

CHINA: Church of Almighty God members fatally tortured while in custody

HRWF (17.01.18) – 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 2nd 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 15th 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 18th 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 23rd 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 27th 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 5th 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.