

# 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 Cesnur](#).

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."

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