

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL PRAYER ALERT

Tuesday, June 22nd, 2010

Prayer support is crucial to those who suffer for their faith in Jesus. Please use these alerts to prompt your own prayers, and to facilitate prayer in your church and other Christian meetings. Please also send it on to other Christians. This information can also be reproduced in church magazines and news bulletins, provided the source is acknowledged.

PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS NEED YOU!

Release 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 the 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 Release team. Please prayerfully consider 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.

8th June 2010 - PAKISTAN – Christian families driven out of village after challenging abuse

About 250 Christian families have been forced to leave their homes in Punjab – after they dared to challenge the abuse suffered by their women and girls.

The head of the predominantly Muslim village No. 123/10R, Katcha Khoh, ordered the expulsions in apparent retaliation for complaints made by four Christian men against their Muslim neighbours.

The four had dared to protest that Christian women and girls in the village, who mostly worked as domestic servants in Muslim households, were being 'routinely' sexually assaulted, according to Compass Direct news agency. Most Christian men in the village worked as agricultural labourers for Muslim landowners.

Villagers told Compass Direct sources that they had not involved police in the situation for fear of being falsely accused under Pakistan's blasphemy laws.

Their fears are not unfounded. Two Christian men in Gulshan-e-Iqbal town, Karachi, have just been charged with 'desecrating the Koran' – after they complained to police that radical Muslims had been 'looking for pages of the Islamic scripture' in their rubbish bins. The men – Atiq Joseph and Qaiser William – and their wives are now in hiding and in fear of their lives.

(Source: Compass Direct)

- Pray for justice for the Christians of Katcha Khoh. Pray that they will know that God is their refuge and their strength (Psalm 46:1).
- Ask God to keep safe Atiq Joseph, Qaiser William and their wives.

14th June 2010 - PAKISTAN – Two Christian women in court for 'blasphemy' tomorrow

Two Christian women in Punjab have an anxious wait before they appear in court on blasphemy charges tomorrow.

Martha Bibi and Asia Bibi, who are not related, were both expecting a hearing last week but both cases were adjourned until Tuesday. At Asia's last hearing in Nankana Sahib on June 8, the adjournment was prompted by prosecution witnesses from the police failing to turn up. Martha's

hearing in Lahore last Thursday (*Prayer Alert, June 10, 2010*) was adjourned because the judge was 'unavailable'.

Both women, charged under Section 295C blasphemy laws, were accused after disputes with people they worked with. Asia Bibi has been detained in Sheikhupura District Jail following a discussion she had about her faith with fellow farm labourers in 2009. Charges were brought against Martha in 2007 after she became involved in a dispute with builders in Kasur who, her friends allege, refused to return equipment belonging to Martha and her husband, Boota Masih.

Members of Release partner Sharing Life Ministry Pakistan (SLMP) were in court last week to encourage both defendants – and have been offering practical and spiritual support to both women and their families. SLMP has also contributed to Martha's legal fees.

Martha is said to be 'very concerned' about the outcome of her trial and SLMP has reported that Asia's two daughters are finding it very hard to be separated from their mother.

(Sources: Sharing Life Ministry Pakistan, Release International)

- Pray that Martha, Asia and their families will have a fresh revelation of God's love and His power working in and through them.
- Pray for justice – and immediate acquittal – for these two women.

18th June 2010 - SOMALIA – Christian girl 'shackled to a tree' for leaving Islam

A Christian teenager in Somalia is reportedly being abused and held prisoner in her own home after she refused her parents' demands that she return to Islam.

The Muslim parents of 17-year-old Nurta Mohamed Farah are said to leave her 'shackled to a tree' during the day and imprisoned in a small, dark room at night – in a bid to make her renounce her faith. For more than a month now, Nurta has resolutely refused.

The family, who live in Bardher in the Gedo region of southern Somalia, tried initially to 'cure' their daughter by beating her and giving her medication a doctor had prescribed for 'mental illness'. Nurta has reportedly become 'very sick' as a result.

Nurta's family are said to recite long passages from the Koran to her twice a week in the belief that Islam's holy book can cure mental illness, Compass Direct news agency reports.

The tiny Christian community in Gedo region is said to be very distressed about Nurta's treatment – but feel they cannot intervene for fear of attack.

Religious freedom is enshrined in Somalia's Transitional Federal Charter – but is not upheld by the transitional Government. Islamist Al Shabaab militants, who control much of the country, are also attacking Christians in a bid to extend strict *Sharia* (Islamic law) across the country.

(Sources: Compass Direct, US Department of State *International Religious Freedom Report 2009*)

- Thank God for Nurta's strong faith and her powerful witness. Pray that her family will stop persecuting her and come to know Jesus for themselves.
- Ask God to protect and build His church in this troubled land.

NEWS UPDATE:

The blasphemy trial of Punjabi Christian Asia Bibi (*Prayer Alert, June 14, 2010*) has heard evidence from the policeman who registered the original case against her – and more prosecution witnesses are due to appear in court in Sheikhupura this Saturday (June 19). The next hearing in the blasphemy trial of Martha Bibi in Lahore is scheduled for June 24. Please continue to pray for justice for Asia and Martha – and for protection over both women, their families and the Release partners supporting them.