

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL 7x7 PRAYER ALERT

Tuesday, January 13, 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 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. ERITREA

The Eritrean authorities have detained scores of Christians in what appears to be a fresh wave of mass arrests.

More than 100 men, women and children from different denominations are reportedly behind bars following a government crackdown across several regions, including Asmara.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide, the human rights organisation, cites unconfirmed reports that some detainees may even have 'died from injuries' sustained under torture due to lack of medical treatment.

Among those arrested was Eritrea's most senior paediatrician, Dr Michael Mehari, who is a member of the Kale Hiwet church in Asmara and the father of four young children.

The religious rights organisation Release Eritrea reports that several teachers at a church mission school in the town of Dekemhare, south-east of Asmara, were also arrested in the crackdown. Some of these teachers are thought to be in their 60s and 70s.

All the Christians detained in the latest crackdown, which began in late-November, are said to have been transferred to a military facility. Release Eritrea points out that detainees are not allowed visits from relatives.

Eritrean Christians have been under intense pressure since May 2002 when the government banned all but four religious groups: the Orthodox Church, Sunni Muslims, Roman Catholics and Lutheran Evangelicals.

(Sources: Christian Solidarity Worldwide, Release Eritrea)

- Pray for all the Christian families affected by the recent wave of arrests in Eritrea. Pray particularly for Dr Mehari and his family.
- Pray for a radical change in the governing regime's mindset so that Christians are no longer perceived as a threat to national security.

2. INDIA

Christians in Orissa feared a violent Christmas – but have instead been celebrating the first signs of an interfaith push for peace in the troubled state.

Hindu extremists' threats of a state-wide strike or *bandh* on December 25 failed to materialise – and Christmas celebrations passed off peacefully, amid heightened security. In fact, in many places, Hindus 'expressed solidarity with the Christians and joined the Christmas celebration', according to Orissa Follow Up, a church training organisation.

There are huge challenges ahead, not least the task of resettling thousands of people displaced by recent violence. Hundreds are still hiding in forests.

The Supreme Court has directed the Orissa state government to take all necessary steps to protect religious minorities – or resign. Judges directed the Orissa authorities to rebuild churches destroyed in recent months.

The violence appears to have subsided but tensions remain high. In Orissa's Gajapati district, extremists warned people to observe the Christmas Day *bandh* or be killed. There was a heavy police presence in the area and no reported violence. And in Hyderabad in Andhra Pradesh, a group of pastors and church elders were severely beaten by Hindu militants who attacked them on their way home from a prayer meeting on December 23.

Hindu extremists launched several weeks of attacks against Christians after one of their spiritual leaders, Laxmanananda Saraswati, was murdered in Kandhamal in late-August. Hindu militants blame Christians for the murder – despite the fact Maoists have claimed responsibility for it.

(Source: Assist News Service, Christian Post, Friends of Orissa, Orissa Follow Up, VOM Canada)

- Praise God for signs of peace and reconciliation in Orissa after weeks of bloodshed. Pray that moderate religious leaders will help promote peace.
- Pray for Christians still in displacement camps or living rough who face an uncertain future.

3. CHINA

The Christmas and New Year celebrations brought no respite for Chinese Christians as police and security officers went on the offensive.

On December 21, Beijing pastor 'Bike' Mingxuan was detained yet again in Wulanhaote in Inner Mongolia, where he was due to preach. He was sentenced to 15 days' administrative detention for 'operating an illegal organisation' and held in a cold, dark cell without warm clothes or blankets. Fortunately, he was freed within 24 hours after an international outcry.

Then, on Christmas Day, at least two house churches were raided – one in Bozhou, Anhui province, and one in Qitai, Xinjiang province. A total of nine leaders are still in detention.

Meanwhile, nine Christian women were arrested as they took part in a nativity play in Yucheng, Henan province, on Christmas Eve: four remain in detention. On the same day, officials beat and detained a group of Christians who were helping to rebuild homes in Jingjia village in Sichuan province which was devastated by the earthquake last May.

Earlier, on December 17, police, government officials, developers and a huge mob demolished the Chengnan Christian Church in Tinghu, Jiangsu province. Less than 24 hours previously, the church had won a court case to protect their building from demolition.

China Aid is reporting that three leaders of a house church in Tai Kang, Henan, arrested in December (7x7, *December 23, 2008*), were sentenced to a year in a labour camp.

(Sources: China Aid, Voice of the Martyrs Canada)

- Pray for all those Christians who suffered persecution over Christmas. Pray for the immediate release for those in detention – and God's rich blessings over them all.
- Pray that 2009 will see greater religious freedom for China's long-suffering church.

4. PAKISTAN

A Christian prisoner is appealing for his jail sentence to be commuted because he is now partially paralysed after being tortured in custody.

Emanuel Masih from Faisalabad was jailed for five years last May for allegedly kidnapping a child. Emanuel's family and lawyer insist that the charges were false and that he was framed by a Muslim policeman whose son had had a fight with Emanuel's son.

Emanuel was arrested on the kidnap charge in 1999, along with his brother-in-law Amin Masih. In custody, they were regularly beaten with iron rods, which left Emanuel's arms and legs paralysed. They were eventually released on bail – but it took nine years for the courts to reach a verdict.

Emanuel's health has deteriorated so much that in late December he was hospitalised for a time. It is said he has only survived in jail because Amin feeds and washes him.

Lawyers for Release partner CLAAS (Centre for Legal Aid Assistance and Settlement) filed a petition for Emanuel's release to Pakistan's Home Secretary who declared him 'incapacitated'. Under Pakistan law, incapacitated prisoners can be released without a court order if proper facilities are not provided for them. The decision to free Emanuel now rests with the prison governor.

(Source: Compass Direct)

- Pray for the immediate release of Emanuel and Amin Masih.
- Pray for justice for these Christian men, whose lives appear to have been destroyed over a petty squabble.

Our next Prayer Alert issue will be on Tuesday, January 27, 2008.

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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