

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL 7x7 PRAYER ALERT

Tuesday 12 June 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

Pakistan threatens to be consumed by Islamist extremism unless its president takes a tough stand against the radicals, commentators claim.

The country is said by some to be in meltdown, with almost daily reports suggesting that radical Islam is fast gaining ground. Many blame the crisis on President Musharraf's willingness to court hardline Islamists on the opposition benches to win votes.

Reports of extremist activities are arriving fast and furious. The government is caught in a tense stand-off with radicals at the Lal Masjid mosque in Islamabad who are openly defying the regime and threatening *jihad* if the police move in. As 7x7 reported on May 30, the first reading of an apostasy bill had gone through the National Assembly unopposed.

Meanwhile, Christians are bearing the brunt of upsurges of extremism. On May 30, a district court condemned Younis Masih to death for allegedly making derogatory comments about the prophet Mohammed and the Koran. Masih, arrested in 2005, is planning to appeal to the high court in Lahore but has already received death threats from extremists.

And Walter Fazal Khan, 84, a Christian from Lahore, is in hiding with his wife after he was charged with blasphemy for 'burning the Koran'. Their house has reportedly been seized and turned into a *madrasah* or religious school by Muslim clerics. Some reports say the clerics forcibly converted Gladys to Islam before she escaped. RI partners believe charges were brought because Mr Khan had refused to sell land to Muslim businessmen.

Meanwhile, in Rawalpindi, four student nurses and two teachers – all six of them Christian – have been suspended from the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences on suspicion of crossing out a Koranic verse on a noticeboard on May 17.

Writing in The Daily Telegraph (June 3), the Pakistan-born Bishop of Rochester Michael Nazir-Ali says Pakistan is at a crossroads. 'It can take the path of being a sectarian, fundamentalist state ruled by clerics, or it can become an enlightened, moderate country, informed by the best traditions of Islam (...),' he says. 'Unless the path of enlightened

moderation is pursued relentlessly and consistently, Pakistan will not be able to curb the extremism that is giving rise to (...) terrorism.'

- Pray that President Pervez Musharraf will make wise political choices to help pull Pakistan back from the brink of extremism.
- Pray for the many Christians paying a high price for being caught up in recent sectarian tensions, including Younis Masih, Walter and Gladys Khan, and staff and students at the Rawalpindi nursing school.

2. CHINA

Activists have condemned the Chinese authorities for using a secret court to convict Beijing house church leader Hua Huiqi.

Though the Chayang District People's Court gave Huiqi a six-month sentence – much less than was feared – campaigners continue to demand his immediate release or a fair trial. Neither his lawyer nor his wife was allowed to attend the two-hour trial on June 4.

Huiqi was charged with 'obstruction of justice' after he and his ailing mother Shuang Shuying were arrested as they walked through the Beijing Olympic village in January. She was given a two-year sentence on apparently trumped up charges. Both were beaten.

Hopes that China might relax its repressive policies towards Christians during next year's Olympics are fading. The Ministry of Public Security has reportedly issued a directive listing 43 categories of 'unwants' who are to be investigated and possibly barred from the games. Banned groups will include some unregistered churches. All Olympic participants including athletes are to be investigated on these grounds.

- Continue to pray for Huiqi and his mother. Pray that both will be released soon.
- Pray that the Olympics will prove a window of opportunity for China's church to grow while China is under the international spotlight.

3. NIGERIA

Christians are demanding justice for a murdered schoolteacher in Gombe state after police released 16 suspects without charge.

Christianah Oluwatoyin Oluwasesin was killed by her own students and extremists after she was falsely accused of desecrating the Koran (as 7x7 reported on April 17).

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) reports that Mrs Oluwasesin, who had been invigilating an exam at the Gandu Government Day Secondary School, was attacked after confiscating the book of a Muslim student whom she had caught cheating. The student reportedly lied to the class, saying that her teacher had torn a copy of the Koran. Mrs Oluwasesin was then stoned, stripped, beaten and stabbed to death.

Despite a detailed report of the incident by the Gombe chapter of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Gombe state's attorney general has made a public statement claiming that 16 suspects detained for questioning had 'no case to answer'.

CAN Gombe is now calling for the prosecution of three people who it alleges were involved in the murder – and for an investigation into why police at the scene did not intervene. CSW also reports that the attack may have been pre-planned: Mrs Oluwasesin had been 'targeted by thugs' a fortnight earlier and had had to be rescued by passers-by.

- Continue to pray for the family of Mrs Oluwasesin who are fighting for justice as well as wrestling with their grief.
- Pray that Nigeria's new government would take firm action to ensure this type of violence does not go unpunished.

4. INDONESIA

A pastor and his wife have been testifying about how God protected them from sword-wielding extremists during an attack on their church in Aceh.

Pastor Luther Saragih and his wife Netty fled into the jungle when a 100-strong mob set fire to the Evangelical Mission Church in Siompi in the *Sharia* province last year (7x7, September 26). The attack came after news that the church was to hold a revival meeting.

'The people were holding swords ready to kill us,' Pastor Saragih told CBN News, 'but we were astonished when they just looked at us as we passed in front of them. I believe God's angels were there to protect us.'

Netty, who was three months pregnant at the time, fell several times as she fled and feared a miscarriage. But she thanks God that He kept her baby safe.

The church building was completely destroyed but there are plans to rebuild. Meanwhile, members meet in each other's homes. 'At first I told myself I will stop sharing the gospel,' said Netty, 'but God allowed me this amazing experience. We did not think we'd survive.'

- Thank God for Luther and Netty's strong testimony – and for the gift of their child.
- Ask God to give their church courage to continue its outreach work.

Sources: AsiaNews; Assist News Service; BBC; BosNewsLife; CBN News; China Aid; Christian Solidarity Worldwide; Compass Direct; Independent Catholic News; International Christian Concern; The Daily Telegraph; World Evangelical Alliance Religious Liberty Commission.

RI'S NEWS WEBCAST:

RI now produces 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 26 June 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.

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