

## PRAYERS FOR THE PERSECUTED: September 2013

**“Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners. And those who are ill-treated as if you yourselves were suffering.” Hebrews: 13:3**

A group meets for silent meditation in St Catherine’s chapel on the first Sunday of each month at 10am for 15 minutes. Here we hold in mind or pray for the people whose cases are highlighted for the current month. This meditation is open to those of all faiths and none. Please join us.

### Syria

With the use of chemical weapons, it seems likely that there will be armed intervention in Syria in the next few weeks. Amnesty International neither condemns nor condones the possible use of such military intervention. Its focus is on protecting civilians and on reminding those thinking of entering the conflict, that they are subject to the rules of law. AI continues to demand justice for the people of Syria.

### Youssef Abdelke and Adnan al-Dibs

They were arrested by Syrian Security forces in Tartus on the 18<sup>th</sup> July. They have not been heard from since. The official reasons for their arrests are unknown. However, as members of the National Coordination Body for Democratic Change, immediately prior to their arrest, they had signed a declaration calling for peaceful democratic change in Syria, including the departure of the Syrian president, Basher al-Assad. It is likely they are being detained solely for their political views and peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of expression. As such, AI regards them as prisoners of conscience. **Please hold in mind and pray for all who have disappeared, their families and those responsible for their detention.**

AI has received the names of over 1000 individuals who are believed to have died in the custody of the Syrian Security forces since the unrest began. Armed opposition groups although to a lesser extent, have also committed abuses – torturing and killing captured Syrian Security forces and abducting and killing people suspected of working with the government. **Please hold in mind and pray for both the victims and perpetrators of violence.**

### Syrian and Palestinian refugees in Egypt

There are over 100,000 refugees from Syria, registered or awaiting registration, in Egypt. Under international law, Egypt has a responsibility to protect people fleeing the conflict. However, since the military takeover in Egypt, stricter entry requirements have been imposed and reasons sought for the deportation of refugees. Specifically, the Egyptian authorities are preparing to deport **13 Syrians** to Turkey and **28 Palestinians** to the Gaza strip. The group includes at least 13 children and 10 women. They are being held in a police station, the men with ordinary prisoners. Until recently they were handcuffed. Two of the children have health problems.

Around half of the some 500,000 Palestinian refugees living in Syria have been displaced by the conflict. More than 1,400 have been killed, the vast majority civilians, according to local activists. In the light of the difficult humanitarian situation caused by the continuing blockade on Gaza and the lack of any system for receiving refugees, Palestinians from Syria should not be forced to go to Gaza.

**Please hold in mind and pray for this small group of refugees, those responsible for their processing, and for all refugees worldwide.**

**A prayer you may like to use for the Syrian conflict.**

God of Compassion, hear the cries of the people of Syria,  
Bring healing to those suffering from the violence,  
Bring comfort to those mourning the dead,  
Strengthen Syria's neighbours in their care and welcome for refugees,  
Convert the hearts of those who have taken up arms,  
And protect those committed to peace.  
Inspire leaders to choose peace over violence and to seek reconciliation with enemies,  
And give us hope for a future of peace built on justice for all.

**USA**

**John Ferguson and Marshall Gore**

**Florida**

In last month's prayer sheet we highlighted the case of John Ferguson. He had been on death row for thirty five years. He was responsible for eight murders, but had been assessed repeatedly as a chronic paranoid schizophrenic. There was therefore a question of his competency. The execution of a prisoner who lacks understanding of the reason for, and the reality of his punishment, violates the US constitution. **John Ferguson** has now been executed.

**Marshall Gore** is in a similar situation. He was convicted of two murders in 1985 and 1998. In 2009, the Florida Supreme Court noted that his 'mental status' had been a 'recurrent theme' throughout the proceedings against him. In May 2013, he was sentenced to death. His state court lawyer raised the question of competency. The same psychiatrists who had assessed **John Ferguson** were appointed to assess **Marshall Gore**. At a final trial, after various complexities in the legal procedures, which may well have muddied the waters, an expert for the Defence stated that **Marshall Gore** was incompetent for execution, whereas two of the three psychiatrists for the Prosecution stated that he *was* competent and was faking mental illness to avoid execution. He was sentenced to death. Please hold in mind and pray for:

- Marshall Gore, his family and those working with him.
- The families of his victims
- The mentally ill, mistreated and untreated, caught up in the justice system worldwide.

Source for cases: Amnesty International – [www.amnesty.org.uk](http://www.amnesty.org.uk)

***“To clasp one's hands in prayer is the beginning of an uprising against the disorder of the world.”***

Please take this sheet away with you and use it in prayer and action. Your local Amnesty group can be contacted at <http://ely.amnesty.org.uk>.