

Peaceful Christmas leads to hope of reconciliation in Orissa, India



Christmas passed off peacefully in Orissa state after a Bandh (political strike) scheduled to begin on Christmas Day was cancelled. The peaceful atmosphere enabled many Christmas services to be held throughout the state which has been ravaged by anti-Christian violence in 2008.

Over 10,000 Christians remain in refugee camps following the autumn violence in which over 60 people were murdered and 300 villages destroyed.

Looking to the future, Dr. Richard Howell, General Secretary of the Evangelical Fellowship of India, said, ***"It is imperative for the state government to continue to provide security and maintain law and order... the four month old camp life existence of the innocent, vulnerable and weak cannot continue for long. Serious questions still have to be addressed. Even if the people return to their villages, how will they be accepted? Will they be forced to convert to Hinduism? How do we ensure peace, justice and coexistence?"*** (Friends of Orissa)

Church in Chains has sent a further €2,350, via its partners, to assist Christians in Orissa recovering from the violence.



PRAISE GOD ... for a peaceful Christmas and continue to pray for peace and reconciliation in Orissa state.

New wave of arrests of Christians in Eritrea

Over 100 Christians have been arrested in Eritrea since late November. The wave of arrests appears to have been co-ordinated and occurred in a number of towns across the country before reaching the capital, Asmara.



Among those who have been arrested are some elderly Christian schoolteachers (in their 60's and 70's) from a church mission school in the town of Dekemhare. Local sources said that detained Christians were transferred to army camps where they were beaten. There is speculation that some have died as a result of their injuries and a lack of medical care.

A prominent paediatric doctor, Dr Michael Mehari, has also been arrested in this latest round-up of Christians.

In a statement Dr Berhane Asmelash, Director of Release-Eritrea said **'It seems that with every passing year I am losing more and more of my friends and colleagues to the Eritrean prison system. I know the school in Dekemhare and many of those who worked there for many years and Dr Michael was a colleague.'**

It is now estimated that over 3,000 Christians are imprisoned, without trial, in jails, police stations and shipping containers in Eritrea. In May 2002, the government published a decree closing all churches (apart from the Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Lutheran churches).

(Release Eritrea/CSW)

Church in Chains has sent a gift of €1,500, via its partners, to assist the families of imprisoned Christians in Eritrea.



PRAY ... that God will strengthen and encourage Dr. Michael Mehari and all those recently imprisoned.

Families of *Innocent of Acteal* march for justice in Mexico

Families and friends of *The Innocent of Acteal* have marched to government offices in Tuxtla Gutierrez (the state capital of Chiapas) calling for justice for the imprisoned group of 76 prisoners, mainly evangelical Christians, who have been unjustly imprisoned in Mexico for the past eleven years on false charges of participating in the Acteal "massacre".

Over 1,000 people took part in the peaceful protest held in mid-December just before the 11th anniversary of the arrest of the men who were accused of involvement in the gun battle which killed 45 innocent people (mainly women and children) in December 1997.

Discussions were held by representatives of the marchers with state government officials for several hours. The Secretary of State for Chiapas said that the State government of Chiapas had no jurisdiction in the matter and said that lawyers for the men should go to Mexico City for discussions.

The march took place in response to a lack of action on the case. In July, the Mexican Supreme Court, after long deliberations, accepted the evidence showing that 70 of the imprisoned men were innocent. It recommended that 24 of the



men be initially released but **President Felipe Calderon has not yet acted on their recommendation.** Observers of the case fear that he is reluctant to release the innocent men because of political pressure from long-term opponents of evangelicals in Chiapas.

Church in Chains has sent a further gift of €1,500, via its partners, to assist the families of the Acteal prisoners.



PRAY ... that President Calderon will act bravely and justly and order the release of the innocent men.

Major obstacles for Christians in Turkey

Christians in Turkey are continuing to face major obstacles in finding a place to worship. These difficulties arise because the Turkish state only legally recognises three minority communities – Armenians, Greeks and Jews.



The Alliance of Protestant Churches of Turkey has recently released a report titled, "**The Question of Places of Worship for the Protestant Community of Turkey**" in which the current situation is outlined in detail. Churches throughout the country find it difficult to build or rent suitable premises. The congregations, which typically have 30-40 members, face legal, political and administrative obstacles in the simple quest for a place to meet.

Tom Slattery (*Director of Operations, Evangelical Alliance Ireland*) and **David Turner** (*National Co-ordinator, Church in Chains*) **met diplomats at the Turkish Embassy in Dublin in December** to discuss this and other religious freedom issues. They asked for the Turkish government to engage in dialogue with the Alliance of Protestant Churches of Turkey on these issues. One of the Alliance's major concerns is to promote a correct understanding of Christian belief and practice in Turkey. The recent publication of a school textbook which describes "**Christian missionary activity**" as "**a threat to national unity**" highlights the need for progress in this area.



PRAY... that the Turkish government will take steps to allow congregations in Turkey the freedom to meet together.



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