

France / China: Will France hand over Chinese religious refugees to their persecutors? Appeal to President Macron

Mr President,

In France, 335 Chinese citizens who are members of The Church of Almighty God (CAG), one of the largest new religious movements in China, have been denied asylum. 156 of them have received a departure order and are now under threat of deportation. Only six applications for asylum have been accepted.

We have been studying the situation of the CAG for several years and we are morally sure that once they are extradited back to China, the CAG members living currently in France will be immediately arrested, tortured and detained for several years. *

The Chinese government considers the CAG « an heterodox belief system » (xie jiao), and article 300 of the Chinese Criminal Code provides prison terms of three to seven years or more for those who “use” a xie jiao – the jurisprudence interprets this as active membership in such movements. The CAG also denounced cases of torture and suspicious deaths in prisons.

The Chinese government accuses the CAG of several crimes but the scholars who have studied these issues have concluded that it is pure propaganda. A French brochure published by the DIDR (the Research and Documentation Branch of the Refugee Office) in 2016 echoed one of these accusations. Four well-known scholars wrote to the DIDR in February to ask for an update of

this brochure, published before the CAG started being the object of significant scientific research.

The issue is not purely academic but it is a human rights issue. It is about the protection of the freedom and the life of people who have already suffered a lot and who expect from France the protection they are entitled to.

We call upon you, Mr President, upon the relevant French authorities and upon all the friends of human rights to prohibit the handing over of victims to their persecutors.

Paris, 10 March 2018

Associations

CAP-LC Coordination des associations et des particuliers pour la liberté de conscience

HRWF Human Rights Without Frontiers/ Droits de l'homme sans frontières (Brussels)

EIFRF European Interreligious Forum for Religious Freedom

CESNUR Center for Studies on New Religions

ORLIR International Observatory of Religious Freedom of Refugees

Scholars

Marie Holzman – Sinologist, president of the « Association Solidarité Chine »

Bernadette Rigal-Cellard – University Bordeaux Montaigne

Massimo Introvigne – Center for Studies on New Religions,

Torino, Italy

Holly Folk – Western Washington University

Susan Palmer – University Concordia and McGill University,
Montreal

Jean-Luc Marin-Lagardette – Journalist and essayist

Press Release

CAP CL (12.03.2018) – On 9 March 2018, *CAP Liberté de Conscience* held a press conference in Paris about France's rejection of applications for asylum filed by Chinese refugees belonging to the Church of Almighty God.

Several scholars and representatives of human rights organizations gathered to expose the dramatic situation to which these asylum seekers will be submitted if they are sent back to China.

The well-known Prof. Massimo Introvigne, Director of the *Center for the Studies of New Religions* ([CESNUR](#)) presented the Church of Almighty God from a scholarly perspective, insisting on the fact that several university studies and expertise have demonstrated and confirmed that most of the accusations against this Church were false and were the product of Chinese propaganda.

[See the presentation](#)

Mr Willy Fautré, the director of *Human Rights Without Frontiers International* ([HRWF](#)) presented disturbing statistics about the number of asylum denials concerning members of the Church of Almighty God in European countries, and particularly in France.

[See the presentation](#)

Mrs Marie Holzman, a well-known sinologist, writer and journalist who is a specialist of contemporary China and Chinese dissidence, described the political roots of the persecution of religious minorities in China and explained the socio-psychological context which might have created some misunderstanding between the asylum seekers of this Church and French institutions.

Mr Eric Roux, President of the *European Interreligious Forum for Religious Freedom*, ([EIFRF](#)) analyzed the difficulties faced by asylum seekers in France and the way French authorities can mistakenly rely on outdated or false information when they take negative decisions.

[See his declaration](#)

The participants have also watched a video in which two members of the Church of Almighty God testified about the persecution, imprisonment and torture they were victims of in China.

Mr Thierry Valle, President of the *Coordination des Associations et des Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience, CAP LC*, and organizer of this event, announced that a [Call to President Macron](#) had been launched by a group of human rights organizations, scholars and other personalities to inform him about the tragic consequences entailed by the denial of asylum for the members of this Church in France and to urge him to make sure that they find a safe haven in France.

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