

# **RELEASE INTERNATIONAL 7x7 PRAYER ALERT**

**Tuesday 15 March 2005**

---

This is the regular Prayer Alert service of Release International.

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 in your church and in other Christian meetings. The information can also be reproduced in church magazines and news bulletins, provided the source is acknowledged.

Our next Prayer Alert is due for issue on 29 March 2005.

In this issue ...

1. Another of the Mennonite Six has been released from jail in Vietnam - as the campaign to free the remaining three gathers momentum.
2. A 3,000-strong community of Christians have fled Adamawa state in northern Nigeria after Islamist militants attacked their village, killing 36 people.
3. Disturbing reports coming out of China suggest that a prominent church leader from Beijing has been tortured in police custody.
4. Christians in Sudan are engaged in a courtroom battle to keep their denominational headquarters.

1. Another of the Mennonite Six has been released from jail in Vietnam - as the campaign to free the remaining three gathers momentum.

Evangelist Nguyen Van Phuong was released on March 3 after serving a one-year sentence in Ho Chi Minh City for 'resisting officers doing their public duty'.

He was said to be 'in fair health' when he was reunited with his wife Pham Thi Phuong Trang and one-year-old son Trung Tin (meaning '*faithful*'). Trung Tin was born a month before his father's arrest.

There is continued concern for the other three Mennonites still in jail: church leader Rev Nguyen Hong Quang, evangelist Phan Ngoc Thach and Le Thi Hong Lien, a children's worker.

Rev Quang's wife, evangelist Le Thi Phu Dung, has now written to the Prime Minister Phan Van Khai, urging him to release the remaining three Mennonites. She expresses concern over what she calls widespread persecution of Mennonites across Vietnam at the hands of local authorities – despite a government directive last month guaranteeing citizens' right to religious freedom.

She writes: 'I express our sincere desire to see justice respected in the way the State is governed and at the same time to receive some good will from government authorities of various levels in returning peace and stability for religious activities in Vietnam.'

Appeal hearings for two of the Mennonite Six, Rev Quang and Pham Ngoc Thach, were originally set for February but were postponed. No new date has been set. Rev Quang and Pham Ngoc Thach, sentenced to three and two years' imprisonment respectively, are both being held in Ho Chi Minh City.

Le Thi Hong Lien, who is being held in Binh Phuoc province, is still being denied the right to appeal, despite suffering huge physical and psychological torture. She is scheduled for release in June.

The other two Mennonites arrested in Ho Chi Minh City last year, brothers Nguyen Thanh Nhan and Nguyen Hieu Nghia, were released last December.

### Act

- Write a short, polite letter to the Vietnamese Embassy in London, asking for the release of Rev Nguyen Hong Quang, Pham Ngoc Thach and Le Thi Hong Lien, as a matter of urgency. **Please do not, under any circumstances, mention Release International when you write.** The address is: His Excellency Mr Trinh Duc Du, Vietnamese Head of Mission in London, The Embassy of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 12 Victoria Road, London W8 5RD.

### Pray

- Thank God for the release of evangelist Nguyen Van Phuong. Pray for the immediate release of the remaining members of the Mennonite Six: Rev Nguyen Hong Quang, Pham Ngoc Thach and Le Thi Hong Lien.
- Pray that pressure being brought to bear on the Vietnamese government through campaigns such as RI's will encourage Vietnam to follow through on its promises to respect its citizens' right to religious freedom.

2. A 3,000-strong community of Christians have fled Adamawa state in northern Nigeria after Islamist militants attacked their village, killing 36 people.

The survivors were so terrified by the attack on Demsa village that they have taken refuge in Mayolope in neighbouring Taraba state – and vowed not to return until the government intervenes to guarantee their safety.

Compass quotes a Muslim contact in Mayolope speaking out against what appears to have been religiously motivated violence. 'I have lived with Christians in our village for 51 years and I have never witnessed any crisis where people are being killed without caution as it happened that day,' Alhaji Saleh Jatau said. 'I am appealing that the government should act quickly to end this conflict. We have lived in peace with Christians but now some of us [Muslims] have decided to cause problems between us.'

Tensions in Adamawa state rose last month when a Christian woman was murdered in the town of Numan. She was shot dead by peace-keeping troops brought in to curb interreligious violence following the murder of a Christian evangelist Rev Esther Jinkai Ethan some 19 months ago.

The governor of the state of Taraba, Rev Jolly Nyame, visited the displaced Christians in Mayolope and expressed his concern over their plight. And he was at pains to point out that Nigeria's future depends on resolving interreligious conflict which plagues an increasing number of its states.

'No community can move forward while crisis takes centre stage,' says Rev Nyame. 'It is only peace that can usher in development in the country. Only tolerance and forgiveness can bring about peaceful co-existence among people of different religious backgrounds.'

Meanwhile, in Abuja, delegates from across Nigeria continue to debate the key issues facing Nigeria, including religious conflict, in a national conference which could pave the way to constitutional reform.

- Pray for the displaced Christians from Demsa, that they would not be embittered by their experiences but rather be determined to help build a better nation.
- Pray for President Olusegun Obasanjo, a committed Christian. Ask God to grant him wisdom as he tries to build national unity and eradicate religious violence.

3. Disturbing reports coming out of China suggest that a prominent church leader from Beijing has been tortured in police custody.

Pastor Zhuohua Cai, 34, was arrested in September on charges of printing 'illegal religious literature' after officials found 200,000 Bibles and other Christian literature in his storeroom. His wife Yunfei Xiao and his brother-in-law Gaowen Xiao were arrested shortly afterwards in Hunan province where they were in hiding.

China Aid Association reports that Pastor Cai's interrogators have used electric cattle prods on him in an attempt to extract false confessions that he had 'illegally managed a printing business and illegally profited from 200,000 RMB' (US\$25,000).

The young pastor, who oversees six house churches in Beijing, is said to be 'physically wounded and spiritually depressed'.

Pastor Cai's five-year-old son Yabo Cai is being cared for by his grandmother who is said to have been subjected to constant harassment from police.

Christian literature is permitted in China but its publication and distribution is limited by the official press affiliated with the Three Self Patriotic Movement. Chinese sources insist Pastor Cai's stock was for internal house church use only.

Meanwhile, in Harbin, a city in north-east China, Chinese security officers raided an office building where house church pastors were receiving leadership training. More than 100 officers from five different government agencies were involved in the raid in Heilongjiang province.

About 140 Chinese pastors were interrogated and released on the same day after giving details of their home addresses, their house-church affiliation and fingerprints. Their cash and cell phones were confiscated. At least 10 foreign evangelicals in the gathering – most of them Americans – were deported after interrogation.

- Ask God to sustain and strengthen Pastor Zhuohua Cai who is reported to have been physically and emotionally weakened by torture. Pray for his release.
- Pray that the church leaders involved in the raid in Harbin will be envisioned through the experience to preach the Gospel with renewed passion.

4. Christians in Sudan are engaged in a courtroom battle to keep their denominational headquarters.

The Episcopal Church of Sudan (ECS), part of the Anglican communion, was evicted from its headquarters in Khartoum when security police forced church officials to empty the building at gunpoint last May. An Arab company has since claimed ownership of the building – a claim being disputed in the courts.

However, it now appears that the company, Al-Ghazal Residence Enterprises, has been undertaking building work on the property, in violation of a court injunction forbidding any such work.

ECS staff and a reporter for Compass report seeing trucks bringing building materials into the property and workmen busying themselves around it.

The company's attorney has denied that his clients are doing any work on the premises. Yet an engineer's report, commissioned by a judge, found 'extensive repairs both inside and outside the building' in progress, which in his opinion were tantamount to 'a complete renovation'.

Compass believes that in fact the building was sold by a former trustee of the property, a defrocked Episcopalian bishop who was dismissed two years ago.

It further claims that this disgraced bishop had links with the ruling Islamist regime and that the property sale documents were signed by three government ministers. ECS Archbishop Joseph Marona suggests this raises 'the valid question as to what extent the ruling party and indeed the Sudan government is involved in the process of destabilising the ECS'.

The former British Archbishop of Canterbury Lord George Carey raised the issue of the disputed property with the Sudanese Vice President Ali Osman Taha on a visit to Sudan in February.

The next court hearing in the case is scheduled for Tuesday (March 15).

- Pray for lawyers representing the Episcopal Church at the next hearing on March 15 at which the disputed ownership of the property will again be discussed.
- Pray that the Episcopal Church of Sudan, which has an estimated five million members, will continue to thrive and grow.

*Sources: ASSIST News Service; BBC; China Aid Association; Compass; International Christian Concern; The Voice of the Martyrs Canada; The Voice of the Martyrs USA.*

This prayer alert is part of Release International's 7x7 initiative to encourage prayer and action for seven years for seven countries where Christians face 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 their families, supplying Christian literature and Bibles and working for justice. RI is a member of the UK organisations Global Connections (formerly EMA) and the Evangelical Alliance.

To stop receiving these prayer alerts or to change your address please telephone, or write to:

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

Tel: 01689 823491

General enquiries: [info@releaseinternational.org](mailto:info@releaseinternational.org)

Website address: [www.releaseinternational.org](http://www.releaseinternational.org)

Registered charity 280577