

## Pray 173 – Help bring freedom for Eritrean Prisoners of Faith

**Day 1** At the start of these 173 days of prayer for the release of all Christian prisoners of faith in Eritrea, let's thank our Father God for every one of our dear brothers and sisters who are in prison. Right now, there are hundreds of Christians in prison in Eritrea because of their faith in Christ and many more who have been imprisoned in the past. Each one is precious and deeply loved by God. Please pray that God would change the heart of Isaias Afewerki, the first President of Eritrea who has held that position since the country's independence in 1993. Pray for God's blessing on the nation of Eritrea, on President Afewerki, his family, his people and pray for freedom for our Eritrean brothers and sisters in Christ.

**Day 2** On May 13, Eritrean security officials in the town of Adi Quala went from house to house to arrest members of the Kale Hiwot evangelical church. They arrested a total of 25 adults and 12 children. So far, none of them has been charged or released. Pray they will be released shortly and allowed to return to their families.

**Day 3** Pray for our Christian brother who tried to visit the recently arrested Christians in the town of Adi Quala. He wanted to take them some food and to enquire about their situation but he too was arrested, bring the total number of adults arrested to 26.

**Day 4** Some of the women arrested in Adi Quala have children at home with no one to look after them. Please pray for the release of these prisoners and for their families at home.

**Day 5** Please pray for Almaz who served as an evangelist and teacher in Adi Quala's Kale Hiwot Church. She is disabled and uses a wheelchair. Prison is never easy but in Eritrea where Christian prisoners are routinely tortured to force them to recant their faith and conditions are almost unbearable, Almaz will find things incredibly difficult.

**Day 6** Pray today specifically for 15 Christians arrested last month (May 2017) in Ginda. None of them has been charged and all are still in prison.

**Day 7** Please pray for Zeray who is imprisoned in Me'etir prison camp. He is a member of Asmara Kale Hiwot church and a teacher by profession. Zeray was arrested in 2006. Those who know him testify to his faithfulness and willingness to suffer for his faith in Christ.

**Day 8** Today we are asking you to pray for 17 long-term Christian prisoners of faith in Assab. Some of them have been in prison more than eight years. We heard recently they are suffering from malnutrition and poor health. Many of them are seriously ill as a result of the poor sanitation. Security officials have prevented anyone from visiting them. They are under constant government surveillance. Food and medicine are not allowed to be brought in from outside.

**Day 9** Pray for the Eritrean government which has started a new wave of rounding up Christians in several towns. Nobody knows the main reason for this renewed crackdown but the government believes it can act with impunity and has nothing to fear from the international community. Christians across Eritrea are under renewed pressure of arrest and many have begun to pray and fast for peace and security. Pray for a change of heart in the government of Eritrea.

**Day 10** Pray for God's protection over all prisoners but today please pray specifically for Weini, a grandmother, along with her daughter and three grandchildren, the youngest of whom is just two months old and who are currently imprisoned in Eritrea.

**Day 11** The degree of suffering endured by Christian prisoners in Eritrea depends largely on how they are treated by the guards and prison officers day by day. Pray for favour with the guards and that God will move the hearts of these men and women to treat the prisoners with dignity and kindness.

**Day 12** Million Gebressilassie, a member of Rhema Church, was arrested in 2004 in Massawa. He is a single man and worked as a male nurse in Massawa hospital prior to his detention. He was arrested with his church pastor, Tesfatsion Hagos, who was released in 2010 and is currently living in Australia. Million is currently in Wengel Mermera high security prison and is not permitted visitors.

**Day 13** Please pray for God's provision for the families of prisoners. A very real pressure on Christian prisoners is to sign the required papers recanting their faith so that they can return home to help provide for elderly parents, spouses and children.

**Day 14** Please pray for Mussie Yemane, an evangelist who was arrested in 4<sup>th</sup> October 2006. He is currently imprisoned in 5<sup>th</sup> Asmara police station prison. Mussie is married and has two children. Both of his children are living with their grandparents. His wife Senait is currently living outside the country.

**Day 15** Pray today for prisoners to experience God's presence with them in their prison cell wherever that cell is in Eritrea, or whatever it is like. Pray they will feel the warmth of his love, that he will speak with them and comfort them. Pray that God's Holy Spirit will powerfully work in and through them enabling them to somehow find ways to encourage one another.

**Day 16** Pray for Reverend Haile Naizghi, leader of Eritrea's Full Gospel Church who was arrested on May 23, 2004. He was taken from his home to Police Station #1 in Asmara, before being moved to Wengel Mermera - a dungeon-like prison in Asmara, where he is still held, along with at least five other prominent church leaders. Without God's intervention they have little hope of release any time soon.

**Day 17** Pray for pastor Haile Naizghi's wife Rahel and their three children. Neither she nor her children have been allowed any contact with Reverend Haile since he was imprisoned in 2004. In 2013, Rahel received credible information that the government wanted to arrest her and the children and was forced to leave Eritrea.

**Day 18** Pray today for the health of all prisoners of faith in Eritrea's hidden network of prisons. Many of them are malnourished, dangerously underweight and seriously ill because of poor sanitation, hygiene and torture. Pray for healing for damaged and broken bodies and that God would strengthen, encourage and protect them right now.

**Day 19** Aregaheign Weldeclassie, is an Eritrean American who came as a missionary to Eritrea with his wife and two teenage daughters. He served as Director of The Nehemiah Project in Asmara, helping to train and equip pastors for ministry. Aregaheign had been a long term supporter of the Eritrean struggle for independence during his time in the US and possibly believed his support for the government would help keep him safe and allow him to continue in ministry. He was in his early 60's when he was taken from his home and detained by security officers in 2006. He has never been charged. Pray for him and his family. His wife and children are in the US.

**Day 20** Pray particularly for prisoners who are in solitary confinement. When Christians are arrested they will often be taken initially to a police station or detention centre before being transported to prison. Individuals or house church leaders may be separated, isolated and placed in solitary confinement. An isolation cell typically would measure just 2m x 2.5m. The cell will have no curtain

or mattress, nothing to bring comfort, no window, no toilet – just the bare floor. Solitary confinement combined with torture is very hard to bear.

**Day 21** Several Eritrean Christians have died in prison. For some of these dear men and women it was a result of beating, malnourishment or infection. Others have suffered so terribly, that they have taken their own lives. Today we pray this promise over every single prisoner young, old, church leader or church member; ‘The Lord is near to the broken hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. Psalm 34:18

**Day 22** Pray for the senior pastor of the Kale Hiwot church, Pastor Ogbamichael Teklehaimanot. Pastor Ogba, as he is affectionately known was arrested in 2003 and 2005 before his arrest in 2007. During his time in prison in 2005 he was subjected to months of solitary confinement and hard physical labour which resulted in him having a nervous breakdown. Currently he is imprisoned in the 5<sup>th</sup> Asmara police station. Please also pray for his wife and three children.

**Day 23** Any prisoner found reading the Bible or a portion of scripture will be in serious trouble. Pray that the Holy Spirit will help prisoners to recall verses and promises from God’s word, that he will speak the Word of God to them and help them find a way of memorising and sharing his word.

**Day 24** We know the church is growing inside the prisons of Eritrea. We know numbers but in order to protect believers cannot name specific prisons or give any details. Pray that today even in the darkest of prison cells Christian prisoners will show God’s love and share the gospel with other prisoners.

**Day 25** January 20, 2017 marked the 11-year anniversary of the Eritrean government’s illegal removal of Abune Antonios as the rightful Patriarch of the Eritrean Orthodox Church. The Patriarch has been detained since 2007: His ‘crime’ was his refusal to excommunicate 3,000 parishioners who opposed the government. On May 27, 2007, the Eritrean government forcibly removed Patriarch Antonios from his home and placed him under house arrest at an undisclosed location. He remains detained and is denied medical care despite severe health concerns. He will be 90 years old on July 12.

**Day 26** Pray specifically for church leaders imprisoned in Eritrea. Their faithful confession of faith in Christ and their refusal to recant that faith means that many of them have now been in prison for more than 10 years. Their discipleship has been costly. If they were to deny Christ and sign a document to that effect they would be released and reunited with their families and loved ones. There is incredible pressure and temptation for these pastors and leaders to take that option and go free. Eritrean Christians regard these men as, ‘fathers’ in the faith. Their witness, example and perseverance are so significant to the Eritrea diaspora. Pray that they will be given grace to remain faithful and stay strong.

**Day 27** Pray for Reverend Dr Tekleab Menghisteab, a highly respected physician who was arrested in 2005 as a church leader involved in the Medhane Bible study group and renewal movement within the Eritrean Orthodox Church. Dr Menghisteab is insulin dependent and has been reported to be in poor health. He is married with four children.

**Day 28** Many elderly parents of long term prisoners are dying without ever seeing their sons and daughters released. Young children who were left behind when their parents were arrested are now coming of age without experiencing the nurture, provision and closeness of their father and mother. Pray for the families of prisoners today.

**Day 29** The government enlists community members to spy on Christians. Although members of the Eritrean Coptic Church enjoy relative freedom, other denominations are seen as 'agents of the West'. The West was blamed for unrest in the nation after a failed coup in 2013, and this resulted in more intensive persecution of Christians. Even in prisons there are spies who report on the activities of Christian prisoners. Pray today for these spies, that as they witness the faith of Christians their hearts would be changed and they would come to faith.

**Day 30** Evangelist Mussie Ezaz had a growing ministry with young people in the Kale Hiwot Church before his arrest in 2007. He escaped from custody but was rearrested in January 2008 as he tried to flee to Ethiopia. Mussie has now been in prison for nearly ten years. He has not been permitted to see his wife or three sons during this time. Please pray for Mussie and his family.