



# CHURCH IN CHAINS

AN IRISH VOICE FOR PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS

## March 2009



## Christians in Pakistan nervous as Sharia law introduced

Christians in Pakistan have voiced serious concerns about the decision of the government in February allowing Sharia (Islamic) law to be enforced in the Swat valley in North West Frontier Province. The decision formed part of a controversial peace agreement between the Pakistani Army and Taliban militia groups who have been in conflict for the past two years.

In December 2008, it was reported that about 60% of 1.8 million Swat residents had fled the violence and over 150 schools, the majority of which provided education to girls, had been destroyed.

It is feared that the introduction of Sharia law could bring new suffering and persecution – especially for women and religious minorities. While few Christians live in the Swat valley, it is feared that the Pakistani government will extend Sharia law into neighbouring areas where thousands of Christians live. *(Christian Post/Asia News)*

*The Spring issue of Church in Chains magazine (to be published in late March) will have a major feature on the situation of Christians in Pakistan.*



**PRAY...for God's protection on Christians living in the Swat valley and other troubled areas of Pakistan.**

### News from China, India & Egypt



# Sixty house church leaders arrested at seminar in China

Sixty house church leaders were arrested in mid-February in China while at a seminar in the central province of Henan.



About thirty police officers disrupted the meeting, arrested the Christians (all evangelical Christians from different house church groups) and confiscated phones, books and money. **The names and addresses of each leader were recorded and a fine was imposed on each one.**

Some of the elderly believers were then released. Police from the home provinces of the church leaders were summoned to Henan to escort the Christians to local detention facilities.

Most of the leaders were then released but four continued to be held. They were released nine days later after international publicity prompted enquiries from foreign journalists.

Two visiting South Korean pastors (who were speaking at the seminar) were expelled from China for **"engaging in illegal religious activities"** and have been banned from entering the country for five years.

*(China Aid Association)*

**China Aid Association**, along with many other religious freedom and human rights groups expressed great disappointment with the statement made by Hillary Clinton (US Secretary of State) before her recent visit to China: *"Our pressing on those issues [human rights and Tibet] can't interfere on the global economic crisis, the global climate change crisis and the security crisis."*



**PRAY... for courage and boldness for these sixty leaders as they continue to serve the Lord in China.**

# Christians prevented from returning to their homes in Orissa, India

Continued threats from Hindu extremists to "convert or die" have prevented thousands of Christians from returning to their homes in Orissa following last year's violence.

In the village of Bareka, a local Christian, Goliath Digal, 58, stated that the Hindu hardliners had taken 18 Roman Catholic families to a Hindu temple and performed Hindu rituals on them, forcing them to sign statements that they had converted of their own will. ***"During the riots, all our belongings had been taken away and we were left with nothing,"*** Goliath said. ***"Now they are threatening to murder us if we do not become Hindus."***

Of the 22 other families in Bareka, 16 have returned to the village from relief camps but are living in fear, Goliath said, and the rest have fled to nearby villages with no plans to return. He added that he and others with farmland near the village have not been able to cultivate crops out of fear and opposition.

In Udayagiri refugee camp, 55-year-old Vipin Nayak of Tiangia Budaripura village said that all 400 Christian families from the village have remained in the camp except for five families who were allowed to return after being forced to become Hindus.



The Orissa state government has set up meetings of "Peace Committees", but Christian leaders say there is almost no willingness by hard-line Hindus to tolerate Christian presence.

***"'Only Hindus and no Christians' is the new slogan of Hindu fundamentalists in the area,"*** said one local pastor.

*(Compass Direct)*



**PRAY ... that the Christians of Orissa will be able to return safely to their homes and live peacefully there.**

# Hope for Andrew and Mario as Egyptian custody law is reviewed

A court in Egypt has decided to grant the Christian mother of 14-year-old twins Andrew and Mario Medhat Ramses the right to appeal a custody decision awarding her sons to their Muslim father.

Last September their father, Medhat Ramses Labib, gained custody of the boys, contrary to Article 20 of Egypt's Personal Status Law, which states children should remain with their mother until age 15. Mr. Labib converted from Christianity to Islam in 1999 after divorcing the boy's mother, Kamilia Lotfy Gaballah, to marry another woman.



***“We all have a little bit of hope, new hope,”*** said George Ramses, the twins' older brother. ***“Of course, they are a little afraid about everything, but generally they are excited.”***

The twins will celebrate their 15th birthday in June of this year when they should have the legal right to choose which parent they want to live with. Custody battles between Muslim fathers and Christian mothers have typically been instances where Islamic law has predominated over secular legislation.

Islamic (*Sharia*) law states that a non-Muslim should not have authority over a Muslim. (Compass Direct)



**PRAY...that Andrew and Mario will be able to continue to live as Christians with their mother and brother.**



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