

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL PRAYER ALERT

Tuesday, January 10, 2012

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

December 15, 2011: BURMA – Kachin Christians targeted

There has been a series of attacks against the mainly Christian Kachin people in Burma. At the end of November soldiers fired mortar shells against civilians and burnt down homes.

In a separate incident, ten people, including seven children, were killed after an explosion rocked a Christian-run orphanage. The blast took place shortly after evening prayers. Sixteen children were injured, including two sons and a grandson of the Christian couple who run the orphanage.

Despite this, the authorities arrested the family in charge, Dayawng Tang Gun and his wife Ja Dim, alleging they had made the bombs. Residents suspect it was actually government officials who planted the explosives.

Minority groups within Burma, including the Kachins, have been fighting for independence from the military dictatorship for decades. Despite a show of reform from the Government, observers say attacks against minority groups generally have been increasing.

However, religious and human rights campaigners are encouraged by recent developments in Burma. The BBC reports that President Thein Sein has issued a communiqué ordering all military commanders in the Kachin area to stop offensive action.

(Sources: Compass Direct, BBC, *Time*)

- Pray for families of Christians killed and those injured in the recent attacks in Kachin State, and for Dayawng Tang Gun and his wife Ja Dim, who have been charged with bomb-making.
- Pray also for a genuine change of heart in the military government in Burma and a complete end to attacks against the Kachin people.

December 16, 2011: NIGERIA – Bombers target TV viewers in Christian areas

Militants have set off nail bombs at TV viewing centres in Jos, Nigeria. Three bombs went off on December 10 at centres in Christian areas where people gathered to watch a Spanish football match on cable TV.

Joshua Dabo, aged 35, was killed when one of the bombs exploded close to his head. Ten others were injured – four are said to be in a critical condition.

The home-made bombs, which contained nails, were constructed from sheet roofing and held together with car body filler.

Esther Matthew was watching the football match at one of the viewing centres when the bomb went off shortly after 10pm. She said: 'There was lightning, followed by an explosion. The next thing I noticed people around me were bleeding.'

Jos in Plateau State straddles the mainly Christian south and the predominantly Muslim north. Bomb attacks there have become more frequent, beginning with a blast on Christmas Eve last year, carried out by Islamic militants. Violence has claimed more than 1,000 lives in and around Jos in recent years.

The attacks appear to be intended to destabilise the area and stir up religious conflict. As they grow more commonplace Release partner Stefanos Foundation warns: 'Almost every family is now touched by tragedy. The situation seems to be getting out of hand. A state of anarchy is feared.' However, Stefanos adds: 'We are still hopeful that the situation can be averted and call for prayer for Nigeria.'

(Sources: Stefanos Foundation, AFP)

- Please pray for those injured in the latest bomb blasts in Jos, and for those grieving the loss of Joshua Dabo.
- Pray also that Christians will exercise restraint and forgiveness, and will not seek revenge.

December 20, 2011: NORTH KOREA – Pray for stability and peace after Kim's death

Christians in North Korea face a critical moment following the death of the country's leader Kim Jong-Il from a heart attack. North Korean television announced that the 69-year-old leader had died at 8.30am on Saturday, while travelling on a train.

Christians in North Korea have faced some of the harshest persecution on earth. In this land where a form of emperor worship is practised, Christians can be detained, tortured and removed from society. Some risk being shot by border guards as they try to flee the country to avoid persecution or famine.

Christians have also been sent to concentration camps. Human rights organisations say inmates – including those arrested for their faith – can face torture, starvation and execution. As well as religious persecution, Christians have suffered with all North Koreans famine and economic collapse following years of misrule.

Little is known about Kim Jong Il's nominated successor. His son Kim Jong-un is in his late 20s and was educated in Switzerland. That so little information is available indicates the isolation of what has become known as the hermit kingdom. Observers fear a power struggle ahead for control of the country, and a time of instability in the region.

South Korea, which is still technically in a state of war with the North, has put its military on alert.

This year Release has run a major campaign pressing for change in North Korea, and is presenting a petition to the North Korean authorities in January calling for religious freedom.

(Sources: BBC, Reuters)

- Pray that instead of instability, transition in North Korea will bring peace and freedom for all its citizens, including Christians.
- Pray that Release's campaign and petition will help to bring freedom of religion in North Korea.
- Ask God to grant wisdom to North Korea's new ruler, Kim Jong-un.
- Pray that the leadership transition will not lead to conflict in the region.

December 23, 2011: THANK YOU... for your support and prayers in 2011

In too many countries across the world, regimes continue to limit religious freedom – and yet, as we look back through 2011, we can clearly see many answers to prayer. We want to remind you that your prayers are 'powerful and effective' (James 5:16) – and to encourage you to continue to pray fervently for the persecuted church.

Your prayers were answered for several **Iranian** pastors, including Vahik Abrahamian and his wife Sonia, who resettled in the Netherlands in September. Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani from Rasht, meanwhile, has been told he may have to wait another year to learn whether his death sentence for 'apostasy' will be carried out.

Prayer helped to secure the release of **Afghan** Christian Said Musa, who was raised as a Muslim. Said, freed in February, was detained for ten months after video footage of Christians worshipping was shown on national television.

Chinese human rights lawyer Jiang Tianyong was freed after 60 days' detention earlier this year – though he remains under surveillance. Others are still waiting for their freedom. Beijing lawyer Gao Zhisheng, detained since February 2009, has just been given a three-year jail term for 'violating' a probationary sentence in 2006.

Christians in many nations need our prayers of protection more than ever at Christmas. In **North Korea**, Kim Jong-il's death brings uncertainty for Christians – whose religious freedom has been the subject of our *One Day* campaign this year. **Pakistani** Christians in Lahore, meanwhile, will find churches guarded by extra police over Christmas.

And, in **Nigeria**, where many Christians continue to live in fear of militant attacks, a woman was killed in a raid on Kukum Gida village in Kaduna state as recently as December 10.

In **Iraq**, there are heightened fears of sectarian violence after the formal withdrawal of US troops – and a spate of recent attacks on Christian targets. As recently as December 13, a Christian couple were shot dead in Mosul. In neighbouring **Iran**, Christians

reportedly fear a repeat of the wave of arrests last Christmas and new year – fears fuelled by senior public figures issuing threats against them in recent weeks.

Thank you again for standing with us – and with our persecuted brothers and sisters worldwide. We wish you all a joyful Christmas and a peaceful new year.

(Sources: Agence France-Presse, Compass Direct, Middle East Concern)

- Thank God for all the answered prayer this year.
- Please pray that persecuted Christians around the world will enjoy a happy and peaceful Christmas, free from fear.
- Pray for the countless Christians across the world who are separated from their loved ones, including prisoners of faith. Pray that they will know the peace and presence of our ‘Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace’ (Isaiah 9:6).

December 27, 2011: NIGERIA – Call for prayer and increased security after Christmas bombs target Christians

Militants launched Christmas Day bomb attacks on Christian worshippers in three Nigerian states. The blasts killed around 40 who had gathered to celebrate Christmas and injured scores more.

The largest of several attacks took place in Madalla, Niger state, near the capital Abuja, where militants detonated a car bomb outside a Christmas service. They set off other blasts in Jos, central Plateau state, and Gadaka, Yobe state, in the north-east. Christian-owned shops and a home were set alight in Potsikum, also in Yobe.

Islamist militant group *Boko Haram* claimed responsibility, calling for an end to democracy and the imposition of *Sharia* (Islamic law) across Nigeria, Africa’s most populous nation.

In the run-up to Christmas, *Boko Haram* set off nail bombs in TV-viewing centres in Christian areas. It’s the second year running they have targeted Christians at Christmas.

The Christian Association of Nigeria is demanding government protection for churches, warning that *Boko Haram* may be trying to instigate a religious war. They have called on Christians to be law-abiding but say that, if the government does not defend them, they will have to defend themselves.

Release partners believe the Islamists’ aim may be to stir up violent unrest that will tear the country in two, creating a separate north ruled by strict *Sharia* law.

(Sources: BBC, Agence France-Presse, Associated Press, Al Jazeera, *Daily Telegraph*)

- Please pray for those whose family members have been killed and injured as they celebrate Christmas. Pray that in their grief they will know the presence of Jesus, who is both Emmanuel – God with us – and the Prince of Peace.
- Pray that Christians will not allow themselves to be provoked into retaliation. Pray too that the Government will protect Christians where they are in a minority and deal effectively with the terrorist threat to their nation.

January 03, 2012: UGANDA – ‘Apostate’ bishop blinded in acid attack

At the start of a new year, we invite you to stand with us in declaring God’s lordship over all the earth and in praying that His peace and His presence will be with the persecuted church. Thank you for your continued support and prayers.

A bishop has been left blind in one eye and suffering severe burns after Islamist extremists threw acid over him.

Bishop Umar Mulinde, a former Muslim, is recovering in hospital in Kampala after the attack on Christmas Eve outside his Gospel Life Church International in Namasuba, six miles from the Ugandan capital. Doctors say they are fighting to save the sight in his other eye.

The 37-year-old bishop was attacked just before his church was to host a party after a seven-day revival – inviting ‘hundreds of new converts to Christianity’, reports Compass Direct news agency.

Bishop Umar says that he was approached by a man who called out, ‘Pastor, pastor,’ and then threw acid over his face. Others then threw acid on his back. His attackers fled, shouting *Allahu akbar* (‘Allah is greater’). A fatwa had previously been declared against Bishop Umar.

The bishop has received many threats and suffered several life-threatening attacks for leaving Islam and for his vocal opposition to *Sharia* (Islamic law) courts in Uganda. Bishop Umar, who had recently relocated for his family’s safety, has vowed to continue his campaign for the religious rights of those who leave Islam.

NEWS UPDATE:

Local Islamists and Muslim Fulani herdsman wielding firearms and machetes killed five Christians and left six more wounded in a raid on Ungwan Rami village in Kaduna state, Nigeria, on December 19. The assault came just nine days after a deadly attack on the Christian community of Kukum Gida in the same area (Prayer Alert, December 23, 2011). Nigerian Christians are still reeling from extremist bomb attacks on churches on Christmas Day (Prayer Alert, December 28, 2011). One of the targets – St Theresa’s Church in Madalla, near Abuja – has become a focus for national mourning. A suicide bomb planted at St Theresa’s by Boko Haram extremists killed at least 45 people.

(Source: Compass Direct)

- Pray God’s supernatural healing over Bishop Umar. Ask God to protect him and his family – and fill them with His perfect peace.
- Pray for Christians in Kaduna state, Nigeria, especially those in Ungwan Rami and Kukum Gida who have suffered recent attacks. Pray God’s peace over His church across Nigeria, particularly Christians in central and northern areas facing extremist threats.