

# RELEASE INTERNATIONAL 7x7 PRAYER ALERT

*Tuesday 26 June 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. INDONESIA**

Three Sunday School teachers in Indonesia said their time behind bars was 'worth it' as they were released on parole more than a year early.

Fellow inmates wept as Dr Rebekka Zakaria, Eti Pangesti and Ratna Bangun left Indramayu district prison at 6am on June 8, after an international campaign for their release.

They were due to be freed at 9am but officials brought the time forward after reports that extremists were planning to stage a protest at the women's early release. Their trial had been dogged by militants shouting murderous threats. Two busloads of Christians turned out to meet the trio at the prison gates – and ensure their safety.

'This is nothing compared with the suffering and persecution faced by others,' Dr Zakaria told Open Doors. 'Compared with the Lord's love and what He has given me, it's worth it.'

The three women were sentenced to three years in September 2005 for 'Christianization'. They were accused of proselytising after welcoming Muslim children onto their Happy Sunday programme in Harguelis, West Java – despite having parents' permission.

Remarkably, Dr Zakaria was allowed to hold church services in the prison compound which members of her former church in Harguelis were permitted to attend. Officials had shut down her old church shortly after her arrest.

The three women are also reported to have transformed the environment in the prison during their stay, by cleaning, gardening, decorating and sharing food.

The women's lawyer said that, as a condition of their parole, they will have to report monthly to the authorities in Cirebon until February 2009.

- Pray God's protection over these women, their families and their church. 'Muslim radicals are still scrutinising us,' says Dr Zakaria. 'Pray that we would stand firm and strong in the Lord, in whatever we do.'
- Pray that Dr Zakaria's church will be able to find new premises.

## 2. NORTH KOREA

As the worldwide Christian family unites in praying for North Korea this week, defectors from the 'hermit kingdom' have been underlining why those prayers are so vital.

Former prison guard Ahn Myeong-Cheol was one of two defectors to address a conference in London last week, with tales of the brutal treatment meted out to political prisoners and Christians. A new report launched by conference organisers, Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), accuses North Korea of 'crimes against humanity', including murder, extermination, enslavement and forced labour.

CSW claims that the regime has killed between half-a-million and a million prisoners. Some of them are imprisoned simply for worshipping Jesus, rather than Kim Jong Il.

Ahn Myeong-Cheol, who was a guard at four different prison camps, said Christians were given the worst treatment. 'In camp no 22 there was a Christian elderly [woman]. To me she seemed really faithful. One day I witnessed that she was getting beaten up and I asked one of the guards why and he said, "This crazy lady, she is still believing in God." Christians are considered as mentally ill people. The worst crime in North Korea is not believing in Kim Jong Il and his father. Christians are one of the worst criminals.'

This week (June 25-July 1) has been designated a global week of prayer for North Korea by the church of South Korea. June 25 was the anniversary of the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 and 2007 is the centenary year of Pyongyang's Christian revival.

### Act

- Visit [www.pfnk.org](http://www.pfnk.org) – which has information and resources to help you and your church join the Pray for North Korea 2007 initiative, which is supported by RI.

### Pray

- Ask God to bless His church in North Korea, both inside and outside its prison camps. Pray that the current regime will be reformed – or replaced.

## 3. ERITREA

About 20 Christians including several young children are believed to be still in custody, a month after they were arrested by security forces in Eritrea.

The group, all from the Kale Hiwot Church, were seized on May 27 when officials raided a house in Dekemhare, 25 miles south of Asmara, expecting to interrupt a prayer meeting.

When they discovered that no such meeting was taking place, they rounded up everyone in the home and at several addresses in the neighbourhood, reports Release-Eritrea UK. The watchdog also reports that officials seized the video recording of a wedding – and later arrested the bridal couple and the pastor who had married them.

Many of the detainees are reportedly held in Adi Abeyto prison, and some in the 5th police station in Asmara. Eritrea bans Independent churches such as the Kale Hiwott Church.

Friends are particularly concerned about one of those detained, Pastor Michael Abraha. He suffers from a condition called hypoglycaemia. Christian Solidarity Worldwide quoted a friend of the pastor as saying, 'If food does not come to him on time, he will die.'

- Pray for the health and safety of all those detained – and for their swift release.
- Pray that the international community would put more pressure on Eritrea to halt its crackdown on 'illegal' faith groups and allow greater religious liberty.

#### 4. PAKISTAN

Religious rights groups in Pakistan are demanding government protection for six Christians thrown out of a nursing college after accusations of blasphemy.

As 7x7 reported on June 12, four students, the school principal and a tutor were suspended from the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS) in Islamabad after a verse of the Koran on a noticeboard was crossed out with a pen.

The All Pakistan Minorities Alliance said Muslim students at PIMS had threatened to 'kidnap and kill' the four students from the School of Nursing, Nabeela Zafar, Adena Dalton, Semab Hadayat and Kanwal Bekhtawar.

A fortnight after the alleged desecration, 'hundreds' of Muslim students staged an angry protest outside the college on June 1, demanding justice. They were joined by about 40 baton-wielding women students from *Jamia Hafsa*, an Islamic seminary linked with Islamabad's controversial *Lal Masjid* (Red Mosque). They tried to storm the building to reach the noticeboard at the centre of the furore, but were barred by police.

Then on June 3, more than a thousand female students from *Jamia Hafsa* demonstrated outside the Red Mosque against the alleged desecration at the nursing college. As 7x7 reported on June 12, hardline Muslims at the Red Mosque are openly defying the government and demanding that it imposes Islamic law more strictly.

'The religious extremists are furthering their agenda by abusing the blasphemy laws while the government constantly refuses to discuss the issue in any proper forum,' said the National Justice and Peace Commission in a published statement.

- Ask God to strengthen and protect the six Christians suspended at the nursing college in Islamabad.
- Pray that the Pakistani government will take a tough stand against rebellious extremists wanting to impose *Sharia* through aggressive means.

*Sources: Assist News Service; BosNewsLife; Christian Post; Christian Solidarity Worldwide; Compass Direct; International Christian Concern; Open Doors UK; Release-Eritrea UK; The Voice of the Martyrs Canada; UCANews.*

#### **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 10 July 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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