

# **RELEASE INTERNATIONAL 7x7 PRAYER ALERT**

**Tuesday 21 June 2005**

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This is the regular Prayer Alert service of Release International.

Prayer support is crucial to those who suffer for their faith in Jesus. Please use these alerts to inform other Christians as well, and to facilitate prayer in your church and in other Christian meetings. The information can also be reproduced in church magazines and news bulletins, provided the source is acknowledged.

Our next Prayer Alert is due for issue on 5 July 2005.

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2. Muslims and Christians in the Indonesian town of Tentena have stressed their commitment to peace in the wake of last month's bomb attack in a crowded market.
3. Thousands of displaced Sudanese are on the move after January's peace deal – but there are fears that the peace process is not progressing as it should.
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1. About 100 house church leaders are still in custody after police and security officials swooped on 100 house churches in China's north-eastern Jilin Province.

Sixty house churches were raided simultaneously in Changchun, Jilin's capital city, on the morning of May 22, during Sunday worship. Further raids in Jiutai, a suburb of Jilin, followed five days later.

Up to 600 church members and leaders were detained after the raids but most were released after between 24 and 48 hours of interrogation.

One of the church leaders who was detained but later released, Zhao Dianru, reports that 'about a dozen' police and public security officials burst into his home at 5am on May 22, as he was praying.

They searched his property without a warrant, confiscated 20 boxes of Christian books then arrested him on charges of 'using other means to instigate and disturb social stability'. No mention was made of his church activities.

Dianru, 58, was held at Jiutai City Detention Centre in a suburb of Changchun until June 6.

According to China Aid, Dianru, who is currently overseeing about 18 house churches in his area, was asked to join the official registered church on three separate occasions recently. He declined.

The 100 church leaders still in custody include professors from Changchun University and targeted congregations include many students and young intellectuals. The raids are believed to be part of a concerted attempt to stamp out house church influence on university campuses in the area.

The sheer scale of the campaign suggests the direct involvement of central government, sources say.

- Pray for the prompt release of all the Jilin house church leaders currently being detained.
- Ask God to strengthen and bless His church in Jilin. Pray that these raids would encourage not intimate the congregations that were targeted.

2. Muslims and Christians in the Indonesian town of Tentena have stressed their commitment to peace in the wake of last month's bomb attack in a crowded market.

Police have now arrested 13 suspects - including two former government officials – but the motive for the attack in Central Sulawesi remains unclear.

Initially, observers suspected an extremist attack as reported in 7x7 on June 7. Some now believe it was an attempt to cover up a corruption scandal; others claim it was a ploy to trigger renewed conflict in the region.

Rev Rinaldy Damanik, the Tentena-based peace campaigner jailed until last year, chaired a meeting of Muslims and Christians, the day after two bombs exploded in the town, killing 21 people. Muslim cleric Adnan Arsal was also a key figure in the meeting.

Rev Damanik was later quoted in The Jakarta Post as saying Muslims and Christians had agreed not to blame one another for the attack and had vowed to help police find the culprits.

It has now emerged that among those arrested are Abdul Kadir Sidik and Elvis, former government officials who were previously convicted of embezzling 2.3 billion *rupiah* (£134,000) from funds allocated to refugees affected by conflict in Poso district. They were granted early release from jail on this embezzlement charge.

Kadir and Elvis' former prison warden is among those arrested in connection with the Tentena bombing, as are three other prisoners involved in the embezzlement scandal. Two of these three were also accused of being involved in the beheading of Christian leader Sarminalis Ndele from Pinedapa; the pastor had blown the whistle when he realised funds were not reaching refugees.

Compass quotes a 'source' who visited Tentena just days before the bombing as saying, 'Based on the bombing, there are a few who want to revive the conflict.'

Meanwhile, the market bombings have prompted some Muslim leaders to call on the government to adopt Sharia or Islamic law across the whole of Indonesia, to combat violence and corruption.

- Thank God for the united front presented by moderate Muslims and Christians in Tentena. Pray that they will be a formidable force in pushing for greater religious tolerance in their town and across Poso district.
- Pray that extremist elements in Central Sulawesi bent on reigniting interreligious tensions would be opposed at national and local level by ordinary people committed to peace.

3. Thousands of displaced Sudanese are on the move after January's peace deal – but there are fears that the peace process is not progressing as it should.

The BBC reports on a group of 6,000 people who are trekking 400km from West Equatoria to Western Bahr El Ghazal, hacking their way through forests and crossing rough terrain to avoid minefields. They are having to 'cut down trees and build bridges' to make their mammoth journey which they began in April. Aid organisations have now begun to help them with food drops.

Their homes in Raja, which they fled four years ago, have all been cleared and will have to be rebuilt.

This group are among four million internally displaced people in Sudan, most of whom are southern Sudanese living in northern Sudan in camps outside Khartoum and Omdurman. There is as yet no official structure in place to help displaced people return home.

Whether their efforts to return home will be rewarded with peace has yet to be seen. Sudan's more cynical observers point out that deadlines for the drafting of a new democratic constitution which might pave the way for free elections have not been met.

A report in the New York Post last month claimed that 'a stream of military personnel and materiel' is still flowing into southern Sudan.

Meanwhile, Sudan's biggest opposition party, the Umma party, says it will boycott the power-sharing government due to take office in July. Umma leader Sadiq al-Mahdi claims that neither group making up the new government – the Islamic Khartoum regime and southern rebels – has been democratically elected.

- Pray for the 6,000 Sudanese trekking through western Sudan back to their home in Raja. Ask God to strengthen them and keep them safe. Pray that all of Sudan's displaced people, many of whom fled abroad, would be able to make their way home and be fully integrated into new communities.
- Pray that there would be real progress now to start implementing January's peace deal so that ordinary people on the ground would start to live the reality of peace and no longer live in fear.

4. Three Christian students in Nigeria have taken their university to court after it expelled them for campus evangelism.

Abraham Adamu Misal, Habakkuk Solomon and Hannatu Haruna Alkali were thrown out of Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University (ATBU) in Bauchi in November. The three have now filed a suit before the Federal High Court of Justice in Jos, claiming religious persecution and demanding they be reinstated.

Emmanuel Danboyi, lawyer for the three students, is basing his case upon the fact that the university's disciplinary committee which expelled them was biased. It was made up of 10 Muslims and only one Christian, according to Compass.

Danboyi claims that this Muslim bias contributed to the students being wrongly accused of blasphemy against the Prophet Mohammed. Some Muslims at the university have since issued death threats against the three Christian students, as 7x7 reported on February 15. Two other students from the Federal Polytechnic of Bauchi who held a similar outreach event were also expelled - and threatened.

Soon after the ATBU evangelism, Islamist extremists murdered a prominent Christian student there, Sunday Nache Achi, whose murder on December 8 led to the university being closed until late February.

The hearing continues on July 6.

Meanwhile, in Zaria city, Kaduna State, in northern Nigeria, a Christian lecturer has disappeared after a *fatwa* was issued against him.

Andrew Akume, dean of the law faculty at Ahmadu Bello University, was issued with the death sentence by the campus's Concerned Muslims Movement. It was furious when Akume asked a female Muslim student not to wear the *hijab* (the Islamic head-to-toe covering) because it hid her identity and contravened the faculty's dress code.

A circular distributed on campus accused Akume of 'assault on Muslim sisters and blasphemy against Allah and Islam', says Open Doors.

In Kano the state governor has ordered all Christians to dress in keeping with 'the culture and religion of Islam'. The dress code will be enforced in schools across the state first and then be extended to encompass the whole of society.

Governor Malam Ibrahim Shekarau said appropriate dress includes head coverings and robes that cover women from head to toe.

- Pray for the friends and family of Andrew Akume, the lecturer who has disappeared since a *fatwa* was issued against him.
- Pray for increasing tolerance between the different faiths on Nigeria's higher education campuses which in some areas are becoming hotbeds of fanaticism.

*Sources: Action by Churches Taken Together; BBC; China Aid Association; Compass Direct; International Christian Concern; New York Post; Open Doors; The Jakarta Post; The Voice of the Martyrs USA.*

This prayer alert is part of Release International's 7x7 initiative to encourage prayer and action for seven years for seven countries where Christians face intense persecution: China, Indonesia, Nigeria, North Korea, Pakistan, Sudan and Vietnam.

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