

Christian charity highlights Pakistan on International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church



UK Christian religious freedom charity Release International has shifted their focus to Pakistan on this year's International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church (IDOP), which was on Sunday.

Although 17th November has been set aside for Christians in the UK and Ireland to pray for persecuted Christians, people are being urged to set aside the whole month for prayer.

Some 80 per cent of those persecuted for their faith around the world today are Christians, and the indications are that violence against Christians is on the rise, according to a report commissioned by the Foreign & Commonwealth Office from the Bishop of Truro.

Release International said part of the reason it chose to focus on Pakistan for this year's IDOP is because "believers face discrimination in education, employment and the law".

The charity added: “Most Christians in Pakistan are poor, illiterate and vulnerable to abuse, especially young women and girls. Pakistan’s blasphemy laws have been used to make false allegations against Christians, often to settle personal vendettas.”

Release International has helped Christians who have been falsely accused of blasphemy and given support to families of prisoners like Asia Bibi, a Pakistani mother who spent 10 years in jail on charges that were later thrown out by the Supreme Court.

Speaking recently from Canada, the 54-year-old called on Christians everywhere to remember others behind bars.

She said in a video posted on YouTube: “I Asia Bibi, believe in Jesus. My belief is strong. I never let my belief weaken.

“Stay true to your beliefs. Even if you have to face the sword, please hold firm to your faith. Even if you have to sacrifice everything.”

Asia was picking berries in a field when she brought water for her Muslim co-workers to drink. But they refused, calling her and her water unclean, because she was a Christian. They went on to accuse her of committing blasphemy against the prophet Mohammed.

The Supreme Court ruled the charges against Asia were false and malicious, and threw out the case after eight years on death row.

Release International has long campaigned for Pakistan’s blasphemy laws to be repealed. The charity said just the accusation of blasphemy can incite extremists to commit murder.

IDOP began in 1996, when a coalition of Christian organisations recognised that more Christians had died for their faith in the 20th century than in all the centuries combined since the Church began. They decided that the global Church must no longer be silent about the increasing persecution of Christians.

— Source: premier.org.uk