

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL 7x7 PRAYER ALERT

Tuesday 11 December 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.

1. NIGERIA

A Christian teacher and father of 11 was killed when local elections sparked a fresh outbreak of religious violence in the northern *Sharia* state of Kano.

Danyaro Bala was stabbed and his body burned when Muslim youths went on the rampage in Gani mission, a Christian settlement in the Sumaila area. They were furious when news came through that a Christian candidate was ahead in the polls.

Several other Christians were injured and many Christian-owned houses and shops were wrecked. Order was restored only when the military moved in.

RI's partner the Stefanos Foundation reports that Danyaro, a church elder, had been trying to calm the mob when they turned on him. Stefanos also reports that a Muslim, dismayed by the violence, opened fire on the mob, killing a fellow Muslim.

Sani Duma, Danyaro's brother, believes the attack was an attempt to force Christians to submit to Islam. 'The selection of only houses of Christians and their shops for destruction shows clearly that Muslims were out to force us into submitting to their hold on political leadership,' Sani told Compass Direct.

The All Nigeria People's Party, who rule the state and introduced *Sharia* law there in 2000, reportedly won the local Sumaila election. All voters in the area are from the Hausa tribe.

Meanwhile, a committee investigating violence in Tundun Wada, Kano, in September (7x7, October 16, 2007) has reported only three deaths in its interim report to state authorities. The committee, made up of nine Muslims and three Christians, learnt at public hearings that 19 Christians were killed in the riots. A committee member told Compass Direct that protests by the three Christian officials about the statistics had been overruled.

- Pray for the friends and family of Danyaro Bala, killed in the Gani riot.
- Pray for a restoration of calm between faith groups in this troubled *Sharia* state.

2. VIETNAM

Two Christian lawyers from Hanoi have had their sentences cut on appeal – but failed to win a reprieve.

Nguyen Van Dai and Le Thi Cong Nhan appeared in court on November 27 to appeal a conviction for 'disseminating slanderous and libellous information' against the state. Their original sentences – five and four years respectively, handed down in May – were reduced by one year.

In a statement to the court, Dai's wife Vu Minh Khanh argued that her husband was a 'patriot' – but, she said, he had become the victim of a government smear campaign.

Dai, 38, a church elder, came to prominence when he defended Mennonite pastor Nguyen Hong Quang from Ho Chi Minh City, one of the so-called Mennonite Six. Dai and Le, who work in the same office, have both been involved in advocating for religious liberty.

They are also members of the pro-democracy movement Bloc 8406. In March Thaddeus Nguyen Van Ly, one of Bloc 8406's founder members, was jailed for eight years for 'spreading propaganda' criticising the government. RI sources report that he is being held in solitary confinement and has been denied a Bible and communion wine.

- Pray for the Nguyen Van Dai and Le Thi Cong Nhan and their families, as they come to terms with dashed hopes – but continue to pray for their release.
- Pray for Thaddeus Nguyen Van Ly in solitary confinement. Pray for his immediate release.

3. CHINA

A senior church leader in China has sent an open letter to the president urging him to do more to protect China's hard-pressed church.

Zhang Mingxuan, president of the Chinese House Church Alliance, has taken the bold step of publishing his letter to Hu Jintao, which catalogues two decades of persecution. Pastor Zhang writes that he has been harassed, jailed, beaten, even sent to a mental hospital for his faith, since he turned to Christ 21 years ago.

It's never been easy but things have been particularly bad since the Communist Party's National Congress in October, he writes. On the day of the congress, officials raided the school and orphanage which he runs at Yanjiao village in Hebei, threatening staff and children. Pastor Zhang was told to shut both premises – and his church.

He remains defiant. At the end of his letter, he writes: 'At the time I began to write this open letter to you, I had already fully prepared to die because of this. However, I believe both my life and your heart are in the hands of God Jehovah.'

Sadly, Pastor Zhang's story is all too common. RI sources report that 40 China Gospel Fellowship leaders were detained in Fanhu, Hunan, last month. Twenty-one were released within a week but 19 others are being held at the county detention centre.

And in Guangdong province the Christian owners of a firm called Guangzhou Enoch, who were put under house arrest last month (7x7, November 13, 2007), have been fined heavily and had their business licence revoked for alleged 'illegal religious activities'. Daniel and Eliza Ng's firm had a strong Christian ethos. They now face bankruptcy. Three senior employees have been arrested for 'illegal business management'.

- Ask God to protect Pastor Zhang Mingxuan and his projects from further aggression. Pray that President Hu Jintao will be moved by his letter.
- Pray that God will provide for Daniel and Eliza Ng and their staff.

4. PAKISTAN

A young Christian teacher has received death threats after sheltering his cousin who is accused of blasphemy.

Mushtaq, 27, told RI's prison visitor Sohail Johnson that he had had a letter delivered to his home, warning that he should 'convert or die'. His cousin Martha Bibi, who was mentioned in the letter, went to live with Mushtaq south-east of Lahore after she was released on bail in May (7x7, May 15, 2007). She is unable to return to her home in Kot Nanak Singh, Kasur, for fear of being attacked by extremists.

Martha spent more than three months in jail after she was accused of making derogatory comments about the Prophet Mohammed while trying to retrieving building equipment she had loaned to a construction site. No verdict on her case has been given yet.

Martha told Sohail Johnson that she still feels imprisoned. 'I do not feel comfortable going out to even shop for vegetables,' she said. 'My lawyer has also suggested that I should not go out.'

- Ask God to protect Martha and her family. Pray that they will soon be reunited.
- Thank God for Mushtaq's willingness to shelter Martha, despite the risk to himself.

UPDATE:

An RI partner says there is 'cautious optimism' about the plight of Yoo Sang-joon, a North Korean Christian facing repatriation after being caught in China helping other refugees escape (7x7, November 27, 2007). Helping Hands Korea says it appears that the courts have decided to fine Yoo instead. Please pray that he will be freed immediately.

Sources: Assist News Service; China Aid; Christian Solidarity Worldwide; Compass Direct; Helping Hands Korea; Stefanos Foundation; The Voice of the Martyrs Canada.

RI'S NIGERIA DOCUMENTARY SCREENINGS OVER CHRISTMAS:

As our bimonthly email update of November 19 reported, RI's one-hour documentary about Nigeria, *The Remains of the Day*, was broadcast on Genesis and Revelation TV in November. For anyone who missed it, it will be broadcast worldwide on God TV as follows:

UK - Christmas Day 15:30, Boxing Day 13:00. **US** - Christmas Day 15:30, Boxing Day 13:00.

Europe - 29 December 13:00, 30 December 02:00. **Africa** - Christmas Day 15:30.

Australasia - Christmas Day 15:30. **Asia** - Christmas Day 19:00.

RI'S NEWS WEBCAST:

Have you seen RI's ground-breaking online news bulletin *World Update on the Persecuted Church* yet? 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

Due to Christmas, our next Prayer Alert issue will be on Tuesday 8 January 2008.

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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