

CHINA: How China uses anti-refugee sentiment

By Massimo Introvigne



The Korea Times (29.10.2018) – <https://bit.ly/20ZEXzX> – Chinese authorities are undertaking an extensive fake news campaign in Korea to persuade local authorities to deport Chinese members of the Church of Almighty God who have come here to escape religious persecution.

With the Ministry of Justice looking to revise the Refugee Act to prevent fake asylum seekers in the wake of the outcry over the arrival this year of around 500 Yemeni refugees, mostly men, China is doing what it can to portray Chinese asylum seekers here as bogus.

The Chinese refugees in question are from the Church of Almighty God (CAG), a new Christian religious movement which the government has singled out for suppression, and are among several thousand who have escaped overseas and sought asylum in democratic countries.

Several NGOs have submitted evidence to the Human Rights

Council of the United Nations that thousands of CAG members have been arrested for the sole reason of belonging to the church. Many of them have been tortured and more than 30 died while in custody in suspicious circumstances.

Scholars have also documented that accusations of crimes allegedly committed by the CAG are in fact fabricated by Chinese propaganda.

These bullying tactics are stark explanation for the abysmal reputation China has internationally for its handling of political and religious dissidents.

Confidential Chinese Communist Party (CCP) documents obtained and published by Bitter Winter, the online publication of my NGO, the Center for Studies on New Religions, show that the campaign of fake news also extends to South Korea.

An internal CCP document dated July 3, 2015, which we published in Bitter Winter, explicitly required officials throughout China to investigate members of both the Falun Gong religion and the CAG who had left the country, obtain a comprehensive grasp of their basic situation (including the activities they are engaged in overseas, who their relatives in China are and what they do, and so on), conduct an analysis on a person-by-person basis, and formulate a special work plan for each person.

At first, the attempts to force believers back home were quite thuggish. For example, back in May 2016, a woman arrived in

Korea with CCP agents and tried to kidnap her husband, who had joined CAG. The husband was lured to a hotel where his passport and mobile phone were taken. He was held for a while against his will but managed to escape.

After this failure, the strategy appeared to change. The woman returned twice to Korea and held public protests with the Korean representative of a local pro-CCP magazine.

In 2017, the wife of another CAG member who had fled to South Korea was ordered by the political commissar of the Provincial Public Security Department in Heilongjiang, where she lived, to join the CAG community in South Korea and "follow his instructions." Unwilling to do this, she claimed to be suffering from a serious heart disease and fled her home together with her parents.

On Nov. 8, last year, the magazine representative brought the relatives of five CAG members to South Korea and held demonstrations outside the court in Jeju, the Seoul Immigration Office, and at CAG's own premises. The family members were required to hold a banner reading "My relative is not a refugee," and request that the court dismiss the asylum bids.

At this time, one of the Chinese family members brought to Korea realized that something was wrong and sought the cooperation of Korean authorities to meet with his relative. He discovered far from having been "kidnapped and abused" by the church as the CCP had claimed, his relative was finally enjoying the freedom of belief and was very happy to be

allowed to remain in Korea.

Now, in the wake of the protests against the refugees from Yemen, China has upped its game. We have learned that the Chinese Ministry of State Security recently pressured the relatives of many CAG members now in Korea to film videos and write joint letters “seeking missing family members.”

Nobody in China would believe such letters and videos to be spontaneous and genuine, but they are used in Korea to persuade the authorities to deport the CAG asylum seekers. But, ironically, in Korea, such gestures risk being taken at face value.

Obviously, the Chinese plan is being implemented in Korea to take advantage of a new climate that is generally unfavorable to refugees.

It is something that Koreans, despite the need to maintain good political, economic and cultural relations with China, for the simple reason that it violates their sovereign values as a modern democracy that respects freedom of religion and individual human rights.

Massimo Introvigne is a sociologist and the founding director of the Center for Studies on New Religions.

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UKRAINE: Report on infringement of religious liberty under Ukrainian rebels

Terror in occupied territories: Rights advocates publish instances of persecution of churches

Read the report [here](#).



RISU (24.10.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2Dh8I94> (en) / <https://bit.ly/2ETCa6U> (ru) – The Institute for Religious Liberty presented a report, “Freedom of religious confession in the crosshairs: Russian terror in occupied territories of eastern Ukraine.”

In it the rights advocates cite numerous instances of religious persecutions in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, which are committed by Russian-supported militants.

The presentation of the report was held on 24 October 2018 in the press center of Ukrinform in Kiev, with the participation of representatives of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kiev Patriarchate, the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches of Evangelical Christians-Baptists, the Ukrainian Church of Christians of Evangelical Faith, the Ukrainian Christian Evangelical Church, the Association of Jewish Religious Organizations of Ukraine, and the Ecclesiastical Board of Muslims of Ukraine.

The role of the international community is key in putting a

stop to current persecutions against believers and churches, which are being committed by the occupying authority in the east of Ukraine. This was why on the eve of the press conference, religious leaders and experts of the IRL conducted a separate presentation of the report for representatives of diplomatic representations and foreign missions.

“There are no doubts of the fact that the religious factor was used as one of the instruments of the hybrid war by Russia against Ukraine, in which an essential role is being played by false propaganda and destabilization of society on the basis of religious, national, and linguistic identity. With the help of provocations of schisms and social rifts, Russian authorities have prepared the ground for further military intervention and occupation,” the authors of the report conclude.

Evangelical Christians, Orthodox parishes of the Kiev patriarchate, Greek Catholics, and Jehovah’s Witnesses are the main targets of religious persecution on the part of occupation authorities who are supported by Russia.

At the same time, so-called “laws” of the self-proclaimed republics in the sphere of religious activity and combating extremism actually are being exploited for concealing under a cover of “legality” those religiously motivated crimes that militants are committing against the civilian population. Thus in the territories of Donesk and Luhansk oblasts, the occupation authorities are implementing the same religious policy as is also in Russia itself.

Participants of the presentation noted that the response of the international community to religious persecutions, which the occupation authority in the east of Ukraine is exercising, should be a comprehensive and impartial international monitoring of freedom of religious confession. And also, as a consequence, there should be the documentation and public disclosure of violations and crimes on the grounds of religion in the territories of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts that are not controlled by the Ukrainian government, including instances of requiring religious societies to reregister and the subsequent religious persecutions for activity “without registration,” and also baseless accusations of extremist activity.

The authors of the report also recommend to the Office of the High Commissioner of the United Nations for Human Rights that it prepare a separate report on the basis of results of the work of the Monitoring Mission of the U.N. regarding the situation concerning the right to freedom of religion or convictions in the territories of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts that are not controlled by the Ukrainian government.

The full text of the report is available in English at:

<http://www.irf.in.ua/files/publications/2018.10.24-IRF-Report-ENG.pdf>

Russian version:

<http://irf.in.ua/files/publications/2018.10.24-IRF-Report-RUS.pdf>

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CHINA: Church of Almighty God member Tian Ji'an dies after brutal beating by Chinese communist police



Tian Ji'an, male, born 27 September 1953, resident of Huafeng Township, Shizhu County, Chongqing Municipality, joined The Church of Almighty God (CAG) on 8 June 2002. On 5 June 2006, he was arrested and brutally beaten by the Chinese Communist police. As a result, Tian suffered from a lacerated lumbar vertebra and a fractured cranium

with a bone fragment recessed into his brain. Hardened blood coagulation led to neurological disorders and impaired reasoning. Tian was left unable to work. After more than nine years of affliction, Tian died on 2 April 2016, at the age of 63.

Arrested and beaten

At 16h00 on 5 June 2006, Tian's wife, Jin Zhenghua, and two other Christians were preaching the gospel to four potential converts in their own house when the front door was suddenly rammed open. Led by Captain Sun Jianming, Director Liu Zhikui, and Secretary Zhou Shicai of the National Security Brigade, Shizhu County, Chongqing Municipality, more than a dozen policemen entered the house, placed the Christians under control, and beat Jin Zhenghua viciously. The police pressed Tian on the floor, handcuffed him behind his back and violently punched and kicked him. A policeman stepped and treaded hard on Tian's back and shoulders. Another policeman stomped hard on Tian's lower back and waist while a third policeman stepped on his head. Other plainclothes policemen in leather shoes kicked Tian's body hard. They yelled as they were beating him, "Kill him! Dammit, kill him...". Tian shrieked in pain throughout the ordeal, powerless to resist. More than a dozen policemen kept on battering him for more than an hour. Tian Ji'an was beaten unconscious on the spot. He was close to death. His face was ashen and his lips blue.

After the beating, Zhou Shicai and two other policemen ransacked the house and seized four spiritual books, a pack of spiritual compact discs, and other items. The police took Tian, Jin Zhenghua, and the others into police cars and escorted them to the Shizhu County National Security Brigade for interrogation. That night, seeing that Tian was seriously wounded and fearing that he might die at the National Security Brigade, the police sent him home. On the third day after returning home, Tian felt his condition was worsening: he lost a lot of weight, felt it hard to swallow anything, or sleep; he coughed and urinated with thin blood; and even became incontinent. He was too weak to do anything.

A life in pain

On 5 July, Tian's wife, Jin Zhenghua, was sentenced to one-year imprisonment on the charge of "disturbing public order," serving her sentence outside prison. A month later, when she went home to dress Tian's wounds with medicinal cream, she saw that his body was covered with bruises as a result of the police's beatings. There was a fist-sized dented mark on his waist and a large cyst on his shoulder. On his head, there were two large hairless spots and more than a dozen of smaller-sized hairless spots. He looked dazed and his speech was incoherent and hesitant. With the help of friends, Tian's wife scraped together 1,000 RMB and took Tian to the Shizhu County Hospital. Upon examination by the physician, it was discovered that Tian was suffering from many serious internal injuries. Blood stasis in his brain had pressed the nerves and blocked the cerebral blood vessels which led to a blood clot. The beatings had left Tian with a lacerated lumbar vertebra and fractured cranium with a bone fragment the size of a thumb

being recessed into the brain. The blockage resulted from hardened blood coagulation and led to neurological disorders and aberrant reasoning. The doctor said, "The part of the skull where the bone fragment is recessed in the brain is inoperable. To operate on it involves life-threatening risks. Without surgery, he can only live for six to seven years at most."

Since the beating, Tian experienced severe pain in his spine, chest, and brain. He lost his ability to work and exhibited neurological disorders and impaired reasoning. Even when visiting his own farming land, he was unable to recognize where he was or properly care for his crops.

Because of their poor economic situation, Tian's family couldn't afford medical treatment and controlled his condition with medicine alone. His condition grew increasingly worse. Tian completely lost ability to take care of himself.

On 2 April 2016, Tian Ji'an passed away.

Supporting documents

Supporting document 1: Identity card



Translation:

Front :

Name: Tian Ji'an	
Gender: Male	Ethnicity: Han
Photo	
Date of Birth: 09/27/1953	
Address: 390 Huafeng Group, Huafeng Village, Nanbin Town, Shizhu County, Chongqing City	
ID No.: 5 1 3 5 2 1 1 9 5 3 0 9 2 7 0 5 5 7	

Back

	THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA IDENTITY CARD
Issued by: Public Security Bureau (PSB) of Shizhu Tujia Autonomous County	
Valid Period: 08/19/2006-Permanent	

Supporting document 2: Certificate of disability



Translation:

<p>Certificate of Disability</p> <p>Tian Ji'an is intellectually disabled, with certificate number: 51352119530927055753.</p> <p>We hereby issue this certificate.</p> <p>China Disabled Persons' Federation (seal)</p> <p>Date of issue: August 3, 2010</p> <p>Validity Period: 10 years</p>	<p>Photograph of the holder</p>
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Supporting document 3: Medical certificate (inference) of death

居民死亡医学证明(推断)书

行政区划代码□□□□□□ 编号: □□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

第二联 公安部门保存	死者姓名	田吉安	性别	男	民族	汉	国家或地区	中国	年龄	62	
	身份证件类别	身份证	证件号码	513521195109270557	常住地址	万源镇万年社区万年组					
	出生日期	1951年9月27日	死亡日期	2016年4月27日	死亡地点	万源镇万年社区万年组					
	死亡原因	猝死		家属姓名	田永发	联系电话	13594909732				
	家庭住址	万源镇万年社区万年组		医师	田	民警					
	医疗卫生机构盖章	[Redacted]		派出所意见(盖章)							
	医疗卫生机构日期	2016年1月5日		年 月 日							
	注: ①死者家属持此联到公安机关办理户籍注销手续; ②无医师及民警签字、医疗卫生机构及派出所盖章无效。										

Translation:

Medical certificate (inference) of death

Administrative Area Code:

Certificate Number:

Name	Tian Ji'an	Gender	Male	Ethnicity	Han	Country / Region	China	Age	62
Type of ID	ID Card	ID Number	513521195309270557		Addresses	Huafeng Group, Huafeng Village, Wan'an Street			
Date of Birth	September 27, 1953	Date of Death	April 2, 2016		Place of Death	Huafeng Group, Huafeng Village, Wan'an Street			
Cause of Death	Severe Pneumonia		Name of the family member		Tian Yongfa	Phone Number	13594909733		
Address or Workplace of the family member of the deceased	Huafeng Group, Huafeng Village, Wan'an Street		Physician's Signature		Wang	Police Officer's Signature			
Medical and Health Institution (Stamp) Date: January 3, 2017					Comments by the Police Station (Stamp) Date:				

Note:

1. The family members of the deceased shall go through the formalities of household registration cancellation in public security bureau with this medical certificate of death.
2. This medical certificate of death is invalid without the signatures of the doctor and police as well as the official seals of the medical and health organization and local police station.

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SUDAN: Sudan releases 13 Christians arrested in Darfur after torture, threats

One church member said to be in critical condition.

Morning Star News (23.10.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2zhJqn2> – After torturing them and threatening to charge them with serious crimes, authorities in Sudan have released 13 Christians arrested in the Darfur Region, sources said.

Personnel from Sudan's National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) released 12 of the Christians by Sunday (Oct. 21) and freed church leader Tajaldin Idriss Yousif on Monday, all without charges, but they threatened to charge the native Darfur evangelist and others with apostasy, public disturbance and crimes against the state, sources said.

"All of them were said to be tortured by NISS and are in bad shape," a source said. "One of them is said to be in critical condition owing to torture. He is said to have been vomiting and bleeding. He was rushed to a hospital, but he was not attended to by the physicians in that hospital."

The 13 Christians from four different house churches were worshipping together on Oct. 10 in Nyala, capital of South Darfur state in western Sudan's Darfur Region, when NISS officers disrupted the service and arrested them, sources said.

NISS authorities did not give any reason for the arrests, but sources said they are targeting converts from Islam from Darfur and, in south-eastern Sudan, South Kordofan state. Three of the Christians were said to be from the Nuba Mountains area in the country's southeast.

The Christians were not taken to any court of law during their nearly two weeks of jail and interrogation.

Along with team leader Yousif, arrested were members of his church Alfadil Ismail Alnil, Ahmed Mohammed Hassan, Neseraldin Osman, Shemen Ahmed Shemen and Abubaker Biri.

Other Christians arrested were identified only as Kamal, Abdullah, Mutasim, Mujahid, El Sadik Afendi, Bolis Suliman and Abdel Maseh. NISS, widely known as a notorious agency staffed by hard-line Islamists, may hold people in detention for up to four and a half months without charges.

Following the secession of South Sudan in 2011, Sudan President Omar al-Bashir vowed to adopt a stricter version of sharia (Islamic law) and recognize only Islamic culture and the Arabic language. Church leaders said Sudanese authorities have demolished or confiscated churches and limited Christian

literature on the pretext that most Christians have left the country following South Sudan's secession.

The Sudanese Minister of Guidance and Endowments announced in April 2013 that no new licenses would be granted for building new churches in Sudan, citing a decrease in the South Sudanese population.

Sudan since 2012 has expelled foreign Christians and bulldozed church buildings on the pretext that they belonged to South Sudanese. Besides raiding Christian bookstores and arresting Christians, authorities threatened to kill South Sudanese Christians who do not leave or cooperate with them in their effort to find other Christians.

Sudan fought a civil war with the south Sudanese from 1983 to 2005, and in June 2011, shortly before the secession of South Sudan the following month, the government began fighting a rebel group in the Nuba Mountains that has its roots in South Sudan.

Due to its treatment of Christians and other human rights violations, Sudan has been designated a Country of Particular Concern by the U.S. State Department since 1999.

Sudan ranked fourth on Christian support organization Open Doors' 2018 World Watch List of countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian.

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PAKISTAN: Pakistani Christian Asia Bibi has death penalty conviction overturned

By Sophia Saifi and James Griffiths

CNN (31.10.2018) – <https://cnn.it/2JsxC5V> – Pakistan's Supreme Court has acquitted a Christian woman who has been on death row for almost eight years on blasphemy charges.

Asia Bibi, a mother of five from Punjab province, was convicted of blasphemy in 2010 and sentenced to hang after she was accused of defiling the name of the Prophet Muhammed

during an argument the year before with Muslim colleagues.

The workers had refused to drink from a bucket of water Asia Bibi had touched because she was not Muslim. At the time, Asia Bibi said the case was a matter of women who didn't like her "taking revenge."

She won her appeal against the conviction and subsequent death sentence on Wednesday.

The court quoted Shakespeare's "King Lear" in its ruling, saying Asia Bibi appeared to have been "more sinned against than sinning."

"Even if there was some grain of truth in the allegations leveled in this case against the appellant still the glaring contradictions in the evidence of the prosecution highlighted above clearly show that the truth in this case had been mixed with a lot which was untrue," the ruling said.

David Curry, CEO of Open Doors USA, an organization that lobbies on behalf of Christian minorities, said in a statement that "we are breathing a sigh of relief today."

"These charges stemmed from her Christian identity as well as false accusations against her," he said. "We are hopeful that Pakistan will now take additional steps to offer religious freedom and basic human rights throughout the country."

Islamist movement Tehreek-e Labbaik had previously vowed to take to the streets if Bibi was released, and protests broke out in Islamabad and Lahore soon after the ruling was announced.

Within hours, the protests were large enough that government officials in the cities were urging people to stay inside and avoid adding to the chaos.

Controversial law

Under the Pakistan penal code, the offense of blasphemy is punishable by death or life imprisonment. Widely criticized by international human rights groups, the law has been used disproportionately against minority religious groups in the country and to go after journalists critical of the Pakistani religious establishment.

Her case has attracted widespread outrage and support from Christians worldwide, and condemnation from conservative Islamist groups in Pakistan, who have demanded the death penalty be carried out and threatened widespread protests in the event of her being freed.

The case has been extremely divisive within Pakistani society, splitting liberals and conservatives and leaving even many supporters afraid to speak out on Asia Bibi's behalf.

In 2011, senior politician Salman Taseer was shot dead by his

own bodyguard for voicing support for Asia Bibi and condemning the country's stringent blasphemy laws. His killer, Mumtaz Qadri, immediately surrendered to police and was later executed, becoming a martyr for many hardline Islamists.

At his funeral in 2016, thousands converged on the northern city of Rawalpindi as the Pakistani media was blacked out to prevent riots. Leaders of prominent Islamist political parties attended the funeral as supporters of Qadri carried signs in celebration of his "bravery."

Qadri's grave, in the capital city of Islamabad, has since become a shrine for those supporting Asia Bibi's death sentence.

Polarizing case

Amnesty International researcher Rabia Mehmood said that one of the reasons the Asia Bibi case has become so polarizing and controversial is the Pakistani government's failure to take "effective measures to curb the campaign of hate and violence incited by certain groups in the country following her conviction, in fact the state has shown immense tolerance for the narratives of hate."

She previously highlighted a tweet by a media organization linked to Tehreek-e Labbaik, which last year led to violent anti-blasphemy protests, warning the court to "think carefully before making any decision."

In May this year, Pakistan's Interior Minister, Ahsan Iqbal, was shot and wounded in his shoulder in an incident police

sources linked to the 2017 demonstrations.

“We can only hope that (the Asia Bibi case) becomes a watershed moment when it comes to blasphemy laws in Pakistan,” Mehmood said.

A verdict in Asia Bibi’s favor, sends “out a message of hope and will be a step in addressing human rights abuses, religiously motivated discrimination and violence targeted at religious minorities and even Muslims who are accused of committing blasphemy.”

CNN understands that at least two Western countries have offered Asia Bibi asylum once she has been released. Such a move will likely be greeted by mass protests by Islamist groups, which could turn violent.

It will also prove a key test for new Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan, who courted the country’s religious right during his successful campaign and has voiced support for blasphemy laws.

Khan should “take a stance against the intimidation of Tehreek-e-Labbaik, whose leaders have demanded that Khan fulfill his promises to make Pakistan an ‘Islamic state’,” Pakistani journalist Rafia Zakaria wrote for CNN last month.

“Instead of snubbing the international community, one that Islamists see as impinging on Pakistan’s move toward a full

theocracy, Khan could emphasize the need to embrace it and to work with it. In other words, Khan could choose to stand with the innocent woman instead of the rabid and bloodthirsty extremists.”

Religious battle

Outside of Pakistan, Asia Bibi’s case has become a rallying call for many Christians, particularly Catholics.

Catholic charity Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) led prayers for Asia Bibi’s release last week in the UK, at a ceremony attended by her husband Ashiq Masih and daughter, Eisham Ashiq.

“We have prayed 10 years now for our sister, Asia, and I am confident that our prayers will be heard, and the judgment will go in favor of Asia, her family and the entire Pakistani Christian community,” Father Emmanuel Yousaf said in a statement from the group.

The family met with Pope Francis at the Vatican in February, during which the Catholic leader reportedly described Asia Bibi as a “martyr,” according to ACN President Alessandro Mondeduro.

Francis’ predecessor, Pope Benedict, previously called for Asia Bibi’s release.

In her 2012 book "Get Me Out of Here," Asia Bibi included a letter to her family urging them not to "lose courage or faith in Jesus Christ."

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