

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL PRAYER ALERT

Tuesday, November 23, 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.

November 17, 2010 – CHINA – Guangdong house churches banned from meeting during games.

Officials in Guangzhou city and surrounding areas in south Guangdong province have forbidden house churches to meet during the Asian Games.

Church leaders and their congregations have been warned not to hold services during the games, which run from November 12 to 27 and which are being hosted by Guangzhou city.

Sources for Release partner China Aid said the ban is likely to last until January – which would have serious implications for Christmas celebrations.

Officials have told pastors that the closure is due to 'security concerns'. A China Aid source said some churches were trying to get around the ban by splitting into much smaller groups and meeting at different locations.

In fact, it appears that the ban may well extend across the whole Pearl River delta area – which accounts for much of south Guangdong. This is certainly the understanding of Pastor Wang Dao, leader of the Guangzhou Liangren Church, who reports that a church in Jiangmen, further south, has also been issued with the ban.

Pastor Wang is dubious about talk of 'security concerns' during the games. 'I think it's just an excuse,' he says, 'so they can undertake a total crackdown (...) on house churches.'

Pastor Wang is currently on bail awaiting trial on charges relating to 'credit card administration' (Prayer Alert, August 24, 2010). His church has been thrown out of rented accommodation and moved on many times since May 2008.

(Sources: China Aid, Release International)

- Pray that churches in the Pearl River delta will enjoy strong fellowship and a fresh sense of God's presence during this ban.
- Continue to pray for Pastor Wang Dao and the Guangzhou Liangren Church. Pray that charges against Pastor Wang will be dropped and the church allowed to worship in peace.

November 10, 2010 – ISRAEL – 'Arson' guts part of Jerusalem church and injures foreign visitors.

A suspected arsonist is being blamed for a night-time blaze at a church in Jerusalem which caused serious damage and injured ten Christian volunteers.

The Jerusalem Alliance Church Ministry Centre, whose basement was wrecked by the fire, receives threats routinely and has long been 'a focal point for anti-Christian sentiment', according to Compass Direct news agency.

Ten volunteers visiting from Denmark and the US, who were sleeping in the church building, had to be treated for smoke inhalation at a nearby hospital.

Senior Pastor Jack Sara believes that the arsonist knew that people were sleeping in the church and that his or her intention was not simply to damage property. 'Whoever did it intended to kill people,' said Pastor Sara. He told Compass Direct that investigators now considered the fire to be 'very suspicious'.

The fire, which gutted the basement and destroyed recent renovations, caused about £52,000 of smoke and fire damage.

The church hosts several congregational groups including expats, Arab Christians and Messianic Jews – and has suffered opposition from 'all sides', according to Pastor Sara.

But he insists that he wants the church to be 'a beacon of light reflecting God's love to all people'. 'We will continue to serve the Holy Land residents from this place, proclaiming peace and justice for all human beings, declaring God's love for all of our neighbours, friends and enemies,' he said.

(Source: Compass Direct)

- Ask God to hedge the Jerusalem Alliance Church Ministry Centre around with His angels. Pray special protection on its leaders, including Pastor Jack Sara.
- Ask God to bless His church in Jerusalem so Christians can indeed be 'beacons of light' amid ongoing political and religious tensions in the city.

November 8, 2010 – PAKISTAN – First woman sentenced to death for blasphemy.

Christian mother-of-two Asia Bibi has been sentenced to death for blasphemy – the first woman ever to receive this sentence for blasphemy in Pakistan.

Release has just learnt that a sessions court judge gave Asia the maximum sentence yesterday at the end of a trial lasting more than 16 months. Asia, a farm labourer in her late-30s from Ittanwali, Punjab, was also fined more than £700 – the equivalent of two-and-a-half years' salary for the average worker.

Release partners at Sharing Life Ministry Pakistan (SLMP), who have been supporting Asia and her family throughout their ordeal, say that they and the family are shocked by this outcome.

No one sentenced to death for blasphemy in Pakistan has ever been executed – but Asia could now spend years in appalling conditions on death row. If she appeals to the High Court, it may take years before her case is heard.

Police first filed a case against Asia in June 2009 after local Muslims accused her of making derogatory comments against Islam's prophet, Mohammed. She had reportedly been discussing matters of faith with fellow labourers in the fields when Asia and her daughters were attacked by local villagers and Muslim clerics. She had reportedly been under pressure from her fellow workers to convert to Islam.

A spokesman for SLMP described Asia as having a strong faith – but said that this decision would be a crushing blow to her and her family. 'She was longing to go back home to her children, but her dreams of release have vanished now,' he said. 'She desperately needs peace in her heart, the peace that comes from God.'

The SLMP team plan to visit Asia in prison as soon as possible.

Release is concerned that Asia's conviction could set a dangerous precedent. Martha Bibi is currently on trial for blasphemy in Lahore. She was charged in 2007, after a dispute with builders who allegedly refused to return equipment belonging to her.

(Sources: Frontline – India, Release International, Sharing Life Ministry Pakistan)

Pray:

- Pray God's perfect peace that passes all human understanding over Asia Bibi and her family. Ask God to intervene to secure her earliest release. Ask God to grant wisdom and strength to SLMP workers supporting this family.
- Pray for the immediate acquittal of Martha Bibi in Lahore.

Act:

- Sign our petition calling for justice for Christians in Pakistan at: www.releaseinternational.org/current or ring our office for a paper copy.
- Write to the Pakistan High Commissioner in London, expressing polite concern about Asia's conviction. Write to: His Excellency Wajid Shamsul Hasan, High Commission for Pakistan, 35-36 Lowndes Square, London SW1X 9JN. Also, write to your local MP at: www.writetothem.com
- Forward this information to your friends to encourage them to take action on Asia's behalf.

November 5, 2010 – NIGERIA – Women and children killed in brutal night raid on plateau village.

Four children and two women were killed when gunmen launched a night-time assault on a Christian village in Plateau State, according to Release partners.

Stefanos Foundation reports that gunmen raided Ranwianku at about 11pm on October 25, shooting at villagers and attacking them with machetes, despite the presence of an army barracks little more than a mile away. Homes were set alight and cattle killed.

One man, Umaru Hole, lost his wife and three children in the attack. The other victims were an elderly woman and a young boy who was brutally attacked with a machete.

Stefanos Foundation will be providing emergency relief and trauma counselling for survivors of the raid with financial support from Release. Ranwianku is 18 miles from the state capital, Jos.

Most eyewitnesses interviewed by Stefanos Foundation said that the gunmen were speaking the Fulani language. Fulani Muslims have been blamed for previous attacks on Christian communities in and around Jos this year. The villagers are all ethnic Irigwe Christians.

Villagers said that all ethnic Fulani people had left the village over the past decade, since tensions had flared between Muslims and Christians in Plateau, although some continued to graze their cattle near Ranwianku.

The funeral for the six victims of the attack was attended by several clergy, a senior military commander and community leaders, many of whom urged villagers not to seek revenge. The military chief assured villagers of his commitment to 'bring lasting peace to the state'.

(Source: Stefanos Foundation)

- Ask God to pour out His love and comfort over the village of Ranwianku – and particularly on the three families who lost loved ones in the raid.
- Pray that Plateau officials, including the military, will remain true to their word and do more to bring lasting peace and protection for vulnerable Christian communities.