

# RELEASE INTERNATIONAL PRAYER ALERT

Tuesday, July 05, 2011

*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.*

## **June 17, 2011: CHINA – Prominent house church leader arrested again amid ongoing crackdown**

The deputy chairman of the Chinese House Church Alliance (CHCA) was seized again by Jiangsu police on the day he was released from detention – even before he reached home.

Pastor Shi Enhao had just been freed on Sunday after 12 days' administrative detention when he was immediately rearrested and taken away to an unknown location, according to Release partner China Aid. He has not been heard from since.

Pastor Shi's latest detention is in fact the third in three months. He was also arrested while preaching in Nanyang city on March 4 and was taken to Suqian city detention centre, where he was reportedly beaten.

This is just the latest incident in an ongoing, relentless crackdown on house church Christians and rights activists by the Chinese authorities.

One of Beijing's largest house churches, Shouwang Church, continues its stand-off with officials who refuse to allow the congregation to meet in their premises in Haidan district (*Prayer Alert, April 12, 2011*).

Last weekend, for the tenth Sunday running, Shouwang members met outdoors to worship – and for the tenth consecutive week, police made arrests – 14 on this occasion. All 14 had been released by midday on Monday. As had happened on previous occasions, several Christians were put under house arrest over the weekend and a few were even taken away to guesthouses, leaving only a few dozen people to meet in the plaza near their church.

China Aid reports that members of the state-sanctioned Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) Church visited many of those detained this week and last while they were in custody, to try to persuade them to join the official, registered TSPM church.

'Even though we've been through two months of battles and are feeling tired in body and soul, our desire to worship God is unchanged,' Shouwang Church said in a statement this week.

China Aid has also received a letter from the wife of Beijing activist Chen Guangcheng detailing the brutal treatment they received from officials in February during their ongoing house arrest (*Prayer Alert, February 11, 2011*).

The couple have been held captive in their home in Shandong province since September, when Chen, who is blind, was released after serving more than four years in jail on criminal charges. The letter from Chen's wife, Yuan Weijing, reveals that up to 80 men stormed their house in February and beat both of them for more than two hours, leaving Chen unconscious and Yuan with suspected broken bones. Neither has received medical treatment. The assault was apparently in retaliation for a video about their house arrest posted on YouTube.

Yuan also says that officials have confiscated much of their property and that their windows were sealed with metal sheets in March, she says. They remain under tight surveillance.

(Sources: China Aid, Compass Direct, Radio Free Asia)

- *Pray for the immediate release of Pastor Shi Enhao and ask God to protect him and other CHCA members from state persecution.*
- *Pray for wisdom and protection for Shouwang Church.*
- *Pray that officials will relent and release from house arrest activist Chen Guangcheng and his wife, Yuan. Pray that they will know Jesus' miraculous healing and His love.*

## **June 22, 2011: INDONESIA – Christians encouraged to keep calm after school attacked**

Indonesian Christians are being urged not to retaliate after an attack on a mission school in West Java.

Release partners report that more than 80 assailants raided a mission school linked to the Indonesia Bethel Church (GBI) in the Jonggol area of the province – ‘escorted’ by police and soldiers from the local military base.

The mob, who arrived on motorbikes after Friday prayers at the mosque, stormed every room, ripping down images of Jesus from the walls and demanding the school’s closure.

The school, which trains students for Christian mission, was established in 1999 and has always enjoyed good relationships with neighbours and local government officials.

Release partners said the motive for the raid was hard-line Muslims’ objections to what they perceive to be attempts to ‘Christianise’ the region. They said the attackers were ‘not from the local neighbourhood surrounding this mission school’.

The school’s director, who also leads a local church, said it was a mercy that the students were not in school at the time of the raid. He said he intended to raise the matter with the authorities.

A GBI senior official said it was important that the matter was seen to be resolved by believers in Christian-majority areas of this predominantly Muslim nation. Otherwise, he said, some Christians might be tempted to retaliate.

(Source: Release partners)

### **NEWS UPDATE:**

Ethiopian courts have reportedly sentenced 579 Muslims to between three months and 18 years in jail for their part in anti-Christian violence in the Oromia region, west Ethiopia, in March (*Prayer Alert, March 9, 2011*). One person died and 69 churches and several Christian homes were destroyed in the week-long campaign of violence, which followed blasphemy accusations against a Christian in Asendabo. About 100 people are still to be tried – and eight of the main perpetrators are said to be still at large. Church leaders have welcomed the authorities’ tough stance. Although Ethiopia is predominantly Christian, believers can face harassment and discrimination in some mainly Muslim areas. (Source: International Christian Concern)

- *Pray that Christians in Indonesia will stand firm in their faith and not be tempted to retaliate against Islamist hardliners trying to curb church activities. Pray particularly that God will protect all those involved in the mission school and the church with which it is linked.*
- *Thank God for the Ethiopian authorities’ swift and decisive crackdown on those who attacked Christian communities earlier this year. Ask God to continue to heal and restore all those affected by the violence.*

## **June 24, 2011: NEPAL – Christians fear ‘law against evangelism’**

Nepal's Christian minority are concerned about draft laws which they fear could make evangelism illegal.

Draft legislation for the new Nepali constitution would make it a criminal offence to play any part in another person changing their religion – with a maximum penalty of five years in jail and a fine of £420.

Christian leaders say they have not been consulted over these proposed constitutional changes – even though Prime Minister Jhalnath Khanal has already presented the draft documents to the Cabinet. They will now go to parliamentary committee for revision and approval, before being passed to the Constituent Assembly – Nepal's interim Parliament – to be passed into law. President Ram Baran Yadav has final approval – and the power of veto.

Christians are particularly concerned over Clause 160 of the draft Act of Offence Against Religions which would make it an offence to ‘convert a person or abet him to change his religion’ whether this be with or without ‘inducements’. Christians fear that this could jeopardise a number of activities that they see as central to their faith, including aid work.

Release sources say other clauses are causing alarm because they imply that challenging social injustices such as caste oppression and women's inequality would be illegal in so far as it undermined ‘religious feelings’.

Christian leaders are reportedly seeking further information and legal advice in an effort to ensure that they are allowed input in to the process from now on. Some fear the Nepal equivalent of the ‘anti-conversion’ legislation operating in some states in neighbouring India, which has been misused against Christians.

The deadline for finalising the constitution was extended by three months from the start of June.

Nepal became a secular state when the Hindu monarchy was abolished and the country was declared a republic in 2008. Under its transitional constitution, ‘proselytising’ is already banned but Nepali citizens are currently ‘free to express their faith’, including through charity work.

(Sources: AsiaNews, BBC, Christian Today, Compass Direct)

- *Pray that President Ram Baran Yadav and the Assembly will require significant changes to the draft constitution to uphold religious freedom for all citizens.*
- *Pray too that Christians in Nepal will present a united front in opposing anything that limits religious freedom and will be allowed to help shape Nepal's new constitution.*

## **June 29, 2011: EGYPT – Mob destroys Christian homes**

Large gangs attacked two Christian communities in Egypt in the latest of a series of ongoing attacks on the country's Christian minority.

In the most recent assault, on Saturday, a mob destroyed seven Christian homes near Sohag, 240 miles south of Cairo, after rumours started that one Christian was building a church.

The believer in question, Wahib Halim Atteyah, was attacked and robbed of more than £5,000 before his attackers bulldozed his home and other buildings on his property in Awlad Khalaf village. The gang went on to raid six other Christian homes, burning them to the ground, according to Compass Direct news agency.

Two men have been arrested in connection with the assault on Atteyah's property. Atteyah himself and one other Christian have also been arrested, apparently for using firearms – a charge Atteyah has reportedly denied.

Compass Direct also reports that moderate Muslims in the area intervened to ensure that most of the property that the mob stole from Christian homes was later returned.

Earlier, last Thursday, an armed mob surrounded St George's Church in Beni-Ahmed al-Gharbiya village near the town of Minya, about 130 miles south of Cairo. They threatened to kill its pastor, Gorgy Thabet, unless he left the village. Pastor Thabet was able to leave only when security police arrived on the scene and escorted him from the building.

This is not the first time Pastor Thabet has met with hostility. In fact, he had only recently returned to the village after being forced to leave in March when hard-line Muslims protested about expansion work on a church building. The building project was abandoned – and now protesters are demanding Pastor Thabet leaves the village for good. His opponents are reported to be hard-line Salafi Muslims, a group who model themselves on early generations of Islam's followers.

There have in fact been several attacks on Christians by Salafi Muslims in the post-Mubarak era. In May, 12 people died in the Imbaba district of Cairo when riots broke out following rumours that a church was holding against her will a woman who, Muslims claimed, had converted to Islam (*Prayer Alert, May 10, 2011*). More than 230 people were injured and St Mary's Church was gutted by fire in the ensuing violence.

Christians in Egypt remain apprehensive about the outcome of parliamentary elections scheduled for September.

(Sources: Compass Direct, Reuters)

- *Ask God to protect Christian communities across Egypt from the threat of extremist violence, particularly in the run-up to the elections. Ask Him to bless and restore believers who have suffered attacks.*
- *Thank God that on several occasions moderate Muslims in Egypt have taken a stand against Islamist extremism after instances of religious persecution against Christians.*