

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL 7x7 PRAYER ALERT

Tuesday 27 November 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 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. NORTH KOREA

Nine young Christians who have disappeared in North Korea are feared to have been arrested as spies.

Security officials took the unusual step of holding a press conference in September to announce the arrest of unnamed 'native citizens working for a foreign intelligence service'.

The Voice of the Martyrs USA now says it believes the so-called spies were in fact a group of Christians who ran a portrait photography business in North Hamgyong province. They have all vanished without trace. The group, who had registered their business with the authorities, were mostly in their 30s. It is believed that 'espionage equipment' seized by security officials was in fact the Christians' cameras.

Meanwhile, Yoo Sang-joon, a co-worker of RI partner Helping Hands Korea (HHK), has been held in a Chinese jail for helping his North Korean compatriots seek asylum abroad.

Yoo Sang-joon, a former refugee now in his mid-30s, was arrested in Inner Mongolia, for assisting refugees in August. He was due to go on trial yesterday (November 26). His supporters hope that, because he is now a South Korean citizen, he will be deported to his adoptive home. The other options – jail in China or repatriation to his native North Korea – are of much greater concern. Yoo lost his wife and youngest son to famine in North Korea; his other son, who was 10, died in the Gobi desert, trying to escape with his father.

- Pray for the immediate release of the nine photographers who have disappeared.
- Pray earnestly that Yoo Sang-joon will not be repatriated to North Korea.

2. SUDAN

Sudan's president has sparked outrage after he called on militia groups loyal to the government to train 'holy warriors'.

President Omar al-Bashir's belligerent outburst came at a mass rally of the Popular Defence Forces (PDF), which fought southern rebels in Sudan's long civil war.

He called on the PDF to 'open training camps and to gather *mujahideen*, not for the sake of war but to be ready for anything'. These militia have been accused of widespread atrocities during the north-south civil war and in the ongoing Darfur crisis in western Sudan.

Southern leader Salva Kiir, who is also Al-Bashir's vice president, later told a rally in the southern capital Juba that the president was 'mobilising for war'.

Al-Bashir's speech has added fuel to the fire in the current stand-off between northern and southern politicians and is seen as a further threat to the north-south peace deal of 2005.

7x7 on November 13 quoted UN Special Envoy Andrew Natsios as saying that, after crisis talks, both north and south were committed to implementing the peace deal fully. But al-Bashir's speech to the PDF painted a very different picture.

He told the rally that he would not budge 'an inch' on the issue of Abyei, a disputed oil-rich region which straddles the current north-south border. Al-Bashir insisted he would only accept the 1905 border, which absorbs Abyei into the northern region of Kordofan.

The border demarcation issue is one of the key sticking points jeopardising the peace deal. Al-Bashir's stalling on the Abyei question was one of the main reasons that the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) withdrew its ministers from the coalition government last month.

Pagum Amum, SPLM Secretary General, told Reuters his party stood 'for peace and not for a return to war, and deplored public statements threatening and calling for war'.

- Pray that northern politicians would take meaningful steps towards building peace.
- Pray that fresh talk of *mujahideen* (holy warriors) in the north will not shake southerners from their commitment to peace and a new Sudan.

3. CHINA

The leak of a secret document has exposed an official crackdown on Chinese house churches – as the European parliament blacklists China for religious rights abuses.

The paper, leaked this month, reveals a concerted plan to abolish unregistered house churches which are preaching 'heresies, religious fanaticism, feudal superstition or harming the physical and mental health of the people, and violating the laws of the state'.

The confidential document was circulated specifically to Duodao district in Hubei province. But it was drawn up with input from national government institutions such as the Public Security Bureau and reflects national policy, according to wording in the paper itself.

News of the leak came in the same week that the European Parliament passed a resolution condemning Christian persecution across the globe, particularly in Asia.

The resolution, adopted by a near-unanimous vote, spoke out against 'serious events which compromise Christian communities' existence'. And it urges governments to do more to protect Christians from 'discrimination and repression'.

It mentions several instances of persecution on which 7x7 has reported in the past, including the attack on the New Apostolic Church in Govind, Pakistan, last month (7x7, October 30) and the murder of three Christians at a publisher's in Malatya, Turkey (7x7, May 1). It also notes 'the seriousness of the situation regarding religious freedom' in China, where the authorities 'continue to repress any religious expression'. Glaringly obvious in its absence is any mention of India or North Korea.

- Pray that the international community would continue to put pressure on China to end its campaign of intimidation and violence against its house churches.
- Thank God that the European Parliament has drawn attention to religious persecution – and its perpetrators.

4. NIGERIA

Christians in Nasarawa in central Nigeria have taken their governor to the high court in protest at his 'biased' nominations to the state's executive council.

The Nasarawa Youths Progressive Vanguard (NYPV) is angry that Governor Alhaji Aliyu Doma nominated 12 Muslims as commissioners and only three Christians. They claim this is against the constitution and unfair in a state where some 65 per cent of people are Christian. And they accuse the governor of trying to 'marginalise' Christians.

The group wants to force the governor to withdraw his list and draw up a new one which better reflects faith ratios in the state. The list is currently with the state House of Assembly.

The online newspaper *Daily Champion* reports that the state chapter of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) has moved to try to dispel tensions and is urging its members to push for 'dialogue, not confrontation'.

Nevertheless CAN's state secretary Amaechi Apollos accused the governor of breaking pre-election promises which distanced him from the perceived pro-Muslim bias of the previous governor. 'Aliyu promised he was going to toe a different line in the state by taking adequate consultations from Muslims and Christians alike before taking any decision,' said Apollos. 'What we are witnessing now is betrayal.'

- Pray that Christians' demands for a fairer system to nominate state commissioners in Nasarawa will be heard and acted upon.
- Pray that Christian youths will choose dialogue, not confrontation, to bring change.

Sources: allafrica.com; AsiaNews; BBC; China Aid; Christian Solidarity Worldwide; Daily Champion online; Helping Hands Korea; Reuters; Sudan Tribune; The Sunday Times; 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 11 December 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.

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