

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL 7x7 PRAYER ALERT

Tuesday 10 July 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. PAKISTAN

Animosity towards Christians in Pakistan is reaching alarming proportions, with fresh attacks now reported regularly.

Pakistan's Christian community is on high alert after security forces engaged in a gun battle with militants at the controversial Lal Masjid (Red Mosque) in Islamabad last week. As 7x7 reported on June 12, radicals at the mosque have been defying the government for months and demanding strict *Sharia* or Islamic law. Now they are threatening violence if security forces do not back off.

These developments are of considerable concern to the church. As one RI partner put it, 'Whenever there is any incident against Muslims, Christians are always held liable. The Christians of Pakistan are in serious need of prayer.'

The catalogue of attacks and threats across Pakistan underlines the urgency of this call. Christians in the village of Shanti Nagar in southern Punjab, for example, have received hand-written letters warning them to convert to Islam or die.

The letters, written in Urdu, were targeted at church leaders – and appear to be an attempt to discourage those who would normally build the community's morale. Villagers' fears are not ungrounded: 10 years ago, a 30,000-strong mob destroyed 13 churches and 800 Christian households there.

'Their purpose is to weaken the leaders,' says Joseph Francis, director of the Centre for Legal Aid Assistance and Settlement (CLAAS), an RI partner.

CLAAS is also investigating a report that up to 30 men tortured and gang-raped a young Christian man for refusing to convert to Islam. The young man was seriously injured – but CLAAS reports that police have locked him up, amid claims that the youth was a thief.

Meanwhile, several Christians have fled the village of Bismillahpur Kanthan, in Punjab, after a mob armed with guns, axes and sticks attacked a Salvation Army church on June 17. Seven Christians were injured and their building desecrated in the raid, apparently triggered by the church's plans to hold an evangelistic meeting.

- Pray for God's protection over Christians in Pakistan, in these tense times.
- Pray that the government will take steps to contain the violence and ensure that the rights of all citizens are upheld, whatever their faith.

2. VIETNAM

The Vietnamese premier has received a frosty welcome in the US, amid disquiet over human rights abuses back home.

President Nguyen Minh Triet had officially come to strengthen trade ties between Vietnam and the US – but he came in for stern criticism from US congressional leaders. Representatives protested against the current crackdown on dissidents such as Father Nguyen Van Ly and the persecution of ethnic minorities such as the mainly Christian Montagnards.

The president replied simply that all dissidents were lawbreakers and that there were 'lots of human rights' in his nation.

The mysterious disappearance of a key religious leader from the president's official delegation may prove to contradict Triet's comments. The name of Rev Phung Quang Huyen, president of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (North), had been confirmed in Washington as being on the official list of delegates.

But Compass Direct reports that Rev Huyen was sent instead to China with Vietnam's Bureau of Religious Affairs. It also points out that Rev Huyen has 'extensive knowledge of religious persecution aimed at ethnic minority Christians in north-west Vietnam.

Congress's unfriendly reception for President Triet may help appease campaigners who were enraged when the US removed Vietnam from its religious rights blacklist of 'Countries of Particular Concern'.

Even as Triet met President Bush, Compass Direct revealed the death in April of Vin Y Het, a Hroi ethnic minority Christian in his early 20s who was savagely beaten by police in Phu Yen province for refusing to recant his faith.

- Ask God to comfort and strengthen the family of Vin Y Het, who left a pregnant wife and two small children. Praise God for his strong witness.
- Pray that Vietnam will respond to international criticism of its religious rights record by ending its crackdown on dissidents.

3. CHINA

Eight house Christian leaders are still in detention after raids on church activities in Shaanxi and Shandong provinces.

A total of 12 church leaders were arrested as they distributed Bibles in a marketplace in Jiaocheng county, Shaanxi. Four of the 12 were released on the same day, June 9, and six more were freed six days later.

The remaining two – Zhou Jieming and Niu Wenbin – have been accused of being part of an 'evil cult' and of obstructing law-enforcement. Their homes were raided soon after their arrest and many pieces of Christian literature confiscated.

Meanwhile, on June 15, Public Security Bureau officials raided a worship service at a house church in Cao county, Shandong, arresting six leaders. The Voice of the Martyrs

Canada reports that the six are now being held at Cao County detention centre – and have been promised long spells at labour camps unless they pay 10,000 yuan (about £650).

- Pray for the swift release of all eight church leaders. Ask God to bless their families as they wait for news of their loved ones.
- Pray that, in the meantime, the church leaders will be a huge blessing to their fellow inmates.

4. INDONESIA

Christians in West Java are calling on the Indonesian authorities to help them find land for church buildings – as Muslim extremists threaten to close down all house churches.

Some 150 Islamist extremists took to the streets of Bandung to demand that the government took action against private homes which had been turned into churches. If the authorities refused, they would take matters into their own hands, they threatened.

Protesters cited the Joint Ministerial Decree which states that all Indonesian church groups must have a worship permit. But the strict criteria required for a permit now make it virtually impossible for house churches to gain authorisation – and so most meet ‘illegally’. One of the criteria is that church has the approval of 60 neighbours, which is hard to obtain in a Muslim-majority nation.

The protest on June 14 has prompted Simon Timorason, head of the West Java Christian Communication Forum, to call on the government to help minority group churches find new meeting places. He claims that, according to an article in the decree, the authorities are legally required to do so.

- Pray that God will send His Holy Spirit to stand with Bandung’s house churches.
- Pray that the Indonesian authorities will be forced to act, either to revise legislation on church permits or to help house churches find new premises.

Sources: AssistNews; BBC; BosNewsLife; Centre for Legal Aid Assistance and Settlement; Christian World News; Compass Direct; International Christian Concern; Sharing Life Ministry Pakistan; The Jakarta Post; The Voice of the Martyrs Canada.

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 24 July 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:

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

Tel: 01689 823491

General enquiries: info@releaseinternational.org

Website address: www.releaseinternational.org