

Pray 173 – Help bring freedom for Eritrean Prisoners of Faith

Day 31 Among the hundreds of Christians imprisoned in Eritrea are a number of prominent church leaders who were arrested in 2004. These leaders face intimidation and hunger and are denied access to proper medical care because they refuse to renounce Christ. Now, 13 years later, they remain incarcerated at Wengel Mermera prison, a dungeon- like inner prison in Asmara, also known as Karselli prison. Without a miracle and God’s intervention they have little hope of release any time soon. Today we pray particularly for the release of these key church leaders.

Day 32 Pray that the Eritrean church would esteem, support, pray for and speak out on behalf of those who are still in prisons in Eritrea and those who have been released. Eritrean Christians outside the country do not want to speak out against the government or to speak up on behalf of their suffering brothers and sisters in Christ for fear that their relatives in Eritrea will suffer or be imprisoned.

Day 33 Many of Eritrea’s prisoners – and many refugees who have fled Eritrea – are people who have tried to evade conscription. National service in Eritrea is often indefinite, sometimes lasting for decades. Conscripts can be ‘as young as 16 as well as the elderly and conscription often amounts to forced labour’, says Amnesty International. Many of those who have tried to evade conscription have done so for religious reasons. Pray that Eritrea will yield to international pressure to reform its national service.

Day 34 At Mai Serwa military camp near Asmara, prisoners are reportedly held in underground cells and shipping containers. Prisoners include many who have tried to evade national service and those practising a religion not recognised to the state. Conditions inside the shipping containers are inhumane: unbearably hot or freezing cold. Some prisoners report only being allowed out to the bathroom twice a day. Pray that God will sustain and strengthen people in these appalling conditions.

Day 35 Gospel singer Helen Berhane spent two years in detention in Mai Serwa army camp, first in a metal shipping container and later in an underground cell. She was tortured repeatedly to make her deny her faith: she refused. She now lives in Denmark. Pray that God will continue to heal her and use her singing ministry to strengthen the church in Eritrea.

Day 36 Pray today for prisoners who are in danger of losing hope, especially those who have not seen fellow prisoners released. Pray that God will lift their heads (Psalm 3:3) and renew their hope in Him. Pray that they will know that He is the God of miracles, the one who rules and reigns above every earthly Government. Stand with them in praying for the release of all Eritrea’s prisoners of conscience.

Day 37 The notorious Me’eter prison on the Red Sea coast is renowned for its harsh conditions: the heat is intense, abuse is rife and conditions are inhumane. Prisoners have been known to die due to the extreme heat. Pray for a change in regime at the prison, so that conditions will improve dramatically.

Day 38 Thank God for the courage of Eritrean prisoners who repeatedly refuse orders that they should deny Christ – even though it means they face torture and they know they are rejecting the chance to be released. Pray that they will know that they are one with Jesus before God in their refusal to recant their faith (Matthew 10:32).

Day 39 The Eritrean Orthodox Church has sometimes been wary of establishing a closer relationship with Pentecostal and charismatic churches. Pray for unity in Eritrea's church so that God's people in Eritrea will unite in prayer to support those in prison for their faith in Jesus, Eritrea's Lord and King.

Day 40 Pray that our global Christian family will take on the cause of our imprisoned Eritrean brothers and sisters. Pray for a worldwide outpouring of prayer so that something shifts in the heavenly realms and Eritrea experiences a spiritual breakthrough into an era of greater religious tolerance.

Day 41 Continue to pray for the men and women assigned to torturing and beating prisoners of faith. Pray that the Holy Spirit will convict them, even in the middle of a beating, that what they are doing is wrong. Pray that they will undergo a Damascus Road experience just as Saul did soon after witnessing the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7, 9).

Day 42 Kiflu Gebremeskel of the Full Gospel Church was a senior academic before becoming a full-time pastor in 1999. Five years later, he was jailed and has not seen his wife and children since. He has never been charged or brought before a court. Pray that God will remind Kiflu of His everlasting love for him.

Day 43 Please pray that prisoners of faith will find fellowship with other inmates and with the Holy Spirit, even if they are being held in solitary confinement. Pray that they will know they truly are part of one body, a global Christian family.

Day 44 Prisoners may be taunted and told that they are forgotten. Pray that God will contradict such lies by reassuring prisoners of faith of His great love. Pray too that they will know that their wider Christian family are praying for them.

Day 45 Pastor Kidane Weldou is a senior pastor in the Full Gospel Church and a member of the executive committee of Gideons International in Eritrea. His vehicle was found abandoned in 2005 and he is believed to be in Wongel Mermera prison. Pray that the gospel of Christ, which Kidane helped spread, will sustain him in his prison cell.

Day 46 Pray for the family of Pastor Kidane Weldou who have never had official confirmation he was jailed: his abandoned car was the only clue they have had to what happened to him. Pray that more information will come to light.

Day 47 Pray for the release of Futsum Gebrenegus, Eritrea's only psychiatrist, who has been jailed since November 2004 for his work with the Orthodox Church. Pray that his work among young people will have a powerful legacy. Pray he will be able to continue this work, igniting young people's love for Christ.

Day 48 Gebremedhin Gebregioris is a prominent theologian and leader in the Orthodox Church. He was reportedly arrested in November 2004 as the Orthodox Church was experiencing renewal. Praise God that, just as there are no denominations in Christ, there are no church divisions within Christians in jail. Ask God to bless Gebremedhin with strong friendships and spiritual support.

Day 49 Pray for the release of Pastor Meron Gebreselasie and the many other pastors arrested like him in 2004. Pray that the Government will decide that 13 years' imprisonment is enough and release all these church leaders. Pastor Meron led Massawa Rhema Church and worked as an anaesthetist at Massawa Hospital.

Day 50 Rev Ogbamichel Teklehaiminot, who suffered a nervous breakdown after being subjected to solitary confinement and hard labour at Sawa military camp, was released after six years - then rearrested six months later. His current spell in jail began when a member of his church, who was trying to flee Eritrea, called his phone. Ask God to help Rev Ogbamichel turn feelings of injustice to positive effect.

Day 51 There are fears that the deposed head of the Orthodox Church, Patriarch Abune Antonios, who has been under house arrest since 2007, may have been poisoned. Sources say the 90-year-old was taken to a healthcare facility in May and injected with a substance that made him seriously ill. Pray that God will heal and protect him.

Day 52 Pray for wisdom for leaders of the Orthodox Church, amid the continuing detention of Patriarch Abune Antonios who was ousted after criticising the Government for interfering in church activities. Pray that they will be bold in their faith but will not fall foul of the authorities.

Day 53 Pray the persecution in Eritrea will spark revival as the powerful witness of Jesus' followers, especially those in jail, prompts many others to follow Him, as happened in the book of Acts. Pray that Eritrea's prisons will also witness revival: pray that prisoners will repent and turn to Christ in their droves.

Day 54 Pray that prisoners of faith in Eritrea will have opportunities to share the Gospel with their fellow inmates. Just as Paul urges his fellow Christians in Colossians, 'Pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison— that I may make it clear' (Colossians 4:2-4).

Day 55 Pray for Aster whose twin sister was tortured to death as Aster listened. Aster herself was also beaten at the same time, but survived. Pray that God will heal the physical and emotional wounds of people who have suffered brutal treatment in Eritrea's prisons.

Day 56 Eyob Yemane has been in prison in Eritrea for 11 years. His wife has fled to Sudan. Pray that this couple will soon be reunited. Pray that each of them will know God's plan for their life. Eyob's brother, Semere Yemane, spent ten years in Asmara Prison before his release.

Day 57 Pray that the spirit of every prisoner of faith in Eritrea will remain unbroken, despite torture and abuse. Speak the word of God over their lives: '[You] are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed' (2 Corinthians 4:8-9).

Day 58 Let's remember in our prayers today prisoners who have been released but who are struggling to reintegrate into normal family life. Pray for those former detainees who have become 'institutionalised' and who are finding it hard to adapt to their newfound freedom. Ask God to heal and restore them.

Day 59 Publishing news of Eritrean prisoners is potentially harmful to the prisoner and those with whom he or she is held. Pray that the appalling truth about prisoners' experiences will continue to be made known so that Eritrea can be held to account for its terrible human rights record.

Day 60 Many of Eritrea's current prisoners of faith have never been formally charged or brought to court but instead they're detained arbitrarily. Pray that officials will heed the international outcry about this injustice – and release them.