

# RELEASE INTERNATIONAL 7x7 PRAYER ALERT

*Tuesday 9 January 2007*

Prayer support is crucial to those who suffer for their faith in Jesus. Please use these alerts to inform other Christians as well, and to facilitate prayer both in your church and other Christian meetings. This information can also be reproduced in church magazines and news bulletins, provided the source is acknowledged.

## **PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS NEED YOU!**

**Release International (RI) wants to recruit volunteers from around the UK and Ireland to represent the needs of persecuted Christians to their churches. Could you be a Church Rep? Your core role would be to receive and disseminate information, and encourage prayerful support for RI's ministry within your church. How you develop the role depends on the amount of time you have to give. Church Reps are a vital part of the RI team. Please consider prayerfully if you can join us – and pray that many others will take on this role too. To find out more, ring 01689 823491.**

## **1. CHINA**

The Chinese authorities upheld a strong seasonal tradition by raiding churches and arresting believers over Christmas.

Brother Lou Yuanqi from Xinjiang province was one of many house church leaders in jail over Christmas: he was arrested on December 23 – less than 30 days after he had been freed from a separate month-long spell behind bars.

He was arrested in October initially for organising house church meetings in the Yili city area. His second arrest in December was apparently to deter local Christians from holding Christian celebrations, according to China Aid. Brother Lou was released on bail on December 29, pending trial. The charges against him are not known.

On Christmas Eve, officials raided a young people's worship meeting in the Haidian district of Beijing, videotaping participants and taking ID numbers. The host church is that of Cai Zhuohua, another pastor spending Christmas in prison: he is serving a three-year sentence for printing Christian literature.

And in Inner Mongolia, police attacked a house church in Duolun county on December 29 and dragged three female church leaders off for 15 days' 'administrative detention'.

Meanwhile, prominent human rights lawyer Gao Zhisheng has been given a three-year jail sentence, suspended for five years. As 7x7 reported on December 19, a surprise guilty plea was entered on his behalf when he was tried in Beijing for 'inciting subversion'.

- Pray for the many Chinese pastors who have spent Christmas behind bars.
- Ask God to anoint His church in China so it experiences growth and refreshing. Pray for a new generation of passionate leaders to extend His kingdom.

## **2. PAKISTAN**

The extreme faith of a Christian woman and her teenage daughter under torture has won them international attention and – eventually – their release.

Poverty forced Nasreen Pervaiz and her daughter Razia to take up work as housemaids for a Muslim employer after Nasreen's husband died last September.

Initially, they were forbidden from practising their faith. Their boss and his wife ripped crosses from their necks; prayers were banned. Things went from bad to worse when they were ordered to renounce their faith – and they refused.

They were held as slaves, working unpaid in the day and spending the night chained in the basement. They were tortured often: on one occasion, they were threatened with injections of acid, according to Christian Solidarity Worldwide. Still they refused to deny Christ.

Their plight came to light when Nasreen's eldest daughter Sheeba went to visit her mother but was turned away from the house. She contacted her church elders, who appealed for help to the All Pakistan Minorities Alliance (APMA).

The APMA and its lawyers filed a petition at the Lahore High Court for Nasreen and Razia's release. They were duly rescued and are now living temporarily in a safe home.

Meanwhile, a year on from the brutal attack on Christians in Niale da Wara, Sangla Hill, Jubilee Campaign USA has revisited some of those who were injured. In particular they sought out Pastor Indriaz Masih, who was left brain-damaged, half-blind and paralysed when armed Muslims stormed the village.

A year ago, Jubilee had found him lying outside a hospital ward, where he'd been discharged without proper treatment. Today, his mind is 'miraculously' restored though his body is weak – and he is involved in a church in Islamabad. Nearly all the Christians in Niale da Wara have been forced to leave, after threats and persecution.

- Thank God for the remarkable faith and determination of Nasreen and Razia.
- Praise God for the recovery of Pastor Indriaz Masih of Sangla Hill. Pray that God would strengthen his fellow Christians, whether they have stayed in the area or not.

## **3. IRAQ**

Church leaders in Iraq are considering drastic measures to halt the exodus of Christians from their fractured nation.

Attacks on churches and their pastors continue, reaching a crescendo in the autumn after Pope Benedict's comments regarding Islam. In October, one priest was kidnapped and told to refute the Pope's address; he was later beheaded. Church leaders are now regularly abducted in Mosul and Baghdad.

One proposal on the table is that Christians should form an autonomous area within Iraq's Kurdish federal state, and specifically on the Nineveh plain, Iraqi Christianity's ancestral home. Kurdish leaders are keen to prove their democratic credentials by embracing minorities such as Christians, according to Compass Direct.

Another proposal is that Christians and other minorities should have a separate federal state of their own, amid reports that Kurdish police and militia are persecuting Christians.

Some believe Christian autonomy is the only way forward and say the Kurdish offer is the last real chance of saving the church. Others warn against establishing a Christian 'ghetto' – fearing it will only attract greater persecution. Chaldean Archbishop of Kirkuk, Luis Sako, told Compass Direct: 'Christians cannot live in isolation – we are in the north, we are in the middle of Iraq and we are in the south.'

The UN estimates that, since 2003, more than a million Iraqis have left their homeland, 40 per cent of them Christian. About 450,000 Christians remain – half the number in 1991.

- Pray for the church in Iraq, under severe pressure in a hostile climate.
- Pray that the exodus of Christians from Iraq would stop. Ask God to grant wisdom to Christian leaders considering political options to halt the flow of émigrés.

#### **4. NIGERIA**

A church in Kano state has been told to accept a feeble pay-off for having its land seized or face losing everything.

The actual building of the Combined Churches of Christ (HEKAN) church in Rogo was destroyed during religious violence in 2004. Since then, its pastor has been under pressure from local officials to sell them the site for £3,000. He has always refused.

Then, last November, the authorities began to build an Islamic school on the site. HEKAN church has now been told it must accept the compensation offer – or lose everything. The HEKAN congregation has met in the open air since 2004 – effectively in a building site.

- Pray for the leaders of the HEKAN church in Rogo, Kano state, who are in an impossible position. Pray that God would intervene to provide a new building.
- Thank God for the strong witness of a congregation worshipping in a building site.

*Sources: Amnesty International; China Aid; Christian Solidarity Worldwide; Compass Direct; International Christian Concern; Jubilee Campaign USA; The Voice of the Martyrs Canada.*

#### **PRISONERS OF FAITH MINISTRY:**

Our Prisoners of Faith Ministry provides pastoral care and practical support for Christians imprisoned for their faith. An email alert is sent free monthly, highlighting an individual Christian prisoner, giving prayer points and addresses for letter-writing. To receive these alerts, please contact the office or sign up by visiting our web site: [www.releaseinternational.org/prisonersoffaith](http://www.releaseinternational.org/prisonersoffaith)

#### **Our next Prayer Alert issue will be on Tuesday 23 January 2007.**

This prayer alert is part of Release International's 7x7 initiative to encourage prayer and action for seven years for seven countries where Christians have faced intense persecution: China, Indonesia, Nigeria, North Korea, Pakistan, Sudan and Vietnam.

Through our international network of missions, RI serves persecuted Christians in 30 countries around the world by supporting pastors and Christian prisoners, and their families; supplying Christian literature and Bibles; and working for justice. RI is a member of the UK organisations Global Connections, the Evangelical Alliance and the Micah Network.

#### ***To stop receiving the prayer alerts or change address, please write to or telephone:***

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