

Chinese Asylum Seekers: An Urgent Appeal to Chancellor Angela Merkel

Dear Chancellor Merkel:

We are NGOs active in the field of religious liberty, and write about the urgent situation of a Chinese refugee, Ms. Zhao, currently detained at the Aufsichtsund Dienstleistungsdirektion Landeseinrichtung für Asylbegehrende und Ausreisepflichtige in Hamburg, after she resisted forcible deportation to China on July 9.

We urge you to consider that, should Ms. Zhao be returned to China, she would certainly be arrested and might be subject to torture or “disappear” while in custody.

Ms. Zhao is a member of The Church of Almighty God (CAG), also known as Eastern Lightning, a Chinese Christian new religious movement founded in 1991, whose core teaching is that Jesus has returned on earth incarnated as Almighty God, a Chinese woman currently leading and guiding the Church in the U.S.

CAG teaches that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which has consistently persecuted Christians, is a manifestation of the evil Great Red Dragon of the Book of Revelation, and that the Dragon will fall under the weight of its errors. CAG does not advocate any revolution and is a non-violent religious movement. Virtually all Western academic scholars who have studied the CAG have debunked the accusation of crimes it has allegedly committed as fake news spread by the Chinese regime.

Because of both its beliefs and its phenomenal expansion (in 2014, CCP sources credited it with four million members), CAG has been persecuted since the 1990s and included since 1995 in the official list of xie jiao.

Xie jiao (normally translated as “evil cults,” but in fact meaning “heterodox teachings”) are movements the government does not approve of. Being active in a xie jiao is a crime punished by Article 300 of the Chinese Criminal Code with a jail penalty of 3 to 7 years or “more.”

CAG claims that more than 300,000 of its members have been arrested, more than 40,000 tortured, thousands held in the dreaded “transformation through education” camps, and more than 30 died in jail in highly suspicious circumstances. Bodies returned to the families in several cases had organs missing, evidence that the infamous “organ harvesting” practice has been extended to CAG prisoners. Scholars cannot confirm precise figures, but regard them as believable, as Chinese media and documents report weekly that hundreds of CAG members have been arrested.

A confidential CCP document leaked to Western media indicates that a new massive campaign for “eradicating” CAG has been launched in 2018, thousands of members have been arrested and the number of arrests is still increasing.

Those who have sought asylum abroad are regarded as particularly dangerous members of the CAG and as disloyal citizens, and are prime candidates for harsher jail penalties, with a serious risk of torture and extra-judicial killing.

We urge Germany to honor its well-known tradition of protecting human rights and religious liberty and not to return Ms. Zhao, and other CAG members in similar conditions, to her persecutors, granting them the asylum they deserve.

August 1, 2018

CAP-LC Coordination des associations et des particuliers pour la liberté de conscience

CESNUR – Center for Studies on New Religions

EIFRF European Inter-Religious Forum for Religious Freedom

FOB – European Federation for Freedom of Belief

FOREF – Forum for Religious Freedom Europe

HRWF – Human Rights Without Frontiers

LIREC – Center for Studies on Freedom of Belief, Religion and Conscience

ORLIR – International Observatory of Religious Freedom of Refugees

Soteria International