

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL PRAYER ALERT

Tuesday, December 21, 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.

December 3, 2010: EGYPT - Four Copts killed in clashes with security forces over church building

Four Copts were killed and at least 50 were hurt when members of a church in Talbiya, Giza, clashed with security officials trying to stop their building work.

The violence began at 3am on November 24 when nearly 5,000 security officers surrounded a site where a community centre is being built on the property of St Mary's Church.

This was the security forces' third attempt to stop construction in less than a fortnight and 200 Copts, including women and children, were keeping a vigil inside the church.

When officers successfully entered the site, both they and members of the church reportedly resorted to violence – but security forces came armed with tear gas, rubber bullets and live ammunition. Assyrian International News Agency (AINA) reports that members of the public joined security forces in pelting Copts with stones.

Religious rights group Middle East Concern reports that four church members were killed and at least 50 injured, many of them seriously. About 170 Copts have since been charged with offences ranging from attempted murder to not carrying ID papers, according to AINA.

Thirty lawyers reportedly staged a sit-in outside the courts in Giza to protest at not being allowed access to the Copts in detention.

Leaders of St Mary's Church insist that they do have the required permission for their building work – but the authorities deny this. Religious rights campaigners have seized on this incident to accuse the Egyptian authorities of double standards when it comes to permission for building mosques and churches.

Talking to Reuters news agency, Hossam Bahgat of the Egyptian Institute for Personal Rights said that 'excessive force' had been used on people simply asserting their constitutional right to freedom of worship. 'We have been warning about the Government's failure to deal with the rising sense of injustice [felt] by the Christian community for a long time,' he said. 'This is an extremely disturbing development.'

(Sources: AINA, Middle East Concern, Reuters)

- Please pray God's comfort and healing over all those bereaved and injured in this incident.
- Pray that this incident will prompt the Egyptian authorities to reflect and make a more conscious effort to accord equal religious rights to all citizens.

December 10, 2010: IRAQ - Attacks on Christians continue as general violence subsides

The ongoing assault on Iraq's Christian community has claimed two more lives – in stark contrast to declining levels of general violence in the country.

An elderly couple were killed in their home in Baghdad last Sunday, bringing to more than 70 the total number of Christians killed in the capital since early November. At least ten Christians were murdered in the northern city of Mosul in the second half of November, according to religious rights group Middle East Concern.

This spate of attacks on Christians coincides with what appears to be a decline in the overall level of general violence. November had the lowest monthly toll of killings across Iraq for more than a year.

Despite their fear and insecurity, dozens of Christians gathered to pray in Baghdad's Our Lady of Salvation Church yesterday, to mark 40 days since the militants' siege of their building which left 53 Christians dead (*Prayer Alert, November 3, 2010*). Many of those at the service yesterday were reported to be survivors of the siege on October 31 – or relatives of those who died. Two priests were among the dead.

Hundreds of people were expected to attend another service in the church today.

(Sources: Agence France-Presse, International Christian Concern, Middle East Concern)

- Continue to pray for the congregation of Our Lady of Salvation Church in Baghdad and for the relatives of all those Christians killed in Baghdad and Mosul in recent weeks.
- Ask God to protect and strengthen the faith of Iraq's church, amid the continuing threat of violence.

December 14, 2010: VIETNAM - Officials bulldoze Bible school and beat beleaguered pastor unconscious

Mennonite pastor Nguyen Hong Quang was beaten unconscious by Ho Chi Minh City officials today as they bulldozed his Bible school.

Pastor Quang, one of the so-called 'Mennonite Six' jailed in 2004, is currently being held at a undisclosed location after being beaten with batons 'until he fainted', according to Release sources. Pastor Quang and five members of his congregation were detained for allegedly 'resisting arrest' six years ago.

At 7am Vietnamese time, about 500 police, soldiers and fire officers arrived with bulldozers at the pastor's school in the city's District 2 and proceeded to demolish the property.

Twenty students from the school were also arrested and interrogated. Release partner Voice of the Martyrs (VOM) Australia reports that police specially drafted in from the Central Highlands region were on hand to escort students back to their provinces. Montagnard Christians from this region make up a large proportion of the Mennonite Church in Vietnam.

VOM Australia also reports that Pastor Quang's wife, Phu Dung Le, and his three children are safe.

Release sources suggest that the whole attack appeared carefully planned and co-ordinated. It follows a series of critical reports about Pastor Quang that appeared in a government-owned newspaper in September. Leaders and Bible college students linked with Pastor Quang have come under intense pressure from officials to give up their association with the Mennonite church since October.

(Source: Voice of the Martyrs Australia)

- Please pray for the immediate release of Pastor Quang and his students. Ask God to keep him, his family and his students safe – and in His perfect peace.
- Pray for the officials involved in this demolition. Ask God to touch them through the witness of the Christians.