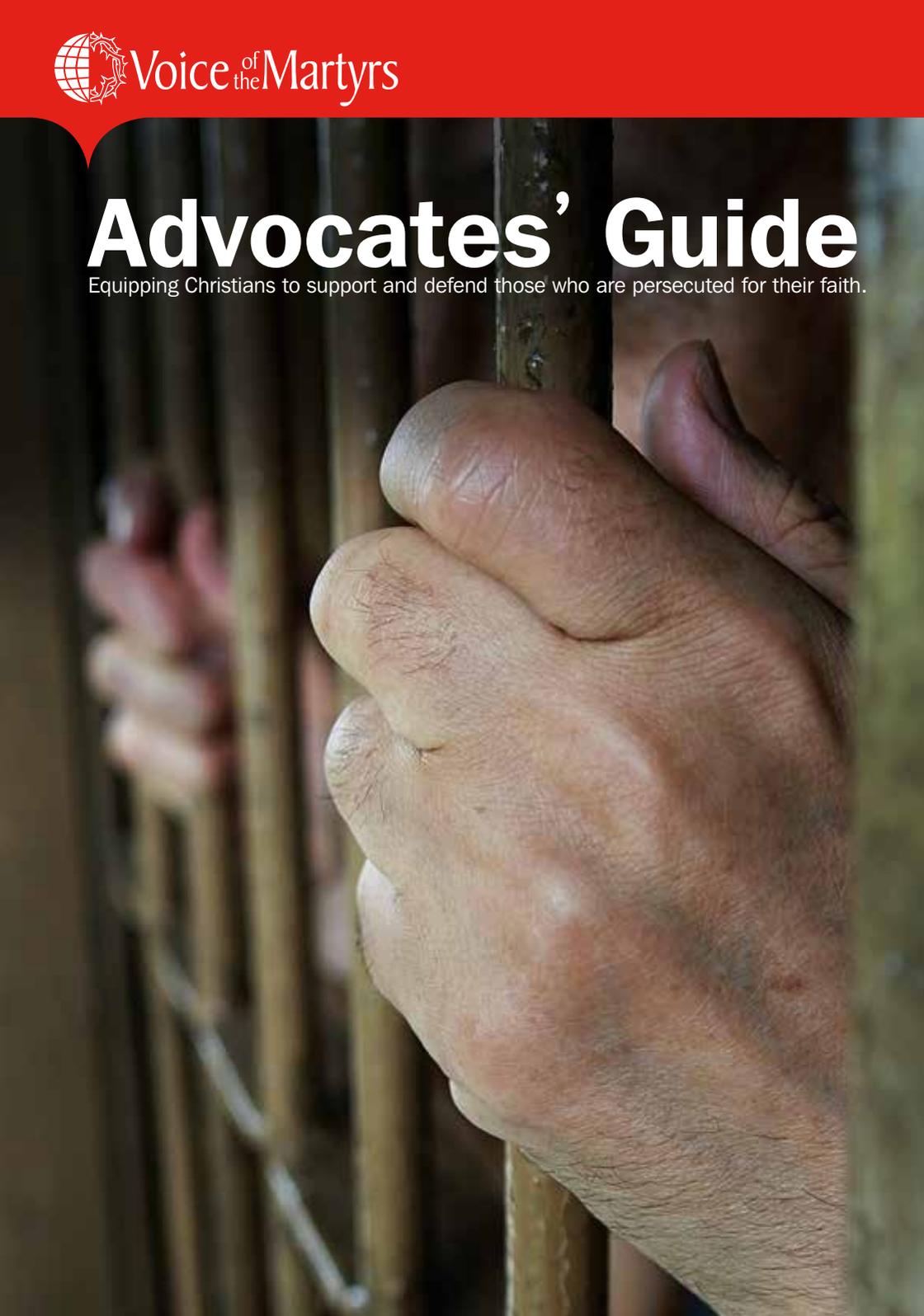




Voice ^{of} the Martyrs

Advocates' Guide

Equipping Christians to support and defend those who are persecuted for their faith.



“Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.” Hebrews 13:3



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Supporting and Defending Prisoners of Christ

Jesus taught us to expect persecution

The persecution of Christians is not primarily caused by social and political prejudice, ignorance or injustice. Jesus explained that it is fundamentally a matter of identity: “If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you” John 15:19. Therefore, Jesus gave us a solemn warning, “If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you” John 15:20.

Persecution often involves physical violence, but it always involves emotional trauma. Although we are convinced of God’s love, we can still be emotionally devastated by false accusations, curses, rejection, hatred, arrests, fines and the shame of imprisonment. The Apostle Paul, who forsook his religious reputation and achievements to follow Christ, asked his people to be not ashamed of him while a prisoner.

Jesus identifies with the persecuted today

Jesus would have us know that He suffered before us: “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.” John 15:18. The risen Jesus confronted a persecutor of the New Testament church, Saul of Tarsus, with this remarkable question: “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” Acts 9:4. When the church is persecuted, Jesus feels it personally. He warned Saul: “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting” Acts 9:5.

The church is to identify with Christian prisoners

The Bible tells us to “remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners,...” Hebrews 13:3. This means more than simply to ‘call to mind’. In the same way that Jesus identifies with His Body, we as members of His Body are to identify with Christian prisoners, with heart-felt understanding, “as if you yourselves were suffering”. It is the ministry of Voice of the Martyrs to support and defend prisoners of Jesus Christ in this way.

This Advocates Guide is to help you minister to your brothers and sisters imprisoned for Jesus. When Saul the persecutor became Paul the persecuted, and was later imprisoned in Rome, he told the story of a ‘brother’ called Onesiphorus who, he said, had often refreshed him and was not ashamed of his imprisonment: “...when he was in Rome, he searched hard for me until he found me” 2 Timothy 1:16-18.

Writing to prisoners is an important way that we can identify with our persecuted family in Christ.

Examples of Responses from Prisoners

“For five years now, your words and good wishes have kept me company on the difficult road of suffering. They have given me strength and the comfort that my sacrifice has not disappeared in the darkness of anonymity, and that there are people who are concerned for the fate of someone they don’t know.”
Gintautus Iesmantas

“During my eight years of imprisonment I received 9,546 letters! They were a tremendous source of encouragement. They gave me new life and hope. Those letters are probably the only earthly treasures which I would like to take to heaven with me.”
Yakov Skorniakov

“Each card that arrives from distant lands seems to say, ‘I come from your brothers and sisters who love the Lord as you do. And they love you, pray for you, have compassion for you and want you to remain faithful to your Redeemer and Lifegiver.’ I hold each letter with a sense of awe.”
Neonila Antonova

Benefits of Letter-Writing

It can make a real and lasting impact when you write to Christian prisoners:

- Personal letters are tangible evidence to imprisoned Christians, whether they can read them or not, that they are not forgotten. Communist oppressors and other persecutors try to brainwash Christians into believing that no one knows about them, that they are forgotten and unloved.
- Letters to prisoners tell the authorities that outsiders are monitoring their activities. Letters may result in better treatment and/or earlier release.
- Letters are a testimony of the unity and love of the Christian Church worldwide, especially to the authorities who may read them.
- Letters demonstrate clearly to authorities that Western Christians and their governments are aware of persecution and human rights abuses.

Important Note: *It is not dangerous for a prisoner to receive personal letters, but never mention the name of your information source, or the name of any organisation such as Voice of the Martyrs.*

To do so may:

- Cause the authorities to accuse the prisoner of links with ‘foreign organisations’, leading to interrogation, harsher treatment and/or longer sentences.
- Expose the activities of organisations working with the persecuted church.

Writing to Prisoners and their Families

May I write in English?

English is widely known as a second or third language, and therefore a prisoner may be able to read your letter, or may know someone who can.

- Therefore, write simply and legibly.
- If the prisoner cannot read English, your letter still serves as a symbol of Christian love.
- Include where possible simple pictures, drawings and clipart of universal expressions for Christian care and love.

What if the letter is confiscated by prison staff?

- Often prison staff reveal to the prisoner that his/her mail has been confiscated, particularly when large quantities are received over a period of time. This knowledge comforts the prisoner, revealing to them that they are not forgotten by Christians in other parts of the world.
- Large quantities of mail received by prison staff can result in better treatment and shorter sentences for prisoners.

What kind of letter do I send?

- Send letters, notes, postcards, even bookmarks. Attractive Christian greeting cards are very effective.

How do I send the letter?

- Carefully copy the address.
- Address the envelope by hand (don't type) and mark it AIRMAIL.

- Make sure the postage rate is correct.
- Do not include your address.

How do I write for the benefit of the prisoner?

- It's preferable to write in your own words.
- Express your Christian love in a simple and appropriate manner.
- Include encouraging comments based on God's Word.
- Write naturally and positively.
- Reassure the prisoner that you are praying for him/her and their family.
- Include a Bible verse.
- Keep your letter brief and courteous.

What must I avoid in my letter?

- Avoid words (and even Bible references) that might imply some kind of hidden activity. A sentence like “Thank you for the Christian work you have done in Vietnam” might imply that the prisoner had done some covert work for a foreign organisation to subvert the government.
- Avoid building up the hopes and expectations of prisoners. If you intend to write only once, write in a manner that suggests your letter is a ‘one-off’ letter of encouragement.
- Long letters with lots of detail may mislead the prisoner into believing you are building a long-term relationship.
- Do not include your return address.
- Do not write about politics, criticise the government, cast judgement on the Christian's case, or in any way provoke the prison authorities. Write only for the benefit of the prisoner and be mindful that your letter may be censored.
- Avoid religious jargon.
- Do not be presumptuous about the prisoner's situation, needs, or feelings.
- Do not sermonise.
- Do not make any offer of help unless you intend to act on it.



Sample Letters to Prisoners

Your letter should be written very simply but may be tailored to the particular circumstances of the prisoner providing it doesn't take on a political tone.

Dear Pastor Damanik

I have read the story of your arrest, imprisonment and trial, and I am praying for you. Thank you for your testimony and for your service to God in Indonesia.

The Apostle Paul said, "At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength,..." 2 Timothy 4:16-17.

Please remember that Jesus said, "They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me" John 15:21, but He also said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you" John 14:27.

I pray that God will sustain and protect you, and that even in prison he will give you opportunities to share your faith with others.

May God bless and keep you

Dear Sister Li Ying

I have read the story of your arrest and imprisonment, and I am praying for you. Thank you for your example of faith, love, and perseverance.

Please remember that Jesus said, "They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me" John 15:21 and, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of My hand" John 10:27-28.

I pray that God will strengthen and protect you and that even in prison you will have opportunity to share your love and faith with others.

May God bless and keep you

Writing to Government Authorities

What is the purpose of writing to government authorities?

- To protest the maltreatment of Christians in a given country.
- To request the political maintenance of religious freedom in a given country.
- To seek a fair trial or hearing for a particular Christian prisoner/s.
- To seek the release of Christian prisoners.
- To protest the torture, abuse and poor living conditions of prisoners.
- To call upon governments to defend all citizens, including Christians.

Writing to government authorities tells them:

- That people in other countries are aware of the government's treatment of its citizens and its prisoners.
- That Christians care about what happens to fellow Christians.

When a government discovers its treatment of prisoners is public knowledge, it can help to prevent a Christian being imprisoned with dangerous criminals, being abused, deprived of food, or denied rights to their mail, parcels and visits.

How do I write effectively on behalf of persecuted Christians?

- It's preferable to write in your own words.
- Write simply and clearly.
- Be courteous and respectful, imploring rather than demanding.
- Avoid religious language and words, phrases, and terms that only Christians understand.
- Be brief and to the point.
- Provide relevant facts, but not details that might disclose your sources or endanger Christians and/or prisoners.
- State your general concern for persecuted believers.
- State a specific concern for one or more prisoners.

- Where possible, give the full name and hometown of the prisoner.
- Tell why you are concerned (perhaps they have been tortured).
- Describe what you would like to be done (released, given medical treatment, etc).
- You may courteously remind the authorities of their obligations under international standards for human rights and freedom of religion, if it serves a useful purpose.

What must I avoid in my letter?

- Do not be judgmental and condemning.
- Do not write as if you know better how to run their country.
- Write with an imploring tone, not a demanding tone. Do not exaggerate the facts.
- Do not attack the government, including its philosophy (eg Communism) or its religion (eg nationalistic Hinduism, Islam, etc).

Important Note: It is not dangerous to write on behalf of prisoners and persecuted Christians, but never mention the name of your information source, or the name of any organisation such as Voice of the Martyrs.

To do so may:

- Cause the authorities to accuse Christians/prisoners of links with ‘foreign organisations’, leading to arrests, interrogation, harsher treatment and/or longer sentences.
- Expose the activities of organisations like VOM working with the persecuted church.

Who do I write to?

You can write to government leaders and UN Ambassadors and embassies in Australia.

You can also write to your local members of Parliament and the Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs.

**Minister for Foreign Affairs
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia**

Please note: The circumstances of a particular prisoner may change. Current news reports may infer that it is safer to write to government authorities rather than to the individual prisoner. Please be discerning.

Sample Letters to Government Authorities

It is important to write factually and respectfully, making a clear request.

The following are samples when writing to governments about prisoners whose circumstances of arrest and imprisonment are only partly known or entirely unknown to you.

Dear Sir/Madam

I respectfully request your attention to the case of (name). He/she was arrested in (place) for sharing his/her Christian faith and on (date) was sentenced to (sentence given). He/she is detained in the (name of prison) prison. The story of his/her case has been circulated around the world and is known to thousands of Christians.

I respectfully ask your government to release (name) so that he/she might freely practise his/her religion. The United Nations Declaration on Human Rights [Article 18] states that “everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion” and the right “in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance”.

Yours faithfully

Dear Sir/Madam

I respectfully request your attention to the case of (name) who is currently serving a prison sentence in (place). The story of his/her case has been circulated around the world and is known to thousands of Christians.

I respectfully ask your government to release (name) so that he/she might freely practise his/her religion. The United Nations Declaration on Human Rights [Article 18] states that “everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion” and the right “in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance”.

Yours faithfully

Dear Sir/Madam

We are thankful that the laws and constitution in (country) allow freedom of religion. However, we have heard that a man/woman named (name) was put in prison at (place). We are concerned for his/her welfare in prison.

I respectfully ask that he/she be able to freely practise his/her Christian beliefs according to the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights [Article 18] which states that “everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion” and the right “in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance”.

Yours faithfully

The following are samples of writing to governments about prisoners whose circumstances of arrest and imprisonment are known to you:

Dear Sir/Madam

The arrest, imprisonment and trial of Rev Rinaldy Damanik, on the charge of illegally possessing weapons, has been widely publicised outside of Indonesia. Rev Rinaldy Damanik is an honest man who is respected for helping both Christian and Muslim victims of violence. He has been a key supporter of the reconciliation between Christians and Muslims and has therefore been a hindrance to terrorist organisations provoking sectarian violence in Maluku and Sulawesi.

Rev Damanik was sentenced on 16 June to three years’ imprisonment. The court ruling has shocked the international community because the evidence against Rev Damanik was inadequate and contradictory.

Firstly, the search of Damanik’s vehicle was conducted without a warrant and, contrary to police procedure, Damanik was not appraised of the results of the search. Furthermore, the police signatures on the indictment (BAP) against Damanik could not be confirmed. According to a leading Indonesian legal expert, J E Sehatapy, these facts alone should have been cause to dismiss the case.

Furthermore, the police officers called by the prosecution gave completely contradictory testimony regarding which vehicle Damanik was in and whether he was a passenger or a driver. Likewise, they did not even agree on the number of weapons removed from the vehicles. Amazingly, however, nearly a year later they all recalled the license plate number of Damanik’s vehicle. However, a mechanic, called by the prosecution, testified that the vehicle in question had actually been in his shop at that time.

I respectfully request that the trial of Rev Damanik be investigated by your government to ensure that justice is done. J E Sehatapy testified that Damanik was being framed by the police and, in such cases, police procedures should be thoroughly scrutinised. The release of Rev Damanik is my most respectful request.

Yours faithfully

Dear President

I respectfully ask that you carefully consider my letter. It has been widely reported in the international press that your government is holding a Christian, Ms Li Ying, in Wuhan City Prison. I am very concerned for her safety and welfare because there are many reports of how Christians are treated in Chinese prisons.

I respectfully ask your government to release Ms Li Ying so that she might freely practise her religion. The Chinese Constitution promises religious freedom. The United Nations Declaration on Human Rights [Article 18] insists that “everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion” and the right “in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance”.

Ms Li Ying is accused of publishing a Christian magazine. Please allow me to assure you that Christian magazines and literature are used to instruct and teach Christians how to live honest, respectful and productive lives, as good citizens of China. The Bible teaches Christians to pray for their leaders. I respectfully ask the Chinese government to uphold religious freedom by releasing Ms Li Ying.

Yours faithfully

The following is a sample of writing to the Australian government, perhaps to the Prime Minister or the Minister for Foreign Affairs, about prisoners whose circumstances of arrest and imprisonment are known to you:

Dear Sir/Madam

The case of Rev Rinaldy Damanik, an Indonesian arrested and tried on the charge of illegally possessing weapons, has been widely publicised in the Western media. Rev Rinaldy Damanik is an honest man who is respected for helping both Christian and Muslim victims of violence in the Maluku Islands and Central Sulawesi regions of Indonesia. He has been a key supporter of reconciliation between Christians and Muslims and has therefore been a hindrance to terrorist organisations, chiefly the Laskar Jihad with its alleged links to Al-Qaeda, believed to be the primary instigators provoking sectarian violence in Maluku and Sulawesi.

Rev Damanik was sentenced on 16 June to three years' imprisonment. The court ruling has shocked the international community because the evidence against Rev Damanik was inadequate and contradictory.

Firstly, the search of Damanik's vehicle was conducted without a warrant and, contrary to police procedure, Damanik was not apprised of the results of the search. Furthermore, the police signatures on the indictment (BAP) against Damanik could not be confirmed. According to a leading Indonesian legal expert, J E Sehatapy, these facts alone should have been cause to dismiss the case.

Furthermore, the police officers called by the prosecution gave completely contradictory testimony regarding which vehicle Damanik was in and whether he was a passenger or a driver. Likewise, they did not even agree on the number of weapons removed from the vehicles. Amazingly, however, nearly a year later they all recalled the license plate number of Damanik's vehicle. However, a mechanic, called by the prosecution, testified that the vehicle in question had actually been in his shop at that time.

I respectfully request that the Australian government express its concern to the Indonesian ambassador and Indonesian authorities at the highest level, asking that the trial of Rev Damanik be investigated by the Indonesian government to ensure that justice is done. J E Sehatapy testified that Damanik was being framed by the police and, in such cases, police procedures should be thoroughly scrutinised. It is widely believed that the release of Rev Damanik is the only just outcome.

Yours faithfully

United Nations Declaration on Human Rights [Article 18]

It is good to know the statement of the United Nations on human rights, commonly known as the UN Declaration on Human Rights, which states:

“Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”

Be an Advocate

Voice of the Martyrs Australia is committed to mobilising Christians to speak out on behalf of persecuted Christians imprisoned for their faith in Christ.

Our Be an Advocate program equips you to regularly pray for and write to Christians who are suffering because of their faith.

Subscribe to Be an Advocate monthly emails to receive the latest news on Christian prisoners and a profile of a persecuted Christian brother or sister who needs your prayers and letters of encouragement. To subscribe, go to Get Involved at www.vom.com.au

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Voice of the Martyrs exists to **help**, **love** and **encourage** persecuted Christians by providing Bibles, Christian literature, ministry equipment, medical aid, practical assistance and advocacy.

**Thank you for
being an advocate on
behalf of persecuted
Christian prisoners.**

