

# RELEASE INTERNATIONAL 7x7 PRAYER ALERT

*Tuesday 31 January 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. CHINA

A prominent religious rights lawyer from Beijing has survived an assassination attempt.

Gao Zhisheng, whose clients have included Pastor Cai Zhuohua, was driving in the north-west of the Chinese capital when a car stopped suddenly in front of him. Gao narrowly missed hitting the vehicle and got out of his car to remonstrate. The driver of the other car then tried to run Gao down, but failed as the lawyer dodged out of its path.

The incident took place at about 10.30pm on January 17. Shortly afterwards, Mr Zhisheng sent this message to a Beijing civil rights activist: 'This was obviously an attempt to cause an accident so it looked like I deliberately hit the other car. Because that car's rear plate was covered, I walked to see their front car plate. At that very moment (...), the car suddenly started and rushed straight at me. I stood aside in a miraculously fast move (...) My right hand touched the right front of the car.'

A piece of newspaper obscuring the car's rear number plate blew off as the vehicle sped away and Mr Zhisheng was able to report its registration. The Voice of the Martyrs Canada reports that Gao's attacker is believed to have been a 'security agent of the Chinese government'.

Mr Zhisheng also reported that the occupants of a 'mysterious military vehicle' nearby observed the incident, without intervening.

This attack is by no means the first on Mr Zhisheng since he took on the defence of a well-known Beijing church leader, Pastor Cai, who was given a three-year sentence in November for printing Christian literature. 7x7 reported on December 6 that Mr Zhisheng has been followed by up to 20 agents at a time and that agents have tried to drive him off the road more than once. His law practice has been shut down for a year and his licence suspended in December.

The church he attends, the Church of Ark in Beijing, has been raided twice this month by law enforcement officers claiming the congregation was 'disturbing the public peace'.

### Act

- Write a polite letter to the Chinese authorities expressing concern for the safety of Gao Zhisheng. Write to: Ms Wu Aiyong, Minister at the Ministry of Justice of the People's Republic of China, No. 10 Nan Da Jie, Chaoyangmen, Beijing City 100020, China.
- Email messages of support to Mr Zhisheng at [gaozhisheng@263.net](mailto:gaozhisheng@263.net)

### Pray

- Pray for the safety of Gao Zhisheng, his wife and 12-year-old daughter who are under almost constant surveillance. Ask God to strengthen their faith.
- Pray that the people sent to follow the Zhisheng family will be touched by their bravery and Mr Zhisheng's Christian witness.

## 2. PAKISTAN

A Muslim cleric accused of torturing a Christian teenager to death to make him convert to Islam has been arrested – almost 21 months after the boy's murder.

Police apprehended Umar Hayat on charges that he and two other members of a *madrassa* (or Islamic seminary) in the Punjab had inflicted fatal injuries on Javed Anjum over five days in 2004.

7x7 reported on January 3 that a second suspect, prayer leader Ghulam Rasool, had been rearrested in November after the Supreme Court revoked his bail. A third suspect Mohammed Tayyab, a teacher at the *madrassa*, was freed on bail in December 2004.

Compass reports that Muslim clerics have been pressing for Hayat's release by visiting the police station where he is detained and putting pressure on officers in charge of the case.

The judge in the ongoing court case brought by the dead boy's family has now ordered police protection for Anjum's father, Pervez Masih, and Masih's lawyer, Khalil Tahir Sindhu. They had appealed for Judge Javed Iqbal Warraich to intervene after receiving death threats from *madrassa* members.

Sindhu has reported that as many as 40 clerics and students from the seminary have gathered outside the courthouse on repeated occasions.

Nineteen-year-old Javed Anjum was allegedly kidnapped as he stopped to drink water from the seminary's pump. After his torture ordeal, he was handed over to police as a 'thief'. He died of his injuries in hospital in Faisalabad in May 2004.

Compass reports that the *madrassa* is alleged to have ties with an outlawed fundamentalist group called Sipah-e-Sahaba, one of five extremist groups banned by President Musharraf in 2002.

- Thank God that the trial judge has taken steps to protect Pervez Masih and his lawyer, despite considerable pressure from Islamic fundamentalists.
- Pray for President Musharraf as he wrestles with the question of how to subdue extremist elements in some *madrassas*. Pray that he will take decisive steps to stamp out radicalism.

### **3. INDONESIA**

Eight house churches in a housing complex in West Java received official letters on the same day ordering them to stop meeting.

Each church in the Rancaekek Kencana complex in Bandung was told that private homes should not be used as worship venues.

The pronouncement followed a meeting on January 12 to which local government officials, police, the local military commander and the leader of a local Muslim forum were invited.

Several of the churches defied the order and reportedly met for worship the following Sunday as usual. All the churches have applied for permits on several occasions since they were set up in 1993 but their applications have been rejected repeatedly. Permits have to be approved by local residents – which can be a significant hurdle in a Muslim-majority country.

In the case of at least three of the eight Bandung churches, no objections from neighbours had ever been received. One of the eight churches, the Huria Kristen Batak Protestan (HKBP) has 250 members but, according to Compass, the congregation's singing is 'barely audible' from the street.

The pastor of a church in Gradiol Street, Rev Margaret, said local residents had no objections to her congregation – but were afraid to speak up for them. She told her church on January 15, after the ban was announced: 'God will help us in this difficult situation. Don't stop praying.'

Edin Hendradin, head of the Office of National Unity and Public Protection which ordered the churches to stop meeting, told Compass: 'Please be fair. What has happened in Rancaekek is not church closure: we're just restoring the proper function of private homes.'

- Pray for the members and pastors of the eight Bandung churches which were ordered to close this month. Pray that God's presence with them will be strong as they continue to meet, albeit perhaps in smaller groups.
- Pray that local residents who have no objections to Christian meetings would start to stand up for Christians' right to religious freedom, instead of allowing themselves to be intimidated by the authorities.

#### 4. NORTH KOREA

Work on North Korea's first church for foreigners has been on hold for more than a year, despite official permission for the project being granted in 2004.

The project, which is being funded from abroad, has stalled because the Pyongyang regime has since asked for the money to be spent on renovating the Chilgol Church in the capital, one of only a handful of official churches in the country.

Pastor Lee Sung-woo of a South Korean missionary group which is heading up the project told Radio Free Asia: 'We turned down the offer. We still plan to build a brand-new church there.'

The design for the four-storey Pyongyang International Harvest Church has been submitted to the Pyongyang authorities by South Korean builders. The original schedule for construction would have seen the building completed by the end of this year.

The church, funded by ethnic Koreans in the US and by missionary groups in South Korea, would combine traditional masses with 'a school for foreign students', according to *The Korea Times* in Seoul.

North Korea opened three official churches in 1988, two Protestant and one Catholic – but they are believed to be little more than a showcase for foreign visitors. Their teachings are strictly controlled and are a mix of religious doctrine and politics.

- Pray that the Pyongyang authorities would bow to foreign pressure for the International Harvest Church to be built – and that it would live up to its name when it is completed.
- Continue to pray for North Korea's Christians who are forced underground in a brutal regime. Pray that they would know God's love and His power in an extraordinary way.

*Sources: China Aid; Compass Direct; Daily NK website; International Christian Concern; Radio Free Asia; The Epoch Times; The Korea Times; The Voice of the Martyrs Canada.*

#### **Our next Prayer Alert issue will be on Tuesday 14 February 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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