

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL 7x7 PRAYER ALERT - SPECIAL EDITION -

Tuesday 5 August 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.

SPECIAL 31-DAY PRAYER FOCUS ON CHINA

The world is training its gaze on Beijing, waiting for the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games this Friday. Away from the cameras, China's unregistered church is bracing itself for yet more persecution – as the government ratchets up its crackdown on so-called 'illegal religious activities'. In this special edition of 7x7, Release International (RI) invites you to join with Christians worldwide in a month-long strategic prayer campaign focused on China. For the next month, we will be interceding for policy reform and Christian revival in this vast communist nation, standing with the persecuted church and asking God to extend His kingdom there. We offer here a prayer a day for 31 days – you choose when to begin your own prayer campaign. Our next standard 7x7 will be sent out on 2 September.

Day 1

The Sichuan earthquake in May caused the death of some 69,195 people. Despite the scale of the tragedy, the Chinese government refused to allow house churches to send donations to the relief effort: some house church members were even arrested for trying to help in the quake zone. Please pray that the Chinese government will change its hostile attitude towards these Christians and let them engage in charity work.

Day 2

The Chinese authorities appear to be waging a concerted campaign of persecution against the ethnic minority Uyghur Christians of Xinjiang province, north-west China. Most Uyghurs are Muslim. Several Christians have been arrested on suspicion of separatist sympathies or leaking state secrets recently, including Alimjan Yimit. In May a judge sent Alimjan's case back to the Public Security Bureau due to insufficient evidence – but Alimjan remains in detention. Pray for Alimjan's swift release.

Day 3

On 2 July, 2008, house church leader and Christian rights activist Hua Huiqi was evicted from his rented home in Beijing. Officials broke into the apartment with a hammer and threw the family, including Hua's 90-year-old father, into the street with their furniture. Hua's brother suffered serious injury to his eye when officers beat him. The government is rumoured to want to detain Hua during the Olympic Games: he was jailed for six months last year. Pray for a new home for Hua's family and for their safety.

Day 4

Shuang Shuying, the elderly mother of Beijing house church leader Hua Huiqi, is serving two years in jail – apparently because the authorities want to force Hua to give up his human rights and church work. She was accused of 'damaging government property'

when she protested over being arrested with her son last year. Her health is frail: pray that God will uphold and strengthen her and make her a powerful witness for Christ in jail.

- RI continues to campaign for Shuang Shuying's release. To join our campaign, view our one-minute video alert at: www.releaseinternational.org/current (scroll down to view). Pass it on to friends too.

Day 5

In January 2008, Beijing bookstore owner and house church leader Shi Weihuan was arrested on suspicion of printing illegal Christian materials. He has been illegally held in a detention centre in Beijing for nearly five months without formal charge or trial. Shi's family members have not been allowed to visit him or send him the medication he needs for severe diabetes. Pray for Shi's release. Ask God to keep him in good health and to comfort his family.

Day 6

Thank God for the powerful witness of a house church in Beijing whose members' homes were raided recently by officials. Despite their ill-treatment, Christians pronounced a blessing over officials and shook their hands after the raid. Pray that this powerful Christian witness will touch the hearts of these officers and open their eyes to their own brutality.

Day 7

In June 2008, senior house church leader Zhang Mingxuan was detained for several hours – to prevent him from meeting with an EU official in Beijing. Officials closed down his orphanage early this year; Zhang's family have been forced to move home more than ten times since Christmas. The government reportedly wants to move the family out of Beijing. Pray for strength and courage for Pastor Zhang, his family and four orphans living with them. Ask God to provide them with a permanent home.

Day 8

In the last year Chinese police have detained some 600 Christians and sentenced 38 of them to more than a year in prison. Please pray that the Lord will grant His strength, His comfort and His wisdom to those in prison for their faith. Pray that they will remain faithful and be salt and light to their fellow prisoners.

Day 9

In May, the government held a conference on 'administering Christian gatherings' in Beijing. Recently, many house churches have had Sunday services interrupted by local policemen, and some landlords have been forced to stop renting out their property to Christians for worship meetings. Please pray that house churches in Beijing will find new places to worship. Pray that their leaders' hearts will be on fire for God, despite regular harassment.

Day 10

Government leaders from across the globe are attending the Beijing Olympics. Please pray that these senior politicians will urge the Chinese government to improve its religious rights record, particularly in its dealings with the unregistered house church movement.

Day 11

Liu Huiwen from Gansu province is serving 18 months in jail for handing out Christian leaflets at a Muslim wedding in April 2007 and so 'insulting ethnic minorities'. He is said to be suffering bullying and abuse in a prison full of Muslims. Pray for Liu and his family: his wife Miao Hui Lian has been under police surveillance since she complained about Liu's ill-treatment.

Day 12

Despite the authorities' determination to keep a tight rein on house churches in Beijing, the Olympic Village will have a prayer centre for athletes. Please pray that Christian athletes will be bold in sharing their testimonies and the gospel with their fellow Chinese athletes and others involved in the Games.

Day 13

Even a year ago, there were rumours that government agents had infiltrated every house church in Beijing to keep watch on their activities and, presumably, root out pastors considered to be 'troublemakers'. This news must have bred distrust between house church members, with suspicion focused especially on newcomers. Pray that God's Holy Spirit would help unite His family in churches which have been under intense pressure for months.

Day 14

Many poorly built school buildings collapsed during the Sichuan earthquake in May, killing many pupils. Due to China's one-child policy, many parents lost their only child in the tragedy. Some held silent protests outside courtrooms, calling for justice, but were beaten by police or even arrested. Ask the Lord to use His people to bring comfort, friendship and hope to the bereaved.

Day 15

Many Christians in Beijing are volunteering to help in the smooth running of the Olympics, because they have a heart to share the gospel through their service. Please pray that God will give them courage and wisdom to share their faith.

Day 16

Daniel Ng and his wife are Australian citizens who own a large company in China. Since August 2007, they have been barred from leaving the country and their assets have been frozen. Their firm was shut down by the authorities amid allegations of illegal religious activities – based on the fact that the company has a Christian ethos. Please pray for God's protection for Daniel and his wife. Pray too that the Lord will raise up more Christian business leaders to bring His light into the business community.

Day 17

In May 2008, a prominent house church leader from the Uyghur community, Luo Yuanqi, was detained in Xinjiang province on charges of 'inciting separatism'. He has been badly abused in custody. Pray for physical and spiritual healing for Luo and ask God to bless his ministry.

Day 18

It is illegal in China to share the gospel with people under the age of 18. Many churches do not have an active Sunday School programme and some do not recognise the importance of children's ministry. On 28 February, 2008, 11 children in Xinjiang were detained for a day when they were caught attending a children's Bible study. Pray that more churches will catch the vision for teaching children to grow up following Christ.

Day 19

Many churches had property and land confiscated by the communist regime in the 1950s – and many congregations are still pressing for this property to be returned. The Chinese authorities have resisted this. In Fanzhi, Shanxi, a pastor and several other Christians were injured recently when they remonstrated with builders redeveloping land which had belonged to them before the government seized it. Pray for justice to be done for these churches' sake.

Day 20

The Chinese administration under President Hu Jintao has the stated aim of creating a 'harmonious society'. Please pray that Hu Jintao and his ministers will be more open-minded about Christians and recognise the contribution they already make to social harmony by being good citizens.

Day 21

Chinese constitutional law grants citizens the right of religious freedom, yet many house church members do not know how to summon this right in defending themselves against allegations of 'illegal' religious activity. Christian lawyers are starting to educate Christians about their constitutional rights and have helped bring several successful lawsuits as a result. Ask God to protect these Christian lawyers and their families as they undertake this high-risk work.

Day 22

China has been fiercely criticised over its harsh repatriation policy for North Korean refugees found in its territories. North Koreans repatriated from China – about 4,000 a year – are reported to face brutal treatment as defectors, even execution. Pray that China will recognise the brutality of the Pyongyang regime and scrap its repatriation policy.

- RI has just launched a new campaign urging China to end its policy of repatriating North Korean refugees. Join us by gathering signatures on a petition which can be downloaded at: www.releaseinternational.org/current

Day 23

Missionaries to China have done much to build her church and spread the gospel. The Beijing Olympics will bring more than 500,000 foreigners into China. Pray that among these visitors will be some who are called to work with the church in China and extend God's kingdom in the nation.

Day 24

Against a backdrop of persecution and suffering, misunderstanding and lack of communication have sometimes conspired to cause rifts between different Chinese house church movements. Please pray for unity between these movements. Pray that church leaders will work together to spread the gospel.

Day 25

Pastor Zhang Zhongxin was sentenced to two years at a labour camp in Shandong province recently for belonging to an 'evil cult'. He had a varied ministry, which ranged from training to preaching, over a wide geographical area. Pray that Pastor Zhang will be able to continue his ministry during his detention.

Day 26

College students who turn to Christ on campus face worldly pressures once they step out into the workplace – particularly during China's economic downturn this year. There is an urgent need for church workers to disciple these new Christians and keep in touch with them as they leave campus. Pray that God will raise up good and faithful servants to minister to these young people.

Day 27

Some house church leaders are misinterpreting the Bible and leaving their families behind to serve the Lord. They want to respond to China's urgent need for Christian ministers – but they may pay a heavy personal price: family breakdown. Pray that church leaders in China will find the right balance between family priorities and spreading the good news.

Day 28

Cai Zhuohua, a house church pastor from Beijing, was jailed between 2004 and 2007 for distributing Bibles for free in poor areas where people could not access Bibles or could not

afford them. The Chinese government recently held an exhibition in the US to try to prove that China not only has sufficient Bibles but is a major exporter of them. Pray that God will provide sufficient Bibles to meet the needs of believers in China.

Day 29

Jiang Zongxiu, 34, was beaten to death in 2004 for carrying Scriptures: she left behind an eight-year-old son. Her family is still waiting for justice: Jiang's body has not been returned to her family and her attackers have not been punished. Pray that Jiang's family will be comforted by the love of Christ and will see justice done.

Day 30

Despite its recent economic downturn, China is the world's fastest-growing economy – a position which carries considerable political clout. Pray that, while much of the international community courts this emerging superpower, nations of influence will continue to put pressure on Beijing to clean up its human rights record in the future.

Day 31

The Beijing Olympics have inspired churches and believers all over the world to pray for China. Pray that this prayer campaign will gather momentum and that the Lord will bring revival to the nation of China.

Source: China Aid Association.

RI'S NEWS WEBCAST:

Have you seen RI's 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/pages/downloads/world-update-webcast.php

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 amount of 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.

Our next Prayer Alert issue will be on Tuesday 2 September 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