

# RELEASE INTERNATIONAL 7x7 PRAYER ALERT

*Tuesday 26 September 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. INDONESIA

A pastor and his pregnant wife are in hiding in Aceh after Islamist militants burned down their church – because they had dared to speak of Christian revival.

A 100-strong mob poured gasoline over the Indonesia Evangelical Mission Church in Siompi town, Aceh Singkil, and set it alight after news got out that the church was planning a revival meeting.

Pastor Luther Saragih had sent invitations to local Christians about the special service on September 1. But his letter had fallen into the hands of a Muslim who edited it to give the impression that everyone was invited – and circulated it to 3,000 Muslims.

So when 500 Christians turned out for the meeting, they were joined by a large crowd of Muslims, furious that such an event should be held in a province under *Sharia* or Islamic law. Pastor Saragih was detained briefly and told by police to send the Christians home. This he did – but not before he'd preached for 10 minutes on enduring persecution.

Later that same night, a horde of 100 men on motorbikes set the church ablaze, then went looking for Pastor Saragih and his wife Netty. The couple escaped into the jungle and hid in the undergrowth until they were found by friends in the early hours of the next morning.

Christians in a neighbouring province are now caring for the couple – but Compass Direct reports that local police and Muslim leaders are still hunting for them.

- Pray for the safety of Pastor Luther Saragih and his wife Netty, who is pregnant. Thank God for the pastor's bravery in preaching to his flock under huge pressure.
- Pray for all churches in Aceh, a province which adopted *Sharia* law earlier this year. Praise God that Pastor Saragih's church continues to meet in someone's home.

## 2. SUDAN

As Sudan wrestles with the crisis in Darfur, its north-south peace deal appears to be in jeopardy, according to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan.

In a report to the UN Security Council, Mr Annan pointed out that major commitments made in January 2005 have yet to become reality. And he criticised the Sudanese government for blocking imports and failing to pass important legislation, Reuters reports.

In particular, Mr Annan drew attention to the fact that a commission set up to share Sudan's oil revenue fairly is not functioning properly. There has been little progress

towards disarming fighters and setting up a human rights commission, says the BBC. And election planning is way behind schedule.

The UN's own work in trying to rebuild Sudan has been severely hampered, Mr Annan claimed. Its peacekeepers have been denied access to the contented oil-rich region of Abyei, while UN equipment and rations have been barred by customs. A UN radio station set up to promote peace across Sudan has not been allowed to broadcast in the north.

Mr Annan said that the future of the north-south deal depended on the resolution of the situation in Darfur, which has reached a critical point.

- Pray that the Sudanese government in Khartoum and the southern administration would commit themselves afresh to consolidating peace across Sudan.
- Pray for a breakthrough in peace negotiations over Darfur so that this appalling tragedy will end and no longer threaten the political stability of the nation.

### **3. CHINA**

Four Christians serving time doing hard labour are demanding their right to be able to read the Bible and worship in their detention centre.

The four pastors from Sichuan province – Li Ming, Jin Jirong, Wang Yuan and Li Mingbo – have instructed their lawyers to appeal to authorities at the Langzhong Detention Centre.

As 7x7 reported on August 1, the four were each given two years' hard labour in July – simply for asking local police about two members of their congregation who had been detained. The group are all members of the Chinese House Church Alliance.

The four imprisoned pastors have not been allowed to read the Bible and are even forbidden to mention words such as God or Jesus in letters home, says China Aid.

Their lawyer Dr Li Baiguang is realistic about his clients' chance of success – but hopes that, at the very least, the authorities will be shaken out of their complacency and blatant disregard for prisoners' religious rights.

- Thank God for the principled stance that the four pastors are taking in demanding their religious rights. Pray that they will be a powerful witness in detention.
- Pray that their lawyer will be successful in his aim to encourage Christians to stand up for their rights and shake the authorities out of their complacency.

### **4. PAKISTAN**

A Christian teenager suspected of theft has suddenly become the focus of a huge controversy and a blasphemy case.

The family of Shahid Masih, 17, first realised something was wrong when their doctor, Dr Masood, warned them some medicines had been stolen from his clinic. They did not discount the possibility of Shahid's involvement in the theft and openly admitted that Shahid had a drug problem. But they could not have predicted what happened next.

Two weeks later, four police officers came to the Masih home in Faisalabad and told his family Dr Masood had accused Shahid of blasphemy. Shahid was alleged to have torn pages from a *tafseer*, a book explaining the Koranic verses, together with a Muslim friend.

Both youths have now been charged under Pakistan's Section 295B blasphemy laws. Shahid is now in custody in Faisalabad and has not been allowed any visits from his family, according to AsiaNews.

Khalil Tahir, the lawyer who prosecuted members of a Muslim seminary in Punjab accused of torturing to death Christian teenager Javed Anjum, has taken on Shahid's case and waived his legal fee. He claims there were no witnesses to the alleged desecration of the Muslim holy book and so there is no case to answer.

RI and its partners in Pakistan have long campaigned for the repeal of the blasphemy laws which are frequently abused to settle personal scores. Though it is apparently not the case in this instance, they are often used to persecute religious minorities.

- Pray for Shahid Masih and his Muslim friend who were accused of blasphemy, apparently on trumped-up charges. Pray for wisdom for their lawyers.
- Continue to pray for the repeal of Pakistan's blasphemy laws. Pray for justice for Pakistan's religious minorities such as Christians whose rights are often ignored.

*Sources: AsiaNews; BBC; China Aid; Compass Direct; International Christian Concern; Reuters; The Voice of the Martyrs Australia.*

#### **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)

#### **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 10 October 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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