

# RELEASE INTERNATIONAL PRAYER ALERT

*Tuesday, July 14, 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. IRAN – Hopes rise that apostasy Bill will be scrapped**

Iranian Christians are hopeful that a Bill proposing the death penalty for apostasy will be scrapped for good after a parliamentary committee rejected it.

The Iranian Parliament triggered an international outcry last year when it approved the so-called Apostasy Bill on September 9 (*Prayer Alert, September 30, 2008*). The Bill, which is part of a wider revision of Iran's penal code, would dictate a mandatory death penalty for men leaving Islam and life imprisonment for women.

However, after reviewing the Bill, the Parliament's Legal and Judicial Committee has now advised that the clauses relating to apostasy as a capital crime should be dropped.

The committee's revised Bill must now be approved by Parliament and the Guardian Council. The Council has the power to veto any Bill deemed to be inconsistent with the constitution or Islamic law.

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's recent criticism of the Western media and the UK Government has led to fears that Christians, who are often accused of being pawns of the West, may now suffer even greater persecution.

Two Christian women – Maryam Rostampoor and Marzieh Amirizadeh Esmaeilabad – are still being held without charge at the notorious Evin prison in Tehran, apparently because of their church activities (*Prayer Alert, June 2, 2009*). Both women were raised as Muslims.

(Sources: Christian Today, Christian Solidarity Worldwide, Compass Direct, Middle East Concern)

- Thank God that a parliamentary committee has rejected the Apostasy Bill. Pray that the Parliament and Guardian Council will approve the revisions.
- Pray for the release of Maryam and Marzieh, who are said to be in poor health.

## **2. PAKISTAN – Release supports Christian village targeted in ‘blasphemy’ attack**

Release partners are supporting a Christian community in Punjab where a violent mob threw acid over women and attacked homes.

A huge mob rampaged through Bahmaniwala village in Kasur district, looting and burning after mosque loudspeakers accused local Christians of blasphemy.

Nine women and girls had to be treated for acid burns after the assault on July 1. One teenage girl named Noreen narrowly escaped being hurt by a petrol bomb which was thrown into the room where she was washing. When she ran out, naked, someone threw acid over her back and her face. Most of the men from the village were away tending their land or selling their crops at market at the time.

The precise details of the alleged ‘blasphemy’ are unclear. Some Release sources report that the furore arose out of a petty ‘road rage’ squabble between a Christian and a Muslim.

Release partners Centre for Legal Aid Assistance and Settlement (CLAAS) and Sharing Life Ministry Pakistan were soon at the scene, providing food and arranging medical treatment for the injured, who included four children.

As well as being traumatised, the village’s 100 Christian families were left without food, electricity and water – the mob had also cut power lines and destroyed water pumps. Local shops were reportedly refusing to serve Christians.

CLAAS and SLMP led a demonstration in Lahore on July 6, calling on Kasur officials and police to do more to bring the culprits to justice and to protect the local Christian community. Some police were allegedly at the scene during the attack but did not intervene to stop it. No arrests have been made so far. SLMP reports that Bahmaniwala villagers were intending to take part in the protest but ‘police blocked them in their houses’.

(Sources: AsiaNews, CLAAS, Compass Direct, Sharing Life Ministry Pakistan)

**Breaking news: Joseph Francis, Director of CLAAS (see above), has just been detained over legal procedure in relation to a case alleging attempted conversion to Christianity by force. Four others are also being held by police at the time of writing. CLAAS says that the attempted conversion charges are false.**

- **Pray for the immediate release of Joseph Francis and the others. Ask God to grant His peace to them and the rest of the CLAAS team. Pray that any charges against Joseph will be dropped.**
- Pray God’s peace, healing and protection over Christians in Bahmaniwala. Pray that police and officials will do their utmost to bring the culprits to justice.

## **3. CHINA – Christian woman jailed for smuggling in North Korean refugees**

Lawyers representing a Christian woman detained for smuggling North Korean refugees into China hope to strike a blow for refugees’ rights.

Li Mingshun, a Chinese Korean from Heilongjiang province, north-east China, is in jail in neighbouring Inner Mongolia, charged with helping to smuggle 61 refugees into China.

She was arrested this April at her home in Qingdao. Officials demanded 100,000 yuan (almost £9,000) for her release – a fine her family was unable to pay. Police have threatened to arrest Li’s 26-year-old daughter, Piao Zhengying, on similar charges.

Li's family are particularly concerned because she has severe hypertension and heart disease. Lawyers believe this case could help draw attention to the plight of North Korean refugees in China, whom the Chinese authorities tend to detain or forcibly repatriate.

Meanwhile, Pastor 'Bike' Zhang Mingxuan has been arrested yet again – along with 50 leaders from the Chinese House Church Alliance (CHCA) which he heads. Public Security Bureau officials raided Pastor Bike's house church in Nanyang city, Henan, where the CHCA was celebrating its fourth anniversary on July 4. All 51 were released later that day.

(Source: China Aid)

- Pray that Li Mingshun's case will indeed force China to rethink its current policies on North Korean refugees. Ask God to bless and protect Li in custody.
- Continue to pray God's peace over Pastor Bike and his family.

#### **4. INDIA – Orissa Christians pretending to be Hindu for fear of further attacks**

Many Christian homes attacked by Hindu extremists ten months ago still bear Hindu flags – because Christians are too frightened to take them down.

Saffron-coloured flags planted by Hindu extremists still fly from Christians' roofs, particularly in remote rural parts of Kandhamal district, apparently showing that the household has embraced Hinduism. Extremists tried to force many Christians to become Hindus during last year's anti-Christian violence.

Release sources say that many of these households are still Christian – but are pretending to be Hindu for fear of further attacks. In other parts of Kandhamal, police have encouraged Christian villagers to remove Hindu flags, assuring them of police protection.

Christians have also been reassured by the recent electoral defeat of the Hindu nationalist BJP – and the first conviction in court linked to last year's riots. A Hindu has been found guilty of inciting a mob to set fire to a Christian home in Dampidia, Kandhamal.

(Sources: The National online news, UCA News)

- Pray that Government and police will do more to protect Orissa's Christians.
- Pray that India's new Government will be a staunch defender of religious rights.

#### **SPECIAL PRAYER REQUEST:**

Two Afghan refugees who became Christians in Austria are now in the UK awaiting a decision from the British authorities about whether they can stay or will be returned to Afghanistan. As Christians, they would face an uncertain and potentially life-threatening situation in their homeland. Please pray that God will give the two men strength and that His will would be done in their lives.

#### **Our next Prayer Alert issue will be on Tuesday, July 28, 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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