

CHINA: 10 myths about The Church of Almighty God

Most of what you find on the Internet about The Church of Almighty God is false. Here is why, and where to look for more reliable information.

By Massimo Introvigne

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The Church of Almighty God (CAG) is the largest Chinese Christian new religious movement. It is also known as “Eastern Lightning.” It has been founded in 1991, and after its rapid growth alarmed the Chinese regime, it was banned in 1995. It was heavily persecuted since, with hundreds of thousands arrested, hundreds of cases of torture, more than one hundred well-documented instances of death while in custody or as a consequence of police mistreatment, and several cases of organ harvesting. In the 21st century, to justify the persecution, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has launched a massive campaign of fake news against the CAG. Unfortunately, despite having been debunked by independent Western scholars, the fake news has been uncritically spread by some Western media and is still widely available on the Web, where Chinese propaganda is also active with anonymous or pseudonymous texts. Here is a guide to the most common myths and fake news.

Myth 1. The Church of Almighty God Killed a Woman in a Chinese McDonald's

False. On May 28, 2014, salesgirl Wu Shuoyan (1977–2014) was killed in a McDonald's diner in the city of Zhaoyuan, Shandong. Six “missionaries” entered the McDonald's and asked for the cell phone numbers of the customers. Wu refused to supply hers, was identified as an “evil spirit,” and killed.

Chinese authorities claimed that the perpetrators were CAG members, and used the claim to justify their persecution of the CAG. However, Western scholars who studied the documents

of the subsequent trial, where two of the assassins were sentenced to death, concluded that the group, although using the name “Almighty God,” was not related to the CAG. It was a different religious movement, which believed in a dual deity incarnated in the two female leaders of the movement: Zhang Fan (1984–2015), who was executed, and Lü Yingchun. At trial, Lü Yingchun clearly explained that she regarded the CAG as “a fake ‘Church of Almighty God’” and her own movement as “the real ‘Almighty God.’” Zhang Fan stated that, although they had read some CAG books, they never had any contact with the CAG (please refer to the above video). Scholars have unequivocally concluded that the assassins were not related to the CAG. The Chinese regime attributed the crime to the CAG to justify its persecution at home and abroad.

Myth 2. The Church of Almighty God Is Violent

False. The CAG, according to Chinese governmental sources, has four million members. It is surprising, and a testament to its peaceful nature, that only a handful of them have been accused of violent behavior (the rate is much higher in mainline religions). Moreover, the accusations were false. The most horrific accusation is about gouging out the eyes of a young boy in 2013 in Shanxi. Police records show that the crime was perpetrated by the boy’s aunt, who later committed suicide and had nothing to do with the CAG, which was accused of the incident only one year later by a website against “cults.” Chinese propaganda shows pictures of people beaten and mutilated by the CAG but has failed to produce any more specific evidence, detail, or court record, related to the prosecution of CAG members for these alleged crimes. More than 5,000 Chinese CAG members escaped abroad. If they are so violent, why not even one of them has been accused of any violent crime in the host countries?

Myth 3. The Church of Almighty God Kidnaps Christians to Convert Them

False. This has been alleged in 2002 by China Gospel Fellowship (CGF), a large Christian house church, which complained that CAG had “kidnapped” 34 of its leaders. Although CGF claims it reported the incident to the police, no CAG member was arrested or prosecuted for the crime. The CGF incident became the model for subsequent (and unsubstantiated) similar accusations by other Christian groups, but no police or court records were ever offered as evidence. One only needs to pause and think. CAG members are mercilessly hunted in China. Rewards are offered for their capture. How would they be able to mount a vast kidnapping operation in a police state like China? And CAG grows very fast: millions converted in a few decades. Would they run serious risks just to convert a few dozens more? And are people kidnapped and beaten likely to convert?

Forcing people to convert is against CAG theology. In a large church, it is not unlikely that some members, at some stage, used over-zealous or inappropriate recruitment practices. This was noted, and stopped, by the CAG highest administrative authority in 2005. His instructions read, “The gospel must be preached by using regular ways. This has been emphasized many times. Some people still use low and base means to preach the gospel. This must be forbidden. Whoever uses such means to preach the gospel must stop immediately. Anyone who uses them again will be expelled.”

A charitable explanation of the accusations by those Christian

groups is that some of their leaders were invited to seminars in China and went there without realizing the organizer was CAG (of course CAG, as a banned movement, cannot organize anything in China using its own name). A less charitable explanation is that they were embarrassed by the fact that so many of their members had converted to CAG and invented the “kidnapping” and other rumors as convenient explanations.

Myth 4. The Church of Almighty God Predicted the World Would End in 2012

False. Many Chinese of all faiths believed in the so called “Mayan” prophecies that the world would end in 2012. Some individual CAG members also did, but they were told they were wrong by the leaders. Those who insisted in talking about the end of the world were expelled. There was a very good reason for this. In CAG theology, there is no end of the world. Our world will be transformed, but will not end. And the transformation will not occur before the person the CAG worships as Almighty God (who was alive and well in 2012) will leave this world. The CCP accused the CAG of being involved in 2012 end of the world riots, but this was just another pretext to justify the persecution.

Myth 5. The Church of Almighty God Brainwashes Its Followers

False. Most academic scholars of new religious movements do not believe brainwashing exists at all. It is a convenient label used to discriminate against unpopular movements and explain why people convert to them. Courts of law in the United States (since 1990, with the landmark Fishman decision)

and elsewhere agreed: brainwashing is a pseudo-scientific myth. Even the tiny, controversial minority of scholars who believes in brainwashing admit its existence can be proved only through large-scale psychological studies of members of a specific group. No such study of CAG has ever been performed, and an independent study would obviously be impossible in China, making the conclusion that the CAG “brainwashes” its followers wholly unsubstantiated.

Myth 6. Church of Almighty God Evangelism is Motivated by Money

False. The fake news that CAG members receive money for every new person they convert has been invented by Chinese propaganda publications. Considering the number of converts, even the richest religious organization in the world would have been quickly bankrupted by giving money awards for each new convert. It is also false that members are milked of their money and compelled to buy expensive books. In fact, there is no membership fee. CAG rules mandate that, “Believers of The Church of Almighty God can enjoy all of the books of God’s words, spiritual books, and audio and video productions without charge”.

Obviously, monetary contributions are needed in a large organization such as the CAG. The CAG’s Principles, however, leave a large individual latitude. “Some insist on making an offering of ten percent [the tithe, common in many religious groups], while others contribute in different ways. As long as it is being offered willingly, God will gladly accept it. God’s house only specifies that those who have only believed in God for less than a year are temporarily exempt from providing any offerings, while poor people are not required to

provide any offerings but can make offerings according to their faith. The church will not accept offerings that might lead to family disputes. Those making an offering of money must pray several times, and only after they are sure they are completely willing and are certain they will never have any regrets are they to be allowed to make their offerings.”

Myth 7. The Church of Almighty God Is Against the Family

False. As in all religions, contrasts may emerge when one member of a family converts while the others don't, or when somebody decides to become a full-time missionary (a choice available in most religions) and parents or other relatives do not approve. However, studies of CAG's sacred scriptures and policy documents proved that the CAG has a positive view of marriage and the family as foreordained by God. CAG teaches that the family exists because of God's "sovereignty and orchestration," and reiterates God's requirement of honoring parents and respecting the marriage.

Sociological surveys conducted on CAG members outside of China also proved that most of them were converted by relatives and in turn tried to convert their relatives to CAG, although of course other methods of proselytization also exist. On the other hand, it is true that many families including one or more CAG believer are destroyed and separated—not by CAG, but by Chinese persecution. The High Commissioner for Human Rights of the United Nations mentioned in a 2018 report that, “during 2014-2018, the Chinese Communist Party's monitoring, arrest, and persecution had caused at least 500,000 Church of Almighty God (CAG) Christians to flee their home, and several hundred thousand families had been torn apart.”

Myth 8. The Church of Almighty God Advocates a Revolution in China

False. The CAG believes that the Chinese Communist Party has constantly “resisted God” and persecuted Christians and other believers. The CAG think that this fulfills the prophecy of the “evil Great Red Dragon” in the Book of Revelation. However, by reading CAG scriptures and literature it becomes obvious that the CAG believes the Dragon will fall by itself under the weight of its errors, and does not advocate any revolution. CAG members are counseled to stay away from politics. And, again, each person needs to pause and think by herself. Since they managed to grow so rapidly and resist persecution, one may assume CAG leaders to be intelligent and realistic people. How can they believe that a small (for Chinese standards) and persecuted group of believers may organize a successful revolution against the Chinese Communist Party, government, and army?

Myth 9. The Church of Almighty God Is Clearly Not Christian

False. That somebody is American, or Chinese, is an empirical statement. When in doubt, there are authorities (the respective governments) that can certify who is a citizen of their countries, and who isn't. Who is or isn't a Christian is a theological statement, and there is no universally recognized authority that can certify this status. Admittedly, CAG theology is different from traditional Christianity, as CAG believes Jesus Christ came back to Earth and incarnated as the Chinese woman it worships as Almighty God. American scholar Holly Folk, who has studied CAG theology, has found in

it a number of "Protestant continuities." As a conclusion, she declared it "a new Christianity with deep Christian roots," "a real Christianity." Different denominations and theologians use different definitions of Christianity, some broad and some very narrow. Catholics until the mid-20th century called Protestants non-Christians. Some fundamentalist Protestants still claim Catholics are not Christians. Who is Christian? Who decides?

Myth 10. The Church of Almighty God Is a Cult

False. As used by the Chinese Communist Party, "cult" or "evil cult" simply indicates a group the Party does not approve of, and whose persecution it tries to justify by spreading fake news. More generally, just as it happens for "brainwashing," most academic scholars do not use the word "cult," acknowledging it is a polemical rather than empirical label. A "cult" is a group somebody else do not like. All religions have been called "cults" in their early years. One can still find Protestant literature claiming the Roman Catholic Church is a cult, and arch-conservative Catholic literature making the same accusation against most Protestants. Anti-cultists propose checklist of the features of "cults": they are dogmatic, authoritarian, patriarchal, demand much from members, discriminate against their ex-members who left the group, and so on. Academics do not regard these criteria (most of which, by the way, would not be applicable to the CAG) as valid for distinguishing between "religions" and "cults," as the same features are also found within traditional religions. But, at any rate, "cult" is just a label used to discriminate against certain religions and movements, be it by totalitarian regimes, secular opponents of certain religions, or religionists disturbed by the competition. Almost all religions were, and are, accused by somebody of being "cults."

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CHINA: The Church of Almighty God: Situation of asylum-seekers in the EU

The Church of Almighty God (March 2019) –

Countries	Total Applications	Asylum Granted	Asylum Rejected	Departure Order	Deported
GERMANY	305	45	252	7	2
FRANCE	444	31	413	219	0
ITALY	820	103	284	0	0
GREECE	48	5	25	0	0
NETHERLANDS	54	15	33	33	0
CZECH REP	42	3	37	0	0
FINLAND	39	9	30	0	0
SWEDEN	9	7	2	2	1
SWITZERLAND	33	2	29	24	3
PORTUGAL	10	0	7	0	0
BELGIUM	11	0	11	10	0
UK	3	1	0	0	0
AUSTRIA	9	2	7	0	0
SPAIN	421	0	0	0	0
IRELAND	2	0	0	0	0

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CHINA: New report accuses the CCP of mass-scale human rights violations

By Willy Fautré, *Human Rights Without Frontiers*

HRWF (11.03.2019) – In 2018, more than 11,000 members of the Church of Almighty God (a new Christian movement with continuities to the Protestant tradition) were arrested in China for merely engaging in religious activities. It has been reported that twenty of them died during their imprisonment: seven of which were in so-called ‘transformation through education centers’, the same centers where one million Muslims from Xingjiang are currently detained and indoctrinated against their will.

According to information gathered by the Church of Almighty God (CAG), 23,567 of their members were persecuted by the authorities in 2018 for either attending underground religious meetings or for trying to share their faith with others.

Across thirty provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities, at least 12,456 church members have suffered harassment, including having their personal data collected, being forced to sign statements renouncing their faith, being forcefully photographed or video recorded, and having their fingerprints, blood samples, and hair involuntarily collected.

According to the report, some 6,757 members were held in

detention either for short or long periods; 685 members were known to have been tortured and 392 members were sentenced to lengthy prison terms. The majority of individuals were sentenced to three years in prison, but eight were sentenced to more than ten years.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) estimates a total of 4 million members of the Church of Almighty God.

Since the Church's foundation in 1991, over 300,000 members have been arrested and at least 500,000 have fled from their homes. The report says that 101 known cases of death in detention have been confirmed by the Church.

The report details nineteen documented cases which demonstrate the CCP's use of arbitrary detention, torture, extra-judicial killing, propaganda against the CAG, and undue interference in applications for political asylum abroad.

The two cases below, taken from the report, illustrate the intensity of the repression (pseudonyms are used to protect the victims and their families).

Tortured & Humiliated, Aizhen's brutal story from a Chinese prison

On 9 May 2018, Aizhen (pseudonym) a 54-year old woman from Jiujiang City, Jiangxi Province was arrested in a police raid.

While at the police station, three police chiefs took turns questioning her. The interrogation lasted from 5:00 p.m. on the day of her arrest until the afternoon of the following day. She was brutally beaten and humiliated, deprived of sleep, and was not given anything to eat or to drink. They wanted to know her name and her address. They attempted to force her to release information about the Church and to sign a document by which she would renounce her faith. When she refused to comply, the police officers took off their leather shoes and used them to hit her face.

On 16 May, the police transferred her to a detention center. They indicated to the prison guards that she was a believer of The Church of Almighty God and required 'special treatment'. While in custody, Aizhen was frequently subjected to beatings by both the prison guards and other prisoners. On three occasions she was handcuffed, suspended from a pole and beaten. Her entire body was black and blue.

The prison guards made Aizhen stand at attention facing the bathroom wall for over two hours every day and got other prisoners to watch over her. If they noticed she was praying, they would beat her. They pulled her into the restroom and pressed her head down on the floor, they hit her face, buttocks, and thighs with the soles of their shoes. They hit her all over her body. The inmates also beat and insulted Aizhen. Once, the head of the prison forced her to sit topless in the main hall under the surveillance cameras in order to humiliate and shame her.

Aizhen was released on 10 June. After returning home, her arms

hurt so much that she could not fully stretch them. To this day, even after several rounds of medical treatment, she remains physically impaired.

Tortured to death

On the evening of 13 September 2018, Miao Zenghua, a fifty-one-year old woman, was arrested at home in Dunhua City, Jilin Province, by officers from the local Public Security Bureau (PSB). She had a heart attack on the spot and was sent to the hospital for emergency treatment. After regaining consciousness, despite her health condition, she was taken by the police to the local PSB where she was tortured for a confession.

On 14 September, her family received a call from the PSB and rushed to the hospital. They discovered that Miao was not breathing. Big purple and blue marks covered her left arm and legs. They were clearly the result of terrible torture.

Her medical record stated that when an ambulance arrived at the PSB on the afternoon of 14 September, she had already stopped breathing and her heart had ceased beating.

Miao Zenghua had joined The Church of Almighty God in 2007. She was a mid-level leader of the Church. Once CCP officials learned about her position, they targeted her for arrest.

Moving forwards for justice

In 2018, Brussels-based NGO, *Human Rights Without Frontiers* contributed to the United Nations Universal Periodic Review of China with a brochure titled **“Tortured to Death”** documenting numerous fatal cases of torture (See <https://hrwf.eu/forb/our-reports/>).

On the homepage of its website, *Human Rights Without Frontiers* has published documented cases of prisoners believing in the teachings of The Church of Almighty God in China. At the beginning of 2019, the list, which is only partial, comprised **1663 prisoners: 1291 women and 372 men** (See <https://hrwf.eu>)

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CHINA/NETHERLANDS: She escaped from China as a Catholic and joined The Church of Almighty God abroad

Interview with a Chinese believer who fled from China, currently residing in the Netherlands, and still fears for her life

HRWF (28.02.2019) – Zhao Y, whose full name is withheld for security reasons, was forced to leave China because of her Catholic faith. As she sought refuge in Switzerland, she found a new spiritual home in The Church of Almighty God.

Zhao Y was denied asylum in Switzerland and lives in constant fear of her life if forced to return to China. Human Rights Without Frontiers Int'l interviewed her.

HRWF: Ms Zhao, it's not easy to leave your home and family behind. What prompted you to make this difficult decision and come to Europe?

Ms Zhao: I became a Catholic in October 2011, and since that time I have suffered threats to my life because of my belief. I was not arrested or imprisoned myself, but after my mother was arrested my family was put under surveillance by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). I was forced to leave my home and to go into hiding. In January 2016, Li, a faith sister, was arrested and so heavily tortured that she gave my name to the police. Afterwards, the police went to my home several times to look for me. There was no other option for me to flee from China.

HRWF: In China, how free were you to practice your faith publicly?

Ms Zhao: Before my mother was arrested, we attended mass twice a week in a private home. A priest could only be present for one of the weekly meetings because the situation was too dangerous to attend more often. Other meetings were run by a “godmother”. We sang songs quietly, read the Bible, and prayed for people who had difficulties.

HRWF: Can you tell more about the circumstances surrounding your mother’s arrest?

Ms Zhao: My mother was arrested in May 2015 and detained for fifteen days. During her time in custody, she was severely tortured and forced to sign three letters to recant her faith (Letter of Guarantee, Letter of Penance and Letter of Rupture). She was released only after my uncle bribed a police officer with money and gifts.

However, her freedom is an illusion. My family is still being under surveillance and she is shunned by our neighbors. While I still lived at home, the village cadre came to my house every few days to see if my mother went outside to worship. Our neighbors did not dare visit her and pushed us to give up our beliefs. The village cadre also let it be known everywhere that our family believe in God. So, we often suffered from discrimination, ridicule, and depreciation from our neighbors and some of our relatives.

Later on, I was forced to leave home and stayed at my church member’s house and lived a dark life. Every day, I stayed in a small room without opening the window. When I heard footsteps or a police car, I was filled with fear and had nightmares almost every night. I couldn’t go back home, but I couldn’t leave the house.

HRWF: That sounds like quite the ordeal. What did you do to make it through that difficult time?

Ms Zhao: When I think back to that period of life, without God’s companionship, protection, and the strength God gave to

me, I really couldn't have survived in such conditions. I never knew what would happen the next day. I lived in fear and suffered mental torture every day. Then, through the grace of God, I fled to this free and democratic country, fortunately.

HRWF: Is anyone else in your family a Catholic, and, if so, have they ever experienced any problems with the CCP?

Ms Zhao:My brother was a Catholic for a time, but he gave up his faith because of the acute persecution from the CCP against Christians and he was afraid of losing his job. However, he still supported my mother and me in our belief. Sometimes he listened to us talk about our religion and he believes in the existence of God.

My auntie was arrested in 2012 for preaching the gospel; she was reported by someone. She was detained for approximately a month and only released because her husband paid a lot of money for her release. But after her release the police still controlled her; they pushed my uncle to make her stop believing in God and even threatened him with the future of their son. So my auntie was persecuted by her own husband, and he even used violence to make her stop believing. He kept her under surveillance, restrained her with an iron chain, and didn't let her leave the house. My uncle also threatened to report all the Catholics he knew if she was found to still believe in God. Hence, my auntie lost all her freedom.

HRWF: Did anyone else in your religious community face persecution from the police?

Ms Zhao:Yes. One day in May 2015, one of my church members was reported by a neighbor when she attended mass. She was detained for approximately fifteen days and tortured severely by the CCP. During her detention, the Chinese police made threats against her family members' livelihoods if she didn't release the names of other church members. They told her they would monitor all her movements and she was not allowed to

sleep.

Furthermore, in January 2016, another church member, Li, was reported when she attended mass and was arrested. After enduring half-a-month of torture, Li was exhausted. Because the police couldn't get any more information out of her, they threatened on her five-year old grandchild, saying that if she didn't cooperate the CCP would ensure the child would bear the burden of his family's crimes and live with constant bullying. Due to this threat, Li betrayed me.

HRWF: Is there anything else you want to share about the pressure you felt to renounce your faith?

Ms Zhao:Yes. Because the CCP is an atheistic party, I was educated with atheism since I was young. The CCP lavishly promotes atheism on television, in newspapers, and via other media outlets. It condemns Christianity, Catholicism, and other religious beliefs as superstition. To believe in God in China means you not only face arrest and persecution, but also discrimination from others.

HRWF: How did you come to join The Church of Almighty God?

Ms Zhao: In April 2016, I escaped to Switzerland to ask for asylum. In July of the same year, I met sister Si Ma, a Christian of the Church of Almighty God in Switzerland. She told me about The Church of Almighty God. Over a period of four months, I researched and read a lot about the teachings of the church and I officially became a member of The Church of Almighty God in December 2016.

HRWF: Your asylum claim in Switzerland was rejected. Do you still fear for your life if you are sent back to China?

Ms Zhao:My experience in Switzerland has brought me to live in fear again. My asylum application was rejected by the Swiss government. Even worse, some Christians were repatriated to China. I am scared I will also be also repatriated, and then I

will be arrested by the CCP, tortured, and sentenced.

Recently, I saw a report about my fellow-Christian, Wang X. I knew her when I was in Switzerland. She was arrested by the CCP after she was deported back to China by the Swiss government. She was sentenced to three and a half years in the name of "participating in cult activities". I am now more worried than ever about my situation.

I have submitted the asylum application in the Netherlands, but I don't know what the result will be. I hope it will be a good decision.

Human Rights Without Frontiers (HRWF) recommends that the Dutch authorities grant Ms Zhao Y. political asylum. HRWF is in possession of the details of her case (full name, date and place of birth, certificate of membership of The Church of Almighty God, composition of her family, dates and places of incidents, etc.) and can help the Dutch authorities dealing with applications for political asylum.

Interview taken by Elisa Van Ruiten with a translator Chinese-English.

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CHINA: From China to the Netherlands in search of a safe haven

Interview with a Chinese believer who fled from China directly to the Netherlands

HRWF (11.02.2019) – Xu L., whose full name is withheld for security reasons, fled from China in search for a safe haven to The Netherlands where she arrived on Christmas Eve. She left behind her husband, her 5-year old daughter, and her parents, both farmers. If she had not left her loved ones behind, she would have been locked away for years in a camp or a prison.

Last year, Xu L. narrowly escaped arrest when the police cracked down on a small group of believers of The Church of Almighty God. Human Rights Without Frontiers Int'l interviewed her.

HRWF: Ms Xu, you recently had to leave your country in a hurry, leaving behind your whole family, for an unknown future in another part of the world. What motivated you to make such a heartbreaking decision?

Ms Xu: Last year, I was almost arrested while during a religious meeting with a few other women of my church in a private home. It was an evening in April, and the leader of our prayer group did not realize that she had been followed by the police on her way to our underground meeting place. Just a few minutes after she arrived, the police burst into the room. At that moment, I was in basement toilet. When I heard their voices, I immediately ran out the back door. My spiritual sister, our leader, and our host were all arrested. The police confiscated two printers, four laptops, three MP5 players, the offerings of more than 5000 RMB, and all our religious books.

My spiritual sister Y. couldn't bear the severe torture of the police and revealed my name. After that, she was released but the whereabouts of the other sisters remain unknown. The police came to my home to arrest me but I had already gone into hiding, and over the next months, I was forced to live like a fugitive away from my family. I suffered greatly from this separation, but there was no hope that I could resume a normal family life.

HRWF: How free were you to exercise your religious freedom?

Ms Xu: We had no religious freedom at all. We always had to hide our religious beliefs, and we could only meet clandestinely. Twice a week, I met with four or five sisters in a discreet place to study the Bible and the teachings of our church. We prayed for other brothers and sisters who were experiencing difficulties in their physical or spiritual life, and we also shared our experience about our lives with God. Sometimes, we also sang songs of praise to God but in a low

voice because of the surveillance of the Chinese Communist Party.

By trying to be nice with our family, our friends, our neighbours, and other people, we were also good citizens of our country but that is not how the CCP perceived us. The official ideology of China is atheism and believers of any faith are considered a threat to the regime.

HRWF: According to official statistics in China, The Church of Almighty God, which was founded less than 30 years ago, is said to number around one million people. How could you share your beliefs if there is such a strict surveillance of the CCP and the police? Did you do that openly in the street or online via WeChat?

Ms Xu: In China, I was preaching the gospel privately to my family, my friends, and others. That is what we all do.

My mother joined The Church of Almighty God and was almost arrested when preaching the gospel, but she managed to escape.

My husband is also a member of the Church. He has not been arrested but is always in danger because he performs duties in the church. He is currently in hiding.

The risk is that some people we approach with our message are identified by the CCP, harassed, interrogated, and tortured by the police until they denounce us. We do not use online

services like WeChat to share our faith because they are closely monitored by the CCP. There are sensitive words like “God” or “the Gospel” that cannot be used online, otherwise we would immediately be identified, located, and arrested.

HRWF: Did you face specific obstacles in regards to your prayer meetings?

Ms Xu: Renting a place for our religious meetings is very difficult in China. Once the landlords know we are Christians they refuse because they are afraid of being involved. I still remember that, two years ago, several sisters and I had gathered in a rental house in Huai’an City, in Jiangsu Province. The landlord had the key to the house; she opened the gate to the yard and heard we were talking about our Christian beliefs. She knocked on the door of our room heavily and shouted at us angrily: “You are Christians. The government arrests you and you dare gather here! You don’t care about your lives, but I will be involved because of you! Get out of here right now! I will not rent this house to you anymore. If you don’t move right now, I will call the police!” In desperation, we had to move immediately, and the remainder of the rent was not returned to us.

HRWF: Did you get into trouble because of your preaching activities?

Ms Xu: Yes. In April 2017, I preached the gospel to a colleague, and she told my boss. “Now, The Church of Almighty God is the first enemy of the Chinese government and you dare preach the gospel here!” he said. And he fired me.

HRWF: Can you tell us more about the persecution of your Church?

Ms Xu: Yes. In 2014, the CCP carried out the so-called “100-Day Campaign” to arrest Christians all over the country. All the media and the internet were reporting about attacks against our Church. Everywhere we could see policemen in uniform and in plainclothes patrolling and investigating. We often heard that some brothers and sisters were arrested. At that time, my home was a meeting place, and I was nervous every day because I was pregnant and afraid I would be arrested one day. Other sisters were arrested and imprisoned even though they were pregnant, and they underwent forced abortions. I was scared that I would suffer the same fate. In the 6th month of my pregnancy, there was a possible sign of miscarriage but thanks to God’s protection my child was born safely. However, my anxiety did not stop with the delivery because what would happen to my baby if I were arrested?

I moved all the time from one place to another to avoid being arrested. As the police could not find me, they harassed my family. They told my mother-in-law that I am a wanted criminal and she should send me to the police station once I would go back home. There was no other choice than to flee to a free country.

Human Rights Without Frontiers (HRWF) recommends that the Dutch authorities grant Ms Xu L. political asylum. HRWF is in possession of the details of her case (full name, date and place of birth, certificate of membership of The Church of Almighty God, composition of her family, dates and places of

incidents, etc.) and can help the Dutch authorities dealing with applications for political asylum.

Interview taken by Willy Fautré with a translator Chinese-English.

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