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Gong Dazhi: Fled religious persecution in China, now waiting for refugee status in Spain

– The case of Gong Dazhi, a member of the Church of Almighty God

– Human Rights Without Frontiers calls upon the Spanish authorities to grant refugee status immediately to believers

of all faiths that are persecuted in China

– HRWF (28.05.2020) – After thirteen years of harrowing persecution in China due to being a member of The Church of Almighty God, **Gong Dazhi**, 41, shared his story with HRWF. He was detained and subjected to horrific torture. In April 2019, he arrived in Spain and applied for asylum. To this day, he is waiting to hear whether he will be recognised as a political refugee or not.

Arrested and tortured in 2003

“On 15 March 2003, I was arrested in Jilin Province because of my faith in The Church of Almighty God and my evangelism activities. While detained, I was tortured and then sentenced to one year of so-called ‘re-education’ through labour.

On the day of my arrest, I was reported to the police by passers-by for preaching the gospel with an elderly sister. The police confiscated our books and took us to the Jingyue Town Police Station in Erdao District, Changchun City, Jilin Province. It is in the Changchun Municipal Public Security Bureau that my first experience of torture occurred.

The policemen put hoods over our heads, handcuffed us and took us to a secret interrogation room. They put me on a tiger bench, twisted and lifted my arms behind my back, and then placed my arms on the iron rail at the top of the tiger bench. They handcuffed my wrists in that position and tied a white nylon rope to the chain between the handcuffs. They also tied

my feet to the tiger bench with another rope.

A young officer slapped me hard in the face. A middle-aged policeman yanked the nylon rope connected to my handcuffs while simultaneously stomping on the rope attached. The handcuffs pulled on my wrists so tightly that it felt like the metal was cutting through my bones.

The officers attempted to force me to identify and denounce my fellow brothers and sisters in the church. When I refused, they placed two thick white plastic bags over my head and tightened them around my neck. One officer repeatedly punched my chest while another treaded hard on the rope connected to the handcuffs at the same time.

I was being suffocated while experiencing excruciating pain. I struggled and, in the process, managed to free my feet from the rope. I twisted my feet around the chair legs, trying to tear the plastic bags with my teeth so that I could breathe. Despite my best attempts, I failed to create a hole and subsequently passed out.

The police revived me by pouring cold water on me. When I came to, gasping for breath, they interrogated me about the church. Again, I refused to tell them anything, and so they put the plastic bags back over my head and trod harder on the rope tied to my handcuffs. I fainted again from a lack of oxygen. They repeatedly tortured me in this way until they were exhausted.”

Tortured and sentenced

“The next evening, the police took me to Daguang Detention Center of Changchun Municipal Public Security Bureau. After seven days of detention and torture I was charged with ‘disturbing the social order’ and sentenced to one year of so-called ‘re-education’ through labour. I was sent to the Chaoyanggou Labour Camp in Changchun City to serve my sentence.”

Tortured again and subjected to inhumane labour

“At the camp, the guards often instigated other prisoners into torturing me. I was forced to carry out intense physical labour every day that year without pay. I was woken up at 5 am every day and had to work until midnight. If I couldn’t finish the compulsory tasks within the stipulated time, I would be subjected to severe beatings.

Additionally, the prison guards and inmate boss often forced me to handwash clothes and sheets for them, even when the temperature of the winter in Jilin Province was colder than minus 20 degrees Celsius. The water was icy and it took two or three hours to do the washing, which created great pain in the joints of my fingers.

If I stood in the wrong line at the cafeteria, the inmate boss would punish me by forcing me to bend down until my head touched the iron pipe at the corner and lift my hands as high as I could from my back. I would have to stay in this position

for a prolonged period of time. They would also hit my mouth hard with a 30 cm long bamboo plate. I lived in constant fear.

After my release in 2004, I had to go into hiding, moving from place to place, because the police were searching for me.”

Forced to flee China

After living in hiding and nonstop fear for many years, Gong Dazhi fled China “to freely practice my faith”, as he said to HRWF. He arrived in Spain in April 2019. He now has an interim residence permit and is waiting for a final decision on his asylum application. He says: “I’m often afraid that I may be sent back to China where I have suffered so much persecution by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) government. I do not want to experience that ever again.”

HRWF Comment

Since Xi Jinping came into power in 2012, the Chinese Government has dramatically escalated the persecution of Christians and other religions.

HRWF’s Database of Prisoners in China is regularly updated. At the time of writing, it has documented over 4,000 cases where members of The Church of Almighty God are imprisoned. This figure is estimated to be only the tip of the iceberg.

See HRWF's Prisoners' Database
here: <https://hrwf.eu/hrwf-prisoners-database-china/>

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