

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL PRAYER ALERT

Tuesday, May 25, 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.

CHINA – Christian lawyer Gao vanishes again, two weeks after his ‘release’

Beijing lawyer Gao Zhisheng has disappeared again, just days after security officials apparently freed him at the end of a 13-month detention.

Gao, a Christian human rights lawyer, has been missing since April 20 and is ‘definitely in the hands of security forces’, according to Release partner China Aid.

After his release on April 6 (*Prayer Alert, April 13, 2010*), Gao was allowed to return home to Beijing and later to visit his in-laws in Urumqi, Xinjiang province. But four police officers accompanied him to his relatives’ home and allowed him just one night there. Gao promised to call his in-laws on his return home to Beijing – but never did.

China Aid believes that the Chinese authorities allowed Gao a brief re-appearance to prove he was still alive – but have seized him again to stop him speaking about his treatment in custody, when he was held *incommunicado*. Gao, who was tortured by security police in 2007, refused to discuss his recent detention at a press conference on April 7, saying only that he ‘no longer had the strength’ to continue his legal work.

(Sources: China Aid, Compass Direct)

- Ask God to strengthen and protect Gao and his family. His wife and children have fled to the US.
- Pray that the Chinese authorities will respond to international pressure to release Gao for good.

INDIA – Religious motives suspected in murder of Bihar evangelist

Christians suspect Hindu militants of the brutal murder of an evangelist in east India, soon after he had helped screen the *Jesus* film.

A search was launched for Ravi Murmu when he failed to return home after the screening to up to 200 people in Laksmanpur village, Bihar state, on May 2. His mutilated body was found the next day. Christians are now convinced the murder was religiously motivated, not least because none of Ravi's belongings had been taken.

Indeed, Ravi, 32, who was part of the Brethren church, was no stranger to persecution. In 2008, he had been part of a team of evangelists who were attacked in Bihar's Newada area, allegedly by members of Hindu extremist group *Bajrang Dal*.

Ravi's pastor, Yunus Mandal, who was also hurt in the earlier attack, regularly receives threats, according to his wife, Mary Mandal.

When asked how Ravi's family were coping, his brother Shailendra reportedly said: 'The peace of God still reigns in this house and in this family.'

Police detained two suspects – but later released them.

(Sources: All India Christian Council, Baptist Press, Compass Direct, Gospel for Asia, International Christian Concern)

- Ask God to comfort and bless Ravi's widow, Rinku, and their eight-year-old daughter, Celesty.
- Pray for protection for all Christians in Bihar, who represent about 1 per cent of the state's population.

EGYPT – Courts suspend Christian's legal battle to change his ID papers

An Egyptian Christian branded an apostate for leaving Islam is 'devastated' by a court decision to suspend his legal battle to change his religion on his identity card.

Mohammed Ahmed Hegazy has had his case suspended until the Constitutional Court rules on a separate legal challenge to a section of the civil code which, in theory, allows Egyptians to change the religion listed on their ID card.

Mohammed says that delaying a judgment in his case will only prolong the uncertainty and danger surrounding his family, including his two children – Mariam, two, and baby Yousef.

The 27-year-old, who lives in hiding, has suffered severe persecution, including imprisonment, since he became a Christian in 1998. The persecution intensified in 2007 when he began his legal battle to change his religion to 'Christian' on his ID papers in a high-profile suit. The court ruled against him and he is currently appealing against that judgment.

Currently, the Egyptian Government lists both Mohammed's children as 'Muslim' – so they too would be considered 'apostates' if they chose to embrace Christianity. Compass Direct news agency reports that this latest court ruling could delay a decision in his case 'for several years'.

(Source: Compass Direct)

- As they share in Christ's sufferings, pray that Mohammed and his wife and children will receive Christ's comfort (2 Cor 1:5).
- Pray for a swift and positive ruling on Mohammed's case.

UZBEKISTAN – Christians fear harsh judgment heralds more detentions

An Uzbek court has given three Christians 15-day jail sentences – just two days after police and other officials raided their church in the capital Tashkent.

Assistant Pastor Artur Avanesyan and two other church members were sent to prison little more than 48 hours after the raid on the Church of Christ, which is fully registered. Five other members were given hefty fines, two more than 80 times the minimum monthly wage in Uzbekistan. Christian literature confiscated on May 16 has been destroyed.

Prosecutors brought many charges against the eight, including being in possession of works 'promoting national, ethnic, racial or religious hatred' and 'resisting' police.

The swift and harsh judgments handed down to the eight Christians have prompted fears that the Uzbek authorities have started targeting Christians for short-term detentions, a trend which was evident last year and which appears to have resumed. The Church of Christ in Tashkent has now been sealed and its power cut off.

Uzbekistan's authoritarian regime requires all religious groups to be officially registered – but most applications are denied. Unregistered groups are illegal.

(Sources: Forum 18, International Christian Concern)

- Ask God to reveal His purposes clearly to the eight Church of Christ members.
- Pray that the Uzbek authorities' apparent campaign to clamp down on even registered churches will end.

Our next Prayer Alert issue will be on June 8, 2010.

Through our international network of missions, we serve 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. Release is a member of the UK organisations Global Connections and the Evangelical Alliance.

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