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An Address by

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**REACHING OUT TO THE PERSECUTED CHURCH:
ON THE WORK OF THE VOICE OF THE MARTYRS CANADA**

This year, VOMC is celebrating its 40th anniversary of ministry to persecuted Christians around the world. Arising from the organisation founded by Richard Wurmbrand in the United States, VOMC is part of a world wide network of sister organisations involved in such ministry. Pastor Wurmbrand was himself a victim of persecution under the post war Communist regime in Romania and his story is still widely read in his book, *Tortured for Christ*. He spent two terms in prison, the second starting in 1959 and lasting through to 1965. Richard and his wife Sabina, who had also spent time in prison, arrived in the United States in 1966. From their home there, they travelled widely and their message fell upon the ears of a Canadian, Nellie Brobbel, who started the Canadian ministry in her own home, and was soon joined in the work by her husband Klaas.

Today, service is provided to the Persecuted church in five ways:

1. Running to help those who suffer for their faith in Christ. We seek to encourage and empower persecuted Christians to fulfill the Great Commission by providing Bibles, literature, radio broadcasts and other forms of aid.
2. Remembering the families of today's Christian martyrs. We provide relief for the families of Christian martyrs in many countries.
3. Rebuilding the Church's witness after persecution ends. Through projects of encouragement, we help believers to rebuild their lives and Christian witness after incidents of persecution.
4. Reaching out in love to the persecutors. We equip persecuted Christians to share Christ to those who oppose them.

5. Raising a voice for those who cannot speak. Christian persecution rarely gets reported in the mainstream media. Using a multitude of means, we seek to share the courage, faith, and trials of persecuted Christians with fellow believers in Canada and beyond.

Voice of The Martyrs is a ministry which remains steeped in the Gospel message, ever conscious of our Lord's own words to the faithful, "If they persecuted me, they will persecute you." (Jn.15:20, RSV). The ministry functions through private donations and directs as much of those funds as possible towards ministry, rather than administration. In the office, one team devotes most of its time to the newsletter and to the Persecution and Prayer Alert, another to field based projects. Projects prepared by the team are written into a profile document and sent to Board members for approval.

Some, but not all, field projects are visited by staff and occasionally by Board members. The author has been privileged to visit two different locations in South Sudan during the prolonged persecution of the Christian and animist South by the Muslim government in Khartoum. He has also visited Orissa in India to investigate the violent persecution of Christians which hit parts of that state in 2008.

It is only possible here to give a brief glimpse of what those visits taught. There are two distinct sides to persecution: i) the horrors of beatings, rape, kidnappings, community displacement, property destruction and killings, and ii) the heartening stories of steadfast faith, courage and genuine Christian commitment to continue serving The Lord. In Dajo, in the Eastern Upper Nile, Pastor John provides an example of both. He walks between his congregations, spread out over an area of hundreds of square miles, yet he is one of only two men I met in that part of the country who do not carry AK47's. Just before Christmas of 2000, he was caught by a government militia. They stripped him, beat him and left him for dead. But Pastor John did not die, and in this photograph, taken about 4 weeks after the event, he is seen baptizing 32 new Christians. When I visited them, these Christians told me that the most important thing for them was my being there. It meant that they were not forgotten.

Simon, an 8 year old boy, was captured from a village north of Rumbek. A rope was tied around his neck and he was dragged behind a camel through a river. Simon survived and was taken to his captor's home where he was forced to tend animals, requiring skills he did not possess. He was beaten by his Muslim captor, and then sold to another man, who made him do the same chores. Simon failed again. His new tormentor took him into the bush and hung him by the neck from a tree. Soon after the man left, another man found Simon. God surely intervened, because the man was from Simon's village. He recognized the little boy, cut him down and took him to freedom. Later Simon was interviewed by an American associate of VOM, who asked him what he thought about it all. Simon said, "I believe God must have planned a wonderful life for me."

In Orissa, persecution was encouraged by the State Government, then the Hindu BJP party. Violence was triggered in August, 2008 by the slaying of a local Hindu guru, Saraswati, killed by the Maoist guerillas, who went public about the slaying. The local Hindus instead blamed the

Christians, and launched incredibly violent attacks upon them. Tens of thousands were displaced, dozens killed, hundreds more injured, and over 200 churches were destroyed.

One young victim was 17 year old Manini. She was attacked in her home, taken out and beaten unconscious and raped, by a group which included two pupils from her school. Kerosene was poured on her and ignited, the mob then leaving her to die. The pain woke her up and she ran to a nearby house, where she found water and doused the flames with it. She was in excruciating pain. The right side of her body was terribly burned, and when her father found her, he took her to the local clinic, and then to the government hospital. The Hindus who had beaten her told the staff there that if they treated her they would be killed. Eventually, Manini was taken hundreds of miles away to the town of Indore. There she has received serious medical attention. When interviewed in September of 2009, Manini said, "I have forgiven them because they don't know Jesus Christ." The utter sincerity with which she says this leaves me in not doubt that it is the truth.

These are but three of the myriad stories from the Persecuted Church. They radiate the horror of persecution and the faith of so many of those persecuted. Please pray for our persecuted brothers and sisters, that God will sustain them and keep their faith strong.

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