

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL PRAYER ALERT

Tuesday, September 22, 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. PAKISTAN – Extremist attacks sow fear in Christian community

Islamist extremists shot dead five Christians at a laboratory in Pakistan after they refused to convert to Islam.

The Christians were gunned down at the Maryiam Labs facility in Quetta city, Baluchistan, by two men who fled on a motorbike. The dead men were named as Mushtaq Masih, Naveed John, Naymat Gill, Nadeem Akhtar and Suleman.

The five had reportedly received several threatening letters demanding they 'convert or die' before the attack on August 28. Seven other Christians were injured in the attack.

Local Christians suspect their attackers belonged to the same militant group which killed at least seven Christians in Gojra, Punjab, last month (*Prayer Alert, August 11, 2009*).

Police in Punjab say there have been several attempts to provoke further attacks on Christians in different parts of the province. In one such incident, torn pages of the Koran were recently found on land between Christian and Muslim communities near Chichawatni. Local Muslim and Christian leaders quickly dismissed the find as a 'plant' to try to stir up religious tensions. When Chichawatni Muslims realised their Christian neighbours were too frightened to send their children to the local school, which is in a Muslim area, the Muslims offered to escort Christian children to school.

Also in Punjab, a young Christian named Falish Masih, 20, was found hanged in his prison cell hours after he was accused of desecrating the Koran. About 100 people destroyed a church and two Christian houses in Sambrial district after the allegations against Falish became public. His family believe his real 'crime' was to have fallen in love with a Muslim girl, enraging her family.

(Sources: Agence France Presse, International Christian Concern, Pakistan Christian Post, The New York Times, The Voice of the Martyrs Canada)

- Pray for the relatives of Christians murdered in Quetta – and for Falish’s family.
- Thank God for good relations between local Christians and Muslims in Chichawatni. Pray that this unity and tolerance will deepen.

2. CHINA – Christians given long jail terms for helping North Korean refugees

Two Christians have been given tough jail sentences for helping North Korean refugees flee to South Korea through China.

Li Mingshun and Zhang Yonghu were given ten- and seven-year sentences respectively for providing food, shelter and transport to 61 refugees crossing northern China into Inner Mongolia. State laws in Inner Mongolia, an autonomous region of northern China, allow people to seek asylum in South Korea – but, for the rest of China, the policy is to repatriate North Korean refugees by force.

On August 30, the Erlianhaote City People’s Court found Li guilty of ‘human smuggling across the border’. She was arrested in Heilongjiang province, as the refugees crossed into neighbouring Inner Mongolia. Zhang was convicted of helping to transport refugees. Li’s family plan to appeal against both convictions, according to ASSIST News Service.

China has come in for fierce criticism over its policy of repatriating North Korean refugees. It considers them to be economic migrants rather than refugees. Yet, North Korean defectors who are repatriated are reported to face brutal treatment, even execution.

(Sources: ASSIST News Service, YonhapNews)

- Pray that Li and Zhang’s appeal will be heard quickly and will be successful.
- Pray that the Chinese authorities will choose to distance themselves from Pyongyang’s repressive regime by relaxing their policy on asylum-seekers.

3. IRAN – Christians in Mosul dogged by ‘fear and loneliness’

Christians in northern Iraq are said to be ‘losing hope’ amid fears of escalating violence in the run-up to next year’s elections.

Recent kidnappings and murders in Kirkuk and Mosul have deepened the climate of ‘fear, loneliness and concern’ which surrounds Christians in the north of the country.

On September 3, 60-year-old businessman Salem Barjjo was found dead, a month after he was kidnapped in Mosul. Nothing has been heard of another Christian, Hikmat Sayid, who was abducted in the same city earlier this month. In both cases, kidnappers demanded huge ransoms which their families were unable to pay. There is no news either of a Christian doctor named Samir Jarjis, who disappeared in Kirkuk on August 18.

Though kidnappings are commonplace in Iraq, many commentators believe there is a concerted campaign to intimidate the Christian minority and even drive them out of cities such as Mosul. A spate of murders in Mosul last autumn prompted an exodus of Christians who fled the city in their thousands over a fortnight (*Prayer Alert, October 28, 2008*).

Most have since returned home to Mosul – but remain uneasy. Many fear an escalation of attacks in the lead-up to parliamentary elections, scheduled for January 16, 2010 – as extremist elements try to undermine public confidence in Iraqi security forces.

Archbishop Louis Sako of Kirkuk says that Christians in his city are 'pessimistic'. 'We do not have the same hope that we had before,' he told the charity Aid to the Church in Need.

(Sources: AsiaNews, Christian Post, CNA)

- Ask God to protect and strengthen His church in northern Iraq.
- Pray for wisdom for Iraqi church leaders such as Archbishop Louis Sako.

4. INDIA – Hindu extremists accuse hostel director of forced conversion

Police accompanied by Hindu extremists have arrested the director of a hostel for boys in Karnataka, accusing him of forcing children to become Christians.

Pastor Hanuma Naik, who also leads a church, stands accused of offering food, shelter and education to boys at the Christian Ashram hostel as an 'allurement'. One of his Christian colleagues, Rama Naik, was also arrested.

Pastor Hanuma, who was released on bail soon after his arrest on August 28, said the allegations were false. He said the parents of all 42 students attending the hostel are fully aware that Christian teaching is part of its programme. He told Compass Direct news agency that Rama was slapped repeatedly by Hindu extremists at the time of their arrest.

Anti-conversion legislation is now in force in several Indian states – but not Karnataka.

(Source: Compass Direct)

- Ask God to protect Pastor Hanuma and Rama. Pray their ministry will continue.
- Pray against any bias in the Karnataka police force which might lead officers to side unjustly with Hindu extremists.

NEWS UPDATE:

Seven Iranian Christians detained in Amameh, just north of Tehran, on July 31 (*Prayer Alert, August 25, 2009*) have been released on bail, according to Middle East Concern. The seven, all of whom were raised as Muslims, were among 24 believers arrested at the same church meeting – though the other 17 were released later that day. Under the bail conditions, each of their families had to surrender the title deeds for two properties. Pray that no charges will be brought.

PRISONERS OF FAITH MINISTRY:

Our Prisoners of Faith Ministry provides pastoral care and practical support for Christians imprisoned for their faith. An email alert is sent free monthly, highlighting an individual Christian prisoner, giving prayer points and addresses for letter-writing. To receive these alerts, please contact the office or sign up by visiting our website: www.releaseinternational.org/prisonersoffaith

Our next Prayer Alert issue will be on Tuesday, October 6, 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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