



Aid to the
Church in Need

ACN AUSTRALIA

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A time of reflection and solidarity with the persecuted Church

Wednesday 25 November (#RedWednesday) ended the so-called #RedWeek, an international week aimed at raising awareness about the persecution of Christians around the world and the question of religious freedom generally. It was sponsored by the international Catholic pastoral charity and pontifical foundation Aid to the Church in Need (ACN).

Hundreds of important buildings and monuments, in Australia, Canada, Colombia, Brazil, the Czech Republic, Poland, the Netherlands, Austria, Slovakia, the Philippines, Ireland and the United Kingdom, to name a few countries, were lit up in red throughout the week for this purpose. Among them were the cathedrals of Montreal and Toronto in Canada, Manila in the Philippines and Armagh in Ireland, the Elizabeth Bridge in Budapest, Hungary, The Bridge of the Slovak National Uprising and the castle in Bratislava and the statue of Christ the Redeemer in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

In the Netherlands alone a total of 119 buildings were involved in the campaign, more than twice the number of the previous year. Peter Broeders, the national director of ACN Netherlands, explained that these numbers “reflect a growing concern over what we are seeing throughout the world,” where “authoritarian governments, terrorists and radical groups are attacking religious minorities” and where a “growing number of people are discriminated against, persecuted and imprisoned on account of their faith.”

In Australia, a number of cathedrals and churches were lit in red and Masses and prayer services were held to highlight and pray for suffering and persecuted Christians throughout the world.

ACN has this year published a report drawn up by the UK national office of the charity, entitled *Set Your Captives Free*, in order to draw attention to the many Christians unjustly imprisoned. During the launch of the event in London, one of the victims, Maira Shahbaz, a 14-year-old Christian girl from Pakistan, whose case is described in the report, gave her personal testimony via video link. She described how she had been abducted, forcibly converted and made to marry against her will, as well as being “blackmailed, tortured and badly abused.” Having escaped from her captor, she is now living in hiding. She said: “The lives of me and my family are at risk in Pakistan. We are constantly receiving death threats. We are extremely scared and concerned about our security.”

In various countries, #RedWeek also drew attention to the worrying situation of Christians in Nigeria. Archbishop Ignatius Kaigama of Abuja, the federal capital, asked for prayers for one of his priests, Father Dajo Matthew, who had been abducted just two days earlier, and at the same time recalled the many other victims of kidnappings among members of the Christian community. He emphasised,

in particular, the case of Leah Sharibu, who was abducted by the Boko Haram terrorist group and whose story is also included in the report Set Your Captives Free. Leah is a shining example of courage in the face of adversity, he said. He also asked not to forget the 112 schoolgirls abducted from their school in Chibok in the north of the country in 2014, who remain missing to this day.

ACN would like to thank everyone who took part in this year's Red Week events. Your support and participation are a great witness to Christians who are unable to speak freely, and who look to us to speak on their behalf.

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