

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL PRAYER ALERT

Tuesday, July 28, 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. IRAQ – Christians face a new wave of violence

Christians in Baghdad are calling on the authorities for better protection after six churches in the city were bombed over a weekend.

In the worst attack, a car bomb exploded near a church on Palestine Street in eastern Baghdad on Sunday, July 12, at the end of an evening service, just as the congregation were leaving. Four people were killed and 21 were injured, according to the BBC. Bombs were detonated in four other churches in the city on the same day, injuring at least ten other people.

A church in the west of Baghdad had been attacked the previous day. And, on Monday July 13, a bomb exploded in a church in the northern city of Mosul. More than 20 people in total were injured in the attacks, according to Iraq's Interior Ministry. The BBC reports that most of the bombs were hidden in cardboard boxes.

Also on July 12, a senior provincial government official was shot dead in Kirkuk in northern Iraq. It is not yet known if the murder of Aziz Rizqo Nisan, a Christian, was religiously motivated or not.

Auxiliary bishop of Baghdad Shlemon Warduni said he had asked Christians in the city to 'take courage'. But he also told AsiaNews news agency that there was a feeling of 'powerlessness and despair' in the Christian community that, he fears, could lead to another mass exodus of believers, unless officials heed their calls for greater protection.

(Sources: AsiaNews, BBC, IRIN News, Middle East Concern, Reuters, The Daily Star - Lebanon)

- Ask God to multiply His church in Iraq and build His people's faith.
- Pray specifically for everyone who was injured or bereaved in the bomb attacks.

2. SOMALIA – Extremists hunting down Christians to extend *Sharia*

Islamist extremists linked to al-Qaeda appear to be hunting down and killing Christians in Somalia in a bid to 'cleanse' the country of Christianity.

Rebels from Al Shabaab (whose name means 'youth' in Arabic) are responsible for the brutal murders of several Christians recently – including the beheading of two young boys. The rebels are determined to overthrow the Western-backed Transitional Federal Government – and are already enforcing strict Islamic or *Sharia* law in large areas of southern Somalia that they control.

In their most recent strike, Al Shabaab rebels shot dead a Christian named Mohammed Sheikh Abdiraman at Mahadday Weyne, about 60 miles north of Mogadishu, on July 20. Abdiraman, who was raised as a Muslim but became a Christian 15 years ago, reportedly led an underground Christian 'cell group'.

Ten days earlier, the same militants allegedly beheaded seven Christians or 'spies' in the city of Baidoa – formerly a Government stronghold. Italian news agency AGI reports that the extremists had said they were applying *Sharia* in carrying out the killings.

In April, militants beheaded two boys, aged 11 and 12, in Yonday village, near Kismayo, because their Christian father Musa Mohammed Yusuf refused to inform on a church leader. Musa, his wife and surviving sons are now in hiding abroad.

(Sources: AGI; CNA; Compass Direct)

- Ask God to lead Musa and his family to a place of safety and restoration.
- Pray for the protection of Somali Christians who have been shaken by recent murders.

3. VIETNAM – Pastor escapes 'house arrest' to speak out about police's abuse

A well-known evangelical pastor has made a desperate cry for help for his family – because the police have made them prisoners in their own home.

Pastor Nguyen Cong Chinh, who oversees several Mennonite churches in the Central Highlands, says his family have been under siege in their home in Hoa Lu commune in Pleiku city, central Vietnam, for months. Police have been guarding his house around the clock. The pastor managed to escape in a bid to find 'help, food and medication' for his wife and three young children on July 17.

He says his wife has been in poor health since police officers assaulted her on June 6 – when she protested about the disappearance of laundry from their washing line. 'She's confined to bed now, she cannot eat,' Pastor Chinh told Radio Free Asia last month. The siege has left the family on the brink of 'starvation and serious sickness', according to IMIDCHR, a Vietnamese human rights agency.

The authorities have been harassing Pastor Chinh since 2003, urging him to disband his church and the other Mennonite churches he supervises. His home and church have been raided several times and he has been banned from preaching. He was held for questioning for 12 days in May. His current whereabouts are not known.

(Sources: BosNewsLife, Radio Free Asia)

- Ask God to act in His sovereign power to set Pastor Chinh's family free.
- Pray that Pastor Chinh and his family will know God's Holy Spirit is with them.

4. CHINA – Pressure mounts on Beijing to release lawyer Gao Zhisheng

A partner of Release is stepping up its campaign to free Beijing lawyer Gao Zhisheng – after Chinese officials refused to accept a huge petition demanding his release.

China Aid delivered 100,000 signatures – gathered online from people across the world – to the Chinese embassy in Washington DC in the US. Embassy staff allowed China Aid's representative into the building – but, seeing the petition, they asked him to leave at once, refusing to accept the papers. He was forced to leave the petition at the front door.

Gao, who has not been seen since he was arrested on February 4, is feared to be undergoing 'severe torture', according to China Aid sources. Gao, who is well known for his human rights work, was brutally tortured during a spell of detention in 2007. He later spoke out about the abuse, despite threats from officials that he should keep quiet.

Now, China Aid is calling on religious rights campaigners to contact China's embassies worldwide and ask them to disclose Gao's whereabouts and his condition. It is also continuing to gather signatures on its online petition. Gao's wife Geng He, their daughter Geng Ge, 16, and five-year-old son Gao Tianyu fled to the US earlier this year.

Another family ripped apart by Chinese officials is that of Pastor Dou Shaowen from Zhengzhou city, Henan province. Pastor Dou and his wife Feng Lu have both been sentenced to one year's 're-education through labour' for 'engaging in illegal activities' – leading the Rock (Panshi) Church. Pastor Dou is now in a prison camp in Zhengzhou – while his wife has been allowed to serve out her sentence at home so she can care for their daughter. Pastor Dou is reported to be enduring inhumane treatment in the camp.

Meanwhile, in Shandong province, police held three Christians – including a 16-year-old student – for seven days for their part in organising a Christian youth camp in Tengzhou city. Two other Christians, who were teachers at the camp, were ordered to be detained for ten and 15 days. The five were starved of food and water for the first two days of their detention.

(Source: China Aid)

Act:

- Write to the Chinese Embassy in London, enquiring politely about the whereabouts and condition of Beijing lawyer Gao Zhisheng. Write to: Her Excellency Mrs Fu Ying, Embassy of the People's Republic of China, 49-51 Portland Place, London W1B 1JL. **Please do not mention Release when writing.** And ask your friends to sign China Aid's online petition, demanding Gao's release, at www.FreeGao.com

Pray:

- Pray for the release of Gao Zhisheng so he can be reunited with his family.
- Ask God to build up the faith of Pastor Dou and his family – and the Tengzhou Christians who organised the youth camp.

Our next Prayer Alert issue will be on Tuesday, August 11, 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.

Release International, PO Box 54, Orpington, BR5 9RT, UK

Tel: 01689 823491

General enquiries: info@releaseinternational.org

Website address: www.releaseinternational.org