

PERSECUTION



FISHERS OF MEN

**BUILDING AND BANDAGING
THE PERSECUTED CHURCH**

**How One Pastor
Evangelizes
Through Soap-
Making Workshops**

**Building a
Ministry in
Indonesia by
Breeding Catfish**

**Broadcasting
the Gospel Into
North Korea**

INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN CONCERN

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**"AND HE SAID
TO THEM,
"FOLLOW ME,
AND I WILL
MAKE YOU
FISHERS OF
MEN."
MATTHEW 4:19**

BUILDING THE CHURCH AT THE FRONT LINES

So many persecution stories come across my desk that stop me in my tracks, even after doing this for two decades.

Whether it is baby Ruth who was left for dead in the grass by a riverbank (and saved) in Nigeria, or Smith Sabir who lost his parents in a Pakistan bombing, or Vu A Sua who was strung from the ceiling in Vietnam to denounce his Christian faith, yet still refused.

The attacks ripple through families and communities and cause unfathomable suffering and chaos. We rush in and care for those we can save, restore them to life, and shepherd them through tragedy with love and support.

I'm inspired by the Christians who endure endless beatings and trials and continue to carry the mantle of Christ. They refuse to give in to their attackers. They are refined in the fire of persecution and come out renewed and strengthened in Christ. And they march on.

So, we continue – through them – to build the church.

After we care for the persecuted and restore them to wholeness, we give them the tools, training, and resources to continue to make a living. We then support their efforts to reach others for Jesus and grow the church. And we do this in the most difficult places on the planet.

In this issue, we catch up with Pastor Andrew who is creatively reaching Muslims in Africa. Despite great trials and threats, he teaches local women how to make and sell soap to earn a living and share Christ with others.

This illustrates the transforming power of Jesus. And how our ministry works. We provide Pastor Andrew with the financial support to make a living and the tools to share the gospel and expand the church. We take this same approach in each of our four regions: Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East.

As you know, we could not do any of this work without your kindness, support, prayers, and donations.

You have no idea how much it means to me.

In Him,



JEFF KING
President: International Christian Concern
Author: *The Last Words of the Martyrs* and *Islam Uncensored*



YOUR DOLLARS AT WORK

ICC'S ONGOING INITIATIVES



EMERGENCY AID FOR CHRISTIAN REFUGEES IN THE DRC

Amid the ongoing conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), many Christian families have been forced to uproot their lives to seek refuge elsewhere. ICC recently connected with a pastor in the DRC who is helping refugees in the region resettle. With his help, we identified 10 refugees with the greatest needs and provided each of their families with a supply of rice and beans.

"I can testify that these food items shall help in a big way, more than you can imagine," the pastor explained. "Your food relief help is a big support to these 10 suffering believers who have been displaced from their original homes due to the war on Christians in Eastern Congo."

ONGOING INITIATIVES



AFGHANISTAN CRISIS

Last August, ICC called upon its supporters to help rescue Afghan Christians in danger following the rise of the Taliban. ICC has rescued hundreds of families and continues to provide for them through safe houses, food aid, medical assistance, and extractions to neighboring countries.



HOPE HOUSE CENTER

Due to persecution, Egyptian Christian children are forced to abandon their education and enter trade work to keep their families afloat. Hope House provides educational support to these children with the freedom to decide what they want to do with their future.



BIKES AND BIBLES

Currently, we are working with partners to train 240 new church planters to spread the Good News throughout rural India. Each will receive a new bike that will double or triple the number of villages they can reach.

To learn more about how you can support these initiatives, visit www.persecution.org or give us a call at 800-422-5441.



HAIRDRESSING SHOP FOR MONA

Mona, 25, lives as a single mother after she and her daughter fled the home where she lived with her abusive Muslim husband. In an effort to provide for her daughter, she took a position in a medical laboratory owned by a Christian doctor. Thanks largely to the Christian hymns he played in the lab, she began to explore her own faith and eventually converted to Christianity.

In order to set Mona up for long-term success, ICC helped her establish her own hairdressing business which she can operate from an extra room in her parents' home. ICC provided her with furniture, hairstyling tools, and makeup tools to alleviate the initial start-up costs. She expressed, "I dreamt of [a] modest hair straightener and makeup tools, but God is generous. He gave me more than I deserve."



THE **UNSHAKABLE FAITH** OF MINISTER AN YANKUI

Despite Chinese authorities repeatedly harassing and detaining a house church minister, his church never ceased meeting despite the ongoing persecution.

By Gina Goh

An Yankui, the minister of Xuncheng (Zion) Reformed Church in Taiyuan, Shanxi Province, was arrested last November by Chinese authorities on charges of illegally crossing the national border, when he and other church members attended a 2020 Christian conference in Malaysia.

Other church members arrested for the same fabricated charge were recently sentenced to six to eight months of imprisonment, so it is likely that An will be incarcerated for a similar duration, if not longer.

Unfortunately, losing freedom is not unfamiliar to An. As early as 2018, An was arrested along with more than a dozen other house church members after holding a prayer vigil for the 1989 Tiananmen Square Massacre. Since then, harassment, church raids, and detention were no longer foreign to him.

While ICC supports church planters in China and around the world, we can't disclose the names or details of the church planters we support. But An's situation is symbolic of the challenges that so many Christians and church planters face in China.

Despite the persecution, An continued to speak out against injustice by signing onto

Minister An Yankui is warmly welcomed by his family after he served his 15-day administrative detention in January 2021.



Minister An Yankui
China



Xuncheng Church was raided on November 15, 2020. Minister An and six other members were detained briefly following the raid.

joint letters that openly called on Beijing to respect religious freedom for Christians, a move that is considered highly risky under the communist regime.

In November 2020, local authorities raided Xuncheng Church's Sunday service and questioned An's qualifications as a preacher. They questioned whether his credentials were approved by the state and whether their gathering was registered with the government. His church was disbanded the same day.

This was not going to stop An. He continued to lead his church and gather people at his house for Bible study, yet even that has been monitored and clamped down.

Xuncheng Church was planted by the heavily persecuted Early Rain Covenant Church (ERCC) in Chengdu. An graduated from the seminary founded by ERCC and is under the influence of reformed theology and ERCC Pastor Wang Yi, who has been imprisoned since December 2018 under trumped-up charges.

An once said, "Those who experience the Lord's suffering in the detention centers, but are able to live a witness that amazes the generation and makes history sigh, are worthy of our respect!"

Perhaps this would also be his adage, giving him hope and comfort, as he walks towards unknown imprisonment. ✝️



"Those who experience the Lord's suffering in the detention centers, but are able to live a witness that amazes the generation and makes history sigh, are worthy of our respect!"

- Minister An Yankui

HOPE HOUSE CHILD SPONSOR

A FUTURE OF ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES

ICC gives children a better life in Egypt through educational and Bible programs.

Eleven-year-old Hana is perhaps one of the brightest students in his grade at Hope House in Egypt. He was one of two students with a perfect score during his summer school cumulative testing and consistently scores well in Arabic, English, and math.

Hana told ICC staff that he loves these subjects and feels smart answering questions in class when the teacher asks. With his educational aptitude, Hana and his parents both have big dreams for his future. His father commented that his “desire is for Hana to attend college.” And yet, as the oldest male child in the family, Hana’s future career may be in question.

His mother said, “I have two daughters, Rania and Amira. Rania has vision problems and is hearing-impaired. Amira also has vision problems.”

In addition to Hana’s two older sisters, he also has a brother who is several years younger than him. Hana’s father works as a carpenter and, as such, it is normally expected that Hana would learn alongside his father and eventually join him in his career.

Hana said, “I want to be a lawyer to defend the poor people.” It was an echo of the same sentiment Hana told ICC three

years ago.

This ultimately stems from the mindset pushed upon Egyptian Christians that they have less value within the broader community.

Christian children in Egypt typically struggle to ever attend college or pursue higher education, particularly for first-born sons who are needed to help financially support the family



by entering the workforce immediately. When Hope House is not in session, Hana goes with his father to work.

Hope House seeks to equip poorer Christian Egyptian children like Hana so that they can combat the generational persecution that often keeps them in the same careers and day laborer jobs.

The child sponsorship program provides educational incentives, medical attention, nutritional support, and additional gifts and activities. This summer in Hope

House, Hana wrote a letter saying, “I have learned reading quickly, the alphabets, words, spelling, and the punctuations. I also have learned to obey God and ignore the devil.” Empowering children through education allows students like Hana to pursue their own betterment, which in turn supports the whole Christian community.

Though Hana is fortunate enough to receive a sponsorship, more than 50% of eligible students are currently still waiting for sponsors. ✝



Partner with ICC

Would you consider partnering with ICC to help fight generational persecution that Christians in Egypt face?

To learn more about ICC’s Hope House or provide a financial gift, please visit www.persecution.org/initiatives/hope-house/. To inquire about sponsoring a child, contact ICC at icc@persecution.org.

ABC



BUILDING AND BANDAGING THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

ICC supports livelihoods for long-term sustenance and the spread of the gospel.

By Mike Anderson

When Fulani militants in Nigeria chased down Rahlia in an attack on her village in Kaduna State, she tried to protect her 5-year-old son and 3-year-old daughter. The extremists shot her son, slashed her daughter who thankfully survived, and cut off the mother's left hand. Seventy people in her Christian community were killed and many more wounded.

So much pain and hardship, so many tens of thousands of Christians like Rahlia whose lives are crushed and uprooted globally every year.

At ICC, we want to hold every hurting soul, remind them that Jesus is with them, and do what we can to relieve their suffering. We want them to persevere in

their faith, care for their families, and help grow the church in the most dangerous places on earth.

At ICC, our first concern is to care for survivors of persecution and help them recover, get to safety, pay medical bills, feed hungry mouths, and repair damaged homes. For Rahlia, ICC provided food staples so she and her daughter could survive.

We then seek to ensure that survivors can support themselves and their families for the long haul. While other organizations parachute in, deliver aid, and leave, ICC stays for the duration. We provide schooling and vocational training, small business loans, and support livelihoods that can sustain the home and church. For example, we continue to assist survivors of the 2013 All Saint Church bombing in Pakistan.

Building the body of Christ – the church – is the goal of International Christian Concern. That’s why we believe strongly in supporting small businesses and encouraging survivors to use their vocations as a platform to share the gospel. To grow the church, ICC provides hundreds of evangelists and pastors with bicycles and New Testaments to share Christ in India. Additionally, 20 communal farms in Nigeria launched by ICC serve more than 1,500 people, providing sustenance and a vehicle to share Christ to the broader community.

In Southeast Asia, ICC bought farming equipment for an evangelist so he could earn an income harvesting and selling rice while witnessing to Muslim farmers. In Indonesia, ICC bought supplies for a specialty nurse who travels to patients’ homes. She shares the gospel with patients while providing them with medical care. In Nigeria, ICC helped a Christian widow launch a small fruit and vegetable business after her husband was killed by Fulani militants. Her business is a testament to the enduring and sustaining power of Christ and his church.

In this magazine, you will find examples of persecuted believers who are caring for their families through ICC-sponsored endeavors, while using their time, talents, and resources to tell others and about Jesus and expand God’s kingdom.

In Africa, Pastor Andrew is teaching Muslim women how to make soap while discipling them in the Christian faith. ICC also helped a Christian father develop a grocery business and overcome the emotional scars from his family’s time in war-torn Syria. In Indonesia, Cahyono uses his catfish breeding business to make a living and share the Good News. In Afghanistan, ICC continues to sustain Christians and creatively grow the underground church.

As ICC treats the visible and invisible scars of the persecuted, it’s inspiring to see survivors persevere and use their God-given talents and resources to grow the church in all corners of the globe.



HOPE FOR THE HERMIT KINGDOM

ICC builds the underground church in North Korea through daily radio messages.

By Mike Anderson



“Right now,
people inside
North Korea want
to rise up against
the regime.”

- Jang, a Christian in North Korea

North Korea is one of the worst places to be a Christian. It's also one of the best places to share the gospel because people are suffering under the evil regime of Supreme Leader Kim Jong-un. North Koreans hunger for Christ.

That's why International Christian Concern (ICC) is committed to building the church in North Korea. ICC partners with a group to broadcast gospel radio messages twice a day into the hermit kingdom.

Suzanne Scholte, chair of the North Korea Freedom Coalition, told ICC that the morning and evening radio messages were having an impact: “God is on the move in North Korea, revival is underway, and radio broadcasting is critical.”

Scholte shared in an email the testimonies of several defectors:

“My friend smuggled a radio from China, and I could not stop myself from listening even though I knew I could be discovered and sent to a political prison camp. Just listening secretly to the radio for three nights, decades of indoctrination were peeled away...It was through Free North Korea Radio that I found out what life was like outside North Korea.” — Kim

“God is working in North Korea with power. Christianity is alive in North Korea and there is revival. Many people are listening to radio broadcasts.” — Ju

Children line up in front of a mural in Pyongyang, North Korea | Photo by Thomas Evans on Unsplash



“Christianity is *alive* in North Korea and there is *revival.*”

- Ju, a North Korean defector

“Nine years ago, I started listening to the radio with my father. It opened our eyes...All varieties of getting information into North Korea are important, but radio is crucial.” —Ju

“People are so thirsty for information; they are making their own radios... This is a regime built on lies, just countering with the truth, the regime will crumble... Information gives them a fresh life.” — Huh

“There are many underground churches in North Korea that are striving to spread the gospel. For instance, during last year’s Christmas, some people secretly handed out Christmas gifts to others...Right now, people inside North Korea want to rise up against the regime. There is so much discontent inside and it is at every level of society...When North Koreans come to South Korea, they fully realize how really bad their situation was in North Korea. It is humiliating and they wonder how much of their life was lost because they were born in North Korea...I guarantee you we will continue to fight to end the Kim regime, so please be our friend and ally” —W. Jang

Scholte also cited a confidential directive from the Kim Jong-un regime that referenced the daily broadcasts. It said in part, “Currently, South Korea and the United States have been spreading [the] gospel through leaflets and radio that you should believe in God and trust God in all things.” The document, Public Propaganda Project No. 7 (1124), stated, “Let’s eradicate superstitious activities that distort and corrupt one’s mind.”

This is further proof that the radio broadcasts are working and touching a nerve.

Defector Voices

In November 2021, ICC named Kim Jong-un Persecutor of the Year for the “individuals” category. During the unveiling of the comprehensive, 140-page Persecutor of the Year report and announcement in Washington, D.C., defectors Jinhye Jo and Kim Seong-min (via video) shared their testimonies about life in North Korea.

Jo fled in 2008 and founded the nonprofit North Korean Refugees in the United States, which helps facilitate the escape and resettlement of North Koreans in America. Seong-min was a lieutenant political commissar before his defection in 1995.

In a lengthy interview, Seong-min traced the longstanding roots of persecution.

North Koreans are guaranteed the freedom of religion under the constitution, but a subclause stipulates that “the people shall not use religion to bring foreign influence in the state or to disrupt the social order of the state.”

“The Kim regime brainwashes the people to think Christianity is a tool employed by the upper class to oppress and exploit the lower class,” Seong-min said. “And it has been historically used by imperialists to invade other states.”

Seong-min noted that the regime promotes anti-Christian sentiment in elementary schools through textbooks, and in movies, TV shows, and novels. The rhetoric continues at the Anti-Spy exhibition in Pyongyang, the Victorious Fatherland Liberation War Memorial, and the Sinchon Museum of American War Atrocities in South Hwanghae.

Because of the shared animosity among the people toward Christianity in North Korea, the regime’s arrests, executions, imprisonments, and exiles of Christians are justified, he explained.

“What I know of and have experienced in the North is only the tip of the iceberg. More horrendous persecutions toward Christians are still occurring in the North. And the regime does not tolerate any religion other than their own which reveres (the Kim dynasty).” 



The music room inside the Grand People’s Study House in Pyongyang, North Korea. | Photo by Thomas Evans on Unsplash



PEDDLING PAST THE SCARS

A rural Indian pastor braves the threat of persecution to share the gospel.

By ICC's South Asia Team

The Kandhamal anti-Christian riots changed everything. Lives lost, homes destroyed, futures gone.

About 52,000 Indian Christians were displaced during that 2008 persecution incident, and though over a decade has passed, most have not returned home. The Christian community needs rebuilding, a mission which Pastor Nayak believes he is specifically called to fulfill.

His heartfelt dedication to God is reflected in a lifetime of service, overcoming many obstacles to take part in an extraordinary outreach effort. As ICC's field team observed, "Pastor Nayak pedals through unhealed scars from the past riots." He knows each of the villages personally. As Pastor Nayak shared with ICC, "I had a burden to reach out to the people with the gospel in 42 villages in Raikia block because there is a very little scope for people to hear the gospel."

Pastor Nayak is the only church planter who has been faithfully ministering to these eastern-central Indian villages in the last 19 years. Throughout most of his ministry, he lacked transportation and thus traveled on foot to most of these villages. The solution was simple: a bicycle.

"I am so thankful that my ability to visit these villages has increased many times. Because of the bicycle provided to me by ICC, my desire even grew, and I am much more motivated," said the pastor.

ICC provided Pastor Nayak's bicycle through the Bikes and Bibles program, which was launched to empower 1,000 rural church planters in India. Ministry leaders in India are often in Pastor Nayak's shoes, and thus their ministry is limited to

how far they can travel by foot. A gift of a bicycle allows church planters, such as Pastor Nayak, the opportunity to access more villages on a regular basis. These evangelists are also gifted Bibles so that new disciples can have access to the written Word of God.

"Prior to receiving the [bicycle], it used to take months for me to cover all the 42 villages, but now I take advantage of the transportation tool and visit more often now," he explained.

Many of those under Nayak's pastoral care also suffer additional hardship because of the COVID-19 pandemic. When speaking with Pastor Nayak, ICC's field staff observed how "he is glad that God is using him to counsel people and share the message of hope, as people are gripped with fear due to corona."

The pandemic creates opportunity for further reflection on just how deeply scarred the community remains because of the anti-Christian riots in 2008. Hundreds of churches and Christian institutions were destroyed, and at least 100 Christians were murdered. Fear of renewed persecution remains hidden underneath the community's surface. For Pastor Nayak, he pedals throughout these villages with a promise.

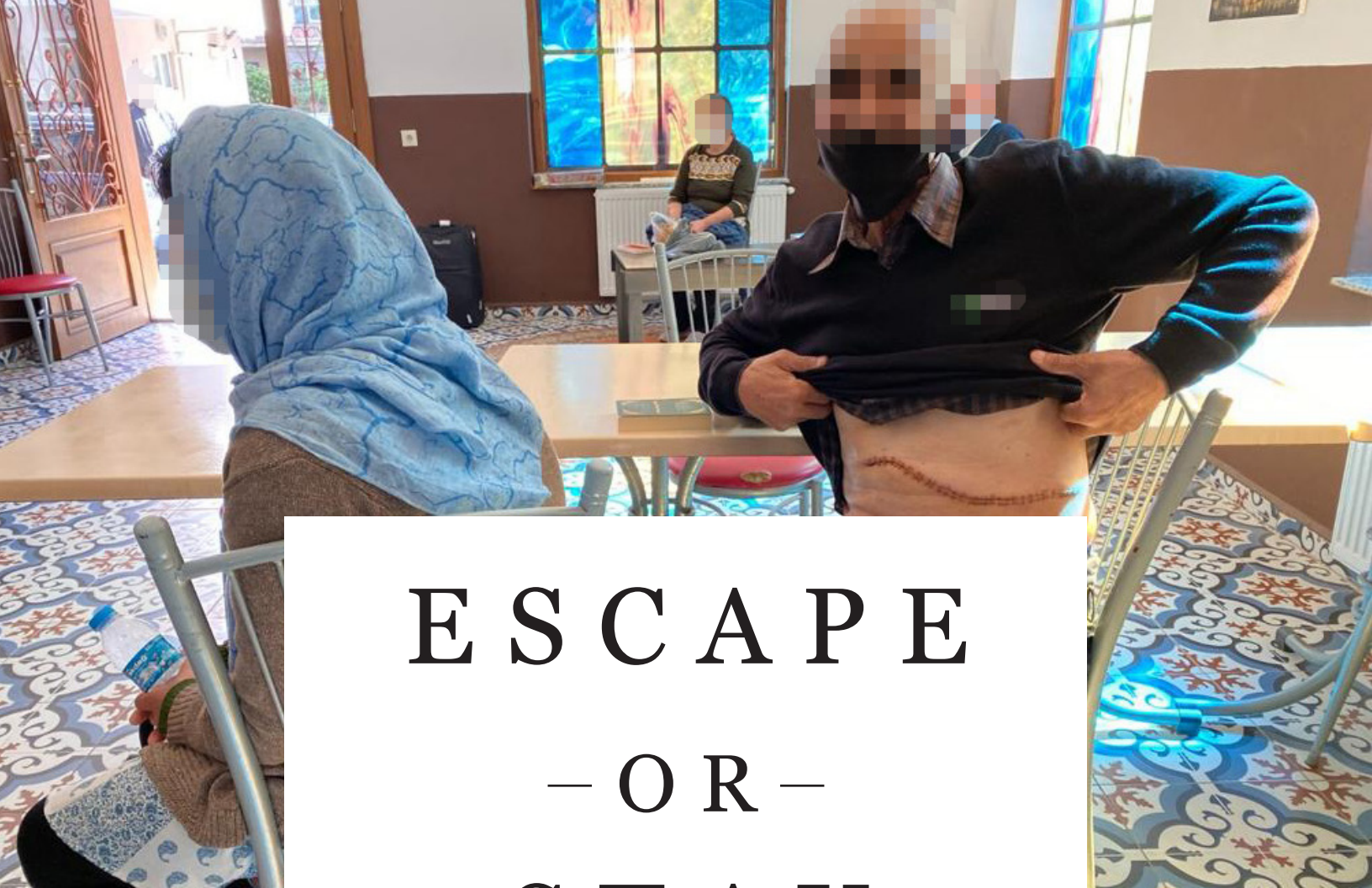
"Jesus is the only hope for these forest dwellers, I thank God for this [bicycle] which carries the message of healing and reconciliation," he shared. A special gift with a significant impact. Pastor Nayak is but one of many ICC beneficiaries who have put to use a new bicycle and allowed God to bless it in the continuation of his work. ✝



ABOVE: Villagers study the gospel after receiving it from a pastor who benefited from ICC's Bikes and Bibles program.

OPPOSITE: TOP | Long distances between India's villages make it hard for pastors to travel without the benefit of a bike. BOTTOM | Pedaling to share the gospel across rural India is a passion for many church leaders.





ESCAPE — OR — STAY

Afghan Christians face a death sentence under Taliban rule, but escaping elsewhere may not bring needed relief.

By Claire Evans



Risk permeates the life of an Afghan Christian. The Taliban criminalizes Christianity to the extent that believing in the gospel is often an automatic death sentence. But leaving Afghanistan carries its own challenges. Whether a believer escapes Afghanistan or remains behind, severe hardship is often the result.

Abdul discovered this firsthand. He was recently released by the Taliban, after he spent months in captivity following an escape attempt. His release was bittersweet. The Taliban threatened to eventually take him back, and he has become a changed person following the torture.

“He suffers from fever, chills, and a sense of panic,” said a source close to the family. “He reported that the first month, the Taliban torturers would bite him. The second month, they would put him in cold water at night and then leave him naked. The third month, they did not torture him, apparently wanting to sell him alive to his family without the evidence of torture. He does not leave the home where he is [now] staying.”

Sadly, this story is all too common. All Afghan Christians are converts from Islam, a choice the Taliban considers worthy of death. For this reason, many have fled, but persecution often haunts them regardless.

“When I was in Afghanistan, I was the commander of one of the parties during the war fighting against the Taliban. After

the war, the Taliban found me, and I was arrested and imprisoned for six months. I had to escape to Turkey by myself and then try to find a way to bring my family,” shared one believer.

He continued, “When I came to Turkey, I was very disappointed, and I lost my composure... God gave me new hope and a new peace. Despite the persecution I now face for my faith, it has become my goal to

“I am trying to leave everything in the hands of God and Jesus Christ because I know and understand that only he is the *Almighty God* who is sovereign over all, including the good and working good in the bad.”

- Afghan Christian

make disciples of all nations with the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

Persecution follows exiled Afghan believers for a variety of reasons. They are usually escaping the Taliban by going to yet another Islamic country. In those locations, converts may not be as quickly killed, but they are equally unwelcome. Since they are living as refugees, they likely do not know the

language, and thus naturally seek support from other exiles. In this way, threats from the Taliban can be exported. In one case described to ICC, an Afghan believer in Iran was kidnapped and brought back to Afghanistan as part of a deal another individual made with the Taliban.

A woman with a possibly similar experience explained, “With help from my uncle, we were able to secure passage. Along the way, we found ourselves on the border, where my husband suddenly disappeared. Without warning, my husband was no longer by my side and there was no way to find any news of what could have happened to him. I suspected that the Taliban might have been involved with his disappearance, but there is no way to know.” The gamble which Afghan Christians must make with their lives is an impossible choice. Stay or flee, neither option promises safe results. Regardless of these challenges, they often have great hope.

As one Afghan Christian explained, “After trusting in him, I felt happy. I realized how to live in the shadow of Jesus. I found the feeling of hope for life and heaven and the day of resurrection. After believing, regardless of my external circumstances, my life in the church community became very sweet. I am trying to leave everything in the hands of God and Jesus Christ because I know and understand that only He is the Almighty God who is sovereign over all, including the good and working good in the bad.” ✝

TOP | An Afghan Christian attends a food aid distribution event hosted by ICC for believing refugees. BOTTOM RIGHT | Afghan Christians gather for a meal and Bible study. BOTTOM LEFT | A team prepares relief materials to be distributed among Afghan believers.



BREEDING HOPE

ICC supports a catfish business in Indonesia

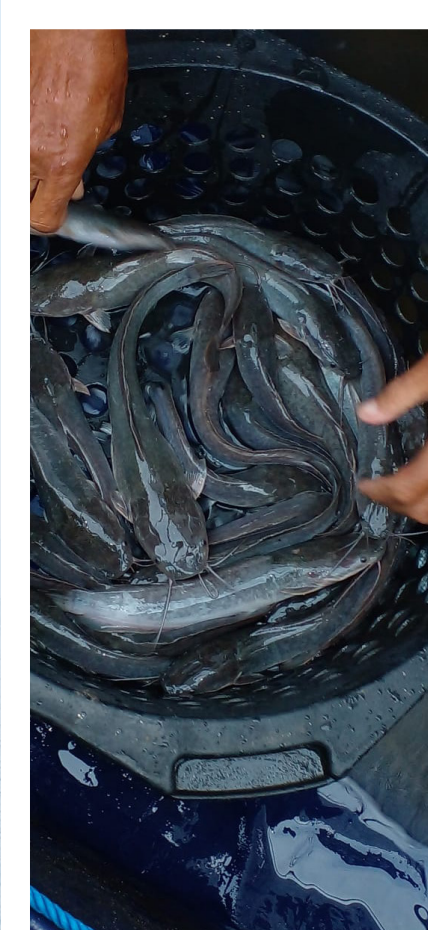
BY GINA GOH

Cahyono* has been serving tribal people in one of the major islands in Indonesia since 2014. In the beginning, he installed water filters to serve the community and build relationships with local residents. But in 2017, the organization that was supporting him moved to another Southeast Asian country.

Cahyono chose to stay and continue to serve the community as an independent field worker.

He connects with the community in many ways, including hosting vocational skills and language training sessions. Since the beginning of the pandemic, Cahyono faced a new challenge as people tended to stay home to avoid gathering.

Cahyono produced a plan to breed catfish using a tarpaulin pond to serve the people in his region. Previously, he was a trainer in catfish breeding, so he was already equipped to share his skills with others. He hoped catfish breeding would attract the attention of the



residents and be a model for the community.

Through his efforts with breeding and training, he can help the local community's economy while growing his ministry. What's most important is his desire to meet people to bring hope and joy to them by sharing the Good News.

ICC has provided financial assistance to Cahyono to get his catfish breeding business off the ground and to sustain his work for the future. Cahyono recently gave an update on his catfish breeding business to ICC.

Cahyono said, "The financial assistance ICC provided to us has been used in holistic services with a catfish rearing program using a tarpaulin system. This program is a way to approach local communities in the area where we live with the Good News. It covers the cost of the facilities we are using to reach out to local residents. We thank you for the prayer and funding support from ICC. May Jesus bless you."

The catfish business was able to



support the operational costs of the ministry. But as no stranger to adversity, Cahyono had to move to a new location in the city.

As a result, the inventory of the tarpaulin pool and other equipment had to be left behind. The pool fence, made of wood and bamboo, could also not be taken with them.

Though his new operation is smaller, due to the pandemic, the cost of fish food has increased and it's not the same quality. For Cahyono, it's hard to make a decent profit.

He has continued his outreach to unreached people in his region, even during the pandemic. Along with some friends, he is helping to build a learning hut in one of the villages. This learning hut is a place for the field workers to do their outreach. People use the huts to rest or chat—a prime opportunity for sharing hope.

We hope and pray that Cahyono's business, regardless of the challenges he faces, can be a blessing for the community. ✝️





CLEANSING THE BODY AND SOUL

PASTOR BUILDS THE CHURCH WITH A
SOAP-MAKING BUSINESS



Pastor Andrew remembers the vivid dream that drew him to this Islam-dominated enclave. He put his faith in Christ as a teenager, and knew God was calling him to share the gospel with Muslims. He prayed for six months before God opened the door and showed him the way.

“In my church, my pastor would pray for me,” Andrew said. “I used to have this vision. I could see myself preaching in the Muslim territories, dream of preaching. That’s why I have so much passion today ... I’m going to continue to be here until Jesus returns.”

To protect his identity and location, ICC can only share that he is located in Africa.

Taking up residency in another community and openly preaching about Jesus would surely be a death sentence in most radical Muslim areas. So, Andrew began his work as a small businessman in 2002, selling second hand clothing and doing what he does best – forging friendships one stranger at a time. Over time, he could be more vocal about his faith and launch a small church.

It was through initial brief sidewalk encounters that Andrew began sharing Christ with others. While he was occasionally slapped and threatened, he persevered knowing the Lord had called him to this community.

“I would take a prayer walk. Because of courage, the prayer, and the faith that I have, God helped me to overcome even if I face opposition. Even now it’s not so smooth, I am still preaching because we know how to handle ourselves. I smile at them with the smile of Jesus.”

While Andrew married his hometown sweetheart in 2006, she did not join him for two years because the area and ministry were too dangerous for Christians. They have been together ever since.

In 2014, Muslim extremists demanded that Andrew leave six times, he ignored their threats in this spiritual hardscrabble place.



Saving Souls Through Suds

The pastor loves and serves his neighbors and they have accepted him, telling him discreetly that they are curious about Jesus. He comes to their aid as a friend and neighbor and isn't surprised when they ask him to pray for them.

After trying his hand at several small businesses and farming, Andrew has sold bar, liquid, and detergent soap since 2018. More importantly, he teaches Muslim women in the village the soap-making process while simultaneously discipling them in the Christian faith.

It takes a dangerous, 14-hour round-trip journey to buy the necessary items including coconut oil, aloe vera, caustic soda, neem, and liwa white powder. ICC supports Andrew financially in his small business to build the church in Africa.

"We have a group of 20 women, Muslims and Christians, who meet every Thursday for fellowship and soap-making in my home. We pray and read the Bible. Through this group, I've been able to meet more villagers in the community."

When Andrew hands someone a bar of soap, he tells them that it can clean their skin. But if they put their faith in Jesus, God can remove the sinful soil on their eternal soul.

Four Muslim women recently put their faith in Jesus, though they cannot celebrate and announce it publicly outside of their weekly gatherings.

Pastor Andrew is grateful that the soap-making business allows him to provide for his family and serve as a tool to share Jesus with others, and grow God's kingdom.

"We are going to continue even though it is hard. People need Jesus now more than anything. They used to tell me they don't want me to preach in this area. I will die one day anyway, so I cannot stop sharing Christ." ✝️



A GROCERY STORE PROJECT BORN IN FAMILY TRAGEDY

ICC helps a father overcome loss and the hurdles of persecution

When ICC first crossed paths with Khalid, one staff member observed, “He is so broken. He feels so much guilt, he can barely speak; he just looks down.” As Khalid shared his story, it was a life punctuated with immeasurable hardship and one particularly tragic decision.

It also demonstrates how, with God’s help, ICC comes alongside the brokenhearted, restores them to wholeness, and provides resources to help them survive long term.

During the Syrian Civil War conflict, Khalid and other Christians suffered greatly. ISIS initiated a genocide against all religious minorities as the government fought hardline Islamists. The government also restricted the rights of Christians



OPPOSITE | ICC provided Khalid with the materials needed to open a grocery market. **RIGHT** | Syrian Christians are living in impoverished circumstances because of the war.

who were never given a viable option for peace and safety.

Khalid, like so many others, was displaced because of the ISIS fighters who slaughtered people even in front of his family. It became impossible to live with their Sunni neighbors. Khalid wanted to work in Qatar to support his family, but the father couldn’t leave his sons in Syria.

At 17, his eldest son was required to enter military service with the Syrian Army, as rebels also recruited young teenage boys. Christians were particularly at risk, as they were put in the more dangerous areas. Khalid was not willing to send his sons to the military because it was against his Christian beliefs for them to be forced to kill someone, nor did he want them to be killed.

So, he sent them away to protect their lives and faith. The decision proved fatal. The boys hired a boat and attempted to cross into Greece, but the eldest son drowned during a boat accident in front of his younger brother. The traumatized youth returned to Syria.

“Khalid blames himself, saying that in trying to keep his son from killing another person (by joining the military), he instead killed his son,” said an ICC staffer. “After this, it became too much for Khalid to leave his family alone. The stress of the incident put his health into crisis.”



When ICC heard Khalid’s story and saw how the family was suffering simply because they tried to follow Christ, the team was brought to tears and felt much compassion for him.

ICC helped Khalid open a grocery store so that he could rekindle

his livelihood before the war and begin to rebuild his family.

“It is a good push forward,” said one ICC staffer.

The grocery business will help Khalid heal, care for his remaining son, and continue to lean into Christ. ✝



PERSECUTION IN THE WEST?

West Watch seeks to share with you glimpses of issues involving Christianity in the Western world.

So often, ICC's content focuses on where we see persecution in its most extreme forms—murder, rape, torture, and imprisonment. Those who experience and endure these forms of persecution will always be at the forefront of our ministry mission.

However, ICC stands for religious freedom for everyone, everywhere. When we see religious freedom being violated, especially in the “free world,” we call it out.

West Watch highlights some of the issues ICC's advocacy team spots in Europe and North America—places where persecution of religious groups doesn't make headlines.



Finland Charges Government Official for Sharing Bible Verse

Paivi Rasanen, a member of the Finnish Parliament and the former Interior Minister of Finland currently faces charges for hate speech for a tweet promoting the biblical views of marriage. Rasanen faced the first session of the trial on January 24, 2022, which continued through February.

In the tweet, Rasanen expressed her concern for the Evangelical Lutheran Church's participation in the 2019 Helsinki Pride Day and quoted a passage from Romans. As a result, Finland's Prosecutor General formally filed charges against the MP for incitement against a group of people.

Rasanen's case has received a broad range of reactions from the public and media. Overwhelmingly, people have supported her from various backgrounds, ranging from freedom of speech proponents and freedom of religion proponents. Even atheists have

stood up for Rasanen and supported her freedom publicly.

Nevertheless, Finnish Christians now live in fear when delivering their sermons, preaching the same content and values as always, but now looking over their shoulder in fear that they too will be charged.

International Christian Concern recently spoke to Rasanen, who said that despite the trial, she keeps a very “calm mind” and is hopeful that the trial will give her an opportunity for the gospel to be heard all over.

To learn more about Paivi Rasanen's case, you can listen to Episode 74 of ICC President Jeff King's podcast, Into the Deep, during which the MP sat down with King to discuss her work. You can find it on ICC's website at www.persecution.org/icc-podcast.



Australian Parliament Rejects New Religious Freedom Bill

Earlier this year, the Australian government failed to pass the new Religious Discrimination Bill aimed to protect religious freedom in Australia. More specifically, the bill would bolster protections for faith-based schools to provide them with more autonomy to operate according to their values.

The government was unable to pass the Religious Discrimination Bill due to

proposed changes to the Sex Discrimination Bill, another piece of legislation which would counter some protections in the first bill regarding religious schools' policies towards transgender students.

Several religious organizations have expressed disappointment with the new developments, including the Diocese of Sydney and the Australian National Imams Council.

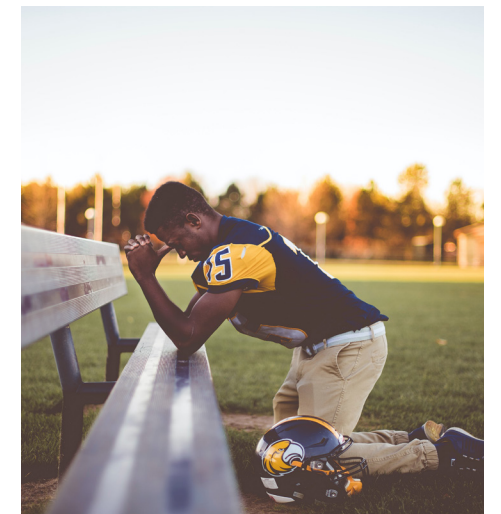
US Football Coach Fired for Post-Game Prayer Will Have Case Heard by Supreme Court

The Supreme Court has granted an appeal to the case of Joe Kennedy, a Christian football coach fired for praying with players after games.

In 2015, the Bremerton School District informed Kennedy that his post-game tradition of prayer determined that the prayers violated school policy and indicated he could not hold prayers to “avoid alienation of any team member.” The tradition originated as a solitary prayer of thanksgiving, though caught the district's

attention when players began asking to join and the prayers began to include post-game speeches as well.

Requesting accommodation under the Civil Rights Act, Kennedy sued the school, claiming that he had been discriminated against and his rights had been violated, but both the federal trial court and 9th Circuit Court of Appeals rejected his claim. The question is now set before the Supreme Court in *Kennedy v. Bremerton School District*.



2021 Survey Reveals Evolving Attitudes Toward Religious Freedom in US

Last year, the Freedom Forum, an American nonprofit promoting First Amendment freedoms, released a survey on Americans' attitudes towards the First Amendment and religious freedom. Some significant findings included that only 14% of those surveyed reported that freedom of religion was the freedom they considered most valuable.

Another interesting finding was that 37% of respondents said that business owners should fulfill all requests of customers, even if they violate their religious beliefs, and 37% say that the owners should have the discretion to choose to fulfill such requests. Amidst a growing number of Supreme Court cases on this question, Americans remain fairly divided on this particular manifestation of religious freedom.



STAFF COLUMN



PARTNERING WITH THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

ICC's Partner and Grants Associate shares the inspiration she's seen by working for the persecuted church.

I was primarily attracted to working at ICC because of the chance to engage with faith all around the world. I love attending Christian liturgies from outside the West, and at ICC I have the opportunity to interact with people for whom these are typical features of existence.

But with the cultural richness of these religious expressions also comes great challenges. Christians outside the West, particularly in communist and Muslim-majority countries, face great hostilities in professing the faith, including persecution and even death.

This is where ICC and our strategic partnerships come in. We seek to assist the persecuted and spread the gospel in the darkest corners of the world. We do this through employing both funding partners and implementing partners.

Funding partners, on the one hand, provide funding for projects, and are usually based in the West. Implementing partners, on the other hand, work on the implementation and logistics of projects, and are usually based in the countries the projects operate in. Without the synergy of both funding and implementing partners, we wouldn't be able to accomplish our projects around the world.

Thanks to a strong network of domestic and international partners, in the past year ICC successfully delivered COVID-19 aid to Christian-owned small businesses in Pakistan, extracted and resettled Afghan

Christian refugees, distributed Bibles and bikes to pastors in India, and more.

I've been especially inspired by our Bibles and Bikes project, which assisted 1,000 pastors in distributing 100,000 Bibles. I'm moved by the faith of these pastors, and I think they serve as exemplars of zeal for the glory of God. The Bibles and Bikes initiative was an immense undertaking, but it successfully accomplished its goals and furthered ICC's mission. In the process, it built several key partnerships in India.

Aside from these projects, I've also enjoyed working with a major NGO partner which conducts research and advocacy on democracy, freedom, and human rights.

With the support of this organization, we've been conducting counseling projects in the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa. These projects catalyze the healing process for Christians who have experienced genocide and persecution.

We've been working with an exciting array of partners, including an organization which works on conflict resolution, human rights, and dialogue between Muslim and non-Muslim communities, as well as an organization that promotes human rights in South Asia.

I'm grateful for the existing partnerships that have made these projects possible and look forward to forging fruitful partnerships in the future. ✝



HOPE FOR THE PRESENT



The Other Revolution in Iran

By Jeff King, ICG President

It seems like only bad news flows out of the Middle East, doesn't it? For the last 40 years, the headlines on the Middle East have been dominated by wars, revolutions, and most recently ISIS.

But this raging river of bad news often obscures an amazing movement of God—the explosion of the gospel and the church over that same period.

Let's look at Iran as an example. The Islamist Revolution of 1979 and the Ayatollah Khomeini are the first things that come to my mind when thinking of Iran. The revolutionary guards have beaten, tortured, and killed believers for 40 years. But in spite of that, the church has been growing at an amazing rate for several decades!

Early on in my work with ICC, I met an Iranian believer who told me a story that summarized the great move of God in Iran. He attended an evangelism seminar for Iranians taught by Westerners. It focused on various methods to attract a disinterested audience to the gospel. But it didn't apply in Iran because in his experience, people were very interested in the gospel. He stood up and shared his thoughts.

"These methods all seem good for America, but we do things differently in Iran," he told them. "I go to a party and announce that I'm a Christian and anybody that wants to talk about Jesus should visit with me during the party."

He laughed as he told me that he would be trapped in a corner for the next four

hours with people asking him questions about Jesus and about how to become a Christian. The testimonies of these converts, as well as those of other Iranian evangelists, are always a source of great encouragement to me.

A testimony from a woman, Vida, in Iran describes how she met a woman at a party who had converted to Christianity. Vida spoke with the woman for several hours on how Jesus had transformed her life. The conversation ended with Vida asking how she could acquire a Bible. Vida eventually came to Christ and stated, "From that day on, I experienced many miracles in my life. The first time I told my husband [about my] conversion, he was against it. Then, after a couple of days, he said that I was totally



APRIL
WEEKLY PRAYERS

Take one week this month to pray for the persecuted.

SUNDAY

Please pray for the protection of pastors in Kenya as they face death daily to spread the Good News.

MONDAY

Please pray for healing and restoration in the lives of those who are victims of persecution.

TUESDAY

Please pray for strength for the church in regions where evil desires to destroy the church.

WEDNESDAY

Please pray for the gospel to bring restoration to North Korea.

THURSDAY

Please pray for evangelists in India who are visiting unreached villages.

FRIDAY

Please pray for small businesses in Indonesia that double as a ministry.

SATURDAY

Please pray for the safety of Afghan Christians both in the country and in neighboring countries.

To download our monthly prayer calendar, visit www.persecution.org/take-action/prayer-calendar

changed and kept telling me, 'Your eyes are really shining.' He said he felt a very big and very powerful love inside of me and that he could not ignore it. Then, after two weeks, he came to Christ. A year after that, many of our family members accepted Jesus. The [secret] police (threatened) that they were going to keep me in jail for two years and even kill me."

Vida's testimony may give you a sense of the futility of the efforts of the secret police in Iran. Fear, the enemy's main weapon, will only work on some. The power of the gospel far surpasses the intimidations of man. Nothing and no one can stop the incredible

victory that's already been won through Christ.

When I think of our persecuted family, the verses from 2 Corinthians 4 come to mind. "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed...Therefore we do not lose heart...For our momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

The darker the world becomes, the brighter the light of the gospel shines and beckons those who are searching.

May each of us take heart and be renewed by the knowledge that the afflictions and heartbreak of this world are temporary, but we have an eternal victory and hope in our Savior's words, "Take heart, I have overcome the world."



This was an excerpt from Jeff King's upcoming devotional book focused on spiritual lessons from the persecuted. For information about pre-orders, please contact moreinfo@persecution.org.

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