

SOCIAL & ETHICAL ISSUES GROUP

GET FED BY THE FAITH OF THE PERSECUTED CHURCH!

These days, persecution against Christians isn't just limited to North Korea....Syria.....Iraq etc.

It's happening on a massive scale across the whole world. But these millions of persecuted Christians are made up of millions of individual faces just like us, and like Meena and Sunita (see below).

Recently, Pope Francis commented on Christian persecution, saying "In this third world war, waged piecemeal, which we are now experiencing, a form of genocide is taking place, and it must end."

Last Easter, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby spoke of Christian "martyrs", noting that Christians are living under persecution in almost half of the 38 Anglican provinces worldwide. "They fear for their lives every day."

The Prince of Wales has described threats to Christians in the Middle East as "an indescribable tragedy".

So what does this persecution look like?

Persecution of Christians is more than just physical violence. It is a complex, multifaceted phenomenon that involves various forms of cultural marginalisation, government discrimination, hindrances on conversion, interferences on participation in public affairs and restrictions on church life.

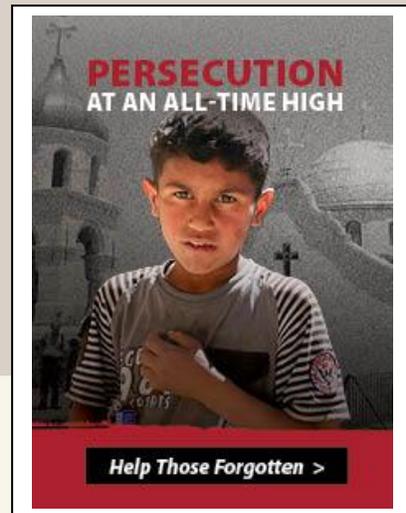
World Watch Research (a measuring system for levels of Christian persecution) distinguishes two main expressions of persecution: 'squeeze' and 'smash'.

'Smash' is defined as incidents of violence or aggression, such as rapes, kidnappings, forcible evictions, killings and church burnings. Violence is the aspect of persecution most readily visible to the outside world. The top ten 'smash' countries in the period covered by the World Watch 2016 are Pakistan, Nigeria, Egypt, Mexico, Syria, India, Sudan, Bangladesh, Vietnam, and Afghanistan.

'Squeeze' is tracked by discerning how the exercise of the Christian faith is undermined in private life, in families and communities, at a national level and in church life. The countries where this squeeze is most intensive are North Korea, Somalia, Yemen, Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iraq, Maldives, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Sudan.

This month, in this article by Heather Westwood, we focus on Christians around the world who suffer physical and emotional persecution because of their faith.

There is a group in SBC which meets to learn more about, and to pray for, our persecuted Christian brothers and sisters. Contact Heather Westwood at heatherwestwood@bigpond.com for more information.



Imagine your face appearing on a big screen in some church somewhere where people are being asked to pray for YOU because you are facing persecution. How would you feel knowing that some people you don't even know in some other part of the world, care about you and are praying for you by name?

Informing Politicians

On 12 January 2017 at least 88 parliamentarians, including 78 MPs and 10 Peers, attended the launch of the 2017 World Watch List in Parliament, which was hosted by Theresa Villiers MP. Parliamentarians and other guests heard testimonies from Aminu Sule (name changed for security reasons), a church leader from northern Nigeria, Daniel, a church leader from Erbil, Iraq, and Lisa Pearce, CEO of Open Doors UK & Ireland, who called on parliamentarians to act on behalf of persecuted Christians.

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Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are ill-treated as if you yourselves were suffering. Hebrews 13:3

TWO STORIES OF PERSECUTION

'I can die or I can witness..make me a witness'

Meena and Sunita from India describe the night they were beaten by Hindu extremists for choosing to leave Hinduism and follow Jesus, but prayed for God to forgive their persecutors, even as the attack was taking place.



"I can die or I can witness. Make me a witness for you."

This was the courageous prayer of Sunita as she hid in a goat shed from her attackers. She had been beaten with bamboo rods by a group of men until she was unconscious, then dragged to the edge of her town. When she awoke, her wrist was broken; a bone was sticking out of it. She had no idea if her sister, Meena, who was also beaten, was alive or dead.

Theirs is just one example of the discrimination and violence that is becoming increasingly common for Christians in India. Sunita is only 25, but has already experienced more persecution than most will face in a lifetime. And yet, she has refused to give up her faith in Christ. See more at <http://bit.ly/2iyQjWE>

'Sometimes it is too much....'

11 January 2017 - Ten Uzbek Christians were arrested by the authorities during a secret prayer meeting. Accused of illegally meeting and rallying, the believers were taken to a police station and questioned for several hours before being released late that night. 'I know that God is with us in all these troubles, but I feel like sometimes I lose hope, sometimes it is too much,' said one woman who was amongst those arrested. 'Please, pray for me to refresh my strength and faithfulness.'

Just one month earlier, one of the Christians in the group had been accused of illegally meeting and rallying and was fined almost £495 - a large sum of money in Uzbekistan. See the story at <http://bit.ly/2j13xfE>



LATEST SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION

Currently running is a Scottish Government consultation suggesting changes to the law in relation to human organ and tissue donation.

There are two aspects to the consultation.

The first asks for views on the idea of 'presumed consent' – that unless you have opted out of donating your organs doctors would be free to remove any of your organs after death. The second question relates to whether hospital clinicians should be encouraged to refer patients for organ donation.

The consultation runs until mid-March and we hope to provide you with more background information next month. You can view the consultation at <http://bit.ly/2j6L1mr>

FREEDOM OF SPEECH BEING CHALLENGED

You may have become aware through local reporting that there have been a few examples of street preachers/evangelists being prosecuted for no more than sharing the Gospel in the public forum.

Locally there have been, and there are ongoing, prosecutions where it is alleged that preachers have behaved in a threatening or abusive manner following complaints due to apparent offence taken by some of those who have heard these preachers. Similar complaints have led to prosecutions elsewhere across the country.

Some of these cases have been successfully defended already and it is encouraging to know that the judicial system is robust enough to protect an individual's right to express their views and beliefs even if that is contrary to the current politically-correct societal view. It is concerning, however, that prosecutions have been brought at all and that the authorities have attempted, in some cases, to suggest that straightforward expressions of faith, which some people may well find offensive, constitute a criminal act.

Whatever our view of the merits of sharing the Gospel in this way we should be aware of this development and alert to the possibility of further changes to the law which, however well intentioned, risk restricting our freedoms and opportunities to share our faith rather than enhancing them.

Further information on this difficult area can be found at the websites of Christian Concern /Christian Legal Centre at <http://bit.ly/1L9z5Nf> and the Evangelical Alliance, who recently published a resource entitled "Speak Up" in conjunction with the Lawyers Christian Fellowship - <http://bit.ly/2jYAvvx>.