years in prison in 2007 for trying to undermine the Government.

## RESOURCES TO HELP YOU PRAY

*Prayer Shield*, which is included with this magazine, provides a daily prayer request, as well as brief background information.

Our *Prayer Alert* emails highlight situations needing urgent prayer, and are sent free of charge. Subscribe via our website [www.releaseinternational.org/signup](http://www.releaseinternational.org/signup) or by calling us on 01689 823491.

Our monthly *Prisoners of Faith* email alert gives details of a Christian prisoner of faith, with prayer points and suggestions for letter-writing. Subscribe



via our website [www.releaseinternational.org/signup](http://www.releaseinternational.org/signup), or by using the back-page coupon.

Our booklet, the *Prayer group guide*, gives practical advice on

how to start your own prayer group, and suggests topics for prayer. Available free of charge on request.

Release also produces a range of informative DVDs about countries where Christians face persecution. These can be purchased securely online from our eStore at [www.releaseinternational.org/estore](http://www.releaseinternational.org/estore), or requested from our office for a donation.

## 2011: PRAY FOR SUDAN

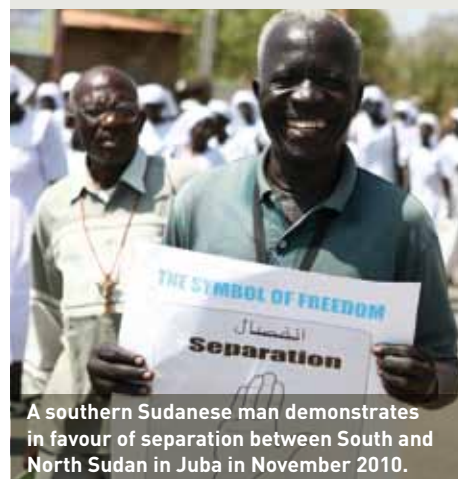
The planned referendum on independence for southern Sudan, a key part of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2005, is due to take place on January 9, 2011.

A recent report by Release's partner Middle East Concern identified the implications for the South as being 'profound, with the threat of serious challenges for Christians and churches'.

It said: 'The major concerns of Sudanese Christian leaders are a changed legal status for the church in the North, and the potential forced migration of Christians of southern origin living in the North leading to a crisis of leadership for churches and Christian ministries in the North and a large influx of people in the South.'

Please pray urgently:

- Thank God for the growth of the church in Sudan, and pray that this growth continues
- For effective and peaceful preparations for the referendum on southern independence
- For agreement on the North-South border and that it is accurately and effectively demarcated
- For the rapid development of infrastructure across the South and other disadvantaged areas
- That oil revenues and natural resources are shared equitably
- For all involved in the mediation of outstanding North-South issues



A southern Sudanese man demonstrates in favour of separation between South and North Sudan in Juba in November 2010.

Photo: Reuters.

# HELP US DO MORE

**As this overview of 2011 suggests, now more than ever we need your prayers, gifts, time and advocacy to support persecuted Christians across the globe.**

**In nations such as Eritrea, Iran, Nigeria, North Korea and many others, your support will make a vital difference to Christians and church leaders on the frontline of faith.**



**Thank you so much for the ways in which you will partner with us – and persecuted believers – in 2011.**

Andy Dipper CEO



Your support makes a vital difference to persecuted Christians.

**These are some of the ways you, your family and your church can make a real difference in 2011:**

## **release** ACTION

Look out for details of our new campaign for North Korea in the next edition of *Release* magazine. Encourage your church to take part throughout 2011 by praying, supporting our petition, and raising the profile of North Korea (see page 2).

Consider becoming a Church Representative – and raise the profile of persecuted Christians in your church or area. Full training and topical resources provided. (See page 13).

## **release** PRISONERS

If you haven't already done so, sign up to receive the free monthly Prisoners of Faith alert (see back-page coupon). Pray for the Christian prisoners featured, and write letters to the authorities on their behalf (see page 12).

## **release** women

Support persecuted Christian women by taking part in our new 'Love, St Valentine' meal during February 2011. Read more on page 14.



## **release** :potential

Get young people and youth leaders plugged into *release:potential* (see page 18), which in 2011 will be launching a new campaign to support the work of partners sharing the love of Jesus with the people of North Korea.

## **release** PRAYER

Make use of our prayer resources (see opposite) and 'Keep on praying for all the saints' (Ephesians 6:18). Sign up to receive our email Prayer Alert at [www.releaseinternational.org/signup](http://www.releaseinternational.org/signup)

**We need your prayers and gifts to continue supporting persecuted Christians throughout 2011. To make a donation, please use the back-page coupon.**