

# RELEASE INTERNATIONAL 7x7 PRAYER ALERT

*Tuesday 12 September 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. INDONESIA

A 4,000 strong demonstration has paralysed the city of Poso, as Muslims rallied to demand the immediate execution of three Christians.

Fabianus Tibo, Dominggus da Silva and Marinus Riwu have been sentenced to death for allegedly inciting riots in 2000 and killing Muslims – charges they deny.

Their execution has been postponed three times, partly due to international pressure. But Muslim protestors with banners calling for their execution jammed the streets, forcing schools and transport to shut down.

Meanwhile Jakarta has removed the police chief who gave the three Christians a stay of execution and replaced him with a hard-liner who favours their deaths.

Lawyers for the three Christians say a good police officer has been silenced. They're now 'very worried' about the fate of the three and 'what could happen to inter-faith peace and harmony in Central Sulawesi.'

Other observers fear the Christians could be executed in secret by firing squad, presenting the international community with a *fait accomplis*.

There has been strong international pressure to save them – including from the Pope and the European Union. Observers say they were not given a fair trial, that evidence pointing to their innocence has been ignored and the trial was conducted against a backdrop of armed demonstrators yelling for their deaths outside the courthouse.

Militants also made death threats against their legal representatives, and planted a bomb at the house of one legal advisor.

The defence case is that the three Christians were evacuating children under attack in a church school and were in no way responsible for the violence. Militants burnt the school to the ground. No Muslims have been brought to justice.

According to Jeff King, President of International Christian Concern: 'In the attacks from 1998 to 2003, there were approximately 10,000 Christians murdered, 1,000 churches and 80,000 homes burned down. In that orgy of violence against Christians, the only individuals the government chose to convict were these three Christians – this is a glaring injustice.'

- Pray for the lives of the Fabianus Tibo, Dominggus da Silva and Marinus Riwu - that the death sentence will be dropped – not merely postponed.

- Pray that the Indonesian government will stand up for justice for Christians as well as Muslims, and will act to stop the violent attacks against its Christian minority.
- Pray that the Lord will strengthen and support the three accused and their families.

## **2. VIETNAM**

Ma Van Bay, a prominent house church leader from the Hmong ethnic minority, has been freed from jail in a national prisoner amnesty.

His release, after only two years of an 11-year sentence, follows intense international lobbying, particularly by America. US Ambassador-at-large for Religious Freedom John Hanford had included Ma Van Bay's name on a list which he handed to the Vietnamese authorities during his visit last month.

More than 5,300 other prisoners were freed to mark Vietnam's National Day on September 2, says the BBC.

Ma Van Bay was arrested in 1997 on charges including illegally propagating Christianity. He escaped and fled to the Central Highlands where he became a well-known evangelist, and was rearrested in November 2003.

Vietnam may have an ulterior motive in backing down. It is trying to establish Permanent Normal Trade Relations with the US, one of the final hurdles before it can join the World Trade Organisation. US President George Bush is due to visit Vietnam later this year.

- Thank God for the unexpected early release of Ma Van Bay. Pray that he can have some quiet time with his family before re-engaging in church affairs.
- Praise God that Vietnam appears to be responding to international pressure to clean up its human rights act – even if its motives are suspect. Pray that the pressure will continue.

## **3. PAKISTAN**

A young Christian mum who has not seen her children since their father abducted them two years ago has been given fresh hope with the arrest of her ex-husband.

As 7x7 reported on August 1, Maria Samar John has been living in a centre run by RI partner Centre for Legal Aid Assistance and Settlement (CLAAS) who have been trying to trace her children.

Miriam and Joshua were snatched by their Muslim father Abdul Ghaffar from inside a Lahore courthouse where Maria and Abdul were engaged in a custody row.

CLAAS now reports that members of its staff managed to track down Abdul Ghaffar and Maria had a phone conversation with him. When she tricked him into believing she was 'having an Islamic life', he agreed to meet her in a park on August 30.

He was promptly arrested. He is believed to have told police that he abducted the children because Maria wanted to raise them as Christians. 'This is a war of faith,' he said.

- Praise God that, while hopes of a reunion seemed so far off last month, there is now a real possibility Maria might see her children again. Pray that her dream will become a reality.

- Pray for Abdul Ghaffar that he will not try to bar Maria from seeing her children. Pray too that his heart would soften towards Christianity.

#### 4. CHINA

Six house church leaders whose church in Xiaoshan district was bulldozed have been charged with 'resisting the carrying out of the law by instigating violence'.

They were held for three weeks before charges were laid, reports China Aid.

As 7x7 reported on August 15, hundreds of believers clashed with officials who moved in to demolish the church in Dangshan town, Zhejiang province.

According to China Aid the authorities have now also knocked down the Dalin church in Shaoxing City.

The names of the Christians who've been charged are: Brother Ni Weimin, Sister Shen Zhuke, Elder Shen Chengyi, Pastor Wang Weiliang, Brother Feng Guanglian and Brother Guo Lijun.

More than 50 Christians were detained initially. At the time of writing, 30 had been released and 11 had been told officially that they were 'criminally detained'. The status of the remainder is unknown.

In a separate development, the prominent human rights lawyer Gao Zhisheng was seized by a dozen security agents at his sister's home in Shandong province on suspicion of 'criminal activity'.

His wife and children, aged 12 and 13, are also under house arrest. National Security Bureau officers are surrounding the house, and some appear to be living with the family to monitor their every move.

- Pray that the international community will put justice before trade and bring increasing pressure on China to allow religious freedom.
- Pray that China will recognise that Christians who love and serve the Lord are better citizens and not a threat to society.
- Pray for the Christians detained and the believers who have lost their churches – that they will be strengthened in their faith and witness.

*Sources: BBC; Christian Solidarity Worldwide; Centre for Legal Aid Assistance and Settlement; China Aid; International Christian Concern; Jubilee Campaign; Release International; The Voice of the Martyrs Canada.*

#### **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](http://www.releaseinternational.org/prisonersoffaith)

#### **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](http://www.releaseinternational.org/pages/downloads/world-update-webcast.php)

**Our next Prayer Alert issue will be on Tuesday 26 September 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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