

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL 7x7 PRAYER ALERT

Tuesday 9 May 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. NIGERIA

Armed militants have attacked the home of an Anglican bishop in Kaduna state – for the fourth time in a year.

The latest attack on the household of Rt Rev Ali Buba Lamido in Wusasa district began as all the others had: a gang of men approached his guards and announced they wanted to kill him.

They fired into the air, then attacked the bishop's staff in the courtyard. A guest of one of the guards was shot dead; a guard and another worker were seriously injured.

Lamido believes the attack is the work of Islamist militants because of parallels between this and attacks on other clergy in Kaduna, which is under *Sharia* law. 'It is difficult to believe that it was not religiously motivated because some bishops have been attacked and one priest was murdered in a similar way,' he told Compass Direct. 'And the killers never stole anything from their houses.'

The bishop is the only Christian leader in Nigeria to come from the Fulani ethnic group. He presides over a diocese of the Church of Nigeria where 98 per cent of members in his denomination are from the indigenous Hausa community. Both Hausa and Fulani groups are largely Muslim. Indeed, Lamido himself was raised as a Muslim.

Lamido's congregation in Wusasa includes about 100 Christians who were raised as Muslims. They have fled persecution in *Sharia* states such as Zamfara.

Lamido has been an outspoken critic of persecution against the Church, says Compass. As well as their churches being destroyed, Christian communities in Kaduna are denied access to water, schools, clinics and proper roads.

- Pray for Bishop Ali Buba Lamido and his staff. Ask God to set His angels around the household and protect its members from further attack.
- Pray for Christians in *Sharia* states such as Kaduna who are discriminated against in every way. Pray that God would strengthen them and add to their number.

2. NORTH KOREA

Protestors have gathered in London, Seoul and Washington DC to protest against the death sentence hanging over a North Korean man, Son Jong Nam.

As we reported in the 7x7 Special Prayer Alert of April 26, Son Jong Nam is due to be publicly executed for 'betraying his country' and sharing information with South Koreans. The charges appear to be based on Mr Son's visit to China to see his brother and, possibly, on the fact he is a Christian. Mr Son is believed to be in the basement of the National Security Agency in Pyongyang, 'practically dead from horrible torture'. It is known that Christian detainees often receive worse treatment than others.

This is the first time that the international community has appealed against the execution of a named individual in North Korea. The outcry has been led by his brother Son Jong Hoon, who

insists: 'I only talked to him about how my siblings were doing and what North Koreans think of the Kim Jong Il regime. He shouldn't be executed for the crime of betrayal or espionage.'

Mr Son defected from North Korea with his wife, son and brother in 1997, and began a new life in China where he became a Christian. His brother reached South Korea five years later but Mr Son was repatriated. After three years in a North Korean prison camp, he made an 'illegal' visit to China, but he was betrayed by those who arranged his trip and arrested in January 2006.

Protestors outside the North Korean Embassy in London on April 28 wore gags and observed a minute's silence for Mr Son. One protestor was bound to a tree with three strips of cloth, to evoke an execution scene: the cloth around his head was symbolically blood-stained. Songwriter Graham Kendrick led singing, and prayers were said in Korean and English. Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) organised the demonstration.

A letter protesting against Mr Son's sentence and North Korea's violations of international law was delivered to the embassy. In South Korea, Son Jong Hoon presented a similar petition to the National Human Rights Commission. And in Washington, a rally was held on Capitol Hill.

It is not known when Mr Son's execution is due to take place – but it is thought to be imminent.

- Pray for Son Jong Nam, who has endured terrible torture at the hands of the Pyongyang regime and who now faces public execution. Thank God that he has accepted Christ as Lord and pray that God will comfort him now.
- Pray too for Mr Son's family as they lobby for his release.

3. INDONESIA

Christian politicians have hit out at a bill proposing to apply *Sharia* law to all people living in Aceh, regardless of their religious beliefs.

Jakarta gave the province the green light to impose Islamic law in 2001 and Aceh also set up an Islamic court three years ago.

Now the Justice and Peace Party (PKS), which has strong Muslim affiliations, wants to extend the scope of *Sharia* to cover all Acehnese, including non-Muslims.

The bill was submitted as part of discussions on how to govern Aceh, after Jakarta and separatists of the Free Aceh Movement signed the Helsinki peace agreement in 2005.

AsiaNews reports that the bill was criticised by the political parties of both the President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and of his predecessor in office, Megawati Sukarnoputri.

Golkar, the party of the deputy president Jusuf Kalla, offered a compromise solution. It is proposing that *Sharia* should be applied to non-Muslim Acehnese who have 'committed crimes against Muslim residents', reports AsiaNews.

After the debate in parliament, a spokesman for the Christian Peace Prosperous Party said: 'The PKS positions are too far from ours and we cannot accept that *Sharia* be applied across the board, including to non-Muslim residents of Aceh.'

Sixteen of Indonesia's 32 provinces have now implemented some form of *Sharia* at district level. In Aceh, where the Islamic code has been formally adopted, Muslims are forbidden to attend churches or convert to Christianity.

- Pray that the bill to extend Islamic law to cover all Acehnese will be thrown out.
- Pray for Christians across Indonesia whose religious freedom is being eroded by a powerful lobby pressing for *Sharia* law to be implemented across the nation.

4. PAKISTAN

A Christian woman has been accused of blasphemy and forced to flee her home in Kasur district.

Naseem Bibi, a cleaner and mother of four, has just been released on bail. Earlier, there was an international outcry when she was refused bail at a court hearing on April 7.

But her torment continues. Naseem is charged with desecrating a poster of Khana Kaba, the Muslim holy place in Saudi Arabia – under Pakistan's notorious blasphemy laws, section 295. Her husband and young children have moved with her to Lahore, fearing extremist attacks.

The charges followed an incident in which Naseem challenged Muslims protesting against Danish cartoons depicting the Prophet Mohammed. When she saw them put a plaster-of-Paris cross on a rubbish heap, she went out to remonstrate. She was beaten and stripped. Soon afterwards, police arrived, thrashed her and charged her with blasphemy.

The Pakistan Christian Post quoted Naseem as saying: 'I love Jesus Christ. I could not control myself when I saw that Muslim protesters were desecrating the cross.' RI associate Sohail Johnson, who heads up RI's Prisoners of Faith ministry in Pakistan, is supporting the family.

- Pray for the safety of Naseem, her husband and their young family.
- Pray that Naseem's principled and passionate witness would impact her community.

Sources: AsiaNews; ASSIST News Service; Christian Solidarity Worldwide; Compass Direct; International Christian Concern; Pakistan Christian Post.

REMEMBER ERITREA:

Release International is supporting a special prayer concert for Eritrea on Saturday May 20, 6pm to 9pm, at St Paul's Church, Robert Adam Street, London W1U 3HW. The concert, organised by CSW and Release Eritrea, will focus on persecuted Christians in Eritrea and on refugees who have fled the country. CSW is also organising a public demonstration showing support for Christians in Eritrea on Wednesday May 31 at 2pm outside the Eritrean Embassy at 96 White Lion Street, London N1 9PF, near the Angel, Islington tube station. Please pray for the success of these events – and attend them if you can.

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

Our next Prayer Alert issue will be on Tuesday 23 May 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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