

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL PRAYER ALERT

Tuesday, March 2, 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.

1. IRAQ – ‘Terror campaign’ against Mosul Christians in run-up to elections

Several Christians have been killed in Mosul as campaigning for parliamentary elections this weekend gathers pace.

Iraqi Christians have appealed to Release's contacts for prayer following a spate of fatal shootings and kidnappings in and around this troubled northern city as the nation prepares to go to the polls on March 7.

On February 16, Zayia Thomas, an engineering student from Mosul University, was shot dead in the al-Tahir district of Mosul. Fellow student, Ramsin Shmael, 22, was injured in the same attack. The following day, 20-year-old student teacher Wissam Georges was killed. And two shopkeepers – Fatukhi Munir and Rayan Salem Elias – were also reported murdered. Reuters news agency reports that eight Christians were killed in Mosul in less than a fortnight last month.

Meanwhile, one Christian was abducted on February 13 and two others on February 16, according to advocacy group Middle East Concern. While kidnappings are quite common in Iraq, Christians have been specifically targeted by extremists who appear determined to drive believers out of cities such as Mosul.

Some sources say Iraqi Christians are interpreting these attacks as an attempt to dissuade them from voting on Sunday. Many Christian leaders are urging their community to stand firm, exercise their right to vote and secure more seats in Parliament. Five of the 325 seats in Iraq's Council of Representatives are ringfenced for Iraqi Christians.

(Sources: Agence France Presse, AsiaNews, Assyrian International News Agency, CNA, International Christian Concern, Middle East Concern, Reuters)

- Pray that Christians across Iraq will know God is their stronghold (Psalm 18:2).
- Pray that peace will be restored in the run-up to the elections. Pray that the ballot will lead to fair representation for Iraq's religious minorities, including Christians.

2. NIGERIA – Eight churches destroyed in unprovoked assault on Christians

A mob burnt down eight churches and several Christian shops – apparently to vent their frustration over the unrelated death of a Muslim tractor driver.

The attack on Christian properties in Kazaure city, Jigawa state, followed news that a Muslim had died after allegedly being chased and assaulted by police for a traffic offence.

A mob which had gathered around a Kazaure police station to protest against the man's death on February 21 was chased away by police. Furious, the mob allegedly took out their frustration on an easy target: nearby churches and Christian businesses.

Human rights group International Christian Concern reports that tensions between Muslims and Christians in Kazaure have been high since clashes in Jos, Plateau state, in January, when more than 300 people died (*Prayer Alert, February 2, 2010*).

The Emir of Kazaure, state officials and police authorities have condemned the attack on the Christian community in this northern *Sharia* state.

(Sources: BBC, International Christian Concern)

- Pray for the Christians whose properties and churches have been destroyed.
- Pray the authorities will do their utmost to ease inter-faith tensions in Kazaure.

3. IRAN – Senior Assyrian pastor detained in spate of arrests

A senior evangelical pastor is among a number of Christians detained in Iran in recent weeks.

Rev Wilson Issavi, leader of the Assyrian Evangelical Church in Karmanshah, has not been seen since state security officers arrested him near Isfahan on February 2. The pastor was seized at the home of a married couple who were also arrested, along with another female visitor. The wife of the host has since been released but the other three Christians remain in detention at an undisclosed location.

Rev Issavi's church, described as one of the last surviving historic church buildings in Iran, was closed in January, when officials also raided Rev Issavi's home. Iran's Christian minority is traditionally Assyrian or Armenian.

More recently, on February 16, a Christian couple, who were raised as Muslims, were arrested in the city of Karaj. The woman has been freed but her husband remains in detention, reportedly accused of proselytising.

Seven Christians with a Muslim background were arrested in Shiraz, south-west Iran, on January 11. Two of the seven have been released on bail – but the remaining five remain in custody. Middle East Concern reports that these five detainees have been offered bail but that bail has been set at a prohibitively high level – almost £20,000 each.

Two Christians in the northern city of Rasht, who are reportedly associates of the Shiraz detainees, have been held since their arrests in October and January respectively.

Three believers raised as Muslims are still in Tehran's Evin prison after being arrested near Tehran at Christmas. They were initially released but rearrested in early January.

(Sources: Assist News Service, Farsi Christian News Network, Middle East Concern, Operation World)

- Pray for the release of Rev Wilson Issavi and other Christians held arbitrarily.
- Pray for Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and his regime, amid rising concern over some of Iran's current domestic and international policy.

4. PAKISTAN – Call for talks and tolerance after Christian colony attacked

Christian leaders in Karachi have initiated peace talks with local Muslims after an armed mob went on the rampage through a Christian community.

About 150 armed men raided a Christian settlement in the Pahar Ganj area on February 21, beating Christians, shooting at their homes and destroying their property over the course of two hours. Two churches – St Mary Church of Pakistan and the Interdenominational Calvary Church – were attacked and damaged.

'Seeing [the mob] approach the church, I closed the main gate,' local Christian Ashraf Pervaiz told UCA News. 'But they jumped over the gate... and opened fire on the church. I tried to stop them but they kept beating me with sticks and weapons.'

The raid was reportedly triggered by a row between a Muslim grocer and local Christians. A Christian boy was reportedly injured when the grocer hit him with an iron weight – after the boy picked up some of his fruit. A group of Christians nearby intervened to stop the child being hurt further – which apparently provoked the raid on their colony.

UCA News reports that Christian leaders have begun talks with local Muslims 'aimed at forming a joint committee and preventing similar attacks in future'. More than 200 Muslims and Christians met in Calvary Church the day after the raid to discuss what had happened.

(Source: UCA News)

- Pray for peace to be restored in Pahar Ganj.
- Thank God that local Christians and Muslims have met together to discuss ways to prevent religious intolerance spreading.

NEWS UPDATE:

In our last *Prayer Alert* (February 16, 2010), we asked for prayer for Gulinuer, wife of Uyghur pastor Alimjan Yimit in Xinjiang, China. We reported that Gulinuer had made a video message asking Christians to pray for her family and for Alimjan's release. We wish to clarify that it was not Gulinuer herself who posted this video online. In fact, she had simply sent her message to church leaders elsewhere in China by mailing it on a CD-Rom. Sources close to Gulinuer say that she was not therefore trying to defy or protest against the Chinese authorities – and we regret any implication in our original story that this was the case.

Our next Prayer Alert issue will be on March 16, 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, the Evangelical Alliance and the Micah Network.

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