

Lawyer appeals for Alimujiang Yimiti

A lawyer representing Uighur Christian, Alimujiang Yimiti, has launched an appeal against the 15 year sentence that was handed down late last year – the harshest sentence given to a church leader in China in the past decade.

Li Baiguang, a prominent Beijing-based lawyer, has sent letters of appeal to the People's Congress, People's Supreme Court and People's Procuratorate at both the national and Xinjiang-regional levels, stating that the charge and sentence are illegal and should be withdrawn.



He pointed out that there is no basis for the charge: Alimujiang could not have been able to "unlawfully provide state secrets to overseas organisations" because he had no access to any state secrets, being an ordinary citizen working for an agriculture company. Li Baiguang also highlighted that the original charge against Alimujiang was that of illegal religious activity, i.e. spreading Christianity among Uighur people. This is not spreading state secrets.

Church in Chains has written to the Chinese Embassy in Dublin appealing to the Chinese government to investigate this case.

PRAY ... that justice will prevail and that this appeal will succeed. Pray also for Alimujiang in prison and his wife, Guli Nuer, as she looks after their two young children.



Six Christians killed outside Coptic Church

Six Coptic Christians were killed outside a church in southern Egypt on 6th January. The victims were shot dead as they left a Christmas Eve service (Christmas is celebrated in Egypt on 7th January).

Two vehicles approached St. John's Coptic Orthodox Church in the town of Nagaa Hammadi 64 km (40 miles) from Luxor, as worshippers were leaving a Christmas Eve Mass. Gunfire was sprayed into the crowd. Seven people were killed, six Christians and a Muslim security guard. Ten others were injured, including two Muslim passers-by.

The authorities believe that the attack was intended as retaliation for the alleged rape of a young Muslim girl by a Christian man in November, that triggered five days of widespread sectarian violence in the area.

Bishop Kirolos, who led the Mass, described the attackers as "Muslim radicals". "It is all religious now. This is a religious war about how they can finish off the Christians in Egypt," he said. Three Muslim men were arrested two days after the attack and charged with murder. Police have also arrested many Coptic teenagers in a move to appear "even-handed". (AFP, Al Jazeera, Middle East Concern)

PRAY ... that God will bring comfort to those who have been bereaved and pray also that the Christians of Nagaa Hammadi will be able to live in peace.

Eight churches firebombed in Malaysia

Eight church buildings in Malaysia, including three in the capital, Kuala Lumpur, have been firebombed in the first two weeks of the New Year. Muslim extremists are suspected as tensions are running high in the country over the use of the word "Allah".

On 31st December, the Malaysian High Court overturned a government ban on non-Muslims using the word "Allah" in their literature, allowing Roman Catholic newsletter, *The Herald*, to use the term to refer to God in the Malay language. The government has appealed against the court verdict and the High Court has suspended the decision's implementation in the interim.



Protesters at mosques in Kuala Lumpur carried placards reading "Allah is only for us" and "Heresy arises from words wrongly used". "I hope the court will understand the feeling of the majority Muslims of Malaysia," said Ahmad Johari, at the National Mosque. "We can fight to the death over this issue," he told Associated Press news agency.

The National Evangelical Christian Fellowship (NECF) of Malaysia has condemned the attacks and welcomed the swift action of the police and firefighters. NECF urged all parties to learn to respect each other's basic constitutional and human rights to practise one's faith and religion and called on all Christians to pray for the peace and well-being of the nation. (*Al Jazeera, BBC, Compass Direct*)

PRAY ... for an end to these attacks and pray also for wisdom for Christians in the country in what they say and do at this time of heightened sensitivities.



Mother placed under house arrest in Iran

A Christian mother from the northern city of Mashhad has been sentenced to three months house-arrest and threatened that her 10 year-old daughter, Hodi, will be taken away from her if she does not deny her faith.

Hamideh Najafi's ordeal began when security police with an arrest warrant from the Mashhad Revolutionary Court entered her family home on 16 December. After searching her home and confiscating personal belongings, including books and compact discs, police took her away. She was interrogated for the next 13 days and told that she should turn back from her faith in Jesus Christ and return to Islam. Hamideh stands accused of contacting a foreign Christian television network, which court officials labeled as a "political" crime. The Revolutionary Court initially ordered that Hamideh's daughter, Hodi, be taken from her. Hodi suffers from a severe kidney and bladder condition so the court allowed her to stay with her parents.

Hamideh and her husband have been threatened that if they insist on their Christian beliefs and speak publicly about their faith, the custody of their child will be revoked and Hodi will be transferred to the care of the welfare office immediately. (*Compass Direct, FCNN*)

PRAY ... for God's protection for Hamideh and her husband and for their daughter, Hodi. Pray also that they will be encouraged and guided by the Holy Spirit in all that they do.



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