

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL PRAYER ALERT

Tuesday, October 6, 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. SUDAN – Church appeals for help after Christians crucified by militants

A Sudanese bishop has called on the international community for help after guerrillas crucified seven Christians.

Militants from the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) ambushed and murdered six of the Christians in a forest near the town of Nzara in Western Equatoria State near the border with the Democratic Republic of Congo. The seventh was snatched from a church in Ezo.

The LRA, a Ugandan rebel force influenced by Islam and the occult, has been terrorising southern villages for years but stepped up its attacks at the end of last year – training its sights particularly on Christians.

In their raid on Ezo, guerrillas ransacked a church and abducted 17 people who were mostly in their teens and early 20s. Thirteen of them are still missing. A further 12 people were abducted from a village close to Nzara. The LRA is known to conscript youths by force and to enslave captives.

Bishop Eduardo Hiiboro Kussala of Tombura-Yambio diocese has spoken out about the atrocities. He says the Sudanese Government has not done enough to tackle the problem – and is calling on foreign governments for help. 'Nobody is coming to our aid,' he says.

The bishop recently helped organise a three-day prayer vigil which culminated in a silent protest at government inaction, when about 20,000 people walked barefoot in sackcloth and ashes for two miles to Yambio. Thousands of people in Western Equatoria State are said to have fled their homes because of recent LRA violence.

(Sources: Sudan Tribune, The Catholic Herald)

- Ask God to strengthen His church in Western Equatoria State to stand against fear.
- Pray that officials will do more to protect southern Christians and rout the LRA.

2. CHINA – Prominent pastors detained during Communist celebrations

Long-suffering Beijing pastors Zhang 'Bike' Mingxuan and Hua Huiqi have been detained yet again – apparently as part of the government 'clean-up' for China's National Day.

Police took Pastor Hua Huiqi from his home on September 17 because, they said, their boss wanted to discuss his work over dinner. In fact, police forced him into a car and drove him out of the city – and, at the time of writing, they appeared to be holding him until the Communist Party's 60th anniversary celebrations last Thursday were over.

Meanwhile, officials took Pastor Bike and his wife on a 'forced vacation' to a mountainous area of Henan on September 23. Pastor 'Bike' is head of the Chinese House Church Alliance. Both he and Pastor Hua have been detained repeatedly over the past few years.

Pastor Hua's brother Hua Huilin is reported to be dying in Beijing Tiantan Hospital. When his family asked for permission for Pastor Hua to pay him a visit, the Beijing Public Security Bureau (PSB) initially refused – but then relented on September 22. Pastor Hua lost his father, Hua Zaichen, earlier this year.

Pastor Hua recently set up the Tentmaker Fellowship, a ministry which employs Christians, including some disabled people, to screen-print Bible verses on items made out of fabric. Officials have threatened to close down the ministry.

Meanwhile, in Shanxi province, officials have promised leaders of Fushan Church they will pay out 1.4 million yen in compensation for demolishing 17 buildings in its compound in Linfin city on September 13. At least ten church members were seriously injured in the night-time raid, during which officials allegedly beat Christians with 'bricks and other blunt instruments'. Several remain in a critical condition. Nine Fushan Church leaders were seized by Shanxi PSB officials on September 25: their whereabouts are not known.

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

- Thank God for the courage and commitment of Pastor Hua and Pastor Bike.
- Ask God to grow the Fushan Church in Linfin. Pray that justice will be done.

3. PAKISTAN - President speaks out against misuse of blasphemy laws

President Asif Ali Zardari has said his Government is keen to solve the problem of Pakistan's blasphemy laws in a move welcomed by Christians.

At a meeting with the Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams in London, President Zardari said he was very conscious of the need 'to urgently address the issue... with a view to preventing the misuse of the blasphemy law in future'. Mr Zardari acknowledged that the blasphemy laws – section 295/C of Pakistan's Penal Code – have been exploited by extremists to attack religious minorities, as well as Muslims. Release International has campaigned against this legislation.

The president's promise comes in the wake of extremist attacks on Gojra and Korian villages in Punjab after Christians there were accused of blasphemy (*Prayer Alert, August 11, 2009*). *Prayer Alert* reported on September 22 that Falish Masih from Punjab was found hanged in his cell just hours after he was detained on blasphemy charges.

Release staff and Sohail Johnson of our partner Sharing Life Ministry Pakistan recently visited Sandal Gulsher (also known as Bibi), 20, who was detained a year ago on

blasphemy charges (*Prayer Alert*, November 25, 2008). They prayed with her in Jhang District jail, Punjab, and gave her some essentials such as food. 'It was very painful to see Sandal in prison,' said a member of the Release team. 'We could only touch her fingers with our fingers through the bars.'

(Sources: AsiaNews, Release International, SLMP, The Archbishop of Canterbury's office)

- Pray that politicians will act fast now to repeal or amend the blasphemy laws.
- Pray for Christian prisoners such as Sandal Gulsher accused of blasphemy. Pray for Sandal's acquittal: her faith is strong but she is struggling emotionally.

4. NORTH KOREA – Prayers answered as defectors given asylum by Danes

Release partners involved in helping nine North Korean Christians seek asylum in the Danish embassy in Hanoi have spoken about the bold escape.

Helping Hands Korea (HHK) worked with other Christian activists to help the nine escape through China and into Vietnam – and then secure diplomatic sanctuary at the embassy.

HHK Director Tim Peters spent four days with the North Koreans in Hanoi, holding daily gatherings for prayer, worship and Bible study. 'When I brought them copies of the Bible and related reading materials, they were so thankful,' says Tim, who believes the nine became Christians after leaving North Korea. 'God brought it to a successful completion and truly led us each step of the way!' Release helped fund the safe transfer of the refugees – but neither Release nor HHK was involved in helping them leave North Korea.

One of the refugees, Choi Hyon-a, says she tried to escape from North Korea once before but was forcibly repatriated by Chinese police. She was then jailed, tortured and 'forced to knit all day long, from five in the morning until midnight'. 'I personally witnessed the death of four women in my knitting unit,' she said. 'They all died of gross maltreatment.'

The North Koreans are now asking for safe conduct to South Korea. The Danish embassy says it is working with the Vietnamese authorities to find a solution.

(Sources: BBC, Helping Hands Korea, Reuters)

- Thank God for this breakthrough and His faithfulness in answering prayers.
- Pray that these nine North Koreans can now be resettled safely in South Korea.

NEWS UPDATE:

Two Christians abducted in northern Iraq have been released by their captors. Dr Samir Jarjis, who disappeared from Kirkuk on August 18 (*Prayer Alert*, September 22, 2009), was found in a critical condition outside a mosque after being starved and tortured for 29 days. Another Christian kidnapped in August, Hikmat Sayid from Mosul, was freed on September 11. Thank God for both men's release. Pray particularly that Samir's condition will continue to improve. (Source: AINA)

Our next Prayer Alert issue will be on Tuesday, October 20, 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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