

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL 7x7 PRAYER ALERT

Tuesday 5 February 2008

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 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 Gene on 01689 823491.

1. CHINA

The director of a labour camp has apologised for wrongfully jailing a group of Christians freed in a humiliating U-turn for the Chinese authorities.

Three female house church leaders and their four male colleagues were released unconditionally from a camp in Hubei after a 'stunning legal victory', reports China Aid.

After apologising to the Christians, the head of the labour camp said that he and fellow officials 'had learned their lesson and would seek to do a better job in the future'.

A total of nine Christian leaders were sentenced to between 12 and 18 months' 're-education through labour' last August. Two of the nine served their terms at home, for medical reasons.

The nine were arrested in July, at a Sunday service in a private home, on suspicion of 'making use of [an] evil cult organisation to undermine the enforcement of state laws'.

China Aid helped push for a legal review of the case, which was heard by Hubei Provincial Re-education through Labour Administration Committee last month. Overturning the original conviction, the committee decreed that it was not 'based on clear facts' or 'supported by sufficient evidence'.

Fresh reports confirm that the four male leaders were freed on January 11, the women 12 days later. As 7x7 reported on 16 October 2007, the nine included the parents of young children.

Meanwhile, in Kashi, Xinjiang province, the authorities have just arrested house church leader A Li Mu Jiang and his wife over an alleged 'national security issue'.

- Praise God for the release of the nine Christian house church leaders in Hubei. Thank God that the labour camp director apologised publicly for their detention. Ask God to move in the life of this man and his colleagues.
- Pray for the immediate release of A Li Mu Jiang and his wife.

2. NORTH KOREA

A Christian aid worker sparked a major diplomatic incident when he was arrested in North Korea apparently because of 'his religious views'.

Je Yell Kim, a Canadian citizen born in North Korea, was released last month after almost three months in custody – but only after a frenzy of diplomatic exchanges.

The North Korean authorities arrested Kim on November 3 as he crossed the country's border with China. The 61-year-old was freed and deported in late-January, following a visit to Pyongyang by Canada's ambassador to South Korea Ted Lipman.

Though he was reportedly charged with breaching 'national security', the precise reason for his arrest is unknown. Reuters news agency quotes local aid workers saying that Kim had been caught with notes for a sermon in his pocket. Other sources said that he had written a statement under interrogation in which he admitted to trying to set up a church.

Over 10 years, Kim, a pastor and dental technician based in Edmonton, Canada, has made many trips to Rason, a poor area in the north-east of North Korea. He has set up several dental and medical clinics and trained local people, with the authorities' blessing.

Edmonton papers report that Kim has held religious services for foreign aid workers in Rason. At the time of writing, his family had not made any comment about his release.

- Praise God for Je Yell Kim's release. Pray that he can continue his work.
- Pray that the North Korean authorities would be increasingly open to aid workers coming into their territory, so Christians can bring light and life.

3. PAKISTAN

The gunman who shot dead a young Christian evangelist in Pakistan used his victim's mobile phone to tell his family he had been murdered.

Sajid William, who was in his 20s, was shot three times in the chest as he returned home from his office in Peshawar, North West Frontier Province, on January 17. His wife heard the news shortly afterwards – from her husband's killer.

William managed the district office of Shelter Now International, a Christian relief and development agency. He was also an active member of his local Assembly of God (AOG) church – and father to an infant daughter.

A pastor of the AOG church in Peshawar told International Christian Concern: 'We believe that William was murdered for his faith and was a martyr.' William's family has reportedly registered a case with police but no arrests have yet been made.

Meanwhile, police in Punjab have successfully tracked down a young Christian girl abducted, forcibly converted to Islam and married to a Muslim man. This is a rare success story among many reported incidents of young Christian women being abducted by Muslim men – and then disappearing.

Tahira Salamat, 20, was discovered at her abductor's home four months after she vanished from Khanewal district. It took more than two weeks for Tahira's family to persuade police to open an investigation into her disappearance.

- Pray for the family of Sajid William, particularly his wife and young daughter. Pray that they will stand firm in their faith.

- Thank God that Tahira Salamat has been reunited with her family. Pray that the authorities will do more to quash discrimination against the Christian minority.

4. TURKEY

The widow of a Christian tortured and murdered for his faith in eastern Turkey has said she wants to visit the murder suspects in custody, as their trial gets underway.

Susanne Geske told the media that she was 'waiting for the right time' to approach the five young Muslims accused of killing her German husband Tilmann and two Turkish Christians, Necati Aydin and Ugur Yuksel.

The three were murdered at a printing house in Malatya on April 18 last year (7x7, 1 May 2007). The defendants, who have pleaded guilty, are university students aged 19 and 20.

'I don't want to ask them questions: I just have something to say,' said Susanne. 'My children are asking, "When will we go to them?"'

The first of the five defendants Hamit Ceker, who took the witness stand on 14 January, said their aim had been to gather incriminating evidence against Christians, not kill them. The court heard that the murders were part of a broader plot to stop Christian missionary activity in Malatya.

Ceker told the judge the situation had only turned 'tense' when Aydin had told the five Muslim attackers, 'We are all the children of Jesus.'

The court interrogation of the four remaining suspects is set for 25 February.

- Thank God for Susanne Geske's courage. Ask God to comfort all three families.
- Pray God's protection over Turkish Christians, who face mounting opposition from Turkish nationalists and Islamist radicals.

Sources: Canwest News Service; China Aid; Christian Solidarity Worldwide; Compass Direct; Edmonton Journal; Edmonton Sun; International Christian Concern; Reuters; The Star (Canada); The Voice of the Martyrs Canada.

RI'S NEWS WEBCAST:

Have you seen RI's ground-breaking online news bulletin *World Update on the Persecuted Church* yet? 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. www.releaseinternational.org/pages/downloads/world-update-webcast.php

Our next Prayer Alert issue will be on Tuesday 19 February 2008.

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:

Release International, PO Box 54, Orpington, BR5 9RT, UK.

Tel: 01689 823491

General enquiries: info@releaseinternational.org

Website address: www.releaseinternational.org