

# RELEASE INTERNATIONAL 7x7 PRAYER ALERT

*Tuesday 24 October 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.

## **PRAYER WORKS! INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH 2006**

**Join the world's largest prayer meeting for the persecuted church on November 19, when thousands of churches around the world will be marking the International Day of Prayer (IDOP).**

**RI has produced a range of new materials to help you and your church organise your own prayer focus or prayer concert for persecuted Christians, including two new video reports from Nigeria and China. Our new DVD package Prayer Works! is available for a suggested donation of just £10 (incl. postage and packing, UK only).**

**Find out more at [www.releaseinternational.org/idop](http://www.releaseinternational.org/idop) or by calling 01689 823491.**

## **1. INDONESIA**

At the funeral of senior church pastor in Central Sulawesi, Christians and Muslims came together in a show of unity and defiance against the extremists suspected of his murder.

Rev Irianto Kongkoli, acting head of the Central Sulawesi Christian Church (GKST), was shot in the neck while shopping in Palu with his wife and five-year-old daughter on October 16. He was rushed to hospital but doctors could not save him. A gunman and an accomplice were seen fleeing the scene by motorbike.

Rev Kongkoli, who was in his 40s, was the 'right-hand man' of peace campaigner Rev Rinaldy Damanik. Rev Kongkoli took on the GKST leadership after Rev Damanik resigned from the post in protest at the execution of three Christians in September. Rev Kongkoli had also voiced strong opposition to the death penalty handed down to the three after they were convicted of alleged involvement in sectarian clashes in 2000.

At Rev Kongkoli's funeral, a large multi-faith crowd accompanied the coffin to the cemetery in the Telise sub district of Palu, as hundreds of police officers looked on. News of his death sparked a day-long protest outside the Central Sulawesi police headquarters - and demands for the authorities to make arrests.

Meanwhile, a group of lawyers and church leaders says it plans to take the Indonesian authorities to the International Criminal Court over the September executions. The Advocacy Service for Justice and Peace in Indonesia claims the executions were 'illegal and unconstitutional'.

- Pray for Rev Kongkoli's family: his wife Rita and their three children, Gita, Ade and Dea. Pray that his fellow Christians will stand firm in their faith.
- Pray that Rev Kongkoli's efforts to bring peace and justice to Central Sulawesi province will be continued by his church - and will bear fruit.

## **2. NIGERIA**

A Christian high school teacher in the northern state of Nasarawa is being tried for blasphemy after disciplining a Muslim student.

Joshua Lai, who teaches English and history at the Government College in Keffi, is on trial in the state capital Lafia, accused of blaspheming the Prophet Mohammed and of 'public incitement, rioting and mischief'.

The charges arose after an incident on June 12 in which Lai caned a Muslim student who arrived late for class - a customary punishment in Nigeria, according to Compass. The student later claimed Lai had said he would 'flog Mohammed', something Lai denies.

Later that night, two Christian pupils came to warn Lai that Muslims wanted to kill him. He managed to flee before his house in the college grounds was burned down: his private home was also wrecked. Muslim students at his college later attacked Christian classmates and their dormitories, and set light to the homes of other Christian staff.

Lai, who went into hiding, was arrested two days later and taken to Keffi police station. During interrogations, he has been forced to write statements, without a lawyer present.

Lai, who is currently on bail, has now lost his job and values the damage to his property at about US\$8,000. 'What has kept me going is the fact that I believe God has a purpose for allowing this to happen,' he told Compass. 'His comfort has been my strength.'

- Thank God for the way He has been upholding teacher Joshua Lai during his trial. Pray that Joshua's faith will not be knocked by his experiences.
- Pray that interreligious tensions in Lai's former college would be quelled.

## **3. CHINA**

Two Christian lawyers are counting the high cost of defending human rights in China this week.

High-profile advocate Gao Zhisheng has just been informed that he is to be charged with 'suspicion of inciting subversion of state power' – months after his arrest. Police seized him at his sister's home in Shandong province in August, as 7x7 reported on September 12.

Mr Zhisheng rose to international prominence after taking on the case of Pastor Cai Zhuohua, who was sentenced to three years last November for printing Christian literature. According to the Voice of the Martyrs Canada, Mr Zhisheng's own lawyer, Mo Shaoping, has not been allowed to see his client because, allegedly, the case involves state secrets.

Meanwhile, Shanghai lawyer Zheng Enchong reports many incidents of harassment since leaving prison in June. He had served three years for 'illegally providing state secrets overseas'. His conviction was linked to two faxes he sent to the New York-based organisation, Human Rights in China.

Since his release, Mr Enchong has been under house arrest and not been allowed to renew his identity card. Police have raided his home, tapped his phone and called him in for questioning on several occasions, says the World Organisation Against Torture.

Most recently, Mr Enchong was surrounded by a dozen police officers as he tried to make his way to a service at the Mu'en Christian Church in Shanghai. When he insisted on

going to church, he was knocked to the ground and then held for questioning. His wife and friend who were due to go to the service with him were also barred.

- Ask God to bless Mr Zhisheng, Mr Enchong and their families with joy and peace.
- Pray that the example of these two brave men would encourage other lawyers to take a principled stand on behalf of China's persecuted believers.

#### **4. PAKISTAN**

Muslim teachers are accused of beating a Christian teenager because she refused to remove a cross from her neck.

Kiran Shahzadi, 15, was reportedly beaten and dragged before the headteacher at the Government Girls High School in Kasur, near Lahore, after refusing a teacher's demand to take off her crucifix. The All Pakistan Minorities Alliance (APMA) claims that the school principal also beat Kiran then 'pulled the cross from her neck and threw it in the dust bin'. Kiran was then forced to 'stand in the scorching heat of the sun for several hours without water'. The school has not yet commented on the incident.

Shahbaz Bhatti, chair of the APMA, a respected advocacy group, claims that Kiran's family have been told she will be expelled if they go to the police.

Discrimination against the Christian minority is endemic in government schools, claims APMA. 'Muslim students can freely read their Holy Quran (...) but it is not tolerated that Christians students wear a cross or profess their religion,' said Mr Bhatti.

- Pray for emotional and physical healing for Kiran – and thank God for her courage in defending her faith in Christ.
- Pray that Kiran's classmates would be challenged by her powerful witness.

*Sources: AsiaNews; BosNewsLife; Christian Solidarity Worldwide; Compass Direct; Ecumenical News International; International Christian Concern; The Voice of the Martyrs Canada; World Organisation Against Torture.*

#### **RI'S NEWS WEBCAST:**

RI has 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](http://www.releaseinternational.org/pages/downloads/world-update-webcast.php)

#### **Our next Prayer Alert issue will be on Tuesday 7 November 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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