

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL PRAYER ALERT

Tuesday, August 11, 2009

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.

1. NIGERIA – Christians attacked in militants' rampage across north Nigeria

A church pastor was brutally murdered and at least seven churches were destroyed when Islamist militants launched a campaign of violence across four states in northern Nigeria.

For four days, the 1,000-strong *Boko Haram* militant group engaged in fierce battles with police and military – leaving more than 200 people dead in Bauchi, Borno, Kano and Yobe states, according to the BBC.

The group, whose name is roughly translated as 'education is prohibited', appears determined to extend *Sharia* or Islamic law across Nigeria. So, while its primary targets were police stations and government buildings, Christians and churches were soon within its sights.

The main focus of the violence was Maiduguri, Borno state, where the militants had their base. Official reports said 103 people died in the city. Yakubu Sabo, a father of seven and pastor of the Church of Christ congregation in Maiduguri, was killed in a machete attack. Five churches in the city were razed to the ground.

Violence had erupted on July 26 when police arrested a group of *Boko Haram* leaders. The military, which had drafted in an extra 1,000 soldiers, finally routed *Boko Haram* from Maiduguri four days later. Many of the militants are believed to have come from neighbouring Chad and Niger.

Religious rights charity Barnabas Fund reports that the same militants are believed to have been behind violence in Bauchi town in February (*Prayer Alert, March 10, 2009*) which left 11 people dead and 14 churches in ruins. Maiduguri Christians are still coming to terms with the aftermath of violence in February 2006 when Islamist extremists went on the rampage, killing about 65 Christians and burning 57 churches (*Prayer Alert, February 28, 2006*).

(Sources: Barnabas Fund, BBC, Christian Solidarity Worldwide, International Christian Concern)

- Ask God to heal and bless His church in Maiduguri which has suffered so much.

- Pray the authorities will do all in their power to prevent *Boko Haram* regrouping.

2. ERITREA – Yet another Christian prisoner of faith dies in custody

Another Christian prisoner of faith has died in an Eritrean prison after his guards refused him medicine – the third Christian to have died in the same jail this year.

Yemane Kahasay Andom, who was 43, died at the Mitire Military Confinement Centre in north-east Eritrea on July 23 and was secretly buried inside the camp, it has emerged. He had been tortured brutally and continuously in an attempt to make him deny Christ, according to religious rights charity Open Doors. Yemane refused.

Yemane, a member of the Kale Hiwot church in Mendefera, was suffering from a severe case of malaria – after being weakened by torture. He had reportedly been held in solitary confinement in an underground cell for the fortnight leading up to his death.

Two other Christians – Mogos Hagos Kiflom and Mehari Gebreneguse Asgedom – died at Mitire camp in January. They had both been tortured.

A total of nine Christians are known to have died in custody in Eritrea since October 2006. Open Doors reports that Christian prisoners of faith from across Eritrea have been transferred to Mitire. The charity also says that 70 Christians – including 11 women jailed for failing to complete their military service – were suddenly released from Mitire without explanation on April 17.

(Sources: Compass Direct, Open Doors)

- Pray for Yemane's family. Thank God for his determination not to deny Christ.
- Pray that the Eritrean Government will end its repressive policy which bans all churches except the Orthodox, Lutheran and Roman Catholic denominations.

3. VIETNAM – Thousands protest over police attacks on pastors

Thousands of Christians took to the streets in several Vietnamese cities after police and thugs launched vicious attacks on two pastors caught up in a row over an historic church.

Pastor Peter Nguyen The Binh was beaten and then thrown from a second-floor hospital window in Dong Hoi city, Quang Binh province, about 200 miles south of Hanoi. Pastor Peter had been at the bedside of another pastor, Pastor Paul Nguyen Dinh Phu, who had been severely injured in an assault a short while earlier.

Both church leaders are said now to be in a serious condition. Pastor Peter is in a coma, and Pastor Paul has been left with several broken ribs and head and facial injuries.

The attacks on the two pastors are the latest episode in an ongoing dispute between police and Christians in Dong Hoi's Vinh diocese. Christians are protesting against officials' plans to turn an historic, ruined church at Tam Toa into a memorial to the Vietnam War, during which the church was bombed by the US.

The local church wants to rebuild the church and worship there again. Several Christians were injured last month when they clashed with police during a protest.

Pastor Paul was on his way to a church service to mark the start of a peaceful protest over those beatings when he was attacked on July 26. He tried to intervene when he saw

plainclothes police attacking three women who were also on their way to the service. Police turned their aggression onto Pastor Paul when they saw he was a pastor. He says that at least 30 uniformed police officers witnessed the assault and did nothing to stop it. Pastor Paul was taken to hospital by friends.

AsiaNews service reports that police and gangs of thugs are attacking anyone in Vinh wearing a religious symbol. Thousands of Christians are said to have fled Dong Hoi.

(Source: AsiaNews)

- Ask God to heal and restore Pastor Peter and Pastor Paul.
- Pray that Tam Toa will once again be a place of Christian worship.

4. PAKISTAN – Militants mount vicious attacks on Christian communities

Following various rumours about pages of the Koran being damaged by Christians in the village of Korian, 30 miles from Faisalabad, violence erupted five days later on July 30 as extremists went on the rampage. Our partners report that Muslim Clerics made loudspeaker announcements from local mosques encouraging an attack on Christians to teach them a lesson. An estimated 50 homes were looted and burnt.

Two days later a procession seven miles away at Gojra, organised by a banned militant group known as Sunni Tehreek to condemn the 'blasphemy' incident, turned violent resulting in the death of seven Christians. Many houses were looted, including a further 50 burned down. At least seven people were killed during this second attack, and many more were injured.

Local Christians criticised police for lack of action to defend them and also claimed complicity by Islamist officers. A First Information Report was eventually filed by police against a number of attackers. Two policemen have been taken off normal duties. The government have promised compensation to bereaved families and those who have lost their homes. The local community including Muslims have been involved in supporting those affected.

Our partners are helping the displaced community and have sought our assistance in providing emergency relief supplies for 150 families.

(Source: Sharing Life Ministry Pakistan)

- Ask God to comfort the bereaved, heal the injured and traumatised, and for provision of adequate relief supplies
- Pray for the safety of Christians throughout Pakistan who fear further attacks
- Pray that justice will prevail and that the government will demonstrate a genuine commitment to protecting citizens who belong to minority faiths

Our next Prayer Alert issue will be on Tuesday, August 25, 2009.

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, the Evangelical Alliance and the Micah Network.

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