

# RELEASE INTERNATIONAL 7x7 PRAYER ALERT

*Tuesday 20 February 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. CHINA**

House church leader Liu Fenggang has been freed after serving a three-year jail term in Zhejiang.

Liu, who's 48 and from Beijing, was sentenced in August 2004 after being convicted of 'providing national intelligence to overseas organisations'. In fact he had simply reported on the destruction of a house church to Christian organisations abroad. His co-accused Dr Xu Yonghai and Zhang Shengqi served two- and one-year sentences respectively.

Liu's health suffered badly in prison: he was hospitalised five times with serious heart disease and diabetes. China Aid is now helping Liu receive proper medical care. Liu had also spent two years in a labour camp in the 1990s for his work with house churches.

Despite his ordeal, Liu remains buoyant, thanks in large part, he says, to the prayer support of Christians worldwide. 'I will continue to stand up for this just cause for which I am called (to speak up for the persecuted),' he says.

Also in Beijing, police have formally arrested another house church activist and his elderly mother whom they seized in the city's Olympic village last month.

Hua Huiqi and his mother Shuang Shuying, 76, were detained and beaten on January 26 (as reported in 7x7 on February 6). But it was not until February 8 that Hua's family were officially notified of his arrest for allegedly 'obstructing justice'. Shuang Shuying's arrest was announced the next day, for 'wilful damage of public and private property'.

### **Act**

- Write a polite letter expressing your concern about the arrest of Hua Huiqi and his mother to: Premier Wen Jiabao, PRC PO Box 1741, The State Council, Beijing, China, 100017.

### **Pray**

- Thank God for the release of Liu Fenggang and pray his health will now improve. Ask God to fill with His peace Hua Huiqi, Shuang Shuying and their relatives. Pray that China will clean up its human rights record during the 2008 Olympics.

## 2. INDONESIA

A new bylaw will require the people of West Sumatra to sit Koranic exams to graduate from school and even to get married – regardless of their religion.

The ordinance, due to come into effect next year, will require all students from primary through to secondary school to take written and oral tests on the Muslim holy book. They will be tested on their ability to read and write passages from the Koran.

The ordinance was first proposed by the province's legislature and specifically by its Commission IV on Education Affairs. The commission's chairman Guspari Gaus said it had been 'implemented in response to pressure from the governor, legislators and community figures'. The provincial governor, however, has yet to rubber-stamp the bylaw.

In defending the move against claims that it would discriminate against non-Muslims, Gaus said: 'Koranic education is aimed at giving people, especially the younger generation, good morals, so they won't be lured by drugs and other negative activities.'

AsiaNews reports that the bylaw is expected to apply to every regency in the province within two years. Some observers fear it is an attempt to convert non-Muslims to Islam.

- Pray that this ordinance can be modified so it applies solely to Muslims, rather than to the entire West Sumatran population.
- Ask God to bless His church in West Sumatra so it will grow even as the authorities discriminate against its members in society.

## 3. INDIA

A 58-year-old Christian was murdered in front of his wife after he challenged youths shouting offensive slogans about Christianity outside their home.

When the retired government employee, known as S. Stanley, came out to remonstrate with the three youths, they began to stone his house and attack his gate at Pavalloor, Kerala state.

As they ignored Stanley's appeals for calm, he went inside to call the police – but they followed him in. Stanley was stabbed in the back, neck and stomach and died at the scene. The youths gave his wife Sisilet Bhai a severe beating before fleeing the scene on a bike.

The incident, which occurred in broad daylight on February 10, has sparked outrage among the Christian community. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) is demanding an inquiry into the murder, to establish whether or not it was the work of religious extremists.

'Stanley was a practising Christian, who lived a simple retired life,' said a GCIC spokesperson. 'The young men targeted him for his faith.'

- Pray for Sisilet Bhai and her two daughters, grieving the sudden loss of a husband and father. Pray that Stanley's killers will be brought to justice.
- Pray that the local Christian community would show love and tolerance towards people of other faiths, and be bold in spreading the gospel.

#### 4. VIETNAM

A senior US official has sparked controversy after she refuted claims that Vietnam's ethnic minorities are persecuted.

Ellen Sauerbrey, the US Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees and Migration, has dismissed reports that the Vietnamese authorities have harassed groups such as the Montagnards in the Central Highlands.

Commentators have observed that Ms Sauerbrey's comments were based on a brief meeting with just seven Montagnards recently repatriated from Cambodia to the Central Highlands. She also said that most Montagnards now crossing into Cambodia were motivated by 'economic reasons': few should therefore qualify for refugee status.

Her comments have outraged religious rights organisations involved in Vietnam. The flood of asylum-seekers pouring out of Vietnam into Cambodia has gathered momentum since the authorities began their crackdown on unlicensed churches in 2004.

Release International's sources continue to document instances of the Vietnamese authorities persecuting the Montagnards, who are predominantly Christian: arbitrary detention, torture and land grabs have all been reported.

International monitors, even aid agencies, are barred access to the Central Highlands. Rights campaigners are angry that Ms Sauerbrey did not take full advantage of a rare authorised visit into the Central Highlands to make a more thorough investigation.

- Pray that Ms Sauerbrey's comments will not be allowed to let the Vietnamese authorities 'off the hook' in terms of their religious rights record.
- Ask God to build up His church in the Central Highlands. Pray that the church will be equipped with strong leaders and good materials so it can thrive.

*Sources: AsiaNews; Associated Press; BBC; China Aid; Global Council of Indian Christians; Montagnard Foundation; The Jakarta Post; 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)

#### **Our next Prayer Alert issue will be on Tuesday 6 March 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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