

Eritrean Christian Escapes Imprisonment

Discrimination. Harassment. Torture.

Depending on which estimates you believe, at least 200 million Christians around the world are enduring some form of persecution for their faith in Jesus Christ.

One such Christian—we'll call him "Benji"—just escaped Eritrea, an African country where Christian persecution is common. Benji is a staff member for Strategic World Impact, an international missions organization headquartered in Oklahoma. The 23-year-old now holds refugee status in a neighboring country.

"For over three years Benji faced incredible suffering as a result of his faith," says Kevin Turner, president of Strategic World Impact. "Beatings, mock executions, and food and water deprivation were common during his ordeal, along with his captors often demanding him to renounce his faith in Christ."

Benji was arrested and jailed in deplorable conditions, which included confinement in metal shipping containers and caves with metal bars placed at the entrances. Benji survived off of two pieces of bread and one cup of tea per day. He lived in tight quarters with nearly 300 other men, some of whom died in the face of harsh conditions.

Benji eventually fled the country by foot, enduring Africa's searing heat and deadly hyenas. Strategic World Impact found him in a nearby country. He was treated for typhus, malaria and severe malnutrition.

Located just north of Ethiopia, Eritrea has a documented history of persecuting religious minorities, in a country

where only four religious groups—Islam, the Eritrean Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran Evangelical Church of Eritrea—are formally recognized by the government. Christians of other denominations, particularly evangelical Christians, regularly face discrimination and even imprisonment.

Turner, who has testified before the United States Congress several times about persecution and human rights violations around the world, says that Benji's story is not uncommon. Strategic World Impact is currently working on his release to assist him in beginning a new life.