

China/ Spain: Forced to flee China due to religious persecution: the case of Li Jie

– HRWF (14.07.2020) – Li Jie[\[1\]](#) was transporting religious books in 2006 when he was stopped by armed police, arrested and tortured. Fortunately, he managed to escape. He then lived on the run to avoid another arrest until 2016 when he fled China and sought asylum in a democratic country.

Li Jie, who is from Shandong Province in eastern China and joined The Church of Almighty God (CAG)[\[2\]](#) in 1999, shared his experiences of religious persecution in China with *Human Rights Without Frontiers* during an interview.

Stopped by armed police

“On 7 August 2006, we loaded a truck with 20 boxes of books of Almighty God’s words[\[3\]](#) in Shandong Province’s Rizhao City, which were scheduled to be transported to a congregation in another province. When we reached a toll station in Pizhou City, Jiangsu Province, five or six armed police officers stopped us. They forced the driver to open the container door to search the contents. As soon as they saw that the title of the books in the crates was *The Word Appears in the Flesh*, they phoned their superior to report it. They then took us and the truck to the police station.”

Eight officers tortured him

“At the Police Station, officers searched me and confiscated

my money (700 RMB or 100 USD in cash), as well as my notebook which contained handwritten phone numbers. They destroyed my trousers in the process. The officers fiercely interrogated me about where I came from, where we had printed the books, and demanded to know where they were destined to go. Seeing that I would not say anything, the chief of the Police Station pointed at my head and angrily said, 'Do not think that the Government is a loving entity. You, believers in Almighty God, deserve harsh punishment.' Their interrogation lasted four hours, but it yielded no results. Consequently, they called the local Public Security Bureau to take over my case.

At around 9:00pm a man in his fifties came in. Under his command, eight officers took turns torturing me in an attempt to force me to speak. They first demanded that I stand in a half squat. As it was August, and scorching hot in Jiangsu, I sweated profusely, wetting the ground under my feet. After about half an hour, I was so exhausted that I collapsed onto the floor, unable to stand up.

They then instructed me to sit on the floor with my two legs stretched out straight and a straight back. If I moved, they kicked and beat me as punishment. Since I had still refused to talk, they took a stainless-steel instrument with an iron head and a spring. They violently beat my toes and ankles, causing a tremendous pain. Even to this day, the skin around my ankles is dark and numb.

Next, they sprayed a liquid with a very strong odor into my eyes, causing immense pain and for me to tear heavily. It felt like my eyes were burning. Later, with a fully charged electric baton stick, an officer shocked my shoulders and knees. The torture I endured from these nine officers caused

tremendous agony.”

A narrow escape

“The next morning, two officers took me into a separate room. They twisted my arms behind my back, tied my thumbs together with a thin cotton string, and told me to squat between two sofas near the wall. I knew that I would soon face more severe torture, and so I kept praying silently to be able to escape.

Out of the corner of my eye I observed how the door of the room was opened and closed. At the same time, I tried to pry my thumbs loose. To my surprise and joy that seemed to work. One of the two officers on guard then left the room, leaving only a young officer to keep an eye on me. This officer kept dozing off while sitting on the bed in the room. I was hoping to escape while he was napping.

However, just when I thought it might be possible, he seemed to notice something was wrong and moved a chair so as to sit directly in front of me, with his feet on one of the sofas to prevent me from leaving. I felt my heart in my throat because soon it would be lunch time and I would lose this window of opportunity to escape. Luckily, it wasn't long before he began to snore. That is when I built up the courage to creep over him and, as quietly as I could, leave the room. To my horror, the door slammed shut behind me. After I realized the young officer was still sleeping, I breathed a huge sigh of relief. There was no one in the corridor and so I was able to walk out of the police station without being stopped. This is how I escaped the CCP and return home safely.

About two months later, fellow members of the CAG informed me

that the CCP was asking about my whereabouts, and that I had to go into hiding as soon as possible. It left me with no choice, I had to leave my home and start to live as a fugitive.”

Forced to flee China

“After eight years of living in hiding, in 2014, the CCP falsely attributed the so called ‘May 28 Shandong Zhaoyuan Murder Case’ [\[4\]](#) to the CAG. The CCP mobilized the armed police, as well as the army, and conducted the ‘One Hundred Day Battle’ nationwide to repress and arrest CAG members. I learned from my family that people were asking about my whereabouts. My village’s Party Secretary had already reported me to the municipal township authorities. Later, I received word that many CAG members in my village had been arrested. I did not dare return home again.

It took another two years of living on the run before I managed to get a Passport and flee to Spain in August 2016, seeking asylum. In late September, my case was heard by the refugee board. Now, in 2020, I am still awaiting a decision from the Government.”

Footnotes

[\[1\]](#) This is a pseudonym. The real name of this asylum-seeker is known to HRWF.

[\[2\]](#) The CAG is a new religious movement that has only gained visibility outside of China due to thousands of its members fleeing and applying for refugee status in Europe and North America. It has been defamed by Chinese propaganda and, as a fast-growing movement, it is perceived as a competitor by Protestant Churches inside and outside of China, which present its theology as heresy.

The CAG releases periodic statistics on its website.[2] According to this source, between 2011 and 2013 more than 300,000 members were arrested. These figures are not inconceivable if one factors in the frequent references to 'successful' campaigns against the CAG in Chinese anti-xie-jiao propaganda and other official sources. The Church also reports that many of its members were tortured, and that some have died while in custody under suspicious circumstances.

According to official Chinese sources, the number of CAG members had reached approximately four million members by 2014. However, this figure is disputed by scholars who argue that it is inflated. They believe this over-estimation is used by the CCP as justification for the urgent need to persecute the CAG.

[\[3\]](#) In the CAG theology, the Almighty God is their (female) spiritual leader, the reincarnation of Jesus-Christ.

[\[4\]](#) In 2014, the CCP falsely accused members of the CAG of being responsible for a homicide that occurred at a McDonald's in Zhaoyuan, Shandong Province. The CCP used all of the media outlets under its control to attack, defame, and slander the CAG. In 2017, Dr Massimo Introvigne investigated this criminal case and uncovered the CCP's deliberate deception in an article published in [The Journal of Cesnur](#).

Special

Weekly

FORB

Newsletter (06-11.07.2020)

11.07.20 – Afraid to seek medical care, believer on the run dies

For runaway Church of Almighty God members, seeking medical care means being found by the state. Many are arrested in hospitals; others die of untreated illnesses.

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11.07.20 – Uyghur traditional houses destroyed by the CCP: Another tool of cultural genocide

A fascinating study by Timothy Grose shows how the “Three News” brutal campaign in Xinjiang is transforming domestic spaces to eradicate Uyghur identity.

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10.07.20 – Ancestral halls destroyed or turned into propaganda centers

Under the CCP rule, any form of religion is banned: even worship of ancestors or ancient sages is banned.

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09.07.20 – The EU will have another special envoy for religious liberty in the world

The office was restored, after the European Commission dismantled it and many protested. While his or her name is still unknown, the work of the next Envoy must start from China.

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09.07.20 – House churches suppressed, believers arrested in Chongqing

Since the coronavirus restrictions started to be lifted in March, the CCP intensified attacks on Protestant venues that are not part of the state-run church.

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08.07.20 – The CCP before the International Criminal Court for the Uyghur genocide

Although China did not sign the treaty establishing the court in The Hague, London attorney Rodney Dixon believe jurisdiction against Beijing can be asserted there.

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08.07.20 – Church of Almighty God members tortured for their faith

In China, dissidents and members of banned religious groups are often subjected to torture while in detention. Two believers share their stories.

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06.07.20 – Pope Francis and China: A Vatican mystery and a proposal

Allegedly, on July 5 a paragraph of a pre-written speech by the Pope where he supported freedom in Hong Kong was not read by Francis. To avoid further wild speculations, the Vatican may publish the text of the 2018 China deal.

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06.07.20 – China's outdoor Buddhist statues continue to tumble

As temples were shut to prevent the spread of COVID-19, CCP intensified its campaign to eliminate all Buddhist statues in Sichuan, Fujian, and Shandong provinces.

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CHINA: Special Weekly FORB Newsletter (28.06-06.07.2020)

04.07.20 – Must raise national flag and sing anthem to reopen church

Some state-run churches were allowed to reopen in China after a 5-month lockdown. But only after proving their loyalty to the Communist Party.

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03.07.20 – Numerous mosques ‘sinicized’ amid the pandemic

Threatening and intimidating Muslims, the CCP implemented forced rectifications of mosques in Hui-populated areas in Henan, Hebei, and Ningxia.

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02.07.20 – Hundreds of policemen sent to demolish Buddhist temples

The Chinese government continues stepping up efforts to suppress religions by demolishing places of worship.

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01.07.20 – Religious venues ordered to subscribe to CCP’s periodicals

The government wants to ensure that all people of faith in

China accept its ideological leadership. Those who disobey are punished.

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01.07.20 – Two State-run protestant churches demolished in Henan

As other venues started reopening after the coronavirus lockdown, places of worship remained closed in China. Some never opened—they were destroyed instead.

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01.07.20 – Protestants, catholics stifled to curb ‘foreign infiltration’

Amid escalating tensions with Western democracies, China’s regime incites nationalist sentiment among residents, cracks down on religions as “foreign agents.”

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30.06.20 – Three-Self church venues demolished or repurposed

Officials suppressed state-approved Protestant venues in Jiangxi Province using a variety of pretexts—for being “dilapidated” or “too eye-catching.”

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30.06.20 – 100+ Church of Almighty God members arrested

Most of the detained have been monitored for days, and some elderly people were tortured to make them disclose information about fellow believers.

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29.06.20 – Uyghurs subject to mass sterilization: A new CCP crime against humanity

A new study by Adrian Zenz proves that Muslim women in Xinjiang are massively subjected to forced abortion, sterilized, and fitted with IUDs.

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29.06.20 – Makers of religious statues suppressed

The Chinese government is expanding the scope of crackdowns on religions by stifling businesses that produce religious items.

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29.06.20 – Poverty alleviation—Yet another tool to control Xinjiang

In the name of fighting poverty, the CCP moves impoverished households from across China to Xinjiang, while sends Uyghurs to other provinces for forced labor

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28.06.20 – Islamic Symbols Removed from 300+ Hui-Run Businesses in Yunnan

Star-and-crescent and other symbols, also writings in Arabic, are purged from shops and restaurants, as the CCP enforces its plan to “sinicize” China’s Muslims.

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The Axis of Shame, July 2020:

The countries that supported China on Hong Kong

– The Representative of Cuba introducing the 53-country pro-CCP resolution at the Human Rights Council in Geneva

Bitter Winter (05.07.2020) – <https://bit.ly/2AvoUDX> – On July 1, 53 countries (including China) signed a resolution introduced by Cuba at the United Nations' Human Rights Council in Geneva praising China for the passing of the Hong Kong National Security Law. The list of those that became part to this new [Axis of Shame](#) (a label Bitter Winter originally created for those supporting Chinese persecutions of Muslims in Xinjiang) has now been [published by Axios.com](#):

China, Antigua and Barbuda, Bahrain, Belarus, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Comoros, Congo-Brazzaville, Cuba, Djibouti, Dominica, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Gabon, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Laos, Lebanon, Lesotho, Mauritania, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Nicaragua, Niger, North Korea, Oman, Pakistan, Palestine, Papua New Guinea, Saudi Arabia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Suriname, Syria, Tajikistan, Togo, UAE, Venezuela, Yemen, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

Russia did not sign, but its Permanent Representative to the United Nations Office and other International Organizations in Geneva issued on June 30 a [separate statement](#) denouncing the “external interference into the domestic affairs of

China.” [Chinese media announced](#) that other countries also issued pro-China separate statements, including Afghanistan, Algeria, Armenia, Capo Verde, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Ivory Coast, Kyrgyzstan, Madagascar, Maldives, Nigeria, Serbia, Tanzania, Chad, Vietnam. It seems however that these separate statements did not necessarily “praise” the new Hong Kong National Security Law, while they criticized those “politicizing human rights” and “interfering in the internal affairs of China.”

The following countries signed a statement introduced at the same Human Rights Council by the United Kingdom strongly criticizing China for violations of human rights and international law in Hong Kong and Xinjiang:

Australia, Austria, Belgium, Belize, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Iceland, Ireland, Germany, Japan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Marshall Islands, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Palau, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, and the U.K.

The United States did not sign because of their problems with the Human Rights Council, but have also strongly condemned China’s wrongdoings in both Hong Kong and Xinjiang.

In the middle are those countries that did not sign either statement, including European Union countries such as Greece, Italy, Spain, and Portugal.

Fled China to escape the CCP's persecution, now seeking asylum in Europe

– HRWF calls upon the relevant Spanish authorities to grant asylum to Wang Dongdong and other members of The Church of Almighty God whose case is similar.

HRWF (30.06.2020) – Wang Dongdong is from Jiaozuo City in Henan Province, China. In 2001, his family all joined The Church of Almighty God and so he has been a member since childhood. He once had a happy family, but it was torn apart by the CCP's arrests and persecution. In May 2015, he managed to escape China and reach Spain to seek asylum.

The following is Wang Dongdong's personal experiences under the CCP's persecution that he shared with *Human Rights Without Frontiers* (HRWF).

Arrested at the age of 12, forced to drop out of school

“One day during the spring of 2002, someone reported that my parents were preaching the gospel to the police. About eight police officers arrested my father and three other church members on charges of ‘illegal preaching’ and took away all of their faith-related books. My father was released one day later. After that, the police would regularly come and raid

our home, intimidating and threatening us by saying that they were going to take my father away to be re-educated through labour. In order to avoid another arrest, my father had to run away from home and go into hiding.

The harassment by the police and the CCP's persecution had a long-lasting impact on my mental and emotional wellbeing. Even today, I am overwhelmingly fearful when I see police on the streets in Spain, and I panic. My entire body shakes uncontrollably.

In 2003, when I was 12 years old, I was arrested while preaching on the streets. The police informed my school and my teachers began discriminating against me. For example, I was disqualified from exams. Later, I had to drop out of school because of this."

Mother died due to being in hiding and unable to see a doctor

"In November 2011, the CCP carried out a massive repression campaign in Henan Province. They frantically arrested and persecuted Christians everywhere: 29 leaders of our Church as well as many members were arrested in our area. My parents had to leave the region to escape capture.

Afterwards, the police learned that my parents were custodians of church funds. They went to our home and turned it upside-down during their search for them. My home was a total mess after that, as if it had been cleaned out by looters. Fortunately, my parents had transferred the church's money

when they had fled home. The police didn't find the funds, so they arrested my older brother and waited at our home until the evening, hoping to capture all four members of my family.

In order to avoid being caught by the CCP, my parents hid in a cave for a long time. Due to the lack of clothing and food, they suffered from extreme cold and hunger. They lived in fear the entire time. My mother soon fell ill. My parents didn't dare go to the hospital because they were afraid of exposing their whereabouts after showing their ID cards. Unable to receive treatment, my mother passed away.

When I heard about my mother's death, I was absolutely devastated and am heartbroken to this day. I wish I could have seen her one last time before she died but that was made impossible. It was the CCP's persecution that separated us and broke my family.

Unexpectedly, I met my father one day. When I saw him, I was shocked. He had become so thin, aged and haggard. Almost all of his hair had turned white. His eyes were swollen, and he looked defeated. I held my father tightly in my arms and we cried. The passing of my mother is an anguish that will never end for us."

Arrested again in 2013

"In 2012, I faced great difficulties in my attempts to reach Sichuan Province to spread the gospel. On the morning of 29 March 2013, I was meeting two church members at the Guangyuan

City Wetland Park when, within five minutes, we were surrounded by twenty to thirty heavily armed special force officers, all of them pointing their guns at us. An older member tried to run, but several police rushed up to her and violently kicked her onto the ground. They forced us in police cars and drove us to the police station.

The police took away my two cell phones, my watch, and RMB 1,500 (approximately 212 USD) in cash. After they had searched me, they yelled at me and violently kicked me onto the floor. They kept kicking if I made even the slightest movement. Later, they took me to the interrogation room and cuffed me to a tiger stool, without allowing me to relieve myself, and while denying me any food or water.

That evening, the Cangxi County National Security Brigade Police escorted me to the Cangxi County Detention Center.”

Torture and forced labour

“On the morning of 30 March 2013, the police cuffed me to an iron chair and interrogated me with the aim of extorting information about myself and the church. When I told them nothing, they threw burning cigarette butts on my face. For more than half a month, I was threatened and interrogated every day. They showed me many photos of church members and pressed me to identify them. They told me details about phone conversations I had with other church members. It was then that I realised that they had already been tracking us for at least half a year using video cameras, wiretapping our phones, and recording our conversations.

While I was incarcerated at the detention center, I was forced to make tin foil for up to ten hours every day. This tin is poisonous, and if you continually breathe it in, you will eventually get cancer. After working for a long period of time, every inmate there developed numerous red blotches on their skin which were insufferably itchy, and our mouths were also festering.

One time, a flu was spreading amongst the inmates, but the guards refused to give us medicine and forced us to continue working. According to one inmate, the work of just our cell alone would net them over one million yuan in one year. We ate moldy rice and rotten vegetables boiled in water, without any salt or oil. We never had enough to eat. Apart from that, two video cameras were installed in every cell to monitor us 24 hours a day.

I was detained under these horrendous and dangerous conditions for three months and eleven days.”

Fleeing China and arriving in Spain

“On 28 May 2014, the CCP accused members of our Church of a horrifying homicide at a McDonald’s in Zhaoyuan, Shandong. This tragic incident was used by the CCP to justify a large-scale mobilisation of armed police and military troops to arrest leaders and members of our Church. Fellow followers of the Church of Almighty God were captured one by one and so I had to relocate many times. In 2017, Dr Massimo Introvigne investigated this criminal case and uncovered the CCP’s

deliberate deception in an article published in [The Journal of Cesnur](#).

In 2015, as there was a high risk of being re-arrested, I somehow managed to obtain a passport. After many challenges, I finally escaped China and have now reached Europe where I am applying for asylum.”

HRWF calls upon the relevant Spanish authorities to grant asylum to Wang Dongdong and other members of The Church of Almighty God whose case is similar.

From China to Italy after being on the run for three years

– HRWF calls upon the relevant Italian authorities to grant asylum to members of The Church of Almighty God who have fled China because of the persecution.

HRWF (30.06.2020) – After being persecuted and living in hiding for three years in China, Cheng Lu, a pseudonym used to protect her family who still live in China (*), arrived in Italy and asked for the protection of the Italian government.

Cheng Lu is from Henan Province, China, and used to work as a designer at a shoe company. In 2012, she was arrested by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) because of her membership in The Church of Almighty God. Consequently, she lost her well-paid job.

In 2013, she narrowly escaped from the CCP's mass arrest campaign targeting believers of all faiths. After that, she lived on the run. In 2015, she escaped China and sought asylum in a democratic country overseas.

She shared her experiences of persecution in China during an interview with *Human Rights Without Frontiers* (HRWF).

Arrest in 2012

“It was 12 December 2012. Two church sisters and I were sharing the gospel with other people when four police officers caught us. They put us in a police car without showing any official identification. One of them shouted at me: ‘You break the law by believing in God in China. Instead, you should believe in the Communist Party. If all people become followers of God, then who will follow the Party?’

At the police station, the officers ordered us to take out all of our religious materials and personal belongings and to put them on our legs. They photographed us and then separated us for interrogation. An officer questioned me about how I got the religious material. As the three of us refused to say anything, they locked us in a very small room and deprived us

of food and water.

That night, my then company manager bailed me out. When I left, an officer warned me that if I was found to be continuing to believe in God and spreading the gospel, I would be sentenced to between eight and ten years in prison. My manager became afraid for his business and gave me an impossible choice: to leave The Church of Almighty God and continue working there or to leave. I chose to quit my job.

Since I now had this arrest on my record, I was unable to find a job or rent an apartment, and I was afraid to show my ID card to others. I had no other choice than to flee to another city and live in hiding.”

A narrow escape in 2013

“In late June 2013, the CCP launched a mass arrest campaign in Zhejiang Province, which led to the arrests of over 100 members of our church, including leaders and general members. Among them was Sister Liu, who managed the church in the town I lived in. She had been secretly tracked by the police for six months. Since I had frequent contact with her, I was in grave danger. I decided to escape immediately to another province. Later I learned that five leaders and church staff were arrested there after I left.

Sometime in August 2014, the CCP ordered the police to re-arrest believers of The Church of Almighty God who had arrest records and to re-sentence them. The CCP police conducted a

blanket search for church members by going from door to door under the guise of a census or checking either the water or electricity.

To escape another CCP arrest, I moved from place to place and had to constantly hide. Wherever I was, I dared not go out and only spoke in whispers, living in stifling fear every day. Once, when residential committee staff visited our place for a check, I had to hide in a small cupboard, curling myself into a ball in total darkness. I could only see a gleam of light from the crack in the cupboard door, and in that moment, I felt miserable. It occurred to me that believers in God had nowhere to live in China where they would be free from persecution. This realisation led to a great deal of pain. I longed for freedom.

In the 14 months I spent in hiding, I did not dare to call my parents because I knew their phone was under surveillance.”

Forced to flee China

“In 2014, the CCP falsely accused members of our Church of a homicide at a McDonald’s in Zhaoyuan, Shandong. The CCP used all of the media outlets under its control to attack, defame, and slander our Church. In 2017, Dr Massimo Introvigne investigated the criminal case and uncovered the CCP’s deliberate deception in an article published in [The Journal of Censur](#).

Afterwards, the CCP mobilised armed police and military forces

to carry out a nationwide 'Hundred Day Battle' with the sole purpose of arresting members and leaders of our Church. Throughout the campaign, almost 1,900 members of The Church of Almighty God were arrested and at least six of them were tortured to death. From time to time I heard news about the arrests of members and leaders that I knew or had worked with. My situation became even more dangerous and I ran out of places to hide.

In 2015, I managed to get a passport and escape China to seek asylum in a democratic country. I have filed my application for asylum in Italy and I am waiting for a decision that will change my whole life. During my hearing in March 2018, I talked about how I joined The Church of Almighty God, my participation in the church activities, and my persecution by the CCP. The Church of Almighty God overseas confirmed my membership after rigorous review and issued a certificate.

However, in July 2018, Italy's Ministry of the Interior rejected my asylum claim. They didn't recognise my affiliation to The Church of Almighty God and my persecution in China because I managed to obtain a valid passport. This demonstrates ignorance of the loopholes within the Chinese system and the widespread corruption that allowed me to purchase this passport. I have appealed this decision."

HRWF calls upon the relevant Italian authorities to grant asylum to members of The Church of Almighty God who have fled China because of the persecution.

(*) The real name of this asylum-seeker is known to HRWF.