

# RELEASE INTERNATIONAL PRAYER ALERT

*Tuesday, October 20, 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 – Christians charged with apostasy but not ‘anti-state activity’**

A judge in Iran has dropped a charge of ‘anti-state activity’ against two Christian women – but they have now been formally charged with apostasy.

Maryam Rustampoor and Marzieh Amirzadeh Esmailabad, who have been detained in Tehran’s notorious Evin prison since March, have also been formally charged with ‘propagating Christianity’.

The women and their lawyer are said to be delighted with the judge’s decision on October 7 to drop the more serious charge of ‘anti-state activity’. Such decisions are rare in Iran, according to the religious rights charity Middle East Concern.

Because of the judge’s decision to drop this charge, the women’s case will now be heard by a general court, not Iran’s Revolutionary Court – which is another positive development. The Revolutionary Court deals with certain categories of crime, including matters relating to national security and acts deemed to ‘undermine’ the Islamic Republic.

Elam Ministries, which serves the persecuted church in Iran, has reported that both women remain in poor health. On October 4, Maryam suffered severe food poisoning and was only given medical attention after much insistence.

In a recent interview with the Voice of America Persian News Network, the women’s lawyer said, ‘My clients are not prepared to lie about their faith under any condition.’

Iran’s apostasy Bill – which would impose a life sentence on anyone leaving Islam – is still being considered by Parliament.

(Sources: Christian Post, Elam Ministries, International Christian Concern, Iran Chamber Society, Middle East Concern)

- Thank God for positive developments in the case of Maryam and Marzieh. Pray that both formal charges against them will soon be dropped so they can be freed.
- Ask God to guard their minds and strengthen their bodies during this ordeal.

## **2. CHINA – Detained church leaders face anxious wait over prosecution threat**

More than 11 leaders of a large church in Shanxi province are waiting for officials to decide whether they will face prosecution for ‘illegal’ church activities.

The leaders of the Fushan Church in Linfen city have been held since September 25, soon after much of their church compound was destroyed in a night-time attack by 400 police and officials (*Prayer Alert, October 6, 2009*). Dozens of Christians who were staging a ‘sleep-in’ at the compound were seriously hurt in the raid.

The Religious Affairs Bureau for Huozhou has reportedly decided that the church is ‘legitimate’ – but the Fushan government has accused the church leadership of ‘gross violations and law-breaking actions’. They are reportedly focusing their investigation on Senior Pastor Wang Xiaoguang and his wife Yang Rongli.

The central Government has reportedly ordered ‘all relevant government agencies’ to prepare to use military force against any Christians who might react to the attack on the Fushan Church. Military police have been posted outside the church since September 26.

Release partner China Aid says that ‘more than 30 daughter churches in nearby townships’ have been banned from meeting.

Meanwhile, Pastor ‘Bike’ Mingxuan, head of the Chinese House Church Alliance, has been freed after spending a ‘forced vacation’ with his wife in Henan, courtesy of the Beijing authorities (*Prayer Alert, October 6, 2009*). The couple were detained from September 23 to October 4 apparently to keep them out of Beijing for the Communist Party’s 60th anniversary celebrations earlier this month. There has been no news about another prominent Beijing pastor, Hua Huiqi, detained and removed from the city on September 17.

(Sources: BosNewsLife, China Aid, Compass Direct)

- Pray that the leaders of Fushan Church will be released and all charges against them dropped. Pray that this church will continue to thrive.
- Thank God that Pastor Bike and his wife are now free. Pray for the release of Pastor Hua.

## **3. INDONESIA – Jakarta churches receive bomb threats**

Two congregations in the Jakarta area are on high alert after their church leaders received bomb threats.

Rev Abidan Simanungkalit of the Batak Protestant Christian Church in Bogor Street, East Jakarta, had a call on his mobile on October 4 warning that a bomb would explode during Sunday worship. And, on the previous day, Rev Jeffry Lamentik of the Bethel Indonesia church in north Bekasi received an anonymous call making the same threat.

Police and bomb squad officers searched the area around both churches but found no explosives – and Sunday morning services have so far passed off without incident. Outside the Batak Protestant Christian Church, police found a package in a rubbish bin containing four large batteries, a clock and a can, prompting speculation that this may have been an attempt to provoke fear without creating an explosion.

Pastor Simanungkalit said that his congregation had been shaken by the threat. ‘People kept getting up to go outside and check on things,’ he said of the service on October 4.

Pastor Lalamentik's church is no stranger to persecution. Radical Islamist groups are campaigning for the construction of its new premises to be halted – and for the church to be shut down. Hundreds of protesters have demonstrated against the church outside Bekasi government offices. The church currently meets in the home of one of its leaders.

Meanwhile, officials have ordered the closure of the Jakarta Christian Baptist Church, which meets in the home of Pastor Bedali Hulu. It appears the authorities have given in to pressure from radical Islamist groups who have intimidated church members for weeks.

(Sources: Compass Direct, The Voice of the Martyrs Canada)

- Pray that these Jakarta churches will keep their eyes on Jesus amid persecution.
- Pray that the Indonesian authorities will do more to uphold religious freedom and stand up to pressure from Islamist radical groups to close down churches.

#### **4. PAKISTAN – Christians dismayed by courts' leniency towards Gojra suspects**

Churches in Punjab are dismayed by court decisions to release on bail 19 people accused of involvement in the attack on Gojra in which 11 Christians died.

On October 12, the district and sessions court of Toba Tek Singh granted bail to six people accused of inciting and perpetrating violence during the raid in August. Thirteen other people facing similar charges – including radical clerics who are alleged to have incited the violence – were bailed by the High Court in Lahore on September 7.

'I am sure that, soon after securing their release, they will resume their anti-Christian activities again,' Khalid Gill of the All Pakistan Minorities Alliance told International Christian Concern, a religious rights charity.

Up to 3,000 heavily armed Islamist radicals raided Gojra on August 1, destroying 40 Christian homes and attacking villagers (*Prayer Alert, August 11, 2009*). This followed an assault on the nearby village of Korian which was completely destroyed on July 30 after a local Christian family was accused of blasphemy for allegedly desecrating the Koran – a charge they strongly deny.

(Sources: International Christian Concern, UCAN)

- Continue to pray for Christians in Korian and Gojra coming to terms with these violent attacks.
- Pray for the Christian family from Korian who have been accused of blasphemy.

#### **Our next Prayer Alert issue will be on Tuesday, November 3, 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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