

# RELEASE INTERNATIONAL PRAYER ALERT

Tuesday, June 21, 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.*

## **June 7, 2011: IRAN – Christian arbitrarily detained for months in solitary**

Friends and family of a Christian father-of-two are calling for clarity on his case more than five months after he was detained in Tehran's notorious Evin prison.

Farshid Fathi, 32, has endured months of solitary confinement even though 'no court orders or instructions have been issued in his case', according to Christian news agency Mohabat News.

Farshid was detained by government security officials on December 26<sup>th</sup>, 2011, in a series of raids on homes in Tehran. His wife and two young children – Rosana and Barbod – have only been allowed to speak to him once a week.

Mohabat News reports that interrogators have been using psychological torture to force Farshid to reveal details of other Christian contacts. The news agency also says that Farshid was first detained briefly and released – but was immediately re-arrested and transferred to solitary confinement in the 209<sup>th</sup> wing of Evin prison where 'political prisoners' are held.

Farshid's family have reportedly been forced to sell his father-in-law's home to survive this ordeal financially. The family have been unable to afford to post bail to secure his release.

Scores of Christians were arrested in Tehran and other cities in a spate of raids initiated in December (*Prayer Alert, January 6, 2011*). According to Mohabat, more than half of these detainees were released within a few hours, making Farshid's detention unusually long.

Pressure on Iranian house churches appears to have increased since Ayatollah Khamenei, Iran's supreme leader, branded home-based churches a new threat to the regime in a speech last October.

(Source: Mohabat News, Release International)

- *Pray for the immediate release of Farshid Fathi. Ask God to heal and restore him and his family during and after this ordeal.*
- *Pray for an end to the Iranian authorities' clampdown on Christians. Pray that the church in Iran will keep their focus on God and stand firm in their faith.*

## **June 13, 2011: NIGERIA – Pastor killed amid rising Islamist militancy in Borno**

Extremists shot dead a Nigerian pastor and his secretary in the north-eastern town of Maiduguri which is beset by increasing Islamist militancy.

Pastor David Usman and church secretary Hamman Andrew were killed in the Borno state capital by *Boko Haram* militants who have been blamed for several recent bomb attacks. The attacks have been widely interpreted as a protest against April's national elections which returned Christian incumbent Goodluck Jonathan to power.

A bomb attack on an army barracks in Maiduguri on May 29 killed 15 people and a series of seven bombs on June 7 included an attack on St Patrick's Church which killed three people. *Boko Haram* claimed responsibility for bomb attacks on the Plateau state capital, Jos, on Christmas Eve (*Prayer Alert, December 29, 2010*).

Another pastor in Maiduguri, Rev Titus Dama Pona of the Evangelical Church Winning All, told Compass Direct news agency that recent violence had left Christians in fear of their lives.

'We no longer feel free moving around the city and most churches no longer carry out worship services for fear of becoming targets of these unprovoked attacks,' he said.

Pastor David, 45, described as a gentle and jovial man, was shot in an area of Maiduguri called the Railway Quarters, where his church is based, on June 7. He had reportedly raised the problem of *Boko Haram* with his superiors and commented that the Government needed to do more to stamp out this threat.

This was the second time *Boko Haram* had targeted Pastor David's church, a Church of Christ in Nigeria congregation. In July 2009, militants set fire to their building and killed several church members.

*Boko Haram* is committed to extending strict Islamic law or *Sharia* across Nigeria and has regularly targeted officials – including politicians, military personnel and police – as well as Christians. It rejects democratic institutions, which it sees as based on Christian values, according to Compass Direct.

On June 6, *Boko Haram* killed Ibrahim Birkuti, a moderate Muslim cleric who had criticised the group. He was shot dead outside his home in the town of Biu, some 120 miles south of Maiduguri, according to the BBC.

(Sources: BBC, Christian Today, Compass Direct)

- *Ask God to bless and comfort the grieving families of Pastor David Usman and Hamman Andrew. Pray that their deaths will not be in vain.*
- *Pray that moderate Muslims will stand up against the extremist activities of Boko Haram – and against Islamist extremism generally which so often targets Christians.*