

15 October 2010

15 more Acteal prisoners released – on parole

In a surprise development, 15 more of *The Innocent of Acteal* group of prisoners were released yesterday from prison in Mexico. The news was totally unexpected by the prisoners and their lawyers.

The 15 men were released on parole (called pre-liberation in Mexico). "Pre-liberation" means that the prisoners were of good conduct in prison; they have served over half of their sentences; and they have given indication that they will keep themselves out of trouble in the future. If a prisoner violates the terms of his parole, he will be returned to prison to finish his sentence. Release on parole does not reflect on the guilt or innocence of the men.

One of the newly-released men is **Victorio Arias Perez** (pictured) who had served as one of the spiritual leaders of the men in prison. Victorio was an elder in a local Presbyterian church at the time of his arrest back in 1998.



Victorio Arias Perez
Imprisoned for almost 13 years

The newly-released men have already met the Chiapas Secretary of State to sign an agreement pledging not to return to their homes, in exchange for government grants of five hectares of land and a house. They will be housed temporarily in the state capital, Tuxtla Gutierrez. The prisoners who were released last year continue to live in Tuxtla while waiting to be allocated suitable lands by the state government in which to resettle. The state government of Chiapas is not permitting them to return to their homes after violent threats were made in August 2009 against the first batch of released prisoners.

The remaining 35 Acteal prisoners have been given no indication if they also will be released on parole. Lawyers for the men continue to work on their case and remain hopeful that their innocence will be recognised, leading to their release in the coming months.

Church in Chains, which has long campaigned for The Innocent of Acteal, welcomes the news of the release of 15 more innocent men though we would have wished for their innocence to be recognised. David Turner met Victorio Arias Perez during his visit to the prisoners in 2003. Church in Chains will continue to pray and work until all the innocent men have been freed.

RELEASED MEN

Agustin Vazquez Mendez
Alfonso Jimenez Entsin
Daniel Perez Perez
Elias Luna Ruiz
Javier Vazquez Luna
Jose Peres Perez
Juan Luna Perez
Julio Entsin Guzman
Manuel Luna Vazquez
Mariano Luna Perez
Mariano Luna Ruiz
Pedro Luna Perez
Pedro Mendez Lopez
Rafael Luna Vazquez
Victorio Arias Perez



PRAISE GOD... for the release of these 15 men, and pray for them and their families as they resettle away from their home area. Pray also for the men who remain in prison.



Dr Fan Yafeng
20 police kept him
under house arrest

200 Chinese Christians prevented from attending Lausanne Congress

200 Chinese Christians who had booked to attend the Third Lausanne International Congress on World Evangelization which began in Cape Town, South Africa last Saturday, have been blocked from doing so by Chinese police. Among those prevented from attending was **Dr Fan Yafeng**, a well-known constitutional lawyer who has represented many persecuted Christians. Dr Fan also pastors a house church in Beijing, and provides Christian mentorship to the young lawyers working under him.

China's State Administration for Religious Affairs had notified border control staff that **the participation of Chinese Christians in the conference threatened state security** and ordered them not to allow delegates to leave. Last Wednesday (13 October), approximately 1,000 police officers were stationed at Beijing International Airport to restrain an estimated 100 house church members who planned to leave for the Congress via Beijing. In a statement, the banned delegates said, **"We hope the government will improve its religious policy and build a harmonious relationship between state and religion so that the church will become an even greater blessing for Chinese society. May God bless China!"** (China Aid, Compass Direct)



PRAY... for the 200 delegates who have suffered the disappointment of not being at the Congress. Pray that the Lord will encourage each of them as they serve Him in China.

Turan and Hakan acquitted of "anti-Turkishness"

Turan Topal (50) and Hakan Tastan (41) have finally been acquitted four years after they were first charged with "anti-Turkishness". They had been involved in leading Bible correspondence courses.



On 14 October, Judge Hayrettin Sevim acquitted the defendants of two charges that they had insulted the Turkish state (Article 301) and that they had insulted its people (Article 216) by spreading Christianity. Sevim cited lack of evidence. He found them guilty, however, of collecting information on citizens without permission (Article 135) and sentenced them to seven months imprisonment each. The court ruled that the two men could each pay a 4,500 lira (€2,275) fine instead of serving time, said their lawyer Haydar Polat, who plans to appeal the fines.

Hakan has expressed mixed feelings about the verdicts. **"For both Turan and me, being found innocent from the accusation that we insulted the Turkish people was the most important thing for us, because we've always said we're proud to be Turks. But it is unjust that they are sentencing us for collecting people's information."** The two men had used contact information that individuals interested in Christianity had voluntarily provided on a Christian website. (Compass Direct)



PRAISE GOD... that Turan and Hakan have finally been acquitted and pray that the Lord would bless them as they continue to serve Him in Turkey.