

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL 7x7 PRAYER ALERT

Tuesday 18 September 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. INDONESIA

A Christian pastor is seriously ill in hospital after 'hundreds' of extremists attacked him and his church during a Sunday meeting.

Pastor Jau Dolokseribu and six members of his congregation suffered 'grave wounds' when more than 300 militants raided the Protestant Church of the Christian Synod in Tangerang, about 15 miles from Jakarta.

AsiaNews reports that the extremists struck because the 60-strong congregation 'had not received official permission to build a church'. 7x7 has previously reported (eg: on 10 July 2007) that many house churches find it hard to meet the stringent criteria for licences as set out in 2006's 'houses of worship' legislation. And extremists are increasingly using lack of a licence as a pretext to attack churches.

Most of Pastor Jau's congregation are drawn from the Batak ethnic group.

Five days after the attack, on 7 September, Pastor Saut Hasibuan, a leader of the Christian-based 'Peace and Prosperity Party' (*Partai Damai Sejahtera*), challenged the government to take a firmer stand against attacks on churches. He also asked them to encourage inter-faith dialogue and revise legislation governing church licences.

- Ask God to heal completely Pastor Jau and the six other Christians injured with him.
- Pray that the Indonesian authorities will revise legislation which sets near-impossible barriers for house churches seeking a permit.

2. CHINA

The Chinese authorities have hit back hard after intercepting a cache of 'illegal' Bibles being delivered to a Christian pastor in Xinjiang.

Zhou Heng, a well-known house church leader in Urumqi city, was seized when he went to pick up three tonnes of Bibles at a bus station. Zhou, who also runs a Christian bookshop selling legally published literature, now faces up to 15 years in jail on charges of 'illegal business practices'.

A former detainee who shared a cell with Zhou at the Xishan Detention Centre told China Aid that Zhou had been badly beaten by other inmates and prison guards. China Aid is supporting Zhou's legal team.

The Bibles Zhou was collecting had reportedly been donated by South Korean churches and were intended for free distribution rather than sale. But the Chinese authorities allow only two 'patriotic' religious associations within China to print and distribute Bibles each year. Zhou's bookstore, the Yayi Christian Book Room, was closed down after his arrest.

As the authorities continue to detain house church leaders in raids across the country, they are also busying themselves to present China in a good light during next year's Beijing Olympics. Plans to erect a temporary church for foreign athletes in the Olympic village are well underway. It will be part of a 'religious service centre' catering for all faiths and run by specially trained 'volunteers'.

Meanwhile, Open Doors' contacts suggest that undercover agents from China's secret service have now infiltrated 'every house church' – and are putting pressure on church leaders to leave Beijing before the Games.

- Ask God to bless and strengthen Zhou Heng, as he suffers abuse in jail. Pray for his immediate release.
- Thank God in faith that He will do amazing things through His church during the Olympics, despite the authorities' attempts to keep the church in check.

3. NIGERIA

Christians in eastern Nigeria have been tipped off that the local authorities may try to seize land that the church has bought for a mission school.

The land has been earmarked for 'a school of missions and discipleship' ever since it was acquired by Missionary Crusaders Ministries (MCM). But now the group has been told that Muslim state officials will snatch most of the land unless it builds a wall round it, 'which will serve to lay claim to it and silence the authorities'.

The US-based Christian Aid Mission, which supports MCM, reports that the local land commissioner warned MCM of the authorities' plans on a visit earlier this month. It also reports that the cost of building a wall would be prohibitive in such an impoverished area.

MCM, whose workers are local people, has been in this area of eastern Nigeria for more than 20 years, providing aid and spreading the gospel among the indigenous Koma people. Its work has often met with opposition from Muslim officials and Islamist militants in the area. The precise location of the land has not been given for security reasons.

BosNewsLife reports that in states with Muslim-majority rule, authorities have become 'emboldened' to challenge Christian projects since Muslim president Yar'Adua was elected.

Pray

- Ask God to ringfence this land with His protection, so that it can bless the area.
- Ask God to strengthen the resolve of Christians involved in this building project.

Act

- Christian Solidarity Worldwide is holding a prayer event for Nigeria as a whole on Saturday 13 October, 2-6pm, at The Redeemed Christian Church of God (Inspiration House), 54-80 Ossory Road, London SE1 5AN (nearest Tube: Elephant and Castle). For more details, call 0845 456 5464.

4. ERITREA

A Christian woman has been tortured to death in an Eritrean jail for refusing to deny Christ – the fourth believer to die in custody in less than a year.

Nigsti Haile, 33, died at the Wi'a Military Training Centre, near Massawa, on 5 September, 18 months after she and nine other Christian women were seized at a church meeting in Keren. RI sources say Nigsti, a member of a Rhema church, had been under severe pressure to abandon her faith for all of that time.

Amnesty International reports that at least 21 other Christians have been arrested in Asmara since mid-August and are being held incommunicado. Among them were 10 members of the Full Gospel Church who, according to Amnesty, are now being held at the notorious Karchele security prison in the Eritrean capital.

Two young Christian men died of torture wounds at a military camp in October, while a third, Magos Solomon Semere, succumbed to four-and-a-half years' abuse at a military base outside Assab in February (7x7, 6 March 2007).

UK-based Release-Eritrea believes the Eritrean authorities are turning up the pressure on the country's evangelical Christians to 'unprecedented levels'. Testimony from Eritrean refugees arriving at the Shimelba camp in Ethiopia suggests that Christian prisoners are 'routinely' tortured to try to make them recant their faith.

Amnesty adds that most of the 2,000-plus Christians currently jailed for their faith have been held for more than two years, in extremely harsh conditions.

- Praise God for Nigsti Haile's courage in resisting the authorities' brutal campaign to make her deny Christ. Pray that her testimony will bring many to know Jesus.
- Pray that pressure will be brought on the Eritrean authorities to end their witch-hunt of Christians and release all those being detained without charge.

Sources: Action in Solidarity with Asia and the Pacific; Amnesty International; AsiaNews; BosNewsLife; China Aid Association; Christian Post; Compass Direct; Forum 18; Indonesia Matters; International Christian Concern; Open Doors UK; Release-Eritrea; 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

Our next Prayer Alert issue will be on Tuesday 2 October 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:

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