

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL 7x7 PRAYER ALERT

Tuesday 29 August 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

The lives of three Christians still hang in the balance as the Indonesian authorities agonise over whether or not to execute them.

Fabianus Tibo, Dominggus da Silva and Marinus Riwu were to have faced the firing squad on August 12 – but, in a dramatic turn-about, they were given a reprieve an hour before their scheduled execution. Officials said the stay of execution was granted because of ‘Independence Day preparations’.

The trio were convicted of allegedly orchestrating sectarian violence in Central Sulawesi in 2000: the men and their many supporters insist they have not been given a fair trial.

The news they were due to be executed on August 12 sparked frenzied lobbying and much prayer across the world. Even Pope Benedict XVI appealed to President Yudhoyono for a reprieve on ‘humanitarian grounds’.

Campaigners warn that the three men remain at high risk and are urging Christians worldwide to lobby and pray on their behalf.

Act

- Send a polite fax appealing for the three men’s lives to: the Indonesian President, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, fax: +62 21 345 2685 (Salutation: Dear President Yudhoyono). Or to the Governor of Central Sulawesi, Mr HL Paliuju, fax: +62 451 423 612 or +62 451 423 111 (Salutation: Dear Governor). Or to the Minister of Justice and Human Rights, Mr Hamid Awaluddin, fax: +62 21 725 0213 (Salutation: Dear Minister).

Pray

- Pray for Fabianus, Dominggus and Marinus and their families as they endure this agonising wait. Pray too that those in positions of power would heed international calls for the men’s reprieve – and grant them a retrial.

2. CHINA

The torture of four missionaries in China’s Yunan province has provoked a wave of international protest.

Ten police officers reportedly took turns over six hours to attack the four who were arrested in Wuyi township near Jinghong City, on suspicion of ‘superstitious activity’. One of the two female missionaries had her hair ripped out. The four were then left handcuffed to chairs for 12 hours. When they were finally released, 24 hours after their arrest, they could barely walk, according to China Aid.

The missionaries – Xing Baoying, Wang Guizhen, Li Jianying and Li Tuying – have since said that they thought they would die in the interrogation room.

It is only six months since Xing Baoying and Wang Guizhen, who are husband and wife, were released from prison camp after two years' hard labour for religious activities. They were brutally tortured on their arrest in 2004.

Meanwhile, a pastor of the officially sanctioned Three-Self Church in Pinglu County, Shanxi province, has been thrown out by the Religious Affairs Bureau. Pastor Hu Qinghua was expelled after inviting an American missionary to preach to his congregation.

- Pray for healing for the four missionaries tortured in Yunan province. Thank God for their courage and refusal to be bowed by pressure from the authorities.
- Thank God that, even in China's officially recognised churches, there are men and women of God such as Pastor Hu committed to religious freedom. Pray that Pastor Hu would find another spiritual home quickly.

3. PAKISTAN

Christians in a village near Lahore are fighting for the right to remain on land where they have built their homes and their church.

Believers in Momin Pura Theki say that they have been attacked and their church set alight by associates of a local Muslim man who is challenging their right to remain there.

Three Christian men received serious injuries on August 7 when a gang brandishing knives and other weapons attacked the church and some of the villagers. Five days later, the church and two Christian homes were set alight. A man named as Bashir Masih, who tried to resist the assault, was abducted.

About 55 Christian families moved to Momin Pura Theki, then an area of wasteland some 20 miles from Lahore, when flooding along the Ravi River forced them to flee their former homes in 1988. While they admit they have no legal entitlement to the land, they insist their Muslim opponent has no claim either.

Yet, this Muslim has been pursuing ownership of the land through the courts since 2000 – the year Christians started to build a church. He had also appealed unsuccessfully for the court to ban the church construction – but was reportedly jailed for six months after producing fake documents before a judge.

The Christian villagers are now appealing for the authorities to grant them land rights. 'It is government property but, since we have been living here for so many years, we appeal to the authorities that it be given to us,' one man told ASSIST News Service.

RI partner Centre for Legal Aid Assistance and Settlement (CLAAS) reportedly intervened after Christian villagers protested that local police had failed to take the matter seriously. Joseph Francis, National Director of CLAAS, ensured that a case has now been registered.

- Pray for villagers in Momin Pura Theki who have endured years of violence and intimidation. Pray that they would be granted a safe home – and allowed to live in peace.
- Thank God for CLAAS' help for villagers. It is committed to defending the rights of Pakistan's religious minorities, which would otherwise be trampled under foot.

4. NORTH KOREA

North Korea has opened its first-ever Russian Orthodox church – in a move which seems to have more to do with politics rather than human rights.

An inaugural mass has been held at The Trinity Church in Pyongyang, attended by Russian delegates and senior North Korean officials, including Vice Premier Kwak Pom Gi.

The chairman of the Korean Orthodox Church Committee, Ho Il Jin, said that the North Korean government would 'successfully manage and operate the church'. He added that the church would build bridges between Russia and North Korea. AsiaNews reported in 2004 that North Korea was footing most of the bill for construction work.

Pyongyang has also had one Catholic and two Protestant churches since 1988 – but these are considered to be empty showcases tightly controlled by the authorities. 7x7 reported on January 31 that work on a church for foreigners, the International Harvest Church, has been on hold for more than a year, as the Pyongyang regime stalls on giving the go-ahead.

- Pray for the congregation of this new Russian Orthodox church. Pray that they would be able to worship freely, despite the inevitable attempts by officialdom to infiltrate teaching with doctrine and politics.
- Continue to pray that construction work on the International Harvest Church would resume quickly – and the church would live up to its name.

Sources: AsiaNews; ASSIST News Service; Centre for Legal Aid Assistance and Settlement; China Aid; Christian Post; Christian Solidarity Worldwide; International Christian Concern; Jubilee Campaign; Pravda; Sharing Life Ministry Pakistan; The Voice of the Martyrs Canada.

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

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

Our next Prayer Alert issue will be on Tuesday 12 September 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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