

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL 7x7 PRAYER ALERT

Tuesday 1 August 2006

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.

1. CHINA

Four well-known leaders of the Chinese House Church Alliance are likely to be sent to labour camp – just for pleading for other arrested Christians to be released.

China Aid reports that the four pastors from Sichuan province – Li Ming, Wang Yuan, Li Mingbo and Jin Jirong – were detained on June 27. They had gone to the police station in Langzhong to try to free 14 other believers arrested at a worship service earlier that day.

Eyewitnesses reported that Langzhong police rounded up the four church leaders in a large room, blocked all exits and beat them brutally. The four were sent in separate police cars to the First Detention House of Langzhong. Wang Yuan could not stop vomiting.

RI sources report that the four pastors will probably be sentenced to three years in a prison camp where prisoners are forced to work up to 18 hours a day. Of the 14 other believers arrested in Langzhong, seven were detained for more than five days.

This was followed by a spate of other raids last month. Ten believers in Hubei province received between 10 and 15 days' detention after being arrested at a fellowship meeting in Chen Dian town on July 21. Fifteen house church leaders were arrested in Nanyang City, Henan, on July 9: 11 are reportedly still detained.

And on July 11, a prominent house church leader, Wang Jinhua, was arrested in Jilin province, along her with her husband and eight-year-old son. Father and son were later released, but Wang Jinhua has been transferred to Baishan prison in Jilin city.

- Pray for the families of all those believers still detained after a spate of raids on China's house churches. Pray they will draw close to God.
- Pray for those who are still in detention. Pray that they will be a powerful witness to their fellow detainees and prison authorities.

2. PAKISTAN

Almost two years after a Christian woman's children were abducted by their Muslim father, she has had no word from them – but has not lost hope of ever finding them.

Maria Samar John was finalising arrangements for her divorce from Abdul Gaffar through the courts when Abdul seized his son and daughter from inside the courthouse. Miriam and Joshua, now five and seven, have not been seen since.

Her children's kidnapping is particularly poignant for Maria because, as 7x7 reported on September 28, 2004, she herself had been kidnapped and sold into marriage at the age of

17. Her Muslim husband Abdul tried to force her to read the Koran. When she refused, she was beaten. Maria escaped with Joshua in 2000, when she was pregnant with Miriam.

It was in September 2004, when Maria and Abdul were battling for custody of their children through the Lahore Family Court, that Abdul abducted Joshua and Miriam.

Release's partner CLAAS (Centre for Legal Aid Assistance and Settlement) helped Maria win her divorce and gave her refuge in its women's shelter. In March, Maria, now 26, married Basharat Masih, a Christian employee at the refuge.

'I am happy but the wound that I have because of my children can never be completely filled until they come back,' Maria told Compass Direct. 'Only if God allows it will they stay away but do please keep praying.'

- Pray for the happiness of Maria and her new husband Basharat. Ask God to bless them with a family and build their faith.
- Pray that Maria will one day be reunited with Miriam and Joshua and pray that God will give her the strength to endure until that day comes.

3. SUDAN

There are fears that an outbreak of sectarian fighting in southern Sudan could escalate and threaten the north-south peace deal.

At least 15 people are said to have died in clashes between northerners and southerners, according to the Sudan Tribune. The precise facts are unclear but violence seems to have been triggered by an attack on militia allied to southern Sudan's army in Rubkona in the south's Unity state.

Reuters reports that a soldier from the north's army, the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF), allegedly shot a militiaman linked to the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), the south's army. Several civilians were also killed.

Southern civilians then reportedly attacked and killed several northerner traders. The SAF has since denied that a northern soldier provoked the violence. Major General Elias Waya of the SPLA told Reuters he expected 'retaliation from the north'.

Against the uncertainty of recent days, the southern government has pledged to give the UN £16 million towards road-building projects in the south, says the BBC. The south currently has very little infrastructure— but its new administration gained a share in national oil profits as part of the peace agreement. Tangible evidence of a 'peace dividend', it's hoped, will help sustain the hope of lasting peace which has seemed precarious for much of the past 18 months since the peace deal.

- Pray that recent fighting in Rubkona will not escalate further. Pray for an end to longstanding enmity between northern and southern forces.
- Thank God that there is now a real hope of progress for Sudan's hard-pressed southerners. Pray that evidence of this 'peace dividend' will come quickly.

4. VIETNAM

A grieving widow asked to pay a bribe to retrieve her husband's body from jail has now been told he must remain buried in prison 'until he has served his sentence'.

As 7x7 reported on May 23, Siu Lul died in Ha Nam prison in April after being tortured and starved. At the time, we reported that his widow was too poor to claim his body and had had to agree to her husband being buried at the jail.

RI sources now say Siu's widow has since approached the authorities with the money they had demanded in return for the body, hoping she could give him a 'Christian burial' in his home village, Ploi Kueng. But the authorities allegedly refused to allow the body to be exhumed until Siu had 'served his sentence', according to AsiaNews.

Siu, 62, a Montagnard from Gai Lai province, was sentenced to an unknown prison term in 2004, apparently for 'activities relating to his Christian faith', according to BosNewsLife.

Meanwhile, a second Montagnard, Siu Dolel from Ploi Oi village, has also died in Ha Nam prison. He was allegedly tortured to death with electric batons. After his death on June 25, officials visited his widow and demanded money if she wanted to see the body before burial. Unable to pay, she was forced to hand over an identity card, says AsiaNews.

- Pray for the grieving widows of both Siu Lul and Siu Dolel. Both women have suffered a double injustice – and are apparently powerless to act in the face of brutal authorities. Pray that God, who has a particular heart for orphans and widows, would comfort and protect these women.
- Continue to pray for the plight of Vietnam's minority ethnic groups such as the Montagnards whose religious rights are severely repressed.

Sources: AsiaNews; BBC; BosNewsLife; Centre for Legal Aid Assistance and Settlement; China Aid; Compass Direct; International Christian Concern; Reuters; Sudan Tribune.

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

RI'S NEWS WEBCAST:

RI has launched a ground-breaking online news bulletin: *World Update on the Persecuted Church*. This regular bulletin brings you face-to-face with the overcoming Church with stories, video and pictures. It's an indispensable resource for church services or prayer and home groups. www.releaseinternational.org/pages/downloads/world-update-webcast.php

Our next Prayer Alert issue will be on Tuesday 15 August 2006.

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:

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

Tel: 01689 823491

General enquiries: info@releaseinternational.org

Website address: www.releaseinternational.org