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## **The persecution of the Church of Almighty God raised in a side-event at the UN**



### ***The denial of religious freedom in China and the case of The Church of Almighty God exposed at the 37th session of the Human Rights Council at the United Nations***

CAP LC (05.03.2018) - <http://bit.ly/2FdMKRQ> - On March 1, 2018, during the 37th session of the Human Rights Council at the United Nations in Geneva, the Coordination of the Associations and Individuals for Freedom of Conscience (CAP LC) organized a side event on the denial of religious freedom in China and the case of The Church of Almighty God.

A panel of international scholars and human rights and freedom of religion experts discussed the dramatic situation of the members of The Church of Almighty God both in China, where they are severely persecuted, and in South Korea and Europe, where their requests for asylum are often denied. The event was introduced and coordinated by Mr Thierry Valle, the president of CAP LC.

Prof Massimo Introvigne, a well-known Italian scholar of new religious movements and managing director of CESNUR (Center for Studies on New Religions), presented the problems of religious liberty in China and introduced The Church of Almighty God, insisting on the fact that scholarly studies have confirmed that most of the accusations against this church found on the Internet are false. See his presentation at <https://tinyurl.com/ycn2zpcr>.

Ms Lea Perekrests, deputy director of HRWF (Human Rights Without Frontiers), presented both statistics and several case studies of members of The Church of Almighty God who have been arrested, incarcerated, and tortured in China. Some of them died in jail. See her presentation at <https://tinyurl.com/yazszc3u>.

Ms Rosita Šoryte, a former Lithuanian diplomat who is currently president of ORLIR (International Observatory of Religious Freedom of Refugees), insisted on the fact that being a member of The Church of Almighty God is enough for being arrested or worse in China. As a consequence, refugees of that Church have a reasonable fear of being persecuted in China and should be granted asylum. See her presentation at <https://tinyurl.com/ybtvul3q>.

Mr. Eric Roux, the president of EIFRF (European Interreligious Forum for Religion Freedom), discussed the difficulties of the Church's asylum seekers in France, and how French authorities often rely on outdated or false information when rendering their negative decisions. See his text at <https://tinyurl.com/y86p4wpj>.

Attendees also watched a short video with testimonies of three members of The Church of Almighty God who have been persecuted, jailed and tortured in China.

The Church of Almighty God is the largest Chinese new religious movement, with some three to four million members according to Chinese government's estimates. Its core belief is that Jesus Christ has returned as the incarnated Almighty God, this time in a female form as a Chinese woman. Its brand of Christianity is admittedly non-traditional, but this does not justify persecution in China, nor the lack of understanding for the well-justified refugee claims of its members in other countries.

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## **Ban on Islamic clothing in Xinjiang**

The Dui Hua Foundation's Human Rights Journal (27.02.2018) - <http://bit.ly/2g4qXRB> -



**Pedestrians walk past propaganda posters in Urumqi, Xinjiang. Image credit: The Uyghur American Association.**



In April 2011, France became the first Western country to ban the wearing of full-face veils in public. Similar national and regional bans in other secular Western countries soon followed, including in Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, Austria, and Canada. In Australia, there is ongoing legislative debate on the issue. Under these bans, anybody caught wearing a burka (a veil covering the full face and body) or a niqab (a veil covering the face except the eyes) in public can face fines and in some cases even imprisonment.

China is an officially atheist country. Civil servants and teachers across the country have long been prohibited from participating in religious activities or wearing religious clothing in public. In schools, students can be disqualified from scholarships, government subsidies, attending their graduation ceremonies and even face expulsion if found wearing religious clothing on campus. Around the same time when many in the West were busy passing anti-Islamic legislation, China was rocked by the Urumqi Riots of July 2009. Shortly after, the Xinjiang government began tightening restrictions on Islamic clothing on security grounds in the autonomous region, home to a Muslim population of over 13 million.

In enforcing restrictions on Islamic clothing, Chinese officials have denied that veils are a part of Uyghur culture and have attempted to stigmatize wearers as uneducated and sharing a propensity towards religious extremism. A Phoenix News Media article in 2014 reported that veils had historically never been part of Uyghur culture and only first gained traction in southern Xinjiang in the 1980s. While officials argue that veils are unique to uneducated Uyghurs who share a propensity towards extremism, they also blame religious extremism in Xinjiang as deriving from overseas forces – a line of argument frequently used to justify the forced deportations of overseas Uyghurs. A Uyghur researcher from the Xinjiang Academy of Social Science’s Institute of Sociology opined that the phenomenon of religious extremism was largely driven by the high and disproportionate rates of poverty and unemployment among the Uyghur population. As Xinjiang becomes increasingly dominated by a market-oriented economy run by the Han population, Uyghurs feel they face greater economic, cultural, religious, and political marginalization. The same Uyghur scholar stated that the local Uyghurs’ disillusionment

with their future in Xinjiang has led more Uyghur women to adopt the black veil and jilbab in place of their traditional headscarves, especially after the 2009 attacks and the ensuing incidents of ethnic unrest in the region.

Not only has Xinjiang outlawed the wearing of veils in public, but Dui Hua has also uncovered cases of individuals facing criminal charges for wearing veils in their own homes and for selling the banned clothing items.



**The “Five Abnormalities”**

The restrictions on Islamic clothing in Xinjiang first emerged in a number of localities in province’s southern region. However, after the 2009 Urumqi attacks, similar regulations were implemented in northern Xinjiang. Restrictions in the north remained relatively lax until 2013, when the Xinjiang government issued a

The “Five Abnormalities” in Karamay, Xinjiang August 2014. Image credit: ifeng.com



provisional-wide directive known as Document No.11. In a question and answer format, the document serves as a set of guidelines for local authorities and as a warning to the public on how “illegal religions and extremism” will be handled; there are three mentions of the ban on the jilbab in the text. The document does not specify what the punishment for wearing a jilbab is. It merely calls on officials to “resolutely handle” violators.

It should be noted that the translation of terms used to describe Islamic clothing under Chinese regulations differ from what is generally used in Islamic communities. In August 2014, authorities in Karamay, a city in northern Xinjiang, banned those wearing Islamic clothing and those with beards from boarding a public bus, including women and girls who were wearing what authorities call a jilbab. In Islamic communities, a jilbab refers to a long and loose-fitting garment or cloak designed to cover the entire body while leaving the face visible, whereas under Chinese regulations they use the word jilbab for what would be considered a burka or a niqab in most Islamic communities, which covers the body and the face. The first category of women shown in the “Five Abnormalities,” with veils covering their face and hair but not their eyes, are wearing what would be considered a niqab outside of China, but is called a jilbab in China.

The ban also prohibits young women from wearing what China calls a niqab, a garment that would generally be referred to as a hijab (a headscarf covering the hair and neck while leaving the face visible) in most Islamic communities.

As a provincial-wide directive, Document No.11 has been introduced in localities across Xinjiang. In Karamay, authorities have banned the jilbab, the niqab, all face-covering veils, as well as young men from growing “big beards.” The ban has also outlawed clothes featuring the Islamic star and crescent symbol.

Also in 2013, Xinjiang’s Ili Prefecture issued a provisional rule to proscribe the “five abnormalities” from all public spaces. The 2014 Ili Yearbook reported investigating nearly 1,000 violators and confiscating 7,364 jilbabs and garments with the star and crescent symbol. The following year, the capital of Urumqi followed suit. Instead of using the term jilbab, which opens room for debate about what constitutes a jilbab, the Urumqi regulation has added the more secular-sounding but even vaguer term – “face-masking robes” (蒙面罩袍) – to the Chinese legal lexicon, giving authorities even greater power to determine what garments can be considered illegal.

Effective April 1, 2017, Xinjiang’s “Anti-Extremism Regulations” claimed that the wearing of “face-masking robes” and “abnormal beards” symbolized extremism. The regulations also officially expanded the administrative ban to the entire autonomous region.

### ***Criminalization of Islamic Clothing***



**The five main categories of Islamic clothing in the Islamic world. Image credit: ABC News**

Violators of the aforementioned bans can face criminal prosecution under a number of offenses. One can be prosecuted for “forcing others to wear terrorism, extremism clothes or symbols,” a new offense that carries a maximum sentence of three years’ imprisonment. It was added to the Criminal Law in November 2015 and can be used in cases where violence or coercion is involved. Dui Hua is unable to find online judgments to understand how often this offense is being used by authorities. Unofficial news media has reported on cases of Uyghur women sentenced for promoting the wearing of headscarves, but the exact charges remain unknown.

Dui Hua has found one case where the charge of illegal business activity was used to prosecute an individual for selling banned Islamic clothing. Yang Bao’an (杨宝安), a Han Chinese man who originally migrated to Xinjiang from Hunan, was sentenced to three years’ imprisonment in April 2015 in Ili Prefecture for selling a hundred niqabs in a shopping center in Korgas (China’s westernmost port bordering Kazakhstan). Twenty-four of the niqabs carried the star and crescent symbol. The court found that Yang violated the “five abnormalities” ban that had been widely enforced in Ili Prefecture. Yang pled innocent on several grounds – 1. He was not aware of the meaning behind the star and crescent symbol; 2. Nobody had purchased any of the garments from him; 3. He did not know about the local rules since he had only just arrived in Xinjiang. Given that he had obtained a university education, the court found that Yang should have been aware and cautious about local regulations and that his actions had adversely affected the social stability of the area.

There is also evidence that wearing banned Islamic clothing can fall under the purview of the crime of “picking quarrels and provoking troubles.” In September 2014, the Supreme People’s Court, the Supreme People’s Procuratorate, and the Ministry of Public Security jointly issued a judicial interpretation to expand the applicable scope of this “pocket crime” in cases related to terrorism and extremism. An individual is now punishable for this offense if they disrupt social order by “willfully attacking, chasing, intercepting, and insulting others” while calling others “infidels or religious traitors.”

In March 2015, China Youth Online reported that a court in Kashgar sentenced a group of religious extremists for “picking quarrels and provoking troubles.” The report cited one case in which a Uyghur couple repeatedly refused to comply with “Project Beauty,” a campaign to discourage men from keeping long beards and women from wearing veils and headscarves. The husband was sentenced to six years’ imprisonment for “ignoring the national law.” Not only was he punished for keeping a long beard, but he was also

punished for encouraging his wife to wear a veil. As his wife was said to have shown remorse, she was given a relatively lenient two-year imprisonment sentence. The original report was removed the day after it was originally posted. An anonymous source who proclaimed to have written the article allegedly sent an apology statement via WeChat for misreporting the case. Critics remain skeptical of its authenticity, with some suspecting that the apology was made under duress. The article has since been widely circulated online and remains accessible on official news websites.

### ***Banning Islamic Clothing in the Home***

Although the ban on Islamic clothing has been enforced in the name of “maintaining public order,” Dui Hua has found cases where authorities in Xinjiang have enforced the ban in people’s homes. Dui Hua uncovered a judgment in which a Muslim man, Gong Xiaojun (龚小军, ethnicity unknown), was sentenced to two years’ imprisonment for “disrupting official business” in Urumqi after arguing with community cadres in December 2014. When the community cadres paid Gong a home visit in June 2014, they found that Gong had grown an “abnormal beard.” The cadres admonished Gong for his beard and Gong allegedly responded with “extreme language” insisting that he grew the beard because he simply liked the way it looked.

The cadres informed Gong and his wife about the ban on “black religious clothing,” and accused his wife of wearing a jilbab. Gong argued that his wife was wearing a long loose black robe, not what the cadres were calling a jilbab and that the cadres had no right to intervene in what his family chose to wear at home. He claimed that he had requested his wife to wear the robe and his wife agreed that she had done so voluntarily. Gong was first indicted for “picking quarrels and provoking troubles,” but was convicted of a different charge – “disrupting official business.” The judgment did not explain in what ways Gong’s language was “extreme,” it only vaguely stated that his language was “extreme” and provocative enough to disrupt law enforcement.

### ***Beyond Xinjiang***

For Muslims who belong to China’s Hui minority, reports suggest that they currently do not face the same intensity of restrictions as Muslims in Xinjiang do. In a propaganda film entitled *Leaving Heart in Hezhou* (情定河州) about China’s “One Belt, One Road” initiative, the Hui women of Linxia Hui Autonomous Prefecture in Gansu Province are portrayed in long black garments covering their bodies, hair, and necks. While the same clothes are banned in public and private spaces in Xinjiang and violators can face imprisonment, in Linxia, also known as “China’s Little Mecca,” Hui women are currently free to wear veils in public. However, given the growing restrictions on religious freedom in Linxia, the question remains for how long this freedom will last.

Xinjiang’s ban on Islamic clothing is no less controversial than the anti-Islamic legislation we see in the West and is no less discriminatory to Muslims. Since joining the global ranks of countries that impose restrictions on the appearance of its Muslim citizens, China has been under fire by human rights groups for intruding on its citizens’ religious freedoms. Although transparency of criminal cases involving the ban on Islamic clothing leaves much to be desired in Xinjiang, given what we know about how the sellers of Islamic clothing and those who wear Islamic clothing in their homes have fared, it is likely that those caught wearing Islamic clothing in public are facing increasing risks.

## **Tibetan monk arrested during visit from India, jailed on unknown charge**

Radio Free Asia (09.02.2018) - <http://bit.ly/2EsAeS4> - A Tibetan monk missing since traveling from India more than a year ago to visit his family in Sichuan has been found jailed by China on an unknown charge, Tibetan sources say.

Tashi Choeying, a monk enrolled at the Ganden Jangtse monastic college in South India, vanished after being taken into custody by police on Nov. 21, 2016, a Tibetan living in exile told RFA's Tibetan Service, citing contacts in the region.

"He had returned to pay a visit to his family and relatives in Tibet, and one month after he arrived there, the local authorities suddenly arrested him without giving any reason," RFA's source said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

"He was held incommunicado until the end of 2017, when a fellow inmate was released from a prison in Dartsedo and was able to take a message to Choeying's family, letting them know that he was being held in custody," the source said.

Only then did Choeying's family learn that he had been handed a six-year prison term on Nov. 21, 2017, after being convicted on an unknown charge, he said.

Choeying, aged 37 and a native of Tawu (in Chinese, Daofu) county in Sichuan's Kardze (Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, had traveled to his home town on a valid travel document issued by the Chinese embassy in India, the source said.

"But he was illegally held by the Chinese authorities without charge for a year, and then was given his sentence," he said.

Sources close to Choeying say that during his stay in India he may have spoken to the media about self-immolation protests challenging Chinese rule in Tawu and other Tibetan areas of China, and this may have resulted in his arrest, RFA's source said.

"Everyone who knows him says that he is a good-mannered monk with impeccable integrity. He is a very kind and patriotic person with a deep love for his people and Tibet's language and culture," he said.

Sporadic demonstrations challenging Beijing's rule have continued in Tibetan-populated areas of China since widespread protests swept the region in 2008.

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## **U.S. pastor subjected to China's unfair trials**

ChinaAid (09.02.2018) - <http://bit.ly/2Bq7BT3> - The trial of a North Carolina pastor and his co-worker commenced today in China's southwestern Yunnan province.

Throughout the proceedings, which lasted from 9:00-11:30 a.m., Lawyer Liu Peifu defended Pastor John Cao by telling the court that he often crossed the border between Myanmar and China to help poor minority children in Myanmar's Wa State receive an



education. Liu added that because of Cao's efforts, the minority community is thankful towards the Chinese people.

Cao is well-renowned in that area of Myanmar for establishing 16 schools, providing educational resources to more than 2,000 children. Since the border between Myanmar and China has little regulation, he used to pass through with no incident.

However, the prosecution accused Cao of "organizing an illegal border crossing" and pinned an "illegal border crossing" charge to his colleague, Jing Ruxia, who was brought into custody with him on March 5 as they were attempting to enter China from Myanmar.

Shortly after, Cao's relatives received a detention notice from the Menglian County Public Security Bureau, and his arrest warrant was formally approved by the procuratorate 20 days later. On July 13, his mother, identified only by her surname, Sun, said that the case had been transferred to the procuratorate for prosecution.

Sun, who attended the trial, said her son looked well and hopes for a fair hearing. However, China is notorious for discriminating against Christians in their trials, framing masses of innocent people for crimes they did not commit in order bring the religion under Communist control.

In addition to his educational work, Cao founded a church in Hunan, his home province, and serves as a pastor for China Ministries International. His previous humanitarian work includes helping students and victims rebuild their lives after a devastating earthquake tore through Wenchuan, Sichuan in 2008 and setting up schools for impoverished children in Pu'er, where he is now being held.

Cao married Jamie Powell, an American citizen, in 1988, and he became North Carolina resident. Powell still lives in the United States, along with the couple's two sons.

ChinaAid exposes abuses, such as those suffered by Cao and Jing, in order to stand in solidarity with persecuted Christians and promote religious freedom, human rights, and rule of law.

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## **14 Christian house church leaders abducted in China amid Communist crackdown on faith**

By Stoyan Zaimov

Christian Post Reporter (01.02.2018) - <http://bit.ly/2odMPh4> - Fourteen Christian house church leaders who are part of the Middle Eastern evangelism network have been abducted by government security agents in China.

ChinaAid reported on Wednesday that the Christians, who weren't named, are being held captive at an undisclosed location by state authorities in the coastal Zhejiang province.

"This massive, enforced disappearance of 14 peaceful church leaders shows the Communist Party has no regard to rule of law and its citizens' religious freedom rights," said ChinaAid President Bob Fu.

The group, which monitors the crackdown on churches and arrest of Christians and human rights activists in China, said the Communist government continues to deny believers religious freedoms and basic human rights.

"ChinaAid urges international leaders to speak out against this blatant abuse against religious freedom and human rights, and calls on China to immediately and unconditionally release these innocent Christians," the group declared.

Back in January, Christians shared their fears that the persecution could get worse following the government's destruction of an evangelical megachurch in the northern Shanxi province.

Chinese military police detonated explosives inside the Golden Lampstand Church in Linfen, destroying the house of worship which was owned by the Christians who worshiped there.

A video of the demolition was shared worldwide, showing the moment the church collapsed.

"My heart was sad to see this demolition and now I worry about more churches being demolished, even my own," a local pastor who wasn't named said at the time. "This church was built in 2008, there's no reason for them to destroy it now."

A Catholic church was also destroyed in a similar fashion in December, while at least 1,200 church rooftop crosses have been forcefully removed in Zhejiang province since 2015.

Chinese authorities have been known to raid worship services and detain dozens of Christians at once, such as what happened to 13 believers in Guangdong province in November.

Police officers raided Qingcaodi Church, a small house church in Jingmen, with believers seeing their Bibles and other church-owned material confiscated.

Chinese lawyers who have stood up for Christians have also been persecuted. Several attorneys who sought to represent 40 Christians who were arrested over "cult" activities last year were told in January that their legal certifications could be taken away.

Xiao Yunyan, one of the lawyers under government review, vowed that he and his colleagues will continue representing the Christians, with the lawyers working on a contingency plan.

China is listed No. 43 on Open Doors USA's World Watch List, which states that church life is heavily controlled by the government.

The watchdog group explains that Christians are "hedged in by authorities," since at 100 million strong, they are the largest social group that is not controlled by the state.

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## **Chinese bishop confirms Vatican sacked him in Beijing**

***Vatican also denies claims made by Hong Kong's Joseph Zen that pope's opinion on talks with Beijing differs to his diplomats***

UCANews (1.02.2018) - <http://bit.ly/2rYknF9> - Sacked Chinese Bishop Peter Zhuang Jianjian, who is at the center of the latest storm around the Holy See's controversial talks with China's communist government, has broken his silence on being called in to Beijing by Vatican diplomats.

The confirmation of the Vatican's role in replacing two bishops originally appointed Rome, with two bishops who were appointed by the Communist Party controlled Catholic Patriotic Association — including one who has been excommunicated by Rome — has continued to rock China's so-called underground Catholic Church.

"But these acts, in fact, are scarifying the underground community for the benefit of half the China Church, which is the open community, not the whole," said a researcher who does not want to offend the Vatican.

In a phone call with ucanews.com, 88-year-old Bishop Zhuang of Shantou in Southern Guangdong province admitted that he went to Beijing "in December, where I met with four Vatican officials" but he was reticent to say much more. The Chinese government is well known for its monitoring of the communication devices of its critics or potential critics.

People close to the bishop, not known for his public display of emotions, said he was deeply and visibly upset by the ordeal.

The two-way talks between the Vatican and Beijing, that have now been underway for four years are aimed at ultimately establishing diplomatic relations but at present are solely at the first step focusing on the appointment of bishops in the China Church. The Holy See wants to gain approval of all bishop appointments, at present they are made by the Party and not all are agreed by Rome.

Bishops Zhuang's comment came as the Vatican rebuked Hong Kong Cardinal Joseph Zen, who travelled to Rome to present Pope Francis with a letter from the sacked prelate and to voice his long held view that the Vatican is wasting its time trying to negotiate with Beijing, in the process upsetting about half its 12 million followers who worship in underground churches.

Cardinal Zen has claimed the Vatican was "selling out" millions of Catholics in China who did not worship at the Party controlled version of the church.

A strongly worded statement, issued by Vatican spokesman Greg Burke's office, said some people in the church were "fostering confusion and controversy."

The statement and a loquacious interview with the Vatican's chief diplomat, Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin in La Stamp's Vatican Insider appeared to dispute Cardinal Zen's read out of a private meeting with Pope Francis over the issues.

The statement said that it was "surprising and regrettable" that some were promoting "a presumed difference of thought and action" between Pope Francis and his top aides over China strategy.

In his interview, Cardinal Parolin said: "The Holy Father personally follows current contacts with the authorities of the People's Republic of China. All his collaborators act in concert with him. No one takes private initiatives. Frankly, any other kind of reasoning seems to me to be out of place."

He added that the main purpose of the Holy See in the ongoing dialogue is safeguarding communion within the church, in the wake of genuine tradition and constant ecclesiastical discipline.

"You see, in China there are not two churches, but two communities of faithful called to follow a gradual path of reconciliation towards unity," Cardinal Parolin said.

"It is not, therefore, a matter of maintaining a perennial conflict between opposing principles and structures, but of finding realistic pastoral solutions that allow Catholics to live their faith and to continue together the work of evangelization in the specific Chinese context."

In return, Cardinal Zen disputed the No. 2 official, writing in a fresh blog post that the Vatican had shifted the focus on the issue of appointment of bishops to the relations between the pope and his diplomats.

"In fact, my blog never mentions that the pope does not know (what the Vatican diplomats are doing), but the pope really told (Archbishop) Savio Hon Tai-fai: 'Why the group (Vatican diplomats) never discussed with me (about recent appointments)?'

"What the pope told me is true: That his opinions are different to theirs. Therefore, at the end of the 'statement,' they cannot doubt the pope telling a lie, and then assert that I tell a lie," he wrote.

"I say in my blog that they are doing bad things (wrong things) but not say that they are lying, and now, readers are needed to judge either I or they tell a lie," he wrote.

"Of course I know my [first] statement will cause controversy but not confusion. I hope the result of the controversy is that they admit what they are doing is bad (wrong) and should step back from the precipice."

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## **Chinese bishop reshuffle reinforces fears of state meddling**

World Watch Monitor (30.01.2018) - <http://bit.ly/2BHsjKj> - Fears are growing that China's communist government may be gaining more control over the Catholic Church there, as news emerged that the Vatican asked two bishops it had appointed to step aside in favour of ones selected by Beijing.

These developments have taken place following a state campaign against China's Protestant churches, involving the removal of crosses from up to 2,000 churches and even the demolition of churches, and as a raft of new restrictions on religious practice come into force this week in the name of curbing extremism.

Bishop Peter Zhuang Jianjian of Shantou (Guangdong) was reportedly forced to go to Beijing, where a delegation from the Vatican asked him to leave his post to be replaced by Joseph Huang Bingzhang, a bishop not recognised by the Vatican. According to the Rome-based website AsiaNews, he received the same request last October.

The delegation then asked Bishop Joseph Guo Xijin of Mindong to accept a demotion to become the auxiliary or coadjutor of Bishop Vincent Zhan Silu, who is also not approved by the Vatican.



Hong Kong-based Cardinal Joseph Zen-Zekiun, 86, wrote in a blog post yesterday that the Vatican was at risk of “selling out the Catholic Church in China”. Pope Francis wants the Vatican to reach a deal with the state-backed Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association that oversees the registered Church.

Cardinal Zen was so troubled by the Vatican asking two of its own bishops to step aside that he flew to Rome to pass on a message from one of them, Bishop Zhuang, to Pope Francis and to convey what he later called “the worries of [Francis’] faithful children in China”. In an audience with the Pope, Francis told him: “I told them not to create another Mindszenty case!” (Cardinal Mindszenty was Archbishop of Budapest during Hungary’s communist dictatorship. The regime imprisoned him, but allowed him to flee the country; the Vatican replaced him with a candidate more to the government’s liking.)

From his experience of teaching in seminaries of the official Catholic community in the 1990s, Zen said state-approved bishops there were subjected to “slavery and humiliation”. He likened the Chinese government today to a “totalitarian” regime.

State-approved clergy are less likely to criticise the communist government and are more likely to follow orders than so-called “underground” priests, despite Beijing’s sporadic crackdowns on clergy who question its authority and human-rights record.

Paul, a Catholic quoted by UCA News, criticised the Vatican’s approach. “We can neither bow nor compromise. If the Vatican does not live up to expectations, we have to fight for ourselves,” he said.

President Xi Jinping has said “religions in China must be Chinese in orientation” and independent from outside influence. The state-approved bishops and the Patriotic Association last December passed a five-year plan to “Sinicize” the Catholic Church.

AsiaNews commented: “Sinicizing the Chinese Church means supporting the principle of independence [from Rome] and follow the leadership of the Communist Party.”

Restrictions that come into force this week urge local officials to exert greater control over Christian and Muslim congregations and effectively outlaw “underground” church meetings, threatening church leaders and congregations with large fines and confiscation of assets.

A local source told World Watch Monitor that the restrictions were one of several measures introduced to promote China’s political ideology and increase control over its Christian population, which is fast growing.

“More and more analysts anticipate further tightening of security, control and increased religious restrictions under Xi’s political influence, which might last until the year 2028 or later. Local churches that are closely connected with overseas groups – for example they’re affiliated with overseas denominations or receiving overseas funds – or which have a large congregation size, meet in public areas, or openly advocate against government policies, would likely be the first to be targeted in a crackdown,” the source said.

China is ranked the 43rd most difficult country in which to live as a Christian, according to the World Watch List published annually by the charity Open Doors. "If churches get too large or too political, they are seen as a threat and persecuted," the charity said, adding: "Communist authorities are increasing restrictions on Christians in order to control society and stay in power."

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## **China's religious clampdown sparks increasing concern**

### ***Catholics and academics warn that oppression started even before the announcement of new regulations***

UCANews (26.01.2018) - <http://bit.ly/2nMcY6A> - Fears are growing among Christians that China's amended Regulations for Religious Affairs will lead to increasing suppression.

Since Sept. 7, 2017, when Premier Li Keqiang announced the regulations would become effective from Feb. 1 this year, China's religious measures have become more stringent.

Authorities organized seminars for religious people and government officials across the country to explain the new regulations and even implemented measures to suppress religions and religious practices.

At Christmas, local governments issued a circular to not allow students and party members to participate in religious festivals.

A Catholic source who wanted to be unnamed told ucanews.com that a shopping mall dismantled a decoration featuring Santa Claus.

"The mall is not a place of worship. Santa Claus is not exactly a religious icon, and the amended Regulations for Religious Affairs had not come into effect, but officials still went to request the mall to dismantle the decoration. I find it very strange," he said.

He does not believe the Cultural Revolution will be repeated but expects religious measures to be tightened, extending the government's control to all levels of society.

Another unnamed Catholic said that before announcing the regulations China's government had already requested all priests, including those from the underground church, to register for a "clergyman certificate" so that the government could monitor them.

"But, after announcing the implementation of the regulations, the government has already put more pressure on underground priests to register. As for what happens after Feb. 1, we still do not know yet. But all local governments will certainly step up efforts to cater to the central government," he said.

Ying Fuk-tsang, director of the divinity school at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, told ucanews.com that the government was always worrying about the beliefs of minors, undergraduates and party members.

It aimed to ban Sunday schools and summer camps for minors, he said, and might step up its interventions more in activities for adolescents and minors.

Ying said the recent ban on Christmas celebrations was the beginning of a policy directed against Christianity.

However, he believes authorities "will not go back to the Cultural Revolution and eliminate religions but will continue to step up their controls and grip the religion firmly under the order of Sinicization."

Ying said authorities might allow certain local churches to develop smoothly and serve as role models in demonstrating that the government's religious policies were feasible.

Authorities understood it was difficult to eradicate religions, so some measures were taken to differentiate them, he said.

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## Six Christians jailed as pressure on churches increases



Christians pray together in Beijing. (Photo: World Watch Monitor)

World Watch Monitor (23.01.2018) - <http://bit.ly/2rKmHiW> - A Chinese court in the southwestern province of Yunnan sent six Protestant Christians to prison last week for their membership of an "evil cult".

The verdict comes as part of a provincial crackdown on cults, as the ruling Communist Party continues its national campaign to restrict unregistered churches before new religious regulations come into force next week.

The six Christians received long sentences of up to 13 years by a court in Lincang city, west Yunnan, which found them guilty of being part of a sect called the Three Grades of Servants and of "using an evil cult to organise to undermine law enforcement", their lawyer, Xiao Yunyang, told [Radio Free Asia](#).

According to [Release International](#), since 2016 China has used its campaign against the sect “as a pretext to round up about 200 Christians across Yunnan: some Christians have already been convicted, while others are awaiting trial”.

A local source told World Watch Monitor that the authorities “seldom give such long prison sentences for just religious reasons, even in a sensitive region like Xinjiang [in the Uyghur Autonomous Region]. But both the Three Grades of Servants and Falun Gong are well-known cults in China and leaders of [these movements] are subject to heavy punishment”.

The six men and women, who belong to an unregistered church group, denied all charges and, according to their lawyer: “The judges in Yunnan were really evil. They didn’t pay any attention to the arguments that no illegal acts had been committed, and that there was no harm of any kind to society.”

According to RFA, Xiao has been notified that his license to practise law will be reviewed to see if he was “illegally” defending his clients.

### **Prominent churches targeted**

Meanwhile two pastors in neighbouring Guizhou province, Su Tianfu and Yang Hua of Huoshi Church, [were fined](#) the equivalent of more than 1 million US\$ earlier this month, after the money they received in collections and offerings from their congregation was deemed “illegal income”.

Huoshi Church and its leaders have clashed with the authorities before. In 2015 [the church was raided](#) by police during the opening ceremony of its new venue, which was attended by hundreds of guests, including some foreigners. The high-profile church was forced to close and its pastor, Yang Hua, was detained. The church did reopen but was then put under pressure to register as a state-sanctioned entity.

Yang Hua was last year [sentenced to two and a half years in prison](#), while Su Tianfu remains under house arrest. A church deacon, Zhang Xiuhong, was also detained for more than two years before his release in August 2017.

A local source told World Watch Monitor the government specifically targets high-profile churches, but that many other congregations do not experience the same level of harassment.

“You have a high profile if you gather a big group of people – in particular in sensitive areas where there are minority people groups,” the source said. “Another thing [that creates this high profile] is if you have close contact with overseas groups, e.g. receive financial support from overseas, or, thirdly when you advocate in overseas media and draw the attention of human-rights agencies.”

Last week a high-profile church in northern China was [demolished](#), the second in less than a month. World Watch Monitor’s source said the order seemed to have come from the top, illustrated by the fact the state-run newspaper reported on it.

“These cases are consistent with a new focus on the control and management of religious activities by the government”, according to [Christian Solidarity Worldwide’s](#) Chief Executive, Mervyn Thomas. “Different approaches are being taken by different provincial authorities, but taken together these cases may suggest a long-term plan to target independent religious communities.”

In his speech at the Communist Party Congress in October, President [Xi Jinping](#) [reiterated](#) the importance of Chinese nationalism, saying the government would “uphold



the principle that religions in China must be Chinese in orientation, and provide active guidance to religions so that they can adapt themselves to socialist society”.

The [new regulations on religious affairs](#) are due to come into force on 1 February. They include guidelines on religious education, the types of religious organisations that can exist, where they can exist and the activities they can organise.

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## **Around 120,000 Uyghurs detained for political re-education in Xinjiang’s Kashgar Prefecture**

RFA (22.01.2018) - <http://bit.ly/2E3Vyt2> - Around 120,000 ethnic Uyghurs are currently being held in political re-education camps in Kashgar (in Chinese, Kashi) prefecture of northwest China’s Xinjiang region alone, according to a security official with knowledge of the detention system.

Since April 2017, Uyghurs accused of harboring “extremist” and “politically incorrect” views have been jailed or detained in re-education camps throughout Xinjiang, where members of the ethnic group have long complained of pervasive discrimination, religious repression, and cultural suppression under Chinese rule.

Prior reporting by RFA’s Uyghur Service found that as arrests in Xinjiang increased around the sensitive 19th Communist Party Congress in Beijing in October, the region’s re-education camps have been inundated by detainees, who are forced to endure cramped and squalid conditions in the facilities.

The security chief of Kashgar city’s Chasa township recently told RFA on condition of anonymity that “approximately 120,000” Uyghurs are being held throughout the prefecture, based on information he has received from other area officials.

“I have great relationships with the heads of all the government departments and we are in regular contact, informing each other on the current situation,” he said, adding that he is also close with the prefecture’s chief of security.

Tens of thousands of people are detained within Kashgar city alone, the Chasa township security officer said, citing statistics from the city’s subdistricts.

“Around 2,000 [are detained] from the four neighborhoods of Kashgar city, as well as an additional 30,000 in total from the city’s 16 villages,” he said.

Among Kashgar city’s four neighborhoods, the largest number of detainees—more than 500 people—are from Yawagh, while among its 16 villages, the largest number are from Yengi-osteng, he added, without providing specific details.

Kashgar city is home to four re-education camps, the security chief said, the largest of which was established in the city’s No. 5 Middle School in May 2017.

“It’s located in the Shinka neighbourhood and is newly built,” he said.

“The plan was initially to build the new school in that area and transfer the current middle school students there. That is why it was named No. 5 Middle School.”

Around 80 people are living in the school's main hall, the security chief said, while 20-25 people sleep in each of its classrooms.

Overcrowded and squalid

Sources say that authorities often convert government buildings and schools into makeshift re-education camps to deal with overcrowding, and routinely shift detainees between locations—that include prisons—without informing their family members.

In Bayin'gholin Mongol (Bayinguoleng Menggu) Autonomous Prefecture's Korla city—where sources told RFA recently that as many as 1,000 people have been admitted to the city's detention facilities over the course of a few days—a local government employee named Erkin Bawdun recently said that area re-education camps "are completely full."

Bawdun said that a friend who spent time as an inmate at a local re-education camp told him he had seen officials from the center tell the police to "stop bringing people ... as it is already too full."

He described cells that had previously held eight people now accommodating 14 inmates, who "were not allowed pillows" and "had to lay on their sides because there was not enough room to lay flat," let alone space to turn over or stretch their legs.

Other acquaintances told Bawdun that they had seen "detainees walking barefoot," and that inmates were "not allowed clothes with buttons or metal zippers," belts, shoelaces, or "even underwear" in some cases, despite average low temperatures of around 15 degrees Fahrenheit (-10 degrees Celsius) at night in December.

Since Xinjiang party chief Chen Quanguo was appointed to his post in August 2016, he has initiated unprecedented repressive measures against the Uyghur people and ideological purges against so-called "two-faced" Uyghur officials—a term applied by the government to Uyghurs who do not willingly follow directives and exhibit signs of "disloyalty."

China regularly conducts "strike hard" campaigns in Xinjiang, including police raids on Uyghur households, restrictions on Islamic practices, and curbs on the culture and language of the Uyghur people, including videos and other material.

While China blames some Uyghurs for "terrorist" attacks, experts outside China say Beijing has exaggerated the threat from the Uyghurs and that repressive domestic policies are responsible for an upsurge in violence there that has left hundreds dead since 2009.

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## **China jails six Protestants in Yunnan amid massive crackdown on 'evil cult'**

RFA (18.01.18) - <http://bit.ly/2DpQq6e> - Authorities in the southwestern Chinese province of Yunnan have jailed a group of Protestant Christians for up to 13 years for involvement in an "evil cult," their lawyer said on Thursday.

The Yun County People's Court near Yunnan's Lincang city handed down a 13-year jail term to Ju Dianhong, 12 years to Liang Qin, and four years to Yang Shunxiang, defense attorney Xiao Yunyang told RFA.

Shorter jail terms were also handed down to Zhang Hongyan, Zi Huimei and Zhang Shaocai, the lawyer said.

The six Protestant church followers had been found guilty of "using an evil cult to organize to undermine law enforcement," he said.

"The judges in Yunnan were really evil," Xiao said. "They didn't pay any attention to the arguments that no illegal acts had been committed, and that there was no harm of any kind to society."

He said the defendants, who have denied being part of a controversial house church group called the Three Grades of Servants, have said they will appeal the sentences.

The sentences come amid a crackdown in Yunnan on the Three Grades of Servants group, which has been designated an a dangerous cult by the ruling Chinese Communist Party.

Some 200 Christians have been detained in the province and falsely accused of being members, according to the U.S.-based Christian rights group ChinaAid.

### ***'Do good deeds'***

Ju told the the court during her trial that she has nothing to do with the Three Grades of Servants church.

"I am a Protestant Christian believer, and I believe in Jesus," Ju said. "None of my evangelism has contravened any of the principles in the Bible, and my beliefs do not constitute an evil cult."

"I never preached about the Day of Judgement, and all of my books are available in the Three Self Patriotic Association [of government-backed churches bookstore]," Ju said. "All I ever wanted to do was resolve conflict and do good deeds."

Defendant Liang Qin meanwhile denied taking part in the Three Grades of Servants cult, saying she has never committed a crime, nor caused any harm to society.

She also denied following the teachings of sect founder Xu Shuangfu's group, which has been targeted by Beijing as an evil cult second only to the Buddhism and qigong-based Falungong.

Xu has been arrested more than 20 times and has spent more than 20 years in prison. His group claims millions of followers.

### ***Lawyers threatened***

Yunnan authorities also notified the detainees' defense lawyers that they are suspected of "illegally" defending their clients and that their licenses to practice will be subject to review, they said.

Defense attorney Li Guisheng told RFA in a recent interview that lawyers representing a similar group of Christians in Yunnan's Fengqing county had had their status as defense lawyers revoked by the court ahead of their clients' trial.

"Yun county and Fengqing county are acting together on this," Li said. "The families went and hired another six lawyers, but the court revoked their status too, just before the trial."

"There are two rights at stake here, the right of the clients to a legal defense, and the right of the lawyers to carry out their profession," he said.

One of the revoked attorneys, Fan Shiwen, confirm the report.

"According to my knowledge, there aren't any lawyers involved in the case now," Fan said. "The authorities are doing this because they know that the lawyers will be able to prove in court that their clients have done nothing illegal."

Meanwhile, the Yunnan High People's Court rejected appeals from Li Shudong, Li Meihua, and Peng Zhenghua, who were sentenced last June in Yunnan's Shaotong on charges related to participation in an "evil cult."

"We have had a decision in the appeals in the Shaotong case. They were rejected," Xiao said.

### ***Religious persecution***

ChinaAid president Bob Fu meanwhile said the crackdown in Yunnan is a form of religious discrimination and persecution.

"This is a historical, massive case of pure religious persecution against peaceful, independent house church Christians," Fu said in a statement on his group's website.

"The large number of arbitrary arrests and extremely harsh, long sentences imposed on these young church leaders under the guise of being 'anti-evil cult' shows that [Chinese President] Xi's regime has no interest in respecting its citizens' freedom of religion or belief."

"We call upon the Chinese leaders to immediately release these leaders and make proper amends to those who have been arbitrarily detained and tortured," Fu said.

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## **Over 600 refugees of the Church of Almighty God persecuted in China threatened to be sent back by South Korea**

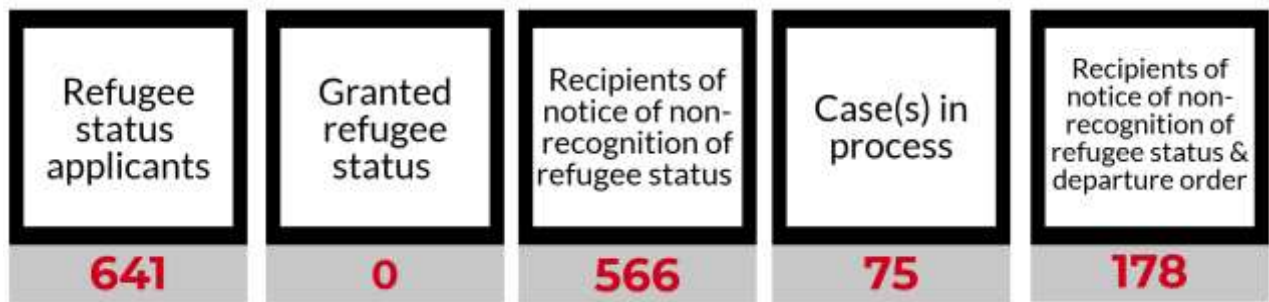
***178 have already received a departure order; arrest, imprisonment and torture are awaiting them***

HRWF (18.01.2018) - Seoul has seemingly decided to deport over six hundred Chinese members of the Church of Almighty God seeking a safe haven in South Korea, despite the fact that there is a high risk for them to be arrested, detained, and tortured in China.

Up until now, none of the applicants have been granted asylum, whereas 178 have received a departure order.

*Data from South Korea, as of 14 January 2018:*





***How have these individuals suffered upon their return to China?***

*All listed names are aliases.*

**Ms. DanChun** was arrested by the Chinese police in Fuling, Chongqing, China on 1 March 2013 and was tortured during interrogation in the Fuling Detention Center.

**Ms. YouXin** was reported and arrested by Chinese police when preaching the gospel and kept in custody at a police station in Hang Zhou, China on December 13, 2012. After being bailed out by the president of her college, she had been kept under surveillance and unable to live a normal life, so she was forced to drop out of school, leave home and live in exile. The Chinese police officers went to her house twice for her whereabouts in June and September 2013 respectively and have been monitoring her mother.

**Mr. Liu Yang** was arrested and interrogated by the Chinese police in Feixi County, Anhui Province, China when preaching the gospel on 12 December 2012, and was detained for 15 days on the charge of "disturbing the social order."

**Ms. Li Chunlian** was arrested by the Chinese police officers from Huichun City Police Station on her way home on 1 June 2005, she was then interrogated under CCP's Kangaroo Court, tortured and sentenced to one year of re-education through labor, which leads to her lifetime physical disability.

**Mr. XiangXin** was arrested by the Chinese police in Guangyuan City, Sichuan Province, China when preaching the gospel in July 2004, he was tortured for a month and kept in custody for 15 days on the charge of "disturbing the social order" later on.

**Mr. Xu Zhigang** was tortured after being arrested by police officers from the National Security Brigade of Yanji City, Jilin Province, China when preaching the gospel on 29 July 2002, and was then sentenced to three years of re-education through labor on charge of "attending illegal meetings and disturbing the social order" without a public judicial process.

***If CAG members are deported back to China, their arrest is imminent, which is coupled with the strong possibility of subsequent torture, and sometimes even death.***

Three members of the Church of Almighty God were immediately arrested upon their return to China from South Korea.

**Mr. Li ZhenYuan** was arrested by police officers once he went through the security check at Yanji Airport in China on May 18, 2015.

**Mr. Han Feng** returned to China seeking medical treatment for his serious heart disease complications in March 2017. He had been monitored for two months before being arrested by the police in Hubei Province when he showed his ID document during a standard procedure. He was detained and 'brainwashed' for a span of two months before being released. Since his release, he remains under police surveillance.

**Ms. Yan Ru** was immediately arrested by the Chinese police upon her return to China from the Church of Almighty God in South Korea on June 2017.

***Human Rights Without Frontiers* has gathered numerous testimonies of arrest and torture from members of the Church of Almighty God in China. Additional testimonies prove that asylum seekers who are ultimately denied asylum status and deported back to China face a high risk of arrest, detention, and torture.**

***Human Rights Without Frontiers* urges the member states of the European Union & South Korea to grant political asylum to members of the Church of Almighty God who have fled from China in search of a safe haven.**

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## **Church of Almighty God members fatally tortured while in custody**

HRWF (17.01.2018) - Since early 2017, the Chinese government has increased nationwide arrests of members of The Church of Almighty God (CAG), under an initiative they call "Door-knocking Action". Security officials and police officers search from house to house, arresting, detaining and sometimes torturing and even killing members of the Church of Almighty God.

Two official CCP websites report that 204 members of the CAG were arrested by the Public Security Bureau in Zhejiang on 2<sup>nd</sup> of July alone. However according to the CAG, at least 583 Christians were arrested in that province that day. It is impossible to estimate the total number of members who have been arrested during this campaign against the church.

Reports of torture while in detention are frequent amongst CAG members. Occasionally, such cases result in death.

### ***The case of Li Qiang***

52-year-old Li Qiang (alias), a member of the Church of Almighty God from Xinyang City, Henan Province, was arrested in December 2012, after proselytizing in Xi County with several other members of the church. The group was arrested and taken to the Xi County Public Security Bureau for questioning and finger-printing. During this period, Li Qiang was forced to point his finger to the Bible while being photographed.

Li Qiang was ultimately detained for fifteen days for 'illegal preaching' and 'disturbing social order'.

### ***Re-arrested & tortured***

On the morning of 15<sup>th</sup> July 2017, Li Qiang was listening to recorded sermons alone in his home when three police officers from the Xi County Public Security Bureau knocked at his

door. Without an explanation or arrest warrant, they removed Li from his home and took him to the Xi County Public Security Bureau.

There, Li Qiang was questioned about the whereabouts of another CAG member who he had been arrested with back in 2012. That member had escaped police custody.

When Li did not answer the questions regarding other church members, the police force stripped him, kicked him, and beat him with sticks and leather boots while he lay on the ground. The police did not subside until Li lay motionless on the ground.

On 18<sup>th</sup> July, Li Qiang was escorted back home by police officers. The police told Li that he was there forth required to report to the bureau every Monday, and warned him that if he was caught professing his religion, they would beat him to death. Out of fear, Li went to stay at his uncle's house that night and then went to the home of a Christian couple the next day. Li informed the couple of what happened and showed his wounds on his body to them. The next day, Li left their house so that they could not be associated to Li by the police.

On the evening 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2017, Li was walking with his bike near his house when two police officers jumped out of a parked car and rushed to him. Li quickly mounted his bike and attempted to escape. After crashing his bike, Li continued his escape on foot, running towards the woods. The police chased him until late that night. Li ran to a three-meter-high wall, jumped off, and lay still, pretending to have died. Seeing this, the police ended their chase.

After the police had left, Li Qiang staggered to his aunt's house around 4:30am the next morning. According to his uncle, Li was covered in mud and badly wounded on his hands, arms, and face. Li's uncle took him to a local clinic, where upon examination, the doctor suggested he visit a hospital.

Li however, was worried that if he were to be hospitalized, which requires him to show his ID, the police would be able to easily find him. Despite his severe injuries, Li decided that the risk to seek proper medical treatment was too great.

### ***Psychological impacts***

On 27<sup>th</sup> July, Li's uncle arrived at his house to check on Li. He found him lying in bed with a blue face. It is reported that Li was not in his usual mental state, that he was panic-struck and paranoid, telling his uncle that the police were surrounding his house.

Li's family said that Li was barely eating and that he was spending the majority of his time pacing back and forth repeating the word 'police'. Li refused to speak about what had happened to him while in custody and also refused to eat.

In the morning of 5<sup>th</sup> August 2017, Li Qiang was found dead in his bed by his mother. His family describes that the physical ailments and psychological scars he suffered due to being tortured and constantly chased by the police caused his death.

### ***Conclusion***

Unfortunately, Li Qiang is only one Church of Almighty God member, among many others, who has been tortured and targeted by Chinese authorities for his religious beliefs.

***Human Rights Without Frontiers has gathered numerous testimonies of arrest and torture from members of the Church of Almighty God in China. Additional testimonies prove that asylum seekers who are ultimately denied asylum status and deported back to China face a high risk of arrest, detention, and torture.***

***Human Rights Without Frontiers* urges the member states of the European Union & South Korea to grant political asylum to members of the Church of Almighty God who have fled from China in search of a safe haven.**

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## **China bans Muslim children from Quran classes**

Aljazeera (17.01.2018) - <http://bit.ly/2FMGDEI> - Chinese government authorities have banned Muslim children from attending religious events during winter break, in a county in western [China](#) that is mostly populated by Muslims.

The notification for the ban has been posted online by the education bureau, as authorities step up their suppression of religious freedoms.

School students in Linxia county in Gansu province, home to many members of the Muslim Hui ethnic minority, are prohibited from entering religious buildings over their break, a district education bureau said, according to the notification.

Students must also not read scriptures in classes or in religious buildings, the bureau said, adding that all students and teachers should heed the notice and work to strengthen political ideology and propaganda. China is an atheist, communist state.

Reuters was unable to independently verify the authenticity of the notice.

The Linxia education bureau has declined to comment on the document's validity.

Xi Wuyi, a Marxist scholar at the state-backed Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and an outspoken critic of rising Islamic influence in China, shared the picture and welcomed the apparent move by the authorities.

With the notice, the county was taking concrete action to keep religion and education separate, and sticking strictly to education law, she said on the Weibo social media platform.

New regulations on religious affairs released in October last year, and due to take effect in February, aim to increase oversight of religious education and limit religious activities.

Last summer, a Sunday School ban was introduced in the southeastern city of Wenzhou, sometimes known as "China's Jerusalem" due to its large Christian population, but Christian parents found ways to teach their children about their religion, regardless.

Chinese law formally grants religious freedom for all, but regulations on education and protection of minors also say religion cannot be used to hinder state education, or children taught to believe in a religion, rather than communism.

Authorities in troubled parts of China, such as the far western region of Xinjiang, home to the Turkic-speaking Uighur Muslim minority, ban children from attending religious events.

But religious communities elsewhere rarely face blanket restrictions.

Fear of Muslim influence has grown in China in recent years, sparked in part by violence in Xinjiang.

The Chinese-speaking Hui, who are culturally more similar to the Han Chinese majority than to Uighurs, have also come under scrutiny from some intellectuals, who fear creeping Islamic influence on society.

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## **Chinese priest goes missing in Zhejiang province**

UCANews (10.01.2018) - <http://bit.ly/2mCP4uc> - Father Lu Danhua of Lishui Diocese of China's eastern Zhejiang province has been missing since government officials suddenly took him away just after Christmas.

He is the only priest of Lishui Diocese and his predecessor was Kenneth Roderick Turner of Scarboro Foreign Mission Society from 1948 to 1983. Wenzhou Diocese subsequently administered Lishui Diocese.

Father Lu was ordained by underground church Bishop Peter Shao Zhumin of Wenzhou on Dec. 14, 2016, and has served Lishui Diocese up to now.

Bishop Shao was released by authorities Jan. 3 after being detained since May 2017. A source who did not want to be named told ucanews.com that the reason for taking Father Lu away was not related to Bishop Shao.

But he said authorities had stated that Father Lu needed to go to Wenzhou for "re-educating" on new religious regulations coming into effect Feb. 1 and that he would return after obtaining a permit to be a priest.

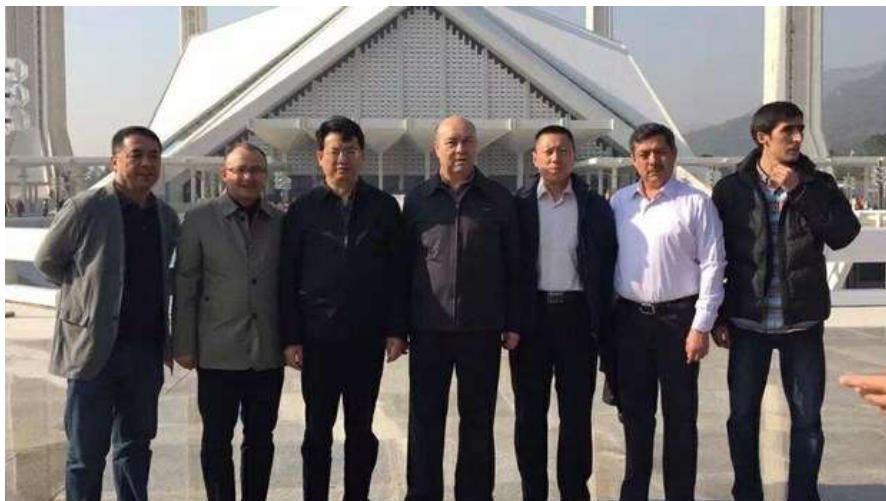
At noon on Dec. 29, officials of the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) took Father Lu away from a priests' dormitory.

A Catholic who witnessed the incident told ucanews.com that the officials claimed Father Lu was only going for a brief chat.

The next day, the Catholic went to SARA's office where officials claimed Father Lu had already been released. But he remains missing and calls to his mobile phone have not been answered.

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## **Chinese authorities jail four wealthiest Uyghurs in Xinjiang's Kashgar in new purge**





RFA (05.01.2018) - <http://bit.ly/2EfiZiH> - Authorities in northwestern China's Xinjiang region have jailed the four wealthiest ethnic Uyghurs in Kashgar (in Chinese, Kashi) city for acts of "religious extremism," according to an official, amid a crackdown he said is unlikely to end any time soon.

A source, who spoke on condition of anonymity, recently told RFA's Uyghur Service that Abdujelil Hajim, Gheni Haji, Memet Tursun Haji, and Imin Hajim-all successful business owners in Kashgar-were taken into custody in May 2017.

The four men, whose last names signify that they have made the Muslim holy pilgrimage to Mecca, were later sentenced to a total of 42 years in prison, the source said.

Chairman of the Kashgar Prefectural Trade Association Abdujelil Hajim-who owns a firm that transports goods between China, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, as well as large tracts of property in Kashgar and Xinjiang's capital Urumqi-was sentenced to 18 years in prison.

Gheni Haji, the owner of the Emin Trading Plaza at Kashgar's Sunday Market; Memet Tursun Haji, owner of Eziz Diyar Plaza at the same market; and Imin Hajim, owner of the Ibsina Dental Facility; were each sentenced to eight years in jail, according to the source.

The source's claims were verified earlier this week by Yasinahun, the chief of security for Kashgar's Chasa township, who confirmed that the four men topped the list of the city's wealthiest Uyghurs and that they had all been arrested in May, although he was unable to say where they are being held.

"Gheni Haji, Imin Hajim, and Memet Tursun Haji had displayed signs of religious extremism, so they were arrested," he told RFA in a phone interview, adding that their activities were characterized as "abnormal" by authorities.

"I was told that Memet Tursun Haji did not hold a funeral when his father passed away. Not holding a funeral is one of the signs of extremism. Gheni and Imin prayed only eight times at prayer service, not 20 as others usually do. That is also a sign of extremism."

Imin Hajim, Yasinahun said, is "a man of few words" who normally kept to himself, but had protested police searches of his home.

"He expressed extreme displeasure with our visits to his house related to our security work and said, 'I am a Chinese citizen, why do you conduct so many searches,'" he said.

China regularly conducts "strike hard" campaigns in Xinjiang, including police raids on Uyghur households, restrictions on Islamic practices, and curbs on the culture and language of the Uyghur people, including videos and other material.

While Yasinahun did not provide the specific reason for Abdujelil Hajim's arrest, he said that all four men had also undertaken "unapproved, private hajj" pilgrimages and been involved with imams who were not sanctioned by the state.

### **Re-education camps**

Since April last year, ethnic Uyghurs accused of harboring "extremist" and "politically incorrect" views have been jailed or detained in political re-education camps throughout Xinjiang, where members of the ethnic group have long complained of pervasive discrimination, religious repression, and cultural suppression under Chinese rule.

Yasinahun said he was unsure of how many people are currently being held in re-education camps in Kashgar city, but that "around 2,000 people" were being held from Chasa alone.

"Most people are being detained at the Yawagh Street detention facility in Kashgar city," he said.

The security chief also said it was unclear when the campaign of political re-education in Kashgar would end.

"At one of the meetings held in the city, one of the Chinese officials said, 'you can't uproot all the weeds hidden among the crops in the field one by one-you need to spray chemicals to kill them all,'" he said.

"He went on to say, 're-educating these people is like spraying chemicals on the crops. That is why it is a general re-education, not limited to a few people.'"

"The message I got from this was that the re-education will last a very long time."

### ***Region-wide purge***

Dolkun Isa, president of the Munich-based World Uyghur Congress exile group, told RFA that China has been "targeting all Uyghurs as potential state enemies" since Xinjiang party chief Chen Quanguo was appointed to his post in August 2016.

"Chen has initiated an unprecedented region-wide purge of Uyghur intellectuals, religious figures, businessmen, and any Uyghur who is not pleased with Chinese rule as 'two-faced' people," Isa said.

"He has locked up tens of thousands in the political re-education camps, in much the same way that the Nazis did the Jews, soon after coming to power in Germany," he added.

"The international community should closely monitor what the Chinese government is doing in [Xinjiang] and express concern, because the Uyghur homeland is now simply a massive concentration camp."

While China blames some Uyghurs for "terrorist" attacks, experts outside China say Beijing has exaggerated the threat from the Uyghurs and that repressive domestic policies are responsible for an upsurge in violence there that has left hundreds dead since 2009.

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