

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL PRAYER ALERT

Tuesday, August 16, 2011

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.

August 03, 2011: SRI LANKA – Spate of attacks against Christians

Recent attacks against Christians in south and west Sri Lanka have left several people injured and homes damaged, according to Release partners.

On July 19, a mob of about 50 people attacked the homes of five Christian families in Dehiwinna, Badulla district, with clubs and rocks. A grocery shop was also demolished, reports the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka (NCEASL).

The attackers shouted threats, demanding that Christians leave the area. Several families fled and hid in the jungle for a while. One Christian was badly beaten and required hospital treatment for his injuries. Local police were informed and officers were sent in to patrol the area on subsequent nights – but no arrests have been made.

On July 10, a pastor in Ampara district was hospitalised after being beaten by a Buddhist monk and others. The unnamed pastor from Mount Carmel Church in Keviliyamaduwa had attended a meeting about land distribution convened by the monk – only to be attacked by those present.

The pastor, who was also later assaulted at his home, was taken to Ampara Hospital with injuries to his arm and severe pains in his stomach.

These are not isolated incidents – and in fact NCEASL publishes regular persecution incident summaries. On June 18, the temporary building of an Assembly of God church in Nuwara-Eliva district was damaged during the night. The pastor of the church has received threats for years, according to NCEASL.

And in Puttlam district, in western Sri Lanka, the Prayer Tower Church in Mahawewa was desecrated with excrement on June 5. Later on the same day, it was then raided by about 200 protesters carrying placards and clubs and demanding the church's closure. A lay preacher who tried to remonstrate with protesters was beaten.

Evangelical Christians especially face violence and opposition in this Buddhist-majority nation.

(Source: National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka)

- Pray for all Sri Lankan Christians who have suffered attacks and threats in recent months. Pray that God's rod and staff (Psalm 23) will protect and comfort them.
- Ask God to bless, protect and sustain Release partner NCEASL. Pray especially for its General Secretary, Godfrey Yogarajah, who has had an operation recently.

NEWS UPDATE

Sources have cast doubt on the reliability of some of the details contained in the Prayer Alert of July 22 focusing on an Iraqi house church leader. Pastor Jamal is still away from his family but it is now understood that he is being detained by security forces not militants.

August 08, 2011: PAKISTAN – Health concerns for two Christians detained for ‘blasphemy’

Release partners in Pakistan say they are concerned for the health and well-being of two Christian women detained for ‘blasphemy’ in Punjab.

Sharing Life Ministry Pakistan (SLMP) reports that one of the two, Agnus Bibi, is in such poor health due to a lung condition that she has been transferred to Faisalabad Civil Hospital.

Lack of medical care at Faisalabad District Jail where she has been awaiting trial for alleged blasphemy for six months meant that her health had deteriorated quickly. She has also reportedly suffered ill-treatment from Muslim prison staff – claims that the prison denies. ‘Her failing health caused her great mental stress and depression,’ reports SLMP, whose staff visited her in hospital recently.

Two guards have been assigned to her in hospital. Even so, SLMP says it is concerned for her safety, given that Christians accused of blasphemy are often the target of Islamist extremists, even before a conviction. Christian brothers Sajid and Rashid Emmanuel were shot dead outside the Faisalabad courthouse where they were on trial for blasphemy in July 2010 (*Prayer Alert, July 20, 2010*).

Meanwhile, Ruqiya Bibi from Kasur district, who is serving a life sentence for ‘blasphemy’ in Sahiwal Central Jail, is said to be in poor health because of an insect bite on her foot for which she has not received any medical treatment.

SLMP recently made it possible for Ruqiya’s family to visit her in jail – after a long separation. An SLMP staff member described as ‘heart-rending’ the scene of Ruqiya being reunited with her husband and children. They could see one another but could not touch because they were separated by iron bars and a fence.

‘She called her son and girl near the fence and kissed the fence like she kissed the kids,’ the SLMP staff member reported. ‘She was shedding tears continuously which showed her great pain and sorrow. Even the visitors of other prisoners got emotional seeing her.’

Ruqiya has been detained for the past three years and is currently being kept in solitary confinement, after threats from other prisoners. She has been promised safety in return for converting to Islam – but has refused and remained strong in her faith. SLMP reports that she and her husband, Munir, were both given life sentences but Munir was later released.

SLMP has been supporting both women and their families, providing financial and spiritual support. Neither family could otherwise afford to visit their loved ones in jail.

(Source: Sharing Life Ministry Pakistan)

- Ask God to protect and encourage Agnus, Ruqiya and their families. Pray that they will know God’s goodness, His healing, His provision and His peace. Pray that both women will be released immediately.

- Ask God to sustain and protect everyone involved in the work of Sharing Life Ministry Pakistan. Thank God for their powerful, life-transforming ministry which brings hope in desperate situations.

August 11, 2011: TANZANIA – Pressure mounts on Zanzibar’s Christian minority

Two churches serving the tiny Christian minority on Zanzibar island were burnt down in a week, amid mounting opposition to Christians on the archipelago.

In fact, Islamist extremists reportedly burned down two churches on Zanzibar island, which is part of Tanzania, within a four-day period. The Evangelical Assemblies of God Tanzania Church in Fuoni was destroyed on July 30 and the Free Evangelical Pentecostal Church in Africa, in the village of Kianga, was destroyed on July 27.

The congregations of both churches are said to be fearful and unsure now about where to meet. Tanzania’s Zanzibar archipelago is 99.9 per cent Muslim and only 60 Christian congregations are said to meet on the islands.

The persecution is not confined to Zanzibar. In June, a Seventh Day Adventist Church was destroyed in Konde on Pemba, the second largest island in the cluster.

Pemba pastors interviewed by Compass Direct news agency report that for several years now the authorities have obstructed their attempts to build churches, even on land they own. One reported that he had been threatened by local Muslims.

Compass Direct also reports that influential Muslims are building what appears to be a hotel on a 100-year-old burial site owned by the Anglican church on Zanzibar. Officials have failed to respond to a complaint issued by the church about construction work on land it owns about two miles from Zanzibar’s city airport.

A similar land seizure is reported in Wete city on Pemba island, where the Anglican church bought a burial site in Finya village in 2007, only to learn last November that a Muslim was claiming ownership of the site. The church says its appeals for help to the authorities, including the Tanzanian President, have so far fallen on deaf ears.

NEWS UPDATE

Two more Christians are reported to have died in custody in Eritrea. Religious rights charity Open Doors reports that the two women, 23-year-old Hiwet Tesfu and Zemame Mehari, 27, both died at the Alla military camp where they had been detained since being arrested at a prayer meeting in Dekemhare in April 2009. Both women had been in poor health but had been denied medical treatment, Open Doors reports. Both had also suffered torture. They were reportedly buried within the camp. *Prayer Alert* reported on July 28 that Eritrean officials had arrested at least 90 Christians since May and that 12 Christians were known to have died in custody since 2002. That figure now stands at 14, according to Release sources.

(Sources: Compass Direct, Mission Network News, Open Doors USA, Operation World)

- Pray for the Christian minority on Zanzibar who are experiencing mounting opposition from local hardline Muslims. Pray that the rights of Christians – including freedom of worship – will be respected and upheld by officials and local people alike.
- Please pray for the families of Hiwet Tesfu and Zemame Mehari. Ask God to comfort them and pray that they will stand firm in their faith.