

Persecution Watch

China pastor on trial over Bibles

A leader in China's underground church stood trial July 7 on charges of operating an illegal business. Last year, pastor Cai Zhouhua, who oversees six house churches, was detained with 200,000 copies of unauthorized Bibles, the Associated Press (AP) reported. Cai was arrested with his wife and two relatives in what Christian human rights groups say is an ongoing crackdown on underground churches. No verdict has been handed down, and Cai's lawyer, Gao Zhisheng, said he is not optimistic about the outcome, BBC News reported. Though Gao said the Bibles were to be given away for free, the authorities "are always using economics as a pretext to deal with religious and political issues," BBC News reported. Only the state-sanctioned church is authorized to publish Bibles in China, and they are produced in controlled numbers and cannot be sold in ordinary bookstores, the AP said.

Missionaries' Killers Sentenced to Life in Prison

The death sentence of a Hindu extremist who killed Australian missionary Graham Staines and his two sons six years ago has been reduced to life in prison. In June, the high court of Orissa State ordered life imprisonment for Dara Singh, Reuters reported. The court also acquitted 11 people sentenced to a life term by a lower court for burning alive Staines and his sons in a remote village in the state in 1999. Staines' widow, Gladys, and her daughter, Esther, stayed in India after the deaths and opened the Graham Staines Memorial Hospital for lepers in 2004, but have since returned to Australia. Gladys Staines said she had forgiven the killers.

Pastors forced to Apologize for Statements About Islam

Australian pastors Daniel Scott and Daniel Nalliah, both of Catch the Fire Ministries Inc., were ordered June 22 to apologize for comments they made last year that a Muslim group said disparaged Islam. Last December the two were found guilty of breaching the Victorian Racial and Religious Tolerance Act after the Islamic Council of Victoria accused the pair of making derogatory comments about Islam on their Web site and in a seminar, Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) reported. They were then ordered in June to apologize to the council, place a notice on their Web site giving the judges' verdict and take out a newspaper ad for two weeks stating that they have been found guilty of inciting religious hatred. They were also banned from speaking about Islam anywhere in Australia. The pastors have taken out a "staying order" against the verdict and are appealing to the Supreme Court, CSW said. They also have launched a fundraising campaign to help cover their legal fees, arguing that the case is a fight to preserve religious freedom in Australia.