

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL 7x7 PRAYER ALERT

Tuesday 22 January 2008

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 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 Gene on 01689 823491.

1. SUDAN

Mistrust between northern and southern partners in Sudan's unity government appears to be deepening, amid border skirmishes and broken promises.

North Sudan has missed a third deadline for withdrawing its troops from the south – possibly jeopardising the north-south peace deal of 2005. The Sudan Armed Forces gave 'lack of transport' as their reason for not pulling out before the December 31 cut-off date.

Major General Elias Waya of the former southern rebel group, the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), told Reuters news agency: 'They have started moving already, but in very small numbers.'

The north retains a presence in three southern states, mostly in oil-rich areas near the disputed north-south border. Khartoum says it has only 3,600 troops in the south: southern leader Salva Kiir has put the number at 17,000. The south accuses the north of trying to retain control of Sudan's oilfields.

The delay in troop withdrawals has fuelled existing tensions. The SPLA clashed with northern militias in border areas in late-December and again in the new year. *The Nation* in Nairobi reports that up to 100 people were killed when Baggara Arab militia sparred with a southern army garrison in Abyei. Other skirmishes have been reported in Warguet.

Some sources have claimed that northern army officials are training militia at camps inside the border area. The SPLA told *The Nation* that it had no proof that this was the case.

Back in October, southerners pulled their ministers out of the national unity government in protest at Khartoum's failure to keep its side of the 2005 peace deal. The demarcation of the north-south border – and the allocation of nearby oilfields – remains a barrier to progress.

- Pray that northern and southern politicians will work harder to resolve outstanding issues such as border demarcation.
- Pray that the international community will remain committed to helping bring lasting peace to Sudan, despite the many setbacks.

2. INDONESIA

The mothers of two schoolgirls beheaded in Poso have again shown forgiveness to their daughters' killers – as three extremists begin long jail sentences for their murder.

A third girl, Noviana Malewa, who suffered serious injuries in the 2005 machete attack but managed to escape with her life, says she still prays for her friends' killers.

'I pray that their hearts will be open to God, and that they would repent [of] their sins (...) and never kill again,' says Noviana. 'Some day, when I have children, I will tell them the truth about what happened. But I will tell them even more about God's grace in our lives.'

The interviews, which appeared in *Christian Post*, follow the conviction of three Islamist radicals for a string of brutal attacks on Christians in Central Sulawesi, including the schoolgirls' murders in October 2005 (7x7, January 8 2008).

A South Jakarta district court sentenced Rahman Kalahe to 19 years in jail, Agus Nur Muhammad to 14 years and Yudi Heryanto to 10 years, for beheading Theresia Morangke and Yarni Sambue, both 15, and 17-year-old Alfita Poliwo. Three other extremists were also convicted of the murders last year (7x7, April 3 2007). The murdered girls' parents met with these militants and forgave them publicly in 2006.

Alfita's mother has recently spoken movingly about her battle with grief: 'My anger was strong but God's peace and love were stronger. And so I let go of my right for revenge.'

Yarni's mother has also struggled hugely – but she too has broken through. 'If my Lord can forgive those who put Him up on that cross, then I surely can forgive the men who killed my daughter because I want to be like Jesus,' she said.

- Thank God for the powerful witness of Noviana and these two mothers. Pray that their testimony would play a part in bringing peace to Central Sulawesi.
- Pray, with Noviana, for the men convicted of the schoolgirls' murders.

3. PAKISTAN

Extremists have shot dead a Christian in Punjab after apparently mistaking him for his brother who was accused of blasphemy 10 years ago.

Simon Emmanuel was shot in the neck in Gojara, Toba Tek Singh district, when gunmen confused him with his younger brother Younis Tasadaq, according to RI sources.

The gunmen had heard that Younis had recently returned to Pakistan from the US where he had claimed asylum for seven years, with the help of RI partners.

And, even a decade on, they wanted their revenge for the alleged blasphemy, even though the case against Younis was dropped in 1999. When they saw Simon on January 9 this year, they thought vengeance was theirs.

Lawyers from RI partner CLAAS, the Centre for Legal Aid Assistance and Settlement, were involved in Younis' case in the 1990s and helped him find refuge in the States. Now they are involved in the seeking justice for Simon.

CLAAS reports that the Pakistani authorities tried to persuade Simon's father not to press charges, and to consider it a 'suicide' not a murder. Despite this, CLAAS has succeeded in getting the case registered and is supporting the family, including Younis.

Younis was arrested in 1998 after Muslim clerics in Gojara received a letter, bearing Younis' name and address, making derogatory comments about the Prophet Mohammed. The case snowballed: religious leaders, politicians and police all became involved. But the charges against Younis were eventually dropped.

- Pray for Simon's family, grieving for another son after a decade of suffering.
- Pray especially that Younis will be able to rebuild his life again.

4. CHINA

The authorities in Gansu province have arrested two of China's most highly respected house church leaders.

Tian Ming-ge and Su Dean were arrested in Jiuquan city during a church service before Christmas and charged with 'gathering in an illegal assembly under the guise of religion'.

Both men are leaders of the Fangcheng church, one of China's largest house church networks. Su's work has involved him in training Christians across Sichuan province.

Tian, who is 71 and known widely as Uncle Jin, has spent the last 20 years in full-time ministry. He has worked closely with Pastor Zhang Rongliang, a fellow Fangcheng leader who is currently serving seven-and-a-half years for 'illegal border crossing' and 'passport irregularities'. Tian has been transferred to a Public Security Bureau in Henan province.

Meanwhile, international lobbying and prayer are believed to be behind the release of Christian bookseller Shi Weihai, according to China Aid. The 37-year-old's arrest last month was reported in 7x7 on January 8, 2008. China Aid says criminal charges against him have been dropped 'due to insufficient evidence'.

- Thank God for answering prayers about bookseller Shi Weihai's arrest. Ask Him to protect Shi's family from further persecution.
- Pray for the immediate release of Tian Ming-ge and Su Dean.

Sources: China Aid; Christian Post; Christian Solidarity Worldwide; CLAAS; Compass Direct; International Christian Concern; Reuters; The Nation (Nairobi).

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 5 February 2008.

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:

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

Tel: 01689 823491

General enquiries: info@releaseinternational.org

Website address: www.releaseinternational.org