

PRAYER ALERT...

An initiative of the Prayer Forum of the British Isles & Ireland
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BRITISH ISLES & IRELAND

■ PM says Christians should not leave faith at the door

Prime Minister Gordon Brown has admitted ahead of the general election that Christian engagement in politics is beneficial for building a better society. In a video released this week, Mr Brown said the public square was more than just a market place and that it could not be stripped of values. 'I don't subscribe to the view that religion should somehow be tolerated but not encouraged in public life, that you can somehow ask people to leave their faith at the door when they enter a town hall or a Commons chamber,' he said. 'If Christians engage in politics then all of us together can build a society where wealth, good fortune and riches enrich not just some of us but all.' Mr Brown's address will be received with scepticism by those who say recent laws have made it difficult for Christians to live out their faith in public.

Pray: that Mr Brown's comments will lead to faith being more acceptable at the centre of politics. (1Jn.5:9)

More: <http://www.christian.org.uk/news/pm-says-christians-should-not-leave-faith-at-the-door/>

■ Islamic march through Wootton Bassett should not be banned, says Sir Hugh Orde

A senior police officer has called for a provocative march by Islamic extremists through Wootton Bassett not to be banned amid fears it could further inflame tensions. Anjem Choudary, the leader of Islam4UK, has caused dismay with plans to parade through the Wiltshire town with 500 supporters carrying empty coffins. On Monday Alan Johnson, the Home Secretary, said he would support any request to ban the march. Prime Minister Gordon Brown also declared he was 'completely disgusted' at the 'abhorrent' protest. But Sir Hugh Orde, president of the Association of Chief Police Officers, said he would be 'surprised' if senior officers in Wiltshire seek to block the protest because any group has a right to march even if their views are 'unpleasant and offensive'. In just a few days more than 400,000 members have backed a campaign opposing the march on the social networking website Facebook.

Pray: that the issues behind this debate would be fully exposed and that the nation becomes aware of what is really going on. (Rom.1:18)

More: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstoppers/politics/defence/6936850/Islamic-march-through-Wootton-Bassett-should-not-be-banned-says-Sir-Hugh-Orde.html>

■ Clergy bullying 'rife' says Unite union

Workplace bullying of the clergy has become 'rife', according to the union Unite which says priests are being picked on by bishops and parishioners. The union has set up a hotline where the clergy can report abuse, and says it deals with up to 150 cases a year. Unite says the bullying frequently comes from superiors within the church who may be under financial pressure. 'A bullying case can go on for a long time', says Terry Young, a former minister who runs the helpline. Many clergy are probably intimidated and criticised for what they do right, as well as for their failings! They can be unsupported,

driven into depression and a nervous breakdown.' Parishioners can also carry out the bullying, according to Unite, citing the case of a priest in rural Worcestershire who claims he was driven out by a campaign of hate.

Pray: for ministers in all churches that they may carry out their calling with support from colleagues and parishioners alike. (Ps.132:9)

More: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/8439005.stm>

■ Equality Bill could increase squeeze on UK Christians

The upcoming Equality Bill could add to the pressure on Christians' religious liberty, according to an English Bishop. The Rt Revd Dr Michael Nazir-Ali, who until September was the Bishop of Rochester, says the new Equality Bill must not force Christians to act against their consciences. Dr Nazir-Ali highlighted particular cases of Christians who have been marginalised for their faith in an article for a national newspaper. He wrote, 'Nurses have been told not to pray with their patients; registrars ordered to conduct civil partnership ceremonies in spite of conscientious objections; evangelists forbidden to spread the Word in 'Muslim' areas and permission for Good Friday processions refused on the grounds that they are a 'minority' interest and do not warrant police time.' The Bishop went on to say the Equality Bill must make room for Christian beliefs, if Christians and others 'are not to be forced to say that they must obey God rather than Caesar'. (See also Prayer Alert 0110)

Pray: for our legislators that they will recognise and protect the importance of Christian beliefs as they frame this bill. (2Tim.2:15)

More: <http://www.christian.org.uk/news/equality-bill-could-increase-squeeze-on-uk-christians/>

■ Former Archbishop of Canterbury shatters the Anglican consensus on immigration

Lord Carey of Clifton has proved himself to be a brave man today. The former Archbishop of Canterbury has signed a statement by the cross-party group on balanced migration which declares that '70 million is too many'. In other words, he is calling for urgent measures to limit immigration so the British population does not reach that figure in 2029, which is what will happen unless we tighten our borders. The declaration, put together by Labour's Frank Field and the Tories' Nicholas Soames, is also signed by that champion of robust common sense Baroness Boothroyd, former Speaker of the House of Commons. Carey, like many of the other signatories, has a long track record of fighting racism. And that is precisely why he has signed this document: because he believes that unchecked immigration will hand votes to the Far Right.

Pray: for those in government that they will be wise, open to all views and courageous in action. (Dt.31:6)

More: <http://www.anglican-mainstream.net/>

■ Teenagers risk death in Internet craze

Children are posting videos on the Internet showing them choking other youngsters to the point of collapse, in a craze that doctors warn has led to brain damage and death. In onesuch case a group of teenagers set out clear guidelines to the practice in an 'instructional video', while in several others British voices can be heard. The problem has been increasingly acknowledged in the United States, Canada and France but campaigners warn that Britain is turning a blind eye. In Britain, the Department for Children, Schools and Families said it was aware of the activity and was monitoring the situation closely. There is no authoritative research on the issue in the UK, despite campaign groups compiling 86 cases of young people in Britain who may have died this way.

Pray: that young people would say no to this practice, that there would be no more deaths and that the power and fascination of death would be broken. (2Tim.1:10)

More: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/teenagers-risk-death-in-internet-strangling-craze-1858987.html>

■ Irish atheists challenge nation's new Blasphemy Law

Irish atheists have already begun challenging a new Blasphemy Law that went into effect on New Year's Day. The group Atheist Ireland has published a series of quotations on religion in an attempt to challenge the new law. The 25 'blasphemous' quotations include words of Jesus, Mohammed, Mark Twain, and Salman Rushdie. Atheist Ireland published the list on its website www.atheist.ie last Friday. The group says it aims to challenge the law, which makes blasphemy a crime punishable by a \$35,800 fine. 'Despite these quotes being abusive and insulting we unreservedly support the right of these people to have published or uttered them,' the group said on the site. According to the new law, a person breaks the law by saying or publishing anything 'grossly abusive or insulting in relation to matters held sacred by any religion, thereby causing outrage among a substantial number of the adherents of that religion.'

Pray: that this move by the Irish Atheist's would be blocked. (Mt.12:30-32)

More: <http://www.assistnews.net/STORIES/2010/s10010014.htm>

EUROPE

■ Swiss minaret ban threatens Christians in Muslim countries - report

An aid and advocacy group has warned that a recent decision by Swiss voters to ban the construction of minarets in Switzerland is having ramifications for already persecuted Christians in several Muslim-majority countries. 'In Egypt there has been a huge outcry against the Swiss decision' said Barnabas Fund. It said the protests come at a time when Egypt is already a country where 'it is normally extremely difficult for Christians to get permission to build new churches or even repair the existing ones.' The group also mentioned Turkey as one of the nations where churches have been threatened since the Swiss referendum in November. 'In Turkey, on December 4, 2009, the leader of a church with a bell tower was approached by three people who threatened him saying 'Switzerland is banning minarets and we will ban your bell tower' and 'You will demolish the bell tower by next Friday', Barnabas Fund said.

Pray: that the repercussions from this ruling would not lead to further worldwide persecution. (Ps.83:1-2)

More: <http://www.bosnewslife.com/10795-swiss-ban>

■ 'Resist Europe's secularisation' calls made at Taize youth meeting

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomeos I, a spiritual leader who represents Eastern Orthodox Christianity, has urged young Christians to resist secularisation in Europe in a message to an ecumenical meeting that was greeted by global and regional leaders. 'After the fall of the Berlin Wall, Europe no longer recognises the place for Christianity that history dedicated to it - it is as if Christianity were being expelled from the history of Europe,' said Bartholomeos I, the Istanbul-based Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople. The Patriarch made his appeal in a message sent to a five-day European Youth Meeting, organised by France's ecumenical Taizé Community in Poznan, Poland. The mobilisation of Christians throughout Europe is an important initiative recalling the Christian roots of this continent, its identity and its values.

Pray: that this message would lead to a deeper recognition of the importance of Europe's Christian roots. (Is.58:12)

More: <http://www.eni.ch/featured/article.php?id=3657>

WORLDWIDE

■ Korea: Christians divided over US activist's North Korea crossing

A number of South Korean church leaders have criticised a US activist's illegal entry into North Korea, saying that his action will cause more harm than good. 'It doesn't help to increase religious freedom,' said the Rev Kim Tae-hyon, director of the National Council of Churches in Korea. Kim and other Korean church leaders raised concern about how North Korea would interpret the actions of Robert Park, who crossed over into the isolated nation on Christmas Day and was reportedly arrested. Father Raphael Seo Jong-yeob, of the Korean Bishops' Committee for the Reconciliation of the Korean People, went further and predicted that Park's action will 'aggravate the North's hostility toward the South and the rest of the world'.

Pray: for Robert Park's release and that the impact of his action will not harm relationships. (2Cor.5:18-20)

More: <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/korean.christians.divided.over.us.activists.north.korea.crossing/24999.htm>

■ Pakistan: Muslim mob wounds Christian family

Compass Direct News has revealed that a Muslim mob in Pakistan has attacked and wounded a Christian family in Iqbal Town, Islamabad. 'Infuriated by an alleged anti-Islamic comment by a mentally ill man, more than a dozen Muslims attacked his Christian family here last week, beating his 20-year-old sister unconscious and breaking her leg,' said the Compass story. 'The woman's father, Aleem Mansoor, said his daughter Elishba Aleem 'went unconscious' after being struck in the head with an iron rod in the December 28, 2009, attack.' The Compass story went on to state that Mansoor had said that Muslims beat him, his daughter and other family members with rods and cricket bats on the street in front of their apartment home after falsely accusing his 32-year old son, Shumail Aleem of blasphemy.

Pray: for the Aleem family as they face persecution, that God would strengthen their faith. (Ps.5:11)

More: <http://www.assistnews.net/Stories/2010/s10010023.htm>

■ India: More than 150 attacks on Christians last year

The Evangelical Fellowship of India recorded 152 incidents of anti-Christian violence during 2009. Most of the attacks happened in Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Orissa, Jireh and Andhra Pradesh. The Global Council of Indian Christians issued a similar report charting violence hotspots across India. According to the Bangalore-based group, there were a total of 177 attacks against Christians in India in 2009. Karnataka topped all other states with 72 incidents of violence. Howell said 'Persecution of Christians in India is as old as Christianity itself. St Thomas, a disciple of Christ, who came to India, was martyred in about AD 52 in south India.' Howell said the response of Christians to these atrocities had been one of forgiveness and an appeal to the government to protect the life and property of its citizens. A report released in December 2009 by the US-based Pew Research Centre placed India second only to Iraq in social hostility and religious discrimination.

Pray: for believers everywhere as they face persecution that God will be their provider – Jehovah Jireh. (Gen.22:14)

More: <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/more.than.150.attacks.on.christians.in.india.last.year/25014.htm>

■ Kazakhstan: 'There is no persecution in Kazakhstan?'

As Kazakhstan is about to begin the role of 2010 Chairperson-in-Office for the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the country continues to violate its OSCE human rights commitments. Pastor Vissa Kim of Taraz's Grace Light of Love Protestant Church, in Jambyl Region in southern Kazakhstan, is facing criminal charges brought by the Jambyl Regional Department of the National Security Committee (KNB) secret police. The charges under the Criminal Code's Article 111 ('causing severe damage to health due to negligence') state that Pastor Kim allegedly inflicted harm to the health of a woman by praying for her, church members told Forum 18. The authorities also continue to move to close Christian-run rehabilitation centres for people suffering from drug and alcohol addiction.

Pray: for the authorities that they would recognise the Church in Kazakhstan is caring for the people not causing damage. (Jn.13:35)

More: http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1391

■ Haiti: Poverty forces kids into slavery

Unprecedented levels of poverty have driven almost 225,000 Haitian children into slavery. According to Eva DeHart of For Haiti With Love, parents desperate to feed and clothe their starving children are easy victims for child predators. 'Most of those parents are not deliberately selling those children into slavery,' she explained. The enslaved children, known as

'restaveks,' are taken to the homes of families that are less poor. The family takes responsibility for raising the child in exchange for unpaid domestic service. Most of the restaveks are girls, and many of them suffer physical and sexual abuse. 'When you're watching your child starve, and wanting to feed the rest of them, this looks like a good deal,' DeHart said. People from For Haiti With Love recently went out into the countryside and what they found was the worst poverty they'd ever seen in Haiti.

Pray: for all caught up in this problem, especially the 'restaveks', that ways would be found to solve the poverty problem. (Dt.15:11)

More: <http://www.mnnonline.org/article/13692>

■ **Somalia: Pirates attack second ship carrying food aid for World Vision**

A second ship carrying donated food to Rwanda was attacked last week by pirates off the coast of Somalia. 'We're relieved that no one was hurt in this attack and that the ship was able to continue to its destination,' reported World Vision spokesperson Amy Parodi, whose organization planned to use the donated food for development programmes in Rwanda, according to Eric Young writing for www.christianpost.com. 'This food is critical to our efforts in Rwanda,' Parodi added. 'Farmers as well as malnourished children and people living with AIDS all depend on this product. It's vital that we're able to deliver this food as quickly as possible.' Young reports that in recent weeks, attacks by Somali pirates have risen markedly and drawn the attention of the media - particularly after the capture and then daring rescue of American cargo ship captain Richard Phillips. At least 17 ships and around 300 crew are currently being held.

Pray: that international governments would work together to find ways to solve this situation. (Ps.28:4)

More: http://domain1239156.sites.fasthosts.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1348&Itemid=1

■ **Iran: Arrests of Christians during Christmas season**

A wave of arrests hit Iranian house churches during the Christmas season, leaving at least five Christian converts in detention across northern Iran, including the mother of an ailing 10-year-old girl. Security officers with an arrest warrant from the Mashhad Revolutionary Court entered the home of Christian Hamideh Najafi in Mashhad on Dec. 16. After searching her home and confiscating personal belongings, including books and compact discs, police took her to an undisclosed location, according to Farsi Christian News Network. Compass also confirmed that authorities disrupted Christmas celebrations of two house groups in the Tehran area on Dec. 21 and Dec. 29, leaving four in prison. Other members attending the special services were also questioned. In Shiraz, last week at least eight Christians arrested and released over a year ago were called in for questioning about their activities in the past year. (See also Prayer Alert 5109)

Pray: that the believers would be enabled by the Spirit to stand firm in their faith. (Ps.110:5-6)

More: <http://www.compassdirect.org/english/country/iran/13807/>

PRAISE REPORTS

■ **Stephen Baldwin takes his faith to the Celebrity Big Brother House**

If 'Big Brother' chiefs were hoping for some eyebrow-raising controversy on the last ever 'Celebrity Big Brother,' they must be pinning their hopes on contestants other than born-again Christian Stephen Baldwin. The former hellraiser and now active evangelist is one of the contestants on the last ever television series of 'Celebrity Big Brother,' a spin-off of 'Big Brother UK.' Baldwin stayed up late talking with fellow contestant Vinnie Jones and explaining parts of the Bible to him, before kneeling at his bedside to say his prayers at the end of the night. Later, Baldwin and the other housemates got talking about religion. He told them, 'I tell you right now, what the experience in Heaven is going to be is so far beyond this experience. I can't wait to get there.'

Praise: God for Stephen's testimony and pray that he will be able to bring much discussion about the Christian faith to some viewers who may never thought about it. (Ac.2:14)

More: <http://www.christianpost.com/article/20100105/stephen-baldwin-takes-his-faith-to-the-celebrity-big-brother-house/index.html>

■ **Email course targets curious non-Christians**

Non-Christians wanting to find out more about how Christianity could change their lives are being invited to take part in a new email course. Now a Christian has been launched by Church Army to help people outside the church explore the Christian outlook on life and take their first steps towards a relationship with Jesus Christ. The free short course sends out a daily email, with a link to its accompanying interactive website, www.nowachristian.org, on the fourth day of each week. Its creators, evangelist Neil Thomson and writer Peter Graystone, say they want the course to help people explore the faith. Mr Graystone said: 'Now A Christian is also a website for people who have made a decision to follow Jesus, even if it is a tentative one and are asking the question: 'What next?'

Praise: God for this initiative and pray that many will choose to accept the invitation. (Eph.1:13)

More: <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/email.course.targets.curious.nonchristians/25020.htm>

PRAYER FORUM OF BRITISH ISLES & IRELAND

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