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JANUARY 2014

**“He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you,
But to do justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God?” Micah 6:8**

Dear Friends,

“Happy New Year” is too often a phrase we in the west take for granted. Many of us are easily able to respond in kind, knowing that God has blessed us with more than we could ever have expected. My preference is “Blessed New Year.” For some, however, it is hardly a phrase they will hear, let alone speak.

As we ring in another new year, 2014 by our calendar, the headlines continue to remind us of the instability around the globe. Civil war in Syria, massive unrest in Central African Republic, fighting in Somalia and South Sudan, continued problems across the Middle East are but a few of the challenges facing so many. Although we are tempted to be discouraged by such news, it is the faithfulness of God’s people in the midst of such challenges that encourages us.

Encouragement from Bangladesh

One encouraging report from late last year came from our long-time Advocate and dear brother, Godfrey Yogarajah, Executive Director of the Religious Liberty Commission of the WEA (which AI serves as Counsel). Godfrey and his team led a training seminar on Advocacy and the Biblical Theology of Persecution in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The religious liberty situation there is in a steady decline over the past year. Radical Islamists led violent protests, demanding the nation’s Islamization, including changes to the constitution and tighter blasphemy laws. As a result, minority Christians are targeted in violent attacks. On top of that, political violence spiraled out of control with hundreds killed in political clashes.

According to Godfrey’s report, a series of general strikes threatened the postponement of the seminar, but trusting God, they decided to proceed. Upon arrival, the team faced the first of many challenges. Bangladeshi Immigration police detained one of the team members because she was a lawyer. After much discussion with the officials, the entire delegation was allowed to enter the country. However, after being notified of a new 84-hour general strike, the team was transported by Ambulances to the site of the training seminar, to avoid the risk of violent attacks against private vehicles, and warned to remain on the guest-house compound during their stay. Thankfully, they arrived safely.

Although disappointed with news that some of the participants were unable to make the journey to Dhaka because of the country-wide strike, the seminar proceeded with 50 eager participants—including Christian lawyers, pastors, church leaders and young activists—from Bangladesh, Nepal, Myanmar and Sri Lanka. One participant from Pakistan was unable to attend because his visa request was rejected.

The three-day training seminar included sessions on the Biblical theology of persecution, Biblical basis for human rights and advocacy, how to engage in effective advocacy, the role of media in advocacy, UN mechanisms and advocacy, religious liberty trends in Asia, and the importance of intercessory prayer for the persecuted church.

Godfrey reports that the team was overwhelmed by the positive responses from the participants throughout the seminar.

One particular response blew us away. In an unexpected moment a pastor whom we knew had been facing severe opposition to his ministry, walked up to us and said: "I believe God has very specially sent you to Bangladesh to encourage us during this difficult time –thank you for coming." The sincerity and rawness of the statement humbled us.

The participants were equipped and empowered through the seminar to better handle pressure and persecution. As Godfrey reported, "many who felt defeated by persecution were reinvigorated to live a victorious life in Christ." The seminar was a great encouragement to persecuted pastors who contemplated leaving the ministry. Others were inspired to be advocates for social justice and human rights, including a young pastor, Satyarth Roy:

Right after school, while I was still a Hindu, I enrolled as a law student at university. However, a year and a half on, I had to drop out as I could not afford the tuition cost. I then became a Christian. A few years later, God called me into full time ministry. The dream to study law never died though. I always had a burden to speak up for injustices that were happening in Bangladesh. Through this seminar I believe God affirmed to me that I should pursue my passion to be a Christian lawyer. I have decided that I will complete my legal studies and be an advocate for the Christian community in Bangladesh.

It is believers like this who make me realize how much work Advocates International has yet to do. We know that God continues to raise up those like Pastor Roy with a heart to pursue the call to follow the Micah 6:8 challenge to "do justice with compassion."

2014 Changes and Challenges

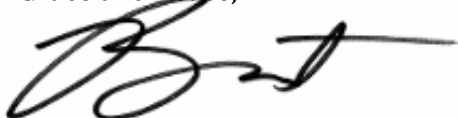
This coming year, not unlike 2013, is full of change and challenge. As I've noted over the past few months, Romi Kobayashi will be moving into a part-time role, but we are pleased that she will remain a critical part of the AI team. We are moving forward with the addition of a Deputy Executive Director for Global Council and plan to announce soon who will be filling that position.

Please continue to join with us each day as we pray for each Advocates region with the November (leaders) and December (2014 prayer needs) prayer calendars. Each is available on our website.

Thank you again for your prayers and continued financial support. With your help, AI can continue to be an encouragement to those facing persecution, and perhaps provide an opportunity for many more to have a "Blessed New Year."

May the Lord bless and keep you throughout 2014 in His perfect . . .

Grace and Peace,



Brent McBurney
President and CEO