

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL 7x7 PRAYER ALERT

Tuesday, February 24, 2009

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 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 the 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 Release 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

Shuang Shuying's dying husband clung on to life until she was released from jail – but he passed away the following day.

Ninety-one-year-old Hua Zaichen was unconscious when his wife was finally able to visit him in hospital and Shuang Shuying, who is 79, was able only to hold his hand. As 7x7 reported on January 27, the Chinese authorities refused to let Shuang Shuying visit her ailing husband before her two-year jail term was up.

It has since emerged that prison officials tormented Shuang by saying she could visit her husband – if she agreed to inform on other Christians. She refused. As her son, Hua Huiqi said, 'My mother would rather suffer than surrender and betray our brothers and sisters.'

Since her release on February 8, Shuang Shuying has issued a public statement saying she was tortured in jail. She says she was forced to drink her own urine and to stand in a prison yard at night – naked and stock-still while mosquitoes attacked her body.

But Shuang also said she had been hugely encouraged by the prayers of other Christians: 'I felt greatly strengthened and empowered which has enabled me to continue to live.' Shuang Shuying, who is from Beijing, was convicted of 'damaging state property' in 2007. She believes it was a ploy to force her son, a church leader, to inform on other Christians.

Meanwhile, Christian lawyer Gao Zhisheng was arrested again on February 4, in Shaanxi province. His whereabouts are not known. His disappearance coincided with the release of a letter he wrote in 2007 detailing torture he suffered during an earlier spell of detention. Gao claims he was beaten and given repeated electric shocks over 50 days.

Gao's letter was released on the same day a Chinese delegate to a UN review of China's human rights record insisted that his nation would 'never torture' religious believers.

(Sources: China Aid, Compass Direct)

- Pray for the immediate release of lawyer Gao Zhisheng. Pray too for his family.

- Thank God that Shuang Shuying has been released and was able to see her husband, albeit briefly, before he died. Pray God's peace over her and her family.

2. NIGERIA

A Nigerian father-of-six has been freed from jail early after an appeal court ruled his conviction for blasphemy by a *Sharia* court was unsafe.

Sani Kibili walked free after a long legal battle to secure his release – and a ruling that his original conviction in October 2007 was based on insufficient evidence.

A *Sharia* or Islamic court in Kano town, Kano state, sentenced Sani to three years in jail, after three men accused him of blaspheming Islam's prophet Mohammed.

Sani's lawyer, who was appointed by religious rights charity Open Doors UK, issued a statement saying that, as a Christian, Sani should not have been tried in a *Sharia* court without his permission. His lawyer added that the trial was 'riddled with irregularities'.

Sani, who is 55, has since said that he faced a great deal of hostility from Muslim inmates in the prison – but that he used the opportunity to tell many people about his faith.

'God never makes a mistake,' Sani said. 'His work in our lives is perfect. He took me to school and I learned so much.'

(Sources: Assist News Service, Open Doors UK)

- Praise God for the early release of Sani Kibili. Pray that he will be allowed to live in peace and in safety with his family now.
- Continue to pray for the church in Nigeria's northern *Sharia* states: Christians are under pressure to conform to strict Islamic law and to end their church activities.

3. NORTH KOREA

An American missionary group has opened an 'underground university' in South Korea to train North Korean Christians to spread the gospel among their compatriots.

The group, Seoul USA, reports that it is now offering a 12-month intensive training course in Seoul to North Koreans wanting either to return home as missionaries or to reach out to North Korean refugees in other nations.

The missionary group reports a growing trend for 'North Korean exiles who are eager to return to China and North Korea to reach their countrymen'.

Meanwhile, the already strained relationship between North and South Korea has deteriorated even further. Communist Pyongyang announced recently that it is 'scrapping all military and political agreements signed with the South', the BBC reports. Seoul is demanding an end to Pyongyang's nuclear weapons programme – while Pyongyang accuses Seoul of deliberately trying to provoke a confrontation.

(Sources: BBC, BosNewsLife)

- Pray for all the students who will enrol in Seoul's underground university. Praise God for their courage and ask Him to fill them with His Holy Spirit.
- Pray for wisdom for political leaders in both North and South Korea.

4. INDIA

Christians in Orissa who lost their homes in last year's violence fear they may now find themselves unable to vote in the forthcoming elections.

Thousands of Christians fled their homes when Hindu extremists went on the rampage last August in Orissa and several other states. Most of these Christians lost their identity papers – and their right to vote in the federal and local ballots scheduled for April and May. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) estimates that more than 70,000 Christians may be affected.

The GCIC is now lobbying India's Election Commission to ensure that displaced Christians are registered as voters. The authorities in Kandhamal district have said they will hand out new identity papers – but will require displaced people to claim them in person. However, many homeless Christians are too frightened to return home to their original villages.

Furthermore, government compensation payouts of \$200 per person are insufficient. AsiaNews reports that many Christians are forced to buy 'shacks in other communities'.

(Sources: AsiaNews, Global Council of Indian Christians)

- Pray that the Indian authorities will ensure that full voting rights for displaced Christians are upheld in forthcoming ballots.
- Pray God's healing over everyone affected by last year's anti-Christian violence.

NEWS UPDATE:

A Christian couple in Iran – Jamal Galishorani and his wife Nadereh Jamali – have been released on bail, amid concern they could be charged with apostasy (*7x7, February 10, 2009*). The charges against them are still unknown. A third Christian arrested on the same day last month, Hamik Khachikian, has been released without charge. Continue to pray for the release of Jamal and Nadereh, who both have a Muslim background. And pray Iran's Guardian Council will reject a Bill proposing to make apostasy a capital offence. (Source: Compass Direct)

WORLD UPDATE:

Have you seen our 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/webcast

Our next Prayer Alert issue will be on Tuesday, March 10, 2009.

This prayer alert is part of our 7x7 initiative to encourage prayer and action for seven years from 2002 for seven countries where Christians have faced intense persecution: China, Indonesia, Nigeria, North Korea, Pakistan, Sudan and Vietnam.

Through our international network of missions, we serve 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. Release is a member of the UK organisations Global Connections, the Evangelical Alliance and the Micah Network.

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