

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL PRAYER ALERT

Tuesday, December 15, 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. CHINA – Harsh prison sentences for Shanxi and Xinjiang pastors

Religious rights campaigners have strongly condemned harsh jail sentences handed down to 11 church leaders in different parts of China.

Release partner China Aid reports that the Chinese authorities have ‘quietly sentenced’ Uyghur house church leader Alimjan Yimit to 15 years in prison in Xinjiang – the most severe penalty given to a house church leader in ‘nearly a decade’. And ten leaders of Fushan Church in Linfen city, Shanxi, have been sentenced to up to seven years in jail – in a move which China Aid has branded ‘farcical’.

Alimjan, 36, who has been detained since January 2008, was convicted of the apparently contrived charge of ‘providing state secrets to overseas organisations’ – because, reportedly, he had given interviews to foreign media. His sentence is the maximum penalty for this charge, meaning he is considered to have caused ‘irreparable national damage’.

Meanwhile, in Shanxi, five Fushan Church pastors – including senior leaders Yang Rongli and her husband Wang Xiaoguang – were convicted in what China Aid called a 12-hour ‘pre-determined show trial’ on November 25. Five days later, the Public Security Bureau sentenced five other leaders to two years’ ‘re-education through labour’, bypassing the courts entirely.

The convictions follow an assault on Fushan Church on September 13, when more than 400 military police and civilians destroyed most of a factory it used as the church building. The five pastors sent to jail were arrested en route to Beijing where they had planned to file a complaint about the demolition. They were in fact convicted of ‘illegally occupying farmland’ and ‘disturbing a transportation order by gathering masses’.

The other five leaders sent to labour camps were accused of ‘gathering people to disturb the public order’ after organising a prayer rally attended by 1,000 people the day after the demolition. One of these leaders, Yang Caizhen, whose husband Yang Xuan was jailed for three years, is said to be in a ‘very fragile’ condition after being beaten in custody.

Yang Rongli, who was given a seven-year jail term, and her husband Wang Xiaoguang, who was jailed for three years, have led Fushan Church for more than 30 years. At a court recess during their trial, they are reported to have told their son to stand firm in his faith. All eleven church leaders plan to appeal against their sentences.

(Sources: China Aid, Compass Direct, VOM Canada)

- **Pray:** Ask God to strengthen Alimjan Yimit and the ten Fushan Church leaders, and comfort their loved ones. Pray that their appeals will be prompt and successful.
- **Act:** Write a polite letter of concern about the sentencing of Alimjan Yimit and the ten Fushan Church leaders to the Chinese Ambassador in London. Write to: Her Excellency Mrs Fu Ying, Embassy of the People's Republic of China, 49–51 Portland Place, London W1B 4JL. Keep up to date with news on Alimjan Yimit and the Fushan Church at: www.chinaaid.org

2. ERITREA – Elderly Christian women detained en masse

The Eritrean authorities arrested a large group of mostly elderly women at a prayer meeting in Asmara.

The 30 Christian women, most of whom are members of the evangelical Faith Mission Church, were praying together in a house in the Eritrean capital on December 5 when security forces arrived and took them to a police station.

The women's relatives told sources for the advocacy group, International Christian Concern, that they are deeply worried about loved ones' safety.

The Faith Mission Church has reportedly existed for more than five decades but was forced underground in 2002 when the Government banned all church groups apart from the Orthodox church, the Roman Catholic church and the Lutheran Evangelical church.

(Source: International Christian Concern)

- Pray for the immediate release of these 30 women. Pray that their faith will be strengthened through their ordeal.
- Continue to pray that President Isaias Afewerki and his Government would allow greater religious freedom in Eritrea.

3. IRAQ – 'Cautious optimism' in Baghdad, bombings in Mosul

Two bomb attacks on one day have dismayed Christians in Mosul – but believers in Baghdad are said to be 'cautiously optimistic' about security in the capital.

The Church of Saint Ephrem in the northern city of Mosul was completely destroyed on November 26 when a gang ordered its congregation to leave, planted explosives around the building then detonated them. Half-an-hour later, more explosives were detonated at a convent in the same city. Although five Christians were in the convent, no one was injured.

The attack has dispelled any hope among Mosul believers that security has improved since a spate of attacks on Christians last autumn. However, the Voice of the Martyrs (VOM) Australia reports that some Christians who fled Baghdad after the fall of Saddam Hussein are now returning home, encouraged by what they see as improved security in the city.

VOM Australia reports, however, that many Christian families returning to Baghdad are 'broke' and are forced to share small houses with other families.

(Sources: Aid to the Church in Need, AsiaNews, VOM Australia, VOM Canada)

- Thank God that no one was injured in the Mosul bomb attacks.
- Ask God to fill His people in Iraq with His peace.

4. BURMA – Threatened repatriation could mean death for child refugees

More than 70 mainly Christian Burmese children who fled to Thailand to escape Buddhist militia face imminent repatriation – and the threat of death.

The 76 ethnic minority Karen children, who are aged six to 16, have been cared for at the Glory to God orphanage in Mae Hong Son province, Thailand, after they fled Burma in June to avoid militia attacks. But earlier this month, Thai border police raided the orphanage and told the children to prepare for deportation.

'If the children go back, they will be killed,' a caretaker at the orphanage told International Christian Concern. 'This should never happen.' She added that she had raised the children's plight with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

The children are part of 4,000-strong group of mainly Christian Karen who crossed the River Moei into Thailand in June when the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) raided their villages in Karen State, Burma. The DKBA is thought to be a 'proxy force' of the Burmese military junta which has violently repressed ethnic minorities and sometimes imposed Buddhism as a means of creating a national identity.

(Source: International Christian Concern)

- Pray that Thai police will not deport the Burmese orphans in Mae Hong Son.
- Pray that all 140,000 Karen refugees estimated to be in Thailand will be granted permanent refuge in other nations.

NEWS UPDATE:

Sources in China say that Christian lawyer Gao Zhisheng has been 'beaten severely' by the authorities and is 'crying daily in pain and desperation'. China Aid says Gao, who has been detained for more than 300 days, is living in conditions 'worse than death'. Gao's wife and children, who have fled to the US, still do not know where he is being held (*Prayer Alert, April 7, 2009*). Gao's siblings had their phone lines cut and were put under police surveillance after speaking up about Gao on Radio Free Asia. Please sign China Aid's online petition calling on Beijing to release Gao at www.freegao.com And pray urgently for Gao's immediate release. (Source: China Aid)

Our next Prayer Alert issue will be on January 5, 2010 – a week later than usual due to the Christmas break.

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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