

release

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CHINA 2009

Get ready for a challenge!

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40
YEARS
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Pray for Pakistan

release
international
voice of persecuted christians



Pray for Pakistan

On November 16 we're asking supporters of Release to pray for Pakistan as part of the International Day of Prayer (IDOP) for the persecuted church. Here's how your prayers and gifts bring blessing and encouragement to persecuted Christians.



Main photo: Three years ago, 18-year-old Nagina was a student at Tabitha sewing centre, which is supported by Release. Now she earns money working from home. 'I'm supporting my family, my father and my brothers and sisters.' Above: Dancing with joy – after these young Christian women complete their training, they will be able to earn a living with dignity, and support their families.

In Pakistan the Christian community is very poor, persecuted, illiterate and poverty-ridden,' says Release's partner, Professor Kaleem Dean, founder of the Tabitha sewing centre.

'Poverty is everywhere. Our Christian women are compelled to work in factories, and the houses of the wealthy, where they mop and clean. But they earn very little money.'

In Pakistan poor Christian women face discrimination because of their poverty, their gender and their faith. They have few rights in the legal system, and so are easily exploited. They work long hours to support their families, earning perhaps only 70 pence a day, but face alarming risks of sexual and physical abuse.

'Overall women have no status'

Release partner Professor Kaleem Dean.

'Overall women have no status,' explains Professor Dean. 'But as a minority we are targeted more ... our women are treated like animals.'

According to his own surveys, carried out in the slum areas where the poorest Christians live, Professor Dean estimates that many of the poor Christian women who go out to work are raped or abused by their employers. 'This is a very grim picture,' he says.

Determined to make a difference, Professor Dean, who works full-time as a teacher, set up CAP (Community Action Programme) Ministries in 2000, situated in a large urban slum that is home to 100,000 Christian families. CAP started by providing a basic education for local children whose families couldn't afford to pay even the minimal fees charged by state schools.

Then he started the Tabitha sewing centre, 'to equip Christian women to earn money with dignity and pride'.

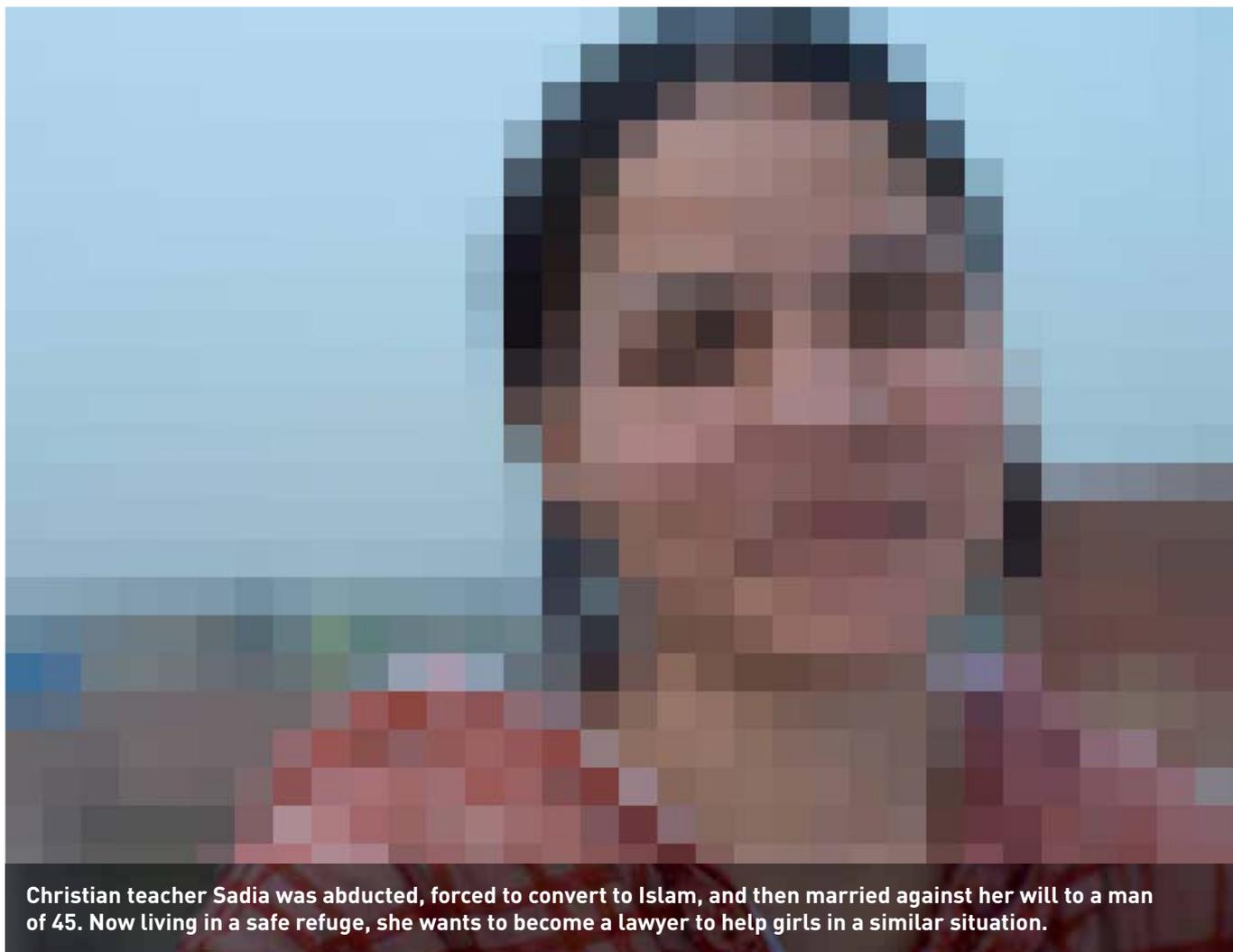
Supported by Release, the centre now trains 22 women and young girls each year in cutting, sewing, stitching and needlework. The centre awards a diploma, which is recognised by the government, and each student who completes the course receives a sewing machine to help them start their own small business at home.

Nagina and Rukhsana

18-year-old Nagina (see photo page 2) finished her training three years ago. 'Now I'm able to work at home,' she says.

'I'm supporting my family, my father and my brothers and sisters. I have seven

Continued over



Christian teacher Sadia was abducted, forced to convert to Islam, and then married against her will to a man of 45. Now living in a safe refuge, she wants to become a lawyer to help girls in a similar situation.

brothers and sisters, and they are all studying at school... My mother and father are very happy, and I'm also very happy.'

Rukhsana (whose beaming face features on the cover of this magazine) came to the sewing centre to help her husband.

'I love stitching, that's why I came here, because my husband is a tailor and I want to help him and support our family.

'The atmosphere here is good. I have learned many things from here about sewing and about my Christian faith.'

Professor Dean says: 'This training has been very successful.' A total of 200 women and girls have been trained so far.

Many now earn up to 4,000 rupees (£50) a month – which is two or three times the income they could expect to earn as domestic servants, or by working in the harsh conditions of local brick kilns and factories.

'We have so many girls and women who are earning enough to support their entire family,' Professor Dean says. 'They are earning good money, and they are supporting their parents and children. And the women can look after their children and

families at home at the same time,' he says. Some are even working as instructors in other training centres.

The gift of literacy

The sewing centre helps the women learn other skills too.

'We give them adult literacy courses. They're able to read their Bibles, and teach their children, and they get awareness, and want to get education for their children.'

Given that only five per cent of Christian women in Pakistan are literate, this is a tremendous benefit for these families, which in turn helps to empower the whole Christian community.

Professor Dean believes that improving the education and literacy of poor Christians is strategic.

'A literate person can face the challenges of discrimination much more easily,' he says. 'They can stand up for their rights, even against the blasphemy laws.'

Pakistan's 295(c) blasphemy laws are open to wide abuse. Christians, as well as other minorities, can easily be accused of blasphemy against Mohammed, the

prophet of Islam, by allegedly dishonouring the Koran, a mosque, or even a Muslim man's beard. Often accusations are made to settle personal scores, such as disputes over land or businesses.

A small number of Christians are convicted of blasphemy every year, with some being sentenced to death – such as the husband of Meena, who features in our new DVD *Pray for Pakistan* (see page 10). The victims of these blasphemy laws may spend up to seven or more years in jail, separated from their families, until they are acquitted, usually because of a lack of evidence.

'By training just one ordinary woman, we can help an entire family'

Professor Kaleem Dean.

'Without education, Christians are easily targeted,' says Professor Dean. 'It is very easy to trap our Christian community. But by training just one ordinary woman, we can help an entire family.'

'We are very grateful for the support of Release.'

Fighting discrimination

Release's partner CLAAS (Centre for Legal Aid Assistance and Settlement) is another pioneering organisation which serves persecuted Christians in Pakistan.

'CLAAS is working in different projects, and each and every project is against discrimination,' says Programme Officer Aneeqa, a trained lawyer. 'We are working against domestic violence, against religious discrimination ... In our society the most discriminated ones are the women.'

In 2000 CLAAS set up a rehabilitation centre to help Christian women. Some are the victims of domestic violence, but most are young girls who were abducted by Muslim men, then forcibly converted and married.

'Fourteen or 16-year-old girls are kidnapped and raped by Muslim men, and then they are forced to get married, often to someone who is three or four times older than they are,' says Aneeqa. 'So it is very difficult for the girls to go back into their own communities and to live a normal life.'

'The centre is a safe place where they can live together as a family, and receive care, healing and encouragement.'

Sometimes CLAAS actually helps these girls escape, and the centre is a safe place where they can live together as a family, and receive care, healing and encouragement.

'Here it is very difficult for a woman to survive after being married to a Muslim man,' says Aneeqa. 'Forced conversion is one of the most burning issues in Pakistan nowadays for Christian women.'

CLAAS is often able to represent these young women in court, so that the perpetrators are charged with kidnapping and rape, and the marriage and conversion certificates, obtained under duress, are annulled.

Sadia's story

Two years ago, Sadia, then 17, was working as a teacher in a private school when a Muslim man aged 45 said he wanted to marry her, later threatening both her and her parents.

'I went to the bazaar for some shopping and this man and his mother and sister were there,' recalls Sadia. 'They forced me into their car ... I don't know where they took me...'

VOICE OF PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS



Joseph Francis
Founder of CLAAS, Pakistan

CLAAS (Centre for Legal Aid Assistance and Settlement) was founded by Joseph Francis in 1992, primarily to help persecuted Christians. The agency gives legal aid and practical help, campaigns against unjust laws and shelters the victims of persecution.

'The triggering incident for starting CLAAS was the arrest of Tahir Iqbal, a paralytic jailed because he had converted to Christianity, who was murdered in jail in July 1992,' says Joseph.

He started the agency with no source of income, while still needing to provide for his wife and four children. 'This brought me to utter dependency on Jesus Christ,' he says. 'Through the trials I was to face, I learned to pray and seek the Lord Jesus for every need and for complete safety.'

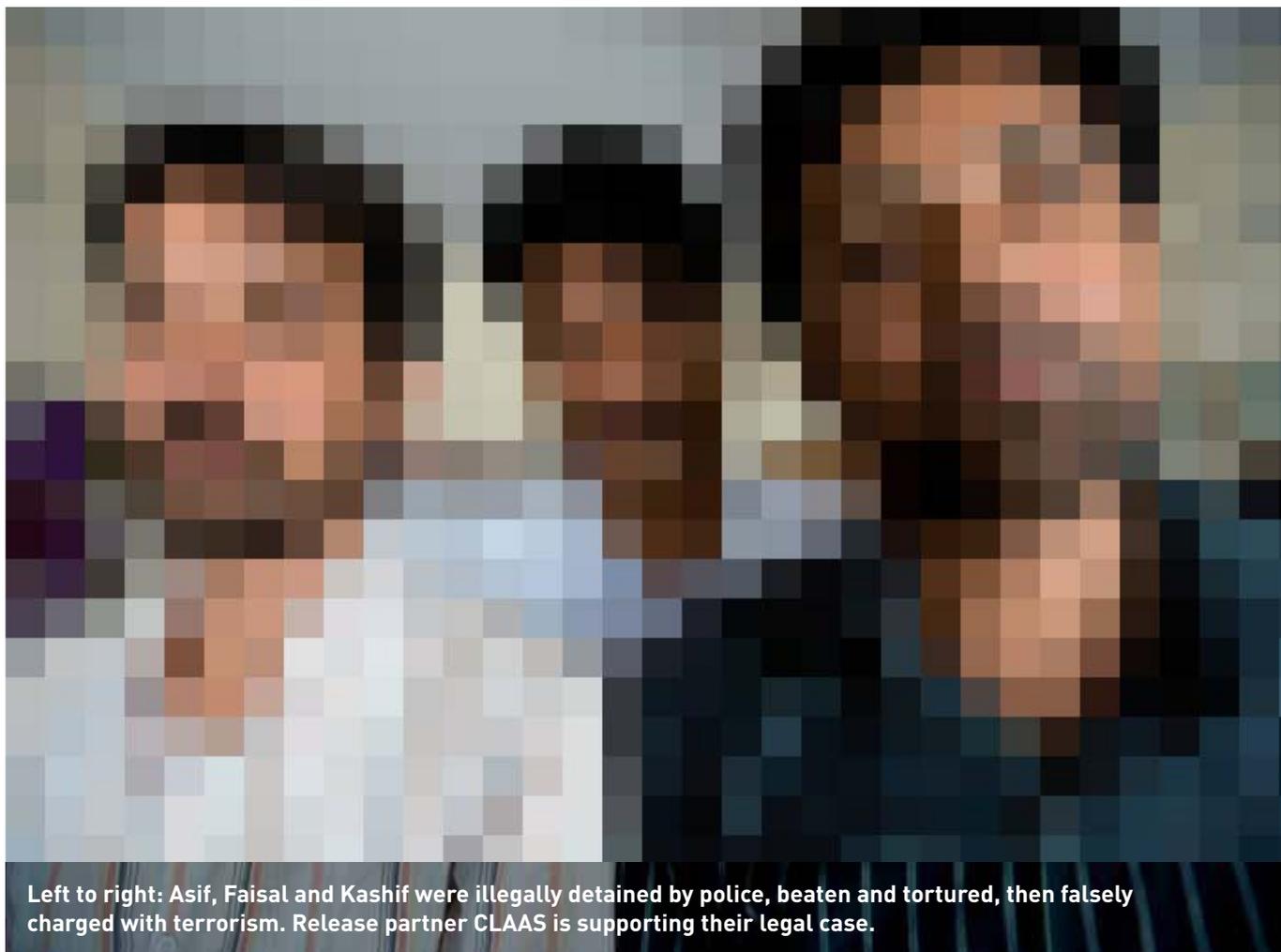
CLAAS has been remarkably successful in defending the rights of Christians in Pakistan, but at a cost. Joseph and other staff have received death threats from militants, and the nature of their legal work means they must have a public profile.

'Every time He gives me strength to fight'

Release partner Joseph Francis, Founder of CLAAS.

'In all these difficult situations and dangers, God's love always stands beside me,' he says. 'Every time He gives me strength to fight: fight against injustice, fight for His people, fight for the voiceless.'

Please pray that God will continue to protect Joseph, his family, and all the team at CLAAS.



Left to right: Asif, Faisal and Kashif were illegally detained by police, beaten and tortured, then falsely charged with terrorism. Release partner CLAAS is supporting their legal case.

'The very next day he took me to the madrasa, that is the Muslim school ... and he forced me to convert to Islam.

'He threatened to kill my family. At gunpoint he made me sign the conversion certificate. Then he forced me to get married. I did not want to marry him, because I am a Christian, and I want to live as a Christian. Later he raped me, and continuously raped me.'

After 15 days of captivity, Sadia escaped and found her way back to her family, who'd been desperately worried about her. 'They took me to CLAAS who helped me and gave me shelter, and who are supporting my case.

'CLAAS is providing everything for me, and all the girls. We are living like a family... It's my home.

'Please pray for my family, and pray for me especially. I want to do more study, and I want to graduate. I want to become a lawyer because I want to help people who are in situations like me, especially young girls who are abducted.'

Supported by Release, CLAAS gives legal and practical assistance to Sadia and

many others. Those helped include victims of the blasphemy laws, Christians involved in land and other disputes, and sometimes those who face brutal treatment at the hands of the police. Without the help of CLAAS, none of these could hope for legal redress or justice.

Police torture

On March 24 of this year, in the early hours following Easter Sunday, three young Christian men were travelling home. Asif, 29, his younger brother Kashif, 25, and Faisal, 32, a graduate of computer studies who works for CLAAS, were stopped at a police check point.

'We thought it was routine checking,' says Asif. 'They asked us different questions. We told them we are Christians, and they arrested us, and said we had to go to the police station.

'At the police station they took our clothes off, and starting beating us, and torturing us. They said we were criminals. They did this until the morning. They took us to a hotel, and spent the whole day beating and torturing us.

'They tied me up, hung me up, and beat my feet with a stick. They beat our bodies with sticks. They told us that all Christians are criminals.'

In all, the three men were detained illegally for 17 days, without charge, during which the beatings continued, and they were accused of different crimes, such as theft, armed robbery and shooting at the police.

'We said we had never been involved in any criminal cases, but they never investigated what we said,' says Asif. 'We thought we would never come out, and would be imprisoned for five or six years.'

When CLAAS found out what had happened, they successfully petitioned the High Court to secure their release, after which the police registered a case of terrorism against the three men. CLAAS continues to fight their case.

'I am very hopeful,' says Asif. 'CLAAS has proved 90 per cent of our case, so I am confident. If CLAAS had not helped us, we would not have been released. They are still helping us, supporting us in this case, and in so many ways.' •

FIND OUT MORE

Keep up to date with the latest news by visiting our Pakistan web page at www.releaseinternational.org/pakistan.

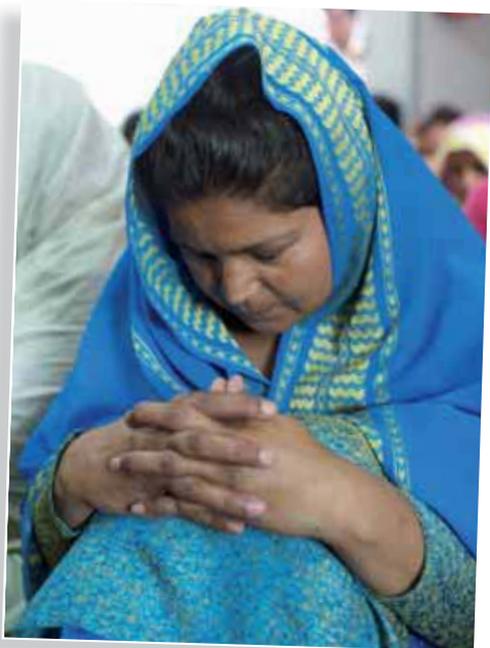
PLEASE GIVE

Release is able to support the crucial work of the Tabitha sewing centre and CLAAS thanks only to the generosity of supporters in the UK and Ireland. If you would like to make a donation to support persecuted Christians in Pakistan and around the world, please use the coupon on the back page of this magazine. Thank you.



PLEASE PRAY

As part of this year's International Day of Prayer (IDOP) for the persecuted church, to be held on November 16, Release is asking supporters and their churches to pray for Pakistan. The prayer points (right) are taken from the PowerPoint presentation which is included on our new DVD *Pray for Pakistan* (see page 10).



Prayers for Pakistan



PRAY FOR THE CHURCH

Pray for church leaders to be strong in the face of militant Islam.
Pray that believers would have growing confidence to stand up for their rights.
Pray that Muslim-background believers will be welcomed by churches.

PRAY FOR CHRISTIAN WOMEN

Pray for poor Christian women, especially those facing abuse.
Pray that these women will find support and healing in their churches.
Pray for the Christian organisations working to empower and strengthen women.

PRAY FOR RELEASE'S PARTNERS

Sharing Life Ministry Pakistan, supporting Christian prisoners and their families.
Tabitha sewing centre, training young girls and women to earn an income.
CLAAS (Centre for Legal Aid Assistance and Settlement), helping to defend Christians in the courts.

Pray that these women will find support and healing in their churches.

RELEASE CHALLENGES 2009

Join one of our exciting Release Challenges in 2009
and help raise money for persecuted Christians



Walk the Wall 2009

Great Wall of China October 4–13, 2009

Your mission: Walk part of the Great Wall of China, and help raise funds for persecuted Christians around the world

Dates: October 4–13, 2009

Cost: Around £1,525 per person including airport taxes, insurance, transfers, food and accommodation (where arranged)



Following the tremendous success of our 2007 China Challenge, we invite you to join a team of people who accept the challenge of walking part of the Great Wall of China in 2009 to raise funds for persecuted Christians through sponsorship.

This is a fantastic experience and an opportunity to do something extraordinary for your brothers and sisters in Christ. We hope participants will have an opportunity to meet local Chinese Christians and hear accounts of the persecution they face.

If you are reasonably fit, and have not yet completed all your 2009 holiday arrangements, this is a challenge you can't ignore!

Those who 'walked the wall' in 2007 found this a very special experience:



'I'm so glad I did. The company, the amazing place and the incredible insight into Chinese life were unmissable.' Lisa

'Going to China was life-changing and life-giving. Enjoying fellowship with the Chinese Christians we met was a tremendous inspiration to us.' Emma

'A wonderful experience.' Nigel

Don't miss out! Find out more by asking for an info pack containing the full itinerary and further details. Call Paul on 01689 823491 or email pjones@releaseinternational.org.

Get on board!

Come and 'ave a go if you think you're 'AARGGH' enough!

Are you 15-18? Will you take up our 2009 sailing Challenge?

Ahoy there matey! Think you're up for a challenge? Could you face four days on the open sea, especially if you've never sailed before?

Could you raise money to help persecuted Christians? You think you could, eh? Well this is your chance to prove it!

Join a squadron of young Christians on a great, grand seafarer; she's a 62ft beauty called *The Morning Star*.

We're sailing from the Solent to the bountiful Channel Islands (and back, of course). The skipper and crew all be hearty Christian buccaneers and experienced on the choppy seas, so you'll all be in good company. But you'll be expected to pull your weight and take orders as a responsible member of the crew – all scallywags and landlubbers will be thrown overboard (or at least be made to scrub the decks).

- Raise funds for persecuted Christians
- No previous sailing experience needed
- Stretch yourself
- Experience life on the open sea and great galley-cooked food
- Draw closer to God during the daily devotions
- And lastly, but not least, you can pretend to be a pirate for the weekend

Cost: about £250 (or the equivalent in gold pieces!)

For further details, including a full info pack, please contact potential@releaseinternational.org or call Carina on 07930 684 006 or 020 8781 1731.

