



# PRAYER ALERT...

An initiative of the Prayer Forum of the British Isles & Ireland  
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## BRITISH ISLES & IRELAND

### ■ Harriet Harman's Equality Bill could lead to ban on Christmas, warn bishops

Christmas celebrations and other public expressions of the Christian faith could be banned under Harriet Harman's controversial Equality Bill, which is currently going through the parliamentary stages in Westminster. The warning came from the Catholic bishops who attended the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales on Tuesday, 17 November. They told MPs that the Bill is so complex that interpreting it could lead to bizarre decisions by town halls and other organisations. They also warned that campaign groups could take legal action in an attempt to have the Bill enforced in ways which fit their agenda. The bishops warn that the Bill will reopen many of the discrimination issues which have left Christians bottom of the pile when it comes to 'equality and diversity'. The Equality Bill is a major piece of legislation that will replace 9 pieces of equality legislation and about 100 other measures.

**Pray:** that this bill will be debated wisely and not be pushed through without due consideration. (Pr.21:30)

**More:** <http://www.ccfon.org/view.php?id=906>

### ■ Faith groups to advise on Government policy, says minister

Faith groups are to be given a key role in shaping Government policies, a senior minister has pledged. Communities Secretary, John Denham, admitted that the Government had failed to include the voice of faith groups in the past but said he now vowed to include them in the decision-making process. The minister, who has described himself as a 'secular humanist', said: 'I don't like the strand of secularism that says that faith is inherently a bad thing to have and should be kept out of public life'. He also said that faiths such as Islam should not be singled out for special favours. Mr Denham revealed that a new panel of religious experts has been set up to help advise the Government on public policy decisions. But the move has been attacked by secularists who view it as a worrying development.

**Pray:** for Government ministers that they will both listen to and act upon the advice of faith groups. (Pr.19:20)

**More:** <http://www.christian.org.uk/news/faith-groups-to-advise-on-govt-policy-says-minister/>

### ■ Lesbian women make better parents, claims Government official

Lesbians make better parents than heterosexual couples, a senior Government parenting adviser has stated. But critics have hit back saying children need fathers. They also point to a wealth of studies which say children do best when raised by their married biological parents. Stephen Scott, the Director of Research at the National Academy for Parenting Practitioners, pointed to research supporting his claim that lesbians make better parents. The research claims that same-sex couples made good parents because they could never accidentally conceive but instead they have to actively choose to adopt or find a sperm donor. But Ann Widdecombe MP criticised the research warning that it 'contradicts every other

Government study that has ever been done'. She said: 'These studies, which are quoted so often by the Government and the opposition, clearly show that children do better when they have both a mother and a father figure'.

**Pray:** that such spurious comments would have no place in Government thinking and that the traditional family should be positively promoted. (Lev.19:3)

**More:** <http://www.christian.org.uk/news/lesbian-women-make-better-parents-claims-govt-official/>

#### ■ UK children trafficked to paedophile parties

Children as young as ten are being moved around the UK and sexually abused at parties organised by paedophiles, according to a new report by Barnardo's. The report, 'Whose Child Now?' revealed that organised gangs may be sexually exploiting as many as 10,000 children each year. One in six of these children is being trafficked into the country from abroad. Author of the report Lisa Stacey said: 'We know of children being moved from north-east England to London, or from Yorkshire to London or Manchester.' Last month it was revealed that British girls as young as twelve are being sold for sex at up to £50,000 a time. In September an academic called for the age of consent to be lowered from 16 to 13 on a BBC Radio 4 programme. Professor John Spencer, professor of law at Selwyn College, Cambridge, suggested that since many under-16s were having sex anyway, the law should be changed.

**Pray:** that Prof Spencer's ideas would be ignored and that the authorities would be enabled to protect and set free these vulnerable youngsters. (Ps.12:5)

**More:** <http://www.christian.org.uk/news/uk-children-trafficked-to-paedophile-parties/>

#### ■ Church leaders call for action on climate change

Church leaders including the Archbishop of Canterbury Dr Rowan Williams and the Catholic Archbishop of Westminster Vincent Nichols are to lead an ecumenical service on 5 December to urge political leaders meeting in Copenhagen to 'Act now on climate change'. At least 3,000 Christians are expected to attend, carrying an array of colourful banners and dressed in blue. They will be travelling from their parishes around the country in special trains and coaches. After the service some church leaders and the congregation will join tens of thousands of people marching to form a blue wave around the Houses of Parliament. Some church leaders and heads of Christian agencies will be at the head of the main Stop Climate Chaos March, setting off from Grosvenor Square to Westminster around 1pm. The keynote address at the service will be given by Dr Rowan Williams. The churches are calling on the UK Government to take a leading role in securing a fair, ambitious and binding climate deal in Copenhagen. (See Prayer Alert 4309, 4209)

**Pray:** that this protest would help challenge our Government to push for a binding deal in Copenhagen. (Dt.16:19-20)

**More:** <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/church.leaders.call.for.action.on.climate.change/24650.htm>

#### ■ Use cash not credit cards this Christmas, says Church

Leave your credit cards at home and use cash when you are Christmas shopping if you want to stick to your budget - that's the advice from Dr John Preston, the Church of England's National Stewardship Officer. It's just one of many money-saving tips to be found in three new videocasts available on the Church of England website. They are being released alongside a budgeting spreadsheet to help people enjoy Christmas without getting into debt. The Wishing You an Affordable Christmas videocasts will be available to view at [www.cofe.anglican.org/debt/christmas](http://www.cofe.anglican.org/debt/christmas). Part one was released on Monday and parts two and three will be available in coming days. The Affordable Christmas Planner is also available from the web page, designed to help people set a budget of what they can afford, and then compare their budget with the total cost of presents, food and drink, parties, travel, and other expenses.

**Pray:** for God's help for people who find the commercial pressure exerted by the shops at Christmas difficult to resist. (Mt.26:41)

**More:** <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/use.cash.not.credit.cards.this.christmas.says.church/24639.htm>

#### ■ Join the campaign – Christmas starts with Christ

Last January churchgoers were dismayed by atheistic bus adverts proclaiming that 'There's probably no God'. They will be encouraged to hear that recent research by Theos reveals that 85% of people agree that 'Christmas should be called Christmas because we are still a Christian country'. But, research also shows that only 12% of adults know the facts of the Christmas story in any detail – the figure dropping to just 7% amongst 18-24 year olds. So, to keep Christmas focused on Christ, we need to constantly tell the story of his birth in ways which engage positively with the public. Churches of all denominations are therefore being urged to participate in an advertising campaign: 'Christmas Starts with Christ'. Posters on bus shelters feature a painting by the renowned artist, Andrew Gadd, depicting the traditional nativity scene in a modern day equivalent of a stable – a bus shelter.

**Pray:** that the Christmas story may be told for all to hear. (Ps.49:1-2)

**More:** <http://www.anglican-mainstream.net/?p=18199>

## EUROPE

#### ■ EU appointments: President of the EU Council and High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

EU leaders have chosen Belgian Prime Minister Herman Van Rompuy to be the first President of the European Council, while UK trade commissioner Baroness Catherine Ashton will become the bloc's Foreign Affairs chief. Welcoming the decision on Thursday evening Swedish leader Fredrik Reinfeldt said: 'What we were seeking were people to create continuity' and 'to be the voice and face of Europe throughout the world.' The recent backroom dealing has both been very

difficult and left the EU open to criticism about the lack of democracy in its decision-making process. After weeks of speculation and recriminations over a lack of transparency, last night the 27 EU leaders in Brussels unanimously chose the Belgian Prime Minister as the new permanent President of the European Council and Baroness Ashton as High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. The new roles are designed to increase the EU's visibility on the world stage and help co-ordinate its work back home. Herman Van Rompuy, is reported to be a devout Christian and to go on retreat once a month.

**Pray:** for those appointed and the European Council that God would anoint them with wise leadership to serve the community. (Ro.13:3-4)

**More:** <http://euobserver.com/9/29024>

## WORLDWIDE

### ■ Mexico: Leaders call for UN help in Ciudad Juarez

Local leaders in Ciudad Juarez - Mexico's most violent city - have asked for UN peacekeepers to help stem the alarming bloodshed. Despite the deployment of 40,000 soldiers in June an estimated 6,476 people have been killed this year in drug-related crimes. The failure of federal and local authorities in staunching the bloodshed prompted local business leaders to petition the United Nations for help to end the wave of extortion, kidnapping and murders. The northern state of Chihuahua, of which Ciudad Juarez is the largest city, is at the heart of suspected drug-related violence that has left 14,000 dead since the end of 2006. President Felipe Calderon deployed 50,000 security forces across the country after he took office three years ago, in a controversial crackdown that failed to stem violence from powerful drug cartels. (See Prayer Alert 1109 & 2509) Beheadings, attacks on police, and shootings in clubs and restaurants are a daily occurrence. Cartels have become so powerful that they effectively control some parts of the country. Source: Bloomberg & BBC

**Pray:** for God to intervene and give His compassion to the UN enabling them to bring peace once again to Mexico and her borders. (Is.30:17-19)

**More:** [http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5h019NY-2l\\_ksBv9zGfJ4df1pvcIQ](http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5h019NY-2l_ksBv9zGfJ4df1pvcIQ)

### ■ Eritrea: Conditions worsen for Christians

Eritrea is notorious for its arbitrary arrests of Christians. A Government campaign against churches has an estimated 3,000 Christians jailed in a military prison camp because they worship outside the Orthodox Catholic and Lutheran churches. Others are under house arrest, one of whom is Pastor Hewelde Hailom, the founding elder of Asmara Full Gospel Church (FGC). The conditions he faces have deteriorated. Sources say Pastor Hailom's sister who has been taking care of him at home has been ordered to leave. He is now provided with prison food - a piece of bread and a cup of tea in the morning and evening, and the insufficient food is aggravating the Pastor's stomach ulcer. Security forces arrested another FGC pastor on November 7, bringing the number to 11 Christians arrested since an October 14 raid on Pastor Hailom's house. The circumstances surrounding the arrest are unknown. For a powerful one minute video urging action for Eritrean Christians go to:- <http://www.releaseinternational.org/pages/take-action/current-campaign/viral.php>

**Pray:** that the Government will take the right action to obtain release of His people and protect the community against illegal activity.

**More:** <http://spiritualcourage.wordpress.com/2009/11/17/house-arrest-conditions-worsen-for-eritrean-pastor/>

### ■ Columbia: Kogi Christians detained

Thirteen adult Kogi Christians and three infants were detained by the Gonawindua Tayrona authorities. Two of the infants are seriously ill. The organization is now threatening to take them into a more remote part of the reserve to force them to convert back to traditional religious practices. This is in direct contravention of the Colombian and international law. Christians are urgently calling on the Colombian Government to extend its protection to this people group and to ensure that their basic rights are protected. Should the Gonawindua organization remove the detainees to a more remote part of the reserve it will be extremely difficult to intervene. Also this organization has threatened to detain all Christian members of the Kogi community in the same way, affecting up to 100 men and women as well as their children.

**Pray:** for an abrupt end to injustice and all corruption of Godly values in Iran. (Is.42:1)

### ■ Iran: Three more journalists arrested

Three more journalists were arrested five months after the start of the demonstrations against President Ahmadinejad's re election. Those who defend the 34 detained journalists and bloggers in Iran are being subjected to increased intimidation by the intelligence service. It is feared that by brutality, intimidation and censorship the authorities will eventually rid Iran of all independent journalists and bloggers who have to choose between saying nothing, speaking out (and being jailed), or fleeing the country. The latest to be arrested is Ako Kurdnasab of Karfto (a weekly newspaper closed by the authorities last year) detained on 12 November after taking part in a demonstration against a young political prisoner's execution - Mazadk Ali Nazari the editor of the 'Journalism for Peace' website who lives on his own in Tehran managed to phone his family to say he had been arrested but could not say where he was being held. Around 10 people who took part in a 4 November demonstrations have still not returned home. Rahim Gholami a journalist who writes for several local newspapers was recently sentenced to a year in prison on a charge of anti-government publicity.

**Pray:** for an abrupt end to injustice and all corruption of Godly values in Iran. (Is.42:1)

**More:** [http://www.rsf.org/spip.php?page=article&id\\_article=35006](http://www.rsf.org/spip.php?page=article&id_article=35006)

#### ■ Israel: Boycott on produce

The Palestinian Authority has called on the public to boycott several large supermarket chains in the West Bank that carry Israeli products. The decision targets Ramallah markets in an attempt to pressure the stores to discontinue the sale of fruits and vegetables grown and processed in Israeli settlements in the West Bank. Palestinian authorities say customers are not aware that some products are produced in Israeli settlements. As a result the Palestinian ministry of economy will aggressively impose an existing law that criminalises trading in settlement products. Israeli settlement products currently hold 15 per cent of the Palestinian market, if the decision is implemented it will provide the opportunity to improve Palestinians products and solve the unemployment problem.

**Pray:** for God's solutions and provision to end the hostilities surrounding unemployment, poverty, housing and border issues. (Ps.68.9-10))

**More:** <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2009/11/2009111910925807378.html>

#### ■ Sudan: 'Conditionally' accept courts for Darfur crimes

The Sudanese government softened its resistance to the African Union proposal of establishing a hybrid court to try the Darfur war crime suspects, saying it may accept it under certain conditions. South African president Thabo Mbeki and Sudanese advisors called for the 'hybrid Criminal Court to exercise jurisdiction over individuals bearing responsibility for the gravest crimes committed during the Darfur conflict. The Hybrid Criminal Chamber would include panels of Sudanese and other nationalities. Following a meeting of the Peace and Security Council last month, Mbeki told reporters this week that Khartoum accepted a hybrid court but it would need further discussions with the African Union.

**Pray:** for God to bring about just decisions and a righteous way forward. (2Sa.22:31-32)

**More:** <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article33172>

#### ■ Global: December festival of Ashura

During this Shiite festival Christians are being asked to pray God's richest blessing on this people group. From December 17 to 26 of this year Shiite Muslims around the world will remember a bloody mass murder that took place over a thousand years ago. They will remember this by cutting themselves with knives and marching through the streets. To help you and your churches pray for Shiite Muslims to come to Christ go to: <http://shbride.blogspot.com>

**Pray:** for God's richest blessing upon His lost sheep. (Re.19:7-9)

## PRAISE REPORTS

#### ■ Iran: Freed after 259 days in prison

A bulletin received from Elam Ministries on Wednesday morning reported that Maryam and Marzieh were released that morning - November 18th at 3:30pm local time without bail. Halleluia! Praise God for answered prayers. Sam Yeghnazar the Director of Elam Ministries said 'We are rejoicing that Maryam and Marzieh have been set free from prison in Iran today! Praise the Lord! They have greatly inspired us all. Their love for the Lord Jesus and their faithfulness to God has been an amazing testimony.' However, they may yet have to face a court hearing and still need our prayers. 'Words are not enough to express our gratitude to the Lord and to His people who have prayed and worked for our release,' they said. Maryam and Marzieh were arrested because of their Christian faith on March 5, 2009. (See Prayer Alert 4209 & 1609 ) Their health has suffered while in prison but they are doing as well as could be expected, and are rejoicing in the Lord's faithfulness to them.

**Praise:** Pray they will continue to know the Lord's presence as they adjust to normal life, are restored to full health and know the Spirit's wisdom in all future activities. (Ps.71:14-15)

**More:** <http://www.breakingchristiannews.com/index.php>

#### ■ Thought for Day complaints rejected

The BBC's governing body has rejected a series of complaints about a ban on non-religious contributors to the Radio 4 Today programme's Thought for the Day. The BBC Trust said on Wednesday that only allowing religious contributors on the slot did not breach editorial guidelines on impartiality. But it ruled that Thought for the Day must comply with requirements of 'due impartiality' and that any future complaints on broadcasts during the slot would be judged on a 'case-by-case basis'. The ruling comes after 11 complaints about Thought for the Day and one complaint about BBC editorial policy on non-religious programming. Complainants objected to a policy of not inviting atheists, secularists or humanists to contribute as speakers. A statement from the trust said it considered that it was a matter for the BBC executive board as to whether the remit of Thought for the Day should remain the same or be changed in the future. (See Prayer Alert 3909 & 2909)

**Praise:** God for answered prayer. Pray that the BBC will remember that the Christian faith is foundational and central to its ethos. (Tim.2:16)

**More:** <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/media/tv-radio/thought-for-day-complaints-rejected-1822411.html>

## PRAYER FORUM OF BRITISH ISLES & IRELAND

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