

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL PRAYER ALERT

Tuesday, May 5, 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. PAKISTAN – Fears of ‘Talibanisation’ of Pakistan’s largest city

Taliban-inspired militants have attacked Christians in Karachi, sparking fears that Islamists are trying to extend *Sharia* law across Pakistan.

Masked militants raided Tanseer Town, a Christian neighbourhood of Karachi, beating residents and setting several homes ablaze. Two Christians, Imran Masih and Qadoos Masih, were badly injured.

The attack on the night of April 21-22 is widely seen as a sign that militants have been emboldened by the authorities’ recent decision to hand over Swat Valley, North-West Frontier Province, to them in a ceasefire deal.

Release’s partner in Pakistan has confirmed that police are now protecting the Christian community – but the situation remains tense. Seven people have been arrested.

Meanwhile, two older Christians – James Masih, 67, and 72-year-old Buta Masih – have been acquitted after serving two-and-a-half years in jail for alleged blasphemy. They were sentenced to ten years in November 2006 for allegedly burning pages of the Koran – but the High Court overturned their convictions on April 16. The men have always insisted the charges against them were fabricated due to a land dispute in which James was involved.

(Sources: AsiaNews, Compass Direct, Sharing Life Ministry Pakistan)

- Pray for physical and spiritual healing for Christians in Tanseer Town, Karachi.
- Thank God for the acquittal of James Masih and Buta Masih.

2. ERITREA – Release calls Christians to pray for repressive African regime

Release is calling on Christians to join in an international day of prayer for Eritrea – a nation recently branded a ‘giant prison’ by human rights campaigners.

We are urging churches worldwide to intercede for this Horn of Africa nation on Sunday, May 24, and to collect signatures for our petition which calls on the Eritrean authorities to allow greater religious liberty.

Human Rights Watch recently criticised Eritrea for its use of military conscription, the forcible repatriation of Eritrean refugees abroad and the arbitrary detention of its citizens, including Christians. It is urging other nations not to send back Eritrean asylum-seekers.

Since 2002, the Eritrean government has recognised only three church denominations: the Orthodox Church of Eritrea, the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran-affiliated Evangelical Church. All others are banned.

(Sources: BBC, Human Rights Watch, Release International)

- **Act:** please encourage your church to get involved in Release's day of prayer for Eritrea on May 24. Our 31-day prayer special (included in the current *Prayer Shield* or available from our office) has lots of prayer ideas. Please email this link www.releaseinternational.org/current to friends who can sign our petition online and download a paper copy to collect signatures at church.
- **Pray:** pray for the thousands of Christians detained arbitrarily in Eritrea – often in inhumane conditions. Pray for their guards and for the Eritrean authorities who head up such a repressive regime. Pray for God's mercy over the entire nation.

3. IRAQ – Three Christians gunned down in 'co-ordinated' attacks

Three Christians were murdered on the same night in almost simultaneous raids on two houses in Kirkuk.

Suzan Latif David and her mother-in-law Muna Banna David were killed at their home in Domeez, a southern suburb of Kirkuk, northern Iraq, at about 10pm on April 26. Within a few minutes, 17-year-old Basil Shaba was shot dead at his home in a neighbourhood nearby. Basil's father Yousif and his brother Thamir were critically injured in the attack.

The region around Kirkuk has been marred by sectarian violence as Arabs and Kurds have fought over the territory. But the bloodshed has generally not extended into Kirkuk. This has prompted church leaders to believe that the murdered Christians were targeted for their faith, not for any ethnic or political association. 7x7 reported on April 21 that Assyrian Christian Sabah Aziz Suliman was killed in Kirkuk on April 1.

(Sources: CNN, Compass Direct, Zenit)

- Pray for the family and friends of the murdered Christians. Pray for the physical and spiritual recovery of Yousif Shaba and his son Thamir.
- Ask God to protect and strengthen His people in Iraq.

4. CHINA – Beijing bookstore owner's hopes of release dashed again

The family of Beijing bookstore owner Shi Weihang face yet another agonising wait after a judge deferred a verdict on his case.

Shi, a well-known house church leader, has been held on suspicion of 'illegal distribution of Bibles and Christian literature' since March 2008 – but the judge at Haidian District Court declined to rule on Shi's case at a hearing on April 9.

On two other occasions, trial judges have ruled that there was 'insufficient evidence' to convict him. At this latest hearing on April 9, Shi's lawyer made a three-hour defence of Shi's innocence, stressing that his business practices posed no threat to law and order.

Meanwhile, the authorities in Xinjiang province have released Uyghur house church leader Lou Yuanqi after holding him for more than a year. Officially he was 'bailed, awaiting trial' – a legal procedure which prevents him from suing the authorities for illegal detention. He was detained in May 2008 on charges of 'using superstition to undermine the law' (7x7, *March 24, 2009*).

Uyghur Christian Alimjan Yimit, detained on suspicion of 'leaking state secrets abroad' in January 2008, was allowed a visit from his lawyer on April 21. Alimjan's family have been very concerned since he was seen being escorted to hospital by prison personnel (7x7, *April 7, 2009*). His lawyer said Alimjan was 'happy' – but could not talk about his health.

(Sources: BosNewsLife, ChinaAid)

- Pray for the immediate release of Shi Weihang and Alimjan Yimit.
- Thank you for praying for Lou Yuouqi and thank God that he has been freed.

5. VIETNAM – Christian celebration hailed as a 'breakthrough'

More than 15,000 people were allowed to attend a huge open-air Christian meeting in Ho Chi Minh City in what is being seen as a breakthrough in religious freedom for Vietnam.

The meeting at Tao Dan Stadium on April 21 was unusual because unregistered house churches were permitted to join in the worship celebration – in violation of Vietnam's strict laws on religion. The event was sponsored by the Vietnam Evangelical Fellowship (VEF), none of whose 24 member house church groups has been officially registered.

Event organisers faced many challenges. Official permission for the event was not granted till 4pm – just three hours before it was due to start. But it was a huge success: about 1,200 people became Christians, according to Compass Direct news agency.

There has been widespread praise for the VEF for the way it has actively promoted unity within the sometimes divided evangelical movement in Vietnam. Many unregistered churches which are not part of the VEF were invited to the celebration.

(Sources: Christian Today, Compass Direct)

- Thank God that Ho Chi Minh City authorities allowed this Christian celebration.
- Praise God for the Vietnam Evangelical Fellowship's work in promoting unity.

Our next Prayer Alert issue will be on Tuesday, May 19, 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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