

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL PRAYER ALERT

Tuesday, May 24, 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.

May 6, 2011: LAOS – Military kill four Christian women amid crackdown

Lao and Vietnamese troops killed four Christian women in front of their families – amid an apparent crackdown on ‘dissidents’ in Laos.

The Lao People’s Army, supported by soldiers and secret police from Vietnam, seized a group of Hmong in Xiengkhouang Province and confiscated their Bibles. Soldiers then shot and killed four of the women, after repeatedly raping two of them, according to Voice of the Martyrs Canada.

Their husbands and children were reportedly beaten, tied up and forced to witness the killings in mid-April. It is not known where the survivors are now.

The Centre for Public Policy Analysis (CPPA) in Washington DC reports that Vietnamese secret police and soldiers are being deployed inside Laos in increasing numbers as part of a communist crackdown on groups perceived as dissident.

VOM Canada too refers to what it calls a ‘disturbing increase of repression’ facing Christians in Laos. The CPPA traces the start of the crackdown to late 2010.

It is not known whether the Hmong group was targeted because of their ethnicity or their religion. The communist regime in Laos is particularly repressive of ethnic minority groups such as the Hmong, but it also encourages – sometimes enforces – Buddhism to impose a sense of national unity and identity. The mainly Christian Hmong are targeted on both accounts.

Protestant Christians in general and the Hmong Christian community in particular are viewed by officials and other sections of Lao society as being pro-Western and therefore a threat to communist rule. VOM Canada reports that authorities in Khammouan Province unlawfully detained 11 church leaders last Christmas. Previously 37 Christians were detained in Meungfeung district in the north of the country in September: at the latest report, five remained in custody (*Prayer Alert, September 28, 2010*).

(Sources: Centre for Public Policy Analysis; Voice of the Martyrs Canada; World Evangelical Alliance)

- *Ask God to comfort the families and friends of the four women killed by Lao and Vietnamese troops. Pray that He will heal them of their trauma, keep them safe and give them His peace.*
- *Pray for the church in Laos which is reportedly suffering a crackdown at the hands of officials. Ask God to build the faith of His people in Laos and pray that many more will be drawn to Christ, even amid such severe persecution.*

May 10, 2011: EGYPT – Church security stepped up after weekend of violence

Communal clashes in a poor district of Cairo over the weekend left 12 people dead, prompting demonstrations for an end to inter-religious violence.

Seven Coptic Christians and five Muslims are reported to have been killed in Imbaba district during riots in which more than 230 people were injured and one church was gutted by fire.

The violence broke out on Saturday evening – after hard-line Muslims claimed that a Coptic church was holding against her will a woman who, they claimed, had converted to Islam.

Muslim *imams* (religious leaders) were invited to search the church in question – the St Mina Coptic Church – and were satisfied that no one was being held there. This, however, did not stop thousands of Muslims flocking to the area during the afternoon, prompting Coptic residents to barricade the street around the church.

At about 7pm, attackers started throwing firebombs at Coptic-owned property, including St Mina Church. Copts reportedly retaliated by throwing glass and stones, according to religious rights charity Christian Solidarity Worldwide.

The nearby St Mary's Church was also set alight and the body of its caretaker, Salah Aziz, was later found in the building, which was gutted in the blaze.

Eye witnesses said that it was 10pm before the security forces arrived – and a further hour before they intervened to stop the violence. In fact, although the army had cordoned off the main streets of Imbaba district by Sunday morning, fighting continued in side streets.

Local media report that the army has since pledged to rebuild St Mary's Church. The BBC reports that the military authorities have increased security around churches in Cairo since the weekend.

The Egyptian Government has declared it will take a tough line on sectarian violence. It has already said that 190 people arrested in connection with the riots will face a military trial.

Middle East Concern, a religious rights organisation, reports that there have been ongoing protests in central Cairo against inter-religious clashes.

The Muslims involved in the weekend riots are widely reported to be hard-line Salafi Muslims who model themselves on early generations of Islam's followers.

(Sources: BBC, Christian Solidarity Worldwide, Compass Direct, Middle East Concern)

- *Pray that peace and order will be restored to Imbaba district. Pray that Copts and moderate Muslims alike, across Egypt generally and in this part of Cairo particularly, will unite against further inter-religious violence.*
- *Pray that the violence this weekend will spur on Egyptians of all faiths to make religious freedom one of the key foundation stones of the new Egypt.*

May 13, 2011: NIGERIA – Pastor's wife and three children killed in raid

A Nigerian pastor who saw his wife and three children murdered by extremists says his loss has only strengthened his faith in Christ.

Pastor James Musa Rike lost his wife, Dune, and three of his five children when extremists attacked his village in Bauchi state on May 4.

Sixteen people – one man, three women and 12 children – were killed in the raid on Kurum village, in Bogoro local government area.

The attackers armed with guns and machetes stormed Pastor James's house around midnight. The family tried to flee but extremists shot his wife and two of their children – a child named Faith and one-year-old Fyali.

Pastor James held the hands of his 35-year-old wife as she died – then heard the cries of his 13-year-old daughter, Sum, who lay dying nearby. He prayed with Sum during her last moments.

Sum managed to tell her father that the militants had told her that they would kill her and had jeered, 'See how your Jesus will save you.' She had replied that Jesus had already saved her and, by killing her, they would allow her to be with Him, according to Compass Direct news agency.

Pastor James, who leads a 30-strong congregation as part of the Church of Christ in Nigeria, has one remaining son and an adopted daughter, Whulham, who is still receiving hospital treatment for her injuries.

He told Compass that his loss had only strengthened his faith and his resolve. 'Whatever the situation, I will never forsake Christ,' he said. 'All human beings are created by God and our attackers must know that they need to abandon anything that will lead them to destroy creations of God.'

Extremists set fire to more than 20 houses in Kurum village and burgled several properties before they left.

Areas of Bauchi state such as Bogoro and Tafawa Balewa have been blighted by violence in recent months. Riots in Tafawa Balewa in late-January exposed the presence of Islamist mercenaries in the area – whom church leaders suspected of plotting a large-scale attack on Christians (*Prayer Alert, February 16, 2011*). In March, thousands of people were displaced in a series of night raids by heavily armed militia in Tafawa Balewa.

(Sources: Christian Solidarity Worldwide, Compass Direct)

- *Thank God for the powerful testimony of Pastor James and his family. Ask God to comfort Pastor James and his surviving children. Pray that many will be added to God's Kingdom through them and that they will be blessed to see the fruit of their ministry.*
- *Pray that the authorities in Bauchi state will take firmer action to stamp out Islamist extremism and curb inter-religious violence.*

May 17, 2011: NIGERIA – Fears of further anti-Christian violence

Thousands of Christians who fled their homes during post-election violence last month are still living in camps for fear of further attack, according to latest reports.

Hundreds of Christians have reportedly been killed across northern Nigeria since the election victory of Goodluck Jonathan, who is a Christian.

International Christian Concern (ICC) reports that the exact death toll remains unknown because the authorities hastily organised mass burials of the dead – 'to hide the extent of the massacre'. More than 300 churches have been set alight and 'countless' Christian homes have been destroyed, says ICC.

Anti-Christian violence has been reported in almost every state in northern Nigeria. Worst hit so far have been Christians in Kaduna state where at least 300 people in just two towns, Zonkwa and Kafanchan, were reported to have been killed (*Prayer Alert, April 28, 2011*). In Kaduna alone, about 1,000 families are living in government-run displacement camps, too afraid to return home.

However, there is particular concern now that Bauchi state may be the latest focus for extremist violence. Christians there fear that the same Muslim groups that have been attacking villages in and around Jos in Plateau state may now have moved into southern areas of neighbouring Bauchi.

The Voice of the Martyrs Canada reports that the Christian Association of Nigeria has confirmed that many villages in southern Bauchi are now under serious threat.

Prayer Alert reported on May 13 that 16 Christians – including a pastor's wife and three children – were killed in a raid on Kurum village in the Bogoro area of Bauchi.

In Plateau state, which remains a flashpoint for violence, reports have emerged of an attack on Dengi town on April 28. Extremists set alight a church and several Christian homes – after complaints that music from a Christian music shop was disturbing Muslims' prayer time.

Pastor Ishaku Danyok, whose home and church were badly damaged, told Compass Direct news agency that his congregation are now worshipping in the wreckage. Pastor Ishaku also said that many church members had fled the town, but added: 'We believe that God wants to strengthen us through these incidents.'

(Sources: Compass Direct, International Christian Concern, Voice of the Martyrs Canada)

- *Pray that Christians in northern Nigeria will be able to stand firm in their faith and keep focused on their Saviour.*
- *Pray for wisdom and God's guidance for President Jonathan. Pray that his Government will take a firm stand against extremism and do more to stamp out anti-Christian violence.*