

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL PRAYER ALERT

Tuesday, September 8, 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 – Christian men acquitted of murder after years in jail

Two Christian prisoners are expected to walk free within days after spending more than three years behind bars on murder charges they had always denied.

Twenty-year-old Asif Masih and Safdar Masih, who is 22, were acquitted last month – they were first arrested for allegedly killing a man in their village in Kasur in 2006. Release partner Sharing Life Ministry Pakistan has been supporting the men and their families for the past three years.

Asif and Safdar were charged with murdering Ahmed Ali, who was attacked and tortured to death in fields outside the village. In fact, Asif and Safdar had rushed to Ahmed's help, hearing his cries – and had themselves been attacked. Ahmed's assailants later had Asif and Safdar arrested on suspicion of murder – allegedly with police collusion. It is not uncommon for Christians, who are treated as second-class citizens in Pakistan, to be falsely accused of crimes – and for some sectors of the police to be biased against them.

Meanwhile, in a separate bid to uphold Christians' basic human rights, Christian politicians are stepping up the pressure on the Government to repeal Pakistan's notorious blasphemy laws. These laws are frequently abused to persecute Christians.

The Pakistan Christian Congress (PCC) has set a deadline of September 15 for the Government to repeal the laws, warning of a 'movement against the Government' if no action is taken. The laws, against which Release has long campaigned, make blaspheming against Islam's prophet Mohammed or desecrating the Koran punishable by imprisonment or death.

The PCC's demand follows the arrest of 18-year-old Christian Safian Masih, who is from Gujranwala, Punjab – the latest Christian to be accused of blasphemy. After a petty row between Safian and a local girl, he was accused of raping her. Safian's accusers beat him and took him to the police. Two days later, they changed their story and accused Safian of blasphemy – of tearing pages out of the girl's Koran. He remains in police custody.

Safian's family insist he is innocent. They have been forced into hiding because they fear for their safety: extremists have called for Safian to be executed.

(Sources: Christian Today, International Christian Concern, Pakistan Christian Post, Sharing Life Ministry Pakistan)

- Ask God to keep Safian safe. Pray that charges against him will be dropped.
- Pray that the Government of Pakistan will now repeal the blasphemy laws.

2. INDONESIA - Fears over rise of Sharia-inspired laws

Indonesian Christians are calling on President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono to stem the tide of Bills and legislation which, they say, are ceding ground to Islamic law.

Church leaders are concerned by a rash of legislation at provincial level which discriminates against religious minorities such as Christians. And now they are lobbying against Bills inspired by *Sharia* or strict Islamic law which are currently being considered at national level by Parliament.

The Indonesian Council of Churches is particularly concerned by the Halal Product Guarantee Bill, which mentions *Sharia* several times as if Indonesia were an exclusively Muslim state. It is feared that if the Bill became law, the legislation could be used against those selling products without halal labels on them.

The impact of these measures would be to sow disunity between religious groups, says Ronald Naibaho of the Indonesian Christian Youth Movement. 'These Bills are a step backward and will lead to the isolation of different religions,' he told Compass Direct news agency.

Meanwhile, Christians' religious rights continue to be trampled upon. In the Malang district of East Java, Muslims successfully lobbied the mayor to withdraw a building permit from a Christian foundation planning to open an orphanage for disabled children in Batu. Opponents claimed the orphanage was a ploy to 'Christianise' the area.

(Sources: Compass Direct, The Jakarta Post)

- Pray that the Indonesian Government would take a stand for religious tolerance and liberty and resist efforts to extend the reach of *Sharia* in this nation.
- Ask God to bless the ministry of the Christian foundation whose plans for an orphanage have been thwarted.

3. CHINA - House churches targeted ahead of anniversary

Chinese officials have issued a secret order calling for several Beijing house churches to be closed – apparently to gag dissidents before the 60th anniversary of Communist rule.

Release partner China Aid alleges that the Chinese Government sent round 'a secret directive' to agencies such as the Public Security Bureau (PSB) ordering them to dismantle at least six big house churches.

The Beijing Huajie Plaza complex has reportedly had orders from the PSB to terminate its rental agreement with the Beijing Shouwang house church – one of the largest house

churches in the area. The church, which has more than 1,000 members, has been renting two floors at the Plaza for several years. Officials shut down the church's website in April.

Several other house churches in and around Beijing have been targeted in recent months. Last month, officials disrupted a baptism which a church from Haidian district was conducting in a river in Beijing's suburbs. China Aid believes the crackdown is an attempt stifle religious freedom during celebrations marking the 60th anniversary of the Communist Party's rule in China next month.

(Sources: China Aid, Los Angeles Times)

- Pray that officials will not succeed in closing down the Beijing house churches which they appear to have in their sights.
- Pray specifically for a new home for the Beijing Shouwang church.

4. INDIA – Hindus falsely accuse pastor of murder in revenge for his evangelism

Hindus opposed to a Christian evangelist in Madhya Pradesh have falsely accused him and three other Christians of murdering a young man killed in a gang fight.

Pastor Kamlesh Tahed, 32, insists he was in another village on a pastoral visit when Roop Singh Baria was killed in Mehendi Kheda village, Jhabua district, on August 8. He also insists that the three other Christians accused with him – Kasna Tahed, Ramesh Tahed and Vasna Tahed – are innocent too. These three men have been taken into custody; Pastor Tahed has fled the area and gone into hiding. Local Christians say Roop was killed in a clash between rival clans.

The pastor, whose ministry has apparently angered local Hindus, spent 20 days in jail in 2001 on false charges of 'forcible conversion' before a judge acquitted him.

Compass Direct news agency says Pastor Tahed supports his wife, six children, his parents and his four orphaned nephews and nieces – and, as an unpaid evangelist, his only source of income is a small plot of farmland.

(Source: Compass Direct)

- Ask God to protect and provide for Pastor Tahed and his family.
- Pray that murder charges against all four Christians will be dropped.

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, September 22, 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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