

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL PRAYER ALERT

Tuesday, April 13, 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. CHINA – Christian activist abducted again, missing lawyer allowed home

A well-known Christian activist from Shanghai has been abducted by government officials for the second time in a month.

Shen Peilan, a seasoned campaigner against government corruption, has not been seen since she was seized on March 24 – when officials from the Bureau of Letters and Petitions raided her home twice on the same day. On their first attempt, they were actually deterred by police summoned by Shen's family – but officials succeeded in abducting her in a later raid, after the police had gone.

Shen was still recovering after being held without a warrant and interrogated by officers from the same Bureau for nine days from March 7. When church friends reported her missing, lawyers and activists managed to track her down at a hotel in Songjiang – and police intervened to free her. She had been travelling to Beijing to protest against her house being demolished by local officials earlier this year. Chinese local government officials do not have the power to make arrests unless sanctioned by a higher authority.

Meanwhile, missing Christian lawyer Gao Zhisheng has contacted his family and Release partner China Aid to confirm that he is alive and has been allowed back to his Beijing home. However, China Aid believes that Gao remains under close surveillance and is not yet free. Gao, who sounded weak on the phone, said he had been recovering from a 'racking cough' – but did not give any further details of his health or treatment in jail.

Gao had not been heard of since he was abducted by Chinese officials in February 2009. His wife and two children fled to the US last year to avoid persecution. Gao said that he had been held in a 'guarded location' in Shanxi until very recently – and now had a strong desire to be reunited with his family. China Aid reports that Gao remains strong in his faith.

(Sources: BBC, China Aid)

- Pray for the safety and immediate release of Shen Peilan from Shanghai.
- Thank God that Gao Zhisheng has been allowed to return to his home. Pray that he will soon be completely free and will be reunited with his family.

2. VIETNAM – Released Christian lawyer vows to fight on for democracy

Christian lawyer Le Thi Cong Nhan has said she will continue to push for a free and fair Vietnam – after serving three years in jail as a pro-democracy activist.

Nhan, jailed in 2007 for ‘propagandising to destroy the Socialist Republic of Vietnam’, was released from prison on March 6. She is not yet free, however – she will spend the next three years under house arrest in Hanoi. In a radio interview with *Voice of America* soon after her release, the 31-year-old lawyer said she had no intention of giving up her struggle for greater democracy in Vietnam – even, she said, if there was a further price to pay.

Nhan, who became a Christian just before her arrest and who was baptised in jail (*Prayer Alert, February 19, 2008*), is reported to have grown in her faith while in prison. Early on in her detention, she was given a Bible by religious rights campaigners from the US – and she went on hunger strike twice when prison guards confiscated the Bible from her.

‘In prison, the Lord became my closest friend, my teacher and the one who carried my burdens with me,’ Nhan said in a Vietnamese language broadcast on *Voice of America*.

Convicted at the same time as Nhan, her work colleague Nguyen Van Dai still has another year of his sentence to serve. Nhan and Dai were originally given four and five-year sentences respectively – but these were both reduced by a year after an international outcry. Many believe their detention was a government backlash against their defence of human rights and their pro-democracy activism.

Meanwhile, Vietnamese churches are celebrating the authorities’ unprecedented decision to allow a high-profile international evangelist to hold major events in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi. More than 600 pastors from different denominations heard US evangelist Luis Palau speak at separate events on March 14 and 17.

(Sources: BosNewsLife, Compass Direct)

- Praise God for the powerful witness of Hanoi lawyer, Le Thi Cong Nhan – and for her release from jail. Ask God to continue to use her, even during house arrest.
- Thank God that the Vietnamese authorities permitted Luis Palau to address large gatherings of pastors. Pray that this will help lead to greater religious freedom.

3. ERITREA – Seventeen Christian soldiers at prayer arrested en masse

Military officials arrested 17 young soldiers as they met for prayer and fellowship in the town of Segenaite in the south of Eritrea.

The young men, believed to come from several different churches, were rounded up on March 27 and taken to Segenaite police station. The 17 are believed to be in the middle of their compulsory national service. Assist News Service reports that this brings to 28 the number of Christians arrested in Eritrea since the beginning of March.

Religious rights charity Open Doors reports that the number of Christians detained for their faith in Eritrea has fallen over the past 12 months. But its sources say that those who had been released were freed due to ‘ill health’ and were reportedly released on ‘very strict conditions’.

(Sources: Assist News Service, Open Doors)

- Pray for the swift release of the 17 detained Christian military conscripts.
- Pray that the number of Christians detained in Eritrea will continue to fall.

4. PAKISTAN – Landmark ruling raises hopes for Christians seeking justice

A court in Pakistan has fined police for detaining and torturing a Christian man without basis – in a case that campaigners hope will set legal precedent for Christians seeking the same rights as Muslims.

Waqas Masih was held without charge at a police station in Lahore, Punjab, for 25 days, during which time he was 'tied' and 'tortured barbarically'. A sessions court in Lahore condemned police for the detention and fined one officer 30,000 rupees (about £235).

The original reason for Waqas' arrest is unclear but sources suggest his detention may have been prompted by Muslim hardliners pressurising police to target devout Christians. This landmark case has raised hopes that Pakistani police may not be so ready to discriminate against Christians, who accuse police of frequent bias against them.

Meanwhile, in Alipur, Gujranwala, a Christian woman named Rubina Bibi has gone on trial for allegedly blaspheming Mohammed, Islam's prophet. Release partner Centre for Legal Aid Assistance and Settlement (CLAAS) says that Rubina was asked to enter a plea before her lawyer from CLAAS arrived in court – and she entered a guilty plea. She is now being held with her 18-month-old son at Gujranwala prison. Release sources say the accusation against Rubina followed 'a minor domestic dispute' with a Muslim who is alleged to have made 'derogatory remarks' about Jesus.

(Sources: BosNewsLife, Centre for Legal Aid Assistance and Settlement)

- Thank God for the ruling against Punjab police accused of detaining Waqas Masih illegally, and pray this will deter officers from discriminating against Christians.
- Ask God to intervene in the case of Rubina Bibi and set her free.

NEWS UPDATE:

Iranian pastor Wilson Issavi, Assyrian head of the Evangelical Church in Karmanshah, has been released on bail from prison in Isfahan. The pastor, 65, who was arrested on February 2 (*Prayer Alert, March 2, 2010*), has reportedly been charged with 'converting Muslims' and 'not co-operating with police' – and still awaits trial. Sources say he is in good spirits and has not given details of his ordeal. Release sources report that two other Christians have also been released on bail – one detained on February 16 in Karaj and another arrested in Shiraz in January. Both may face further court hearings. Please pray that all charges against these three Christians will now be dropped – and ask God to keep them safe. (Sources: Compass Direct, FCNN, Middle East Concern)

Our next Prayer Alert issue will be on April 27, 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 and the Evangelical Alliance.

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