

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL PRAYER ALERT

Tuesday, November 3, 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. INDONESIA – ‘Homeless’ theology college facing closure threat

Students from the Arastamar Evangelical Theological Seminary face imminent eviction from a campsite where they took refuge last year after a violent raid on their campus.

Hundreds of students have been living in 11 large tents and studying in the open air at the camping ground in East Jakarta for more than a year. They were forced out of their premises in Kampung Pulo, Jakarta, in July 2008 when a mob armed with sharpened bamboo broke in, demanding the college's closure (*Prayer Alert, September 2, 2008*).

For three months, the Jakarta provincial government agreed to pay the college's camping fees – but payments stopped when the college rejected its offer of new premises in Jonggol, West Java, about 30 miles away from the old site. Rev Matheus Mangentang, rector of the Arastamar seminary, refused to move to Jonggol in the belief that obtaining a permit to establish a college there would have been 'extremely difficult'.

Campsite officials recently presented the college with a bill for about £171,000 and, at the time of writing, were demanding that the 760 students currently at the site should leave by November 1. Students have been without water and electricity at the campsite for nearly a month – because officials cut off these facilities in protest at non-payment of fees. Sources for Compass Direct news agency say that the students have continued to study enthusiastically.

Some 550 other Arastamar students have also been staying in unsuitable accommodation – some of them at a near-derelict former mayor's office in West Jakarta. Many are said to be in poor health because of their unsanitary, overcrowded living conditions. Compass Direct reports that the college could be forced to close unless it can find new premises soon. Rev Mangentang insists the college should be allowed to return to Kampung Pulo.

(Source: Compass Direct)

- Thank God for the commitment and courage of Arastamar students and staff.
- Pray that the college will soon be re-established in good accommodation.

2. ERITREA – Ten more Christians detained by security forces

Ten Christians from the same church are in custody after security officials raided the Asmara home of prominent pastor Tewelde Hailom.

Officers raided the home of Pastor Tewelde, founding elder of the Full Gospel Church in Asmara, on October 15, according to Mission Network News. During the raid, they arrested Pastor Tewelde's assistant Pastor Samuel Oqba, a woman named Senait Tekle and a man named Gebreberhane Kifle.

Two days later, seven other Christians from the Full Gospel Church were taken into custody – a woman named as Besrat Gebray and six men whose names are not yet known, according to a report by religious rights charity Open Doors Switzerland.

Pastor Tewelde, who is suffering from an ulcer, was not taken into custody, apparently because of his frail health, but he remains under house arrest, with guards posted outside his home. It is not known where the ten Christians are being held.

(Sources: Mission Network News, Open Doors Switzerland, The Voice of the Martyrs Canada)

- Pray for the immediate release of the ten Full Gospel Church members arrested in Asmara last month.
- Ask God to strengthen and heal Pastor Tewelde, who is under house arrest.

3. PAKISTAN – Christian mother appears in court on blasphemy charge

The blasphemy trial of a Christian woman from Punjab has begun amid tearful scenes as she was reunited with her daughters.

Asia Bibi, 37, who has been in custody since June 19, was allowed 15 minutes with her husband Ashiq Masih and their daughters before she appeared in court in Sheikhpura. Asia is said to be standing firm in her faith – but her daughters were visibly upset when they were allowed to hug their mother. Her case was adjourned.

Asia, who is from Ittanwali, was arrested after allegations that she had blasphemed Islam's prophet Mohammed in a heated discussion about religion with her fellow farmworkers. Asia's family is one of only three Christian families in a village of more than 1,500 families.

Meanwhile, also in Punjab, two Christian brothers have claimed that they were tortured by police after being arrested in connection with the violent raid on their village, Gojra, in August. Eleven Christians were killed in the assault (*Prayer Alert, August 11, 2009*).

The two Christian detainees – Naveed and Nauman Masih – were initially arrested on suspicion of 'rioting' and 'spreading terror'. But Release partner Centre for Legal Aid Assistance and Settlement (CLAAS) reports that Naveed has now been charged with murder, following the death of a Muslim man severely injured during the Gojra raid. Nauman has been released on bail. CLAAS lawyers have taken up the brothers' case.

Speaking from his cell, Naveed told Compass Direct news agency that he and his brother had been starved, beaten and tortured. He claims that police tried to force them to say they had links with terrorist organisations. Nineteen Muslims suspected of involvement in the Gojra attack have been released on bail (*Prayer Alert, October 20, 2009*).

(Sources: CLAAS, Compass Direct, The Voice of the Martyrs Canada, VOM USA)

- Pray that Asia Bibi will be acquitted of blasphemy and reunited with her family.
- Continue to pray for justice for the Christians of Gojra.

4. CHINA – Yet more Fushan Church leaders arrested in Shanxi

Public Security Bureau officials are keeping up the pressure on the Fushan Church in Linfen city – detaining ten more of its members and blacklisting its leaders.

Last month, officials offered to release ten leaders of Fushan Church in Shanxi province who were arrested on September 25. The Christians were detained after protesting about their church compound being demolished in a violent raid by police and officials (*Prayer Alert, October 20, 2009*). Dozens of church members were left seriously injured.

But when the detained Christian leaders learned that officials intended to hold one of their number, Pastor Yang Rongli, ‘until further notice’, they refused to leave jail without her.

Officials retaliated by detaining Pastor Yang’s younger sister Yang Linli for six days, ransacking another pastor’s home and arresting ten more leaders. Pastor Yang was then formally accused of ‘illegal building and disturbing the social order’ – as was another leader, Hua Mei. Five other church leaders were sentenced to criminal detention (a penalty for relatively minor offences, served out in a ‘detention house’ rather than in jail) – though three of them have since been released on parole. Nineteen members of Fushan Church are believed still to be in custody.

Meanwhile, Release has learned that Beijing pastor Hua Huiqi was released on October 10 after being forcibly removed from Beijing for the Communist Party’s 60th anniversary celebrations last month (*Prayer Alert, October 6, 2009*). Pastor Hua, who was arrested on September 17, was warned by police on his release that his 13-year-old daughter would be harmed if he ‘caused any trouble’.

Pastor Hua has appealed to Christians worldwide to pray for his ailing mother, Shuang Shuying, who has been persecuted and imprisoned in the past allegedly over her son’s ministry. Another of Shuang’s sons Hua Huilin, Pastor Hua’s brother, is dying of cancer, according to Release partner China Aid.

(Sources: China Aid, Lectlaw.com, The Voice of the Martyrs Canada)

- Pray for the immediate release of all Fushan Church members. Pray that this church will have a powerful ministry in Shanxi.
- Pray for Pastor Hua and the whole of his family, especially his mother Shuang. Ask God to uphold them and surround them with His love amid all their trials.

Our next Prayer Alert issue will be on Tuesday, November 17, 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.

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