

PRAYER ALERT...

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BRITISH ISLES & IRELAND

■ Christians feel persecuted by human rights law and councils

Christians in Britain are feeling persecuted because of 'paradoxical' human rights laws and the ignorance of local councils, according to a major BBC documentary to be broadcast on Easter Sunday. Nicky Campbell, the presenter of the corporation's flagship programme for Holy Week, argues that Labour's anti-discrimination legislation has led to clashes between religious conscience and equality for homosexuals. He blames local authorities for rebranding Christmas celebrations as winter festivals because of a misguided belief that they are standing up for minority faiths. He concludes that although Christians do not face violence and suppression in Britain as they do abroad, their treatment can seem unfair in a modern democracy. The programme, called *Are Christians Being Persecuted?*, looks into widespread claims that the faith is being driven out of public life in Britain while its followers are being treated less fairly than minority groups. Campbell believes council leaders have no understanding of what followers of any religion want.

Pray: that the message of this programme and the cross will be heard this Easter. (1Cor.1:18)

More: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstoppers/religion/7540609/BBCs-Nicky-Campbell-Christians-feel-persecuted-by-human-rights-law-and-councils.html>

■ Christian preacher fined for speaking on homosexuality

A Scottish court has fined a street preacher £1,000 after answering a question about homosexuality. Shawn Holes, who is American, was kept in a police cell overnight and then charged with a breach of the peace. The accusation was that he had used 'homophobic remarks' that were 'aggravated by religious prejudice'. Freedom concerns have been raised that this case shows religious liberty is under threat. One commentator described the charges against the preacher as 'grotesque'. Shawn Holes was in Scotland with a group of American colleagues preaching on a wide variety of topics. 'I was talking generally about Christianity and sin', he said. He continued: 'I only talked about these other issues because I was specifically asked. Mr Holes later commented: 'It felt like a set-up by gay campaigners.' Mr Holes' lawyer said: 'This case raises important issues about the interface between the criminal law in Scotland, freedom of speech and religious freedom.'

Pray: against the progressive limitation on free speech and religious freedom as shown in this incident. (Ga.5:1)

More: <http://www.christian.org.uk/news/christian-preacher-fined-for-speaking-on-homosexuality/>

■ Christian nurse says NHS 'persecuted' her faith and favours Muslim employees

A Christian nurse who refused to remove her crucifix at work has told an employment tribunal she felt 'persecuted' because of her faith. Shirley Chaplin, who has worn her cross every day for 30 years, said she felt that Muslim members of staff were treated with greater understanding when it came to outward symbols of their religion. The 54 year-old was banned from working on hospital wards and moved to an office job by Royal Devon and Exeter NHS Trust after she failed to hide the cross she wore as a necklace. She is now suing her hospital employers. Mrs Chaplin is supported in her case by seven

leading bishops who have written a letter to The Sunday Telegraph published on 28 April.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/religion/7531293/Senior-bishops-call-for-end-to-persecution-of-Christians-in-Britain.html> In the letter, the Bishops express their deep disquiet at the double standards of public sector employers, claiming that Christians are punished while followers of other faiths are treated far more sensitively. (See Prayer Alert 3909)

Pray: for all those whose faith is challenged in the workplace. (Ps.109:28)

More: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/health/healthnews/7538768/Christian-nurse-says-NHS-persecuted-her-faith-and-favours-Muslims-employees.html>

■ Muslim leaders 'failing to tackle extremists'

Muslim leaders have been criticised by a University of Oxford academic for not doing enough to tackle extremists. At the same time a parliamentary committee has attacked a central plank of the Government's counter-extremism programme by arguing that its 'Prevent' strategy has 'stigmatised and alienated Muslims'. Nick Chatrath, a researcher at Oxford's Faculty of Oriental Studies, claims in a paper to be published this week that in the face of growing radicalisation in Britain, Muslim leaders are ignoring extremists' points of view and glossing over some of the more unsavoury parts of Islam's ancient texts. In an essay in next month's Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations, Mr Chatrath calls for a more open engagement by moderate Muslims with the arguments of extremists. Mr Chatrath says: 'Moderate Muslim leaders are doing a poor job of tackling extremism in Britain.' He called on moderate community leaders to do more to counter this.

Pray: against those who promote extreme ideas in any form that they would be moderated. (Ecc.7:18b)

More: <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/faith/article7082139.ece#cid=OTC-RSS&attr=797084>

■ Church backs call to end detention of child asylum seekers

The Catholic Church is the latest organisation to come out in support of a campaign to end the detention of families seeking sanctuary in Britain. It follows in the footsteps of other major denominations in backing the Citizens for Sanctuary pledge. The pledge warns that Britain's history of providing sanctuary to people in difficulty is being threatened by the rise of extremist politics, 'media scare stories' and Home Office failings. It asks politicians to support policies aimed at ending the detention of children and families for immigration reasons, and not to 'demean' those seeking sanctuary in Britain. It goes on to ask politicians to preserve the UK's legacy of providing refuge for victims of persecution and promote a 'culture of sanctuary' by helping the public to understand why it is important to offer a safe haven. Catholic Bishop for Migrants, Patrick Lynch, urged politicians to back the pledge.

Pray: for the persecuted and displaced people who seek sanctuary with us that they may find a compassionate helping hand. (Na.1:7)

More: <http://www.christiantoday.co.uk/article/church.backs.call.to.end.detention.of.child.asylum.seekers/25592.htm>

■ Technicality halts efforts to reverse adoption agency ban

An attempt to exempt Catholic adoption agencies from gay rights laws failed this week when the leaders of the three main political parties united to deny peers a vote. An amendment tabled by four senior members of the House of Lords to overturn a regulation banning the religious adoption agencies from rejecting gay couples and cohabitantes as adopters and foster parents. Led by Baroness Williams of Crosby, the peers claimed their move had the support of the majority of the House. But the amendment was dropped after the 'usual channels' - the leaders of the major parties in the Lords and their whips - ruled that it could not be moved on a technicality. Baroness Williams said she felt that the abuse scandal convulsing the Church in Ireland and Germany had undermined the support her amendment might have generated. (See Prayer Alert 1210)

Pray: for the freedom of charities to organise themselves in such a way that their activities are consistent with their religious beliefs when clearly providing public services. (Ro.12:2)

More: <http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/articles/a0000780.shtml>

■ Church publishes prayers for voters ahead of the General Election

The Church of England has published prayers to help voters as they consider their options in the forthcoming General Election. The prayers remind voters that they can make a difference, ask that the concerns of all may be heard and seek protection from despair and cynicism. The prayers, for personal use or during church services, were specially written by the Mission and Public Affairs Division and the Communications Office in association with National Worship Development Officer the Rev Peter Moger. They are published on the web alongside details of relevant debates in the General Synod over the last five years.

Pray: that through the Holy Spirit these prayers will have the power to encourage those who use them. (Ep.6:18)

More: <http://www.cofe.anglican.org/news/pr3310.html>

EUROPE

■ Russia: The Black Widows - Brides of Allah

The Black Widows is what Russian journalists call female Islamist suicide bombers who have participated in more than 30 attacks that have killed about 900 Russians in eight years. The Black Widows are the creation of notorious Chechen rebel military commander Shamil Basayev, the mastermind of the Beslan school massacre, a three day hostage taking in a school in North Ossetia that left 334 hostages dead. Basayev's theory is that when the Russian authorities are on alert for potential terrorist attacks, a young woman in jeans, or an older woman in a frock, attracts less suspicion than a dark-skinned young Chechen man in a cheap jacket. Basayev dubbed his battalion of suicide seekers Riyad us Saliheen, an Arabic reference from the Koran meaning Garden of the Righteous. It was composed of men and women, but it was the women

who fascinated the Russian media. There have been two more suicide bombings in Dagestan see:

<http://www.cbn.com/cbnnews/world/2010/March/Two-More-Suicide-Bombings-in-Russia/>

Pray: that God's righteousness would overcome all dishonourable plans to rule and oppress. (Ps.3:7)

More: <http://www.cbc.ca/world/story/2010/03/30/f-russia-black-widow.html#ixzz0jkFhogeS>

■ **Serbia: Parliament apologizes for Srebrenica massacre**

Serbia's Parliament has apologized for the massacre of 8,000 Muslims by Bosnian-Serb forces in the Bosnian town of Srebrenica in 1995. But, the declaration does not directly call the crime 'genocide', as survivors had demanded. After 13 hours of debate Serbia's Parliament adopted a resolution condemning Europe's worst massacre since World War II. Two-thirds of the lawmakers voted for a declaration that analysts said ends years of denial by Serbian politicians about the scale of the killings. About 8,000 Muslim men and boys were killed after Bosnian-Serb forces overran the Bosnian town of Srebrenica in 1995. The text of the resolution says, 'The Parliament of Serbia strongly condemns the crime committed against the Bosnian-Muslim population of Srebrenica in July, 1995.' Lawmakers also expressed 'their condolences and an apology to the families of the victims because not everything possible was done to prevent the tragedy.'

Pray: that this apology will bring a start to the healing process for all those affected. (Ps.79:8-9)

More: <http://www1.voanews.com/english/news/europe/Serbias-Parliament-Apologizes-for-Srebrenica-Massacre-89593407.html>

WORLDWIDE

■ **INSIGHT ARTICLE: North Korea: High ranking defector speaks out**

On Thursday AFP reported Hwang Jang-Yop, the highest-ranking official ever to defect from North Korea is calling for 'ideological warfare' against the hard-line regime and says China could easily bring it down if it chose to. See http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5iNZb1U4eRMk3S5oJKDB9nf_2sdJwHwang Jang-Yop, who is at the top of North Korean agents' hit-list, is paying a tightly guarded visit to Washington as he seeks support from US policymakers and activists against his former government. The 87-year-old mentored leader Kim Jong-Il, presided over North Korea's parliament and is credited with developing the regime's ideology of 'juche,' or self-reliance. Speaking on Wednesday to a small audience at a think-tank, Jang-Yop discounted the options either of attacking or engaging Kim's regime and said it was instead crucial to show North Koreans the human rights violations around them. For insights from sensitive Christian sources to help you pray for North Korea click the info button below

Pray: for God to give Jang-Yop the words that would be heard around the world to bring a colossal nonviolent turnaround of regime in North Korea. (Is.41:2)

Info: <http://www.prayer-alert.net/info/NorthKorea2.pdf>

■ **China: Christians call to end internet censorship**

A London conference was held last week by Christian Solidarity Worldwide and Release International to raise awareness of persecuted Christians in China. Release International called on Microsoft and Yahoo to follow Google's lead and refuse to censor the Internet and reports of persecution in China. 'Religious persecution is a daily reality in China,' said Release CEO Andy Dipper. 'The Chinese people need to be told the truth and gatekeepers to the Internet, namely Microsoft and Yahoo, have a duty to let the truth be told.' The conference highlighted the plight of human rights lawyer, Gao Zhisheng, who disappeared more than 400 days ago after defending leaders of the persecuted house church and practitioners of the banned movement Falun Gong. Praise God Gao has been interviewed, see Praise article below.

Pray: that Gao Zhisheng would be released immediately along with many others in similar circumstances. (Ps.4:1)

More: <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/christians.call.on.microsoft.and.yahoo.to.end.internet.censorship.in.china/25584.htm>

■ **India: Christians faced 1,000 attacks in 500 days in Karnataka State**

Open Doors reported 'Christians in southern Karnataka State are experiencing an unprecedented wave of persecution, having faced more than 1,000 attacks in 500 days, according to an independent investigation by Justice Michael Saldanha, a former state High Court judge. In the latest attack on 17 March, a mob of 150 people led by the Hindu extremist organisation Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council) and its youth wing, Bajrang Dal, stormed the funeral of a 50-year-old Christian identified only as 'Isaac'. During his funeral, a mob pulled Isaac's coffin apart, threw his body onto a tractor and dumped it outside, saying his burial would have contaminated Indian soil. State authorities have denied the results of the inquiry, saying the number of attacks is significantly less. Many Christians face false charges of fraudulent or forced conversions. In his report, Justice Saldanha states that Christians are regularly 'dragged to the police station under false allegations, immediately locked up, beaten and denied bail'

Pray: that Karnataka State will have a reliable justice system and that Christians will receive just treatment from the police and law courts. (Jas.1:12)

More: <http://www.compassdirect.org/english/country/india/16634/>

■ **India: Christians seek Easter protection**

Archbishop Marampudi Joji of Hyderabad sought police protection for conducting Easter services, particularly the Good Friday procession through public streets. The city witnessed Hindu-Muslim violence in the last week of March and police imposed a curfew in the violence-hit old city areas with propitiatory orders banning assembly of more than five people. Although the flare up was political rather than religion-related the Archbishop told UCA news, 'We have requested police protection to conduct Holy Week services within our churches.' He also said that Christians in areas where curfew was imposed will 'find it difficult to attend the Holy Week prayer.' He has asked some parishes not to have processions and for

congregations to go home quietly after religious ceremonies. Police relaxed curfew in a few areas on April 1 after the situation improved.

Pray: for this and all Easter Christian services in India to be anointed, protected and a prevailing witness to non Believers. (Mt.28:18-20)

More: <http://www.ucanews.com/2010/04/01/police-protection-sought-for-holy-wee>

■ Sudan: Christians pray ahead of elections

We are urged to pray for the country's first democratic elections in 24 years taking place from April 11 to 13 that could help pave the way for lasting peace, or spark another civil war. Relief organisation Samaritan's Purse International said, 'In 17 years of doing relief work in Sudan we've witnessed so much horrific violence. With this historic election Sudan sits at a crossroads and has an opportunity for long-term peace. We are asking every Christian to join us in prayer for the people of Sudan'. Sudan has been embroiled in a 21-year civil war sparked by government efforts to impose Islamic law on the mostly Christian south. The war was one of the longest lasting and deadliest of the late 20th century with an estimated 2 million civilians killed in southern Sudan and more than 4 million people displaced because of the violence.

Pray: that all polling stations will be safe and secure, for peaceful elections, for political stability in Sudan and for an end to the conflict in Darfur. (Ps.12:5)

More: <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/christians.pray.ahead.of.sudan.elections/25580.htm>

■ Zimbabwe: Possibly increased violence and pray for pastors' conference

Two issues supplied by a reliable but anonymous source. First: 'Robert Mugabe's Zanu Party (PF) is recruiting youths for training in sophisticated murder and torture techniques for a campaign of violence against the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC-T). The campaign of terror is expected to roll into motion in July after the South African soccer World Cup ends and the media spotlight shifts elsewhere. High-level sources within Zanu (PF), MDC-T and the security services said the purpose of this plan was to plunge the country into total anarchy making it impossible to continue with the drafting of a new constitution. The youth recruitment drive is expected to be funded by the state, there are 10,000 illegally recruited members of the Zanu (PF) youth militia on the government payroll. Second: Next week there is a Pastors' conference where leaders will be praying for unity and repentance between leaders and denominations to see both 2 Chron 7:13-14 and Isaiah 58:6-14 coming to pass especially in Zimbabwean Churches!'

Pray: for God's healing of relationships within Zimbabwean society at every level and for the stronghold of fear and death to be broken over the territory.(Eph.2:14)

PRAISE REPORTS

■ Thailand: Children witnessed power of prayer

A report in Mission Network News has described how a group of Thai orphans at the Vision Beyond Borders (VBB) Children's Home witnessed the power of prayer when their orphanage was threatened with fire. According to the report, on March 19, as fires raced toward the Children's Home, workers sent out urgent prayer requests by e-mail and then moved the children to the top of a hill for safety. At the top of the hill, a staff member reportedly encouraged the kids to start worshipping and praying to God. Though Thailand is in the midst of their dry season, the report noted, they trusted God to send rain. Just before the orphanage was surrounded, the sound of thunder was heard and 'less than an hour later it began sprinkling, then pouring, until the fires were extinguished.'

Praise: God that the children will use the miracle as a testimony to the power of Christ in their lives and that they will boldly share Christ with the people of their community. (Is.43:12)

More: http://www.breakingchristiannews.com/articles/display_art.html?ID=7718

■ China: Missing Chinese lawyer confirmed alive

Prominent Chinese human rights lawyer Gao Zhisheng was confirmed alive on Sunday after more than a year without reliable information on his whereabouts. 'I am tremendously relieved that my husband is alive,' said Gao's wife, Geng He, in a statement issued by Freedom Now, a group that represents prisoners of conscience. 'My children and I have not seen their father since January 2009,' she said. 'We urge the Chinese government to allow Zhisheng to leave the country and be reunited with us in the United States.' Gao, who is one of China's most famous lawyers and human rights activists, was last seen in February 2009 when a dozen police officers reportedly seized him in public. Gao elicited the ire of the Chinese government by defending groups oppressed by authorities, such as underground churches, practitioners of the spiritual movement Falun Gong, and farmers evicted from their land. Gao himself is a Christian who worships in a house church. (See Prayer Alert 1309, 1509)

Praise: God for the news that Gao is alive and pray now for his release. (Is.42:6-8)

More: <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/missing.chinese.lawyer.confirmed.alive/25591.htm>

PRAYER FORUM OF THE BRITISH ISLES & IRELAND

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