

# RELEASE INTERNATIONAL PRAYER ALERT

*Tuesday, March 30, 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. NIGERIA – Second brutal attack on Jos Christians in two weeks**

Release partners in Nigeria are calling on the international community to help protect the church in Plateau State after a second brutal attack on Christians in less than a fortnight.

Armed men launched a night assault on Byei and Baten villages on March 17, murdering at least 12 people, including children. Most were killed in their beds. Several houses were burnt to the ground. Release partners have been visiting the injured in hospital.

This latest assault, which took place 29 miles south of Jos, comes less than two weeks after the massacre of up to 500 Christians in Zot, Dogo Nahauwa and Rastat villages on March 7 (*Prayer Alert, March 16, 2010*). In both assaults, ethnic Berom Christians were the target, Fulani Muslim herdsmen the aggressors.

Although the attack on Byei and Baten villages is believed to be linked to a land dispute between the Berom and Fulani, commentators have noted that the killings bore the hallmark of jihadist extremism. Survivors reported that gunmen in military uniform led the assault, joined by Fulani Muslims in normal clothes with machetes.

Again, the attack took place despite military and police enforcing an ongoing curfew in Plateau State. Release has joined a growing chorus of voices now calling on the international community to step in and protect Christians in this central Nigerian state.

Plateau State governor Jonah Jang said recent attacks were severely testing Christians' faith and patience. But he added: 'I know that nothing happens that God is not aware [of], particularly when it happens to His children.'

(Sources: Christian Solidarity Worldwide, Compass Direct, Release International, This Day Online)

- Pray for all those bereaved or injured in Byei and Baten. Ask God to give them the strength to endure – and to forgive.
- Pray that the international community will now step in to ensure there is no repeat of the bloodshed which has plagued the Jos area in recent months and years.

## **2. LAOS – Officials step in to uphold rights of expelled Christian villagers**

Provincial officials have weighed into the row over 48 Christians expelled from their village in Saravan by saying they have the right to worship freely and live where they please.

The official delegation, led by the provincial governor, visited the Christians from Katin and read out a 2002 decree assuring them of their right to practise Christianity. The Christians were also told they could live anywhere in their district, which is Ta-Oyl. The provincial governor invited the Christians to contact him if they needed any further help.

The Christian families are now living in temporary shelters on the edge of the jungle about four miles from Katin village, from where they were expelled at gunpoint on January 18 (*Prayer Alert, February 16, 2010*).

The delegation's visit on March 18 has thrown the Christians into something of a quandary. Only three days earlier, the Ta-Oyl district head, known as Bounma, told them they must either recant their faith or move out of the district. Sources have since told the Christians that local officials are planning to burn down their temporary shelters.

Provincial officials said they would have to 'consult with the proper authorities' before granting the Christians permission to remain where they are, which is on land owned by a neighbouring village. Official permission is also required for any Lao citizen wanting to move to another district.

The Christians were forced to leave behind all their possessions when they were marched out of the village in January. Some of their homes have already been destroyed.

(Sources: Compass Direct, Human Rights Watch for Lao Religious Freedom, VOM USA)

- Thank God that provincial officials have intervened in the case of the long-suffering Katin Christians. Pray that officials will indeed uphold religious rights.
- Ask God to strengthen the Katin Christians with His power and His peace.

## **3. EGYPT – Violence against Copts spreads to north of country**

A huge mob launched a lengthy attack on a Christian community in northern Egypt – apparently in protest at a church's decision to build a wall around its land.

Some 24 Coptic Christians were seriously injured when a mob went on the rampage in the coastal city of Marsa Matrouh, allegedly spurred on by calls over a mosque's loudspeaker urging them to wage *jihad* or holy war against Christians. The attack went on for several hours until security forces contained the mob.

The assault on March 12 marks a disturbing new development as violence against Egyptian Copts has largely been focused on the south of the country to date. *Prayer Alert* has reported on several attacks on Coptic communities in Upper Egypt over the past few months, including the fatal shootings of six Christians outside a church in Nag Hammadi, Qena province, on January 6 (*Prayer Alert, January 19, 2010*).

During the latest attack on the Copts, the mob's main target was Reefiya Church, which had built a wall around newly acquired land adjacent to it. The Assyrian International News Network says the attackers pelted the building with rocks before assaulting several of the

400 believers who had sought refuge inside. The mob also burned an estimated 28 Christian homes.

The assault on Christians in Marsa Matrouh coincided with the release of a report by the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, criticising Egypt for not bringing to justice those responsible for anti-Christian violence.

(Sources: Assyrian International News Agency, Compass Direct, VOM Canada)

- Pray for peaceful relations between Copts and Muslims in Marsa Matrouh.
- Pray for justice for those suffering anti-Christian violence in Egypt.

#### **4. SOMALIA – Extremists murder church leader who had foiled kidnap attempt**

An underground church leader in Somalia who escaped a kidnapping attempt by Islamist extremists earlier this month has succumbed to their bullets.

Madobe Abdi was found dead in Mahaday village on March 15, less than a fortnight after he had foiled an attempt by Al Shabaab militants to kidnap him on March 2. Al Shabaab, which has links with al-Qaeda, reportedly gave warning against anyone trying to bury Madobe's body – demanding that it be left outside in the street as a warning to other Christians, according to sources for Compass Direct news agency.

Al Shabaab, which appears determined to rid Somalia of all Christians, has murdered several believers in the past year, specifically targeting those with a Muslim background. Madobe was different in so far as he was raised as a Christian.

Christians in Somalia are under pressure on all sides. Members of the government-aligned Islamic Courts Union, a coalition of *Sharia* judges and militants, are alleged to have set fire to a Christian home in a district of Mogadishu last month, after learning that it contained a Bible and Christian literature.

(Source: Compass Direct)

- Pray for the relatives and friends of murdered church leader Madobe Abdi.
- Pray God's peace over His church in Somalia, hard pressed on all sides.

#### **NEWS UPDATE:**

Pastor Nguyen Van Ly, a Vietnamese church leader serving an eight-year jail term for 'harming national security', has been temporarily released from prison on medical grounds. Pastor Van Ly has recently been diagnosed with a brain tumour. He suffered a stroke, his third, in November (*Prayer Alert, January 19, 2010*) and his leg and arm are still partially paralysed. He has reportedly been sent to 'a church-run home' for a year's medical treatment. Ask God to heal this strong man of faith and pray that he will not have to return to jail. (Source: VOM Canada)

#### **Our next Prayer Alert issue will be on April 13, 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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