

# RELEASE INTERNATIONAL 7x7 PRAYER ALERT

*Tuesday 5 December 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.

## **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. INDONESIA**

The parents of the three Christian schoolgirls killed in Poso last year have met with the militants accused of their murder – and forgiven them.

In an extraordinary scene, the families embraced the three Islamist extremists on trial for their daughters' murders and shook hands as a sign of peace. The three defendants – named as Hasanuddin, Irwanto and Haris – repented of their crime and expressed their deep sorrow, according to AsiaNews.

Indonesia's vice-president Jusuf Kalla hailed the meeting, which was organised by Indonesian police, as 'an opportunity to bring peace to Poso'.

Hasanuddin, Irwanto and Haris have all pleaded guilty to complicity in the murders and could face the death sentence. The three girls were beheaded as they walked to their Christian school in Poso in October 2005. A fourth girl, Noviana Malewa, escaped but suffered serious machete wounds.

The trial of Hasanuddin, held separately from that of his two accomplices, has heard that he plotted the machete attacks from the library of an Islamic school run by his father-in-law. It emerged that the assassins had watched the girls over quite some time – and were expecting six to appear. Inexplicably, on the morning of the attack, only four turned up.

AsiaNews also reports that the men attacked the girls partly 'to avenge the death of many Muslims' during the sectarian violence in Central Sulawesi from 1999 and 2001. Compass Direct says that Muslim and Christian leaders in Poso are due to meet this month to discuss ways to rebuild peace in the region.

- Thank God for the powerful witness of the three Christian families who have been able to extend Jesus' love and forgiveness to the men who killed their daughters.
- Pray that peacemaking efforts in Poso will gather momentum and bear fruit. Pray that God will be with Muslim and Christian leaders meeting to promote peace this month.

## **2. CHINA and NORTH KOREA**

South Korean aid worker Choi Yong-hun has just been released after serving nearly four years in a Chinese jail for trying to help North Koreans defect.

There were emotional scenes on Wednesday at Seoul airport as Choi was reunited with his wife and two daughters, as Tim Peters of RI partner Helping Hands Korea looked on.

Choi was arrested in 2003 for his part in the well publicised Yantai boat incident in which a group of 30 North Koreans tried to escape from China to South Korea by sea. One of his four fellow defendants, a North Korean called Park Yong-chol, was repatriated to his homeland after serving two years in a Chinese jail. Park's fate remains unknown.

Choi's family had to wait 90 minutes before he finally came through the Arrivals gate at Seoul airport because he was immediately detained by the South Korean authorities for questioning. Tim Peters says: 'When he finally did come out, he was rejoicing in the Lord as he embraced his family and fellow activists. He told of torture at the hands of prison guards and fellow prisoners, mainly due to his Christian faith.'

China insists on dealing harshly with North Korean defectors and those who try to help them, often repatriating refugees to their homeland.

- Thank God for the release of Choi Yong-hun and his reunion with his family.
- Pray for Tim Peters of RI partner Helping Hands Korea, as he and his organisation work to support the Choi family.

## **3. PAKISTAN**

The Pakistani courts have acquitted a Punjabi Christian woman accused of blasphemy – but her neighbours have forced her out of her home.

A judge ruled there was insufficient evidence to convict Naseem Bibi who was alleged to have desecrated the image of a Muslim holy place, Khana Qaba, during a row with locals.

RI's partner in Pakistan, Centre for Legal Aid Assistance and Settlement (CLAAS), claims Naseem was the target of a plot to remove Christians from a strong Muslim area of Kasur.

On March 3 this year, Naseem, who is a street-sweeper and a mother-of-four, was approached by a large crowd of Muslims demanding to buy her house – the only Christian home in the neighbourhood. Tensions were still high, following the publication of the Danish cartoons of Mohammed and their reproduction in European media.

When Naseem refused to sell, Muslims allegedly raided her home, beat her and desecrated a crucifix. In return, Naseem reportedly threw a picture of Khana Qaba at them. By the time the police arrived, people had tried to set Naseem's house ablaze.

But it was Naseem who was arrested – and then held in solitary confinement. She was finally granted bail in April, and she and her family have been in hiding ever since.

Meanwhile, Ranjha Masih, who was acquitted of blasphemy earlier this month after eight-and-a-half years in jail, has been admitted to hospital for surgery relating to his diabetes. His health deteriorated sharply in jail and he was denied medical treatment. In a testimony given after his release, Ranjha says he was beaten every day of his detention. But his faith stood firm, he says: 'Hundreds of cards and letters poured in from around the world strengthening my faith and encouraging me to fight back and resist evil.'

- Pray for the safety of Naseem, her husband Gulzar and their four children. Pray that they will be able to resettle somewhere where they can live in peace.
- Pray for the physical and spiritual healing of Ranjha Masih after his ordeal. Pray for CLAAS lawyers as they seek justice for people like Ranjha and Naseem.

#### 4. VIETNAM

President George Bush used his visit to Vietnam to promote religious freedom – amid mounting pressure on his administration to talk tough with Hanoi about human rights.

Bush, only the second American president to visit since the end of the Vietnam war, joined worshippers with his wife Laura at the Cua Bac Church in Hanoi's diplomatic quarter.

Mr Bush said later: 'It's our way of expressing our personal faith and, at the same time, urging societies to feel comfortable with, and confident in saying to their people, if you feel like praising God you're allowed to do so in any way you see fit.'

Bush's visit last month was primarily to attend the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit - and signal a new era in relations between the US and Vietnam.

Not everyone is as keen as Bush to 'normalise' these relations. Just before Bush left for Vietnam, the US House of Representatives defeated a Republican motion to make Vietnam a full trading partner. The Financial Times reports that the bill is likely to be put to the vote and passed later this month but says its defeat is an embarrassment for Hanoi.

Many commentators believe US is blinkered by trade interests and accuse Bush of appeasing Hanoi. The US recently dropped Vietnam from its religious freedom blacklist. The Augusta Free Press notes that Hanoi sent a large deployment of troops to the Central Highlands to quash any potential demonstrations by the Montagnards during Bush's visit.

- Thank God for Bush's strong statement of solidarity with Vietnam's church.
- Pray that he and his administration would do more to hold Hanoi accountable for its poor religious rights record.

*Sources: AsiaNews; BBC; BosNewsLife; Centre for Legal Aid Assistance and Settlement; Christian Today; Compass Direct; Helping Hands Korea; International Christian Concern; The Augusta Free Press; The Financial Times.*

#### **Our next Prayer Alert issue will be on Tuesday 19 December 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:**

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