

SOUTH KOREA: Imprisoned for their faith

Jehova`s Witnesses (30.11.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2PHJrqw> – On November 30, 2018, authorities in South Korea released nearly all of Jehovah's Witnesses still imprisoned as conscientious objectors. With this historic event, the government has taken a monumental step toward ending its policy of prosecuting and imprisoning Jehovah's Witnesses for conscientious objection.

Since the end of the Korean War, South Korea has criminalized conscientious objectors and sentenced them to prison. However, the government has begun to alter its handling of these cases based on two landmark court decisions rendered earlier this year.

On June 28, 2018, the Constitutional Court ruled that a portion of the Military Service Act (MSA) is unconstitutional because it fails to provide for alternative service for conscientious objectors. Then, just two months later, the Supreme Court heard the case of a young Witness convicted by lower courts for refusing military service. On November 1, 2018, the Supreme Court ruled 9 to 4 in his favor, concluding that conscientious objection is not a crime.

Based on these rulings, lower courts in South Korea now have the legal basis to reconsider over 900 pending cases concerning Jehovah's Witnesses who have been prosecuted for refusing military service. With this legal groundwork in place, young Witness men hope that these courts will render "not guilty" verdicts in their cases.

A Growing Resolve to Reform the MSA

Prior to the June ruling, the Constitutional Court had ruled twice before, in 2004 and in 2011, that the MSA does not violate the constitution, even though the MSA does not recognize the right to conscientious objection. Yet, regardless of those rulings, some lower court judges still believed they were violating the constitution when they sentenced conscientious objectors to prison. Some courageously declared these young men innocent, recognizing they refused to join the military because of their sincere religious beliefs. In time, more judges adopted this view.

Since 2015, judges have declared 157 Witness conscientious objectors “not guilty” of committing a crime for refusing military service, and 15 of these decisions were rendered by appellate courts. As more judges saw the need to reform the MSA, they suspended hearings in many cases, preferring to wait on the decisions by the Constitutional Court and the Supreme Court rather than render an unjust verdict.

Landmark Ruling From the Constitutional Court

Beginning in 2012, lower courts referred six cases to the Constitutional Court, asking it to rule again on whether the MSA is constitutional. On July 9, 2015, the Constitutional Court held a hearing to examine the matter for the third time.

After deliberating for almost three years, on June 28, 2018, the Constitutional Court acknowledged the right to conscientious objection. The Court ruled that failure to provide alternative service for conscientious objectors is unconstitutional and that the government must change the MSA. Although the present law will remain in force for now, the government must amend it by December 31, 2019, and provide

alternative service for conscientious objectors.

The Ministry of National Defense has stated that it will respect the Court's ruling. However, to abide by international standards, acceptable alternative service must not be punitive, it must be truly civilian in nature, and it must not be under military control or supervision. The government has yet to unveil specific plans for implementing alternative service, but Jehovah's Witnesses hope that the new program will be acceptable for all conscientious objectors.

The Court also ruled on whether it was constitutional to penalize conscientious objectors under the MSA. It determined that criminal courts have the right to imprison those who evade military service. However, it also determined that, depending on the circumstances of each case, a conscientious objector could be found "not guilty" of evading military service based on the provision in the law of "justifiable grounds."

Milestone Decision From the Supreme Court

On November 1, 2018, the Supreme Court recognized the right to conscientious objection for the first time in the country's history. In its ruling, the Court quashed the earlier guilty verdict rendered by the Changwon District Court in June 2016 against a Witness who objected to military service. The Supreme Court stated that the original court had not fully examined whether the defendant had acted on a genuinely held religious conviction, and it returned the case back to the Changwon court for further review.

According to the new ruling, courts may accept conscientious

objection based on genuinely held religious beliefs as “justifiable grounds” for refusing military service. In its majority opinion, the Court stated: “Forcing a military duty with criminal punishment or other punitive measures is an excessive restraint of freedom of conscience.”

The Supreme Court not only recognized conscientious objection as a lawful right but also vindicated the neutral stance of Witnesses who had been imprisoned in the past. Additionally, the Court stated that “the existence of alternative service is not a prerequisite for the recognition of conscientious objection as a ‘justifiable ground.’” Rather, according to the Court, if someone objects to military service because of deep, firm, genuinely held beliefs, this should be recognized as “justifiable grounds.

Far-Reaching Effects of the Supreme Court Decision

Since the Supreme Court decision, three trial courts and one appellate court have already handed down not-guilty verdicts for Witnesses who are conscientious objectors. Two of the Witnesses refused reservist training, and the other refused military service. The Supreme Court third division has also rendered 33 not-guilty decisions and referred those cases back to the appellate courts. In addition, the government is in the final stages of drafting its new alternative civilian service program.

As previously stated, on November 30, 2018, Korean authorities released on parole 57 Witness conscientious objectors. They had served at least one third of their 18-month sentence. The remaining eight Witnesses still in prison should be released once they have served at least six months of their sentence.

Jehovah's Witnesses welcome this shift in the government's policy. Over three generations, 19,350 Witnesses have been prosecuted and sentenced to a combined total of 36,824 years in prison for refusing to perform military service. Witnesses around the world rejoice at the prospect that South Korean conscientious objectors and their families may no longer have to endure unjust punishment for their sincere beliefs.

Paul Gillies, a spokesman for Jehovah's Witnesses, stated: "With these two decisions, South Korea has finally chosen to respect the rights of conscientious objectors, upholding its own constitution and international standards. Jehovah's Witnesses hope that all of their fellow believers imprisoned in South Korea for conscientious objection will soon be released. They are optimistic that the judges in pending cases will accept the decision these young men make in adhering to their Bible-trained conscience as 'justifiable grounds' to find them 'not guilty.' Jehovah's Witnesses also hope that the government will expunge the records of the 19,350 Witnesses who have been labeled as criminals for refusing military service based on their strongly held religious beliefs."

.....

If you want to be regularly informed about different violations of human rights in the world, [click here](#) for a free subscription to our newsletters!

Also:

HRWF database of news and information on over 70 countries: <http://hrwf.eu/newsletters/forb/>

List of hundreds of documented cases of believers of various faiths in 20

countries: <http://hrwf.eu/forb/forb-and-blasphemy-prisoners-list/>

WORLD: Older women do double the unpaid work of men, says study

Study of 31 countries finds women over 60 undertake domestic and care work spanning up to to seven hours a day

By Karen McVeigh

The Guardian (16.11.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2DQ60Yp>– Older women spend twice as much time as older men on unpaid work, research has found.

A report by the Overseas Development Institute covering 31 countries shows that women over 60 spend an average of four hours a day on work that goes unrewarded and largely unrecognised.

Researchers who examined employment patterns across developed and developing countries found the disproportionate amount of unpaid domestic and care work performed by women persists into older age regardless of geography. In Ghana, older women spend just over two hours a day doing unpaid work, a figure that

rose to almost four hours in British households. In Cape Verde, meanwhile, women spend seven hours a day on such tasks.

At the same time, and particularly in poorer countries, older women are juggling large amounts of mostly informal and highly precarious paid work too, according to the report.

Researchers found that there were risks for older women engaging in such work, including mental and physical health problems, and financial losses due to the demands of multiple activities. There was also a danger of women encountering violence and abuse during their work as a result of discrimination, the report found.

The study underlines the need to ensure income security for older women as their share of the global population increases. It is anticipated that, by 2050, the number of people aged over 65 will have risen almost threefold compared with figures recorded in 2010, reaching 1.5 billion – 16% of the world's population.

Governments must refocus their social protection policies to support older women, warned the report's authors.

"These findings reveal the full extent to which gender inequalities persist into older age," said lead author Fiona Samuels, senior research fellow with the ODI's gender equality and social inclusion programme.

“The social expectations on women to simply get on with unpaid domestic and care work are putting them under increasing strain and limiting their life choices.”

The researchers found that in Ethiopia, one of the countries where field research was conducted, household chores have a shaping influence on how older women structure their days.

Women interviewed for the project spoke of a relentless cycle of household tasks – cooking, cleaning, washing – as well as physically demanding duties such as collecting water and firewood. When they become too old to carry these items, many women simply resort to dragging them.

Inevitably, there is a limit to their powers of endurance. “How can I work?” reflected one 70-year-old interviewed for the study. “Can people work without their hands? My own clothes are even washed with someone else. I do not wash them. I also have asthma. I cannot breathe.”

The report made several recommendations for governments, including supporting social pensions for older women and reducing and redistributing unpaid care work, through better care provision, including childcare.

Age International, the organisation that commissioned the research, are calling on the UK government to do more to ensure the “invisible” contributions of older women are recognised and valued in its international development programmes, so that they have greater choice in their work.

.....
If you want to be regularly informed about different violations of human rights in the world, [click here](#) for a free subscription to our newsletters!

Also:

HRWF database of news and information on over 70 countries: <http://hrwf.eu/newsletters/womens-rights-gender-equality/>

List of hundreds of documented cases of believers of various faiths in 20 countries: <http://hrwf.eu/forb/forb-and-blasphemy-prisoners-list/>

UNITED STATES: Anti-Semitic incidents fuel 17% rise in hate crimes, FBI says

Crimes targeting Jews increased by 37% in 2017; anti-Muslim crimes fell by 11%

By Joseph De Avila

Wall Street Journal (13.11.2018) – <https://on.wsj.com/2Pt6SZl>
– Hate crimes rose 17% in 2017, the FBI said Tuesday, a jump that was partly driven by a spike in anti-Semitic incidents.

The number of hate-crime incidents targeting Jews increased 37%, to 938 in 2017. Anti-Muslim crimes fell by 11% in 2017, to 273. Race or ethnic-based hate crimes jumped by 18% in 2017 to 4,131. Hate crimes targeting black people increased by 16% and were the most for any category of race, ethnic group, religion or sexual orientation.

Overall, the Federal Bureau of Investigation recorded 7,175 hate crimes in 2017, compared with 6,121 for the year before. The rise in total hate crimes is the biggest since 2001, when incidents rose to 9,730, a 21% increase.

“We are definitely at an inflection point,” said Brian Levin, director of the Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism at California State University, San Bernardino. “We have now risen to the highest level in about a decade. That is a cause for concern.”

Mr. Levin said a myriad of factors likely played a role in last year’s increase in hate crimes, including socio-political polarization, a rise in white nationalist activity and the explosion of online hate speech on sites like 4chan and the social-media site Gab.

The report comes about two weeks after a man shot and killed 11 Jewish people inside a Pittsburgh synagogue. That suspect, who law-enforcement officials said made anti-Semitic remarks when he was apprehended and targeted Jews on social media, is being tried for hate crimes.

The FBI defines hate crimes as a “criminal offense against a person or property motivated in whole or in part by an offender’s bias against a race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender or gender identity.”

The Anti-Defamation League said in a news release that efforts need to be redoubled to address the rise of hate crimes.

“This report provides further evidence that more must be done to address the divisive climate of hate in America,” said Jonathan Greenblatt, CEO at ADL. “That begins with leaders from all walks of life and from all sectors of society forcefully condemning anti-Semitism, bigotry and hate whenever it occurs.”

The statistics are based on reporting from local and state law-enforcement officials to the FBI. The number of law-enforcement agencies that submitted incident reports in 2017 climbed by 6% to 16,149.

The ADL said significant gaps in reporting remain. At least 91 cities with populations exceeding 100,000 either didn’t report any data to the FBI or actually reported zero hate crimes.

“It is incumbent on police departments, mayors, governors, and county officials across the country to tally hate crimes data and report it to the FBI,” Mr. Greenblatt said. “The FBI can only report what the data they receive.”

Hate crimes targeting victims because of their sexual orientation rose by 5% in 2017, to 1,130.

Of 6,370 offenders where the offender's race was identified, 51% of those people were white and 21% were black. The race was unknown for 19% of those offenders.

.....

If you want to be regularly informed about different violations of human rights in the world, [click here](#) for a free subscription to our newsletters!

Also:

HRWF database of news and information on over 70 countries: <http://hrwf.eu/newsletters/forb/>

List of hundreds of documented cases of believers of various faiths in 20 countries: <http://hrwf.eu/forb/forb-and-blasphemy-prisoners-list/>

CHINA: Civil society deeply concerned by removal of key stakeholder information by the UN OHCHR for upcoming UPR

of China

UNPO (05.11.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2RCIQrr>

November 5, 2018

We, the undersigned, express deep concern over the removal of valuable stakeholder information by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) for consideration by UN member states ahead of the 3rd Cycle Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the People's Republic of China.

The UPR process, undertaken through the UN Human Rights Council, explicitly welcomes constructive contributions from civil society to address human rights challenges and promote universal human rights norms. All of the undersigned groups submitted reports through the OHCHR's online platform before the deadline of March 29, 2018 as individual organizations or as joint submissions to be considered by states in the preparation of their recommendations, and by the OHCHR in its official summary of information from civil society.

We are, however, dismayed by the fact that at least seven submissions were completely removed from consideration from the final document intended for UN member states to draft recommendations for China's review.

The OHCHR – tasked with compiling stakeholder information into a summary document – initially released a Stakeholder Summary

dated September 3, 2018. The document listed 85 individual submissions including from the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy (TCHRD) and Demosistō as well as 42 joint submissions including from the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) and Southern Mongolian Human Rights Information Center (SMHRIC); another that included the UNPO and several Tibet groups; and another submission from Hong-Kong-based groups that also included Demosistō.

The World Uyghur Congress (WUC) was provided only passing mention in two citations at the end of the document and the Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP) was cited within the text of the original document, though both were not listed as contributors.

Shortly after the first Stakeholder Summary was posted, however, it was removed from the OHCHR's website for several weeks. Citing "technical reasons", on October 16 the OHCHR re-issued an updated version of the report (version dated October 10). However, this version incorporates critical changes that do not appear to be technical in nature. The updated document removed citations of reports from TCHRD and Demosistō as well as three separate joint submissions (noted above), and removed all references to reports from the WUC and UHRP.

The concerned organizations reached out individually to the OHCHR with concerns from October 22-26; in response, OHCHR officials wrote: "As a subsidiary body of the United Nations General Assembly, the HRC and the UPR Working Group (UPR WG), must adhere to the official United Nations position and terminology as reflected in relevant General Assembly resolutions and within the context of the UN Charter, and therefore, must respect the sovereignty, independence, and

territorial integrity of the State concerned.” Further requests to explain in greater detail specific issues with the seven reports went unanswered.

The OHCHR did, however belatedly, issue a Corrigendum document on November 2, including previously removed citations of reports by TCHRD, UHRP, WUC and a joint submission by UNPO and SMHRIC, we remain deeply concerned about the exclusion of stakeholder information in the first place. Furthermore, an individual submission from Demosistō as well as a joint submission focusing on Tibet continue to be left out of all OHCHR documentation for the review. Since the statements and recommendations of delegations participating in the review are drafted weeks in advance, withholding NGO inputs until less than two working days before the review, effectively precludes these inputs from being considered by participating States.

The undersigned organizations all provided relevant information adhering closely to UN principles and those set out by the OHCHR. All of the aforementioned reports detailed the situation on the ground for particular groups within China and were structured to support efforts for reforms necessary to improve the human rights conditions and the implementation of previous UPR recommendations.

While we recognise the indispensable work performed by the OHCHR around the world working on critical issues and facilitating participation and inputs from various groups, we remain very concerned that the removal of these reports gives further credence to well-documented NGO concerns of China’s growing influence within the UN human rights system, and the deliberate silencing of critical voices.

As NGOs, we look to the OHCHR to facilitate civil society participation in the UPR process. Any differential treatment or interpretation of processes, criteria or NGO engagement by the OHCHR in the context of reviews of China should be justified promptly and openly.

The process concerns in this case raise important questions for OHCHR to answer:

- Why were the NGO inputs excluded in the first place?
- Why, given that the NGO inputs were available since March 2018, did it take until November for the Office to accept them and issue a Corrigendum?
- What specific concerns have led to the submission from Demosistō and the joint submission on Tibet still being excluded, and why have these concerns not been communicated to the NGOs in question?
- Did the delegation or government of China object to the reports or the NGOs which submitted them?

The undersigned organizations therefore call for greater transparency within the UPR stakeholder compilation process including:

1. Prompt notification of exclusion from UPR, Treaty Body

or other human rights reviews.

1. Explanation of terminology used to exclude stakeholder information, including, but not limited to, what constitutes 'politicised' information or fails to respect 'national sovereignty and territorial integrity.'

1. Providing NGOs clear justifications for any concerns, sufficient advance notice, and an opportunity to address any concerns so that their inputs can be duly reflected in the summary of stakeholder submissions.

List of Signatories:

Demosistō

Human Rights Watch (HRW)

International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)

Nonviolent Radical Party, Transnational and Transparty

Southern Mongolian Human Rights Information Center (SMHRIC)

Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy (TCHRD)

Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO)

Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP)

World Uyghur Congress (WUC)

.....
If you want to be regularly informed about different violations of human rights in the world, [click here](#) for a free subscription to our newsletters!

Also:

HRWF database of news and information on over 70 countries: <http://hrwf.eu/newsletters/forb/>

List of hundreds of documented cases of believers of various faiths in 20 countries: <http://hrwf.eu/forb/forb-and-blasphemy-prisoners-list/>

China: Lu Yongfeng tortured to death by the CCP

– HRWF (31.10.2018) – Lu Yongfeng, female, born on 16 October 1948, lived at 0422 Group 6, Wulanheshuo Village, Wulanheshuo Township, Chaoyang County, Chaoyang City, Liaoning Province. In 1999, she joined The Church of Almighty God.

At 3:00 a.m. on 27 June 2018, more than ten uniformed officers with the Beipiao City Criminal Brigade of Liaoning Province drove five police cars (two of which belonged to the Special Service) to the home of Lu Yongfeng and her husband. The police surrounded the home, knocked on the door, and then forcefully entered the home without providing any documentation or identification. The police first grabbed the couple's cellphones to cut off all contact with the outside world. Lu Yongfeng was so terrified that she fainted. The police began tearing the place apart, searching the home. They

confiscated more than ten volumes of religious literature, one laptop, one tablet, and one MP5 player. After more than half an hour the police forcibly took Lu Yongfeng to the Chaoyang City Public Security Bureau; her husband, Zou Jixue, was taken to the Beipiao City Public Security Bureau.

According to Zou Jixue's recollection, the police locked him in a very small interrogation room. Handcuffed, police began asking him about where they got the religious literature, the number of Church members, and the whereabouts of church money. They tried to force him to give up information on the whereabouts of his three daughters (all members of The Church of Almighty God). Zou Jixue recalls them saying:

"Your oldest daughter [Zou Demei] is a coordinator for the Chuan-Gui Pastoral Area [an upper-level leader in charge of the church work of Sichuan Province, Yunnan Province, Guizhou Province, and Chongqing City] and is a nationally wanted criminal! Your three daughters are listed online as wanted! Not a single one of them will be able to escape our grasp. The national government has its ways—they'll do a clean sweep and get them all! Once they're in our hands we can do anything we like with them; there's no room for leniency. We can treat believers in Almighty God however we want!"

Zou Jixue didn't say a word. The police then took him to the Beipiao Detention Center.

At about 9:00 a.m. on 2 July 2018, four police officers put Zou Jixue into a police vehicle and took him to the Beipiao City No. 2 People's Hospital Intensive Care Unit. The officers led him to the bed where he saw his wife, Lu Yongfeng, lying there – she was not breathing properly. He quickly asked the police what they had done to his wife. The officers didn't respond to him. Officers told the doctor to bring an emergency treatment form to have him sign. In his sadness and anxiety, he signed the form and then fainted. Later, the officers took him back to the detention center.

The afternoon of 4 July 2018, police with the Chaoyang City Detention Center went to the detention center to tell Zou Jixue that Lu Yongfeng had died. Two officers tried to force Zou Jixue to sign a document without his reading the name or content. Zou Jixue passed out again. While passed out, two officers took the chance to grasp his hand to sign and fingerprint the document.

Someone from within the detention center later revealed that Lu's death had already been confirmed inside of the detention center, but that the police still took her to the hospital in order to create a false impression that they had provided emergency treatment for her.

Sometime after 4:00 p.m. on 5 July 2018, Zou Jixue once again passed out and could not be fully revived. The police had no choice but to take him back to his rented house and toss him onto his bed. When they left, they forbade him from telling anyone about his arrest and his wife's death. They ordered him not to leave Beipiao City but to await trial at any time.

It has since been learned that Lu Yongfeng and her husband Zou Jixue were subjected to the local police's nonstop harassment and intimidation, and that the police had arrested and detained Zou Jixue twice before with charges of "illegal gatherings and preaching." After Lu Yongfeng's entire family joined The Church of Almighty God in 2002, the CCP government began hunting and monitoring them.

Since believing in Almighty God, Lu Yongfeng had been subjected to the CCP government's increasing persecution; officials had carried out multiple operations to arrest her, her husband, and their three daughters.

The CCP government's consistent human rights violations are well known and recorded. Families such as Lu Yongfeng's, have no opportunity to plead their cases within China. Her daughters remain in grave danger in China. It is up to the

international community to recognize and respond to such outrageous events.

.....

If you want to be regularly informed about different violations of human rights in the world, [click here](#) for a free subscription to our newsletters!

Also:

HRWF database of news and information on over 70 countries: <http://hrwf.eu/newsletters/forb/>

List of hundreds of documented cases of believers of various faiths in 20 countries: <http://hrwf.eu/forb/forb-and-blasphemy-prisoners-list/>

TANZANIA: Special meeting now held to prevent next FGM ritual

Daily News (26.10.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2qcEXhp>– A committee in-charge of protecting children and women in Tarime District has held a crucial meeting to deliberate on what should be done to prevent the next female genital mutilation (FGM) ritual.

The meeting of the committee was made possible through funding from Children's Dignity Forum (CDF), a non-governmental organization leading an on-going campaign against FGM and

child marriage in the region.

Among others, the committee is composed of government officials from various departments entrusted to protect and safeguard children's rights.

These include gender and children's desks at police stations, the Prisons Department, the Social Welfare, Education and Community Development. There is fear that hundreds of girls will be subjected to FGM in the district in December, this year.

The committee, which also includes religious leaders, proposed several measures that will help curb FGM in the area.

Some speakers during the meeting wanted female circumcisers locally known as 'ngaribas' to be arrested and kept until January next year, when the FGM season ends.

"These 'ngaribas' and traditional leaders should be arrested and kept until January 2019 because they are known.

"Let them be arrested," suggested Ms Mariam Julius, a villager from Nyasaricho. Ms Julius and other members of the committee also wanted traditional leaders to be benched from the ongoing anti-FGM campaign in the area on grounds that the elders had been betraying them.

“Traditional leaders are the ones planning and coordinating FGM. It is time to keep them away from this campaign and instead educate girls and women. This will be helpful,” the woman, who is well familiar with FGM in the area, noted. Another committee member Mwihechi Marwa said it was time the campaign involved people, who were not seeing FGM as an important culture.

“The traditional leaders cannot help because they are the ones coordinating FGM,” Mr Marwa, who is the chairman fo Saved Aged People in Tarime, said.

The committee further said there would be public announcement banning FGM ceremonies in the area. Government officials in Mara Region have also blamed traditional leaders from betraying the anti-FGM campaign in the area.

“It is very unfortunate that these traditional leaders are dishonest always taking us backward. This is the truth of the matter,” Rorya District Commissioner (DC) Simon Chacha said recently.

The DC made remarks during a crucial meeting held in Tarime to deliberate on measures that they thought could this time save girls from undergoing FGM in Tarime and other parts of the region.

.....

If you want to be regularly informed about different violations of human rights in the world, [click here](#) for a free subscription to our newsletters!

Also:

HRWF database of news and information on over 70 countries: <http://hrwf.eu/newsletters/womens-rights-gender-equality/>

List of hundreds of documented cases of believers of various faiths in 20 countries: <http://hrwf.eu/forb/forb-and-blasphemy-prisoners-list/>