

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL PRAYER ALERT

Tuesday, June 2, 2009

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.

PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS NEED YOU!

Release 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 the ministry within your church. How you develop the role depends on the time you have to give. Church Reps are a vital part of the Release team. Please prayerfully consider if you can join us – and pray that many others will take on this role too. To find out more, ring Gene on 01689 823491.

1. IRAQ – Five-year-old Christian boy kidnapped and killed

A five-year-old boy has become the latest casualty of what appears to be a concerted campaign to attack Iraqi Christians.

The body of Tony Adwar Shaweel was found in the Roofya area of Akra, two months after an unknown group abducted the child and demanded a \$50,000 ransom. He had been shot several times.

Kidnappings are still common in Iraq but Tony's death is widely seen as yet more proof that criminal gangs are specifically targeting the Christian community.

Four Christians have been killed in the city of Kirkuk alone in the past two months (*Prayer Alert, May 5, 2009*). The AsiaNews online news agency reports that a 34-year-old Christian teacher, Namir Nadhim Gourguis, was abducted from a primary school about 20 miles out of Kirkuk on May 14. The Chaldean Archbishop of Kirkuk Louis Sako has appealed to Muslim religious leaders in the area for help in securing Namir's release.

Overall, violence in Iraq has subsided – but attacks on Christians and other religious minorities have continued. The US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) reinstated Iraq on its list of 'countries of particular concern' in December, for tolerating 'ongoing, severe abuses of religious freedom'.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees reports that, while most Iraqis who have fled their nation want to come back, Christians are much more likely to register as refugees and seek asylum abroad. 'They simply do not feel safe enough [in Iraq],' Philippe Leclerc, UNHCR's acting representative in Damascus, told the Associated Press news agency. 'They cannot sufficiently count on state security or any other force to protect them.'

(Sources: Ankawa, AsiaNews, Associated Press, Baptist Press, International Christian Concern)

- Pray for Tony Adwar Shaweel's grieving family. Pray for the immediate release of teacher Namir Nadhim Gourguis.

2. INDIA – Church’s push for justice and restoration begins

The Indian church is helping hundreds of people in Orissa to seek compensation for the violence they suffered during last year’s anti-Christian riots.

So far the Archdiocese of Cuttack-Bhubaneswar has helped some 650 Christians file legal suits seeking compensation for everything from murder to property damage.

To deal with the flood of compensation claims, the state government has reportedly set up two fast-track courts in Kandhamal district, the epicentre of Hindu extremist violence. Thirty cases are already going through the courts.

Meanwhile, on May 12 police arrested Christians in Chennarayapatna, Hassan district, Karnataka, on trumped-up charges of fraudulent conversions after a group of Hindu extremists attacked them. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that militants entered Sidda Vinayaka School, where members of Every Home Crusade ministry were holding a prayer meeting. The attackers beat pastors K.K. Ramesh and P.S. Anjaneya and falsely accused them of fraudulent conversion; they also beat three Christians and burned Bibles. The two pastors were taken to the police station and released without charge later that night after intervention by GCIC.

The day before, Hindu extremists targeted Christians at Mondakai relief camp, Kandhamal, Orissa. The Global Council of Indian Christians reported that, under cover of darkness, extremists beating drums and chanting Hindu devotionals tried to enter the camp where about 1,500 Christian refugees have stayed since last August’s anti-Christian violence. Swasti Nayak, a Christian who was standing near the camp’s main gate, received minor injuries. Police patrolling the camp intervened soon after, keeping the crowd of attackers at bay. Christian leaders met with state authorities to demand additional police protection.

Across India Christians have welcomed the Congress Party’s victory in last month’s general elections, seeing it as a vote against Hindu extremism. The Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) suffered a humiliating defeat in Orissa.

(Sources: AsiaNews, Assist News Service, Compass Direct, The Hindu newspaper online, UCA News)

- Pray that the God of justice will uphold the cause of all Christians attacked for their faith in last year’s riots (Psalm 140:12).
- Pray for Christians in India who are still experiencing persecution at the hands of Hindu extremists.

3. IRAN – Urgent calls for release of two Christian women jailed without charge

Concern is rising for two young Iranian women sent to prison without charge – apparently for turning from Islam to Christianity.

Maryam Rostampoor, who is 27, and 30-year-old Marzieh Amirizadeh Esmaeilabad were detained almost two months ago when Iranian security officials raided their homes. The women are reported to be in extremely poor health and sharing a cell with 27 others in the notorious Evin prison, north-west Tehran. They have allegedly been subjected to sleep deprivation.

Maryam and Marzieh have reportedly been accused unofficially of being 'anti-government activists'. But their family and friends believe that they have been targeted because they were raised as Muslims but later became Christians.

Iran's Guardian Council has yet to rule on draft revisions to the penal code which could make apostasy (leaving Islam for another religion) a capital crime for men; under the apostasy Bill, women would be jailed for life (*Prayer Alert, February 10, 2009*).

Religious freedom is deteriorating for faith groups such as Christians and the Baha'is in Iran, according to US Commission on International Religious Freedom. Compass Direct news agency says that more than 50 Christians were arrested in Iran in 2008.

(Sources: Christian Solidarity Worldwide, Compass Direct, International Christian Concern)

- Pray for the immediate release of Maryam and Marzieh.
- Continue to pray that Iran's apostasy Bill will not become law.

4. INDONESIA – Christian families driven from their villages

Two families have been driven from their villages in West Java after they decided to leave Islam and become Christians.

One family returned from a mass baptism to find their landlord had decided – with the backing of the Muslim village chiefs – to throw them out of the property they were renting from him. The father of the family was also sacked from his job.

A second family in another village were also evicted from their home after they too were baptised.

Release is providing one of the families with funds to rent a new home and the other with capital to start a new business.

- Pray for these Christian families paying such a high price for their new-found faith.
- Thank God that whole families are coming to Christ in West Java.

WORLD UPDATE:

Have you seen our ground-breaking online news bulletin *World Update on the Persecuted Church?* This regular bulletin brings you face-to-face with the overcoming church with stories, video and pictures. It's an indispensable resource for church services or prayer and home groups – and is now going out on three TV channels: Genesis and Revelation on Sky, and the Omega Channel in South Africa. It's also available on our website: www.releaseinternational.org/webcast

Our next Prayer Alert issue will be on Tuesday, June 16, 2009.

Through our international network of missions, we serve 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. Release is a member of the UK organisations Global Connections, the Evangelical Alliance and the Micah Network.

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