

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL 7x7 PRAYER ALERT

Tuesday 24 July 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. NORTH KOREA

The brother of a North Korean Christian on death row for his faith has made an impassioned plea for help to secure his release.

Son Jong Nam, a former army captain, has now been in captivity for more than 560 days after being charged with being a 'national traitor' and 'receiving Christianity'.

His younger brother Son Jong Hoon travelled to Washington to make a public address on July 12 about his brother's plight. He was supported by RI partner The Voice of the Martyrs USA and by US senator Sam Brownback. 'He is a brave and good man,' Son Jong Hoon told a press conference. 'Please help my brother.'

Son Jong Nam, who is in his late-40s, became a Christian when he first defected from North Korea to China in 1997 with his wife, son and brother (as reported in *7x7 June 6, 2006*). Some reports suggest his wife died in China of complications in pregnancy as a result of being beaten by the authorities in North Korea. While his brother managed to reach South Korea, Son Jong Nam was captured, repatriated and jailed for three years.

When he was released on parole in May 2004 – thanks, apparently, to 'influential contacts' – he met up with his brother in China but later returned home. Back in North Korea, he was arrested in January 2006, on the basis of intelligence supplied by the secret service. Soon afterwards, he was sentenced to death.

It's not known whether he is alive or dead – but his execution has not been announced.

Act:

- Write a polite letter to the North Korean mission at the United Nations in Geneva, expressing concern for Son Jong Nam. Write to His Excellency Mr Ri Tcheul (Ambassador and Permanent Representative), Chemin de Plonjon 1, 1207 Geneva. Please do not mention Release International in your letter.

Pray:

- Pray for God's peace to rest with the family of Son Jong Nam: they don't know if he is alive or not. Thank God that *He* knows – and will watch over His child.

- Pray that RI supporters' letters will have an impact and help bring some clarity to the situation.

2. CHINA

China's 'illegal churches' are bracing themselves as the government launches a crackdown on religious activities in the run-up to the Beijing Olympics.

It has just been revealed that officials launched an 'anti-infiltration' initiative codenamed Typhoon No.5 in February. Its aim: to sever links between Chinese and foreign Christians.

At least 100 foreign Christians were expelled or deported from China between April and June alone for alleged involvement in 'illegal religious activities', says China Aid. Some of those expelled had lived in China for up to 18 years.

Compass Direct reports that there is also a nationwide shortage of Bibles, despite the fact that the only legal publisher produces 'enough Bibles to meet the demand'. Many Bibles have apparently been exported – or destroyed. Unregistered churches that were previously able to obtain Bibles through the legally recognised Three-Self Patriotic Movement churches are now being denied them.

And the crackdown on house churches continues unabated. Two of the six house church leaders arrested in Cao county, Shandong, on June 15 (*7x7 July 10*) have been sentenced to one year's 're-education through labour'; they are Pastor Zhang Geming and Pastor Sun Qingqen. The other four were freed after paying fines of about £650.

Two church leaders arrested for distributing Bibles in a marketplace in Shaanxi (*7x7 July 10*) – Zhou Jieming and Niu Wenbin – have now been released on parole.

- Pray that, despite government restrictions, the gospel will extend its reach across China and win many more people for Christ.
- Pray for pastors Zhang Geming and Sun Qingqen beginning their sentences in a labour camp in Jining City. Ask God to give them a new revelation of His grace.

3. PAKISTAN

Pakistan's proposed apostasy legislation is unlikely to go through on the nod, says the committee charged with reviewing it.

The Apostasy Act 2006, which has been put forward by Islamic hard-liners on the opposition benches, would impose the death sentence on any Muslim man converting to another religion (*7x7, May 30*). A Muslim woman doing the same would be jailed for life.

Christians were alarmed this spring when the bill passed through the National Assembly without opposition. But now the assembly's Standing Committee on Law and Justice looks unlikely to pass it in its original form.

Dr Sher Afgan Khan Niazi, a committee member, told Compass Direct: 'The person who changes religions of his own will and wish, according to his own thinking, should not be punished at all. Therefore we don't consider that it will be passed in this way.'

Some commentators suggest that the government's current battle with religious extremism will sink the bill. The long stand-off between the government and radicals at Islamabad's Red Mosque ended in a battle which left 102 people dead, according to BBC figures.

General Musharraf's troops are now engaged in fierce fighting with militants in north-west Pakistan who launched reprisal attacks after the Red Mosque siege.

Meanwhile, a young Christian man, allegedly 'gang-raped' by up to 30 Muslim men then 'falsely accused' of theft, has been released on bail, thanks to the intervention of lawyers from RI partner CLAAS (Centre for Legal Aid Assistance and Settlement). 7x7 reported on July 10 that police had taken the youth into custody and denied him medical treatment.

- Ask God to strengthen the Christian youth's faith and bring him justice.
- Pray that the apostasy bill will fail to become law.

4. INDONESIA

A group of Indonesian Christians face up to five years in jail if they are found guilty of 'insulting Islam'.

More than 40 Christians were detained in April after a video showing them standing around a copy of the Koran and praying for Muslims 'deceived' by it was leaked to Islamic groups. They then circulated it to the media.

Now the Christians have been charged under Article 156 KUPH which targets 'anyone who expresses hatred, opposition or insults one individual or groups of Indonesian citizens in public', according to the Voice of the Martyrs USA. Their accusers claim blasphemy. Among the Christians who have been detained are the parents of young children.

- Ask God to protect and secure the release of these Christians.
- Pray that the broadcasting of the tape will not have wider repercussions for Indonesian Christians.

Sources: AssistNews Service; BBC; BosNewsLife; Centre for Legal Aid Assistance and Settlement; China Aid Association; Christian Post; Christian Solidarity Worldwide; Compass Direct; International Christian Concern; The Voice of the Martyrs (VOM) Canada; VOM USA.

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 7 August 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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