Your insight into religious freedom

CSW everyone free to believe

response & prayer diary

October 2026 – January 2027



Pastor Ezra Jin Mingri and his daughter, Grace Jin Drexel.

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Now pray for China.

Rebuilding lives, raising voices

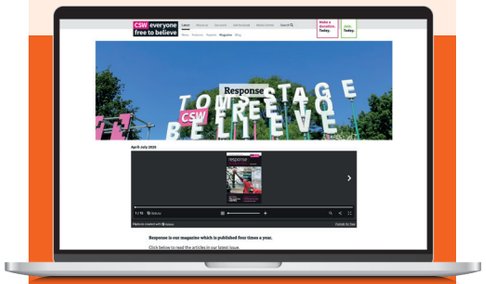
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Pastor Jin is free. Now pray for China.

On 4 July 2026, Pastor Ezra Jin Mingri landed in the United States. After nearly nine months in detention in China, the senior pastor of Zion Church was finally reunited with his family. Among them was his daughter, Grace Jin Drexel, who campaigned tirelessly for his release, and the pastor's new grandson, Ezra, meeting for the very first time. He was born just a month earlier and named in his honour.

'I couldn't be more thankful and pray that others still imprisoned will experience this same freedom soon,' the pastor said. 'Mine is a God of miracles, and he constantly surprises me.'

Even while giving thanks for his release, Pastor Jin did not forget those who were left behind. Others from his church and across China are still not free, facing charges they do not deserve.

Writing in the Wall Street Journal, he issued a simple but powerful appeal: 'I'm free. Now pray for China.'

> **Mine is a God of miracles, and he constantly surprises me.**

When Pastor Jin founded Zion Church in 2007, he chose not to register with the government, holding to firm conviction that Christ is the sole head of the church.

Government control tightened in 2016, and unregistered churches increasingly became targets. Zion Church's main building in Beijing was shut down in 2018 after it refused to install 24 CCTV cameras. In response, Pastor Jin developed a hybrid model, both online and in person, allowing people to continue meeting in small groups across the country.

Zion Church now serves at least 5,000 members across the country, making it one of the largest unregistered churches in China.

A sweeping crackdown

Like many unregistered churches, Zion Church has faced years of pressure from the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which seeks to bring all religious activity under state control.

Then on 10 October 2025, the authorities launched a huge crackdown. In a coordinated operation, they detained 28 leaders and members across 11 cities. Pastor Jin and 17 others went on to be formally arrested on charges of 'illegally using information networks', a charge aimed at suppressing church activity online. The arrests amounted to the largest crackdown on a single church since the end of the Cultural Revolution (1976).

On 18 June 2026, nine of the leaders were released on bail. But nine were still being held, including Pastor Jin. It seemed as if the remaining detainees had been, or were about to be, transferred to face prosecution. The charges had reportedly been changed to more serious charges of 'illegal business operations' and 'fraud', which are commonly used against leaders of unregistered churches.

Then on 4 July, after 266 days behind bars, Pastor Jin was released from prison and taken to the United States, where he was reunited with his family. Reports indicate that his release followed high-level discussions between the Chinese and US governments.

The advocacy continues

Throughout Pastor Jin's imprisonment, his daughter Grace became one of the most visible advocates for his release. While pregnant with her son, she spoke before the UN Geneva Summit, testified before the US Congressional-Executive Commission on China, and shared her family's story around the world.

Now Pastor Jin is advocating alongside her for the release of the remaining detainees from Zion Church: six pastors, one elder, and a pastor's wife. Their names are Pastor Wang Lin, Pastor Yin Huibin, Pastor Liu Zhenbin, Pastor Lin Shucheng, Pastor Wang Cong, Wu Qiuyu, Pastor Gao Yingjia and Elder Wang Zhong.

At the time of writing, the Zion Church eight are awaiting the results of court hearings that were originally scheduled for 14-18 August, in an unusually accelerated legal procedure. According to Grace, many believe it was an attempt to rush an outcome before President Xi Jinping's September visit to Washington DC. Thankfully, the trial has been pushed back with no date yet set for the new trial.

'We argue that the continual persecution and imprisonment of the other eight directly goes against the goodwill established with the release of my father,' Grace posted on her X account.

Our source says their trials have been delayed. Pre-trial detention can last months, or even years, yet this opens a window to raise their case internationally and call for fair judicial procedure. We have seen the difference this can make.

'Hallelujah. The gospel will spread.'

When Grace sat down with CSW earlier this year, she shared a conversation that illustrated her father's unfaltering faith:

'Someone asked my father what would happen if everyone was detained,' Grace recalled. 'The first thing that he said was, "Hallelujah. The gospel will spread further."'

Our prayers for Pastor Jin have been answered. Now he and his family are asking the global Church to not stop praying, until the remaining Zion Church leaders are reunited with their loved ones too.

Help write the next good-news story

Every victory for freedom of religion or belief begins with people who refuse to look away.

With your support, CSW can continue documenting abuses, amplifying overlooked cases and advocating for those whose voices are too often silenced.

Will you join us in continuing this vital work?

Give today and help bring hope, accountability and change to those still waiting for justice around the world: **csw.org.uk/give**



Detained leaders from Zion Church. Clockwise from left: Pastor Wang Lin, Pastor Yin Huibin, Pastor Lin Shucheng, Pastor Wang Cong, Pastor Gao Yingjia, Wu Qiuyu, Pastor Liu Zhenbin, Elder Wang Zhong.

Religious freedom in China: Five things to know

1) Religion is being 'Sinicized'

President Xi called for the 'Sinicization' of religion in 2016, requiring its adaptation to 'excellent traditional Chinese culture' and socialist society. In practice, this can mean removal of crosses from churches, destruction of mosques in Xinjiang Province, and control of education to instil anti-religious sentiment. Religions perceived to be more indigenous to China (Han-Buddhism or Taoism, for example) are less targeted by authorities than those seen to be foreign in origin, such as Christianity and Islam.

2) Registration comes with conditions

The Chinese Communist Party applies pressure on churches to join the state-sanctioned Three Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM). However, churches that register must adapt their services, preaching, and theological education to conform to CCP ideology. National flags are raised, portraits of former CCP Chairmen are displayed, and under 18s are not allowed inside. Many Christians believe these requirements conflict with their faith. Registration is also no guarantee of freedom, with surveillance, doctrinal oversight and arbitrary detention common in the TSPM.

3) The legal framework is used to suppress religious communities.

Religious communities in Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Protestantism and Catholicism are expected to register with state-approved associations. Failure to register is illegal, and can result in harassment, fines or closure. Under Article 300 of the Criminal Law, groups labelled *xie jiao* (often translated as 'evil cults') are banned. One such criminalised group is the Falun Gong, a peaceful spiritual movement which has been subjected to decades of repression, including arrests, torture and enforced disappearance. There is no legal avenue for groups like the Falun Gong to operate legally.

4) Online religious activity is increasingly dangerous.

As restrictions on physical gatherings increased, many religious communities turned to the internet to meet, worship and share teaching. This was an innovative solution, until regulations introduced in March 2022 severely restricted online religious activity. State control now extends beyond physical churches and into the digital sphere, with measures rigidly enforced against many religious communities across China.

5) Xinjiang cotton is still on the shelves.

One million people are still believed to be held in forced labour and re-education camps in Xinjiang. Yet cotton produced by persecuted Muslim-majority people groups, including Uyghurs, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Tajiks and Uzbeks, is still making its way onto shelves and into wardrobes around the world. The UK reportedly imported £809 million of goods from Xinjiang between July 2024 and June 2025, including T-shirts, toys, toothbrushes and Christmas decorations.

Facts and stats

As of **2022**, an estimated **1 in 5** cotton garments in the global market may be linked to Uyghur forced labour.

Source: enduyghurforcedlabour.org

Sunday 18 October

Thank God for the release of Pastor Ezra Jin Mingri. Pray that he and his family would be richly blessed and that he would recover swiftly from his unjust imprisonment. Pray also for the acquittal and release of the remaining Zion Church leaders.

Find the latest updates at csw.org.uk/china

Monday 19 October

On 5 August, Pastor David Tang and six other employees of Purpose Driven Church were taken into custody by Wenzhou police. We later learnt they were being held at a detention centre in Shanghai, but at the time of writing, the authorities still haven't explained why. Pray for their immediate and unconditional release, and for answers.

Tuesday 20 October

Pray for an end to the severe persecution of the Falun Gong community. The Falun Dafa Infocenter has documented the deaths of over 5,000 Falun Gong practitioners because of torture or abuse since the group was declared illegal in 1999.

Wednesday 21 October

'Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save.' (Isaiah 59:1). Pray that those who have been subjected to transnational repression by the Chinese government would know that God can reach further and move far more effectively than the CCP.

Thursday 22 October

Last year the Buddhist Association of China adopted legal measures which effectively exclude non-Han Buddhists (i.e. ethnic minorities) from official recognition as religious leaders. This is yet another aspect of the *Sinicization* of religion. Pray that the measures are overturned.

Friday 23 October

Pastor Li Jie and Elder Han Xiaodong of Linfen Covenant Home Church were released on 16 April, having completed sentences of three years and eight months on unfounded 'fraud' charges. Give thanks for their release, and pray that God would right the grave injustice they were subjected to.

Saturday 24 October

Lord Jesus, thank you that there is nothing that can be hidden from you, that there is no captive you cannot draw near to, and no injustice that you cannot overturn. Bring freedom to all who are detained unjustly, and miraculous transformation to China that will reverberate around the world. Amen.

Rebuilding lives, raising voices

How practical support and international advocacy are bringing hope in Nigeria

From 28 May to 21 June, members of our team travelled to conflict-affected communities with colleagues from CSW Nigeria (CSWN), meeting survivors of religious violence. Yet alongside these first-hand accounts of trauma and loss, we also witnessed how practical training and psychosocial assistance are helping survivors build a more hopeful future.

Content warning: Contains themes of abduction and violence.

We travelled together from state to state, mostly by car, and often circumventing roads and areas where terrorists encamped. These journeys highlighted, once again, the courage, commitment, and professionalism of CSWN staff, who persist in reaching victims of religious violence, despite frequent deadly challenges.

We began by interviewing widows from conflict-affected areas in southern Kaduna, whom CSWN staff were training in income generating skills. We had to pause each interview to comfort and pray with the women, as each one broke down, but insisted on continuing their testimonies.

The 28 women receiving the training were mostly mothers who had lost husbands and loved ones in Fulani militia violence and were struggling to provide for their children.

Felicia, 37, from Kajuru told us her husband was abducted and killed despite a ransom payment. Blessing, 29, from Awon village in Kachia, described her life as 'very miserable' after her husband was ambushed and murdered. Mary, a 42-year-old mother of eight from Kachia, said two of her children were not at school because she could not afford their fees after her husband died in an ambush.

Amid these stories of loss, there was also remarkable resilience. Salome, 46, told us she forgave her husband's killers and prays that 'they will open their eyes, and they will stop.'

As training continued, there was a palpable sense of rising hope. Women who had never sewn before learned how to make different bags. Others were trained to use and maintain grinding mills, and all were taught basic accounting.

At the closing ceremony, participants received either a sewing machine or a grinding mill, and start-up materials. They sang hymns, and expressed amazement at what they had achieved, thanking CSWN for helping them provide for their families. They were also given money to transport their goods home.

During a psychosocial workshop in Borno State, we interviewed displaced survivors of terrorist violence from southern Borno, who have sought refuge in four camps in the capital city, Maiduguri, which we could only reach safely by air.

The Christian camps receive no official help. The smallest has 215 residents and is being extorted for land rent. These IDPs also face pressure from local officials to return home, despite continuing insecurity. We were told almost all who were forced to return to the Gwoza area in 2023 had been killed by terrorists.

Towards the end of the workshop, and following particularly challenging sessions on forgiveness, participants listed the burdens of unforgiveness they wished to be freed from. The lists were then piled up and set alight, as they prayed and sang 'The Great Physician Now is Near' in Hausa. It was powerful and moving.

Voices being heard

Our assignment coincided with a country visit by Dr Nazila Ghanea, the first ever by any UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief. We helped arrange for her to meet Professor and Mrs Tarfa in Plateau State. The CSW team met with her later in Abuja, alongside victims from states she was unable to visit who had experienced child abduction, kidnapping, repeated forcible displacement, religious discrimination and violence.

One of them, a church leader from Katsina, had been abducted and held for 30 days. Members of other kidnapping gangs would also visit

> **"They expressed amazement at what they had achieved, thanking CSWN for helping them provide for their families.**

the forest camp specifically to torture him, having heard a pastor was captured. He described his back being struck at close range daily by 27 stones fired from a sling shot, with the process recommencing if he cried out or shielded himself. His targeted kidnapping illustrated that — amid the appalling militia violence targeting the Hausa Muslim majority in the northwest on ethnic grounds — the Christian minority is also singled out.

Dr Ghanea will present her findings to the Human Rights Council in March 2027. In late June 2026, we shared our findings verbally with country delegations, UN experts and Working Groups in Geneva, and several requested follow-up written briefings – an encouraging sign that Nigeria and its people are now firmly on the international agenda.

For people like the women we met in southern Kaduna, learning new skills to provide for their families after trauma and loss, that attention matters. Their experiences matter, and so does their future. Thank you for standing with them through your prayers, advocacy and support.

Sunday 25 October

At time of writing, several local government areas in Benue, Kaduna and Plateau states in central Nigeria are experiencing a surge in attacks, mass killings and abductions by Fulani militia. Pray for a swift end to these attacks, and to all terrorist violence in Nigeria.

Monday 26 October

Surviving villagers abducted from the Ariko and Awon communities in Kachia LGA (Kaduna State) have been held in the forest by Fulani militia since April. Pray for an effective official strategy to end what has been termed 'the normalisation of prolonged captivity'.

Tuesday 27 October

International Freedom of Religion or Belief Day

Thank you, God, for the 'first freedom' you gave humanity, and for all who work to defend it. With sorrow, we remember those who face injustice and persecution because of their beliefs. Yet with hope, we pray for suffering to cease and justice to prevail. Give us perseverance in our prayers, hope in our campaigning, and determination to keep working for a world where everyone is free to believe. Amen.

Wednesday 28 October

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Benue State continue to receive inadequate assistance from the state and federal governments. Pray the state's governor, formerly a priest, would remember to seek justice, defend the oppressed, and take up the cause of the fatherless and widowed (Isaiah 1:17).

Thursday 29 October

Four Christian IDP camps in Maiduguri (Borno State) receive no official assistance. One is being extorted for rent by the new owners of the land it occupies, and all IDPs face pressure from the state government to return to unsafe areas. Pray for justice, compassion and provision.

Friday 30 October

In August, Plateau State-based cleric Sheikh Muhammadu Sani Yahaya Jingir called for 'infidels' to be shown 'their limit', and falsely claimed that 'Christians in disguise' bombed mosques during a 1980s uprising by an extremist Muslim sect. Pray that divisive sectarian and tribalistic narratives would be rejected, especially in Nigeria's upcoming elections.

Saturday 31 October

Lord God, again we cry out to you for breakthrough in Nigeria, for an end to terrorist violence, for the release of all held in captivity, and for the raising up of righteous leaders and peacemakers who will truly transform the nation. Amen.

Find out more at **csw.org.uk/nigeria**

‘I have no words to thank you’

‘Thank you for your prayers, thank you for accompanying me in the midst of that captivity... I have no words to thank you for your immense love.’


Bishop Jylman Red Jurado Farfán

Bishop Jylman Red Jurado Farfán shared this personal message of gratitude for the CSW community after spending more than five years in prison.

The Venezuelan bishop and human rights defender was arrested on 30 July 2021 after being summoned under false pretences. He was subsequently accused of terrorism, criminal association and conspiracy. He was one of 81 prisoners confirmed to have been released on 14 August, although the regime claimed the number was significantly higher.

Before his arrest, Bishop Jurado Farfán dedicated much of his time to serving others. His ministry included providing free legal assistance to political prisoners and helping run community soup kitchens for those in need. The authorities characterised these activities as ‘political confrontation’.

The bishop had also been developing an education programme on the subject of democratic values, which the authorities interpreted as an attempt to destabilise the government.

The years that followed took a heavy toll.

While imprisoned in Rodeo III Prison in Miranda State, not far from Caracas, his health deteriorated severely. The bishop suffered from multiple serious medical conditions: atypical pneumonia, intercostal neuritis, and both upper and lower gastrointestinal bleeding. Specialists also warned of possible hypovolemic shock or cardiac arrest. However, prison authorities ignored at least six court orders requiring his urgent transfer for medical evaluation.

Bishop Jurado Farfán was mocked for his faith and restricted from accessing religious materials and spiritual support. When he defended the religious rights of other inmates, he was confined to an isolation cell for ten days, where he faced inhumane and degrading treatment. He later shared testimony with the UN describing the brutal torture he had endured.

He sadly lost both his mother and grandmother while in detention.

Today, after five years and 15 days in detention, Bishop Jurado Farfán is free. Even after years of profound suffering, he speaks with gratitude of the faithfulness of God and of those who stood alongside him. He struggled to find the words, but one he repeated was ‘grateful’.

‘The Lord broke the chains of oppression, of fear, of torture, and gave us freedom,’ he said. ‘Every morning He showed His mercy, and everything that has breath praises the God of justice.’

Read

‘God will not get you out of here...’

When Pastor Armando Montero* was summoned to give evidence against a former client, he expected to be home within hours. Instead, his witness interview turned into eight days in detention.

After officials discovered he was a Christian, everything changed. They mocked his faith and insisted that God had abandoned him. Senior officers called him ‘crazy’ and threatened to send him to a psychiatric institution. Yet throughout his ordeal, his spiritual anchor held firm.

Read Armando’s story at **csw.org.uk/blog**

**Name changed*

Prayer Diary Week 3:

“

Always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.

Pastors Rodian and Kelly know the cost of following Jesus.

Their home in Colombia was where they held their church, in the city of Santa Marta, until it was burnt to the ground in August 2024. The leader of an armed criminal group had ordered its destruction after hearing Rodian preach from the Bible.

When we come together to pray on the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church, it’s people like Pastor Rodian and Pastor Kelly that we stand alongside. We not only pray *for* them, but *with* them — and many others facing injustice around the world.

You join with the wife waiting for news of her disappeared husband; the parents fighting for their daughter’s safe return; and the child who just wants an equal chance in school.

You echo the voices behind bars in Iran, in isolation cells in Nicaragua, and in shipping containers in Eritrea.

You join the hushed prayers of the household in North Korea, whose only church is their family. And you join the defiant prayers of Pastor Ezra Jin from China, who said before his impending arrest: ‘Hallelujah. The Gospel will spread.’

Together we stand with people just like these, raising their cases before the God of justice. So let us pray urgently. Let us pray faithfully. And let us pray without ceasing, as Paul encouraged while he himself was an ‘ambassador in chains’

‘Always keen on praying for all the Lord’s people.’:

International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church (IDOP)


Pastors Rodian and Kelly. Photo: CSW/Juan Pablo Daza

1) Read: Ephesians 6:10-20 (The Armour of God).

2) Pray: Ask God to strengthen, encourage, heal and guide those who are suffering for their beliefs — covering them with his full protection. Pray that they may stand firm, and that God would powerfully transform their situation.

You could end with Paul’s closing blessing: ‘Peace to the brothers and sisters, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.’

3) Gather: Could you pray with your church, small group, or a few friends on Sunday 1 November? You could watch our video of Rodian and Kelly’s story, invite a guest speaker, or simply pray through the verses above.

Save the date

Find resources and get involved at **csw.org.uk/idop**

Meet the advocate:

Cecil Chaudhry

Cecil Chaudhry grew up in Pakistan, watching his father champion the rights of religious minority communities. Inspired to do the same, he served as the Executive Director for the National Commission for Justice and Peace (NCJP) before joining CSW's advocacy team. He shares why freedom of religion or belief matters for everyone, and the signs of progress giving him hope.



Cecil Chaudhry

My late father Group Captain Cecil Chaudhry was a highly decorated war hero, a fighter pilot from the Pakistan Air Force (PAF). He served 27 years in the PAF — defending the geographical boundaries of Pakistan.

After leaving the air force, my father dedicated his life to speaking up for marginalised and vulnerable religious minority communities. He served in this field for 26 years — defending the ideological boundaries of Pakistan. He became one of the country's strongest voices for the rights of all religious minorities.

So I grew up hearing about the challenges that religious minorities face in their daily lives, and even faced discrimination myself in school and college, and later in my time as an events manager.

After the passing of my father, I became more involved in human rights work, starting by volunteering for the organisation my sister Michelle set up in my parents' name: The Cecil & Iris Chaudhry Foundation (CICF).

Why do you advocate for freedom of religion or belief for all?

Growing up in Pakistan, I met and made friends with many who belong to the majority Muslim faith. My parents taught me to remember that we are all human beings and we must strive to live together in harmony and peace. They instilled in me the spirit of humanity, right from my childhood. I follow my father's example, who often said: *'By faith I am a Christian, but my religion is humanity.'*

I've learnt that you cannot succeed in isolation, speaking up for only your own community. It is not only Christians who face challenges, but Hindus, Sikhs, Parsis, Ahmadis, Shias, Bahais and others too. Speaking up for all is the only way we can effectively advocate on the issues we hold close to our hearts.

What one key thing would you like people to know?

There are some very serious issues, but underpinning them is a mindset that has evolved over the past decades; a mindset that promotes intolerance and lack of respect for the nation's diversity.

It stems from an education system in which biased and hateful content is prevalent in textbooks. If we truly want to address the challenges faced by different faith communities, we must address this mindset across society.

Lasting change will only come when people learn to respect others, regardless of their religion or belief. For that, education is key.

What gives you hope?

I'm very glad to say that we have started to see changes in Pakistan.

The government is developing curricula for religious minority students to study their own faith, rather than taking Ethics as the alternative to compulsory Islamic Studies.

The lower courts are being given greater protection to help them dispense timely justice, especially in false blasphemy cases. In June and July, they acquitted four such victims.

And in three of Pakistan's four provinces, the legal age of marriage was raised to 18 and child marriage was criminalised. These changes could help reduce the abductions, forced conversions and forced marriages of Hindu and Christian girls.

Major changes take time, but even small steps forward give hope that our voices are being heard and our advocacy is working.

How can supporters make a difference?

Firstly, I truly believe in the power of prayer. We will always value your prayers for the situations and people we tell you about.

And here in the UK, you can help amplify our advocacy by contacting your MP. When you raise your concerns about human rights in countries such as Pakistan, they can raise them in Parliament and press the government to act.

How does your faith sustain you?

Being a Catholic, I find reciting the rosary daily with my family a source of great comfort. The Lord has come to my rescue in some of my darkest and most difficult times.

I'm particularly inspired by the Parable of the Good Samaritan, who did not ask about the injured man's religion, ethnicity, or social status before helping him. His compassion transcended these boundaries. In a society like ours in Pakistan, where religious divisions run deep, it reminds me that our shared humanity must outweigh our differences.

The Samaritan took a risk by stopping on a dangerous road. Similarly, defending freedom in Pakistan often requires courage. Whether it's speaking out against blasphemy laws, supporting interfaith dialogue or protecting the rights of the marginalised, the Samaritan's example encourages me to persist, even when the path feels dangerous and daunting.

Sunday 8 November

Over the summer, four individuals (three Christians and one Muslim) were acquitted of false blasphemy allegations. Praise God for this encouraging development, particularly as it took place in lower courts which are often fearful of extremist groups that put pressure on judges to secure convictions.

Monday 9 November

Pray for the swift acquittal of those who remain imprisoned on false blasphemy charges, and for the protection of judges so that they can dispense timely justice without fear. Ultimately, we pray for radical reform to repeal Pakistan's controversial blasphemy laws.

Tuesday 10 November

As in previous years, members of Pakistan's Ahmadiyya community were targeted during celebrations of Eid ul-Fitr and Eid ul-Adha. Pray that the community would be free to practice their religion without fear of arrest or harassment.

Wednesday 11 November

In June, three Ahmadiyya security volunteers were shot and critically injured when an unidentified gunman opened fire on their vehicle, which was stationed outside the Baitul Aqsa mosque in Rabwah (Chenab Nagar), Punjab Province. Please pray for their full recovery.

Thursday 12 November

In August, Pakistan observed National Minority Day. Events were held across the country, in which government representatives and politicians reaffirmed the promise of equal citizenship for all. Ask God to grant Pakistan's leaders wisdom in making this promise a reality.

Friday 13 November

Please continue to pray for Maria Shahbaz. She is currently appealing a federal court decision which ruled that she could stay married to a man who abducted and forcibly converted her to Islam when she was just 13. Pray that justice is served.

Saturday 14 November

Almighty God, we pray for the hundreds of Christian and Hindu girls like Maria Shahbaz who have been abducted, forcibly married and forcibly converted in recent years. Comfort and deliver them, Lord Jesus. Bring a lasting end to this unacceptable trend in Pakistan. Amen.

Find out more at **csw.org.uk/pakistan**

Remember their names



Josiah Asa K'Okal (Venezuela)

Josiah Asa K'Okal was a Roman Catholic priest and well-known human rights defender. He lived in Tucupita, a city in northeastern Venezuela, where he worked with the Warao indigenous people.

Josiah used his voice to seek justice, speaking out against the mass sterilisation of indigenous women and the trafficking of Warao women and children.

On New Year's Day 2024, he left home on his bicycle to visit people in his parish.

He disappeared, and his body was found the following day. The authorities were quick to label Josiah's death a suicide. However, many of those close to him called for an independent investigation and autopsy, noting that he likely made powerful enemies by speaking out against human trafficking and other serious violations against indigenous communities. So far, those calls have been unsuccessful.

We give thanks for Josiah's commitment to defending indigenous communities, and pray for an investigation that leads to justice. We remember him.

Facts and stats

According to the 2001 census, Venezuela is home to **33 distinct indigenous groups**, comprising more than **536,000 people**, or **2.3% of the national population**.

Reverend Dr Vumthang Sitlhou, Reverend Kaigoulun Lhouvum, Pastor Paogoulen Sitlhou (India)

Rev Dr Vumthang Sitlhou, Rev Kaigoulun Lhouvum and Pastor Paogoulen Sitlhou were senior church leaders from Manipur, northeast India, where ethnic tensions and violence have persisted since 2023. All three belonged to the Kuki-Thadou tribal community.

On 13 May 2026, they were travelling home from the United Baptist Convention Assembly, a gathering focused on peacebuilding and reconciliation between tribal communities. As their group travelled through a hilly area of Manipur, unidentified gunmen opened fire on their vehicles, killing all three men. Several others suffered serious injuries.

Their deaths triggered further unrest and retaliation, highlighting the fragility of the situation in Manipur and the risks faced by faith leaders in conflict areas. Rev Dr Vumthang Sitlhou was a respected Baptist leader, widely known for his efforts to promote reconciliation among tribal Christian communities.

We remember Rev Dr Vumthang Sitlhou, Rev Kaigoulun Lhouvum and Pastor Paogoulen Sitlhou, and pray that their legacy of peacebuilding will live on in the communities they served.

Facts and stats

The conflict in Manipur, ongoing since 2023, has mainly involved the **Kuki** and **Meitei** communities, though tensions have also grown in some areas between **Kuki-Zo** and **Naga** groups:

- **Kuki-Zo** is a broad term for related tribal communities with shared ethnic and cultural roots. The Thadou are one of the largest Kuki tribes, and most are Christian. Churches play an important role in community life and peacebuilding.
- **The Nagas** are another major tribal group in Manipur, made up of several tribes with distinct identities. Like the Kukis, most Nagas in Manipur are also Christian.

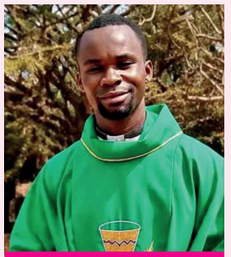
Sunday 15 November

Peacemaking is often costly. Around the world, courageous individuals seek to challenge injustice and bridge religious and ethnic divides. Yet many face threats, violence or even death. Pray for the peacemakers this week, and for God to raise up many more.

Monday 16 November

Across Colombia, pastors play a vital role in building peace, supporting vulnerable communities and guiding young people away from illegal armed groups. Their influence can make them targets for threats and violence. Pray that Colombia's new government will urgently restore protections for vulnerable religious leaders, and that these measures save lives.

Tuesday 17 November



Father Crepin Martial Monga

Father Crepin Martial Monga was a Roman Catholic priest from the Central African Republic. He was known for his reconciliation efforts in Zemio, a town which saw militia attacks and persistent clashes in 2025. Father Monga was killed by gunmen in June 2026. Ask God to comfort his family and parish, and to build on his legacy of peace.

Wednesday 18 November

Targeted attacks by the Azande Militia in Zemio have claimed many lives, including those of UN peacekeepers. Ask God to protect and refresh all who work for peace in the Central African Republic, including community leaders, imams, priests, pastors and UN peacekeepers, and to multiply every good work.

Thursday 19 November

The deaths of three church leaders in Manipur, India, triggered a wave of protests and retaliation in May 2026, which spiralled into a hostage crisis. The men had been returning from a conference on peacebuilding and reconciliation. Pray for tensions to ease between Manipur's various ethnic communities, and for protection for those who courageously seek peace.

Friday 20 November

Sheikh Farhan Al-Mansour, a Shia imam, had taken part in several interfaith dialogue initiatives since the fall of the Assad regime in Syria. He was assassinated outside a mosque in Damascus in May 2026. Remember his loved ones today, and pray for an end to sectarian violence in Syria.

Saturday 21 November

Lord Jesus, we echo your words: 'Peace, be still.' Speak peace into communities divided by violence, fear and hatred. Strengthen those who build bridges, and transform the hearts hardened by conflict. May reconciliation take root, and freedom flourish. Amen.

Facts and stats

Syria



Pastor Nihad Hassan, who leads a Kurdish-speaking church in Lebanon, was arrested on 20 July while visiting relatives in Afrin, Syria. He was held without charge for **two weeks**.

Originally from a Muslim background, the Baptist pastor has in recent years spoken out about the situation facing Syria's Kurdish population, especially converts from Islam. He has also shared Facebook posts that were deemed insulting to Islam, reportedly the main reason for his arrest.

Pastor Hassan was released on 3 August and returned to Beirut for his safety.

Facts and stats

Cuba

CSW documented **667** cases involving violations of freedom of religion or belief between January 2025 and June 2026. Almost all cases involved multiple violations.

The period saw a marked increase in the use of Actas de Advertencia (documents that justify future charges for crimes not yet committed) as a way to intimidate religious leaders. The government also stepped up efforts to prevent them from calling for prayer or responding to Cuba's humanitarian crisis.

Read more in our July 2026 report: '**Cuba's New Normal**'.

Facts and stats

India

The Indian government has introduced further amendments to the **Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA), which would have serious implication on civil society**. This includes places of worship, schools, hospitals, orphanages, community centres and other organisations that receive funding from abroad.

If passed, the bill could allow the government to seize land, buildings, bank accounts and other assets funded through foreign donations if an organisation's FCRA licence is cancelled, surrendered or not renewed.

The existing law with its controversial clauses has already seen numerous instances of civil society work being threatened. For example, in December 2021, the Missionaries of Charity, founded by Mother Teresa, had their renewal refused without reason. It was reinstated after widespread criticism that it would have severely impacted their humanitarian work.

Facts and stats

Myanmar

According to the 2026 report of the UN Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM), military aerial attacks on religious minorities' villages and the destruction of religious sites have escalated steadily since 2021, with **over 600** religious buildings targeted nationwide.

At least **14** civilians were killed and **20** others injured when the Tatmadaw (Myanmar's military) bombed a Buddhist monastery during a meditation retreat on 21 August. The attack is part of a wider pattern of airstrikes deliberately targeting religious buildings, displacement camps and civilian communities across the country.

Sunday 22 November

In July, authorities in Gia Lai Province announced that they had investigated, charged and 'handled' 119 Montagnard Christians in the first half of 2026 alone, allegedly for being involved with organisations advocating for religious and ethnic minority self-determination. Pray for an end to this campaign of harassment.

Find out more at **csw.org.uk/vietnam**

Monday 23 November

Pastor Y Nuen Ayun is a Montagnard Christian. On 5 August, he was sentenced to seven and a half years in prison on charges of 'undermining national unity'. He was accused of supporting separatist movements for organising and leading religious gatherings. Please pray for his freedom.

Tuesday 24 November

Pray for the release of Tran Ngoc Suong, one of four Cao Dai religious leaders arrested in May after sharing evidence of human rights abuses online. Charged under Article 117 of Vietnam's penal code, Mr Suong remains in detention for what should never be a crime: speaking the truth.

Wednesday 25 November

'I keep my eyes always on the Lord. With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken.' (Psalm 16:8). Pray that Montagnard Christians in Vietnam would clearly see God moving and working, and that they would not be shaken by pressure from the authorities.

Thursday 26 November

On 28 April, authorities in Dak Lak sentenced US-based human rights activist Dr Nguyen Dinh Thang to 11 years in prison on unfounded terrorism charges. Fortunately, the sentence was delivered in absentia, but please pray that the efforts to intimidate Dr Thang and undermine his human rights work would fail.

Friday 27 November

Tomorrow marks one year since Y Quynh Bdap — the Montagnard Christian human rights defender and UNHCR-recognised refugee — was forcibly returned to Vietnam, in violation of international law. He is currently being held in Gia Trung prison in Gia Lai Province. Please continue to pray for his freedom, safety and family.

Saturday 28 November

God of justice, today we pray for all those who have been falsely accused of serious crimes or even imprisoned for their advocacy for fundamental rights in Vietnam. May your truth prevail, raise up more advocates for justice, and strengthen all who work to defend the rights of others. Amen.

What if they're guilty?

Speaking up for the unjustly accused.

A pastor accused of sexual assault. A human rights defender labelled a terrorist. An orphanage director charged with child abduction. How does CSW distinguish genuine criminal allegations from attempts to punish people for their beliefs?



Professor Tarfa with children from the Du Merci Centres

Many of the unjust imprisonment cases we work on are relatively straightforward. When someone is charged with blasphemy or apostasy, a clear link can be made to a violation of freedom of religion or belief. Likewise, when individuals are imprisoned, deprived of property, or subjected to other penalties without being charged with any crime, there is little doubt that an injustice has occurred.

But what happens when someone is accused of a crime that would be considered serious anywhere in the world? Terrorism, sexual assault and child abduction are acts that should all be met with serious legal consequences. Yet in some countries, governments sometimes falsify such charges in an effort to whip up public outrage, to remove sympathy for the targeted individual, and to obscure that the real motive is, in fact, connected to human rights such as freedom of religion or belief.

How does CSW tell whether such serious accusations are credible? Why, for example, did we decide to take on the case of Pastor Efrén Vílchez López, a Protestant pastor accused of sexual assault in Nicaragua; of Professor Solomon Tarfa, accused of child abduction in connection to the Christian orphanage he founded in Kano State, Nigeria; or of Dr Nguyễn Đình Thắng, whom the Vietnamese government accused of running a terrorist organisation?

Sometimes, CSW is confident that an injustice has occurred because we personally know the individuals involved, or we have other direct experience that supports the person's claim of innocence. In the case of Dr Thắng, CSW has worked with him and his organisation (Boat People SOS) for over 20 years. We have witnessed the impact of his human rights advocacy in Vietnam, and we have also seen how angry his work — exposing the unjust actions of Vietnamese officials — has made the government.

When Professor Tarfa was arrested and charged on Christmas Day in 2019, CSW already had a wealth of information showing he was a long-time target of the Kano State government; we had worked on a similar case involving the professor and his wife 17 years earlier. In 2002, CSW intervened to secure the release of both Tarfas from arbitrary pre-trial detention following an almost identical raid on the orphanage they ran. A high court subsequently ruled that the Du Merci Centre was duly registered and was conducting a legitimate endeavour. The court also ordered the return of children who had been removed from the orphanage, and ordered that compensation should be paid.

Often, in cases involving false charges, there is a clear absence of due process or an arbitrary changing of the legal goalposts — making it difficult, or even impossible, for the accused to defend themselves.

In Nicaragua, Pastor Efrén was prevented from presenting any evidence at his trial — including CCTV footage that proved his alibi. The charges against him were changed without explanation over the course of the legal procedure. In addition, his accuser was known to work for the Nicaraguan security and had been directly involved in previous government harassment of the pastor.

As for the Kano State government's case against Professor Tarfa, the security officials who arrested him and searched the orphanage did so without a warrant. They initially accused him of not having a license to operate an orphanage. However, once his wife produced documentation proving the orphanage was in fact registered to operate, the charges were changed to criminal abduction of minors.

In most of these cases, the government has a clear motive for targeting the individual in question.

Pastor Efrén has a history of speaking out about injustices committed by the authoritarian government of co-Presidents Daniel Ortega and Rosario Murillo. During the 2018 demonstrations, the pastor published statements condemning the use of violence against protesters. In 2019, after he verbally confronted police officers who routinely surrounded his home, he was severely beaten, resulting in fractures to his hand. His arrest came after he successfully organised a large-scale religious event, bringing together pastors from across denominations and the country.

And in the case of Dr Thắng – a refugee, human rights advocate, NGO leader, and mentor to hundreds of Vietnamese people around the world – the authorities



Pastor Efrén Vílchez



Dr Nguyễn Đình Thắng

failed to provide even a shred of evidence capable of substantiating their accusations. In the absence of any credible evidence, the conclusion is unavoidable: Dr Thắng is being targeted for exposing Vietnam's ongoing human rights violations, particularly those affecting religious and belief minorities.

Governments who routinely violate freedom of religion or belief and other human rights know that the simple existence of serious criminal accusations against individuals they wish to silence — even in the absence of evidence — can be enough to severely damage a reputation. They can leave the victim isolated, with friends and religious and civil society organisations distancing themselves out of fear of any stigma of association.

Such charges force CSW to tread with caution. We examine cases like these and others as thoroughly as possible to ensure there is no merit to the accusations. Years of experience have given the members of our advocacy team the tools they need to identify the markers of a trumped-up case.

With your support, we will continue working to ensure that such tactics, which can destroy lives, are unsuccessful.



Pastor Alexis Padrón Lorenzo and his wife Roselin Benítez Cruz

Home at last, but still not free.

After months of uncertainty, Pastor Alexis Padrón Lorenzo was released from prison on 11 September. He was reunited with his family, but remains under strict restrictions as he awaits trial.

For three months, Pastor Alexis was denied any contact with the outside world. We could only imagine what he was enduring, based on our knowledge of how Christians are treated inside Cuba's prisons.

'Being separated from my family was especially painful,' he said after his release. 'I suffered a lot there.'

He described the conditions as 'very difficult', with food that was almost impossible to eat and sometimes spoiled.

Thanks to your support, our advocates were able to document Pastor Alexis' case and made sure people in authority knew about it.

We provided advice, assistance and solidarity to Pastor Alexis' family when they needed it most.

Now he is back home for the first time in months, and that is a victory worth celebrating. However, he must report to the authorities to sign in every week, on Fridays and Sundays, while awaiting trial. Yet he should never have been arrested at all.

When his community suffered days without water and electricity in yet another national blackout, Pastor Alexis spoke out. He stood alongside ordinary Cubans calling for justice and publicly challenged a government official. He was arrested on public disorder charges.

Many believe Pastor Alexis' detention was never really about public disorder at all, but about silencing a respected church leader whose faith, influence and service to vulnerable people were making a difference in his community.

Pray with us this Advent.

'The people walking in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of deep darkness
a light has dawned.'
(Isaiah 9:2)

Before the birth of Jesus, the people of God spent 400 years with no word from Him. They were years of silence; years of waiting. But the people walking in darkness were about to see a great light. The silence was about to be broken. A saviour was coming with a message of hope for all nations!

Today we live in the light of that good news. Yet there are times when it feels as though we're still waiting for hope to dawn.

As we journey through the season of Advent, we will remember those who are still waiting for justice; those imprisoned or harassed for their beliefs; those who worship in secret; those whose voices are being silenced.

It is a season of preparation and anticipation, but we do not wait in silence. We pray, we speak out, and we continue the work in faith that the God of justice has the final word.

Sunday 29 November

Advent prayer: Loving Lord, as we enter Advent, we remember those who are preparing for a Christmas behind bars, or with an empty chair at the table. Would you comfort those who mourn, protect those at risk, and strengthen those who are waiting for a breakthrough. Lord, you are the One who sets captives free. Amen.

Monday 30 November

Our research shows that prisoners in Cuba are regularly threatened with solitary confinement or losing benefits, such as telephone calls and visits, if they are caught praying or singing. Pray that the religious rights of all prisoners would be respected.

Tuesday 1 December

In our 2025 survey, 93% of participants said they are never able to practice their faith in prison. Meanwhile, 152 out of 180 prisoners said they were not allowed a Bible or religious literature of any type. Pray for an end to such discrimination. Ask the Holy Spirit to speak directly into hearts and minds, inspiring people with scriptures, stories and songs as they wait for freedom.

Wednesday 2 December

Some prisoners reported being called 'a religious scab' or 'parasite' by prison guards, who hold total control over the lives of inmates. Ask God to soften their hearts, that they would no longer humiliate, ridicule or restrict inmates because of their beliefs.

Thursday 3 December

Jorge and Nadir are brothers who are serving seven-year sentences for participating in the 11 July 2021 protests. They have repeatedly been denied the right to be visited by a pastor. Pray for their immediate and unconditional release, and for God to encourage their parents, Jorge Sr and Marta, this Christmas.

Friday 4 December

Loreto and his wife Donaida are Afro-Cuban religious leaders who were unjustly arrested in July 2021. Pray that they would be treated with dignity, and ultimately freed without condition.

Saturday 5 December

He brought them out of darkness, the utter darkness, and broke away their chains.' Read Psalm 107 as you give thanks for Pastor Alexis' release from prison. Pray that he would be fully exonerated and able to serve his community in peace.

‘Praying was forbidden, but we did it anyway’.

An interview with Nicaraguan exile Santos Julio Sevilla Rivera



Mr Sevilla Rivera and his wife

Santos Julio Sevilla Rivera never imagined that serving in church choirs would one day make him a target of the state.

Julio was born in Nicaragua in January 1969, with a visual impairment that severely limits his ability to see. He dedicated much of his life to the Catholic Church in Estelí, teaching vocal harmony, supporting parish choirs and working for the diocese’s Caritas office. He was cheerful and well known in his community.

‘My work was within the church; I was never involved with violent groups,’ he told CSW. ‘I had a good relationship with bishops and priests in general, always connected to music.’

But after protests swept the country in April 2018, the tides changed. President Daniel Ortega’s government responded with force, increasing repression in an effort to silence opposition.

Churches in Estelí have been under surveillance ever since. Services have been recorded, Easter processions banned, and patrol cars routinely stationed outside.

‘Many people stopped going to church out of fear,’ Julio says. ‘I thought, “God is my strength…”’

By 2022, he began noticing that men were following him home. Acquaintances warned him he would be arrested if he kept working with the church. But he responded:

‘I won’t abandon my religion; I serve God, not people. God’s will be done.’

During this period, the Diocese of Estelí was among the most heavily targeted in the country. Churchgoers were harassed by National Police, while priests, seminarians, deacons and Caritas workers were arrested and imprisoned. Julio did not escape the crackdown.

‘I knew I had no choice’

On 20 May 2023, Julio sang a thanksgiving Mass at Saint Francis of Assisi parish. After returning home, exhausted, he was suddenly told that someone was looking for him.

‘I thought they wanted me to sing at another Mass, but it was the General Commissioner of the National Police, in civilian clothes, with three other men in civilian clothes. They tricked me, saying they were taking me to a meeting for an hour and then returning me home. I knew I had no choice; I couldn’t refuse, so I went with them.’

Once at the police station, they held him without explanation. For the first three days, he was denied any communication with his family. Five others from Caritas Estelí were also detained.

On 9 June, Julio was transferred to La Modelo, a maximum-security prison notorious for holding political prisoners.

‘They said we religious people were coup plotters, terrorists... For ten days they interrogated me day and night, and then they took me to cells as filthy as toilets. Those days were very hard. A priest, imprisoned with me, gave me a word of encouragement: “During the interrogations, may the Lord speak through you.”’

His trial in December 2023 lasted just one hour, via videocall. He was sentenced to seven years in prison on charges related to money laundering. Evidence was never disclosed to him.

‘I think they arrested me because I was associated with Pastor Eugenio Benavides. He was making strong statements in his homilies; he spoke of defending justice and human rights, and the government didn’t like that… they want to control what the clergy say.’

In prison, the conditions were harsh. Water was limited and food was scarce.

‘It wasn’t enough; we were hungry,’ Julio recalls. ‘We weren’t allowed to have a Bible. The guards mocked my faith, telling me that God had abandoned me. But all the Catholics prayed the Rosary and the Hail Mary. It was forbidden, but we did it anyway.’

His wife, sisters, mother and daughter were only allowed brief monthly visits. They told him that National Police officers were walking past the house, threateningly, while he was still in prison.

His already limited vision began to worsen because of stress, poor nutrition and lack of medical care. His family feared that without specialist treatment, he would lose his sight completely.

Into exile

In the early hours of 5 September 2024, Julio was taken from prison and put on a plane to Guatemala. He was expelled from Nicaragua, alongside 134 political prisoners.

His wife travelled to join him and act as his guide. Eventually, the couple resettled in Atlanta, Georgia, in the United States. They had to leave their three children behind.

Now the nearest Catholic church is a three-hour walk away, unlike in Nicaragua where they could walk to every Mass. Without a car, going to church is almost impossible. However, a priest friend sends them daily Bible reflections.

The Nicaraguan government took away Julio’s freedom, forced him from his homeland and separated him from his children. But it could not take away his faith.

‘The guards tried to silence us and told us not to pray,’ he says. ‘We did it in silence because God heard us.’

Sunday 6 December

Advent prayer:
‘Silent night, holy night, all is calm, all is bright.’ Holy Lord, as we gather to sing carols this Advent, we remember those in Nicaragua who are under surveillance, scrutiny and restriction. Thank you for those who courageously raise their voices for freedom and justice. We pray that efforts to silence them would fail, and that Christmas would resound with hope, joyful celebration, and peace. Amen.

Monday 7 December

Pray today for Bishop Juan Abelardo Mata Guevara, who was detained and re-detained several times in the summer. His first detention came a day after he referred to religious persecution while leading prayers in Mass. In September, the 80-year-old Roman Catholic bishop was placed under conditions amounting to house arrest at a seminary in Estelí.

Tuesday 8 December

Father Frutos Constantino Valle Salmerón was arbitrarily detained in July 2024, when he was 79 years old. Like Bishop Mata Guevara, he is confined to the Our Lady of the Rosary Seminary in Estelí. Please pray for the Roman Catholic priest’s freedom and health, as he suffers from diabetes, hypertension and Parkinson’s.

Wednesday 9 December

Please pray urgently for Pastor Efrén Vílchez López, who has been detained for over four years on unfounded charges. Prison officials have been withholding medicine and food brought by his family, and we are concerned his life is at risk. Pastor Efrén has diabetes and hypertension and is now experiencing kidney failure.

Thursday 10 December

Ask God to encourage and provide for those who have been expelled from Nicaragua, like Santos Julio Sevilla Rivera. He was held unjustly in a maximum-security prison before being released into exile in 2024. Julio and his wife are rebuilding their lives in the United States, far from friends and family.

Friday 11 December

Pray today for Moravian bishop Carlos Javier Goff Amador, who was detained without warrant on 1 September. At the time of writing, he has been held incommunicado for three weeks. His detention coincided with a wave of arrests in the North Caribbean Coast Autonomous Region.

Saturday 12 December

Across Nicaragua, all religious groups face growing interference from the authorities. Events including youth retreats, prayer breakfasts and processions are frequently cancelled without reason. The authorities often disrupt services by playing loud music outside places of worship. Pray that these tactics would fail and harassment would cease, especially during the religious holidays celebrated around Christmas.

Connect & Encourage

Your words can bring hope, especially at Christmas. Write to someone facing injustice for their beliefs: **csw.org.uk/ConnectEncourage**



Pastor Wang Yi. Photo: Early Rain Church

Important

1. Positive messages: Please don't mention CSW in your cards to Chinese people, and do not make any comment about the government or the political system. This could endanger the person you are writing to.

2. Bible verses: Only write Bible verses by hand, as possession of printed Christian literature is illegal.

3. Card and envelope: Use a completely plain envelope. Choose a plain card without embellishments like ribbons, stickers or glitter, which can be rejected as a hazard.

4. Address: For the best chance of arrival, write the address in English and Chinese. Clearly state: 'Going to China'. You can print these out from our website, or get in touch if you need help.

5. Postage: According to the Royal Mail, an international stamp costs £3.60 for a small letter. You could invite a friend to add their message, and share the cost of postage. The last posting date before Christmas is Friday 4 December, but please allow a couple more weeks when writing to people in prison.

Update

Thank you for writing to Pastor Li Jie and Elder Han Xiaodong. They were released in April having completed their sentences. Please keep them and the whole of Linfen Covenant Home Church in your prayers.

China

Pastor Wang Yi

Pastor Wang Yi was detained eight years ago on 9 December 2018, along with over 100 other members of Early Rain Church, as part of a large-scale crackdown by the authorities. He is still serving a nine-year prison sentence for 'inciting to subvert state power' and 'illegal business operations'.

Wang Yi
Jintang Prison
Huopen Road, Qingjiang Town,
Jintang County
Chengdu City, Sichuan Province
610409
China

王怡牧师
四川省金堂监狱四川省成都市金堂县清镇火盆路
邮编：610409

Zion Church

Pastor Ezra Jin Mingri was released in July, but eight others from Zion Church remain in detention, awaiting trial.

Please send words of encouragement to pastors Wang Lin, Gao Yingjia, Yin Huibin, Liu Zhenbin, and Lin Shucheng, to Wang Zhong (an elder), Wang Cong (a female pastor) and Wu Qiuyu (the wife of a pastor).

No. 1 Detention Center
Pingyang Road No. 8
Yinhai District, Beihai City
Guangxi Province, China
Postal Code: 536005

北海市第一看守所 广西自治区北海市银海区高德镇平阳
邮编：536005

Prayer Diary Week 9: 13-19 December — Sudan

13-19 December

On Easter Monday, Christians in the neighbourhood of South Morta awoke to devastating news: their church had been burned down overnight.

The Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church was the only Christian place of worship in the area. It was so badly damaged that it had to be completely rebuilt. Yet the congregation continues to meet every week, gathering under trees on the church grounds while reconstructing the building, brick by brick. This is a powerful reminder that the Church is more than a building.

What will their Christmas services look like this year? Join us in praying for this congregation, and for all those spending this season in the shadow of war. Civilians continue to bear the brunt of the conflict between the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and Rapid Support Forces (RSF), as both parties increasingly use drones to damage critical civilian infrastructure, and target both churches and mosques.

Find out more at **csw.org.uk/sudan**



Advent prayer:

Lord Jesus, Prince of Peace, we cry out for a lasting ceasefire in Sudan — for the weapons of war to fall silent once and for all, and for justice to flow like a river. Protect and provide for those who will celebrate Christmas amid conflict, yet continue to praise you in the rubble. May there be beauty from ashes, joy instead of mourning, and praise instead of despair (Isaiah 61:3). Amen.

Prayer Diary Week 10: 20-26 December — Christmas

20-26 December

'But the angel said to them,

"Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord."'

(Luke 2:10-11)

The famous carol describes the 'silent night' of Jesus' birth. Yet in Luke's Gospel, we see a chorus of angels lighting up the night sky, saying with jubilation: 'Glory to God in the highest! Peace on earth!'

The wait was over; the silence was broken. The celebration had begun! But first, the angels turn to the bewildered shepherds with a word of comfort: 'Do not be afraid.'

Let that be our prayer this final week of Advent, for all who are suffering for their beliefs.

Advent prayer:

Lord Jesus, as we celebrate your birth and incarnation, we pray for those who may be more vulnerable at this time. We pray for protection, provision and perseverance, as we echo the message of the angels: be not afraid.

Be not afraid, because Jesus is with you. Be not afraid, because his light shines in the darkness. Be not afraid because he brings good news, salvation and peace. Be not afraid because he is the king on the throne, and he reigns with justice and righteousness, now and ever. Amen!



Confronting giants

By Claire Denman, CSW's UN Officer

Whether helping to shape landmark UN investigations, supporting prisoners of conscience, or enabling human rights defenders to speak directly to international decision-makers, CSW's work at the UN demonstrates the power of sustained, evidence-based advocacy. Every intervention is a step towards greater freedom, justice and accountability.

At the UN, we're confronting giants: powerful states and deeply entrenched abuses that rarely change with a single statement or policy decision. This means we often witness smaller victories on the way towards a bigger goal. We may see improvement in conditions before we see a person released from detention, for example. It doesn't stop us from offering big, bold, faith-filled prayers for change. However, we recognise that advocacy also requires credible research, careful strategy and persistence.

Many of you will be familiar with the work of the UN Commission of Inquiry (COI) on North Korea in 2013. CSW played a foundational role in its establishment through a 2007 report written together with REDRESS, 'A case to answer, a call to act', which urged the international community to launch a formal investigation. We rejoiced when the UN took this step, but it followed years of faithfully documenting and reporting on the violations in the country. Its success hinged on patient, consistent research and advocacy.

Our credible research continues to carry weight at the UN, and we regularly meet with UN experts and share our findings with them. In June we had a meeting with the members of the UN Fact-Finding Mission on Sudan, who explicitly thanked CSW. They told us they had started monitoring and reporting on violations of freedom of religion or belief as a direct result of our engagement and the quality of information we share with them.

While progress within international mechanisms is important, I believe that the impact of sustained advocacy is perhaps felt most keenly when it affects the lives of individuals directly.

During a workshop with a group of religious leaders and human rights defenders, we were discussing how they could engage directly with the UN human rights mechanisms and how to submit cases of concern. One person shared how he had served a prison sentence of over 10 years, and at some point his conditions improved. When he was released, he learned that during his detention a group of UN Special Procedures (independent experts) had issued a communication to the government of his country regarding his situation, which CSW had submitted with his family's consent and a full risk assessment. While he had had to serve his full sentence, he was able to correlate the improvement in his prison conditions with this intervention.

Not only do we raise cases with the UN but we also use our UN accreditation to facilitate the participation of those who are directly affected by human rights violations. This means they can speak directly to the UN, giving their own accounts. We believe that the decisions the UN makes should centre the voices of those affected. Delegations of religious leaders and defenders of freedom of religion or belief have joined us at the UN in Geneva from around the world, including Cuba, Iran, Nigeria and Sudan. These courageous individuals can then look injustice directly in the eye, bearing witness to the truth and calling for change.

'Within 24 hours, they had received a call'

One memory that has stayed with me is of a Chinese human rights defender who spoke during a UN plenary session. Their relative, a member of a religious and ethnic minority community, had been detained incommunicado for several years. During the session, they called on the Chinese government to allow communication with their relative and to release them. Within 24 hours, they had received a call from the detention facility. It was brief, but for the first time in years they were able to hear their loved one's voice: proof that they were still alive. The relief and hope that this call brought cannot be underestimated. Moments like this remind us that even the most powerful nations still respond to public pressure.

We believe that every advocacy action we take brings us closer to the day when those who are unjustly detained are set free and discriminatory laws are no more. Driven by bold prayers and steady action, we continue to move forward with confidence that we are bending the arc of history that little bit further towards justice.

Sunday 27 December

'The Lord broke the chains of oppression, of fear, of torture, and gave us freedom,' said Bishop Jurado Farfán in Venezuela. We thank God for his release on 14 August, after five years and 15 days in prison. Please continue to pray for the bishop's full recovery from all he suffered while in detention.

Monday 28 December

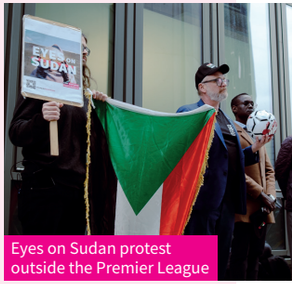
As Bishop Jurado Farfán said: 'Thank you for your prayers, thank you for accompanying me in the midst of that captivity.' Give thanks that God uses the prayers of his people to bring comfort, hope and encouragement to those facing persecution — often in ways that may never be fully known.

Tuesday 29 December

Today we remember with sadness and thanksgiving the lives of Pastor Marlon Lora, his wife Yurlay Rincón, and their adult children, Ángela and Santiago, who were killed two years ago in Colombia. Give thanks for their faithful service to their community, and for the many religious leaders around the world who continue to be peacemakers, pastors and servants despite great risks.

Wednesday 30 December

Give thanks for the thousands of people who took action through CSW campaigns this year. Over 3,000 people signed our Eyes on Sudan petition; more than 1,600 called for greater protection for Colombia's religious leaders; and over 1,000 spoke up for Pastor Efren in Nicaragua. Pray that God will multiply the impact of every voice raised in pursuit of justice.



Eyes on Sudan protest outside the Premier League

Thursday 31 December

Praise God for encouraging developments in Pakistan. June and July saw the acquittal of four people falsely accused of blasphemy, while efforts continue to improve education for religious minorities and strengthen protections against child marriage. Pray that this progress will continue and bring lasting change.

Friday 1 January

In July, the UN voted to renew the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on human rights in Eritrea — despite the country's efforts to end the role. Give thanks that Eritrea's human rights record will remain under international scrutiny, and pray that this contributes towards accountability and justice.

Saturday 2 January

Father God, you were with us in 2026, and you will be with us in the year ahead. We praise you for every step towards justice – seen and unseen – and for the privilege of being your hands and feet in the world. As we enter 2027, equip us to share your love, pursue justice and bring hope wherever darkness remains. Amen.

From family stories to faithful action

Reverend Dr Andy Bawtree, a church leader in southeast England, shares how family stories inspired a lifelong commitment to standing alongside people denied the freedom to practise their faith or beliefs.


Rev Dr Andy Bawtree

Growing up, I would often hear stories about my uncle Dr Martin Panter.

There were stories of him flying round the world offering medical help and care. There were stories of him working in Saudi Arabia, praying publicly that new Christian converts would not be executed. And there were stories of him travelling to Burma (Myanmar) to visit the Karen and Karenni tribes, who were mainly Christian and being targeted by the military Junta; he informed governments and the UN about the use of chemical weapons against the tribespeople, and was proscribed because of it by the Burmese government.

I have another uncle who smuggled Bibles into places where access is restricted. The Bible is often banned because it changes lives and is subversive.

Hearing these stories, I caught the bug of praying for and supporting our brothers and sisters in Christ, as Scripture exhorts us to do.

Often the marginalised don't have a voice, or it is suppressed through fear or punishment. Christians face persecution around the world, but our compassion should be for all those whom God has created.

For many years now, I have supported the work of CSW and others who advocate for people of all faiths or none. And in my role as a vicar, I have encouraged the churches I served to do the same.

River Parish, where I currently serve, has a history of supporting this work. I have built upon it, and we have had various speakers over the years who bring an up-to-date perspective, as well as regular issues of Response. These help us target our financial giving and prayers as a community.

We have a regular prayer meeting most months for the persecuted Church. We write postcards, letters and emails, and make information available to the wider congregation physically and virtually.

Bringing in a guest speaker can help reinforce the support we give. It helps remind the church family that we are part of a worldwide Church community — many of whom do not have the freedom we enjoy here in England.

We will continue to support both in prayer and financially the sterling work of CSW because it is work we believe in. The Gospel, the good news of Jesus, must be for everyone, or it is for no one. We must continue standing for truth, honesty and justice where it is short supply.

Hear more stories of justice

Would you like us to come to your church, workplace or event in 2027? Our team of speakers is made up of lawyers, pastors, journalists and advocacy experts, coming from many different backgrounds and traditions:
csw.org. uk/inviteaspeaker

Prayer Diary Week 12: 3-9 January — Egypt

Imagine being told that, after 45 years of marriage, the state no longer recognises your relationship. That is the reality facing a Bahá'í couple in Egypt.

The couple successfully registered their marriage in 2020. Yet in January 2026, the Court of Cassation overturned that decision. It is part of a wider pattern of barring the legal recognition of Bahá'í marriages, creating difficulties in everyday life, including for children.

Please pray for them, and for all those facing discrimination because of their faith or belief.

Find out more at
csw.org.uk/egypt

- Pray for Ahmadis, atheists, Bahá'ís, Christians, Shia and others who face injustice because of their beliefs. Pray for equality before the law, safety and justice — a future free from intimidation, threats, harassment or violence.
- Ask God to move powerfully in the case of Saeid Mansour Abdulraziq. He faces unfounded charges which could carry a life sentence or even the death penalty. In reality, Saied is being punished for converting to Christianity and asking for this change to be recorded in his official identity documents.
- Pray for Coptic Orthodox Christians as they celebrate Christmas on 7 January. We remember especially the community Tal Al-Quiblya, a village in Upper Egypt whose church building was attacked by a mob in July. Pray for justice, and ask God to grant strength and wisdom to the church's priest, Father Pavlos Kamal.
- Give thanks for signs of hope, such as the 191 churches and affiliated buildings that received legal recognition in May 2026. Pray for this freedom to expand and extend to all religious and belief communities.

Prayer Diary Week 13: 10-16 January — Eritrea

'We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.' (2 Corinthians 4:8-9)

These words have been foundational over the many years we have been praying and advocating for the people of Eritrea. This is a country known as the 'North Korea of Africa' due to the extreme levels of repression. Yet the words of scripture remind us that no earthly power compares to the Lord.

1) Remember the prisoners of conscience.

Thousands of Eritreans are detained without charge or trial – held in harsh facilities that include metal shipping containers, overcrowded cells, and even holes dug in the ground.

It's hard to say exactly how many Christians are currently imprisoned in Eritrea.

The numbers fluctuate due to a continuous series of arbitrary arrests, releases and rearrests, but the current estimate is around 300, including those from permitted denominations. Some are only released if they renounce their faith, or when their health has deteriorated so drastically that they are close to death.

We continue to remember the seven Christian leaders who have been detained indefinitely for over 21 years – cut off from the outside world – simply because of their faith.

Pray that imprisoned Christians would be sustained in body, mind, and spirit, and would feel God's comfort. May the Lord open doors that no one can shut.

2) Pray for families enduring painful separations.

We remember those whose loved ones are detained, disappeared, in indefinite military service, or have escaped from Eritrea.

Some are vulnerable to being punished themselves, as the government has a policy of 'guilt by association'.

Ask God to comfort and protect these families, and provide practical help. Pray especially for children who are missing parents or siblings, and are quietly living with trauma.

3) Pray for churches meeting surreptitiously, whose members live under constant threat of being reported and detained.

Ask God to make their faith resilient and wise, and that fear wouldn't dominate their daily lives. Pray for practical provision and supportive relationships – even from sympathetic members of the regime operating in secret.

CSW everyone free to believe



Leave a legacy of freedom

Make your will for free

A gift in a will to CSW is the most powerful way to support our work long-term. You will join us in working towards a world where everyone can practice their belief without fear, and leave a legacy of freedom for generations to come.

We've partnered with the National Free Wills Network to give you the chance to make your will for free with a local solicitor, offering in-person or remote appointments.

This offer is for a free, simple will and there is a limited number available.

We know how important it is for you to take care of your loved ones. All we ask is that once you have looked after them, you consider including a gift in your will to help those facing harassment, violence and persecution for their faith.

Visit csw.org.uk/freewills to find out more and to register with the National Free Wills network. You can also call 020 8329 0010 for more information.

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