

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL 7x7 PRAYER ALERT

Tuesday 20 June 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. CHINA

Pastor Gong Shengliang, the imprisoned leader of the South China Church, has been beaten up again, as his family appeals for his release on medical grounds.

Pastor Gong was reportedly attacked without provocation by a fellow prisoner, Lei, whom prison officers had designated as Gong's 24-hour guard. Lei was apparently applauded by prison guards and walked away unpunished. When Gong asked for Lei to be transferred to another section of the prison, his request was ignored.

When Gong's two sisters were allowed to visit him in Hong Shan prison in Hubei Province, they saw that the right side of his mouth was swollen, a month after the attack. He told them he had been unable to move his mouth for three days and had suffered some hearing loss in one ear.

Before this visit, his sisters Ms Gong Shuqin and Ms Gong Shuzhen had had no news from Gong for more than a year, because the prison had intercepted his letters. When they were finally given access to their brother, Ms Gong Shuqin was allowed only 10 minutes with him: Ms Gong Shuzhen was threatened with not being able to see him at all. Christian literature they have sent him has been confiscated.

Pastor Gong was given a life sentence for alleged assault, rape and 'illegal cult' activities. In 2003 he was beaten into a coma and suffered serious internal injuries. 7x7 reported on April 25 that his family have asked the Chinese prison authorities to consider giving him medical parole, given his poor state of health.

- Pray for the safety and health of Pastor Gong Shengliang who has suffered brutal torture over the past five years since his arrest.
- Pray for Pastor Gong's family who are engaged in their own battle with the authorities as they fight for their brother's rights and his release.

2. PAKISTAN

Taliban members in North Waziristan have warned of 'serious repercussions' for people engaging in 'un-Islamic activities'.

The declaration by the Taliban and some Islamic leaders came in public notices posted across the area in north-west Pakistan which borders Afghanistan. Locals were warned not to play 'un-Islamic' videos and music; gambling and interest loans are also banned.

The notices effectively warn that *Sharia* law will be applied, regardless of existing civil law. 'Any person committing these atrocities will be punished accordingly even if civil authorities find them innocent and spare them,' they say.

The Pakistani military has been targeting suspected al-Qaeda training camps and Taliban groups in the area since 2004. Then, in March, the army began operations to quell a militant uprising in the town of Miran Shah. Thousands of civilians have since fled their homes. The area has also long been dogged by inter-tribal conflict.

The Taliban declaration came the day after a stronghold of Islamist militants was bombed, according to AsiaNews.

- Pray that the Taliban and their sympathisers would not be allowed to introduce *Sharia* law by stealth in Pakistan's tribal belt.
- Pray that the Pakistani authorities would intervene to prevent hard-liners deciding how society should be policed.

3. NORTH KOREA

The United Nations has called North Korea to account for the scheduled execution of Son Jong Nam.

As 7x7 reported in a Special Prayer Alert on April 26, Mr Son, a Christian, is due to face the firing squad for 'betraying his country' and 'sharing information with South Koreans'. The charges appear to be based on a visit Mr Son made to China to see his brother.

Four UN human rights officials had expressed concerns to Pyongyang back in April about human rights abuses including Mr Son's planned execution. Pyongyang responded by accusing them of 'conspiracy' and 'fabrication'.

The UN has since made a public statement expressing 'profound dismay' over North Korea's dismissive response. Mr Son is believed to be in the basement of the National Security Agency in Pyongyang, 'practically dead from horrible torture'.

Mr Son had previously tried to defect to South Korea in 1997 but was repatriated when he was captured by the Chinese authorities. The date of his planned execution is unknown.

Meanwhile, 10 other North Korean defectors, together with two South Korean Christian aidworkers, have been detained in Laos. There are serious concerns that the North Koreans might be repatriated to face very severe penalties, including possibly execution.

Act

- Join the Global Week of Prayer for North Korea (June 19 to 25), which is supported by several agencies, including Release International. Protesters will gather outside the Chinese embassy in Portland Place, London W1, on June 22 (3.45-5pm). This will be followed by a prayer event at St Michael's Church, Chester Square, London SW1W, on June 24, 12-2.30pm. For more information, visit www.prayfornorthkorea.org

Pray

- Pray for Mr Son's release and pray that he will know God's presence in a powerful way. Ask God to be close to his family too.
- Pray that Laos, which is a communist country, will decide against repatriating the 10 North Koreans found in its territory and allow them to seek refuge in another country.

4. SUDAN

A tribal chief in Darfur has warned of a 'holy war' if UN troops replace African Union peacekeepers.

Sudanese president Omar al-Bashir has told the UN Security Council his government is prepared to discuss the possible transfer of peacekeeping duties to a non-African mission. But he stopped short of agreeing to an immediate transfer.

Mowadh Jalaladin of the Barty tribe, which has about 250,000 members, said any deployment of UN troops would be tantamount to 'foreign occupation'. If the UN arrived, he said, 'we are declaring *jihad* (holy war) against it. It means defending Sudan and Islam.'

The Barty tribe's call for an 'African solution' to the conflict has been echoed by several tribal leaders – and even Osama bin Laden in an address broadcast on Arab TV recently.

The conflict in Darfur continues to jeopardise the future of the north-south peace deal signed in January 2005. Observers fear talk of 'a holy war' could prove inflammatory in a nation divided as much by religion – and particularly the issue of *Sharia* – as by ethnicity.

- Pray for peace in Darfur. Thank God that factions from two Sudanese rebel groups who had previously refused to sign the Darfur Peace Agreement have just signed a 'declaration of commitment' to the pact.
- Pray that the people of Sudan, particularly southerners returning from exile, will keep the hope of lasting peace alive.

Sources: *AsiaNews*; *Associated Press*; *BosNewsLife*; *China Aid*; *Christian Solidarity Worldwide*; *CNN*; *International Christian Concern*.

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

RI'S NEWS WEBCAST:

RI has just 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

Our next Prayer Alert issue will be on Tuesday 4 July 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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