

# RELEASE INTERNATIONAL 7x7 PRAYER ALERT

*Tuesday 1 May 2007*

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 both in your church and other Christian meetings. This information can also be reproduced in church magazines and news bulletins, provided the source is acknowledged.

## **PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS NEED YOU!**

**Release International (RI) 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 RI's ministry within your church. How you develop the role depends on the amount of time you have to give. Church Reps are a vital part of the RI team. Please consider prayerfully if you can join us – and pray that many others will take on this role too. To find out more, ring 01689 823491.**

## **1. TURKEY**

Church leaders in Turkey say growing nationalism and intolerance are behind the murder of three workers at a Christian publishing house.

The three men were found at the Zirve offices in Malatya, eastern Turkey, their hands and feet bound and their throats slit.

Necati Aydin and Ugur Yuksel, both Turkish, worked for the Bible publisher's: Tilmann Geske, a German, worked for a translation firm in the same city, says Middle East Concern.

The publishing manager has told local media that his staff had received threats, amid accusations they were involved in missionary activity. Aydin, who was also an amateur actor, had recently played Jesus in an Easter broadcast on Christian satellite TV TURK-7.

The Daily Telegraph reports that police acting on a tip-off apparently burst into the Zirve offices while at least some of the suspects were still at the crime scene on April 18. Officers questioned 12 suspects and charged five of them with murder. One of the 12 was hospitalised, after apparently leaping from the fourth-floor window to try to escape arrest.

These murders are just the latest in a string of attacks on Christians in Turkey. In February 2006, a priest was stabbed at the altar in Trabzon; soon afterwards an Armenian journalist was shot dead in Istanbul. In both instances, the killers claimed to be defending Islam.

Christian leaders believe Islamist nationalists are fuelling hostility towards immigrants and non-Muslims as Turkey struggles to establish its place in the world. Turkey's (so far unsuccessful) bid to join the European Union has only made nationalists more entrenched.

At a news conference in Malatya, Rev Ihsan Ozbek of the Kurtulus church in Ankara spoke of a 'witch hunt' against minorities such as Christians. 'Our lives are in danger,' he said.

- Pray for the friends and relatives of the three murdered men. Aydin was married with two small children; Geske leaves a wife and three children.

- Pray for Christians in Turkey, who make up less than one per cent of the population. Ask God to strengthen and encourage His church there.

## 2. VIETNAM

Fears are growing for two Christian lawyers charged with distributing ‘material harmful to the state’ – after the authorities in Vietnam published a damning report about them.

Observers believe human rights lawyers Nguyen Van Dai and Le Thi Cong Nhan could face the same harsh sentence as Pastor Thaddeus Nguyen Van Ly, a fellow dissident convicted of similar charges in March. Ly is beginning an eight-year sentence.

Dai and Nhan, who work for the same law firm, were arrested in Hanoi in early March. Since then, the authorities have worked hard to prejudice the courts against them. They are due to be tried on May 11.

Compass Direct reports that an official newspaper, mouthpiece of the Ministry of Public Security, recently ran a four-page report about the lawyers. Both are portrayed as criminals: Dai, for example, is accused of stealing money from his church – a claim even his church is unaware of. Dai also stands accused of distributing ‘alleged infractions of religious liberty’ to Vietnam’s ‘enemies abroad’.

Dai, 38, has gained some notoriety among the authorities for his human rights work. He defended Rev Nguyen Hong Quang and the so-called Mennonite Six in Ho Chi Minh City in 2004 and 2005. Nhan, 27, is also a ‘vocal champion of human rights’, says BosNewsLife.

The two lawyers have reportedly begun a hunger strike to protest their detention in Hoa Lo prison, outside central Hanoi. Their arrest is yet further evidence of what is widely reported to be the harshest crackdown on Vietnamese dissidents ‘in 20 years’.

- Pray that all charges against Dai and Nhan will be dropped. Pray that fellow dissident Thaddeus Nguyen Van Ly will be released on appeal.
- Pray specifically that Dai’s lawyer will be allowed to see his client: police have banned all contact so far. His wife too has been forbidden to visit him.

## 3. NIGERIA

Christians fear that persecution, particularly in Nigeria’s northern states, will rise after the election of a Muslim president in last month’s polls.

Umaru Musa Yar’Adua of the ruling People’s Democratic Party won a landslide victory in controversial elections in April, prompting accusations that voting was chaotic and rigged.

Although Yar’Adua is considered less of a threat to Christians’ liberty than his main opponent, General Muhammadu Buhari, many churches are not enthusiastic about his victory at the polls.

Yar’Adua, former president Obasanjo’s designated successor, was previously governor of Katsina, a northern *Sharia* state; indeed Islamic law was ushered in on his watch. Under his rule, Christians say they have been increasingly denied freedom of worship and the right to build new churches. And he has made little attempt to address their concerns.

The new national government is scheduled to take power on May 29 but, at the time of writing, both main opposition candidates were demanding a re-run.

- Pray that the new president and the newly elected state governors will govern fairly.
- Pray that the new cabinet will studiously uphold the rights of all faith communities.

#### 4. CHINA

Three house church leaders want to sue the Chinese government over the way they were arrested and had their property confiscated.

Pastor Dong Quanqu and his wife Li Huage from Henan province have yet to hear if their case against the local Public Security Bureau can go to court. But Zhi Ruiping, who lives in Inner Mongolia, has had her case accepted and the trial will be heard at the People's Court of Duolun County soon.

Dong Quanqu and his wife were both detained for 10 days after a raid on their house church on March 6. The couple claim the police burst in without showing the proper ID; they also claim irregularities in the way they confiscated property including computers, Bibles and cash. None of these possessions has so far been returned.

Zhi Ruiping was arrested on December 29 and held for 15 days, for allegedly organising a Christmas celebration without registering it. She is demanding that the government pay a token one yuan in compensation, plus her legal fees.

China Aid says it has been supporting all three complainants with legal and financial aid.

- Thank God for the courage of these three leaders in standing up for their religious rights. Pray their suits will be successful.
- Pray that the Chinese authorities will rethink their policies in the light of these cases.

*Sources: Assist News Service; Associated Press; BBC; BosNewsLife; China Aid; Christian Post; Christian Solidarity Worldwide; Compass Direct; Middle East Concern; Reporters Without Borders; Reuters; SAT-7; The Daily Telegraph; The Voice of the Martyrs (VOM) Canada.*

#### **PRISONERS OF FAITH MINISTRY:**

Our Prisoners of Faith Ministry provides pastoral care and practical support for Christians imprisoned for their faith. An email alert is sent free monthly, highlighting an individual Christian prisoner, giving prayer points and addresses for letter-writing. To receive these alerts, please contact the office or sign up by visiting our web site: [www.releaseinternational.org/prisonersoffaith](http://www.releaseinternational.org/prisonersoffaith)

**Our next Prayer Alert issue will be on Tuesday 15 May 2007.**

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

Through our international network of missions, RI serves 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. RI is a member of the UK organisations Global Connections, the Evangelical Alliance and the Micah Network.

***To stop receiving the prayer alerts or change address, please write to or telephone:***

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