

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL 7x7 PRAYER ALERT

Tuesday, April 7, 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

The campaign for the release of Beijing lawyer Gao Zhisheng is gathering pace – as Release sources suggest he may be suffering torture.

Release partner ChinaAid has launched an online petition calling on the Chinese authorities to release Gao, who was detained on February 4 at his relatives' home in Shaanxi province (7x7, February 24, 2009). His family do not know where he is.

His wife Geng He recently released a letter that Gao had written two years previously, detailing abuse he suffered in detention in 2007. In that letter, Gao spoke out about 50 days of torture he endured – despite official warnings that he should keep quiet. Release sources suggest that he may be suffering similar abuse now.

As 7x7 reported on March 24, Gao's wife and children – their 16-year-old daughter Geng Ge and son Gao Tianyu, who is five – have fled to the US.

Gao rose to international prominence after taking on the case of Pastor Cai Zhuohua, who was jailed for three years in 2005 for printing Christian literature. Gao, a relatively new Christian at the time, reported then that officials had threatened to kill him (7x7, December 6, 2005). In 2007, Gao, a Nobel Peace Prize nominee, was himself given a three-year jail sentence, suspended for five years, for 'inciting subversion'.

ChinaAid is also requesting prayer for Alimjan Yimit, the Uyghur Christian from Xinjiang province detained since January 2008 on suspicion of leaking state secrets abroad (7x7, February 19, 2008). Alimjan was reportedly seen at Nongsanshi Hospital in Kashgar, near his prison, on March 31, and eyewitnesses say he cried out repeatedly, 'I'm sick. Tell my lawyer to come quickly to see me.' His hands were bound and he was escorted by police. Alimjan's lawyer had been allowed to see him the previous week for only the second time since his arrest; Alimjan was then 'in excellent health', his lawyer said.

(Sources: ChinaAid, Release International)

- **Pray** for the immediate release of Gao Zhisheng and Alimjan Yimit. Pray that both men will stay true to Jesus and that their families will know God's presence.
- **Act** by signing ChinaAid's online petition calling on the Chinese authorities to release Gao Zhisheng. Go to: www.FreeGao.com

2. INDIA

A church-run orphanage in Orissa was destroyed by fire when Hindu militants attacked the home for the second time in seven months.

A fire started during the night of March 20 completely gutted the orphanage in Padampur, Bargarh district, although no one was hurt. However, last August, 20-year-old teacher Rajni Majhi was burned alive as she tried to protect children from Hindu militants trying to torch the orphanage (7x7, *September 30, 2008*).

The orphanage's director Edward Sequeira is determined to continue his ministry in Padampur to poor Dalits or 'untouchables', who fall outside the caste system.

'In spite of the climate of intimidation, we have to breathe life of hope into these people,' says Edward. 'The cross is always present in the life of a Christian.'

The incident has renewed fears that Hindu extremists are still active in Orissa, the epicentre of anti-Christian violence which swept through several Indian states last year.

Hindu militants went on the rampage in August after one of their spiritual leaders was murdered in Kandhamal district. Maoist rebels later claimed responsibility for his death. The murder last month of another Hindu leader has reignited fears of a backlash against Christians, even though Maoists are believed to have been behind this latest killing also.

(Sources: AsiaNews; Christian Today, The Voice of the Martyrs Canada)

- Pray for all the children and staff at Edward Sequeira's orphanage in Padampur.
- Pray that lasting peace will be restored in Orissa.

3. NORTH KOREA

The underground church of North Korea is preparing for growth – even as the United Nations slams Pyongyang for its continuing human rights abuses.

North Korean society is so 'unstable' that Christians there believe the current repressive regime may be close to collapse, according to a new report by Open Doors USA. North Korean Christians are said to have started a prayer campaign focusing on evangelism inside the 'hermit kingdom' and on unity within the church body.

Their situation remains very dangerous, however. Most ordinary North Koreans are suffering severe food shortages and Pyongyang's recent sabre-rattling against South Korea has led officials to instruct citizens to gather '15 days' worth of war provisions'.

Also, the authorities are said to have stepped up their surveillance of Christians, and house searches are said to be even more intensive than usual. It is considered a criminal offence in North Korea to profess a 'faith' in anyone other than President Kim Jong-il.

Meanwhile, the UN's Human Rights Council has passed a resolution expressing concern at 'ongoing grave, widespread and systematic human rights violations' in North Korea. It

has also extended by a year the mandate of the Special Rapporteur responsible for monitoring the human rights situation in the country.

(Sources: Christian Post; CSW; Open Doors USA; UN Human Rights Council)

- Join North Korean Christians in praying for religious freedom in their nation.
- Pray for the thousands of North Korean Christians jailed for their faith.

4. PAKISTAN

The signing of the peace deal in Swat Valley has prompted hundreds of Christians to return home – but the start of *Sharia* rule means they are wary of going to church.

An estimated 500 Christians are now said to be living in this troubled part of North West Frontier Province. Many have recently returned from nearby districts where they had fled during months of fierce fighting between Islamist militants and government troops.

For the past two years, Christians have suffered intense persecution, including kidnappings and aggression at the hands of extremists (*7x7, November 13, 2007*).

Peace has held since the signing of the peace accord in February – but the ceasefire was conditional upon the government handing over Swat Valley to the Taliban and *Sharia* law. This means Islamic codes of practice – such as women wearing veils – will apply to all citizens, including non-Muslims.

Compass Direct news agency quotes the pastor of a church in central Swat as saying that his congregation are staying home – and watching and waiting. ‘People don’t come to the church as they used to,’ he said.

Local Taliban have reportedly promised ‘equal opportunities’ for all faiths in Swat Valley – but Christians have yet to be reassured that these promises will be honoured.

(Source: Compass Direct)

- Ask God to protect and multiply the 500 Christians in Swat Valley.
- Pray that local Taliban will honour their promise of religious tolerance.

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, April 21, 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.

Release International, PO Box 54, Orpington, BR5 9RT, UK

Tel: 01689 823491

General enquiries: info@releaseinternational.org

Website address: www.releaseinternational.org