

# RELEASE INTERNATIONAL PRAYER ALERT

*Tuesday, January 19, 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. EGYPT – Seven killed in attack on church after midnight mass**

At least seven people were killed in southern Egypt when gunmen opened fire on churchgoers leaving a late-night service in Quena province.

The attack happened just after believers at St John's Church in Nag Hammadi had finished a midnight celebration marking the Coptic Christmas Eve on January 6. Gunmen fired randomly into the crowd from a moving vehicle, killing six Christians and a Muslim security guard. Up to ten other people were injured, three of them critically.

The church's bishop, Bishop Kirilos, told Agence France Presse (AFP) news agency that he had ended the Christmas Eve service earlier than usual, at 11pm, for security reasons.

Officials believe that the attack was intended as retaliation for the alleged rape of a young Muslim girl in nearby Farshoot, which triggered three days of anti-Christian violence in the area in late-November (*Prayer Alert, December 1, 2009*). Bishop Kirilos told AFP that some members of his congregation had had anonymous phone calls, threatening to 'avenge the rape of the girl during the Christmas celebrations'.

Compass Direct news agency reports that thousands of Coptic Christians demonstrated in the town on January 7, to protest about lack of protection from such attacks. About 5,000 Copts attended the funeral of the six Christians killed in the attack.

(Sources: Agence France Presse, Compass Direct, Middle East Concern, VOM Canada)

- Pray for the families of the seven people killed outside St John's Church.
- Ask God to help restore trust between Muslims and Copts in this troubled area.

### **2. IRAN – Officials threaten to take child into care unless parents deny Christ**

Iranian officials have threatened to take a sick child into care unless her Christian parents renounce their faith and stop speaking publicly about Christ.

The threat hanging over 10-year-old Hadi, who has a serious kidney and bladder condition, is the culmination of intense persecution for her family. Both her parents, who were raised as Muslims, were detained in December – and were allowed home only after they had been subjected to two weeks of intimidation and bullying.

Hadi's mother, Hamideh Najafi, was arrested at their home in Mashhad on December 16. While Hamideh was in custody, her husband was also summoned to the interrogation room. Hamideh's interrogators threatened to beat him unless she signed a 'confession' that she was 'mentally and psychologically unfit and disturbed'. Having signed this forced confession, she was then not allowed a lawyer in court.

The court sentenced Hamideh to three months' house arrest – and ordered that Hadi be placed in foster care. However, due to the child's fragile health, the authorities have not yet implemented this custody order. But officials have warned Hamideh and her husband that Hadi will only be allowed to stay with them if they renounce their faith.

There were reportedly no formal charges against Hamideh and it was purely on the grounds of her forced confession that the court ordered that her child be put into care. However, the Farsi Christian News Network says Hamideh was accused of contacting a foreign TV network, which court officials denounced as a 'political' crime.

Compass Direct news agency reports that four Christians from house churches in the Tehran area were detained over Christmas and remain in custody. Meanwhile, a Christian man detained in Rasht last July (*Prayer Alert, August 25, 2009*) has now been released.

(Sources: Compass Direct, Farsi Christian News Network, Middle East Concern, VOM Canada)

- Pray for God's protection over Hamideh Najafi, her husband and their daughter.
- Pray for the immediate release of the four Tehran house church Christians.

### **3. MALAYSIA – Spate of church attacks leaves Christians reeling**

Christians in Malaysia are stunned after a spate of unprecedented attacks on churches which followed a court ruling that a Christian newspaper could use the word 'Allah'.

Suspected Islamists attacked eight churches between January 8 and 11, in Kuala Lumpur, Petaling Jaya, Taiping, Melaka, Miri and Seremban. In four cases, firebombs were thrown. Although there were no reported injuries and most churches attacked suffered only minor damage, one floor of the Metro Tabernacle in Kuala Lumpur was completely gutted by fire.

The attacks have shocked Christians in a country where acts of violence on places of worship have no precedent. The raids attracted widespread condemnation, from church leaders, some moderate Muslims and leaders on both sides of the political divide.

The attacks followed a controversial High Court ruling on December 31 that a Christian newspaper had 'a constitutional right' to use the word 'Allah' for God in the Malay section of its multilingual newspaper. Many Muslim groups reacted with outrage, insisting that 'Allah' should only be used in the context of Islam. The Bible Society of Malaysia points out that the word 'Allah' has been used in biblical translations into Malay from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards – and is still widely used today.

Malaysia's Home Ministry filed an appeal against the High Court decision on January 4, prompting the courts to freeze the decision and refer the case to the Court of Appeal. Malaysia's population is about 60 per cent Muslim and only 9 per cent Christian.

Christians are reported to have turned out in strong numbers at church since the attacks. 'We see this as an opportunity to trust in the Lord and to revitalise our faith,' Sam Ang, Secretary-General of the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship, told Compass Direct.

(Sources: Assist News Service, Compass Direct)

- Praise God for the strong faith of Malaysian Christians in the face of these attacks.
- Pray that the attacks will actually lead to greater tolerance as people unite in condemning the violence.

#### **4. PAKISTAN – Christian family brutally attacked over blasphemy allegation**

A large mob attacked a Christian man and his family in Islamabad following allegations of blasphemy over a remark he made about an Islamic festival.

The trouble started when Shumail Aleem, 32, who suffers from schizophrenia, commented to another Christian that film channels were not being shown on a general store's TV because Muslims were observing Yom-e-Ashura. This is when Shiite Muslims mourn the death of the grandson of Islam's prophet Mohammed. Hearing Shumail's comment, the shopkeeper beat him and accused him of blaspheming Mohammed's grandson.

On his return home, Shumail's neighbours told him that the police were looking for him. When he went to the police station with several relatives to clear his name, a 100-strong angry mob quickly gathered.

The mob proceeded to beat Shumail, his parents, his aunt and his brother Shazir. Shumail's sister was hit on the head with an iron rod and had her leg broken as she lay unconscious. Shazir's infant daughter was thrown to the ground, though was not seriously hurt. The Voice of the Martyrs Canada, an associate ministry of Release, reports that members of the mob bribed police to persuade Shumail's family not to press charges.

(Sources: Compass Direct, VOM Canada)

- Pray for emotional and spiritual healing for Shumail and his whole family.
- Pray that officials will seek and uphold justice for this Christian family.

#### **NEWS UPDATE**

Vietnamese pastor Nguyen Van Ly, 63, is reported to be back behind bars after receiving hospital treatment for a serious stroke he suffered in November (*Prayer Alert, December 1, 2009*). Sources say that Pastor Van Ly is still semi-paralysed down his right side and may still need medical care. Pastor Van Ly was sentenced to eight years in prison in 2007 for 'harming national security'. Please pray for his full recovery. (Sources: AFP, VOM Canada)

#### **Our next Prayer Alert issue will be on February 2, 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, 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)

Registered charity 280577