

# **RELEASE INTERNATIONAL 7x7 PRAYER ALERT**

**Tuesday 30 August 2005**

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This is the regular Prayer Alert service of Release International.

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 in your church and in other Christian meetings. The information can also be reproduced in church magazines and news bulletins, provided the source is acknowledged.

Our next Prayer Alert is due for issue on 13 September 2005.

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2. The Vietnamese authorities have offered to release imprisoned Mennonite pastor Nguyen Hong Quang if he will 'confess' his guilt – but he has refused.
3. Moves have begun to evict 15 church organisations based in a major Christian complex in Nigeria.
4. Another church closure in Sri Lanka has sparked fresh concerns about discrimination against Christians - as the government revisits anti-conversion law proposals.

1. A spate of police raids against Chinese house churches in recent weeks has been followed by accusations of arbitrary arrest and brutal ill-treatment.

China Aid reports that more than 210 pastors and church members have been arrested in Hubei, Hebei and Henan provinces since July. Further arrests have been recorded in Xinjiang and Jiangxi provinces.

About 30 Christians were arrested when police officers in more than 20 vehicles surrounded a house church in Xinjiang on August 7. About ten women were stripped and paraded before the others: those who refused to undress were beaten. Three church leaders are still being held at an unknown location.

On August 11, a Sunday School teacher training class in Xiping Xinjian village in Jiangxi was raided. Everyone present was arrested and some were beaten. Most have now been released but six Christians are to be prosecuted. Another church leader was arrested soon afterwards.

Four days later five American pastors and 28 Chinese church leaders meeting for fellowship in Luoyang City in Henan were detained at an unknown location.

A further 40 Christians were arrested in Hubei on August 10. The ten who have been since been freed report terrible torture during their interrogation, including wrists being punctured with needles. At least two women – Gu Junqing and Ren Daoyun – remain in custody. Ren, who is 60, is reported to have been beaten repeatedly.

- Pray for the release of all those pastors and church members detained and subjected to intimidation and torture over the last few weeks.
- Pray that their faith would grow under pressure and that God would grant them with His peace.

2. The Vietnamese authorities have offered to release imprisoned Mennonite pastor Nguyen Hong Quang if he will 'confess' his guilt – but he has refused.

Rev Quang was reportedly approached by high-ranking prison officials on August 9 while he was attending to a machine extracting cashew nuts in the Dak Lak labour camp.

According to Compass Direct, he was immediately bundled into a car and driven to a prison in Dong Nai Province, some 155 miles away. On arrival at K1-Z30A prison in Xuan Loc, he was told he would be freed as part of a prisoner amnesty on the September 2 National Day – if he would sign papers declaring him to be guilty of the charges of which he was convicted.

Rev Quang was given a three-year jail term in November for 'inciting others to resist officers of the law doing their duty'. The charges on which he and five other Mennonite colleagues were convicted related to an incident in March 2004 when Rev Quang confronted undercover agents staking out his church in Ho Chi Minh City.

Rev Quang reportedly told prison officials in Dong Nai that he had no intention of changing his position now.

Observers believe the authorities are attempting a face-saving exercise amid a storm of negative international publicity over the Mennonite Six case. A Vietnamese pastor quoted by Compass said: "We find it interesting that Vietnamese authorities are so intent on getting Pastor Quang to admit guilt: they have already declared him guilty."

Meanwhile, Rev Quang's wife Le Thi Phu Dung is seeking legal redress for the demolition of her home and part of the Vietnam Mennonite Church in Ho Chi Minh City last month (as reported in 7x7 on August 2). The partial demolition of the site, she says, has left the remaining structure unstable.

- Thank God for Rev Quang's resilience and courage and ask Him to continue to use His faithful servant to witness to His love in prison.
- Pray for his friends and relatives, and particular his immediate family who lost their home when the authorities pulled down part of the church complex.

3. Moves have begun to evict 15 church organisations based in a major Christian complex in Nigeria.

The churches - including Anglicans, Assemblies of God and the United Evangelical Church - made their base in a former police academy in Kano State 30 years ago after police training was relocated.

The Christian organisations had been denied permission to build in the city, so moved into the abandoned police college on an industrial estate and renovated the buildings.

For three decades they were allowed to remain, and the complex became one of the most celebrated centres for Christian worship in Kano.

Now, unexpectedly, the authorities have served an eviction notice on the Christian organisations based at the former police academy site.

Kano has become one of 12 northern states to adopt strict Islamic law - with disastrous consequences for Christians. It has emboldened militants to try to wipe out the Christian presence.

In recent riots Islamists destroyed every church building in Kano city, according to the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN). CAN leaders wrote to President Obasanjo last month appealing to him to end the imposition of Sharia law in northern states – and to do more to protect Christians' rights to religious freedom.

- Pray that the 15 churches threatened with eviction will be allowed to remain at the former police academy in Kano State.
- Pray too that Christian witness will continue in northern Nigeria despite the efforts of militants to enforce religious apartheid. Pray too that the central government of Nigeria will heed the call of church leaders to end Sharia.

4. Another church closure in Sri Lanka has sparked fresh concerns about discrimination against Christians - as the government revisits anti-conversion law proposals.

Police ordered the congregation of the Foursquare Gospel Church in Horana, Kalutara District, to stop meeting after mobs threatened churchgoers on two consecutive Sundays. The harassment was reportedly the climax of a campaign of intimidation levelled at the church by extremists in a mainly Buddhist area.

When the pastor called the police for help in dispersing the 50-strong crowd who were demanding an end to Christian worship on the site on August 7, officers closed the church down to 'prevent a further breach of the peace'. And the congregation was warned by police not to try to meet anywhere else.

This latest church closure is one of many in recent years – and yet another blow to Sri Lanka's Christian minority who face mounting pressure from Buddhist extremists.

They are particularly worried about proposed anti-conversion laws which are again on the political agenda in the form of the *Bill for the Prohibition of Forcible Conversion*.

The bill had been shelved after last year's tsunami but has been dusted off again, allegedly to appease Buddhists angered by the government's decision to allow the mainly-Hindu Tamils to take responsibility for distributing some aid relief.

The bill seeks to prevent so-called 'unethical conversion' involving force, 'allurement' or fraud. While churches and the Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka are publicly opposed to any kind of forced or unethical evangelistic activity, they believe that the proposed bill is badly worded, and may lead to severe restrictions on church activities.

#### **Act**

- Please download and use the petition for Sri Lanka from <http://www.releaseinternational.org/resources>

#### **Pray**

- Pray for the pastor and congregation of the Foursquare Gospel Church in Horana. Pray that they will be able to continue with their worship and witness.
- Pray for the government of Sri Lanka, that it would take decisive action to protect the religious rights of all its citizens and take a lead in promoting religious tolerance.

**News updates:**

- Hecklers at the ongoing trial of three Indonesian woman accused of proselytising Muslim children caused such a disturbance at the August 18 hearing that the judge shouted in a rage: 'Who dared to tell us to hand down the verdict now?' The uproar followed the judge's decision to postpone proceedings for a week to allow the defence to prepare its response to 'new elements' 'in the prosecution's case.

*Sources: Assist News; BBC; China Aid; Christian Association of Nigeria; Compass Direct; National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka; Release International partners; The Voice of the Martyrs (VOM) Canada; VOM USA.*

This prayer alert is part of Release International's 7x7 initiative to encourage prayer and action for seven years for seven countries where Christians face intense persecution: China, Indonesia, Nigeria, North Korea, Pakistan, Sudan and Vietnam.

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