



PRAYER ALERT...



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BRITISH ISLES & IRELAND

■ Religious leaders, charities call on government to end UK poverty by 2020

Poverty campaigners, faith groups, trade unions and politicians all attended a day-long hearing in central London yesterday. Noted figures taking part in the event included the Archbishop of Canterbury, Most Rev Rowan Williams, Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks, and Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor. Niall Cooper, from Church Action on Poverty, which is co-ordinated the event, said the hearing would end with a call to all political parties to commit to ending poverty in the UK by 2020. 'We need to build a movement dedicated to making poverty in the UK history. The National Poverty Hearing is a unique opportunity to illustrate real experiences of poverty in our backyard. About nine million people in Britain cannot afford housing that is properly heated, free from damp and in a safe and habitable condition. In a rich country, this is a national scandal.' Ten years on from Church Action on Poverty's first National Poverty Hearing, organisations including Shelter, Help the Aged, Church Urban Fund, End Child Poverty, Barnardos, Oxfam, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, the Refugee Council and others helped to stage the event.

Pray: that the Hearing would result in a strong movement of Christians in support of this call to end poverty. (Prov. 22:9)

More: <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/religious.leaders.charities.call.on.government.to.end.uk.poverty.by.2020/8624.htm>

■ Age law challenge goes to Europe

A challenge to a law that allows employers to force workers into retirement at 65 has been referred to the European Court of Justice. The action, launched by the Heyday organisation, part of the National Council on Ageing, has now been referred to Europe for legal guidance. Heyday says the new government regulations amount to 'a de facto mandatory national retirement age'. Its challenge to the law is being backed by Age Concern. Lawyers for Heyday told the UK High Court that the challenge to the rules was especially important because of the rising number of people working beyond 65 who could be forced into retirement. They will be presented to the judge in January. The new age discrimination laws came into force in the UK in October in the biggest single change to employment practices in 30 years. The rules affect recruitment, training, promotion, redundancy, retirement, pay and pension provision.

Pray: for justice and respect for all UK citizens regardless of their age. (Job 12:12)

More: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/6212362.stm>

■ Cardinal and Archbishop to visit Bethlehem

England and Wales Catholic Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor and Archbishop of Canterbury Dr Rowan Williams have announced plans for an Advent visit to Bethlehem. They will be joined by the Primate of the Armenian Church of Great Britain and the Rev David Coffey, Moderator of the Free Churches. In an interview with Andrew Marr on BBC Sunday AM programme, Cardinal Cormac said the visit was not a political mission, but a pastoral visit. The Christian community in

Bethlehem is the oldest in the world. Until 20 years ago, 80 per cent of Bethlehem's citizens were Christians. Only 15 per cent remain now. Many thousands of Christian Palestinians have been forced to emigrate because of high unemployment. Others no longer live in Bethlehem because their homes and businesses have been annexed by Israel by the construction of the 30 foot high security wall that has been built around the town. Describing the people of the town as 'terribly alone', the cardinal urged Christians and others to visit.

Pray: For this planned visit to bring encouragement to Bethlehem Christians (Gal.6:2)

More: http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/content/news_syndication/article_06126bethleh.shtml

■ NI Bishops attack schools proposals

In a strongly-worded statement, the nine Northern Ireland bishops said proposed changes would 'radically undermine' the Catholic education system. The bishops were considering draft policy papers on the creation of new structures under the Review of Public Administration (RPA) which will include removing powers from the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, and handing them to the new Education and Skills Authority and the Department of Education. They said they could not accept proposals which 'pose a serious threat to the right of parents to choose a Catholic education. They will radically undermine a long-cherished Catholic education system which has been recognised for the strength of its distinctiveness and the richness of its tradition and diversity as contributing to the raising of school standards and the promotion of a culture of tolerance and understanding,' they said. The department said it had consulted with the bishops and other bodies involved who were invited to submit further views or comments on these papers by mid January 2007.

Pray: that the rights of faith schools in Northern Ireland would not be undermined and that Christian children could continue to receive faith education. (Prov.22:6)

More: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/6215774.stm

■ Faith schools top new primary school league table

Faith schools have come out top in a new league table of primary schools published this week by the government. Of the 209 primaries achieving 'perfect' results, Church of England, Roman Catholic and Jewish schools account for a considerable 127. All pupils at the 'perfect primaries' reached the expected standard for 11-year-olds in English, maths and science. The new league table of nearly 16,000 primaries shows a massive rise in the number of faith schools making the top category. Faith schools currently make up just a third of all schools in England. While in 2005 faith schools made up 44 per cent of the top primaries, this proportion has risen to more than 60 per cent this year. Lord Adonis, the schools minister, said: 'Despite this progress, more needs to be done. We are determined to redouble our efforts to help the one in five 11-year-olds who are still not reaching the standard required of their age in literacy and mathematics.'

Pray: Praise God for the good results from faith schools in mainland Britain asking Him for continued witness and blessing for the rising number of Christian schools. (Mat.21:16)

More: <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/faith.schools.top.new.primary.school.league.table/8637.htm>

■ Bishop joins row over PC town halls

The Bishop of Lichfield, the Rt Rev Jonathan Gledhill, today became the latest church leader to lambast town halls and businesses that play down Christmas for fear of offending people of other faiths. He used his Christmas message to call for spiritual values to be put back at the centre of public life. 'Most of our Muslim, Sikh or Jewish neighbours respect our faith and we respect theirs and they seem to wish we Christians were a bit more up-front about our beliefs.' He congratulated Stafford borough council who 'bravely' purchased new crib figures this year for their town centre Christmas display, saying this 'rather goes against the trend of multi-faith everything. The whole point of Christmas is that love is offered by God in the form of a gift that can be accepted or ignored. It is the amazing mystery of Christmas that we are free to respond as we will. It is because of this that freedom of speech is such an important feature of modern Christian democracy.' (See Prayer Alert 4406)

Pray: for other church leaders to make a stand against this silencing of the true Christmas message by town halls. (Lk.12:3)

More: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml;jsessionid=NL313S34L4K5PQFIQMGCFFGAVCBQUIV0?xml=/news/2006/12/06/nxmas106.xml>

EUROPE

■ CARE welcomes decision to close Amsterdam brothels

CARE, a leading Christian social policy charity, has this week welcomed the decision taken by Amsterdam's City Council to revoke or refuse licences for 33 sex clubs operating in the city. Prostitution was legalised in the Netherlands in 2000, as it was argued that this would remove the connections between organised crime and prostitution. However, the closures come following police investigations which found that these brothels were involved in illegal activities including human trafficking for sexual exploitation, CARE has told Christian Today. CARE believes 'legalised prostitution does nothing to protect the women involved, but rather gives a sheen of respectability to this abusive trade.' In the Netherlands, there are an estimated 25,000 people being prostituted - an estimated 15,000 of these are children. These numbers have increased year-on-year since prostitution was legalised. The announcement came on the same day as CARE for Europe representative Hannah Macsween spoke at a conference in Finland highlighting the link between the acceptability of purchasing sex and increased demand for prostitutes.

Pray: Thank God for this decision and pray that it will be first of many more.

More: <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/care.welcomes.decision.to.close.amsterdam.brothels/8630.htm>

■ Turkey makes last-ditch offer on Cyprus

Turkey has offered to open one port and one airport to traffic from Cyprus in a bid to avert a partial freeze of its EU membership negotiations. 'I can confirm that we have received a proposal from the Turkish side. One element is the opening of one port and one airport,' the spokeswoman for Finnish prime-minister Matti Vanhanen told EUobserver. Ankara's surprise move would mean a first step in meeting a key EU demand to lift an embargo on trade from Cyprus. The commission is proposing suspending the opening of eight chapters of Turkey's 35-strong EU negotiations book while talks on the remaining chapters could continue, with member states' ambassadors to the EU today (7 December) discussing the proposal. The ambassadors' meeting is expected to highlight deep divisions between member states on the issue which are set to come to a head at a foreign ministers' meeting on 11 December.

Pray: Praise God for this minor breakthrough and pray that this step will lead to a full reconciliation between these two nations.

More: <http://euobserver.com/9/23051>

WORLDWIDE

■ UN seeks \$450M in aid for Palestinians

UN aid groups are asking for a record \$450 million to staunch a deepening Palestinian humanitarian crisis, saying Wednesday that international sanctions and Israeli limits on Gaza exports have devastated the Palestinian economy. Despite that gloomy assessment, a top minister in the Hamas-led government offered a rare upbeat economic picture, saying increased aid from Arab countries had allowed the government to stay afloat. But independent economists and analysts said the government was still deep in crisis. The UN's huge aid appeal came as poverty was worsening throughout Gaza and the West Bank. The UN will officially launch its appeal Thursday, but The Associated Press obtained an advance copy of the report. According to the UN, 65 per cent of Palestinians were living in poverty and 29 per cent were unemployed. The Palestinian health care system was running out of medicine and on the verge of collapse, and nearly 50 percent of Palestinians did not have reliable access to food.

Pray: for the lifting of the international boycott that Israel and Western nations imposed on Palestine. (Prov.13:23)

More: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/latest/story/0,,-6263722,00.html>

■ Human Rights Watch concerned over treatment of Sudanese journalists

A new HRW report expressed concern over the treatment of Sudanese journalists, whose situation grows worse as the Sudanese government has pre-emptively clamped down on the possibility of popular dissent with the increased attention of the international community. The HRW report protested against the Sudanese government's frequent use of censorship, arrest of journalists as well as its arbitrary inspection of printing presses and newspaper offices. President Omar al-Bashir said that he will work against any acts he views as 'foreign intervention,' implying that foreign media and relief groups in Darfur could face expulsion. In an interview with the Sudan News Agency Bashir stated that the government planned to 'rid camps of those exploiting the suffering of the people, those suspicious organizations who are part of a series of conspiracies.' Al-Bashir's comments came following the departure of the UN's most senior official in Sudan, Jan Pronk, who had been given three days to leave the country after he criticized the Sudanese government in his blog.

Pray: for relief to have more not less freedom of movement in Darfur, and honest reporting on the situation. (Deut.24:17)

More: <http://middleeastdesk.org/article.php?id=638>

■ Coup leader warns he'll use force in Fiji

Coup leader Commodore Frank Bainimarama warned Fijians he will use force to ensure survival of his regime after Alexander Downer called for a campaign of civil disobedience. The military leader, who last night declared a state of emergency, told Fijians not to 'put themselves in jeopardy' by becoming involved in a programme of resistance. 'After receiving intelligence reports of a number of individuals planning to cause disruption to peace and harmony, we believe that the life of the state is threatened,' Commodore Bainimarama said. 'Should we be pushed to use force, we will do so very quickly, and in addition we will put in place security measures such as curfews that restrict us in living our normal day-to-day lives. The military will quickly suppress any uprising against us,' he said. Mr Downer told federal parliament that the ordinary people of Fiji and the institutions of government should show passive resistance. (See Prayer Alert 4606) For information on suppression of the press go to: http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=20021

Pray: for wisdom at the Foreign Office as they consider commonwealth involvement in Fiji

More: <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,20867,20885231-2703,00.html>

■ Christians sue university for fraternity recognition in America

Christian lawyers have filed a federal lawsuit against the University of Georgia (UGA) after school officials refused to officially recognize a Christian fraternity. The lawyers pointed out that the university permits political party-affiliated groups to have a party membership requirement but won't allow a Christian group to require that its members be Christians. The suit, filed in the U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Georgia Tuesday, states that members of the Beta Upsilon Chi fraternity 'will suffer and continue to suffer irreparable harm to their First and Fourteenth Amendment rights,' because the university has refused to recognize the group. The fraternity was recognized by the university during the 2005-2006 academic year, but recognition was revoked in 2006 because of the group's requirement that members profess Christian beliefs. University policy states that 'student organizations may not exclude members on the basis of race, nationality, ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age, and/or disability.'

Pray: that Christian student groups are not singled out for discrimination both here and globally. (Is.61:1)

More: <http://www.cnsnews.com/ViewCulture.asp?Page=/Culture/archive/200612/CUL20061207a.html>

■ India's military aid to Burma fuels abuses

The Indian government is offering a package of military assistance to the Burmese army, which is likely to use such arms and training to attack civilians in its war against ethnic insurgents, Human Rights Watch said today. HRW called on the Indian government to cease its support for the Burmese military, halt arms sales and to press the government to stop its attacks on civilians. India's air force chief, S. P. Tyagi, offered a multimillion dollar aid package to Burma's military when he visited Burma's new administrative capital at Nay Pyi Taw on November 22 to meet the leaders of the military government, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). This aid package includes counterinsurgency helicopters, avionics upgrades of Burma's Russian- and Chinese-made fighter planes, and naval surveillance aircraft. This followed recent pledges in early November by Indian army chief of staff, J. J. Singh, to help train Burmese troops in special warfare tactics.

Pray: for the emergence of a peaceful and stable government in Burma (Ps.140:1-2)

More: <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/HRW/c2a94740d62f1b7207a300bbd5bb6d62>

■ Several quizzed on Christian murdered in India

Police in northern India investigating the murder of a charity worker are questioning a number of people. The body of Michael Blakey, 23, of Swansea and originally from Burnley, was partially hidden under a mound of stones with head and face injuries. The death of the first-class honours graduate has shocked his friends in Swansea where he was well-known for his charity work with the Swansea Bay Asylum Seekers Group and his work supporting international students. Angela Tristram, who had known him for more than five years said his death was a 'huge loss'. 'He had a deep sense of what was right and a care of the people that suffered,' she said. He had so many gifts, we've lost one of the best. The world will be a much poorer place without him. Mr Blakey was an active member of the Methodist Church at the university. Mr Blakey, who was found on the outskirts of the town of Dharamsala, had been in India for five months working with the Tong-Len Charitable Trust helping refugees.

Pray: that the motive for this killing will be revealed. (Dan.2:22)

More: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/wales/south_west/6216502.stm

PRAISE REPORTS

■ Prosecutor recommends acquittal of church leader in Cuba

Prosecuting attorney in Havana recommended that the Rev. Carlos Lamelas be acquitted of all charges of trafficking in illegal emigrants. The accusations sent the evangelical pastor and former national president of his church to jail for more than four months. While serving as president of the national board of the Church of God Lamelas refused to sign what amounted to a loyalty pledge to the Castro regime and resisted government interference in church affairs. Lamelas lost weight while imprisoned and suffered from headaches and high blood pressure but said he suffered no mistreatment. Despite the motion for acquittal, Lamelas's future still remains in doubt. 'The trial is now at the stage of determining sentence, and we must await the judges' decision,' Lamelas said. 'The worst part is that we have to keep waiting possibly for one or two months more.' He credits international attention on his case, for securing his unexpected release.

Praise: God for the attention given to this case, and the large amounts of encouraging mail that Carlos received. Please continue to pray for complete acquittal by the judges. (Ps.102:19-20)

More: <http://www.compassdirect.org/en/display.php?page=news&lang=en&length=long&idelement=4674&backpage=index>

■ Christians in 13 countries call on Chinese government to protect North Korean refugees

A protest and prayer vigil was held at the weekend by the North Korea Freedom Coalition in partnership with Open Doors to highlight China's violent repatriation of North Korean refugees. Saturday's peaceful protest took place opposite the Chinese Embassy in London and coincided with similar protests taking place in 19 cities, in 13 countries around the world. Fifty protestors gathered opposite the embassy from 11:30am demonstrating the strength of concern felt by Christians for suffering North Korean refugees in China who continue to be hunted down by Chinese authorities and forcibly returned to North Korea. Once repatriated, they face torture, imprisonment and even execution for the 'crime' of leaving their country. At midday, a letter of concern was delivered to the Chinese ambassador to the UK, Mr Zha Peixin, expressing concern on behalf of the Christian Church in the United Kingdom and Ireland.

Praise: God that across the globe Christians are drawing attention to this hidden situation. (Ps.9:9)

More: <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/christians.call.on.chinese.government.to.protect.north.korean.refugees/8622.htm>

PRAYER ASSOCIATION OF BRITISH ISLES & IRELAND

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