

CHINA: How China uses anti-refugee sentiment

By Massimo Introvigne



The Korea Times (29.10.2018) – <https://bit.ly/20ZEXzX> – Chinese authorities are undertaking an extensive fake news campaign in Korea to persuade local authorities to deport Chinese members of the Church of Almighty God who have come here to escape religious persecution.

With the Ministry of Justice looking to revise the Refugee Act to prevent fake asylum seekers in the wake of the outcry over the arrival this year of around 500 Yemeni refugees, mostly men, China is doing what it can to portray Chinese asylum seekers here as bogus.

The Chinese refugees in question are from the Church of Almighty God (CAG), a new Christian religious movement which the government has singled out for suppression, and are among several thousand who have escaped overseas and sought asylum in democratic countries.

Several NGOs have submitted evidence to the Human Rights

Council of the United Nations that thousands of CAG members have been arrested for the sole reason of belonging to the church. Many of them have been tortured and more than 30 died while in custody in suspicious circumstances.

Scholars have also documented that accusations of crimes allegedly committed by the CAG are in fact fabricated by Chinese propaganda.

These bullying tactics are stark explanation for the abysmal reputation China has internationally for its handling of political and religious dissidents.

Confidential Chinese Communist Party (CCP) documents obtained and published by Bitter Winter, the online publication of my NGO, the Center for Studies on New Religions, show that the campaign of fake news also extends to South Korea.

An internal CCP document dated July 3, 2015, which we published in Bitter Winter, explicitly required officials throughout China to investigate members of both the Falun Gong religion and the CAG who had left the country, obtain a comprehensive grasp of their basic situation (including the activities they are engaged in overseas, who their relatives in China are and what they do, and so on), conduct an analysis on a person-by-person basis, and formulate a special work plan for each person.

At first, the attempts to force believers back home were quite thuggish. For example, back in May 2016, a woman arrived in

Korea with CCP agents and tried to kidnap her husband, who had joined CAG. The husband was lured to a hotel where his passport and mobile phone were taken. He was held for a while against his will but managed to escape.

After this failure, the strategy appeared to change. The woman returned twice to Korea and held public protests with the Korean representative of a local pro-CCP magazine.

In 2017, the wife of another CAG member who had fled to South Korea was ordered by the political commissar of the Provincial Public Security Department in Heilongjiang, where she lived, to join the CAG community in South Korea and "follow his instructions." Unwilling to do this, she claimed to be suffering from a serious heart disease and fled her home together with her parents.

On Nov. 8, last year, the magazine representative brought the relatives of five CAG members to South Korea and held demonstrations outside the court in Jeju, the Seoul Immigration Office, and at CAG's own premises. The family members were required to hold a banner reading "My relative is not a refugee," and request that the court dismiss the asylum bids.

At this time, one of the Chinese family members brought to Korea realized that something was wrong and sought the cooperation of Korean authorities to meet with his relative. He discovered far from having been "kidnapped and abused" by the church as the CCP had claimed, his relative was finally enjoying the freedom of belief and was very happy to be

allowed to remain in Korea.

Now, in the wake of the protests against the refugees from Yemen, China has upped its game. We have learned that the Chinese Ministry of State Security recently pressured the relatives of many CAG members now in Korea to film videos and write joint letters “seeking missing family members.”

Nobody in China would believe such letters and videos to be spontaneous and genuine, but they are used in Korea to persuade the authorities to deport the CAG asylum seekers. But, ironically, in Korea, such gestures risk being taken at face value.

Obviously, the Chinese plan is being implemented in Korea to take advantage of a new climate that is generally unfavorable to refugees.

It is something that Koreans, despite the need to maintain good political, economic and cultural relations with China, for the simple reason that it violates their sovereign values as a modern democracy that respects freedom of religion and individual human rights.

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CHINA: China's religious liberty violations denounced at the UN's UPR

Every five years, all countries should submit to a review of their human rights record by the United Nations. China's review is November 6, next and the first report highlights its egregious violations of religious liberty.

By Massimo Introvigne

Bitter Winter (17.10.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2RYxHlC> – The Universal Periodic Review is a procedure where every member state of the United Nations should submit every five years to an examination of its human rights situation before the U.N.'s Human Rights Council in Geneva. China's date is November 6, next, and a first important document has been published by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human

Rights. It is an executive summary of what the High Commissioner regards as the essential findings in the reports NGOs have submitted about China.

The document is necessarily short and deals with all aspects of human rights. However, several of the NGOs' main findings mentioned in the text refer to religious freedom.

About Tibet, the report notes that "China continued its attack on and used torture against Tibetan human rights defenders in line with its denial of self-determination to Tibetans. China enacted policies and practices that actively violate the right to freedom of religion for Tibetan Buddhists. The authorities used 'Chinese-centric' schools as a mechanism for assimilating Tibetans into Chinese culture."

It is also reported that "since around April 2016, tens of thousands of Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities had been sent to extralegal 'political education centers' where they are held incommunicado indefinitely without charge or trial."

In general, "Chinese law curtailed the freedom of religion through two laws: 1) Regulations on Religious Affairs and 2) Article 300 of the Criminal Code, which only allow state-registered religious organizations to gather.[...] Chinese law denied freedom of religion and belief, as it stipulated in Article 300 of the Chinese Criminal Code that being active in groups listed as a 'xie jiao' was a crime punished by imprisonment from three to seven years or more." An example of the application of these laws is 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.”

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US quits ‘biased’ UN human rights council

BBC (20.06.2018) – <https://bbc.in/2tiif8o> – The US has pulled out of the United Nations Human Rights Council, calling it a “cesspool of political bias”.

The “hypocritical and self-serving” body “makes a mockery of human rights”, said US envoy to the UN Nikki Haley.

Formed in 2006, the Geneva-based council has been criticised for allowing countries with questionable human rights records to be members.

But activists said the US move could hurt efforts to monitor and address human rights abuses around the world.

Ms Haley announced her country's intention to quit the council at a joint news conference with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who called the council "a poor defender of human rights".

UN Secretary-General António Guterres, in a statement released through his spokesman, responded by saying he would have "much preferred" the US to remain in the council.

The UN human rights commissioner, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, called the US withdrawal "disappointing, if not really surprising, news". Israel, meanwhile, has praised the decision.

The move comes amid intense criticism over the Trump administration's policy of separating child migrants from their parents at the US-Mexico border.

On Monday Mr Hussein has called the policy "unconscionable".

More dismay among allies

This is just the latest rejection of multilateralism by the Trump administration, and will likely unsettle those who look to the United States to protect and promote human rights around the world.

The United States has always had a conflicting relationship with the UN Human Rights Council. The Bush Administration decided to boycott the council when it was created in 2006 for many of the same reasons cited by the Trump administration.

The then UN ambassador was John Bolton – who is currently President Trump's national security adviser and a strong critic of the UN.

It wasn't until years later, in 2009, that the United States re-joined under the Obama administration.

Many allies have tried to convince the United States to remain in the council. Even many who agree with Washington's long standing criticisms of the body believe the United States should actively work to reform it from within, rather than disengaging.

What is the UN Human Rights Council?

The UN set up the council in 2006 to replace the UN Commission on Human Rights, which faced widespread criticism for letting countries with poor human rights records become members.

A group of 47 elected countries from different global regions serve for three-year terms on the council.

The UNHRC meets three times a year, and reviews the human rights records of all UN members in a special process the council says gives countries the chance to say what they have done to improve human rights, known as the Universal Periodic Review.

The council also sends out independent experts and has set up commissions of inquiry to report on human rights violations in countries including Syria, North Korea, Burundi, Myanmar and South Sudan.

Why has the US decided to quit?

The decision to leave the body follows years of US criticism.

The country initially refused to join the council in 2006, arguing that, like the old commission, the UNHRC had admitted nations with questionable human rights records.

It only joined in 2009 under President Barack Obama, and won re-election to the council in 2012.

But human rights groups voiced fresh complaints about the body in 2013, after China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Algeria and Vietnam were elected members.

This followed Israel's unprecedented boycott of one of the council's reviews, alleging unfair criticism from the body.

Last year, Nikki Haley told the council it was "hard to accept" that resolutions had been passed against Israel yet none had been considered for Venezuela, where dozens of protesters had been killed during political turmoil.

Israel is the only country that is subject to a permanent standing agenda item, meaning its treatment of the Palestinians is regularly scrutinised.

On Tuesday, despite her harsh words for the UNHRC, Ms Haley said she wanted "to make it crystal clear that this step is not a retreat from our human rights commitments".

What's been the reaction?

Some countries and diplomats were quick express disappointment about the US withdrawal.

The UNHRC's current president, Slovenian ambassador Vojislav Suc, said the body was the only one "responding to human rights issues and situations worldwide".

After the US decision to quit, he said, "it is essential that we uphold a strong and vibrant council".

UK Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson said the decision was "regrettable", arguing that while reforms are needed, the UNHRC is "crucial to holding states to account".

A number of charities and aid groups criticised the move, with the American Civil Liberties Union saying the Trump administration was leading a "concerted, aggressive effort to violate basic human rights".

The New York-based group Human Rights Watch condemned the US decision to leave the council and called President Trump's human rights policy "one-dimensional".

But Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was quick to support the measure, posting a number of tweets praising the country's "courageous decision".

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