

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL 7x7 PRAYER ALERT

Tuesday 29 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.

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 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. CHINA

A spate of recent arrests in Xinjiang suggests that China will not easily be cowed by international pressure to clean up its religious rights record before the Olympics.

As the world trains its sights on Beijing, one Xinjiang Christian is facing the prospect of being executed – and many others are being thrown into jail.

The case of Alimjan Yimit, a house church leader and ethnic minority Uyghur (first reported in 7x7 on February 19, 2008), is arousing particular concern. Alimjan, a young professional and father-of-two, has been accused of 'illegal religious activities', 'subversion' and 'endangering national security', a crime which can carry the death penalty.

It's believed that Alimjan has been targeted because of his faith. A verdict on his case is expected imminently, according to Christian Solidarity Worldwide.

Concern is also growing for another Uyghur Christian, Wusiman Yiming, who is serving two years' 're-education through labour' after being convicted last September of 'divulging state secrets'. The outcome of his appeal, scheduled for mid-April, has not yet been made public but Wusiman is known to be suffering from malnutrition and a serious hand injury.

And in Kashi city, officials rounded up 46 Christians at a Bible study in a private home on April 13. Most of the group were freed the next day: two were detained for a fortnight.

Meanwhile, in Beijing, bookstore owner Shi Weihai who was held for more than a month for publishing Christian literature last year (7x7, *January 8, 2008*) has been rearrested. The 37-year-old, whose bookshop is near the Olympic village, has been denied family visits. His wife Zhang Jing is particularly concerned as Shi has diabetes.

Pray: Ask God to build the faith of Uyghur Christians in Xinjiang. And thank Him that the Uyghur church is reported to be growing. Pray particularly for the release of Alimjan Yimit and Wusiman Yiming – and for Shi Weihai in Beijing.

Act: Write a polite letter to the Chinese authorities, expressing concern over recent arrests of Uyghur Christians generally and of Alimjan Yimit and Wusiman

Yiming in particular, to: Her Excellency Mrs Fu Ying, Embassy of the People's Republic of China, 49-51 Portland Place, London W1B 1JL. Fax: 020 7636 2981. **Please do not mention RI in your correspondence.**

2. PAKISTAN

Officials in a troubled corner of Pakistan have agreed to the introduction of *Sharia* law as part of a ceasefire deal with Islamist extremists.

The government of North West Frontier Province has given a previously outlawed militia group the go-ahead to roll out strict Islamic law – in return for an end to fighting.

The deal included the release from jail of Maulana Sufi Muhammad, leader of the Tehreek-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat Muhammadi (TRISM) militia now permitted to 'continue its struggle for the enforcement of *Sharia* law through peaceful means'.

Muhammad was sentenced to 10 years in prison in 2001 for terrorist activities – but has had the rest of his sentence dissolved by the authorities. The provincial government expresses its 'confidence in the good faith' of the TRISM – with one proviso: 'If this respect should fail, we are ready to use any means.'

Some observers insist this is another signal of the 'Talibanisation' of Pakistan.

The agreement follows close on the heels of a report by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, which concludes that 2007 was the worst year in Pakistan's history. It highlights concerns about dwindling religious freedom in North West Frontier Province and tribal areas contested by Islamist extremists. Sectarian violence claimed 580 lives last year.

- Pray for the small Christian community in North West Frontier Province as they face the prospect of *Sharia* law being introduced officially.
- Pray that national and provincial governments in Pakistan will ensure minority groups' rights are upheld when negotiating with extremist groups.

3. VIETNAM

Vietnamese evangelicals have broken their silence and made a public plea for global action on behalf of the suffering church in Vietnam.

The Evangelical Church of Vietnam (ECVN) has issued 'an appeal for prayer', after the government failed to respond to ECVN protests over persecution.

This is an unprecedented move for an officially recognised group whose leaders usually shy away from confrontation with the authorities, according to Compass Direct.

The ECVN appeal, addressed to 'the church of God everywhere', follows persistent petitioning about discrimination against Christians, church property being confiscated and state interference in church affairs. The ECVN executive committee says it has been forced to 'go public' because the government has ignored its protests for months.

Evangelicals provided the government with a list of 265 church properties seized by local officials since 1975. Although a few small buildings have since been returned, the government has refused to discuss the seizure of several key properties, including a seminary campus in Nha Trang and an international church building in Ho Chi Minh City.

Attacks on Christians often raise no response from the authorities, it also claims. The ECVN cites the specific example of a pastor and his congregation beaten up by a swarm of Buddhist monks in Tra Vinh in January and November last year. 'There were witnesses from the local government but these people only stood aside, leaving the people of God to be beaten up ruthlessly by hundreds of people,' the ECVN claims.

- Pray for the church in Vietnam, as it pushes for greater religious freedom.
- Pray that Vietnam's communist leaders will reconsider their repressive policies on religious groups such as Christians.

4. SUDAN

Sudan is holding a national census to help determine how power and wealth is divided between north and south ahead of next year's elections.

The census was a key component of the 2005 peace accord, bringing to an end a bitter civil war which pitted the Arab and Muslim north against the mainly Christian or animist south.

But the census has been hugely controversial. Southern politicians have already said its results should not be used to make key decisions such as the demarcation of the north-south border. Many southerners, forced to flee violence during the civil war, have not yet managed to return home – which, they fear, may skew the results, says the BBC.

The Sudan Tribune reports that census forms for the south were not even in the right language 'in most cases'. In Greater Equatoria, for example, most people speak English – but census forms were in Arabic. In Darfur to the west, civilians and rebel groups are refusing to take part, claiming that, without peace, a census is meaningless.

- Pray that politicians and civilians will unite in a commitment to build the peace.
- Pray that vexed questions like border demarcation and dividing up Sudan's oil revenues can be resolved, to consolidate the peace.

Sources: AsiaNews; BBC; China Aid; Christian Solidarity Worldwide; Compass Direct; Human Rights Commission of Pakistan; International Christian Concern; Sudan Tribune; VOM Canada.

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 website: www.releaseinternational.org/prisonersoffaith

Our next Prayer Alert issue will be on Tuesday 13 May 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