

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL 7x7 PRAYER ALERT

Tuesday, April 21, 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. INDIA – Religious liberty in the balance as India goes to the polls

The outcome of elections in India over the next few weeks could be key in deciding the future for India's long-suffering Christians.

The BBC predicts that the poll will be 'an exceedingly close race' between the Indian National Congress, which has been in government for the past five years, and the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The size of India's electorate – about 714 million – means that the ballot is phased between April 16 and May 13.

The church's attention is focused particularly on Orissa, the epicentre of anti-Christian violence at the hands of militant Hindus last year. Violence broke out last August when a Hindu extremist leader Laxmananda Saraswati was murdered in Kandhamal district. Christians were accused of the murder – despite Maoists' claims that *they* were to blame.

In Orissa, the BJP has based its electoral campaign on anti-Christian sentiment arising from Saraswati's murder. Christians fear a victory for the BJP here would bring further persecution. One of the candidates in Orissa's provincial elections is Dara Singh, a Hindu extremist convicted of murdering Australian missionary Graham Staines and his sons in Orissa in 1999.

The BJP has promised to set up a 'permanent consultative mechanism' to boost interfaith dialogue between Hindus and Christians if it wins the national elections. This announcement has had a sceptical response from many Christians.

There has also been concern that Christians made homeless during last year's riots may not be allowed to vote because they have lost their ID papers.

(Sources: AsiaNews, ANS, BBC, Evangelical Fellowship of India, Jubilee Campaign USA)

- Pray for India's church as it watches and waits for the outcome of the polls.
- Pray that the Indian electorate will vote en masse for religious tolerance.

2. CHINA – Pastor ‘Bike’ arrested for questioning yet again

The Chinese authorities have seized Beijing pastor ‘Bike’ Mingxuan yet again – and threatened to kill him unless he gives up his ministry.

Pastor Bike, head of the Chinese House Church Alliance, was staying at a friend’s home in Beijing when more than a dozen police officers arrested him and took him to a local police station. ‘They searched me all over my body,’ Pastor Bike told ChinaAid, a Release partner. ‘They abused me and threatened to kill me.’

Three hours later, Pastor Bike was handed over to another group of officers who took him by train to his hometown, Nanyang in Henan province, where he was questioned again. He was later released – but his bank account, holding nearly £15,000, was seized.

As 7x7 has frequently reported, Pastor Bike and his family have endured a litany of abuse at the hands of the Chinese authorities – from having their orphanage shut down in 2007 to being evicted from several properties in Beijing during and after last year’s Olympics.

In a statement issued through ChinaAid, Pastor Bike called on Christians worldwide to ‘pray for the Chinese public security authorities... that our Lord Jesus Christ would change their hearts, that they would stop persecuting house churches’.

(Sources: BosNewsLife, ChinaAid)

- Pray for the public security authorities persecuting Chinese house churches.
- Praise God for Pastor Bike’s resilience and resolve to spread the Gospel.

3. SUDAN – Bashir supporters hit back at Christians

Life for Christians in Sudan is getting tougher – as the president’s supporters suspect them of siding with prosecutors who accuse him of war crimes.

Compass Direct news agency reports that ‘orchestrated attacks’ on Christians are on the increase since the International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for President Omar al-Bashir. Pro-government militias reportedly believe that churches are in favour of efforts to bring Bashir to justice for alleged war crimes in Darfur, western Sudan.

The latest attack was on a church in Chat village in the Nuba Mountains, central Sudan. The building was completely destroyed when armed militia attacked on March 27, sending the congregation fleeing for their lives. The militia are alleged to receive government support.

The building was home to the Sudanese Church of Christ (SCC) and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC). EPC pastor Aburahaman Tai is still recovering from injuries he suffered when he was attacked earlier in the month, allegedly by the same militia.

SCC president Barnabas Maitias says religious freedom for Christians in the mainly Arab and Muslim north of Sudan has deteriorated since the 2005 peace deal. Churches are denied land for building – or find their worship subject to surveillance. Christian festivities are restricted and church organisations are not recognised by the authorities.

Barnabas says that life is particularly hard for Christians with a Muslim background living in north Sudan. ‘Most churches in Khartoum are housing [such believers] who have no place to stay or get their daily basic needs,’ he told Compass Direct.

(Sources: BBC, Compass Direct)

- Ask God to bless His church in Sudan with a strong sense of purpose and unity.
- Pray that the authorities in north Sudan will do more to defend religious liberty.

4. IRAQ – Four Christians killed in two days

Four Christians have been murdered in Iraq in the space of two days – confirming the church's fears that persecution is far from over.

Three Christians – Nimrud Khuder Moshi, Glawiz Nissan and Hanaa Issaq – were murdered in Dora, a Christian neighbourhood of Baghdad, on April 2. The previous day, Sabah Aziz Suliman, 60, was killed in Kirkuk, in the north of the country.

All four were ethnic Assyrian Christians in their 50s or 60s and all were murdered in their homes. April 1 is the Assyrian New Year and a time of festivities and family gatherings.

The people responsible for these latest murders have not yet been identified but Islamist militants and other armed groups have specifically targeted Christians in the instability that followed the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Archbishop Louis Sako, Chaldean archbishop of Kirkuk, says that 750 Christians have been murdered in Iraq in the past five years. As many as 100,000 Christians are said to have left Iraq for countries such as Syria, Jordan and Turkey.

(Sources: Ankawa.com, International Christian Concern, Release International)

- Pray for the families of all four Christians murdered earlier this month.
- Pray for courage, boldness, unity and peace for Iraq's beleaguered church.

SPECIAL PRAYER REQUEST FROM ANDY DIPPER, RELEASE'S C.E.O:

'I strongly encourage you to listen to a programme called *Twin sisters, two faiths* on BBC Radio 4 today (Tuesday, April 21) at 8pm. In the 40-minute broadcast, Caroline and her identical twin Elizabeth talk about their faith: Caroline is a Christian, Elizabeth is a Muslim. Their mum, who was terminally ill with cancer, has recently died. Caroline and her family lived with me and my family for two years and we are close friends. Please pray that the Christian message of hope and love comes through powerfully. Pray that people will feel challenged about their faith, not take offence. And pray for spiritual protection for Caroline and her family. Thank you.'

ERITREA DAY OF PRAYER: MAY 24

Please join Release in a day of prayer for Eritrea on Sunday, May 24 – and encourage your church to get involved too. We are asking our supporters to collect signatures for our petition calling on the Eritrean Government to respect the religious rights of its citizens. Also, you could incorporate prayers for Eritrea into your Sunday service. For more information and to download our petition, visit www.releaseinternational.org/current

Our next Prayer Alert issue will be on Tuesday, May 5, 2009.

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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