

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL PRAYER ALERT

Tuesday, December 20, 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.

December 05, 2011: PAKISTAN – Death threats for evangelist challenging injustice

A Pakistani Christian has received death threats after condemning the murder of a Christian government minister – who was himself killed for opposing the blasphemy laws.

Evangelist Arif Ferguson, 36, and his entire family have had to go into hiding, following death threats from the Pakistan Taliban and others. Arif was first warned for sharing the Gospel among Muslims. More serious death threats followed after he made a statement to a local newspaper condemning the assassination in March of Minorities Minister Shahbaz Bhatti, who had spoken up against the blasphemy law.

Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan claimed responsibility for killing Shahbaz Bhatti – and the same group is now threatening Arif.

Arif, a laboratory technician, fled for Karachi after being tipped off that the militants were trying to track him down. But even there he received death threats, forcing the family of nine to go into hiding again. Arif and his sisters have lost their jobs as a result.

Arif said: 'I trust in Jesus. If I die, it will be for Christ.'

- Please pray for Arif and his family – for their protection, support and encouragement.

December 09, 2011: IRAQ – First attacks on Christian 'safe haven' in Kurdish north

Attacks on Christian businesses in the Kurdish north of Iraq have caused deep concern among local Assyrian Christians for whom the region has been a safe haven.

Riots broke out on Friday in the northern town of Zakho in Dohuk province in the semi-autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan – after a Muslim *mullah* spoke out about the sale of alcohol. Reuters news agency reports that gangs set fire to more than 30 shops and bars and damaged three hotels, most of which are Christian-owned businesses.

Later on Friday, rioters tried to attack Christian quarters of Zakho, but the authorities intervened to protect these neighbourhoods. Further violence erupted the following day in the provincial capital, Dohuk, where groups attacked shops and a cultural club in two

Christian areas. On Monday, minor incidents of similar violence were reported near the Kurdish capital, Erbil, and in Sulaymaniyah.

Local sources alleged that the attacks in Zakho had been organised by a pro-Islamic political party.

Canon Andrew White, the vicar of St George's Church in Baghdad and President of the Foundation for Relief and Reconciliation in the Middle East, told Release: 'We had placed so much hope on the fact that there was one place in Iraq where Christians could find security and a future. That place was Dohuk.

'Sadly, with the violence in the last few days, this hope has now gone. People are petrified and are saying, "What happens to us now?" Will we stand with them and support them in this great difficulty? Faith shines a light into the darkness, hope into despair, gives a future where there is no future.'

Since the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, thousands of Iraqi Christians have fled north to areas such as Kurdistan, which became largely autonomous in 1991.

(Sources: Compass Direct, Reuters)

- Pray for peace and religious tolerance to be restored in Iraqi Kurdistan.
- Pray that this latest violence will prompt Christians in Iraq to draw even closer to God rather than be tempted to leave their homeland. Ask God to bless the peace-building ministries of Canon Andrew White and the Foundation for Relief and Reconciliation in the Middle East.