

## **Table of Contents**

- ***Religions Must be 'Subordinate' to Communist Party, Says China***
- ***Goodbye to the Religious Affairs Bureau: religions are now under the direct control of the Party***
- ***Dolkun Isa: Beijing also persecutes the Uyghurs abroad***
- ***Will France hand over Chinese religious refugees to their persecutors? Appeal to President Macron***
- ***The persecution of the Church of Almighty God raised in a side-event at the UN***
- ***Xinjiang, crosses, domes, statues destroyed: the new 'Sinicized' Cultural Revolution***
- ***Ban on Islamic clothing in Xinjiang***
- ***Tibetan monk arrested during visit from India, jailed on unknown charge***
- ***U.S. pastor subjected to China's unfair trials***
- ***14 Christian house church leaders abducted in China amid Communist crackdown on faith***
- ***Chinese bishop confirms Vatican sacked him in Beijing***
- ***Chinese bishop reshuffle reinforces fears of state meddling***
- ***China's religious clampdown sparks increasing concern***
- ***Six Christians jailed as pressure on churches increases***
- ***Around 120,000 Uyghurs detained for political re-education in Xinjiang's Kashgar Prefecture***
- ***China jails six Protestants in Yunnan amid massive crackdown on 'evil cult'***
- ***Over 600 refugees of the Church of Almighty God persecuted in China threatened to be sent back by South Korea***
- ***Church of Almighty God members fatally tortured while in custody***
- ***China bans Muslim children from Quran classes***
- ***Chinese priest goes missing in Zhejiang province***
- ***Chinese authorities jail four wealthiest Uyghurs in Xinjiang's Kashgar in new purge***

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## **Religions must be 'subordinate' to Communist Party, says China**

Radio Free Asia (04.04.2018) - <https://bit.ly/2EjmmVp> - The ruling Chinese Communist Party has asserted its control over all religious practices among its citizens, suggesting that the Vatican will only have limited control over the Chinese Catholic Church in the event of a bilateral deal on the appointment of bishops.

"Religions in China must be Chinese in orientation and provide active guidance to religions so that they can adapt themselves to the socialist society," reads a white paper on religious affairs published this week.

Religious believers must "be subordinate to and serve the overall interests of the nation and the Chinese people ... and support the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party," the white paper said, which includes "integrat[ing] religious teachings and rules with Chinese culture."

On Tuesday, former top religious affairs official Chen Zongrong told a news conference that any potential power-sharing deal between Beijing and the Vatican over the appointment of Chinese Catholic bishops wouldn't affect religious freedom in the country.

China and the Vatican are reportedly close to a deal on bishops, which could bring the country's six million officially sanctioned Catholics back into the Vatican's fold, and legitimize an estimated 10 million Catholics loyal to Rome in the eyes of the Communist Party.

Chen told the news conference: "I disagree with the view that preventing Rome from having full control over the selection of bishops hinders religious freedom ... I believe there is no religion in human society that transcends nations."

"The Chinese constitution clearly states that China's religious group and religious affairs cannot be controlled by foreign forces, and [foreign forces] should not interfere in Chinese religious affairs in any way," he said.

His comments came as Beijing published a white paper on religious affairs saying that it "adheres to the principle of independence and self-management, [and] actively guides religions to adapt to the socialist society."

"Actively guiding" is a key phrase that has appeared under the administration of President Xi Jinping, and denotes a view of religion as a dangerous foreign import, with officials warning against the "infiltration of Western hostile forces" in the form of religion, particularly Christianity.

### **Online sales of Bible banned**

The white paper came as Chinese Christians reported via social media that the Bible has been banned from online selling platforms like Taobao.

Taobao, JD.com, and Dangdang have all banned the sale of ISBN-free Bibles and related spiritual books, including those published by the official Christian conferences, a Taobao seller confirmed to RFA.

"We can't sell ... Protestant Christian books, the Bible, and [related] spiritual books ... without an ISBN code," the seller said, in reference to the International Standard Book Number. Chinese ISBNs start with the number 7, and can only be issued by the General Administration for Press and Publications (GAPP) under the State Council.

He said the ban had taken effect at the start of the week.

"They said it was because these are restricted [internal] publications," he added.

The Communist Party has intensified government control over religious activities with a set of tougher regulations since September 2017, sparking fears of further human rights violations targeting religious believers and ethnic minority groups.

The updated rules increased punishments for unsanctioned religious activities and stepped up supervision of certain groups in a bid to "block extremism" and tackle "terrorism," and include a ban on any activities that harm unspecified "national interests."

Wu Fan, editor-in-chief of the U.S.-based Chinese-language magazine Chinese Affairs, said Xi Jinping's administration treats religious work as ideological work in the communist tradition.

"The religious affairs that Xi Jinping is talking about are in fact mass line ideological work," Wu said. "Religions are expected to follow the leadership of the party, according to [Xi's] Chinese dream."

"Basically, they have completely changed the meaning of religion," he said.

Wu said the party is now insisting that people's spiritual lives become fused with the political goals of the ruling party.

"In insisting on this hard-wired connection, they are controlling religious believers," he said. "The Communist Party is an atheist organization, so it's utterly ridiculous that it should be in charge of people who believe in a god."

A Protestant pastor in the southern province of Guangdong who identified himself as Ma Ke, or Mark, agreed, saying that the recent emphasis by Xi Jinping on the "Sinicization" of religion will result in the stifling of religious belief.

"I have just read the white paper ... and I felt that they are still going in the same old direction," he said. "Unlike in other, free and democratic countries, they want all religions to serve this government."

"But a fusion of religion [and state] can only have one outcome; a total lack of genuine religious belief, which is why other countries don't do the same thing as China," he said.

According to the white paper, "actively guiding religions in adapting to the socialist society means guiding religious believers to love their country and compatriots, safeguard national unity [and] ethnic solidarity."

### ***Doesn't bode well***

Anthony Lam, of the Holy Spirit Study Center in Hong Kong, said the white paper doesn't bode well for any future deal with the Vatican, echoing other Catholics around the world who have called on Rome to withdraw from any deal with China.

"This tug-of-war has been going on for so long, which shows how important the key issues are to both parties," Lam told RFA. "The appointment system [for bishops] must comply with canon law [and] all appointments must be made unanimously."

"Otherwise, the entire world will be against us," he said. "The Catholic Church cannot make an exception ... for China."

## **Goodbye to the Religious Affairs Bureau: religions are now under the direct control of the Party**

By Wang Zhicheng

Asia News (22.03.2018) - <https://bit.ly/2pG7w5T> - The reform, wanted by the Party's Central Committee, was voted by the National People's Congress and made public yesterday. Some Christians see no change: the repression continues. A Protestant professor: It's an important change since the Mao era. What it reveals is the unlimited expansion of Party power. Doubts about the dialogue between China and the Vatican: The Catholic Church will become an instrument of support for the Party. The promotion of Xia Baolong, the destroyer of Zhejiang crosses.

Beijing (AsiaNews) - The State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA), also known as the "Religious Affairs Bureau", so far under the authority of the Council of State, has passed under the direct rule of the Communist Party. The move is among a detailed program of reforms on the Party and the state institutions released yesterday.

The decision to eliminate SARA was passed in the third plenary session of the 19th Communist Party's Central Committee in late February. Part of the program was reviewed in the recently concluded National People's Congress, China's parliament. Detail of the program was made public on March 21, with indication that the reform should be implemented by the end of 2018.

Among the reforms, religious affairs are now managed by the United Front Work Department (UFWD), an organ of the Communist Party's Central Committee, whose main function is to manage relations with the non-Communist elite, including individuals and organizations, such as religious groups. Also now under the management of the UFWD are the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office and the Ethnic Affairs Commission, both also originally under the State Council.

The structural change received mixed views among Chinese Christians and observers. "There won't be big change to religious environment, neither loosen nor tighten. It is only a change on management structure and they will do the same thing," said Father Liu, a priest who serves in a Southern province.

"The reform is to put all authority under the Party, no more sharing power with the State Council," said a Chinese observer who asked not to be named. However, he agreed that there is nothing to surprise as the UFWD has always been the supervising unit of the SARA, adding that the UFWD will still keep the signboard of the SARA as it needs an executive office to implement the work.

"The move could unify different voices on the management of religions," the observer said, noting that religious management could involve a number of departments, such as national security, public security, buildings and education, etc.

But Eric Lai, a Catholic commentator, sees the move shows the Chinese Communist Party no more regards religion as a target to liaise but actively using it as a tool to maintain stability.

"It is nothing new for an authoritarian government to use religion as a tool for stability. The Russian Orthodox Church actively safeguards the Putin regime is an example. In the future, if the Vatican and China sign an official accord, will the China Catholic Church follow the path of maintaining stability like the Russian Orthodox Church or have true

religious autonomy to preach in the country? Under the current situation, no doubt the former is more likely,” said Lai, a Hong Kong native.

Ying Fuk-tsang, director of the Chinese University of Hong Kong’s Divinity School, also questioned on his Facebook if this is “reform or moving backward?”

“Religion is a citizen’s basic rights endowed by the Constitution. If it is assigned as specialized duty of the Party, this is undoubtedly a major change in the religious work since the founding of the Communist-rule China. It reflects the unlimited expansion of the Party’s power, interfering directly the basic rights of citizens. This kind of retrogression is definitely negative for the development of religious freedom in China,” he said.

Following closely recent China-Vatican developments, the Protestant professor said he “could not help but ask whether Vatican recognized these facts or still believe in wishful thinking that China’s freedom of religion is stepping forward to the bright side and that the Chinese citizens’ religious freedom will be fully safeguard?”

“Or will the Holy See make another interpretation to justify the Party’s leadership over religions, and believe that it could bring greater space for freedom of religion in China by its own efforts?”

On the same day of the official announcement, SARA director Wang Zuoan held a meeting for all staff to relate the spirit of the deepened reforms. According to the SARA’s website, he said the decision “fully demonstrates the Party’s central high priority for religious work and is more conducive to strengthening and improving the Party’s leadership in religious work.”

Wang added that it [the reform] will also benefit the implementation of the Party’s central important decision and planning on religious work, he added while urging his staff to understand the urgency and importance of the reforms by taking a political and overall view.

According to media reports, the main duty of the UFWD after the adjustment is to implement the basic principles and policies of the Party’s religious work, study and formulate policies and measures for religious work and supervise their implementation, coordinate religious works, manage religious administrative affairs according to the law, protect citizens’ freedom of religious belief, consolidate normal religious activities and develop a patriotic united front with the religious communities.

The reform comes as another surprise to Chinese Christians following the news of Xia Baolong, former Party secretary of the Cross-removal Zhejiang province, being elected vice chairman and secretary general of the 13th Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference on March 14. As the CPPCC’s secretary general, 66-year-old Xia is regarded as powerful “housekeeper” of the top advisory body of Beijing.

The promotion of Xia surprised many because when he was transferred to the NPC from his Zhejiang post last April, with many regarded it was the end of his political path waiting for retirement. Furthermore, Xia was not even elected to the Party’s Central Committee during the 19th Communist Party’s National Congress last October.

Xia worked in Zhejiang since 2003, with four years overlapping when Chinese President Xi Jinping was party secretary of the province. Before reassigned to the National People’s Congress as a vice chairman of the Environment and Resources Protection Committee last year, Xia was party secretary of Zhejiang from 2012 to April 2017, during which there were three years of Cross removal and Church demolition in the name of city planning.

During the campaign that began in late 2013 and gradually subsided around April 2016, about 1,500 Church Crosses were removed, mostly from Protestant Churches. A few dozens of pastors and laypeople who defended their Church crosses were detained, threatened or prosecuted. The authority also prosecuted lawyers who defended them.

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## **Dolkun Isa: Beijing also persecutes the Uyghurs abroad**

***Students and activists are targeted. The relatives of Uyghurs in exile are sent to "re-education camps". The families in China are hostage to blackmail students abroad. The world's silence favours the Chinese government***

Asia News (21.03.2018) - <https://bit.ly/2ukuNjr> - Dolkun Isa, president of the Uyghur World Congress, which is based in Munich (Germany), is a Uyghur leader living in exile. His people, who are predominantly Muslim, live in Xinjiang, a province on the border of China with Central Asia.

"Not only are Uyghurs controlled by China at home, but they are also harassed in exile," Isa told AsiaNews. This, he knows, comes from personal experience.

Isa fled China in 1997, but on 26 July 2017 he was detained by a special unit of the Italian police as he made his way to a press conference at the Italian Senate in Rome to speak about Chinese repression against the Uyghur community.

"They (Chinese authorities) try to monitor all Uyghurs – sometimes directly – especially activists," he explained. "They say not to try any kind of political activity. They say: 'If you try to engage in one of these activities, remember your parents and relatives in Xinjiang!'"

"Family members are held hostage to convince Uyghurs living abroad – especially students – to return to China. And if they do not return on schedule, the Chinese government keeps their families hostage. They force parents to call their sons or daughters to tell them to come back."

Once back in China, people are sent to re-education camps, "which are more like concentration camps," Isa noted. Last December for example, two young Uyghurs men detained upon their return died in suspicious circumstances.

At present, nothing is known about some 20 Uyghurs students held for months. More than 200 have been detained since 4 July, seized in restaurants, at home, or at the airport as they tried to leave for safer places.

The relatives of Uyghurs living abroad or who have lived abroad have also been sent to "re-education camps".

"As for my family – with whom I have no contact –, I have a father who is almost 90. I do not know if he is alive or dead. I know that my older and younger brothers have been arrested and sent to a re-education camp. I do not know how many other relatives are detained."

"This is my personal story," but "All Uyghurs living abroad have at least one or more family members in re-education camps."

For the Uyghur leader, European countries, the United States, the United Nations and the European Union have a responsibility to condemn human rights violations in China and the persecution of Xinjiang Uyghurs.

Oppression, for the latter, occurs in everyday life, from the ban on giving an Islamic name to children, to hardships imposed during the last Ramadan.

"Many [countries] seek economic agreements with China and their silence about this situation sends the wrong message to the Chinese government, which is encouraged in what it does."

International media too should do more. Some cover events "but that is not enough. The situation is terrible. If the world continues to remain silent, it may worsen, even to the point of genocide. The world should stand up and do something."

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## **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*, ([EIFRE](#)) 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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## **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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## **Xinjiang, crosses, domes, statues destroyed: the new 'Sinicized' Cultural Revolution**

By Bernardo Cervellera

Asia News (02.03.2018) - <https://bit.ly/2FnM8gp> - Crosses removed from the domes and the tympanum of Yining Church as well as external decorations and crosses, and the Way of the Cross within the church. The same happened at the churches of Manas and Hutubi. The Cross represents "a foreign religious infiltration ". Prayer services forbidden even in private houses under the threat of arrests and re-education. Children and young people forbidden to enter churches. Religious revival frightens the Party.

Rome (AsiaNews) - "It's a new Cultural Revolution": this most frequent online comment in reaction to photos of the church of Yining (Xinjiang) stripped of the crosses that stood on the building, of the statues that stood on its tympanum and the decorations and paintings that embellished the facade.

The photo that we published (on the left) shows the color, the momentum, the lightness of the domes and wall decorations, the crosses on the top of the building, before their destruction. The photo on the right shows the "after". Everything was destroyed by order of the government on February 27 and 28, just a few weeks after the meeting between the Chinese and Vatican delegations, which reportedly resulted in the drafting of a "historic" agreement on the nominations of bishops in the Chinese Catholic Church.

Yining, 700 km west of the capital of Xinjiang, Urumqi, has a Catholic community of a few hundred faithful.

The reference to the Cultural Revolution is a must: in the period from 1966 to 1976 the Red Guards led by Mao and the "band of the Four" implemented the most extreme form of communism by destroying churches, temples, pagodas, prayer books, statues, paintings to annihilate all religion.

But the "Cultural Revolution" of these days is justified by another slogan: "syncisation". This implies - as Xi Jinping explained three years ago and reaffirmed at the Party Congress last October - "adhering to and developing religious theories with Chinese characteristics", adhering to the principle of "independence", adapting religion to socialist society and resisting "religious infiltration from abroad".

Now the symbol of the cross represents "a religious infiltration from abroad": from the church of Yining, not only were the two crosses that overlapped the two domes razed to the ground, but also the crosses inside the sacred building have disappeared, including the Way of the Cross and the decorations in the form of a cross have been ripped from the pews.

The iconoclastic fury has also affected other cities. Even before last Christmas, all the crosses from the church of Manas were destroyed and there are rumors that the same happened in the church of Hutubi.

The comparison with the Cultural Revolution does not stop there. Just like then, it is forbidden for believers to pray even in private, in their homes. The police threaten that if they find two people praying together in their home, they will be arrested and forced to undergo re-education.

Under the new regulations on religious activities, proposed last September and implemented last February 1st, worship can only be carried out in church, at the times set by the government. Any other place is considered an "illegal place" and those who break such regulations will be subject to prison, fines, expropriation of the building that houses illegal religious activity. Even private homes are now considered an "illegal place of worship": in every private house religious conversation or prayer is forbidden, under threat of arrest. The faithful can pray only in church, during Sunday service.

All churches must display a sign at their entrance announcing that the building is "forbidden to minors under the age of 18" must be exposed because children and young people are prohibited from participating in religious rites.

It should be noted that the churches mentioned are not illegal buildings, but officially registered churches. The point is that "sinicization" implies submission to the Chinese Communist Party, which must act as an "active guide" of religions, on which their life or death, every construction and every destruction, depends.

The ruthless and suffocating control of the Party on religions can only be explained by fear. It is now everyone's experience in China - confirmed by various sociologists - that the country is in the midst of an impressive religious renaissance, to the point that over 80% of the population has some spiritual beliefs and that at least one fifth of the Party members secretly adhere to some form of religion. All this promises more control and persecution in the future. "I am very sad - a faithful of Urumqi confides to AsiaNews - that the Vatican is compromising with this government. In this way it becomes an accomplice of those who want our annihilation".

## Ban on Islamic clothing in Xinjiang

The Dui Hua Foundation's Human Rights Journal (27.02.2018) - <http://bit.ly/2q4qXRB> -



**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 "Five Abnormalities" in Karamay, Xinjiang August 2014. Image credit: ifeng.com**

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 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.

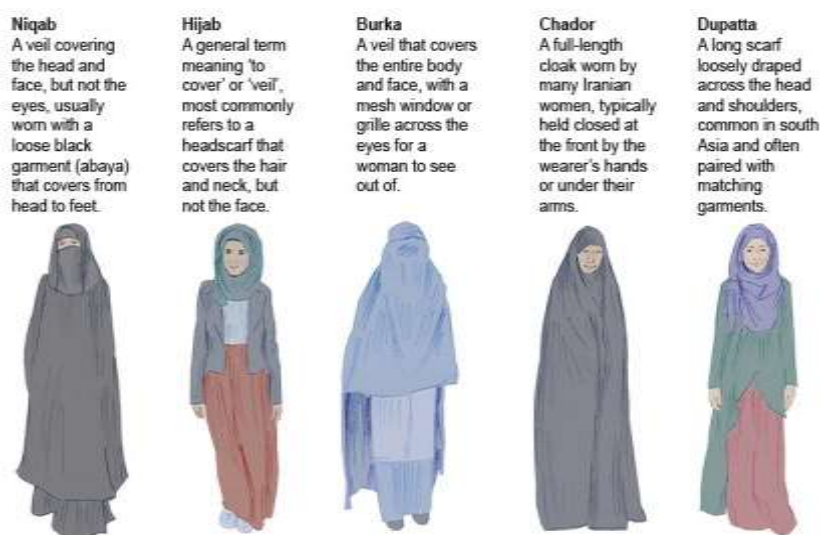
As a provincial-wide directive, Document No.11 has been introduced in localities across Xinjiang. In Karamay, authorities have banned the jilbab, the niqab, all face-covering

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.

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## **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/2DpQg6e> - 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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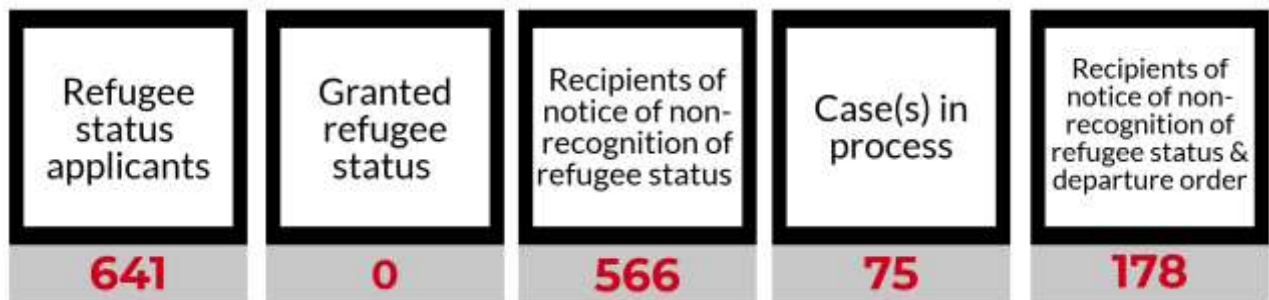
## Over 600 refugees of the Church of Almighty God persecuted in China threatened to be sent back by South Korea

**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.***

## **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 Scarborough 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.

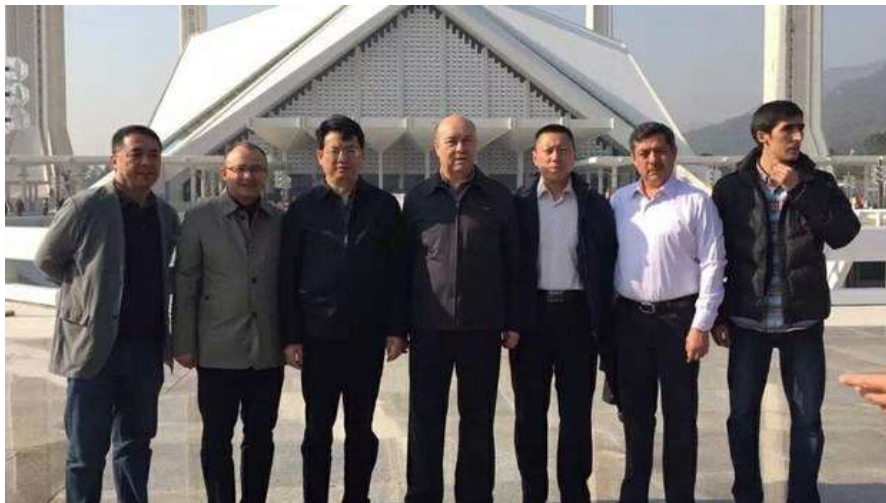
At noon on Dec. 29, officials of the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) took Father Lu away from a priests' dormitory.

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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