

PERSECUTION



**THE UNDERGROUND
CHURCH IN IRAN
THRIVES DESPITE
GENERATIONS
OF HEAVY
PERSECUTION**

***CHRISTIANITY'S
EPIC JOURNEY
IN IRAN***

INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN CONCERN

THE UNDERGROUND CHURCH IN IRAN THRIVES DESPITE GENERATIONS OF HEAVY PERSECUTION.



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**"THE LORD'S
HAND WAS WITH
THEM, AND A
GREAT NUMBER OF
PEOPLE BELIEVED
AND TURNED TO
THE LORD."**

ACTS 11:21 (NIV)

WHERE THE GATES OF HELL CANNOT STAND

The headlines and news coming out of the Middle East have been dire and depressing for as long as I can remember. Think of Iran. After the revolution and takeover by the Ayatollah in 1979, the church entered a long period of deadly persecution that continues today.

For decades, the Iranian regime has ruthlessly hunted Christians and thrown them into notorious Evin Prison where they are tortured and murdered. The mullahs do this because they understand well, the threat the Church is to Islam.

The mullahs also hate Israel and continually threaten to wipe it off the map with nuclear weapons. Internally though, the mullahs are mostly hated and the nation suffers from a myriad of desperate ills. Not the least of which is mass addiction to heroin.

In the disaster that is Iran, there's one thing that is terribly underreported: the explosive growth of the underground church! That's right! The Church is a shining jewel ablaze in the darkness that is Iran and that is what fuels the church's growth. For we all hate the dark and are drawn to the light. So the darker things are, the more clear the path to the light!

One of my greatest joys over my two decades of persecution ministry has been to watch and study this dynamic (the growth of the Lord's kingdom under the most impossible circumstances). It is the real-life living out of the verse in Mathew 16 where Jesus tells us that the very gates of Hell cannot withstand the advance of His kingdom (Church).

Zahra, an Iranian believer, is the fruit of this dynamic. I met Zahra near Iran, years ago. He said to me: "I am an underground Christian and I suffer pains for my faith, but I cannot mention His name without tears in my eyes. I hope that one day, I can shout to the whole world and tell them about (when God) invited me to join (His) family."

The river of God is flowing through Iran and before our eyes we are seeing an ancient prophecy come true. God showed Jeremiah the end of the story in Iran and that was that in the last days, God would set His throne in Iran. In other words, that He would be recognized as King there (Jeremiah 49:34-39) and His followers would be there.

What a privilege it is to work with you on behalf of our persecuted brothers and sisters and to see His unstoppable Kingdom grow where there's no human way it should!

As always, as we partner together, ICC will use your funds ethically, efficiently, and effectively.

I promise!



JEFF KING

President: International Christian Concern

Author: *The Last Words of the Martyrs and Islam Uncensored*



YOUR DOLLARS AT WORK

ICC'S ONGOING INITIATIVES

CONVERT TO ISLAM OR LOSE YOUR JOB!

In Egypt, Omar sought work in a nearby city to support his wife and five children. Although he found a job, his boss regularly cut Omar's wages short. Surrounded primarily by Muslim coworkers, Omar avoided religious discussions to prevent tensions from growing.

One day, a coworker insulted Christianity in front of Omar, prompting him to voice his concerns to the supervisor. Unfortunately, this backfired when the supervisor ignored his complaint and the Muslim men began devising a plan to trap Omar.

The men arranged for a prostitute to arrive at Omar's room, trying to catch him in sin. Omar quickly tried to kick her out, but the coworkers arrived soon after. They gave him two choices: convert to Islam or leave his work.



With no other option, Omar left his only source of income. In order to help the family stay afloat, ICC helped Omar start up his own small grocery shop. Through

this business, he will be able to support his family once again without fear of harassment in the workplace.

ONGOING INITIATIVES



AFGHANISTAN CRISIS

Last August, ICC called upon its supporters to help rescue Afghan Christians in danger following the rise of the Taliban. In one case, ICC worked with two teenage boys who fled Afghanistan to a nearby country. After helping them navigate the legal complexities of resettling in a new country, we provided them with a supply of food to sustain them until they are able to earn an income for themselves.



MBB RESCUE

In April, ICC launched an initiative to support Muslim-background believers (MBBs) in the Middle East with safe housing, food, medical care, business support, and more. We were able to connect with a believer named Johar who came under threat when he shared his newfound faith with his family. They slashed him with a knife and shot him in the head with a nail gun. In response, we paid for his medical care.



BIKES AND BIBLES

ICC has been equipping church planters in rural India with Bibles and bicycles to support their ministry and expand their reach. One pastor shared, "I am doing the Lord's ministry by preaching and sharing the love of God. As I did not have a bicycle of my own, I had my own limitations only to go up to a certain distance. But now with my very own bicycle, I can go out to as much distance as I can and also come back home in the evening to stay at my home."

THROWN INTO THE STREETS AFTER CONVERTING

In 2021, Arif, his wife, and their five young children found Jesus.

His Muslim parents did not approve and they had to move out of His parent's home. With nowhere to go, Arif and his family lived in a tent.

Over the months that followed, Arif, as a Christian, was blocked from Muslim authorities from building a new home because he had left Islam. His pastor told us, "If they stopped Arif's construction they could do the same to more than half of the Christian families in his village.

Arif faced a lot of pressure but despite threats from the authorities, Arif continued attending church even though he had to pass directly by the police station to get to church.

ICC provided the family with three-months of food and funding to purchase a new piece of land to construct a home on where the Muslim authorities couldn't block him.

Arif's pastor said, "Thank you very much to all the donors who showed (his family) generosity. God is using you to build up His church here."



HINDU EXTREMISTS DRIVE OUT NEW BELIEVERS

In January, five Christian families were forced out of their village in central India after a mob of 200 Hindu extremists threatened them. The extremists beat the village's pastor and several church members for refusing to convert back to Hinduism. The five families that fled were in dire straits as they did not have food reserves available or the income to keep them afloat.

In response, ICC came alongside these families to provide them with emergency food aid and blankets to keep them warm through the cold winter. One of the recipients shared, "This is [a] great help for me and my family. I thank you for caring [for] us in this time of scarcity. I am very happy to have food relief from you. I kneel down at the feet of Jesus Christ for you and request you to keep us in your prayers for our wellness [until the] situation becomes normal for us."

MUSLIM ATTACK KILLED 36 - THOMAS & FAMILY RESCUED!

In 2019, an attack in the Democratic Republic of the Congo left 36 Christians dead. In response, Thomas and his family fled their town to seek safety elsewhere. As someone living with a physical disability, Thomas was able to secure safe passage with a truck driver who helped him flee town.

The family was taken in by a pastor who supports local Christian refugees. In order to help Thomas and his family get back on their feet, ICC provided him with the equipment and tools necessary to start up his own shoe-making business as well as a new wheelchair to facilitate his movement.

"My life and that of my family have been changed for good by your generous contribution and the empowerment toward my skill of making shoes," Thomas expressed. "First of all, thank you for the wheelchair that will enable my movement from home to the market and back."

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



FRONT LINES OF MINISTRY

PASTOR PROFILE

TARGETED BY THE CHINESE SECRET POLICE

A secret interview with a Chinese believer.

By Gina Goh

A month after Beijing's crackdown of online religious activities, many wonder how the Christians in China are doing in terms of virtual worship and gathering. Are they being targeted, banned, or arrested for conducting "illegal" religious activities?

International Christian Concern recently interviewed a Christian leader, Gianni*, from a heavily persecuted Chengdu-based house church via encrypted messaging app. His answers provide a glimpse into the persistent challenges our brothers and sisters in China face.



How are you using technology to spread the gospel, gather, and communicate?

In my religious life, I use technology for communication on two fronts. First, is to publicly witness and spread the gospel. I use social media that is used within China, mainly WeChat and its public account. Second, [I use technology to] serve at church. I would use Telegram, which is blocked in China, so I need to employ VPN [to gain access]. For worship, we use Zoom.

Has technology made it easier to keep the underground church alive?

From a church-building perspective, technology has provided a minimum guarantee. When house churches are cracked down, there is at least a basic connection between the leadership team and the congregation, or members to members. That way, the flock will not disperse completely if being struck. Without internet, gathering and the link between Christians would be very weak, scattered, and in smaller scale. With this technology, now we can still maintain online gatherings with more than 500 participants.

What fears do you have about detection from the government?

I am not afraid of the government's secret investigation. Our faith is "declare with your mouth and believe in your heart," publicly testifying for Him in the name of Jesus Christ. It is neither the church's responsibility nor does it have the capacity to counter the investigation. We are a fellowship formed by God's children, not a spy agency. [Our purpose] is so that the souls live in truth, freedom, and joy, not to make our flesh more secure.

How difficult is it to circumvent government detection?

From a technical side, it is not difficult. The server of our app is set up overseas, so the government cannot obtain user information from the back end. In fact, scouting is more difficult for the government. To thoroughly monitor a person all day, you need enormous manpower, resources, and refined technology. Our government is incapable of doing that at the moment.

I have dealt with their law enforcement departments for a while now, and I have discovered that they are, in fact, frail and clumsy.

What would you like Christians in the West to know and understand about your situation? How can Christians in the West help you?

Our church usually shares and updates our information to tell the world what is happening to us, while asking everyone to pray for us. Though house churches in China have endured a tremendous crackdown, it has not reached the point where I lose my freedom, or my life is under threat. Since I have not lost faith, I will try to keep living my life to do the following: share the gospel with people in freedom and joy, receive new brothers and sisters and disciple them, and send preachers to plant churches.

If I shall be incarcerated, then so be it. Nothing will separate us from the love of Christ.

Therefore, I do not think I lack anything. Perhaps, living in China, continuously experiencing deprivation and loss, is a greater path that is gifted to us by God. Brothers and sisters in the West, please pay attention to our situation and pray for us. We would be grateful for that.

Gianni has been detained several times by the local authorities. The landlord of his rented apartment repeatedly threatened him. Electricity and water at his home were shut off by the police. The keyhole to his apartment's door was filled with glue. All of this took place because he refused to budge and leave his house church to join a government-vetted Three-Self church. ✝

**Name changed for security reasons.*





HOPE HOUSE CHILD SPONSOR

AYMAN'S STORY: BREAKING 1,400 YEARS OF PERSECUTION

Ayman Ashraf is about to turn 13 and has grown up as a poor Christian in Egypt where his whole community has faced total persecution for 1,400 years

Ayman's father is a day-laborer and has diabetes. His father is living the life that was handed down to him, and Ayman desires to be a day laborer like his father.

The hidden part of the persecution they face is a terrible education from the State that is useless but purposeful. The parents know the State education is useless, so they pull their children out of school at 11 or 12 to work as day laborers, garbage pickers, and other menial work. This is a generational trap that keeps them in bondage.

Hope House breaks the cycle by providing quality after school education. Ayman learns English, proper Arabic, and math, to raise him above his station in life.

Ayman's mother says, "Hope House is better than the [public] schooling, the kids gain more knowledge there."

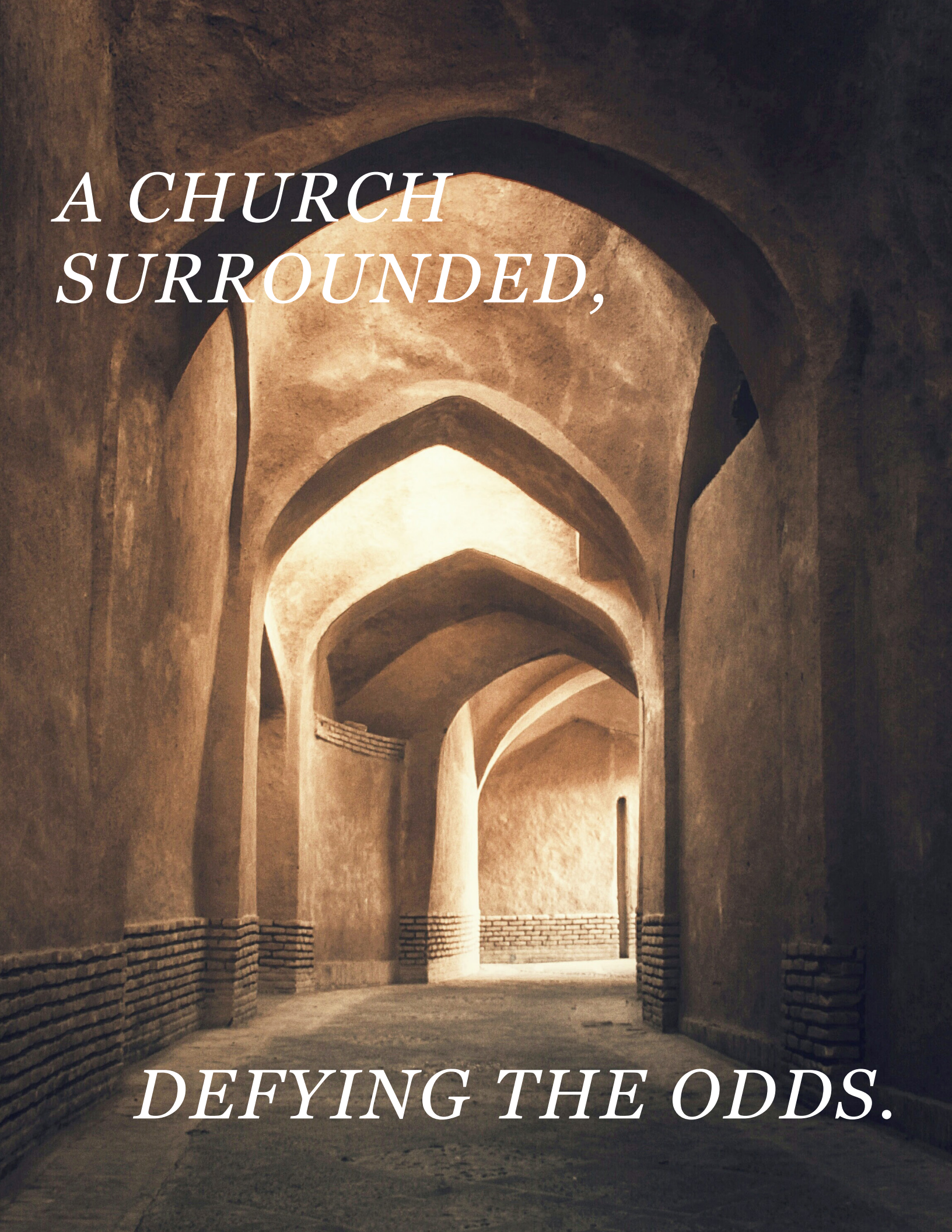
ICC's Hope House will equip Ayman with an education that will allow him to have and pursue dreams beyond that of a day laborer. ✝️

Partner with ICC

If you'd like to join us in the giving Egyptian Christian kids a chance to break the 1,400 year cycle of persecution, go to:
www.persecution.org/initiatives/hope-house/

To inquire about sponsoring a child, contact ICC at icc@persecution.org.





*A CHURCH
SURROUNDED,*

DEFYING THE ODDS.

Despite horrible persecution in Iran, the Church is exploding.

By Claire Evans

To the surprise of few, Iran is home to one of the most heavily persecuted Christian communities in the world. Led by the harsh hand of the Grand Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iranian authorities continue to crack down on Christians throughout the country—adding to a history of persecution that dates back to the Iranian Revolution of 1979 that installed an Islamic theocracy replacing the U.S.-backed democratic order.

Surprisingly, Iran regularly claims that it respects religious freedom for Iranian Christians, pointing to the Assyrian and Armenian communities that have existed in the land since the early centuries of Christianity. These communities have their own churches and can generally attend and worship without much government interference because they are not seen as a threat to the Ayatollah's rule.

What the Iranian government tries to hide is its persecution of Muslim background believers (MBBs), people who converted to Christianity from Islam. With this population of Christians growing within Iran, the government feels that its own authority is being threatened, as is the case in countries like China and North Korea.

In an effort to stop this spread of Christianity, the Iranian government employs several methods of persecution. The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps is an elite military unit that works with the Ministry of

Intelligence to identify Christian converts in society and monitor their activities. In particular, Iranian authorities commonly raid house churches, which the government deems as a threat to national security. Because the only churches recognized by the government worship in their traditional language, converts are left with nowhere to worship in their own language except these house churches.

Iran also criminalizes evangelism and house church worship, landing many pastors and lay worshipers in Iran's prison system, notorious for its poor living conditions and torture of prisoners. Evin prison, one of the worst in the country where dozens of Christians have been held, had their abuse exposed last year when a vigilante group hacked their camera system and put their heinous crimes on display for the world to see the plight of Iran's religious minorities.

It would be expected that under such pressure, the Iranian Church would shrink, and people would leave the faith. In actuality though, the Church has exploded there, and Islam is dying among the young.

In this issue, you will read about the unbearable trials Iran's Christians have endured for decades and the incredible stories of the underground church. Iranian Christians have persevered and are a witness to the world of the power of God's church under persecution. ✝



OPPOSITE: According to recent surveys, Christianity is growing within Iranian society, despite claims from the government. **LEFT:** Grand Ayatollah Ali Khamenei with members of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard. **RIGHT:** A guard stationed outside of Iran's notorious Evin Prison.

FROM DEATH TO LIFE

History is used as a pastoral tool by many church leaders in Iran.

By Claire Evans

King Cyrus' legacy is spread throughout the Old Testament.

He is the king who helped exiled Jews return to their homeland and rebuild the temple. Isaiah calls King Cyrus anointed by God. Meanwhile, Daniel prospered under the reign of King Cyrus.

Today, he is remembered as the first empire ruler to codify religious freedom. Yet, his country is known across the world as a serious violator of religious freedom. Forty-three years ago, Iran violently transitioned from a secular to Islamic nation that became filled with a religious energy that sought to sanctify the nation. Almost overnight, the country transformed.

"The church used to be a sleepy church because there was so much prosperity and there were so many foreigners living in Iran," remembered Tat Stewart from Talim Ministries. Stewart was a missionary living in Iran and witnessed the country's political transformation firsthand. Iran's embrace of Islam forced the church underground.

"They went from sleepy, once-a-month

members to a church on its knees," explained Stewart. "But by closing churches and forcing them underground, they (the regime) could no longer monitor. And all an underground church needs are people who are hungry for it."

Dr. Mike Ansari from Heart4Iran agrees. "Before the revolution, the church in Iran was just maintaining a mere presence. It was a church [whose] legacy was being maintained... After the revolution and a series of events, it seemed that persecution started, and we saw the favor and growth of Christianity in Iran."

Forty years later, the desire for Islamic piety in Iran is replaced by a longing for cultural authenticity. The youth who have only known Iran's harsh interpretation of Islam are weary of the country's moral and economic bankruptcy.

"Iranian youth are no longer happy and satisfied with the status quo," said Dr. Ansari. "They are looking elsewhere for the meaning of life... This is a very enlightened generation of younger people in Iran."

Education has led them to realize that "the legacy and history of Christianity [in Iran] goes over a thousand years ago," continued Dr. Ansari. "The youth realize that, over time, the church was marginalized and eradicated by Islamic rulers. They are taking a sense of pride in their past and heritage. They want to know what their ancestors were before they were forced to be Muslim."

This is where King Cyrus becomes important. Iranians "gravitate toward historical fact... When they realize that in the Old Testament that King Cyrus was mentioned, revered, and even a parallel to the Messiah, they really tune in," explained Dr. Ansari.

"Iranians unfortunately these days are known to be terrorists, but that is not how the majority of them would like to be



known... Once they realize that they have had a global impact and freed the captives, their worldview starts to change. Providing scripture to the people of Iran helps validate their historical past," Dr. Ansari said.

For many Iranians, learning about Christianity means becoming in-touch with their ancestral history, a story that has been suppressed by the authorities. Iran's presence in the Bible is an opportunity for many pastors to share the gospel. As Iranians experience newfound freedom in the telling of their own history, the miracle of the cross works within, and the church only grows. ✝️





ICC continues to monitor and protect Christians inside Evin Prison.

It takes up a strip of land in the Evin neighborhood of Tehran, Iran. But the real estate and walls that serve as Evin Prison symbolize the evil, torture, and broken lives of so many Christians. Its chains have shackled religious freedom for decades.

Iranian Christians face a cascade of everyday threats and struggles for simply expressing their faith publicly. It is inside Evin's walls, however, where the real damage occurs. Widely referred to as a 'torture factory' and 'Hell on Earth,' Evin Prison swallows roughly 60% of Christians who are arrested in Iran (when the prison location is known).

Rather than house the scoundrels and dregs of society, Evin Prison—influenced by the Intelligence Ministry—also serves as punishment for anyone deemed a threat to national security and the Islamic regime: Christians, politicians, journalists, intellectuals, and artists. Or more specifically, anyone who is a threat to Ali Khamenei, 83, the supreme leader of Iran who squashes any faith or dissent outside of the "Islamic" Republic of Iran.

Many cases have attracted worldwide attention. ICC closely monitored and chronicled the arrest, imprisonment, and eventual release of Christians Maryam Rustampoor and Marzieh Amirizadeh Esmaeilabad. Maryam and Marzieh were charged with anti-government activities, but it became clear that apostasy (conversion from Islam to Christianity) was the reason for the arrest.

After eight months of abuse at the hands of Iranian security officials, at their release—in part because of international pressure and prayer—the two women said, "Words are not enough to express our gratitude to the Lord and to His people who have prayed and worked for our release."

Iranian-Armenian Christian Anooshavan Avedian was sentenced to 10 years in prison solely for teaching Christianity – his June 2022 appeal was unsuccessful. The notorious appeal court judge in charge of his case referred to Avedian's activities as "propaganda contrary to and disturbing to the holy religion of Islam."

Former prisoners have reported that guards commonly use torture to elicit confessions of church activities, sometimes even covering up deaths from torture as suicides.

Leaked security camera footage a year ago from a hacker group depicted what ICC and many have believed to be happening in the prison for years: flagrant abuses of human rights, including degrading living conditions and beatings of prisoners. The footage from inside the prison provided more evidence than ever regarding crimes committed within the Iranian justice system.

Prisoners incarcerated in Evin live in dismal conditions. Wards are overcrowded and lack necessities. Inmates have reported more than 70 types of torture, according to a report published by the United Kingdom. For those whose health deteriorates, medical abuse runs rampant.

Christian convert Amin Naderi was brutally interrogated and refused medical treatment during a lengthy stay at Evin that included hunger strikes and international pressure. Amin later fled Iran after his release.

ICC has for years worked behind the scenes with the U.S. government to target Iranian agents of persecution like judges and prison wardens. Several have quickly retired or moved from their positions after we exposed them. We will continue to lose the bonds of wickedness and work to let the oppressed go free! (Isaiah 58:6-10). For those inside and out of Evin prison. ✝️

IRANIAN WOMEN SPARK CHURCH GROWTH

The gospel in Iran often first spreads through the wives, mothers, and sisters within the family.

By Claire Evans

Media broadcasting is the most common way in which the gospel is shared throughout Iran. Given the country's strict Islamic laws, most Persian women are confined to the home, which means they are often the first within a family unit to hear and receive the gospel. Women have no inherent rights within society, forcing them to live a harsh reality that is completely dependent upon the goodwill of others. This dynamic often leaves them searching for hope.

Salma's experience is an example of what many women live through in Iran. She

explained how her conversion to Christianity first started while watching a media broadcast. "We were watching a TV program and, at that time, our brother had received Hep-C through a blood transfusion and had serious health problems," she recalled. "On the TV, they talked about how you can pray in Jesus' name and there will be healing. The next time we went to the doctor, he was healed. So, we talked to the program again and asked for Bibles. All of our family then became Christian."

She continued, "My older sister and my dad were the first to become Christian. My

older sister had just gone through a divorce because of abuse, and as soon as she became a believer, they noticed a change. She and my mom were the strongest in Islam. And then, after they converted, our brother converted. I noticed that my older sister was answering her questions in love and kindness. The way my sister responded to her day in and day out is why I changed my mind."

As it turned out, Salma's father was not genuine in his conversion, and problems began to surface. He didn't want the rest of the family to discuss the gospel or meet with other Christians. He eventually began beating

the women in the family, for no other reason than that they had converted Christianity. They moved away, but eventually were kicked out of their new house because they were considered “infidels.”

“When I was kicked out, our family moved to a poor part of the city where there were a lot of single women. They were selling themselves. And the married women were forced to sell themselves so the family could have money. They saw how I was also poor, but wasn’t selling my body, so they asked me why and how I am happy.”

Salma soon realized that many women were eager to learn about the gospel. She saw how many women were forced into prostitution by their husbands, and generally how social pressures forced women into horrible circumstances that they would not choose for themselves.

For example, one of her friends was hired into a new job, but quickly discovered that her boss wanted sexual favors.

When her friend refused because it was against her Christian

faith, her boss threatened to call the authorities for evangelization, which carries the death penalty.

Christian Persian women are often placed into impossible situations. Nevertheless, they often are able to shine the light of Christ despite horrific circumstances. For Iranian Christians who have escaped, ICC is actively helping them adjust to a way of life that is less dangerous and more empowering. Within the past year, approximately 80 Iranian believers have received relocation support after having fled. ✝

INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN CONCERN PRESENTS

PERSECUTOR OF THE YEAR AWARDS 2022

THE ANNUAL LIST OF THE WORLD'S TOP PERSECUTORS

ICC PUBLISHES ANNUAL REPORT AT IRF SUMMIT

On June 29, International Christian Concern (ICC) released its 2022 Persecutor of the Year Awards, highlighting the worst persecutors of Christians around the world. ICC unveiled the report to stakeholders and the public during the International Religious Freedom (IRF) Summit in Washington, D.C. ICC named 16 of the worst persecuting country, entity, and individual in a 150-page in-depth report.

ICC selected the Iranian Grand Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Nigeria's Fulani militants, and Afghanistan as the recipients of the Persecutor of the Year Awards.

The Grand Ayatollah, cracking down on the spread of Christianity in Iran; Fulani militants, responsible for countless deaths of Nigerian Christians; and Afghanistan, a country with a death sentence for being Christian, are all well-deserving of this dishonor.

ICC President Jeff King announced these persecutors at a press conference during the IRF Summit, bringing in survivors of persecution from around the world to give firsthand accounts of the tragedies that they have endured on account of their Christian faith.

The IRF Summit, a conference that brings together policymakers, civil society, and faith leaders to collaborate on the promotion of international religious freedom, provided a perfect backdrop for the release of the awards. During the three-day summit, ICC used the report to educate U.S. politicians and international delegates about the persecuted church.

Although the Summit and the Persecutor of the Year Awards were a success, the work to serve the persecuted church is far from over. ICC will continue to share the stories of the persecuted and provide necessary aid so that they can continue to follow Jesus.

DOWNLOAD YOUR COPY TODAY

ICC's Persecutor of the Year Awards are a summation of insights and analysis compiled from countless victim interviews, 50 international staff, and their massive network of contacts.

To download the 150-page PDF version of the 2022 Persecutor of the Year Awards, please visit www.persecution.org/poy or scan the QR code with your mobile device.



SCAN ME

THIS YEAR'S TOP DISHONOREES



Afghanistan - Worst Country

The chaotic withdrawal of U.S. military personnel from Afghanistan in August 2021 plunged the country into disarray and put a death sentence on Christians. Since the Taliban became the ruling party of the country, the beating, kidnapping, torture, and murder of Christians and other minority groups have increased dramatically. Within the Taliban's hardline fundamentalist version of Islam, Afghan Christians—most of whom are former Muslims—are branded as apostates deserving of death.



Fulani Militants - Worst Entity

Nigeria is one of the most dangerous places for Christians because of the abundance of violent extremists, including groups of Fulani militants. This faction of a broader nomadic group, through its exposure to Islamist fundamentalist ideologies, has terrorized Nigeria's Christian communities. Radicalized and armed Islamist Fulani militias have killed tens of thousands of Christians and left countless homeless in a 20-year genocide.

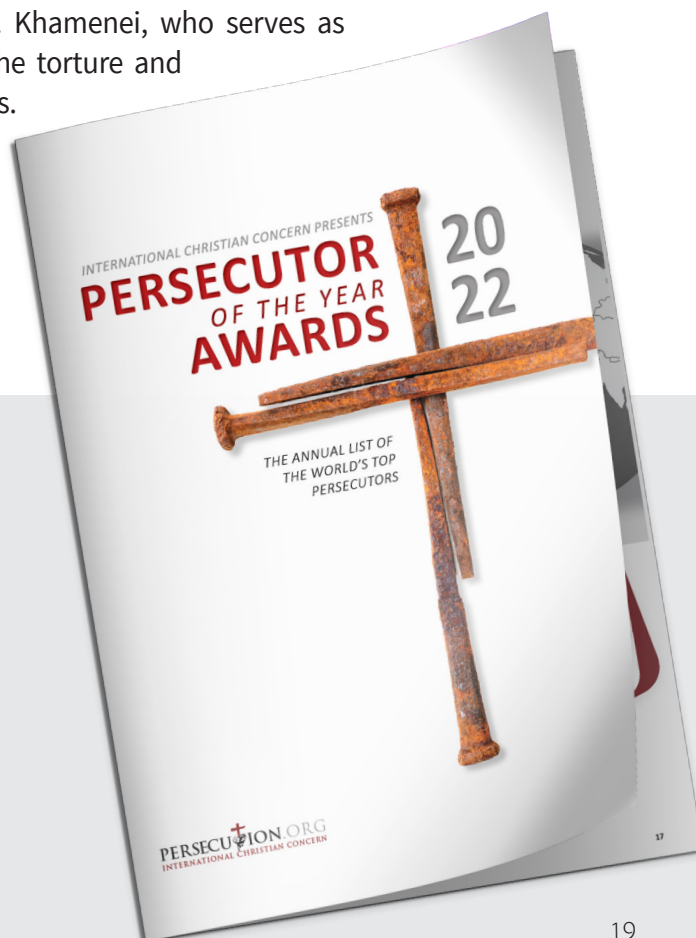


Ali Khamenei - Worst Individual

As Grand Ayatollah of Iran, Ali Khamenei controls every aspect of Iranian life and uses harsh tactics to restrict Christians. Khamenei, who serves as the country's Supreme Leader, allows the torture and execution of many Iranian Christians. Those found attempting to share their faith or worship in a house church are often arrested and sent to the notorious Evin Prison, known for its brutality and torture of prisoners.

SPREAD THE NEWS!

Join us in our efforts to bring awareness of the plight of persecuted Christians. More importantly, join our fight to advance religious freedom for followers of all faiths. Visit our social media channels to learn more.





WEST WATCH

ISSUES INVOLVING CHRISTIANITY IN THE WEST



Photo: Richard Shotwell / Invision/Associated Press

Chris Pratt Risks Joining Hollywood's Personas-Non-Grata Due to Christian Faith

Beloved Guardian of Galaxy, Chris Pratt, has remained the target of Hollywood's ire, as his Christian faith makes him a questionable ally to the industry's progressive tilt. While being one of Hollywood's biggest stars, he has remained an outspoken advocate for Jesus. On several occasions, Pratt has openly shared his love for God and God's love for

us. While many have applauded Pratt's bold faith, not everyone has been thrilled, causing criticism among social activists and the Twitter elite.

In April, as Disney's Avenger saga continued to grow with a fourth Thor film nearing release, several activists lobbied for Pratt's Star Lord character to emerge on the

LGBT spectrum—a move which many see in opposition to Pratt's Christian values. However, even before Disney made any indication of these changes, a social media conflagration emerged, demanding Pratt's cancellation and replacement, alleging that his faith makes him opposed to the LGBT community and that there is no room for a Christian like him in Hollywood.

Finnish Christian MP Cleared of Hate Speech Charges Faces New Appeal

In March 2022, Finnish Parliamentarian and outspoken Christian, Dr. Päivi Räsänen, was cleared of all charges in her hate speech trial. Three years ago, Dr. Räsänen, and Lutheran bishop Juhana Pohjola were charged after Bishop Juhana published a pamphlet written by Dr. Räsänen on biblical marriage. The pamphlet's publication led to an investigation into Dr. Räsänen, where several instances making the biblical case for marriage were found on social media, dating back to 2019.



In April 2021, the Prosecutor General filed three charges for hate speech against Dr. Räsänen and one charge against Bishop Pohjola, who published Dr. Räsänen's pamphlet. In March 2022, the court cleared the two of all charges, stating, "There must be an overriding social reason for interfering with and restricting freedom of expression,"

of which it found none in the case.

The prosecutor quickly alleged that she would appeal this verdict, making another attempt to silence the two Christians. On April 29, that appeal was made official, putting the MP under renewed scrutiny.



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 the persecution of religious groups doesn't make headlines.



Supreme Court Rules: Boston's Refusal to Fly Christian Flag Unconstitutional

In 2017, the city of Boston came under fire over its policy to allow groups to fly their flag on City Hall's third pole. This policy has seen more than 50 different flags flown, as groups look to commemorate their causes with flag-raising ceremonies. However, when a religious group, Camp Constitution, applied to fly a Christian flag on Constitution Day to honor the Christian community's contributions, it was rejected.

The decision was met with criticism, while the city alleged that the flag would appear as an establishment of a specific religion.

The case eventually worked its way to the Supreme Court and on May 2, 2022, the court ruled unanimously in favor of Camp Constitution, citing the flagpole's open-to-all policy. Because the pole is available to everyone freely, it cannot discriminate around who is allowed to use it, even if it views the group as unpopular. In the court's opinion, Justice Beyer stated, "When a government does not speak for itself, it may not exclude speech based on religious viewpoint... Doing so constitutes impermissible viewpoint discrimination."



YOU CAN HELP TODAY!

YOUR DOLLARS IN ACTION

Every time you give to ICC, you demonstrate your love and faithful giving to persecuted children and families. When someone receives your gift through ICC, they are filled with gratitude. We can't do what we do without your generous heart! Here are ways your contribution can be used:

WHERE MOST NEEDED FUND

Where Most Needed supports all ministry needs, including front line workers who investigate persecution cases, support our advocacy initiatives, and strive to awaken the free Church to the plight of our suffering brothers and sisters. When other funds are running low, Where Most Needed covers the needs.

- **\$50:** The average cost of an emergency food package for a victim of persecution.
- **\$100:** One day of an overseas trip for our U.S. staff.
- **\$1,500:** Bringing an overseas victim of persecution to meet with members of Congress for our advocacy efforts.

RESCUE: WIVES & KIDS When believers are stripped of their ability to provide, ICC's Rescue: Wives & Kids fund helps get families back on their feet after persecution.

- **\$30:** One year's worth of school supplies and textbooks.
- **\$1,100:** Rent for an imprisoned pastor's family for one year.

RESTORE: LIVES & COMMUNITIES The Restore: Lives & Communities fund addresses larger needs that impact entire communities after the church suffers persecution.

- **\$30:** Sponsor a child in Hope House on a monthly basis.
- **\$375:** Provides full vocational training for a year for one student through Generation Transformation.

GOSPEL: BIBLES & BROADCASTS ICC spreads the gospel using printed Bibles, radio broadcasts, and discipleship materials in places hostile toward Christianity.

- **\$100:** Send 20 Bibles into North Korea.
- **\$1,000:** Provide 200 Bibles into the hands of persecuted believers.

MESSENGERS: UNDERGROUND WORKERS ICC supports indigenous church planters, pastors, and church workers in the world's most dangerous places.

- **\$250:** Sponsor an underground pastor's ministry for three months.
- **\$1,200:** Fully support a church planter with a salary and training for six months.

Rescue in the Middle East

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to our Muslim-Background Believer initiative. Your dollars are impacting the real lives of Christian converts in the Middle East. George and Aamal share their story:

Aamal was born into a strict Muslim family. At 16, she secretly began attending church. More than 10 years later, she married George, a man from a Christian background, and her uncle began to persecute them. The danger became so severe that they relocated to another country.

Displaced, life was extremely challenging—because Aamal’s conversion away from Islam is not legally recognized, so the two are not legally married. This highly restricts their options for housing.

Seeing their need, ICC stepped in to help. ICC contributed financial aid to Aamal and George for rent and living expenses, and provided George with supplies to become a tea and coffee vendor. George’s expected monthly earnings are now \$300 per month, a lifeline for the couple in their trying circumstances.

Read more about the stories of MBBs we’ve helped:
www.persecution.org/MBB

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GIVING VIA WILL

Provide now for a future gift to ICC by including a bequest provision in your will or revocable trust. If you would like more information on giving to ICC in this way, please give us a call at 1-800-ICC-5441.

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OUR MISSION: Since 1996, ICC has served the global persecuted church through a three-pronged approach of advocacy, awareness, and assistance. ICC exists to bandage the wounds of persecuted Christians and to build the church in the toughest parts of the world.

DONATIONS: International Christian Concern (ICC) is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) (all donations tax-deductible). ICC makes every effort to honor donor wishes in regards to their gifts. Occasionally, a situation will arise where a project is no longer viable. ICC will redirect those donated funds to one of our other funds that is most similar to the donor’s original wishes.

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A wide-angle photograph of a city, likely Santiago, Chile, with a dense urban area in the foreground and a massive, rugged mountain range in the background. The sky is filled with heavy, dramatic clouds. The city features a mix of modern glass skyscrapers and older, more traditional buildings. A prominent domed building, possibly a cathedral or government building, stands out on the left side of the city. The overall tone is somber and dramatic due to the lighting and the imposing mountain.

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