

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL 7x7 PRAYER ALERT

Tuesday 1 April 2008

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.

1. VIETNAM & LAOS

Release International is increasingly concerned about 15 Hmong Christian families arrested in Laos, who could be repatriated to Vietnam.

It is now more than five weeks since the Laotian authorities raided two villages in Bokeo district – Ban Sai Jarern and Fai – and seized 58 believers, including women and children.

Many of those arrested are thought to be church leaders who had fled persecution in Vietnam. If deported, they are likely to face brutal treatment – even death.

The arrests are further evidence of the Laotian authorities' crackdown on Hmong Christians. The following day, a court sentenced nine Hmong church leaders to 15 years each in jail because their ministries had grown 'beyond acceptable levels'.

These nine had been arrested last July during raids on suspected separatist rebels at a large evangelical church in Ban Sai Jarern – the same village targeted this February. At least 13 innocent Christians died in the assault last year (*7x7, 21 August 2007*).

Hmong refugees are regarded with particular suspicion inside Laos. They are viewed as either anti-communist rebels or supporters of Laotian separatists.

The authorities in Vientiane have so far refused to disclose where the 58 Bokeo Christians are being held. A source told Compass Direct: 'What will happen to them is greatly feared and unknown.' One of the Ban Sai Jarern church leaders arrested last July – Dzung Tho Siong – was reportedly sent back to Vietnam in September and has since disappeared.

Meanwhile, eight ethnic Khmu pastors from Oudomxay province, Laos, were arrested as they tried to enter Thailand for meetings on March 18. Their whereabouts are unknown.

Pray:

- Pray for the safety and release of the 58 Hmong believers arrested in Bokeo. Pray too for the release of the eight pastors from Oudomxay.
- Pray that international pressure will prevent the Laotian authorities from deporting the Hmong refugees back to Vietnam.

Act:

- Write a polite letter expressing your concern over the recent mass arrest of Hmong Christians in Laos to: His Excellency Mr Soutsakhone Pathammavong, The Embassy of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, 74 Avenue Raymond-Poincaré, 75116 Paris. Fax: 00 33 1 47 27 57 89. **Please do not mention Release International in your letter.**

2. PAKISTAN

Thousands of Christians brought the city of Gujranwala to a standstill with a noisy protest over an attack on a church.

The main route through the city was blocked when the Christians parked tractors laden with rubbish across a major intersection and stayed put for over two hours.

They staged their demonstration the day after a mob started tearing down the walls of a church in Garjakh, a Christian neighbourhood of the city. RI sources say the mob was trying to seize a community centre belonging to the church.

When the pastor and a few members of his congregation intervened, the group assaulted them and started to pelt the church with stones. But the mob turned on their heels and fled when Christian neighbours arrived on the scene in large numbers.

Demonstrators on March 19 demanded that local officials arrest the masterminds behind the church attack within 24 hours – or face further protests. At the time of writing, police had made one arrest.

The row is apparently part of a long-standing dispute over the land the church is built on. International Christian Concern says the church bought the land from a Muslim man in the 1980s but his sons have since contested the sale.

- Thank God for the boldness of Christians in Gujranwala. Pray that the authorities will intervene to ensure the church does not suffer further attacks.
- Pray for wisdom for Pakistan's new prime minister Yusuf Raza Gillani and his government as they confront the threat of Islamist radicals in Pakistan.

3. CHINA

A Christian jailed for distributing Christian tracts among Muslims is said to be suffering severe torment and abuse in a prison full of Muslims.

Liu Huiwen was said to be 'limping' and 'very thin' when his wife Miao Hui Lian visited him behind bars in Dongxiang, Gansu province, last month. Unable to speak openly, the 39-year-old told his wife that he was being 'bullied constantly'.

When his wife travelled to Beijing to report the abuse, she was warned to stay at home and make no further complaints. She is now under heavy police surveillance.

Liu was sentenced to 18 months' imprisonment in November after being arrested in April for distributing gospel leaflets entitled 'A letter to our Muslim friends' at a funeral. Villagers in the Muslim-majority area reported him to police and he was later charged with publishing literature that 'discriminated against and insulted people of ethnic minorities'.

In fact, his flyer simply spoke of Jesus Christ as 'the only person in this world who overcame sin and death' and appealed to Muslims to turn to Christ, says Compass Direct.

A Compass Direct source also reports that food and other items brought in for Liu by his relatives have been confiscated. Liu's wife and four-year-old son are said to be staying with Liu's parents as they have no means to support themselves while Liu is in jail.

- Ask God to protect and strengthen Liu Huiwen and his family during their ordeal.
- Thank God for Liu's boldness in handing out his Christian leaflets. Pray that the flyers will have an impact, even now.

4. INDONESIA

An Islamist terror network responsible for many crimes against Christians in Central Sulawesi may be resurfacing – via a publishing network.

Many had hoped that at least some parts of Jemaah Islamiah had disbanded in the fragile peace which followed years of violence in the province, as 7x7 reported as recently as 4 March 2008. But a new report by the International Crisis Group, a leading think-tank, says the militant group appears to be regrouping.

The ICG calls on the Indonesian government to keep closer tabs on a network of printers, translators, marketing and distributing agents through which, it warns, Jemaah Islamiah may be spreading its doctrines.

Some of the network's published works are texts downloaded from websites linked to al-Qaeda, says the BBC. Others are articles by well-known radicals from the Middle East who have renounced violence.

The ICG says it is not advocating that these publishing networks should be banned but that the government should use existing legislation to scrutinise the network more closely.

Coinciding with the ICG's warnings were 'credible reports', relayed by the Barnabas Fund, that Jemaah Islamiah had threatened to attack Christians over Easter.

No such attacks have been reported. But growing evidence of a resurgence of Jemaah Islamiah will not be welcome news for Indonesia's Christians.

- Ask God to strengthen the faith of His church in Indonesia, amid rumours of resurgent terrorist cells.
- Pray that the authorities in Indonesia will do more to protect Christians from terrorist attack.

Sources: Barnabas Fund; BBC; Compass Direct; International Christian Concern; International Crisis Group; The Voice of the Martyrs (VOM) Canada; VOM USA.

PRISONERS OF FAITH MINISTRY:

Our Prisoners of Faith Ministry provides pastoral care and practical support for Christians imprisoned for their faith. An email alert is sent free monthly, highlighting an individual Christian prisoner, giving prayer points and addresses for letter-writing. To receive these alerts, please contact the office or sign up by visiting our web site: www.releaseinternational.org/prisonersoffaith

Our next Prayer Alert issue will be on Tuesday 15 April 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.

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

Tel: 01689 823491

General enquiries: info@releaseinternational.org

Website address: www.releaseinternational.org