

# RELEASE INTERNATIONAL PRAYER ALERT

*Tuesday, January 5, 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.*

## **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. INDIA – Peace descends on Orissa’s Christmas for first time in three years**

Christians in India’s troubled Orissa state have celebrated Christmas in peace for the first time in three years.

Security was tight and thousands of extra police were deployed as a precaution – but no incidents of violence were reported against Christians in Orissa, despite fears to the contrary.

About a thousand special police officers and at least 150 police inspectors were mobilised in sensitive areas such as G Udaygiri, Tikabali, Raikia and Baliguda in Kandhamal district, which was a flashpoint for anti-Christian violence in both 2007 and 2008.

On Christmas Eve in 2007, Kandhamal district witnessed a spate of anti-Christian attacks in which at least four Christians were killed and 730 houses and 95 churches were burnt. And then, in August 2008, the murder of a Hindu extremist leader triggered months of anti-Christian violence, which started in Kandhamal and spread to several other states.

Pastor Thomas Chellan was brutally attacked by an extremist mob in August 2008 at the start of the anti-Christian attacks in Orissa that year. He told AsiaNews online news agency that, though many Christians in areas such as Kandhamal are still living in temporary shelters of bamboo and polythene, the Orissa church remains steadfast

‘In the midst of these untold sufferings and [an] uncertain future, the Christian community there is marching ahead, holding their faith with courage and conviction,’ Pastor Thomas said.

Not every church in India enjoyed a peaceful Christmas, however. Hindu extremists are reported to have attacked a church in western Maharashtra state on December 20 during a worship service. The pastor, his wife and several other Christians were beaten in the raid on the New Life Fellowship which meets in a hotel in Kankauli. On the same day,

extremists attacked Pastor R. Timothy and his wife Nirmala with an iron bar in Nalgonda, Andhra Pradesh, in front of their child. The pastor required stitches for a head injury.

(Sources: AsiaNews, Christian Today, Compass Direct, The Voice of the Martyrs USA)

- Thank God that Christians in Orissa are reported to have enjoyed a peaceful Christmas. Pray for the success of peace-building initiatives in this state.
- Ask God to bless and strengthen the two pastors and their families who were attacked over Christmas.

## **2. IRAQ – Church bombings force Christians to spend Christmas alone**

A spate of bomb attacks on churches in Iraq forced many Christians to cut short their Christmas worship celebrations.

At least five churches are reported to have been bombed in the run-up to Christmas, striking fear into the hearts of Christians and forcing many churches to cancel services.

The Syrian Orthodox church of St Thomas in the northern town of Mosul was attacked at about 11am on Wednesday December 23. On the same day, three people were killed – one Christian and two Muslims – when a bomb was detonated near the Chaldean church of St George, also in Mosul. The device had been hidden in a cart of vegetables outside the church. AsiaNews reports that both churches are of ‘great historical and cultural value’.

Two other churches and a school in Mosul had suffered previous bomb attacks on December 15. The Church of Saint Ephrem and a convent in the city were bombed on November 26 (*Prayer Alert, December 15, 2009*).

Middle East Concern advocacy group and AsiaNews report that some churches cut short their programme of events – while some churches in Mosul and Kirkuk cancelled all their Christmas services, following the church bombings.

The Archbishop of Kirkuk, Louis Sako, told *The Washington Post* that it was the first time that churches in his city had cancelled Christmas celebrations. But he insisted that many Iraqi Christians are determined not to be driven out of their land and are standing firm in their faith. ‘We want to work together to build peace and hope in the hearts of all men and women of Iraq,’ he told AsiaNews.

(Sources: AFP, AsiaNews, CNS, Middle East Concern, The Voice of the Martyrs Canada, The Washington Post)

- Pray for God’s peace to rest over His church in Iraq. Pray for lasting peace for this troubled nation, especially in the run-up to parliamentary elections in March.
- Pray for fresh determination for the Iraqi church to spread the gospel.

## **3. INDONESIA – Muslim celebration turns into church demolition**

Hundreds of Muslims celebrating the Islamic New Year’s Eve abandoned a street procession to attack a half-built church in West Java.

A crowd of about 1,000 men, women and children were processing through Bekasi when they drew level with the church construction site in the Harapan Indah residential area.

Many veered off towards the church and began to ransack it. Some started fires, causing several thousand pounds' worth of damage.

Kristina Maria Rentetana, head of the church building committee, told Compass Direct news agency that there had been no warning of the attack on December 17. Indeed, initially, she had joined the crowd as they walked along.

But as they drew near to the church, some in the crowd suddenly started throwing stones, Kristina said. 'They shouted, "Destroy it, destroy it!"' she said. 'Even women carrying babies joined in the stone-throwing.'

The police, who helped disperse the mob, blamed agitators in the crowd for turning the celebrations into a mob attack on the church. 'There were agitators among the crowd as they walked,' Sector Police Chief Iman Sugianto told Compass Direct. 'These persons incited the crowd to burn the church.'

Twelve people have been arrested in connection with the attack. The church's building committee has vowed to complete the construction work.

(Sources: Compass Direct, The Jakarta Post, The Voice of the Martyrs Canada)

- Pray for Kristina Maria Rentetana and the other members of the church which was attacked in Bekasi. Ask God to console them and strengthen their faith.
- Pray that those involved in the attack will repent of their actions and feel compelled to work towards interfaith unity and tolerance.

**Our next Prayer Alert issue will be on January 19, 2010.**

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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