

Prayer Items, April 2011

Iran: Pastor Behrouz Sadegh-Khandjani, Mehdi Furutan, Mohammad Beliad, Parviz Khalaj and Nazly Beliad, members of the Church of Iran denomination, were arrested in June 2010 on charges of apostasy, political meetings, blasphemy and crimes against the Islamic Order. They spent eight months in jail before being released on bail in February. Their lawyer has appealed the one-year prison sentence for crimes against the Islamic Order and a decision is pending. It was initially assumed that the other charges against the five men had been dropped. However, a source close to the detainees has revealed that they will now face charges of blasphemy in a lower court, possibly due to the fact that lower courts are generally more disposed to hand down guilty verdicts.

Christians in Iran are also increasingly concerned for Yousef Nadarkhani, the pastor of a large congregation in the city of Rasht, who was arrested in late 2009. He remains in prison after having been sentenced to death for the crime of apostasy, despite there being no articles in the Iranian legal code that refer to such a crime. Instead, the presiding judge in the Nadarkhani case based his ruling on texts by Iranian religious scholars. An appeal to the Supreme Court was filed in December, and a hearing is due within two months. (Source: Christian Solidarity Worldwide)

South Asia: Two Gospel for Asia-supported missionaries were arrested after they conducted a house prayer meeting. Daya Dass and Garima Rongpi have been serving in a South Asian village for three years. They have one small congregation there, and they spend time in the surrounding villages sharing the love of Jesus. They frequently conduct prayer meetings in villagers' homes. On March 17, they were having one of these home meetings and had just started to pray when a group of anti-Christian extremists broke in and attacked Daya and Garima. The extremists accused them of forcing people to convert to Christianity, and the police arrested them. The state where these missionaries serve has a "freedom of religion" law, which was enacted to protect people from being forced to convert to Christianity by fraud, allurements or coercion. The law allows people to convert to Christianity if they seek permission from the government first. Daya and Garima are still in jail and asking for your prayers. Pray specifically that their charges would be dropped and they would be released soon. They also asked for prayer that Christians in the area would not become fearful but would remain strong in Jesus, and that the anti-Christian groups would truly understand the love of Jesus. (Source: ASSIST News Service)

Ethiopia: The horrendous violence by rampaging Islamists that drove an estimated 10,000 Christians from their homes in western Ethiopia earlier this month may be part of a wider campaign to "clear Christianity from the land by [the] sword". A Christian minister in Ethiopia said the country was being targeted by Muslim extremists with a strategy to Islamise the Christian-majority nation and so gain control of the entire Horn of Africa. He said: "Muslim extremists [are] declaring underground war to clear Christianity from the land by [the] sword. This is why we [are] hearing unfamiliar atrocity, horrific and bloody events in various parts of the country by Muslim fundamentalists" As well as engaging in such tactical violence, he said Ethiopian Islamists were receiving overseas funding from Muslim nations to "take over the country through wide investments", building mosques in every village and launching hundreds of Muslim schools. The government authorities have arrested some of the perpetrators and many machetes have been confiscated. But the danger remains: Muslim extremists have been taking photos of churches and the homes of church leaders, raising fears about their next moves. (Source: Barnabas Aid)

Turkey: Twenty people have been detained in Turkey in connection with the 2007 murders of three men at a Christian publishing house in Malatya. (On April 18, 2007, Turkish citizen Necati Aydin and German citizen Tilman Geske were found tied to chairs by their hands and legs with their throats cut in Zirve Publishing Company, where they worked. A second Turkish citizen, Ugur Yuksel, died later in hospital from multiple stab wounds. All three were members of the Malatya Kurtulus Church. This was the subject of the movie "Malatya" which CAN showed at one of its recent film forums). Prosecutors widened the investigation into the killings over allegations that the attack was part of an alleged plot to topple the Islamic-rooted government by creating

chaos and destabilize the country to trigger a military coup. Hundreds of people, including many active officers, are on trial for allegedly attempting to overthrow the government. Pray for justice in the case. (Source: AP)

Pakistan: The saga continues - Asia Bibi, a Christian mother of 5, was accused of “insulting Islam” and “defaming the Prophet Mohammed”. She has been in Pakistani prison since last June and was sentenced to death by hanging for a crime she very likely never committed. Asia is being persecuted for her religious beliefs in a place where Christians face daily harassment and intolerance. Pakistan’s blasphemy laws, in particular, are often used to persecute religious minorities. In January, Governor Salman Taseer was assassinated by own security guard, who opposed Taseer’s criticism of Pakistan’s blasphemy law. The following week, tens of thousands rallied in Pakistan in support of the country’s blasphemy laws, and Islamic clerics threatened to murder anyone who contested the laws. Then, in March, Shahbaz Bhatti, the sole Christian member of the Pakistani government was murdered. Before he died, Shahbaz recorded a youtube video in which he said, “I want to share that I believe in Jesus Christ, who has given his own life for us. I know what is the meaning of the cross and I follow him on the cross...When I'm leading this campaign against the sharia laws for the abolishment of blasphemy law, and speaking for the oppressed and marginalized persecuted Christian and other minorities, these Taliban threaten me. ... I'm living for my community and suffering people and I will die to defend their rights. So these threats and these warnings cannot change my opinion and principles." Pray for Asia Bibi’s release and that the blasphemy laws will be overturned. (Sources: Voice of the Martyrs et al)

China:

The United States expressed concern Tuesday over the disappearance of prominent Chinese lawyers and activists in China. Up to 100 leading rights lawyers and activists have disappeared since mid-February, campaigners said, as police launched a crackdown to try to avert any political unrest echoing popular uprisings in the Arab world. "The United States is increasingly concerned by the apparent extralegal detention and enforced disappearance of some of China's most well-known lawyers and activists," State Department spokesman Philip Crowley told reporters. He cited the disappearance of such people as Jiang Tianyong. "We continue to urge China to uphold its internationally recognized obligations of universal human rights, including the freedoms of expression, association and assembly," he added. (Source: Voice of America News)

Jiang Tianyong, who has campaigned for religious freedom in China, was seized by police on February 19. The authorities have refused to tell his family where they are holding him or to reveal details of any charges against him. According to reports he was taken to a police station for interrogation where his head was knocked against a wall. He was released five hours later, then rearrested on the 19th. Jiang, a Christian, has represented cases of religious persecution in China and has testified before the US House of Representatives on issues of religious freedom. When he returned from the US he was forcibly arrested and his wife beaten, in front of their terrified seven-year-old daughter. He told Release he always knew his work as a human rights lawyer in China could get him into trouble. “I knew what I was doing was very dangerous,” he said. “I hope God will protect me and my family; but on that day when things happen I can only lift this up to his hand. Please pray that the Lord will strengthen me and give me wisdom.” (Source: Release International)

Also remember: Gao Zhisheng, another Chinese Christian lawyer, who whereabouts are once again unknown after a brief reappearance in April 2010. He initially was seized by police on February 4th, 2009.