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CHINA: The tragic arrest of Cardinal Zen (90)/ Appeal for strong response of Rome

The tragic arrest of Cardinal Zen (90)

"BE NOT AFRAID!"

FOREF Appeals For Strong Roman Catholic Church Response To Arrest Of Cardinal Zen

By FOREFEUROPE

FOREFEurope (17.05.2022) – <https://bit.ly/39DXoWf> –**The Vatican should more forcefully oppose the arrest of Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-Kiun, a retired Hong Kong archbishop who has courageously opposed human rights violations, and Western governments should sanction responsible Hong Kong officials, urged a Vienna-based, independent human rights organisation.**

“Cardinal Zen courageously risked his own freedom and security for the principle of human rights, but the Vatican’s response has been cautious, appearing almost indifferent,” according to Dr. Aaron Rhodes, president of the Vienna-based *Forum for Religious Freedom-Europe* and Senior Fellow in the Common Sense Society.

“The Bible urges us to ‘Be not afraid.’ The Church should not be afraid of Communist China, and should use its moral authority to denounce the arrest, and China’s other massive degradations of human dignity,” he said.

Zen was detained by Chinese authorities on 11 May 2022, and charged with “collusion with foreign forces” under Hong Kong’s National Security Law, imposed by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 2020. Zen was a Trustee of the *612 Humanitarian Relief Foundation*, which assisted protesters to pay their legal fees. Arrested along with three colleagues who also supported the Foundation, Zen was later released on bail, but faces harsh penalties if convicted.

On 11 May, a Vatican statement said the Holy See had “learned with concern” of the arrest. Further comment from Vatican officials said the Church was “very displeased” and expressed

the hope that the incident would not “complicate the already complex and not simple path of dialogue between the Holy See and the Church in China.”

Other Catholic leaders have shown more moral clarity: The president of the Federation of Asian Bishops' conferences, Cardinal Charles Maung Bo of Yangon, said that Hong Kong has been “transformed into a police state,” and that China's “blatant” abrogation of the Sino-British Joint Declaration, was “appalling.”

Dr. Ján Figel, former European Union Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief, told FOREF, “**Human dignity is a foundational principle of our universal brotherhood and fundamental human rights. Regrettably, dignity of any dissenting person is brutally abused by Chinese and Hong Kong's power holders today.**”

Antonio Stango, President of the *Italian Federation for Human Rights*, said, “**The extension to Hong Kong of the suppressive system of mainland China is just a further step in the regime's program of annihilation of any remaining freedom of conscience, in blatant contrast with international human rights law.**”

The arrest of Cardinal Zen was also denounced by *Stand With Hong Kong Vienna*. The group told FOREF that the arrest “**shows how the arbitrary regime weaponizes the vagueness of Hong Kong's national security law to induce terror in anyone who wants a democratic Hong Kong.**”

“It is time that Magnitsky-type sanctions be applied to Hong Kong officials responsible for these arrests, and for destruction of the general Rule of Law in the city,” according to FOREF’s Executive Director Peter Zoehrer.

Zoehrer also expressed the hope that the Vatican will critically review its 2018 arrangement with the CCP, which gives the CCP veto power on the appointment of Chinese bishops, and arrangements which, under new CCP rules, “stipulate that CPCC-aligned clergy actively support the ruling Communist Party. Article 3 requires them to ‘support the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party’ and “the socialist system,” as well as to ‘practice the core values of socialism.’”

“No one should underestimate the challenges faced by the Church in China, but religious freedom means nothing if it is compromised to maintain the presence of institutions,” he said.

Willy Fautré, director of Human Rights Without Frontiers, told FOREF: **“Cardinal Zen is being persecuted for being a long-standing critic of the government in Beijing, for speaking out for Catholics in mainland China and for more democracy in Hong Kong. This is a shocking repression measure to which the Vatican’s timid reaction is inadequate.”**

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Further reading about FORB in China on HRWF website

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