



In this 'special edition' of the Bright Hope World newsletter, we are focusing on the most difficult places. As COVID seems to be getting worse, with both health and economic impacts, we are receiving troubling reports from partners in certain countries. We share them here and ask you to join us in prayer for these places:

Afghanistan

The real consequences of COVID are only now becoming visible. The situation of malnourished children has worsened. UNICEF said in February that about half of all children will be acutely malnourished by the end of 2021. The greatest issue facing our partners is the increasing influence of the Taliban. Everywhere we hear that our friends who live in Taliban territory are forced to go to the mosque. Girls' schools are closing in some places. In Kabul a bomb exploded in a girls' school killing 90 young people. Our partners set up a trauma team and every week listen to the stories of the girls who have lost someone. Many of the team have also lost family yet they have chosen the way of courage to provide spiritual help to others. The positive news is that this opens the door to one of the largest girls' schools in Afghanistan and the Good News can be shared.

Democratic Republic of Congo

Most of our partners in the DRC live in the east. These Provinces have been placed under martial law because of the rampaging militia groups that constantly raid villages. Thousands of people have fled into nearby Bunia and are in camps until the troubles pass. Children have lost parents and cannot go to school, women have lost husbands and been brutalised by the militia. Just last week a partner reported that his wife has just recovered from COVID and has lost significant lung capacity. Now, two of their children have contracted the virus. A local Christian leader we know in his early fifties and who operated two schools and a large orphanage has died. What will happen to all those children now?

India

We have all been confronted by the images in the media about what has been happening in India. Of course, it is much worse than we have seen; maybe five times as bad. Every level of society has been affected, from the wealthiest to the poorest. The need for oxygen concentrators and ventilators has been over-whelming. In the midst of this, and despite increasingly severe opposition, God's people have been serving their communities with great enthusiasm, sewing masks, delivering food packages, picking up people from the streets, carrying people to hospital, burying the dead and praying. And through it all, carrying on with their ministry. They face increased, systemic stigma, persecution, the hacking of their websites and new laws that outlaw their lifestyle, worship and ministry. They feel like they are under real threat and quite vulnerable.

We have seen a fantastic response to our COVID appeal, and are so appreciative of the generosity of our donors. As you can see from Kevin's article, things are tough out there and having funds to be able to meet needs is important.

As we wade through all the need and the heavy stories that we are hearing, it can feel all a bit...grim. We love hearing good news stories of communities being transformed and lives being changed, but those stories are a bit hard to find at the moment.

And yet, though our world is facing one of its hardest periods in living memory, we are seeing extraordinary commitment and dedication from our partners. As they face battles in their own lives, they continue to serve their communities passionately.

One wonders how long this will all go for. Certainly, that is a hot topic within our team. But in the midst of it all we are confident that God is at work. He is doing things that we can sometimes glimpse, but perhaps do not fully understand. He is strengthening his people and purifying his church.

We here, especially as we cannot travel to visit partners, are reminded to hold them in prayer. That is now more important than ever.

Indonesia

Indonesia has taken over from India as the epicentre of COVID in Asia. Our friends report that they are at the end of a prolonged lockdown but the virus is surging. They have lost many people in their network and almost all of the key leaders have had COVID. None of the primary leaders have died but, in many areas, they have lost leaders. Many people have lost loved ones and the need for prayer and trauma counselling is growing. The online ministry has been crucial but it is not as effective as face-to-face meetings. Despite the issues, many new groups are being formed and people are responding to the Good News.

Lebanon

It is hard to explain how difficult life is right now for the Lebanese people. There have been multiple blows over the past two years, which sees the country at a very low ebb. The government is acting bizarrely and has stripped the banks of the personal money of its citizens. Corruption is rife and people are desperate, exacerbated by the war in neighbouring Syria having pumped up to 2M extra people into the population who have nowhere else to go. Then there was a huge blast in the port a year ago which destroyed many businesses, homes and lives as COVID tore through the country. There is little food, medication or fuel available. People are starving and have little access to healthcare. In the midst of this, many people are coming to faith, though many are not able to "come out" as they would be thrown out onto the streets by their families.

Myanmar

54M people are living a total nightmare as Myanmar faces a humanitarian catastrophe. They have been hit by a quadruple whammy: a military coup, a half-century long civil war reignited with a vengeance, economic collapse and coronavirus. Myanmar weathered the early waves of COVID relatively well. Not now. Today, people defy curfews to seek oxygen. Cemeteries and hospitals are overflowing, and the sick die at home. Myanmar's health system was rudimentary at the best of times. Today, with doctors targeted by the military for opposing the coup, it's collapsing. We're hearing very little from our partners, all we can do right now is pray.

Pakistan

Our partners have been busy distributing aid and care just to keep people alive. It has been a mammoth task and is by no means over. The Christian community, as a minority, do not have access to government or even NGO help. Huge numbers of the lowest paid workers, many of whom are Christians, have lost their jobs so their children cannot now attend school. The instability in neighbouring Afghanistan does not help and people are living in fear. However, many nominal Christians are being driven back to their faith and we are hearing of new churches being established as people turn their hearts to God.

Kevin Honore

New Partnerships Facilitator

PRAYER AND PRAISE

1. Please pray for Afghanistan as the political situation is becoming increasingly unstable.
2. Please pray for peace in the DRC and an improvement in the infection rates for COVID.
3. Please pray for India as COVID is worsening and governmental religious persecution of Christians intensifies.
4. Please pray for Indonesia that COVID would subside and the Gospel reaches people through the crisis.
5. Please pray for Lebanon, for provision and protection for the people and economic recovery.
6. Please pray for Myanmar, and for our partners particularly, that God would restore peace and order.
7. Please pray for Pakistan, that more would come to genuine faith and that needs would be met.



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