

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL PRAYER ALERT

Tuesday, April 12, 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.

March 23, 2011: PAKISTAN – Two Christians killed at church after challenging abusive youths

Two Christians were shot dead in Sindh province after reprimanding youths who had been insulting Christian women.

Younis Masih and Jameel Masih died and two other Christians were seriously injured when a group of youths opened fire on Christians at Salvation Army Church in Hurr Camp, a Christian colony in Hyderabad, on Monday, Release sources say.

Christians had gathered to celebrate the 30th anniversary of their church. Jameel, who was 22, had only recently married; Younis, 47, was a father of four.

The attack was apparently prompted by earlier events, when Muslim youths gathered in the square near the church and began playing loud music and verbally abusing Christian girls.

Younis, Jameel and several other Christians remonstrated with the youths, asking them to stop – but they refused. According to Release sources, a scuffle between the two groups ensued.

Shortly afterwards, a group of youths arrived at the church, armed with guns. They killed Younis and Jameel and seriously wounded two others who had challenged them earlier – Siddique Masih and a 20-year-old named Waseem.

Compass Direct news agency reports that Christians have been dismayed by the police's slow response to the attack. A case was not registered until local Christians set up a road block in Hyderabad – apparently with Younis and Jameel's bodies – in protest at what they perceived as police 'indifference'.

Meanwhile, also in Sindh, a Christian family in the Parah Ganj district of Karachi were taken hostage on Monday and photographed with a torn copy of the Koran, Islam's holy book, according to Release sources. Christians fear that extremists may be planning to use the photographs to accuse the family of blasphemy and incite religious violence. Police have been informed.

(Sources: CLAAS, Compass Direct, Release sources)

- x Ask God to bless and comfort all those affected by the shootings in Hyderabad, and particularly the families of Jameel and Younis.
- x Pray God's protection over the Parah Ganj family who fear they may be about to be falsely accused of blasphemy.

March 31, 2011: SAUDI ARABIA – Indian Christians jailed on religious charges

Two Indian Christians working in Saudi Arabia have been detained on 'religious charges' since January, according to their families back home.

Thirty-one-year-old Yohan Nese and Vasantha Sekhar Vara, who is 28, were reportedly arrested at a private address in the Saudi capital, Riyadh, on January 21.

Their relatives told Compass Direct news agency that they had been arrested during a raid on a flat in the Batha area. They reportedly appeared before a Religious Court the following day and were sentenced to 45 days in prison, apparently for alleged proselytising. The men's relatives say the pair are still in detention.

Vasantha, whose wife is expecting their first child in three months' time, is understood to have lost his job as a supervisor in a catering company since his arrest.

(Sources: Compass Direct, International Christian Concern)

- x Pray for the immediate release of Yohan and Vasantha. Pray that they will know God's goodness and His peace throughout their detention and after their release.
- x Ask God to bless and provide for them and their families.

April 6, 2011: PAKISTAN – Release partner 'needs government protection'

A Release partner is among several high-profile Christians in Pakistan to have received death threats since Minorities Minister Shahbaz Bhatti was murdered.

The threats have prompted calls for the Government to provide tight security for the likes of Joseph Francis, Director of CLAAS (Centre for Legal Aid Assistance and Settlement). This Release partner and his team of lawyers have championed the religious rights of many Christians – and called for the repeal of Pakistan's notorious blasphemy laws.

Shahbaz Bhatti paid with his life for his criticism of the same laws: he was shot dead in his car close to his mother's home in Islamabad on March 2 (Prayer Alert, March 2, 2011).

A leader human rights campaigner, Naveed Walter, who is President of Human Rights Focus Pakistan, said he feared that Joseph Francis could be the next target for extremist violence after receiving several death threats recently. He also said other unnamed Christian leaders had been threatened.

'The Government must take note of threats that he is receiving before the Christian community loses this great leader,' Mr Walter told ASSIST News Service, adding that he too had been the target of similar threats.

Joseph is also Chairman of the Christian National Party and a tireless political campaigner for minorities' rights. The recent threats are nothing new: he was threatened and driven off the road by extremists in 2008.

Meanwhile, Christians in Lahore are demanding that police step up their investigation into Mr Bhatti's assassination. Extremist group Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan has claimed responsibility for his death – but no arrest has been made.

About 2,000 Christians held a protest outside the Lahore Provincial Assembly on Sunday, condemning perceived police inaction – and calling for the repeal of the blasphemy laws. These laws are widely misused to persecute Pakistan's religious minorities, including Christians.

(Sources: ASSIST News Service, Christians in Crisis, International Christian Concern)

- x Ask God to protect and grant His wisdom to Joseph Francis, the CLAAS team and others who risk their lives to promote greater religious freedom for Pakistan's persecuted minorities, including Christians.
- x Pray for justice for the family of Shahbaz Bhatti, still grieving his loss. Pray too that God's presence will be with them and give them rest (Exodus 33:14).
- x Pray that God would watch over Release's other partners in Pakistan: Sharing Life Ministry Pakistan and Community Advance Programme.