

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL 7x7 PRAYER ALERT

Tuesday 7 November 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. PAKISTAN

The bodies of a missionary couple and two of their children have been found in Pakistan – as the hunt continues for their two remaining daughters.

Dr Mehaboob, a founder of the At Any Cost Jesus Mission, was kidnapped along with his wife and four children in the Muzaffarabad area in August. His body and that of his wife Paulin were recovered from the Neelum river last month. The remains of their children Shalom, 15, and Sharon, 14, were found in September. Their daughters Sherin, 11, and seven-year-old Shelvin are still missing.

Militants had frequently warned Dr Mehaboob to stop his evangelistic activities which were aimed at Muslims in particular; Dr Mehaboob had been raised as a Muslim himself. A fortnight before the family's disappearance, Shalom had been abducted and forcibly circumcised. When Dr Mehaboob took the matter to the police, officers threatened to charge *him* with attempted murder.

Fellow believers rallied round the beleaguered family and met to pray with them every day. This further infuriated militants who returned on August 21 to rape, mutilate and murder.

The Mehaboob family had originally worked in Peshawar but left after their eldest son was murdered at the age of seven.

- Praise God for the determined witness of the Mehaboob family and their willingness to pay the ultimate price for it.
- Pray for the friends and relatives of the Mehaboob family, coming to terms with their loss. Pray that the younger daughters Sherin and Shelvin will be found soon.

2. SUDAN

Former southern rebels are in uproar after their northern partners in the national unity government took a unilateral decision to expel UN envoy Jan Pronk.

South Sudan's Vice-President Riek Machar told the BBC that his group was not consulted over the decision to throw Mr Pronk out over his comments made about Darfur. Mr Pronk wrote in an internet blog that Sudan's army had suffered defeats in Darfur and its morale was low. Khartoum accused him of 'losing his neutrality'.

Mr Machar has pointed out that Mr Pronk was appointed in consultation with both northern and southern partners in the government and that his mission was not limited to Darfur.

The BBC reports that northerners believe southerners are interfering in their affairs by supporting the deployment of UN peacekeepers in Darfur to replace the current African Union mission. President Omar al-Bashir is fiercely opposed to any UN deployment. Former rebels from the Sudan People's Liberation Movement argue that Darfur is a national issue, one that threatens to destabilise the whole country.

The dispute over Mr Pronk is just the latest rift between northern and southern groups – and a further threat to the north-south peace deal signed in January 2005. Several commitments made at that point have still to be carried out, including the training of a joint military unit and the setting up of a national commission to divide oil revenues.

- Pray for greater cooperation and trust between northern and southern partners in Sudan's national unity government.
- Pray that the UN would be allowed to continue its involvement in Sudan, and particularly in Darfur – where many thousands of lives depend on it.

3. CHINA

House church pastor Wang Zaiqing has been given a two-year jail sentence and a hefty fine for printing Christian literature – the third such prosecution in a year.

Wang, who is disabled, was first arrested in Anhui province in April after Public Security Bureau officials discovered he was printing and distributing Bibles and other Christian materials. He was later charged with 'illegal business practices' – despite the fact that he gave the materials away for free.

Pastor Wang and his lawyer say they plan to challenge the verdict and will appeal to a higher court. Wang's verdict came on October 9, the same day the Archbishop of Canterbury was in Shanghai discussing the need for more pastors in China.

Another pastor convicted of illegal business practices was Cai Zhuohua, who was given a three-year sentence last November. Pastor Cai's lawyer Gao Zhisheng has just had official notification that he, Gao, has been charged with 'inciting subversion of state power'.

Meanwhile, six pastors charged with 'incitement to resist law-enforcement' during the demolition of a large house church in Hangzhou have had their trial postponed. The local Public Security Bureau has been instructed to gather more evidence against the six.

- Pray that Wang's appeal would be successful. Thank God for the sacrifice of people like Pastor Wang committed to spreading His kingdom, whatever the cost.
- Pray that the case against the six pastors from Hangzhou will be dismissed.

4. INDONESIA

One of Indonesia's most notorious extremists has praised the government's handling of recent unrest in Central Sulawesi.

Jafar Umar Thalib, the former head of the now disbanded Laskar Jihad, has said there is no need to revive his group. 'The government is on the right path and the situation is under control,' he told the Italian news agency Adnkronos International (AKI).

Laskar Jihad, which was formed in 2000, was accused of fanning violence which raged in the Moluccas from 1999 to 2002 and spread to Sulawesi. Thousands of *mujahedin* were mobilised, with the alleged backing of some hardliners within the Indonesian military.

Thousands of Christians were forced to flee their homes. Thalib is quoted as saying that Laskar Jihad was disbanded in 2002 because 'the government's good faith and efforts were helping to end the conflict'.

Many observers would disagree with Thalib's assessment of the current situation in Central Sulawesi. The execution of three Christians in September and the murder of senior church pastor Rev Irianto Kongkoli within a month have only raised tensions. As recently as October 21, Muslim residents clashed with police - allegedly after false reports that officers had attacked a Muslim school. A church in Poso Kota was set alight in the unrest. AsiaNews claims that extremists keen to stir up trouble had instigated the violence.

Thalib also told AKI that some Laskar Jihad militants were still in Sulawesi, though merely to 'improve the local population's knowledge of Islam and to monitor the situation'.

- Pray for the Indonesian government, that it would be committed to rooting out extremists and protecting the rights of the minority Christian community.
- Pray against the influence that extremist groups such as Laskar Jihad hold over government and military.

Sources: Adnkronos International; AsiaNews; At Any Cost Jesus Mission; BBC; China Aid Association; Christian Solidarity Worldwide; International Christian Concern; MensNewsDaily; Sydney Morning Herald; The Voice of the Martyrs Canada.

PRAYER WORKS! INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH:

Join the world's largest prayer meeting for the persecuted church on November 19, when thousands of churches around the world will be marking the International Day of Prayer (IDOP).

RI has produced a range of new materials to help you and your church organise your own prayer focus or prayer concert for persecuted Christians, including two new video reports from Nigeria and China. Our new DVD package Prayer Works! is available for a suggested donation of just £10 (incl. postage and packing, UK only). Find out more at www.releaseinternational.org/idop or by calling 01689 823491.

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Our next Prayer Alert issue will be on Tuesday 21 November 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.

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