

# RELEASE INTERNATIONAL PRAYER ALERT

*Tuesday, June 30, 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. ERITREA – Orthodox patriarch remains under the ‘most severe’ house arrest**

The elderly patriarch of the Eritrean Orthodox Church briefly emerged from house arrest after four years – but only to go into hospital.

The 83-year-old patriarch, affectionately known as Abune Antonios, had reportedly been denied medical attention at the undisclosed location where he has been held under house arrest since August 2005. He has not been allowed visitors for the past four years.

Abune Antonios is reported to have needed hospital treatment for a condition associated with his high blood pressure and diabetes – but has now been returned to house arrest.

The patriarch was stripped of his ecclesiastical authority in 2005, after protesting about the imprisonment of three Orthodox priests (*Prayer Alert, May 15, 2007*). He had been strongly critical of the state’s interference in church matters.

(Source: In Chains for Christ)

#### **Act**

- Sign our online petition at [www.releaseinternational.org/current](http://www.releaseinternational.org/current) calling on the Eritrean Government to allow greater religious freedom. Please also email this link to your friends and download a paper copy to collect signatures at church.

#### **Pray**

- Ask God to protect and strengthen elderly Orthodox patriarch Abune Antonios. And pray that Release’s petition calling for greater religious freedom in Eritrea will have a strong impact on its Government.

### **2. PAKISTAN – Christian murdered for drinking from a Muslim’s cup**

Radical Islamists in Punjab beat a young Christian man to death after he accidentally drank out of a cup reserved for Muslims at a roadside café.

Ishtiaq Masih had ordered a cup of tea at the stall in Machharkay village last month after the bus he was travelling on had stopped to allow passengers to have a break.

It was when Ishtiaq went to pay for his tea that the stallholder noticed the cross around his neck. Pointing to a sign warning non-Muslims to declare their religion before being served, the furious café owner and 14 of his employees set upon Ishtiaq, beating and stabbing him to death. Ishtiaq had simply not noticed the warning.

International Christian Concern news agency, whose correspondent later visited the café, reports that the stall still bears a large red sign reading, 'This tea stall serves Muslims only,' and threatening 'dire consequences' to anyone flouting this rule.

Ishtiaq's family reported the murder to the police and filed a case against his alleged attackers. No arrests had been made at the time of writing.

(Source: International Christian Concern)

- Pray God's peace and protection over Ishtiaq's family.
- Pray that local police, who are reported to be Muslim, will do their utmost to detain Ishtiaq's killers, in the name of justice.

### **3. CHINA – Beijing bookstore owner sentenced to three years in prison**

The family of Beijing bookseller Shi Weihai are said to be 'inconsolable' after he was given a three-year jail sentence and a \$22,000 fine for 'illegal business practices'.

Shi's daughters, who are 13 and nine, 'cried uncontrollably' when they heard the news, said Shi's wife Zhang Jing. 'The children just cannot accept it,' she said. 'Their father is their biggest hero. They couldn't believe [he] was convicted like an ordinary criminal.'

Shi, a house church pastor, was first arrested in November 2007 but later released. He was rearrested in March 2008 (*Prayer Alert, April 29, 2008*) and has been detained ever since. His sentence, which relates to printing Bibles illegally, appears to run from his first arrest in November 2007. Bibles can only be bought legally in China in government-sanctioned churches.

Shi's lawyer Zhang Xingshui was not in court to hear the verdict on June 10. Zhang's licence to work as a lawyer has been suspended by the Government. It is not yet known whether Shi will appeal against his sentence.

Meanwhile, a Christian human rights lawyer named Zheng Enchong was detained and tortured for nine hours by Public Security Bureau officials in Shanghai. He was beaten, stripped and burnt with cigarettes.

Zheng is well known for his work defending poor and vulnerable people, including in cases where officials have confiscated their land. He has now been summoned by officials almost 20 times and has been beaten four times, so that now he has difficulty walking.

(Sources: AsiaNews, China Aid, Open Doors, The Star online)

#### **Act**

- Write an encouraging note to Shi Weihai in prison at: Qinghe Detention Centre of the Haidian Sub-Bureau, 2585 Longgang Road, Qinghe Town, Haidian district, Beijing, China. Write to Shi's wife Zhang Jing at: 3207 Jisheng Villa, West Sanqi,

Haidian district, Beijing, China. Please do not mention Release International and do not write anything critical of the Government in your letters.

**Pray**

- Ask God to uphold Shi Weihai and keep him in good health: he is diabetic. Pray God's peace and provision over Shi's family. And thank God for the courageous work of lawyer Zheng Enchong.

**4. VIETNAM – Prominent Christian lawyer accused of being enemy of the state**

A high-profile Christian lawyer has been arrested on charges of 'distributing propaganda against the state'.

Paul Le Cong Dinh has defended several human and religious rights activists, including fellow lawyers Nguyen Van Dai and Le Thi Cong Nhan, who were jailed on similar charges in May 2007 (*Prayer Alert, May 29, 2007*).

Dinh was arrested at his home in Tan Phong ward, Ho Chi Minh City, on June 13. State-run media report that police found 'documents distorting the country's socio-economic policies' in his office and home. Police also allege he has colluded with 'domestic and foreign reactionaries to sabotage the Vietnamese state'. Dinh has been critical of the state in the media and online.

Forty-one-year-old Dinh, who was educated in France and the US, was charged under Article 88 of Vietnam's criminal code, which prohibits distributing information harmful to the Government. He faces up to 20 years in prison if convicted.

Dai and Nhan, who were well-known for their work in defending religious liberty in Hanoi, are serving four- and three-year sentences respectively. Their trial lasted just four hours.

(Sources: Associated Press, BBC, ICN, Spero News, VietNamNet, VOV News)

- Pray that charges against respected lawyer Paul Le Cong Dinh will be dropped.
- Pray for the release of rights lawyers Nguyen Van Dai and Le Thi Cong Nhan.

**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](http://www.releaseinternational.org/prisonersoffaith)

**TELL US WHAT YOU THINK OF OUR WEBSITE:**

We are currently planning the development of our website ([www.releaseinternational.org](http://www.releaseinternational.org)) – so your feedback is greatly appreciated. Please email us at [info@releaseinternational.org](mailto:info@releaseinternational.org), telling us: what you like or dislike about our website; which areas you think we could improve; what new information you would like to see there; how easy or difficult it is to use the site; any other comments.

**Our next Prayer Alert issue will be on Tuesday, July 14, 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.

Release International, PO Box 54, Orpington, BR5 9RT, UK  
Tel: 01689 823491  
General enquiries: [info@releaseinternational.org](mailto:info@releaseinternational.org)  
Website address: [www.releaseinternational.org](http://www.releaseinternational.org)