

JANUARY 2024

“For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise, they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them”. (Matt 13:15 NIV)

Dear Friends,

From all of us at Advocates International we would like to wish you and your families a blessed and prosperous 2024 and pray that every day of the coming year will be filled with God’s love, peace, joy, and presence!

Thank you so much for your generosity in your yearend giving - our appreciation goes beyond what we can express in words! We covet your continued financial support in the year lying ahead – please know that our best plans cannot succeed without your prayers, encouragement, and sponsorship.

Nobel Peace Prize winner, Elie Wiesel, was born in 1928 in the town of Sighet, now part of Romania. During World War II, he, with his family and other Jews from the area, were deported to the German concentration and extermination camps, where his parents and little sister perished. Wiesel and his two older sisters survived. Liberated from Buchenwald in 1945 by advancing Allied troops, he was taken to Paris where he studied at the Sorbonne and worked as a journalist.

In 1955, Elie moved to New York where he became a renowned philosopher, activist, and author of 44 books. He served as chairman of the President’s Commission on the Holocaust (later renamed the US Holocaust Memorial Council) from 1978 to 1986, spearheading the building of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C.

For the world to remember and learn from the Holocaust was not Elie Wiesel’s only goal. **He thought it equally important to fight indifference and the attitude that “it’s no concern of mine”.** Elie Wiesel saw the struggle against indifference as a struggle for peace.

In 1986 he is quoted in the US News & World Report as follows: *“The opposite of love is not hate, it’s indifference. The opposite of art is not ugliness, it’s indifference. The opposite of faith is not heresy, it’s indifference. And the opposite of life is not death, it’s indifference. Because of indifference, one dies before one actually dies. To be in the window and watch people being sent to concentration camps or being attacked in the street and do nothing, that’s being dead.”*

One doesn’t need to take a particular interest in world events to know that 2023 once again marked pain and suffering for millions of people across the globe! Whether because of natural disasters, war, persecution, oppression, disease or endemic poverty, millions of people experienced inconceivable suffering.

It is easier to decide that all of this is “no concern of mine” than to engage with the magnitude and intensity of the anguish and misery of what is happening in far-off places which we cannot point out on the world map or with names we cannot even pronounce. We would rather read about the lives of celebrities or argue superficial issues than expose ourselves to imagining what it must be like if you cannot protect your children against abuse, hunger, hardship, and suffering.

In Isaiah 6 we read Isaiah’s account of the vision of the Lord, magnificent on His throne with the seraphim praising Him and the sound of their voices shaking the doorposts and filling the temple with smoke! After the seraphim touched his lips and Isaiah makes himself available to be sent by the Lord, the Lord says to him: *“Go and tell this people: “Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.” Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise, they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.”*

We read in Matthew 13 that, when His disciples ask Jesus why He speaks to the people in parables, He says that Isaiah’s prophesy has been fulfilled in that people’s hearts have become calloused because they are unable to hear, see or understand. Jesus continues: ***“But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear.”***

When God looks upon us in 2024, will He find us to have calloused hearts, unwilling to see, hear or understand what is happening across the globe? Given our unlimited access to information, we will not be able to claim ignorance.

Globally, religious persecution has escalated to unprecedented levels. Members of minority faith groups suffer physical and verbal abuse, imprisonment, kidnapping, having to pay bribes, deportation, destruction of property and displacement, fines, torture, forced marriage and very often get murdered.

There are more Christians in Africa than anywhere else. In Nigeria alone there are 87 million Christians. It is therefore not surprising that the contention over Christianity in Africa has intensified like never before.

The Daniel Project, which was launched in Africa in 2023, gives to all of us the opportunity to replace indifference with involvement and commitment.

The Lord has given Advocates International the mission to combat religious persecution and to advocate alongside the persecuted. Having representation in 142 countries globally, God has positioned us to be His provision at this hour for all these vulnerable ones who need representation by lawyers in their own countries who know the culture, laws, and local languages.

The Daniel Project has been launched in Uganda, Nigeria, Ethiopia, and Kenya. In all these countries Christian lawyers have made themselves available to be trained to represent the persecuted. Advocates Ethiopia already presented their first training in December 2023. In Nigeria 56 lawyers have stepped forward to be trained – several of them are already representing the persecuted. In March we will be involved in the training of 15 lawyers and activists from a Middle Eastern country where Christians suffer extreme persecution.

In 2024 we plan to launch the Daniel Project in 5 more African countries with the focus on West Africa. We are concerned over the increase of persecution in this region. During the past couple of months authorities in Mauritania for instance arrested 15 Christian leaders following calls for punishment by Muslims outraged over a video showing a baptism ceremony.

Together with our strategic partners, we are in the process of establishing a reliable database of pending cases to identify the need for representation and ensuring that the necessary resources are available to fund these cases.

The members of our network play an indispensable part in verifying information to prevent false rumors, propaganda, and fear mongering.

The African Commission on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR) is mandated to protect and promote human and people's rights on the continent and be the interpreter of the African Charter of Human and People's Rights. Advocates Africa (AA) is in the process of obtaining observer status in the ACHPR. Representatives of AA will be attending the civil society meetings which will be held twice this year at the summits of the ACHPR in Banjul in the Gambia. AA intends making submissions to the ACHPR and proposing resolutions relating to religious persecution and formulating complaints regarding specific cases.

We encourage you again to please give towards the Daniel Project – we have not yet been able to raise the funds necessary to present the different training interventions. The lawyers who have made themselves available to be trained are not wealthy lawyers. They are willing to risk their law firms and family's safety for clients who cannot pay them.

My prayer is that Jesus would say of us: ***"blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear."***

Warmly in Christ



Teresa Conradie - President and CEO, Advocates International



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