

Prayer Day for Persecuted Church

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[] Christians from around the world are expected to unite in prayer Sunday for the 100 million believers who are being persecuted for their faith in Christ.

Considered one of the largest global prayer campaigns, the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church is designed to both raise awareness about religious liberty abuses and support persecuted believers through intercession.

“The International Day of Prayer for the persecuted church presents a tremendous opportunity for millions of people to make a difference in the lives of those being persecuted for their faith in countries like North Korea, Iran, Iraq, China, India and many more,” said Carl Moeller, president and chief executive officer of Open Doors USA, which has sponsored the annual prayer day since 1996. The California-based organization also supports persecuted Christians through literature distribution, leadership training and advocacy.

“Persecuted believers have asked us who live in freedom to pray for them—always their No. 1 request,” he added. “And on Nov. 9 we have the opportunity to collectively lift our petitions to the Lord on their behalf.”

During this year’s prayer effort, Open Doors is also raising funds to supply Bibles for children in regions where persecution is common. “This year’s focus is really on future generations of Christians in these countries ... by providing Bibles as a tangible symbol that they’re not forgotten and they’re being prayed for,” Moeller said.

The day of prayer for persecuted believers comes on the heels of attacks against Christians in India and Iraq, where thousands have fled as militants have bombed their homes and churches. In India, at least 60 people have been killed in the violence that began in late August, while in Iraq more than a dozen people were murdered in the month of October.

Both of those nations were listed in Open Doors' 2008 World Watch List, which names the 50 leading violators of religious liberty. Topping the list for the sixth consecutive year was North Korea, where thousands of Christians have been beaten and put into political prison camps because of their faith. Open Doors reported that the U.N. human rights investigator Vitit Muntarbhorn said the North Korean government is using public executions to intimidate citizens into compliance and is blocking long-distance calls to spread the news about rising food shortages in the nation.

In Iran, the government is considering a bill that would make leaving Islam punishable by death. Christians and other minority religions say persecution has increased markedly since Mahmoud Ahmadinejad became president of Iran in 2005, according to Compass Direct.

Moeller said Christians are being encouraged to pray not only for a curb in violent attacks and religious liberty abuses, but also that the church would be strengthened in the midst of suffering. "Let's pray for the things that the persecuted church asks for," he said. "They don't ask that persecution would be eliminated, but mostly they ask us to pray that they would endure to the end. And I think that is an inspiration—it's an inspirational message. Regardless of how bad it can be, God is willing and able to meet us in the midst of that."