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Chinese priest goes missing in Zhejiang province

Chinese authorities jail four wealthiest Uyghurs in Xinjiang’s Kashgar in new purge

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Almighty God, and now their daughter is detained after

Dozens of Bitter Winter Reporters arrested

Bitter Winter (27.12/2018) - https://bit.ly/2BI559d - Accused of espionage and subversion, at least 45 contributors are in custody; the reporter who filmed a secret camp in Xinjiang "disappeared" after the arrest.

In August 2018, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) authorities designated Bitter Winter a "foreign hostile website" for publishing secret documents and news reports about the CCP's suppression of religious beliefs and Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948." The authorities have retaliated by launching repeated attempts to hack the website, and by targeting reporters and contributors.

Since August, at least 45 Bitter Winter contributors in mainland China have been arrested for filming incidents of, or gathering news about, the CCP's persecution of religious freedom and violation of human rights. Reporters are usually detained and interrogated on the charge of "divulging state secrets" or "involvement in infiltration by foreign
Some reporters have been sent to legal education centers" to undergo mandatory indoctrination, while others have been tortured and abused.

The CCP has intensified its attacks on freedom of the press and those recording human rights violations in China. Reporters Without Borders, an international non-profit based in Paris, France, released a report in December, naming China as the country with the most imprisoned journalists. At least 60 professional and citizen journalists have been arbitrarily detained (strict control of information by Chinese authorities makes it difficult to document the case of every missing journalist, so the number may be higher).

This crackdown on reporters has hit Bitter Winter hard. In mid-October, two contributors were arrested in the southeastern coastal province of Fujian. They are still being detained. The authorities designated them as so-called "first-level persons" that undergo heightened scrutiny, with family visits prohibited. According to insiders, both contributors have been tortured by police.

Another contributor, from Xinjiang, conducted groundbreaking investigative reporting into transformation through education camps," including their internal construction. That contributor was arrested at the end of September. To date, his whereabouts remain unknown.

Some contributors who have been released were able to report on their interrogations. According to one, he was told, "You're in China, so you must abide by Chinese laws. If the state deems that you have violated the law, then you have violated the law. If the Party wants to mess with you, it would be like crushing an ant." The reporter was further told, "Collecting these materials and reporting about these incidents is a subversion of state power; it is espionage."

Another contributor remarked, "Covering the news is very dangerous, but we must let the world know the reality of the CCP's persecution of religious beliefs and its abuses of human rights. They should be condemned and stopped. I think that I will be able to persevere and continue to report."

Reported by Lin Yijiang

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**Early Rain pastor accused of inciting subversion**

*Twelve members of Early Rain Church remain in detention following a spate of arrests beginning on 9 December. The number includes Pastor Wang Yi and his wife Jiang Rong: both are accused of ‘inciting subversion’. At least six other church members are missing and many more are under police surveillance.*

CSW (17.12.2018) - [https://bit.ly/2SWh1ey](https://bit.ly/2SWh1ey) - In the early hours of Sunday 9 December, the authorities launched a large-scale crackdown on Early Rain Church in Chengdu, Sichuan Province, arresting over 100 members. According to an update about the church translated and posted on social media, church members gathered together for a worship service in the open air on 16 December. The post also reports that over thirty more members were detained and many others were prevented from leaving their homes by police on the same day.

Another leader of a church founded by Early Rain Church was put under police surveillance after police and authorities interrupted a service at his home in which they hit him, tore his clothes, confiscated his phone and tried to force him to sign a pledge to no longer attend his church.
An earlier update about the church stated that students who were detained in the crackdown are now being sent back to their hometowns and placed under surveillance in their homes. Their ID cards are being withheld, and they are forbidden from returning to Chengdu.

Statements in support of Early Rain Church have been posted on social media by pastors from churches across the country, including the leaders of Living Stone Church in Guizhou and Zion Church in Beijing. Both churches have been shut down by the authorities, suggesting that the government may be targeting large unregistered churches in different provinces as a warning to others.

The crackdown on Early Rain Church comes amid increasing violations by the authorities against both registered and unregistered churches following the introduction of new regulations in February 2018. Over the past ten months there have been numerous reports of the forced closure of churches, demolition of religious buildings, harassment and physical attacks against church members, and a ban on under-18s attending church services.

On 15 December, police raided a children’s Bible study class at Rong Gui Li Church in Guangzhou. The church was founded by the late Pastor Lin Xian Gao (Samuel Lamb), one of the key leaders of the house church movement, and is one of the largest and oldest independent churches in southern China. Police and officials confiscated books and other materials, and blocked off access to the church after declaring it to be an illegal venue.

Mervyn Thomas, CSW’s Chief executive, said: “The charge of ‘inciting subversion’ against Pastor Wang Yi and Jiang Rong is completely false. It is clear that this is a reprisal against their family in response to Pastor Wang’s peaceful criticism of the government’s policy towards independent churches. This is a case of arbitrary detention of members of a religious community peacefully exercising their right to freedom of religion or belief, as protected in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The increasing arrest, detention and harassment of religious groups in China stand in sharp contrast to the government’s claim that it protects religious freedom for its citizens: in fact, the level of religious freedom has rapidly deteriorated. We call on the government to release Jiang Rong, Wang Yi and all those detained in connection with their freedom of religion or belief in China, and to cease its harassment of Early Rain Church.”

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**Special weekly FORB Newsletter, 21 December 2018**

**Underground Catholic churches closed in Fuzhou Archdiocese**

(17.12.2018) - Authorities are requiring underground churches to join the state-approved Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association if they want to continue holding gatherings.

*Continue reading...*

**Uyghurs secretly moved to hide mass detentions**

(17.12.2018) - International media has already reported that Uyghurs are being transferred to, and detained in, other provinces of China. Bitter Winter has uncovered further details about the movement, and what we are learning is disturbing.
**House Church preacher sentenced to six years**

(16.12.2018) - Authorities in Guangxi Autonomous Region arrested 16 believers from a house church last year; its 60-year-old preacher was later given a prison sentence.

**Sinicization of religion accelerates**

(16.12.2018) - China's efforts to sinicize - or "make Chinese" - all official religions in the country have gained momentum in recent months. Evidence of this acceleration is, literally, blowing in the wind.

**Police force pregnant Christian woman to have abortion**

(15.12.2018) - A member of The Church of Almighty God was four months pregnant when she was arrested and tortured by the police for her belief.

**13-year-old temple in Huangshi city destroyed**

(15.12.2018) - Xishan Temple, which cost million RMB to be built in 2005 by a Buddhist woman from Huangshi city, in the central province of Hubei, is now a pile of ruins - thanks to a government demolition crew.

**Disappearing house churches of Daqing city**

(15.12.2018) - From August to October of this year, more than ten house churches were closed by authorities in Daqing city, in the northeastern province of Heilongjiang. As a result, hundreds of believers have lost their place of worship.

**Officials destroy cemetery, TV news says villagers approved**

(15.12.2018) - Authorities in Hainan Province destroyed a 500-year-old ancestral hill cemetery and then, when villagers standing up for their rights were met with government suppression and seizures by force, officials repackaged the story, saying the "villagers endorsed the relocation of the tombs."

Human Rights Without Frontiers FoRB Newsletter | China
Authorities shutter home for elderly Christians
(14.12.2018) - In Putian city, in the southeastern province of Fujian, a home for the elderly run by a local, government-controlled Three-Self church was shut down, resulting in 80 elderly being kicked out of their residences.

Continue reading...

Milan, CAG exiles take to the streets to say "enough"
(14.12.2018) - On Monday evening, members of The Church of Almighty God took part in a peaceful demonstration on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to remind the world that faith is not a crime.

Continue reading...

Government retaliates by razing church (video)
(14.12.2018) - After Christians from a house church in Henan Province showed just how vicious the government is by posting a video of them tearing up a painting of the cross inside their church government officials proved it again, by mobilizing over 400 people to destroy the house of worship in retaliation.

Continue reading...

"Big brother is watching": tracking devices in bicycles
(14.12.2018) - Authorities in China are installing surveillance devices in electrically-powered bicycles and motorbikes, raising concerns that the government wants to track the movement of citizens.

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Luoyang city: Three-Self Church attacked, demolished
(14.12.2018) - On the morning of November 22, Zion Church-a government-approved Protestant Three-Self church in Luoyang city-was forcibly demolished by the local government. This demolition followed repeated threats against the church and its believers, and repeated physical assaults on the building.

Continue reading...

Underground and patriotic Catholic church: merged in two dioceses?
(14.12.2018) - In Mindong and Shantou, the Vatican orders Underground bishops to retire and places all Catholics under the jurisdiction of Patriotic bishops.

Continue reading...

The Battle of Lhasa, 1959: where it all began
(13.12.2018) - In March 1959, China suppressed a protest in Lhasa by slaughtering thousands of civilians and, in breach of the agreements it had subscribed in 1951, dissolving the Tibetan government and converting Tibet into a Chinese province. It was the beginning of a policy where CCP decided to ignore international law and answer the world’s protests mostly by fabricating fake news.

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Christian books banned, subscribers arrested

(13.12.2018) - In July of this year, Chinese authorities launched a nation wide campaign to stop the distribution of the Christian newspaper Spring Rain News, and to confiscate all copies in circulation.

Continue reading...

Monks in crisis after temples are closed down

(13.12.2018) - Numerous Buddhist and Taoist temples throughout China have been sealed off or demolished, leaving the elderly monks and believers who lived there with nowhere to go.

Continue reading...

What does "stability maintenance" mean to Hans in Xinjiang?

(13.12.2018) - The Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps, established almost 65 years ago to protect and develop the remote northwestern region of China, is now playing an increasing role in the central government's efforts to fight "religious extremism."

Continue reading...

Woman dies after torture during interrogation by Chinese authorities

HRWF (19.12.2018) - Xiaocao (alias) was born on November 26, 1968, and was a native of Dunhua City in Jilin Province. She joined The Church of Almighty God in July 2007, and from 2012 to March 2015, she held a position as a mid-level leader in the Church.

Around 9 p.m. on 13 September 2018, four plain-clothes officers from the Dunhua Public Security Bureau pried open the door and burst into Xiaocao’s home. While yelling at her about her involvement in the Church, the police ransacked her home. Xiaocao was terrified and in complete shock; the trauma caused her to suffer a heart attack right on the spot. She was then taken to the hospital for emergency treatment.

Early the morning of 14 September, as soon as Xiaocao woke up, the police took her from the hospital to the Dunhua Public Security Bureau for questioning. Upon learning this, her husband rushed to the PSB, but the police would not allow him to see her.
At 6:20 p.m. that same day, Xiaocao’s husband received a call from the Dunhua PSB telling him to go to the Dunhua City Hospital. He rushed to the hospital where he found his wife lying in a hospital bed in the ICU hooked up to oxygen; she was unable to breathe on her own and was unconscious. Her family found bruises and purple marks on her left arm. They tried to discretely take a photo for evidence but were stopped by the police. When they asked the police where the injuries on her body had come from, the police and the doctor stammered and then said they were from receiving injections. Her family did not believe their answer.

At 3 p.m. on 15 September 2018, after an unsuccessful rescue effort, Xiaocao died.

According to the medical records, when the ambulance arrived to the Public Security Bureau, Xiaocao was not breathing and did not have a pulse. The police insisted that she was not deceased, but brain dead.

When Xiaocao’s family went to the Dunhua Public Security Bureau to try to get an explanation for her death, Mr. Zhang, the Bureau’s deputy chief, told them:

“This is a major national arrest operation. Orders came directly from the provincial level to round up and get rid of people from The Church of Almighty God. She not only believed in Almighty God but was a leader. Nobody will be held responsible even if she was beaten to death.”

The Public Security Bureau refused to take responsibility for her death in spite of her family trying twice to negotiate with them for reparations. Her husband later contacted the mayor of Dunhua, Lu Yang, to discuss the matter with him. Her husband repeatedly asked about the cause of his wife’s death, but the mayor fobbed him off, saying that it was a ‘normal death’. In their conversation, Mayor Lu also revealed that Xiaocao did not forfeit information about members of her Church during investigations.

Her family asked for the Public Security Bureau’s surveillance footage, but they claimed that their security cameras were broken, so they were unable to provide any footage. Combined with countless of testimonies, the circumstances of Xiaocao’s case points to the cause of her death being torture.

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Yu Baorong, a Christian from The Church of Almighty God brutally tortured by Chinese Communist Police

HRWF (19.12.2018) - Yu Baorong was born on October 15, 1965 and is from Quanshan District in Xuzhou City, Jiangsu Province. She joined The Church of Almighty God (CAG) in January 2014. She was arrested by the Chinese Communist Party police in June 2018 and brutally tortured during questioning, leaving her with permanent physical defects. Her eardrums and nasal passages suffered severe damage and she now has hearing loss and difficulty breathing. She also has pain and limited mobility in her left arm to this day.

Around 3:00 p.m. on June 9, 2018, Yu Baorong was with two other Christians from The Church of Almighty God in a rented room on Bazi Street of Xuzhou’s Gulou District. Suddenly, eight or nine uniformed police officers from Xuzhou’s Tongshan District Xuzhuang Police Station burst through the door, and an officer yelled, “Someone has reported that you’re believers in God. Our country doesn’t allow that. Your faith is
illegal.” The three CAG members were taken to the Xuzhou Economic Development Zone Public Security Bureau for separate questioning.

Around 7:00 p.m. that evening, two officers, Zheng Xin and Liu Chengwei questioned Yu Baorong about her personal life as well as information on the CAG. Yu Baorong would not disclose any information, so Officer Liu Chengwei grabbed her by the hair and repeatedly punched her face with his fist and an empty water bottle. He also took off his belt and whipped her across the mouth with it, over and over. In extreme pain, Yu Baoron's face, eyes, and lips swelled and her eyes bled. When she still did not tell them anything, the police continued to hit her in the head. The beating lasted until 4:00 a.m. before the police stopped their questioning for the night.

The next afternoon, they resumed the interrogation in a hotel at an undisclosed location. When Yu Baorong still would not talk, Officer Zheng started punching her left arm and Officer Liu Chengwei violently beat her right shoulder with his fists. She was held and subject to such beating and questioning for five days straight. Her left arm was hit so many times during questioning that it became swollen and bruised to the point she could no longer lift it.

The interrogation came to an end without Yu Baorong giving any information about the CAG. On June 16, she was taken to the Sanbao Detention Center in Xuzhou and held there.

On the morning of July 21, 2018, the police took Yu Baorong to the bank and ordered her to withdraw 5,000 RMB (about 650 euros) for bail money, and then released her on bail pending trial. She was told she was not allowed to believe in God, warned not to leave the area, and instructed to make herself readily available to the police as needed.

As a result of this interrogation, Yu Baorong still feels the effects of this beating and torture to date. She suffered extreme pain from her injuries, and her left arm remained swollen and bruised for over a month after she was released. She still cannot move her arm properly and her ears and nose are permanently damaged.

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**Special weekly FORB newsletter, 14 December 2018**

**Bitter Winter in Geneva for 70th anniversary of human rights declaration**

(10.12.2018) - Diplomats, media, NGOs, Religions gathered in Geneva to celebrate the Universal Declaration. Bitter Winter was there, to bear witness about the struggle for human rights in China.

[Continue reading...](#)

**Church in Henan stripped of religious symbols as punishment**

(10.12.2018) - All religious decorations and furnishings have been removed from an underground Catholic church in Henan’s Baizhuang village as a punishment for refusing to join the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association.

[Continue reading...](#)
"The time has come": CCP cracks down on Early Rain Covenant church  
(10.12.2018) - One of the most prominent Chinese house churches is raided by CCP, with at least 80 arrested.  
Continue reading...

Two house churches continue to be persecuted  
(09.12.2018) - Bitter Winter reported earlier about the harassment from authorities that the House of Eternal Blessing in Fujian and the House of David Church in Guangdong have been suffering in the past few months. Since then, new information has emerged about the predicament of these two house churches.  
Continue reading...

Eradication of Muslim traditions extends beyond Xinjiang  
(09.12.2018) - Hailed by the authorities for years as the "good Muslims" or "model minority," China's Hui citizens are experiencing the crackdown on their culture and traditions as part of the anti-Islam campaign in northwestern provinces and regions.  
Continue reading...

Preacher arrested for sharing videos online  
(07.12.2018) - A house church preacher was arrested after she posted on a WeChat group some video footage depicting government's persecution of religion. As a result, her church was forcibly closed down.  
Continue reading...

Punished for speaking out: authorities crack down on dissent  
(07.12.2018) - Under the powerful "stability maintenance" policy, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) continues to deprive the Chinese people of their freedom of speech.  
Continue reading...

Saving Buddhist Statues in Hebei  
(07.12.2018) - After the local authorities ordered to demolish all religious statues in Wu'an city, according to the central government's policy, local people decided to conceal 500 Buddhist statues in an attempt to save them. An almost 30-meter-tall statue of Buddha did not survive.  
Continue reading...
CCP cracks down on another xie jiao: Winnie the Pooh and his friends
(06.12.2018) - CCP's ban on Winnie the Pooh, in force since the character has been compared to President Xi Jinping in 2013, reaches new extremes.
Continue reading...

‘I must denounce this wickedness openly’ – detained Chinese pastor

World Watch Monitor (14.12.2018) - https://bit.ly/2LnvWwet - A Chinese pastor and his wife who were arrested alongside 100 church members and detained in southwest China on Sunday are accused of subverting state power, which can carry a prison sentence of up to five years.

Pastor Wang Yi and his wife, Jiang Rong, and other members of their ‘underground’ Protestant Early Rain Covenant Church in the metropolis of Chengdu, Sichuan province, were picked up from the church, their homes or the streets by police during a raid on Sunday evening.

While Wang has been criminally detained, his wife has been placed under “residential surveillance at a designated location”, which, sources say, is a form of secret detention, the South China Morning Post (SCMP) reported yesterday, 13 December.

A lawyer who declined to be named told the newspaper she could be held for up to six months and that “the absurdity of this situation [the detention of the pastor’s wife … and] the handling of the case shows how furious the top party leadership is about the church”.

The couple’s 11-year-old son, meanwhile, is staying with Wang’s mother, Chen Yaxue, 73, and both been placed under 24-hour police surveillance.

“They follow us wherever we go … The surveillance is taking a huge toll on my grandson – he’s in shock after [his parents were taken away]. He hasn’t slept for two nights,” Wang’s mother told SCMP.

‘Unlawful action’

On Tuesday, 12 December, police also arrested Wang’s assistant, Li Yingqiang, for “picking a quarrel and inciting trouble”, according to church members.

Li had hidden himself in the first raid and then posted updates on social media, according to AsiaNews, which quoted Li, before he was arrested, as saying: “Even if we are down to our last five, worship and gatherings will still go on because our faith is real … Persecution is a price worth paying for the Lord. We would rather live through it than to hide our faith, and we hope more Chinese churches will speak up and stand with us.”

Li’s wife, Zhang Xinyue, told SCMP the church would continue to meet: “We will not forsake assemblies. I was frightened at first when it happened but have soon overcome the feeling as we are prepared [for persecution].”

Two days after Wang’s arrest, church members published a letter the pastor had written in September and instructed them to publish if he went missing for more than 48 hours.
In it he wrote that he respected “the authorities God had established in China” and that his aim was not to change institutions. However, he called the government’s persecution of the Church “greatly wicked” and an “unlawful action”.

“As a pastor of a Christian church, I must denounce this wickedness openly and severely. The calling that I have received requires me to use non-violent methods to disobey those human laws that disobey the Bible and God,” he wrote.

Human Rights Watch has called on the Chinese government to “immediate release” the pastor and the members of his church who are still being detained.

“The shutdown of a Protestant church in Chengdu epitomises the Xi Jinping government’s relentless assault on religious freedom in China. It makes a mockery of the government’s claim that it respects religious beliefs,” said China researcher Yaqiu Wang yesterday (13 December).

Violating policies

Although an ‘underground’ church, Early Rain is known for operating openly, including publishing sermons and online studies, and engaging in street evangelism. It also has training facilities for pastors and a primary school which educates 40 children. Its weekly gatherings in different locations in Chengdu are attended by approximately 800 churchgoers.

In September, authorities notified the church that it was violating the government’s religious policies as it was not officially registered, according to the New York Times.

The church had been raided by police in May, as it prepared to commemorate the 10th anniversary of an earthquake. Wang was arrested alongside 200 church members after the authorities warned him that he did not have the permit necessary to hold such an event.

Wang, a former lawyer and human rights activist, has also been vocal in his criticism of the new religious regulations introduced on 1 February, saying they were a violation of religious freedom and that Christians in China should resist them.

As World Watch Monitor has reported, Christians and the Church are an enigma to the Chinese government. “The CCP believes the Church is a de-stabilising force, but not because it is bad; in fact, local communities and authorities tend to believe Christians are good people,” Aaron Ma, an Asia-based researcher for the Christian advocacy charity Open Doors International, said in June.

“Some suggest that because Christians’ allegiance is first and foremost to God and not the Communist Party, there is a conflict of interests that the party believes can potentially hinder the process of unification. Others are more concerned by what they perceive as potential ‘chaos’ arising from the huge number of Christians.”

China also features on the US State Department’s latest list of Countries of Particular Concern (CPCs) for religious freedom violations, and US Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, Sam Brownback, called the situation in the East Asian country “one of the really worst human rights situations in the world”, referring to the incarceration of hundreds of thousands of Muslim Uyghurs in Xinjiang province but also to the arrests of members of the Early Rain Covenant Church.
Repression of Christian church intensifies

Protestant Pastor, Dozens of Congregants Detained


On December 9 and 10, 2018, police officers in Chengdu took into custody Pastor Wang Yi and more than 100 congregants of the Early Rain Covenant Church from the church premises or their homes. Early Rain is considered an “underground” church because it is not registered with the government.

“The shutdown of a Protestant church in Chengdu epitomizes the Xi Jinping government’s relentless assault on religious freedom in China,” said Yaqiu Wang, China researcher. “It makes a mockery of the government’s claim that it respects religious beliefs.”

Authorities also ransacked and sealed Early Rain Covenant Church’s properties, including its offices, a kindergarten, a seminary, and a bible college, and searched the homes of many congregants. The police forced church members to sign a pledge that they would not attend the church again and blocked them from going to the church schools. The church’s accounts on China’s social media platform WeChat were also removed.

Some church members, who were later released, said the police had beaten them. One said he was tied to a chair and deprived of water and food for 24 hours. Dozens of church members remained in police custody. While some families of detainees said they have received police detention notices, others have not been given information regarding the whereabouts or well-being of their loved ones. Police criminally detained Wang Yi on suspicion of “inciting subversion of state power,” according to the notice Wang Yi’s mother received. The wife of church elder Li Yingqiang said police told her that Li was detained for “picking quarrels and provoking trouble.”

Wang Yi, a prominent member of China’s Christian community and a former legal scholar, is known for his impassioned sermons and outspoken criticism of the Chinese Communist Party. Shortly before his arrest, Wang Yi had published an essay critical of the government’s tight control over religion, and calling on China’s Christians to carry out civil disobedience, such as resisting government orders not to preach outside of church premises or to prohibit children from attending church. Two days after Wang was taken into custody, a statement he had drafted in anticipation of being detained was posted online. In it Wang Yi vowed to “use peaceful means... to resist every and all governmental and judicial measures that persecute the church and interfere with Christian belief.”

In recent years, police have frequently harassed Wang Yi and key members of the Early Rain Covenant Church, an independent evangelical church with about 500 congregants. Early in 2018, the church organized a petition to protest the newly amended Regulations on Religious Affairs. The regulations ban “unauthorized” religious teaching and participation in overseas religious training or meetings and expand the role of local authorities in controlling religious activities. The regulations tighten existing religious controls in China, which already restrict religious practice to five officially recognized religions in officially approved premises, among other restrictions.

Several church members believe that the petition, which drew signatures from over 400 pastors across China, might have prompted the mass arrests. In September, Chengdu authorities informed the church that its activities had violated the government’s religious policy.
Under President Xi, the government has further tightened control over Christianity in its broad efforts to “Sinicize” religion or “adopt Chinese characteristics” – in other words, to ensure that religious groups support the government and the Communist Party. Authorities have demolished hundreds of Christian churches or crosses on top of churches, evicted congregations, confiscated Bibles and other church materials, and installed surveillance cameras in the churches allowed to function. In April, the government banned online sales of the Bible. In September, Beijing authorities shut down the Zion Church, one of the city’s largest Protestant underground churches.

In March, Pastor John Sanqiang Cao was sentenced to seven years in prison for “organizing others to illegally cross the border” between China and Myanmar. Cao had been involved in educational projects for impoverished minority groups in Myanmar. In 2014, a court sentenced Pastor Zhang Shaojie to 12 years in prison for “fraud” and “gathering a crowd to disturb public order.”

In September, the Roman Catholic Church and China reached a deal designed to end a decades-long standoff over authority to appoint bishops in China. China’s estimated 12 million Roman Catholics are divided between an underground community that pledges allegiance to the pope and a government-run association with state-appointed bishops. Under the accord, Beijing will propose names for future bishops and the pope will have veto power. Many had hoped the new accord would bring the persecution of bishops of underground churches to an end. However, in November, authorities in Zhejiang province forcibly disappeared Bishop Shao Zhumin, his fifth disappearance in his two years as bishop. Shao’s current whereabouts are unclear.

The Chinese government has also ratcheted up restrictions over Buddhism in Tibetan areas and imposed unprecedented control over religious practices in the predominantly Muslim region of Xinjiang, as Human Rights Watch has extensively documented.

“Pastor Wang Yi has said he would stand up for his faith if he were to be imprisoned,” Wang said. “Everyone who supports religious freedom should stand with Wang Yi and speak out against the Chinese government’s repression of religion.”

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**China cracks down on Christians -- a new era of religious persecution has arrived**

By Nina Shea and Bob Fu

Zion Church in Beijing is the largest in China’s burgeoning Protestant underground. In September, the 11-year-old house church was sealed shut by the government.

Its crime? Zion’s pastor, Dr. Ezra Mingri Jin, a graduate of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, had rejected an intolerable Chinese Communist Party (CCP) directive to mount face-recognition cameras on his pulpit, turned on the congregation. For his refusal, the pastor and virtually all of Zion’s 1,500 members have been detained, searched and questioned by public security – some more than once.
And the worst may be yet to come. Their police records will now be used in China’s new Orwellian social credit score system to deny them access to government trains, planes, schools, pensions and other benefits.

All of China’s more than 100 million Protestants and Catholics are bracing to have their faith severely tested in a harsh, all-enveloping crackdown.

The government’s repression against the churches is being done in the name of President Xi Jinping’s “sinicization” campaign, ostensibly to strengthen Chinese culture. However, it increasingly appears aimed at removing the Bible and its teachings from Chinese Christianity.

Earlier this year, President Xi issued draconian new regulations for religious affairs and charged the officially atheist CCP with enforcing them. Sophisticated technology, combined with iron fist policing, are now being used to suppress China’s booming Protestant and Catholic Church.

A staggering 100,000 or more Christians are estimated to have been arrested this year, compared to 3,700 in 2017, according to ChinaAid – a Christian human rights organization which promotes religious freedom and rule of law in China. Most of these, as with Zion Church’s, involved short term detentions.

Particularly targeted are “underground” churches that are not registered with the Chinese government, principally because these Christians do not want the oversight and control that comes with registration. As we write, word comes that some 100 Christians with the underground Early Rain Covenant Church in Chengdu have been rounded up and detained. Some claim “rape and abuse” by police.

Pastor Ezra is part of the Protestant underground, estimated by a leading China expert at Perdue University to serve all but 30 million of China’s 93 to 115 million Protestants. He and over 400 other Protestant underground pastors have signed onto a courageous declaration, on file at ChinaAid. In it, they affirm their resolve to meet this unfolding persecution with faithfulness and peaceful resistance, stating, in part: “For when churches refuse to obey evil laws, it does not stem from any political agenda; it does not stem from resentment or hostility; it stems only from the demands of the gospel and from a love for Chinese society.”

Despite the Vatican’s agreement with Beijing on the appointment of bishops in September of this year, about a dozen Catholic priests have been jailed since its signing. In November, Bishop Peter Shao Zhumin of Wenzhou underwent two weeks of state indoctrination and interrogation – his fifth detention in two years.

And some Chinese Christians spend years in prison. Catholic Bishop James Su Zhimin of Boading has languished in prison for 20 years after leading a Mass without government permission. The government refuses to provide any information on him.

An American resident is among China’s religious prisoners. Pastor John Sanqiang Cao of North Carolina was sentenced last March to seven years for “organizing illegal border crossings” after opening schools and delivering humanitarian aid in Burma. He reportedly shares a cell and one bed with a dozen inmates, and has lost 50 pounds.

Minors are now banned from entering any church. Online sales of Bibles are blocked. The Catholic Catechism is censored. Churches report that their crosses and other Christian symbols are being torn down and sometimes replaced with pictures of none other than President Xi himself.
Since February, thousands of churches have been forced shut. It’s particularly chilling that many of the 10,000 Protestant churches closed in one province were actually government-approved ones. In addition, this September, the government-approved Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Henan saw its priest detained and defrocked by the state-sponsored Patriotic Catholic Association, reportedly for organizing parish fellowship groups for the youth and elderly.

As these examples show, the repression is not limited to the underground churches. These incidents flag that President Xi intends to curtail all of China’s various Christian communities or possibly even eliminate them.

We have only to look at the suffering of western China’s Uighur Muslims – a million of whom have been confined to indoctrination camps – to be certain that President Xi is ruthlessly ushering in a new era of intense religious persecution.

An eloquent vow from the pastors’ declaration should be both a warning and an inspiration for us: “Christian churches in China are eager and determined to walk the path of the cross of Christ and are more than willing to imitate the older generation of saints who suffered and were martyred for their faith.”

As Christians worldwide celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ two thousand years ago, these new Christians and all others persecuted for their faith in China must not be forgotten.

We should call on our political and religious leaders to urgently speak up for them and to strenuously press President Xi to respect religious freedom.

Bob Fu is a Chinese-American pastor and the founder of ChinaAid, an international non-profit Christian human rights organization committed to promoting religious freedom and rule of law in China. He served as a house church leader in Beijing until being imprisoned for two months for “illegal evangelism” in 1996. Bob fled to the United States as a religious refugee in 1997.

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**Legislative landmark: US Congress passes Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act**

_Citizen Power Initiatives for China (CPIFC) congratulates on this legislation victory for human rights advocates and fair international relations. "This is a remarkable step forward," said Dr. Jianli Yang, president of CPIFC, "We have just been energized by the success of the 13th InterEthnic/InterFaith Leadership Conference where we refreshed and strengthened our united effort with new strategies and tools. We will build on the legislation victory to get more done."*

_Below is a report by International Campaign For Tibet._

Initiatives for China (11.12.2018) - In a triumph today for American citizens-including lawmakers, activists and human rights advocates concerned about the decades-long
repression in Tibet—the United States Congress unanimously passed a bill that takes direct aim at the Chinese government’s unfair treatment of Americans and pushes back against its isolation of Tibet from the outside world.

The US Senate approved the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act (H.R. 1872) on December 11, 2018. It now goes to the desk of President Trump, who is expected to sign the bill into law.

The Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act of 2018—which was introduced in the House of Representatives by Reps. Jim McGovern (D-Mass.) and Randy Hultgren (R-Ill.) and in the Senate by Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) and Tammy Baldwin (D-Wisc.)—is bipartisan legislation designed to address China’s exclusion of American journalists, diplomats and citizens from Tibet.

"The Tibet Reciprocity Act is an important statement of our values, and I am happy to see it sent to the President's desk before the end of the year," said Sen. Robert Menendez (D-N.J.), one of 14 cosponsors of the bill. "This legislation is simply about fundamental fairness. Chinese citizens enjoy broad access to the United States, and I think that is terrific. But, it is unacceptable that the same is not true for US students, journalists or diplomats going to Tibet, including our Tibetan-American constituents just trying to visit their country of origin. If China wants its tourists, officials, journalists and other citizens to be able to travel freely across the US, American citizens must be able to travel freely in China, including Tibet. The International Campaign for Tibet should be commended for its work on this bill and for being a steadfast champion of fairness and decency for all people, including Tibetans."

The bill received support from both sides of the aisle in Congress. After the Senate Foreign Relations Committee passed the Act on Nov. 28, 2018, Sen. Rubio, who introduced the companion bill in the Senate, tweeted that it was "important legislation based on the principle of reciprocity, which has long been missing from our relationship with China."

**Campaign to pass the bill**

Since 2014, the International Campaign for Tibet (ICT)—in coordination with Tibetan-American associations and Tibet support groups—has led the effort to approve the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act. ICT is a nonprofit, membership-based organization in
Washington, DC that advocates for human rights and democratic freedoms for the people of Tibet.

Several thousand ICT members and American citizens contacted their members of Congress to ask them to support the bill.

"This is truly a historic moment in the United States' support of the Tibetan people and for its strategic security interests in the region," said ICT President Matteo Mecacci. "By passing this landmark bill, which implements the diplomatic principle of reciprocity, Congress is saying loud and clear that Tibet's future is and will continue to be a foreign policy priority for the US. Furthermore, the American people's overwhelming support for Tibet shows that the citizens of the free world are opposed to unfair policies that foster Beijing's authoritarian rule and influence all over the world."

**What the bill does**

The bill requires the Secretary of State to assess the level of access to Tibet for US citizens within 90 days of the enactment of the legislation and to send a report to Congress identifying Chinese officials who are responsible for keeping Americans out of Tibet, a historically independent country that China has occupied for nearly 70 years. The Secretary of State will then ban those officials from receiving visas to enter the US.

The bill is predicated on the widely accepted diplomatic principle of reciprocity, based on which countries should provide equal rights to one another's citizens.

When it comes to Tibet, Beijing does not reciprocate. Although Chinese citizens, journalists from state-sponsored propaganda outlets and bureaucrats of the Chinese Communist Party travel freely throughout the US and lobby the American government on Tibetan issues, Beijing effectively prevents American diplomats, politicians, journalists, aid workers and tourists from entering Tibet—except on strictly controlled official tours that hide the truth about the immense suffering there.

**Human rights crisis**

Right now, a human right crisis is taking place inside Tibet. The Chinese government continues to violate the Tibetan people's basic freedoms, arrests them for such crimes as celebrating the Dalai Lama's birthday, tortures them for protesting peacefully and even
murders them if they try to flee into exile. Hundreds of Tibetan prisoners of conscience are locked up in Chinese prisons, where torture is endemic, and have no access to any meaningful legal defense. According to the 2017 Freedom in the World Report by Freedom House, a US think tank, Tibet is among the least free territories in the world.

Given that level of repression, it's no surprise that 155 Tibetans have resorted to the tragic act of self-immolation since 2009, lighting their own bodies on fire in a final, desperate attempt to get the world's attention.

Just a few days ago, a young Tibetan man named Drugkho lit himself on fire, reportedly calling out for freedom in Tibet as he did. Last month, a 23-year-old Tibetan named Dorbe self-immolated in the Tibetan region of Amdo, saying "May the Dalai Lama live long!" as he died.

Despite many attempts, almost no Beijing-based foreign journalists have been able to travel to Tibet to cover the remarkable stories of the self-immolators.

**Pressuring China**

One of the effects of the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act will be to put pressure on the Chinese government to revise its policies that prevent Americans from traveling and freely interacting with the Tibetan people by depriving Chinese officials of the privilege of traveling to the US.

The bill also reflects growing frustration among US lawmakers and the Trump Administration with Beijing's double standards and lack of respect for reciprocity when it comes to the exercise of civil liberties by US citizens in China.

Politicians from both parties and the Administration have also been increasingly outraged at Beijing's unfair policies and have demanded that the Chinese government reciprocate on issues of trade as well as access to Tibet.

**Support for Tibetan-Americans**

Over the past year, Tibetan-Americans and Tibet supporters throughout the country have reached out to their members of Congress to ask them to speak up for access to Tibet and to support the bill. On social media, they've used the hashtag #AccessToTibet.
Bhuchung K. Tsering, Vice President of the International Campaign for Tibet, thanked Congressmen McGovern and Hultgren and Sens. Rubio and Baldwin in particular for getting the bill passed.

"The Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act will benefit all of us in the Tibetan-American community who have been cruelly denied the right to visit our families and ancestral land," Tsering said. "Now that Congress has passed the bill, it is imperative that President Trump sign it into law and that the State Department take every measure to identify and hold accountable the Chinese officials who are responsible for discriminating against Americans and Tibetans."

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**Yingye’er re-education camp managed like prison (video)**

*New exclusive video details internal management regulations of the Yingye’er “transformation through education” camp in Xinjiang. Experts confirm that the rules are almost identical to those of a prison.*


By Massimo Introvigne

Bitter Winter (11.12.2018) - [https://bit.ly/2SLeFyZ](https://bit.ly/2SLeFyZ) - At the end of November, Bitter Winter posted an exclusive video about the large-scale Yingye’er “transformation through education” camp for Uyghurs in Yining city of Xinjiang. The video has drawn a lot of attention throughout the world. We now present another video about the same camp, detailing its internal management rules and regulation.

The rules and regulations are posted on public signboards displayed in the corridors of the camp and detail a variety of internal management issues, such as the security of the camp, the code of conduct of “students” and personnel, as well as provisions regarding the inmates’ communication with families. According to public security personnel, some of these rules and regulations are almost identical to the management regulations of prisons.

The instructions regarding the security of the camp state, “The section needs to make overall arrangements of armed police officers, public security personnel, security guards, and other forces.” In fact, armed police officers and public security personnel are part of the state security forces. So, if Yingye’er camp were an ordinary vocational school, the daily routine of providing safety would only require regular security guards.

The “Code of Conduct” for ‘students,” posted on the “class affairs board” in the corridor, contains 26 regulations. Among these, article 23 is especially worth mentioning: it requires “students” to address armed police and special police as “police officers” and
address teaching cadres as “training officers.” The requirement is notably similar to the code of conduct used for prison inmates.

One of the responsibilities for teachers requires them to “strive hard to study Marxism-Leninism and Chairman Mao’s thought,” “adhere to the Party’s basic line,” and teach students a “proletarian philosophy.”

As per the regulations, the responsibilities of the headmaster and Mandarin Chinese teachers include the indoctrination of students through ideological and political education. The rules state that, basically, only the students who speak Uyghur are required to learn Mandarin.

In a recent interview with Bitter Winter, an employee of another “transformation through education” camp revealed that all Uyghur detainees are forced to learn Chinese. “But even if an Uyghur manages to get a perfect score in Chinese, he or she will not be allowed to leave the camp,” revealed the employee.

The regulations of the Yingye’er camp include detailed provisions regarding contacts between “students” and their families, which are extremely restrictive. Phone calls between them must be applied for and approved, and the length of each phone call is usually limited to under five minutes. The rules require that phone calls must be “personally registered, personally dialed, and personally monitored” by members of the staff. The use of “code words and secret language” during conversations is prohibited. Inmates who do not comply with these rules will be punished with deprivation of family phone call privileges from one to six months based, depending on a situation.

Article 1 of the regulations states that “anti-extremism” should be incorporated within the content of “heart-to-heart chats,” and emphasizes that through such chats, “staff should gain a multifaceted understanding of students’ ideological dynamics and strive to discover emerging and tendentious intelligence information and clues.”

Our reporter has also discovered a room with a sign on the door “zhēnbié shì (Screening Room).” The original meaning of the Chinese word zhēnbié (screening) is “to differentiate and distinguish,” which emphasizes carrying out the assessment, examination, identification, and verification cautiously and seriously.

One of the most probable explanations for the function of this screening room could also lie in the interview with the employee of another “transformation through education” camp, mentioned earlier. He states that all detainees are divided into four levels of supervision: lenient, ordinary, strict, and enforced. According to him, special teams regularly screen “students” to determine whether they have signed a statement of repentance and “admitted their guilt.” An assessment is then conducted, and students who do not pass are sent to a detention center. Therefore, most probably, the screening room at the Yingye’er camp is used to evaluate the degree of “transformation” and “reform” of students.

Although CCP’s propaganda strives to conceal the truth, a growing body of evidence shows that the CCP authorities are carrying out large-scale persecution and suppression of Muslim Uyghurs. In its external communications, the CCP refers to “transformation through education” camps as “schools.” The factual materials our reporter has collected confirm that in terms of both internal structure and management regulations, this “transformation through education” camp is, in fact, a prison.
ChinaAid (10.12.2018) - https://bit.ly/2C5rXRC - Around 100 leaders and seminary students from Early Rain Covenant Church in Chengdu, Sichuan have been arrested today.

Among the arrested are Pastor Wang Yi and his wife, Jiang Rong, who were seen being taken away after those who attend their church could not find them. Another two, Guo Hai and his wife, were forced to leave their two children at home unattended when police took them into custody.

Others had their homes raided. One church elder, Qin Defu, was forced to the ground as police inspected his residence.

The situation began at 6:00 p.m. China Standard Time (hereafter referred to as CST) when police seized a Christian at the entrance of the church and a multitude of officers searched his place.

Additionally, authorities shut off power to the home of church members Song Enguang and his wife. The police stationed downstairs also took three Christians, who attempted to visit them during the ordeal.

As this happened, officials stationed many vehicles outside the entrance to the church and broke in.

The officers carrying out the arrests reportedly exhibited rude behavior. When the Christians asked why they were being taken away without warrants, one of them replied, "We are enforcing laws. Our process is to summon litigants and require them to cooperate with the investigation. you all should follow our process ... What else am I supposed to tell you? You are not supposed to know some details, so you can never know. It is us rather than you who enforce laws."

An incomplete list of those arrested includes: Jiang Ruolin, Ge Yingfeng, Zhu Hong, Xiao Hongliu, Ye Yin, Zhang Jianqing, Liu Yingxiu, Assistant Deacon Zhang Guoqing, Elder Su and his wife, Xiao Yingshan and his spouse, Song Enguang and his spouse, Xiao Baoguang, Zhou Xiaojian, Liu Daxuan, and Zhou Yong.

The arrests continued into Dec. 11, when Li Yingqiang, who went into hiding and became the one contact available to speak to the press, was arrested. A prayer letter released by the church states that at least three Christians who have been freed were raped by the police.

"The massive overnight attack against members of the independent, renowned Early Rain Covenant Church represents a major escalation of religious persecution in China," said Dr. Bob Fu, ChinaAid's founder and president and a close friend of Pastor Wang. "Ironically this largest scale of arrests and clamp down on the international Human Rights Day shows Xi’s regime deliberately making itself the enemy of universal values, such as religious freedom for all. ChinaAid calls upon the international community to condemn these arbitrary arrests of innocent religious believers and urges the Chinese regime for their immediate release."

The church's official translation of one of their prayer letters has been included below.

ChinaAid exposes abuses, such as those suffered by the attendees of Early Rain Covenant Church, in order to stand in solidarity with the persecuted and promote religious freedom, human rights, and rule of law.
Emergency prayer information 07: Autumn Rain St York Church

Three brothers and sisters who have been released told us that they were raped by police at the police station today and even stepped on their feet. One of the brothers was tied to his hands and feet at a late night and was detained all day, and the leg was tortured in multiple ways, and the body was injured with multiple injuries. These evils are heinous.

A brother said the police didn't give him a sip of rice in 24 hours, didn't drink a sip, was deprived of rest time and was tied to the chair all night for only two or three hours.

At around, the police asked the fire officers to break the door and enter the female hostel of the church humanities academy to take two of them. The Church, a sermon in da state, was inspected by the police at nine o'clock at pm and was taken by the same worker.

At around pm, there was a brother who saw more than young lad wearing a license in a car near the church into the church building. We estimate that these people are prepared and will damage, damage the renovation and equipment of church and church schools.

The night is deep, but there are still many brothers and sisters who are missing, we don't know where to look for these taken siblings, parents are looking for children, wife is looking for husband, brother is looking for sister......

O Lord, look at the grievances of your children, and this country trample on the dignity of your children, but these children are the pupils of your eyes. You will have to heal these scars with your loving hands and let us learn from the suffering and learn the patience of Christ. Lord, may you come soon!

Autumn Rain St York church

Issued on 10 December 2018, 24:00 slightly revised.
A temple forcibly demolished despite residents' protests

A Buddhist Temple in Fujian Province was razed to the ground because of the local authorities' plans to use its land for a real estate development with private companies.

Continue reading...

Demolition of government-approved Churches continues in Henan (videos)

Two Protestant Three-Self churches in Henan Province were recently demolished after a round of harassment and without providing to the congregations any credible explanation for their actions.

Continue reading and watch the videos...

Students who fail anti-religion test may not graduate

Some universities in Henan Province have included the assessment of anti-religion knowledge as part of the graduation requirements and are intensifying the promotion of atheism to the newly-enrolled students.

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Government unleashes new round of religious persecution

Since the launch of a nation-wide supervision program to inspect the implementation of Xi Jinping's policies on religion in China's provinces and municipalities, believers across the country are facing even more intense crackdown on their religious liberties.

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A Christian dies in detention, family suspects torture

A member of The Church of Almighty God was arrested and died in detention soon after. Because of injuries on her body, her family believes that mistreatment by the police caused her death.

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Arrested Christians severely injured by police

The police tortured nine co-workers from a house church in Hainan Province, most of them suffered internal injuries as a result.

Continue reading...
A church in Henan shut down for resisting authorities (videos)

Nanyang city authorities raided and closed down a meeting venue of the Great Praise house church after its leader refused to join the government-controlled Protestant Three-Self Church.

Continue reading and watch the videos...

Authorities crack down on Buddhists at Mount Jiuhua

A memorial archway at one of the four sacred mountains of Chinese Buddhism has been forcibly demolished, and the president of the Mount Jiuhua Buddhist Association has been placed under house arrest.

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Religious liberty in China: a status report

A survey of religious liberty under the CCP regime leads to the conclusion that there is no religious liberty in Communist China, although the regime's efforts to eradicate religion went through different stages and used different strategies.

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Religious policies as a means of extortion

A local Religious Affairs Bureau in Hubei Province summoned local Buddhists to a meeting about the newly revised Regulations on Religious Affairs. Not only were they required to pay a participation fee, but also had to purchase national flags and fire extinguishers.

Continue reading...

More "legal education centers" exposed

It's a common practice for Chinese law enforcement authorities to use hotels and hospitals or entire buildings as secret interrogation and indoctrination bases for religious believers and political dissidents. Bitter Winter has uncovered some such centers in the provinces of Gansu and Shaanxi.

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Propaganda and culture shows instead of Sunday mass

Local authorities in parts of China are organizing "alternative" events nearby the places of worship in an attempt to deter people from participating in religious activities.

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Catholics worship outside a locked-up pilgrimage site

Established in the 19th century, the church and its parish in Shanxi's Dongergou village was a massive draw for nearby believers and pilgrims alike. The use of the church was prohibited in July, but members of the congregation still hold mass outside it.

Continue reading...

Faculty and staff at universities fired for religious belief

The CCP exerts an iron hand at universities across China in an attempt to make them "more patriotic." Teachers and staff are expelled at the slightest suspicion of their faith.

Continue reading...

Government unleashes new round of religious persecution

Since the launch of a nation-wide supervision program to inspect the implementation of Xi Jinping’s policies on religion in China’s provinces and municipalities, believers across the country are facing even more intense crackdown on their religious liberties.

By Jiang Tao

Bitter Winter (05.12.2018) - https://bit.ly/2E8gy4P - As reported by Bitter Winter, the United Front Work Department (UFWD) launched in September a nation-wide supervision program to check on the implementation of central government’s policies on religion in provinces and municipalities across China. Since the end of October, special teams are being sent out to various localities in the country to conduct inspections.

Believers from various provinces report that, because of these visits, the persecution of churches and people of faith has intensified.

For example, two crosses were removed from a Three-Self church in Chizhou city of the eastern province of Anhui. Local government officials informed the church that, on October 25, a team of inspectors from Beijing would be coming to the area of Mount Jiuhua where the church is located, and that the crosses were too conspicuous and needed to be removed.

In November, on the eve of the visit by an inspection team, UFWD officials from Shuangyashan city in Heilongjiang, China’s northernmost province, demanded that a government-approved Three-Self church displayed outside its entrance a five-meter-long banner with a speech of Xi Jinping.

The officials also ordered the local village secretary to visit the church every day to make sure that the order had been implemented. He was also demanded to photograph members of the congregation and the displayed banner and send the photos to his superiors.
The person in charge of the church told the congregants about the anticipated inspection, and that central government officials could show up at the church unexpectedly. He, therefore, advised the believers to hide any religious books published by unofficial publishers or they could be punished.

On October 26, the leader of a Buddhist temple under reconstruction in Jincheng city in the northeastern province of Liaoning received a phone call from a local official who stated that a “secret visit group” composed of 37 central government personnel was coming to the city to conduct inspections. The official ordered the leader of the temple to demolish it within one day. If not – the authorities will destroy the temple themselves, threatened the official. The temple’s leader was forced to obey the order.

The Tongguan county government in Weinan city of Shaanxi Province in China’s northwest issued a notice ordering party cadres in every village to demolish all the temples under their jurisdiction. Those who refused to comply were told to submit their resignation letters.

**Woman tortured to death by Chinese police: the case of Huang Guorong**

HRWF (04.12.2018) Huang Guorong, was born on 22 July 1961 and lived in the Dongfanghong Forestry Bureau Shilin Farm in Heilongjiang Province. In 2002, she joined The Church of Almighty God. Around 16 April 2013, she was arrested by the local police during a religious gathering and was locked up in a detention center for the crime of “organizing and using a superstitious sect or Xiejiao organization, and using superstitions to undermine the enforcement of the law.” While she was detained, Huang Guorong was not only beaten and given electric shocks by the police, but was also brutally force-fed feces. After 69 days of detention she began to suffer psychologically and physically; she had injuries all over her body, she was unable to walk, could not eat or drink, and was completely incontinent. She wasn’t able to take care of herself at all. On 10 July, she died without ever having the chance to clear her name; she was just 52-years-old.

**Arrested and detained for attending a gathering**

Around 16 April 2013, while Huang Guorong was in a gathering with another church member, they were arrested by Zhou Kai and two other officers from the Shichang Police Station. The police found faith-related books and CDs at their gathering site. They handcuffed Huang Guorong and took her and the books to the Shichang Police Station. The next day, they locked her up in the Dongfanghong Forestry Bureau Detention Center for the crime of “organizing and using a superstitious sect or Xiejiao organization, and using superstitions to undermine the enforcement of the law.”

When her family learned of her detainment, they went to the detention center to see her on three separate occasions but were denied visitation every time.

**Tortured to breakdown after 69 days of detention**

On 23 June, the detention center notified Huang Guorong’s son asking him to handle procedures to have her released on bail pending trial. Her son demanded that he be allowed to see her before going through the formalities. The police pretended to go call for her, and returned to the son saying that she wasn’t willing to come out – he had to take care of the formalities first. After he had paid 5,000 RMB in bail and handled the
other procedures, four people carried Huang Guorong out of the detention center. They left her rolling around on the ground, yelling gibberish.

After they brought her home, Huang Guorong’s family discovered that she didn’t even recognize her own children. When they changed her clothing they discovered that from the neck down, her entire chest was black and blue; her ribs, her belly, and her four limbs were all purple and covered with wounds.

**Medical treatment ineffective**

That evening, Huang Guorong’s family took her to Raohe County Hospital to treat her external wounds. At this time, she was in a very precarious psychological state; she would start trembling and crying out when seeing a person’s shadow or hearing someone’s voice.

The morning of 25 June, Huang Guorong’s mind cleared for a little while—this was the only time she was fully awake after her release. Her son hurriedly asked her how she had been injured and whether the police had beaten her; she confirmed this. He then asked her why she wouldn’t eat, she replied, “I’m hungry but I don’t dare eat!” Her son asked, “What are you afraid of?” Huang Guorong said, “When they gave me food they mixed it with feces and made me eat it.”

Her family then took her to the Mudanjiang Hospital for treatment. Upon examining her, the doctor said that she had to be admitted to the ICU, but her family had no way of handling the daily medical expenses of over 10,000 RMB.

Around 20:00 on 10 July, 2013 Huang Guorong left this world without clearing her name.

**No recourse, nowhere to turn**

Before her passing, Huang Guorong’s family went to the Dongfanghong Forestry Bureau Discipline Inspection Committee to plead their case, but were threatened by the employees there, who said that if they continued to cause trouble they’d arrest them all. They then went to the Public Security Bureau, but the police refused to release the surveillance videos from the detention center. Huang Guorong’s family hired a lawyer to go with them to review the footage from the Public Security Bureau’s monitoring room, but there was an issue with the equipment, which their lawyer said was the authorities intentionally not allowing them to see the footage. In order to seek justice for Huang Guorong, her family posted a video to Baidu revealing her persecution by the CCP, but it was removed just ten minutes after being uploaded. They then contacted the Tencent news network on QQ, but before they had even finished describing the circumstances surrounding Huang Guorong’s death, the network said: “No, no one can report on this kind of news.”

On 17 July, Huang Guorong’s family went to the detention center to request the bail money that had never been refunded. One employee admitted that Huan Guorong had been tied up and beaten by fellow detainees, and that after learning of this the director did nothing about it. When the police discovered she had had a mental breakdown, not only did they refuse to give her treatment, but they intentionally delayed notifying her family for six or seven days so that they could pay the bail amount.

At Huang Guorong’s grave, her family said: “Such a healthy person—being killed this way was such an injustice! We want to seek redress for you, but that’s impossible with the CCP in power. There’s nowhere to take our case!” Huang Guorong’s family looks forward to the day that the truth will see the light of day.

**Those responsible for Huang Guorong’s death include:**
• Zhou Kai, male, over 30, policeman of Dongfanghong Forestry Bureau Shilin Farm in Heilongjiang Province;

• Zeng Zhibin, male, Director of Public Security Bureau of Hulin City, Heilongjiang Province;

• Ding Yuquan, male, Deputy Director of Public Security Bureau of Hulin City, Heilongjiang Province;

• Zhang Wenjun, male, Political Commissar of Public Security Bureau of Hulin City, Heilongjiang Province;

• Wang Changhong, Executive Deputy Secretary of the Political and Legal Affairs Commission of the Party Committee of Dongfanghong Forestry Bureau of Hulin City, Heilongjiang Province;

• Ji Guosheng, male, Director of the Dongfanghong Detention Center of Hulin City, Heilongjiang Province

HRWF Comment
Members of The Church of Almighty God applying for refugee status in the EU, South Korea, Australia, Canada, the United States should be granted political asylum and should never be sent back to China.

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**Woman driven to suicide by the Chinese Communist Government’s long-term harassment: the case of Wang Hongli**

HRWF (04.12.2018) Wang Hongli was born in May 1971 and lived in Yongle Town, Xixian New Area, Shaanxi Province. In 2008, she joined The Church of Almighty God. In 2013, she was arrested by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) police for attending a gathering, and after her release was subjected to police surveillance and harassment. In July 2017, the CCP police sought out Wang Hongli; they interrogated her and searched her home in an effort to extract information on the church. Throughout May 2018 the police sent her frequent menacing questions, demanding to know if she still believed in God, who the church leader was, etc. These disturbances left her absent-minded and ill-at-ease. Beginning in July of that year, the police started frequently showing up at her door, and their visits increased from once a week to once every two or three days. This was incredibly stressful for Wang Hongli.

On 2 August 2018, the police once again visited her home to threaten and harass her. Unable to withstand all those years of the police’s threats and harassment, she committed suicide by swallowing pesticides; she was just 47 years old.

**Wang Hongli’s arrest**

On 4 August 2013, Wang Hongli was arrested by the police of Jingwei Town in Gaoling County during a religious gathering. The CCP police were unable to get the information on the church they wanted through interrogation, so they released her the following day. In 2016, Wang Hongli got married and moved away, managing to evade local police surveillance. However, the CCP police did not let her slip away; they tried everything to ascertain her whereabouts.
On 5 July 2017, police from the Chongwenta North Road Police Station in Jinghe New City, Xixian New Area found her parents’ home address. They threatened her family members, telling them that they’d be arrested if they didn’t disclose her whereabouts, and that she would be listed as a wanted criminal. Her family were pushed into calling her and telling her to come home.

Around 9 a.m. on 7 July 2017, two male officers from the Chongwenta North Road Police Station rushed to Wang Hongli’s home to question her on whether she still believed in Almighty God; they ransacked the entire place. When they were unable to find any evidence of her faith, they demanded her to disclose her cellphone number and took photos of her as well as the interior and exterior of the home. At that time, Wang Hongli was home alone, and felt frightened. In a message she sent to church members, she wrote: “This blow has really weakened me, but I’ve seen God’s protection. The police failed to find any evidence of my faith.”

On 7 May 2018, a village cadre called Wang Hongli to the Village Committee office where five National Security Brigade officers had been waiting. The police questioned her on whether she still believed in God and who the church leader was. One officer also asked her: “Why didn't you respond to our text message? We need to know what you're doing!” They let her go after questioning. After that she continued to receive frequent menacing text messages from the police; this harassment was enormously stressful for her. She wrote in a letter to the church: “The police are constantly messaging me, disturbing me. I’m feeling really distraught and I can’t get any peace of mind all day.”

In July 2018, the police started frequently showing up at Wang Hongli’s house to harass her— the frequency of which increased from once a week to once every two or three days. Every time, four officers would arrive in a police car and charge into her home wearing their police uniforms, pester and interrogating her for half an hour or longer. Frightened, she was frequently unable to eat or sleep—her suffering was great. Tormented, she confided in her mother that she was afraid if she was arrested, she’d be unable to withstand the torture and would sell out other brothers and sisters in the church, which was something she didn’t want to do. She didn’t dare have any contact with them for fear of implicating them.

At 9 a.m. on 2 August 2018, four officers from the Chongwenta North Road Police Station once again burst into Wang Hongli’s home to interrogate her and left after about thirty minutes. Unable to bear the long-term police harassment any longer, she killed herself by drinking pesticides that very day.

At 10 a.m. the next day, her family found her corpse in the bathroom of her home in the Anju Jinghe Community.

Wang Hongli, was driven to her end by the Chinese Communist government.

**HRWF Comment**

Members of The Church of Almighty God applying for refugee status in the EU, South Korea, Australia, Canada, the United States should be granted political asylum and should never be sent back to China.
Companies lose money due to the ban of "halal" labels
(29.11.2018) - As the Chinese authorities have banned products made especially for Muslims, businesses have had to bear substantial direct and indirect losses.
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Christian congregations keep the faith despite persecutions (Videos)
(29.11.2018) - With more churches being closed down or demolished, congregation members now have to wait until its dark outside or meet in secluded places to continue practicing their religion.
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Underground priest: "Catholicism in China is facing calamity"
(29.11.2018) - Some members of the underground Catholic clergy in China believe that the Vatican-China agreement has exacerbated the persecution of underground Catholics, and they see no hope for their churches to survive.
Continue reading...

Religious terms online might lead to surveillance and arrest
(29.11.2018) - The Chinese government already maintains a firm grip on citizens' Internet use. Words and phrases like "Hallelujah," "Amen," "Thank God" and "Jesus" are now even more sensitive than they already were to plug into a search engine.
Continue reading...

Do they still exist? Investigating the Three Grades of Servants
(29.11.2018) - Periodically, alleged members of the banned religious movement Three Grades of Servants are arrested in China. However, it is possible that the group no longer exists.
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The CCP and the "Fear of the Mosque"
(28.11.2018) - An academic conference held at George Washington University - of excellent scientific level and meaningful participation from the public - illustrates and confirms the nightmare that Xinjiang lives daily, where religion is a "pathology" and a whole people is subjected to "rectification" because it is "wrong."
Continue reading...

Chinese Christians not allowed to worship with foreigners
(28.11.2018) - Due to a wave of deportations of foreign preachers and clergy members, the remaining ones have stopped accepting Chinese Christians in their gatherings now.

Continue reading...

Demolition of temples impacts livelihood of local people (video)
(28.11.2018) - As part of the nationwide campaign, the Wuhan city authorities in Hubei Province demolished a 36-meter-tall Guanyin statue in October. The demolition of Buddhist sites is not only an assault on religious liberties but also on the lives of locals who work there.

Continue reading and watch the video...

**Uyghurs in China: Position of EU High Representative/Vice-President Mogherini**

*Parliamentary question (09.10.2018)*

Under President Xi Jinping, Muslims in China are seeing their freedoms shrink dramatically. Experts and activists say that as he consolidates power, Xi is waging the most severe systematic suppression of religious minorities in the country since religious freedom was written into the Chinese constitution in 1982.

In the most extreme example, an estimated 1 million Uighurs and other members of Muslim minority groups in the country’s North West have been arbitrarily detained in indoctrination camps, where they are forced to denounce Islam and profess loyalty to the Communist Party.

Is the VP/HR aware of the situation? Will the VP/HR raise this issue with the Chinese counterparts in their next discussions? Can an update be provided on any action currently being taken to raise this issue through diplomatic channels?


*Answer of VP/HR Mogherini (26.11.2018)*

1. The EU is extremely concerned about the situation in Xinjiang, especially regarding the expansion of political re-education camps. The deterioration of the human rights situation in China, especially related to freedom of religion and belief, and the rights of persons belonging to minorities is a major concern.

2. The EU has raised its concerns regarding freedom of religion and belief, the rights of persons belonging to minorities, and the situation in Xinjiang on several occasions at the bilateral level. During the 36th round of the EU-China Human Rights Dialogue held in Beijing on 9-10 July 2018, the repression against Uighurs and the situation in Xinjiang were discussed. I also addressed these issues at the European Parliament in two speeches delivered respectively on 11 September 2018 and 4 October 2018. The latter...
was focusing exclusively on the situation in Xinjiang and was delivered on my behalf by Commissioner Bienkowska. Most recently, the HR/VP Spokesperson delivered a statement on 26 October 2018 referring to the gravity of the situation and calling on China to implement the recommendations enclosed in the UN Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

3. The EU and Member States are also conveying their concerns to the Chinese government at the multilateral level. In June and September 2018, the EU delivered two statements at the UN Human Rights Council under the Item 4 raising EU's concerns regarding the deterioration of the human rights situation in China and referring to Xinjiang. A number of Member states have addressed recommendations to China during the Universal Periodic Review of China which took place on 6 November 2018.

4. More generally, the EU attaches great importance to the respect of freedom of religion or belief and expression, as well as the rights of persons belonging to ethnic minorities, and will continue to raise this issue as appropriate.


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**Monetary reward offered for Muslim man’s recapture**

*An imam from Xinjiang managed to escape when he was being taken for arraignment but eventually had to turn himself in because he had nowhere to hide.*

By Li Zaili

Bitter Winter (21.11.2018) - https://bit.ly/2DRf5jS - In March, Mou Guojian, a Hui Muslim from Emin county in Tacheng prefecture, was arrested for reciting the Quran years ago at a mosque without having a state license to do so. He was kept in detention since then.

However, while he was being taken for his arraignment in September, he fled away from the police on the pretext of wanting to use a restroom.

When the officers realized this, they immediately blocked the roads to the village from where Mr. Mou had escaped. The authorities also dispatched nearly thirty heavily armed SWAT police officers to take positions at nearby villages and road intersections.

Local police officers conducted a door-to-door search of households nearby. A notice regarding his arrest was plastered across the villages and messages were posted online on WeChat, stating, “A 50,000 RMB reward will be given for reporting a lead or for the direct capture” of Mr. Mou.

The officers also called up all of his friends and relatives to ask about his whereabouts. Eventually, Mr. Mou realized he had nowhere to hide and sooner or later the police would get to him. He ended up turning himself in. He revealed later that he had escaped wanting to see his parents since they were extremely distressed by his arrest.

It is uncertain how long will Mr. Mou be held in custody. As per a party cadre, the majority of apprehended Muslims are given prison sentences ranging from three to seven years. In reality, most detainees may spend their entire lives in custody.
CCP calls for crackdown against whistleblowers and media

According to an internal document, the CCP is tightening the noose around the flow of information regarding its persecution of religion.

By Piao Junying

Bitter Winter (21.11.2018) - [https://bit.ly/2DRf5jS](https://bit.ly/2DRf5jS) - Bitter Winter accessed a document issued by the Liaoning Province’s Public Security Anti-Xie Jiao Organization. Popularly known as Office 610, it is a specialized police unit set up to persecute religious movements listed as xie jiao organizations, such as Falun Gong and The Church of Almighty God (CAG).

As per the document, the authorities launched a program in October to be carried out until December, through which it will target xie jiao believers and crack down on whistleblowers and media outlets exposing the persecutions by authorities.

The primary demand, as outlined by the document, is to carry out a concentrated suppression of Falun Gong and the CAG. For the former, the authorities want to revive the “knocking on doors” operation to gather personal information of practitioners or ferret out and arrest those who are on the run. The campaign when police officers and officials visited the homes of Falun Gong practitioners to harass them was first launched across China in advance of the Chinese Communist Party’s 19th National Congress in October 2017.

In case of the CAG, leaders and believers are and will be arrested en-masse to gather information on the Church’s activities at home and abroad as well as their communication channels, especially the ways of information transmission abroad, among other aims. Orders are given “to wage proactive attacks, strike at first sight, and use high-pressure intimidation.” The CAG’s financial situation is also under investigation, aiming at restricting the Church’s funding from abroad.

Given the level of persecution of religious belief in China, the CCP is well aware of the consequences if full details of it are exposed overseas. Therefore, the document stipulates that whistleblowers that report about such incidents of persecution must be dealt with severely.

For this, the authorities are working towards “in-depth execution of online spying and on-the-ground investigations” to control online content on popular social networking sites such as WeChat and QQ. Any online group or account found disseminating “problematic” information is to be immediately disbanded, shut down, and blocked.

Media outlets such as the Epoch Times and the New Tang Dynasty Television are amongst those on target as well. The CCP wants to “strike a blow at regional editors,” as per the document.

To leave no stone unturned, the document further calls for “strengthened guidance and supervision of lawyers defending and representing xie jiao cases.”

The document was circulated to all of Office 610 subsidiaries as well as the local Publicity Department, Court, Prosecutor General’s office, Ethnic and Religious Affairs Bureau, Public Security Bureau, and Justice Department.
Xinjiang authorities sentence Uyghur philanthropist to death for unsanctioned Hajj

*Abdughapar Abdurusul’s wife is believed to have died in detention and his eldest son is missing.*


Abdughapar Abdurusul, of Bakyol district in Ili Kazakh (in Chinese, Yili Hasake) Autonomous Prefecture’s Ghulja (Yining) city, “was arrested in July or August,” his brother Abdusattar Abdurusul recently told RFA’s Uyghur Service, citing Abdughapar’s Kazakh business partners living in Kazakhstan’s Almaty city.

“The latest I heard is that my brother has been given a death sentence and he is waiting for his execution to be carried out … The reason is that he went to perform hajj on his own [instead of joining a state-sanctioned tour group],” he added, referring to the annual Muslim holy pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia.

According to Abdusattar Abdurusul, his brother was provided with “no lawyer” during a “group trial,” suggesting he had been illegally sentenced to death. All death sentences should be reviewed by China’s Supreme Court in Beijing, but it is unclear whether Abdughapar Abdurusul’s case has been examined.

Abdughapar Abdurusul, a 42-year-old father of four, owns several shops and businesses, and multiple properties, his brother said, and had used some of the money he earned to build a mosque for the local community in recent years.

Abdughapar Abdurusul had also sold an old family home for around 1 million yuan (U.S. $144,000) in April or May, and was living comfortably before he was arrested and all of his family’s assets—totaling around 100 million yuan (U.S. $14.4 million)—were seized, he said.

“He is a philanthropist who enjoyed helping society … [but] now the government has taken away everything and destroyed his family’s lives completely,” Abdusattar Abdurusul said.

Abdughapar Abdurusul’s eldest son Awzer was detained in 2017 after returning home from studying in Turkey, and his wife Merhaba Hajim was taken into custody in April this year, he added.

Abdusattar Abdurusul said his sister Sayipjamal has been missing for “a long time” and is thought to also have been detained, while several of Abdughapar Abdurusul’s friends “have been sentenced to more than 18 years in prison.”

**Death in custody**

Staff members at the Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture’s Public Security Bureau and local police stations in Ghulja city refused to answer questions or hung up the phone when contacted by RFA about Abdughapar Abdurusul’s case.
But a long-time associate who worked with Abdughapar Abdurusul in Ili Kazakh’s Qorghas (Huocheng) county and is now living in exile told RFA he had also heard of the businessman’s sentence from local sources, and that his wife had died in custody.

“A friend of mine called me, saying that our mutual friend Abdughapar Hajim had been sentenced to death,” the associate said, speaking on condition of anonymity and using an honorific title to denote that Abdughapar Abdurusul had completed a pilgrimage to Mecca.

“[I also heard] that his wife had already died in prison,” he added.

The associate said that “more than 50” people in Abdughapar Abdurusul’s circle of friends—including several police officers—had been arrested and imprisoned before him, but that he was the only to have been sentenced to death.

When asked why Abdughapar Abdurusul might have been given such a harsh sentence, the associate said he was unsure, “but the Chinese government is killing Uyghurs for no particular reason.”

A former close neighbor of Abdughapar Abdurusul’s named Turghunay, who is now living in exile in Turkey, also told RFA she had heard of his sentence and that Merhaba Hajim had died in detention.

“I heard that Abdughapar Hajim was arrested in May or June and, prior to that, his eldest son Awzer had been arrested, followed by his wife, Merhaba Hajim,” she said.

“I don’t know if he was arrested because of his wealth or having gone on hajj, but when I heard the news about his death sentence ... I was devastated.”

Turghunay said that Merhaba Hajim had “died in a [political] re-education camp,” where authorities have detained Uyghurs accused of harboring “strong religious views” and “politically incorrect” ideas throughout the XUAR since April 2017.

“The death certificate was given to the family by the authorities,” she said, adding that “no one knows what has happened to their young children.”

**Camp network**

While Beijing initially denied the existence of re-education camps, the Uyghur chairman of Xinjiang’s provincial government, Shohrat Zakir, told China’s official Xinhua news agency last month that the facilities are an effective tool to protect the country from terrorism and provide vocational training for Uyghurs.

Reporting by RFA’s Uyghur Service and other media organizations, however, has shown that those in the camps are detained against their will and subjected to political indoctrination, routinely face rough treatment at the hands of their overseers, and endure poor diets and unhygienic conditions in the often overcrowded facilities.

Adrian Zenz, a lecturer in social research methods at the Germany-based European School of Culture and Theology, has said that some 1.1 million people are or have been detained in the camps—equating to 10 to 11 percent of the adult Muslim population of the XUAR.

U.S. State Department spokesperson Heather Nauert recently said the U.S. government was “deeply troubled” by the crackdown on Uyghurs, while U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley described it last month as “the largest internment of civilians
in the world today” and “straight out of George Orwell,” during a speech at the Chiefs of Defense Conference Dinner in Washington.

Reported by Gulchehra Hoja for RFA’s Uyghur Service. Translated by RFA’s Uyghur Service. Written in English by Joshua Lipes.

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**House church raided twice for standing up to authorities**

*In the past two months, law enforcement and government agencies ransacked a Sola Fide church in Hunan because its leadership refused to join the government-controlled Three-Self Patriotic Movement.*

By Shen Xiang


Officials from Political and Legal Affairs Committee, Ethnic and Religious Affairs Bureau, Urban Management Bureau, police station, and other state institutions stormed in and ordered the believers to end their gathering, as “privately setting up a meeting place was a violation of the law.”

They then proceeded to tear apart the church’s cross and other religious symbols. They also confiscated the Bibles, hymnbooks, electric equipment, piano, tables, chairs, audio speakers, and other items from the church. When one elderly believer tried to protest the looting, he was pushed aside and shoved to the ground.

The officials also took photos of all the believers and registered their ID details. The church’s leader, Zhang Jian (pseudonym), was taken into custody for “disrupting social order.” He was transported to the local Public Security Bureau and interrogated about the church’s funds and bank details. He was released soon after.

Within days after the raid, members of the congregation put the church back together again and resumed meetings. However, on October 28, the officials showed up again to raid and loot the church, as before.

As per inside information, the authorities are harassing the church because Mr. Zhang had previously refused to join the government-controlled Three-Self Church. Officials from the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Bureau repeatedly came to the church during the week leading to the first raid ordering Zhang Jian to register with the government-approved Patriotic Movement or face the consequences. Each time, he refused, saying that he would instead be imprisoned than join the Three-Self Church.
CCTV cameras installed in washrooms at church

In a case from northwestern Gansu Province, authorities intimidate believers by monitoring them even when using a toilet at a government-controlled Three-Self church, in complete disregard of their privacy.

By Ma Xiagu

Bitter Winter (19.11.2018) - https://bit.ly/2A2YhSs - Bitter Winter has previously reported about forced surveillance at churches and religious sites in China. Such a move is aimed at not only controlling the practice of religious faith but as an intimidation and fear tactic as well.

As per latest reports, the Wujiayuan Three-Self Church in Lanzhou city of Gansu is being so closely monitored that the believers can’t even use the washrooms in peace anymore.

According to a believer at the government-controlled Three Self church, the State Security Bureau installed monitoring equipment and multiple CCTV cameras in May.

The believer revealed that cameras were installed on every floor of the church. Three cameras were installed outside the church also, in order to get a full view of everyone who visits the church.

However, the worst of all are the cameras placed inside the washrooms at the church. Authorities can now monitor anyone who uses the toilets and the time people spend there. As a result, the believers are now afraid to drink water during gatherings to prevent the need to use the washrooms.

In such a situation, believers complained that things today are even worse than they were during the Cultural Revolution, and those who go to church feel like in prison. “The government shows no respect to people’s privacy and human rights,” one believer said.

In September, the authorities forced the Wujiayuan Church to install a Chinese flag on its roof.

Burial site forcibly excavated for being “unattractive” (videos)

Authorities in the southeastern province of Fujian leveled nearly one thousand ancestral graves, severely injuring a woman in the process.

By Lin Yijiang

In a new low for the Communist Party, authorities in Fujian recently clamped down on a burial site, which is located at the Niushan Mountain, next to the Changle International Airport serving the province’s capital Fuzhou.
In a bid to beautify surroundings near the airport, the graves were not only excavated but leveled as well. It all started in mid-September when the villagers nearby received a notice to dig up the graves and remove the tombs buried at the site.

Ancestral graves are important for the Chinese since they are associated with filial respect and reverence for one’s elders. For this reason, the graves are looked after meticulously. Even a blade of grass should not be plucked as it can have a bearing upon the fortunes and feng shui of the family of the deceased.

The locals felt that to obey the notice would be extremely disrespectful to the deceased and their families. They refused to oblige and made repeated visits to the village’s Party committee, where they would try to reason with the officials.

However, the village chief was helpless too. “Officials saw the graves while aboard an airplane and said it affected the area’s appearance,” he said. “So, they demanded that the graves on the mountain be dug up. This is an order from above. I cannot do anything.”

A month later, the local authorities dispatched public security officers and armed police to the mountain. They came armed with electric batons and tools for the excavation. Some villagers stood on the top of the graves to block the work, but they were forcibly pushed aside.

Li Yu (pseudonym), one of the villagers, pleaded with the officers to allow her to see her father’s grave for one last time. She was given a few minutes, and the excavator got to work on her father’s grave again. In the process, a large rock fell on her right foot and broke it. Blood gushed out from her foot, and when she and her relatives cried for help, none of the few dozen officers on site came to help her.

VIDEO: Li Yu’s right foot was smashed and broken. (Warning: This video contains disturbing footage.)

The diggings continued for several days, and by the end of it, authorities had their way: the villagers were forced to take away the excavated remains of the deceased.

VIDEO: The excavator forcibly digs up the graves.

Still grieving the loss of the burial site, a local resident said, “It is our parents who gave us life and raised us. Now we can’t even protect the ashes of our ancestors. How can I let them down like this?”

Another villager said, “When the deceased are laid to rest, it brings comfort to the souls of the living. It is utterly heartless to dig up ancestral graves.” An elderly man added that it was a taboo to dig up graves, “Only the CCP is capable of such barbaric law enforcement.”

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**130 Christians detained after police raid in Henan**
A gathering of believers from across China at an Apostolic house church was unexpectedly disrupted when nearly 200 law enforcement officers showed up, acting on a tip-off from a local party cadre.

By Jiang Tao

Bitter Winter (16.11.2018) - [https://bit.ly/2DLXDgL](https://bit.ly/2DLXDgL) - On August 19, the gathering at a gathering venue of the Apostolic house church in Jian'an district of Henan’s Xuchang city was in procession when nearly 200 police officers stormed inside. The contingent included officers from the riot squad and special police.

According to eyewitnesses, the streets outside the church were lined with police vehicles, and local residents were not allowed to pass by the area.

A total of 130 believers from across China attended the gathering. The meeting had been organized to show solidarity with young believers, but instead, they had to bear this attack after a village Communist Party cadre reported them.

A believer who was present at the site told Bitter Winter, “After the police stormed into the meeting place, they screamed at us: ‘Nobody move! Take your cell phones and put them on the table’.” An officer also grabbed 4,000 RMB or nearly 600 USD of cash that was lying on a table, the believer revealed.

130 police officers were assigned to guard the congregation: one policeman to every believer. Later, 20 attendees who had been identified as people-in-charge of their churches were taken to a sub-division of the Dongcheng Public Security Bureau for questioning while the young believers were taken to a local school.

By the next day, everyone except three people was released. The three left behind were the person-in-charge of the church, Zhang Heng (pseudonym), the host of the gathering, and a believer who was mistaken to be a preacher.

The three were interrogated about the gathering in detail. They were asked about who organized it, how was the church established, where was the donation money kept, and so on. When questioning proved to be unsuccessful, the officers tried to intimidate Mr. Zhang. They told him that his religious faith could be costly for his children and grandchildren as they might not be allowed to serve in the army, work for the government, travel overseas, or avail pensions.

Mr. Zhang revealed that he had been arrested before and so, he was not afraid of the intimidation tactics employed by the officers. In 1994, he was detained for seven days and fined 2,000 RMB or nearly 300 USD for taking a photo with a Canadian pastor. His wife too had been arrested in the past for her faith.

This time, Mr. Zhang was released after two weeks of detention while the detained host of the gathering had been let go two days before him.

Five days later, police officers showed up at the church’s site again. They conducted another raid and this time, seized numerous items, worth 80,000 RMB or 11,000 USD, that were put into eight police trucks.
Police shut down church, intimidate children at Sunday school

Authorities in Henan not only illegally clamped down on a church but also harassed and threatened young children.

By Jiang Tao

Bitter Winter (16.11.2018) - https://bit.ly/2QXw074 - On September 2, more than fifty believers were in a congregation at a Christian meeting venue in Henan’s Luohe city when thirty police officers stormed inside. The place was located on the tenth floor of a building known as Meisheng Tower.

Additional 70 officers surrounded the venue and the building from outside. The officers inside the site kicked around the tables and chairs while yelling at the believers to disperse. More than a dozen of them then found their way into the Sunday school classroom, where children were engrossed in religious teachings.

The officers questioned all the children about their names, home address, where they go to school and so on. All of them were forced to sign their names onto a piece of paper to officially record their questioning.

The children were scared, and when one 10-year-old girl said she couldn’t sign, her mother couldn’t keep her calm. She rebuked the officers, “How can you treat these innocent children like this? Such actions may be used on criminals who commit theft or robbery.” The police officers ignored her and continued with their questioning.

Later, the director of the local Religious Affairs Bureau pressurized the church’s pastor, Mr. Chen, to sign and acknowledge that it was an “illegal gathering.” However, he said, “I didn’t violate the law, so, I won’t sign.” He was then taken away to the local police station.

During this raid, a female church co-worker had tried to film the proceedings. When police officers noticed her doing that, they assaulted her violently by pulling her hairs, slapping her on the face and pushing her against the wall. Another female believer was taking photos but was severely beaten by five police officers. A believer saw this and raised the alarm, shouting, “The police are hitting people!” But an officer near her said that the police had the entire building in its control, and there was no one to heed to the cries of the believers.

By the end of it, the church suffered losses over 100,000 RMB or 14,000 USD as the police had confiscated their technical equipment and musical instruments and destroyed religious symbols.

The police also instructed the director of the neighborhood committee to change the locks of the venue and arranged for local thugs to intimidate believers.
Liaoning and Shanxi Buddhists report cases of harassment

Even the most innocent faith-related practices or rituals may cause troubles with authorities in present-day China.

By Piao Junying

Bitter Winter (16.11.2018) - https://bit.ly/2A7i4An - Ever since the implementation of the new Regulation on Religious Affairs, any act of faith has come under scanner in China. Not only are believers rebuked or harassed for their actions, but they are also threatened to the point of paranoia.

In early September, the police arrested more than 20 elderly Buddhists in Donggang city of northeastern Liaoning simply for reading scriptures together in one of their homes. To show their heft, the officers arrived in four cars and came armed with guns. They claimed that all private religious meetings had been prohibited by the state and seized the group’s books, under the pretense of checking if they had anti-Party content in them.

Among the arrested Buddhists, more than ten out-of-town Buddhists were taken to a police station for questioning, while locals Buddhists were made to register their information on the scene, and next day, they were called in for questioning and were threatened that if they don’t give up their faith, the next three generations of their family will not be allowed to serve in the Chinese army or seek a government job.

An eyewitness from the village revealed that he heard the Buddhists singing songs praising the Party in the police station. He said, “The songs saved them. The police took the singing as the sign of support for Mao Zedong and released them.”

Another villager said that the government’s policies are becoming increasingly difficult to understand and follow. Speaking about some previous arrests, he said, “When these old ladies have nothing to do, they sing together and recite Buddhist scriptures. This does not mean that they oppose the Communist Party. Why arrest them?”

The level of control over religious belief in China is such that even the most innocuous faith-related act may result in huge problems with authorities. Li Gaizhen (pseudonym), a Buddhist from Taiyuan city in the northern province of Shanxi told Bitter Winter that since March, her daily life is monitored only because her religious status had been registered in official records.

In May, she decided to buy some fish from the market and release them into a nearby lake as part of the Buddhist practice known as Life Release. She was called immediately into the police station for questioning, and the deputy director intervened personally to “learn about her situation.”

She was questioned at length about her faith and told that by releasing fish into the water, she had caused “disturbance to the public order.” She was later forced to sign a document guaranteeing that she was no longer a Buddhist. Given such intense scrutiny for even the minutest aspects of her life and faith, Ms. Li now lives in fear of authorities and possible implications against her family.
**Deported by Switzerland, Wang Xiumei is now in prison until 29 December 2020**

HRWF (16.11.2018) - Born on 5 April 1956 in Linshu County of Linyi City, Shandong Province, Wang Xiumei joined The Church of Almighty God (CAG) in September of 2004. After facing persecution in China, Wang Xiumei fled to Switzerland to seek asylum on 23 April 2015. Wang Xiumei’s application was rejected and on 2 May 2017, Wang Xiumei was deported back to China.

Upon return to China, Wang Xiumei found herself in a dangerous situation. Too afraid to return back to her home, Xiumei rented a room in Linshu County. Less than two months after her return, on the night of 27 June 2017, police from the Linshu County Public Security Bureau of Linyi City, Shandong forcefully entered her apartment. The police immediately arrested her and began rummaging through her belongings, seizing a laptop, cellphone, checkbook, and credit cards.

On 30 June 2017, the Linshu County Public Security Bureau sentenced Wang Xiumei to fifteen days of administrative detention for ‘participation in cult activities. On 14 July, the day that her administrative detention expired, the Public Security Bureau announced that they would again detain her on charges of ‘using a Xie Jiao organisation to undermine law enforcement’. (*)

On 18 August 2017, the Linshu County court issued an arrest warrant for Wang Xiumei and subsequently sentenced her to 3.5 years in prison for ‘suspected use of a Xie Jiao organisation to undermine law enforcement’ coupled with a fine of 30,000 RMB. After the court announced this, Wang Xiumei was escorted to the Linyi City Women’s Detention Center.

Wang Xiumei remains in prison today – her sentence will expire on 29 December 2020.

Human Rights Without Frontiers has collected and reviewed testimonies of many CAG members who have spent time in Chinese prisons. Nearly every single case contained testimonies of severe torture, and some even death. Sadly, the statistics reveal that Wang Xiumei will most likely suffer a similar fate.

(*) Xie Jiao in Chinese means 'heterodox teachings'.

See our reports on the persecution of members of The Church of Almighty God in China at [https://hrwf.eu](https://hrwf.eu)

- Tortured to death
- NGOs unite against religious freedom oppression in China

Supporting documents:
山东省临沂市人民检察院

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"Arranging God" trial held on June 16, 2017, subjected to criminal charges by the Public Security Bureau of Linhai County because of being suspected of establishing the group "Arranging God". The case was submitted to the county public prosecutor's office to be investigated on July 14, 2017. The trial was opened on August 18 at the same year. Currently, they are being detained in Linhai City Detention Center.

The People's Procuratorate of Linhai County, Zhejiang Province, initiated a public prosecution on January 1, 2018 charging the defendants Xuxiao Wang and the defendant Delian Zheng with the crime of subverting the administration of the state. The trial was opened by the Linhai County People's Court on the said date, and the court, after going through the preliminary procedures in accordance with the law, found a legitimate verdict and led the public trial on the same. The People's Procuratorate of Linhai County, Zhejiang Province, applied the impoundments Wang and Zheng were subject to the public prosecution in the court. The defendants Xuxiao Wang and the defendant Delian Zheng were present in the court for the trial.

The People's Procuratorate of Linhai County accounts for defendant Xuxiao Wang and defendant Delian Zhang, joining the cult of "Arranging God" at the end of 2012 and the end of 2011 respectively. They are members of members of the "Arranging God" cult's "Dharma Center" as well as the "5th level Management" within the "Dharma Center" (with the Code Name of 006) of the said organization. Since the end of May 2017, Xuxiao Wang and Delian Zhang had been engaged in real and actual activities of "Arranging God", embracing the aim of realizing their criminal purposes at the "Dharma Center".

They engaged in the so-called "prostitution business" on an underground basis, but provided the statements of defense that he was neither engaged in prostitution nor drug dealing.

The defendant Delian Zhang had objection to the facts listed in the indictment, but provided the statements of defense that he was neither engaged in prostitution, drug dealing, nor drug circulation.

It has been confirmed in the trial that the defendant Xuxiao Wang and the defendant Delian Zhang joined the cult of "Arranging God" at the end of 2012 and the end of 2011 respectively. The two of them are members of the "Linhai County "Dharma Center" (with the code name of 006) of the said organization. Since the end of May 2017, Xuxiao Wang and Delian Zhang had been engaged in real and actual activities of "Arranging God", and they have been engaged in criminal activities of "Arranging God", and they have been engaged in criminal activities of "Arranging God".
Back to China, Quan Kuo faced two months in detention and a life under surveillance

HRWF (16.11.2018) - Born on 21 October 1983 in Jingmen City, Hubei Province, Quan Kuo joined the Church of Almighty God (CAG) in 2012. In October 2014, Quan Kuo recognized that he could no longer safely remain in China and fled to South Korea for asylum. On 24 March 2015, his asylum application was denied. Quan Kuo appealed to the authorities and attempted to explain that if he is deported to China he will certainly be arrested. Despite his efforts, his appeal was rejected by the South Korean government on 30 June 2016.

Quan Kuo remained in South Korea despite his asylum rejection letter. While living in South Korea, he was unable to legally work and was not eligible for any government benefits leaving him unable to treat his heart disease. Without any other options, Quan Kuo returned to Hubei Province in China to receive medical attention on 11 March 2017.

Fearing capture if he returned home, Quan Kuo checked into a hotel opposite of Xiangyang’s bus station in May 2017. On 13 May, around 8 a.m. Quan Kuo was checking
out of the hotel at the front desk when the captain of the Hubei Province Jingmen National Security Brigade, Mr. Feng, along with five or six plainclothed police officers stopped him. Without showing any identification or documents, the police officers began to search Quan Kuo’s bags. Despite not finding anything suspicious in his luggage, the police officers handcuffed him and transported him to an unidentified location in Jingmen. The police officers brought him to a room and handcuffed him to a chair. Officers constantly kept tight surveillance while he was in the room.

The following day, Mr. Feng and a few other police officers began to interrogate Quan Kuo about his church and his trip to South Korea. When Quan Kuo refused to answer their questions, Mr. Feng began threatening him. Quan Kuo told the officers that he was a believer in God and spread the gospel – that he had not done anything illegal. Mr. Feng proceeded to shout at Quan Kuo claiming that he is in an evil illegal Xie Jiao movement (*) and threatening him with a prison sentence. During the interrogation, the police showed Quan Kuo photos of other CAG members, asking him to identify the individuals and to share their personal information. Quan Kuo refused to answer any questions. The interrogation lasted for a week.

Following this week, the police officers sent Quan Kuo to the Hubei Province Political Re-education Center. While there, he was forced to write statements renouncing his faith and was subject to intense re-education classes. Several officers from the Jingmen Public Security Bureau visited him in the Center, continuing their interrogation, showing him photos of members and asking him to identify the individuals.

Around 20 June, Mr. Feng and several other officers took Quan Kuo from the Re-education Center and drove him around Changsha City in Hunan Province. The officers asked him to identify the homes of CAG members. When Quan Kuo failed to do so, they threatened him with a prison sentence. They attempted to bribe Quan Kuo insisting that if he helped them arrest upper-level church leaders, they would reduce his sentence and pay him reward money. Quan Kuo refused their proposal.

On 21 July 2017, Quan Kuo was released after being held for over two months. Since his return home, Quan Kuo has to regularly check-in with the police, faces frequent interrogations, and is under constant surveillance.

(*) Xie Jiao in Chinese means 'heterodox teachings'.

See our reports on the persecution of members of The Church of Almighty God in China at https://hrwf.eu

- Tortured to death
- NGOs unite against religious freedom oppression in China

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**Shandong authorities target Christian students at universities**

*Municipal governments are following in the steps of authorities in other provinces to discriminate against students who hold religious beliefs.*

By Jiang Tao

in the north of China. Entitled, the Notice on the Printing of Measures on the Evaluation of the Ethnic and Religious Work, it details a list of activities for all levels of governments and Communist Party committees under the city’s jurisdiction to regulate the religious beliefs of students and teachers.

The document prohibits teachers and students from abroad preaching or promoting religions while local religious students are not allowed to engage new believers among classmates and entice them to participate in religious activities. The dissemination of religious thought through newspapers, books, audio-visual products, and other means should be strictly forbidden. The local authorities are ordered to eliminate venues of religious missionaries, religion-related meeting places, and religious goods stores within the teaching facilities and take actions to prevent their establishment.

Recent reports from across the eastern province of Shandong raise concerns that municipalities across the province have been implementing similar measures with damaging consequences to students.

Zhang Qianqian (pseudonym), a resident of Shandong’s Zibo city, was told that she wouldn’t be granted her diploma if she didn’t renounce her faith. Ms. Zhang, who was raised in a Christian household, was in the middle of an internship at the time and found the situation trying to navigate.

In another case, Wei Tong (pseudonym), also a Christian, is currently studying at a medical university in the province. She was recently discovered to be a believer by her teacher and has since been questioned five times because of it.

Of her experience, she said, “They advised me to give up my faith, and prohibited me from preaching the gospel and attending gatherings. I’m under a lot of pressure right now.” Ms. Wei is worried she might be summoned for an ideological conversation in coming days.

University fellowships are under attack as well. Authorities recently shut down a meeting place for student-believers at a nearby vocational school in Zibo city’s Zoucun district. The venue belonged to the Sola Fide Christian theological doctrine held to distinguish Protestant churches from Catholic and Orthodox churches. The students were getting ready to conduct the first meeting of the semester on September 7, when police officers ambushed them.

In the end, a local Christian was arrested, and the landlord of the venue was forced to terminate the lease agreement. The students are now without a place to congregate.

Similarly, at the Haidu College of the Qingdao Agricultural University in Shandong, students have been sought out for one-to-one conversations during which the teachers ask about their living conditions and religious beliefs. As a result, the college’s Christian fellowship has been suppressed as students have been warned of consequences if they continued to attend the meetings.

Analogous guidelines suppressing religious beliefs in universities have been issued in Heilongjiang as well.

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**Church in Henan demolished before it could be used**

*In September, Lushan county authorities dispatched over 50 police officers to tear down the church that cost nearly one million RMB to build.*
By Jiang Tao


Their contingent included over 50 police officers, two excavators, two ambulances, and over a dozen other vehicles. They were there to demolish the church on the local government’s order, as the church was an “illegal construction.”

VIDEO: Church in Henan demolished before it could be used II

Mr. Zhao reasoned with the officials but to no avail. Instead, when he tried to record the demolition, his cellphone was snatched and its contents deleted. He was accused of obstructing law enforcement and the officials ordered for him to be arrested. At this, his wife, Zhang Guizhi (pseudonym), stepped forward to prevent the arrest but she was violently pushed aside.

The couple stood outside the church as the authorities carried out the demolition. At one point, Ms. Zhang tried to enter through the gaps in the church’s gate. But then, she was not only stopped but also beaten up viciously. It was only when Mr. Zhao pleaded with village cadres to intervene did the police officers ended assaulting his wife.

VIDEO: Church in Henan demolished before it could be used I

Ms. Zhang had to be taken to the hospital. The onlookers saw all this and felt indignant but couldn’t say anything out of fear.

As per reports, believers had pooled in nearly one million RMB or over 140,000 USD of their money to build the church. During the construction, they had even deposited the 14,000 RMB (about 2,000 USD) permit fee as well as 4,000 RMB (nearly 600 USD) to relevant government departments, but their permit had still not been approved.

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Camps for Uyghurs, “schools” or jails? Exclusive report, photos, and footage from Bitter Winter

While China tries to defend the indefensible claiming that the transformation through education camps are benign “schools,” one of our reporters secretly visited the new large camp in Yining, Xinjiang, and proved it is undoubtedly a jail.

Watch the video here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r2PT-RXxcT8

By Li Zaili

On November 6, the United Nations Human Rights Council conducted its Universal Periodic Review of China. Several countries denounced the transformation through education camps, particularly those for Uyghurs in Xinjiang, as places where the inmates are subjected to psychological pressure, inhumane treatments, and torture. China answered that they are simply “educational” facilities. Bitter Winter has repeatedly documented that this is not the case, and is now in a position to offer unpublished news, images, and footages.
The detainees’ family members who are attending the public trial meeting line up outside the re-education camp, waiting to be summoned.

In May of this year, authorities in Xinjiang began to build a large-scale “transformation through education” camp in place of a lumber mill and a free market for buying and selling cattle and sheep, in the city of Yining, Huocheng county. In three months, the construction of this camp was basically completed, covering an area of about 100,000 square meters.

A family member undergoes a security check.

In August, the construction of this camp was in its final stages. When conducting a secret visit inside the camp, one of our reporters discovered that there are altogether nine buildings, where “students,” are detained, surrounded by barbed-wire fences. Each building is four floors high, and each floor has 27 rooms (dormitories) and three
“classrooms.” All the dormitories and “classrooms” are fitted with double iron doors, and iron bars have been installed on all the windows. The facility’s structure is obviously very much similar to that of a prison.

Police patrol and stand guard outside the re-education camp.

A construction worker revealed that most people who would be locked up there, in fact, received prison sentences; some of them were sentenced to five or six years. He also emphasized that the camp was really tantamount to a prison, with little hope for the inmates to be let out or escape.

A large-scale production base has been built adjacent to the re-education camp.

In September, Uyghurs were already being locked up one after the other in the camp. On September 7, the authorities held a public trial of the detainees there. The camp is now
heavily-guarded, with 15 high-definition cameras near the entrance alone. There are also armed police officers guarding the entrance. Vehicles entering the camp must pass through two gateways, and can only enter after passing a security check.

Inside the base, there is a building named “Practical Training Base Service Center.”

Besides, adjacent to the camp, there is also a large production base that contains nine factories, including a clothing factory, an electronics factory, and a food processing plant. One of the factory managers confirmed that the “students” detained in the camp are sent there for forced work, something Bitter Winter has repeatedly documented in similar cases. Not only are the transformation through education camps jails, but inmates are also subject to forced labor.

“Chuangfa Innovative Electronics” is written on the wall of one of the factories.
Machines and equipment have already been installed in the factory.

Workers adjust and test machines in a factory.
Judgement day for China in Geneva

The Universal Periodic Review of the state of human rights in China at the United Nations saw several major countries publicly denounce the CCP and a major demonstration in front of the Palais des Nations, with Muslim Uyghurs, Tibetan Buddhists, members of The Church of Almighty God, and Bitter Winter, united in exposing the Chinese persecution of all religions.

By Marco Respinti

Bitter Winter (07.11.2018) - https://bit.ly/2JNEr2a - Every five years, the United Nations Human Rights Council holds a Universal Periodic Review of each member state’s human rights record. On Tuesday, November 6, it was the turn of China – a world record holder when it comes to the violation of human rights and religious persecution.

As expected, China had a very rough day. Australia, UK, Canada, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, France, Iceland, Ireland, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States focused on “transformation through education” camps, where one and a half million inmates, two thirds of them Uyghur Muslim where one and a half million inmates – two thirds of which are Uyghur Muslims and the rest are Tibetan Buddhists and members of religions declared illegal or banned – are subject to inhumane treatment and psychological pressure to induce them to abandon their faith.

China had dispatched to Geneva Le Yucheng, the Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs. He offered an arrogant but unconvincing defense of the “transformation through education” camps, claiming that they “free the minds of people affected by extremism.” Mr. Le’s speech verged on the ridicule when he explained that the camps offer “free-of-charge vocational training with a diploma after exams to those who had been coerced or lured by extremist groups.” But the speech was also sinister and threatening, as Mr. Le stated that the alternative to the camps would be “suppressing and wiping out” entirely the “extremists,” which in Chinese jargon means physically eliminating them.

To make Mr. Le and the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) rough day worse, hundreds gathered in front of the Palais des Nations, the second iconic symbol of the United
Nations after the New York headquarters, to express their disappointment and anger, and call on international organizations to stop the persecution and slaughter in China.

The event was organized by the World Uyghur Congress (WUC), the largest organization of the Uyghur diaspora. Representatives of other persecuted ethnic groups and religions were also invited to participate. So, starting at early birds’ time from Palais Wilson, on the shore of Lake Leman, enveloped in the mist and numb of a cold morning, a procession of national flags and photographs of CCP victims set out orderly and peacefully to reach the Palais des Nations. Uyghurs, Tibetans, Inner Mongolians, exiles in Taiwan, human rights activists from Hong Kong, members of The Church of Almighty God, and Catholics shouted slogans against the CCP and President Xi Jinping.

Once at the Palais des Nations, many speakers took turns, representing the communities that crowded the square with their flags and signs, defying cold weather and, after a while, even rain. While banners and signposts wreathed in the wind, after the Uyghur and Tibetan national anthems were played, Mr. Omer Kanat, executive president of the WUC, took the floor.

Then Mr. Dolkun Isa, president of the WUC, followed, among others, by Mr. Jampa Tsering Samdho, a Tibetan parliamentarian in exile; Ms. Kristina Olney of the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation in Washington; Sister Sofia Wu from The Church of Almighty God; Mr. René Longet, a former member of the Swiss Parliament and its group for Tibet; Mr. Dolgion Hatgin, president of the People’s Party of Inner Mongolia; and Mr. Vincent Metten of the International Campaign for Tibet.

But, more or less out of the program, several Uyghur speakers, victims who escaped persecution in the “transformation through education” camps, also offered their testimonies. A sign, exhibited by a middle-aged Uyghur woman, composed and dignified in her grief, asked, “Where is my sister?” Adding ironically, “She is a medical doctor, she does not need vocational training.” The allusion is to the CCP’s claim that the camps where, in fact, people are tortured and die, offer “vocational training” to “victims” of religious extremism.

Sister Sofia Wu reminded the crowd that, just as it happens with Uyghurs and Tibetans, thousands of members of The Church of Almighty God are tortured in the Chinese jails and camps, and dozens have died in custody in highly suspicious circumstances.
Bitter Winter was also invited to attend the event. I traveled to Geneva to offer words of greeting, solidarity, and friendship to the rally. I believe that this Tuesday was a great and memorable day. Walking among Buddhists, Muslims, and Christians, all united and marching together for liberty and human rights is not an experience one has every day. To hear the Uyghurs shouting “Free Tibet!”, the Buddhists asking for freedom for the Muslims, and the Christians invoking peace for all faiths was a unique experience. This was not the language of some closet utopian, but a loving experience, forged in the blood shed by all the communities represented at the event.

Many of those marching in Geneva believed the CCP was guilty of terrorism and genocide. Will they be heard by the U.N.? Now, a troika composed of representatives from Hungary, Kenya, and Saudi Arabia—the three countries selected for the task by the Human Rights Council—will prepare a report with recommendations to China, to be completed on November 9.

Some U.N. diplomats are skeptical about the outcome of the process. But perhaps the final recommendations are not even the most important part of the Universal Periodic Review. The summary by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights composed from the documents submitted by NGOs will remain. It denounced the “transformation through education” camps, the atrocities against the Uyghurs and the Tibetans, and the persecution of the religious groups the regime has banned as xie jiao (“heterodox teachings,”), noting in particular 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.”

China can manipulate the information and use its weight to make some documents “disappear” from the U.N. website, as it happened last week. But the Universal Periodic Review has switched on the light, and many crimes the CCP hoped to keep quietly committing in the darkness have now been publicly revealed. I am proud to have been part of this extraordinary day, where Bitter Winter promised to all persecuted minorities in China that it will continue to be a voice for the voiceless and to publish news, documents, and testimonies about the persecution affecting all religions in China.

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**Civil society deeply concerned by removal of key stakeholder information by the UN OHCHR for upcoming UPR of China**


November 5, 2018

We, the undersigned, express deep concern over the removal of valuable stakeholder information by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) for consideration by UN member states ahead of the 3rd Cycle Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the People’s Republic of China.

The UPR process, undertaken through the UN Human Rights Council, explicitly welcomes constructive contributions from civil society to address human rights challenges and
promote universal human rights norms. All of the undersigned groups submitted reports through the OHCHR’s online platform before the deadline of March 29, 2018 as individual organizations or as joint submissions to be considered by states in the preparation of their recommendations, and by the OHCHR in its official summary of information from civil society.

We are, however, dismayed by the fact that at least seven submissions were completely removed from consideration from the final document intended for UN member states to draft recommendations for China’s review.

The OHCHR – tasked with compiling stakeholder information into a summary document – initially released a Stakeholder Summary dated September 3, 2018. The document listed 85 individual submissions including from the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy (TCHRD) and Demosistō as well as 42 joint submissions including from the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) and Southern Mongolian Human Rights Information Center (SMHRIC); another that included the UNPO and several Tibet groups; and another submission from Hong-Kong-based groups that also included Demosistō.

The World Uyghur Congress (WUC) was provided only passing mention in two citations at the end of the document and the Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP) was cited within the text of the original document, though both were not listed as contributors.

Shortly after the first Stakeholder Summary was posted, however, it was removed from the OHCHR’s website for several weeks. Citing “technical reasons”, on October 16 the OHCHR re-issued an updated version of the report (version dated October 10). However, this version incorporates critical changes that do not appear to be technical in nature. The updated document removed citations of reports from TCHRD and Demosistō as well as three separate joint submissions (noted above), and removed all references to reports from the WUC and UHRP.

The concerned organizations reached out individually to the OHCHR with concerns from October 22-26; in response, OHCHR officials wrote: “As a subsidiary body of the United Nations General Assembly, the HRC and the UPR Working Group (UPR WG), must adhere to the official United Nations position and terminology as reflected in relevant General Assembly resolutions and within the context of the UN Charter, and therefore, must respect the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of the State concerned.” Further requests to explain in greater detail specific issues with the seven reports went unanswered.

The OHCHR did, however belatedly, issue a Corrigendum document on November 2, including previously removed citations of reports by TCHRD, UHRP, WUC and a joint submission by UNPO and SMHRIC, we remain deeply concerned about the exclusion of stakeholder information in the first place. Furthermore, an individual submission from Demosistō as well as a joint submission focusing on Tibet continue to be left out of all OHCHR documentation for the review. Since the statements and recommendations of delegations participating in the review are drafted weeks in advance, withholding NGO inputs until less than two working days before the review, effectively precludes these inputs from being considered by participating States.
The undersigned organizations all provided relevant information adhering closely to UN principles and those set out by the OHCHR. All of the aforementioned reports detailed the situation on the ground for particular groups within China and were structured to support efforts for reforms necessary to improve the human rights conditions and the implementation of previous UPR recommendations.

While we recognise the indispensable work performed by the OHCHR around the world working on critical issues and facilitating participation and inputs from various groups, we remain very concerned that the removal of these reports gives further credence to well-documented NGO concerns of China’s growing influence within the UN human rights system, and the deliberate silencing of critical voices.

As NGOs, we look to the OHCHR to facilitate civil society participation in the UPR process. Any differential treatment or interpretation of processes, criteria or NGO engagement by the OHCHR in the context of reviews of China should be justified promptly and openly.

The process concerns in this case raise important questions for OHCHR to answer:

- Why were the NGO inputs excluded in the first place?
- Why, given that the NGO inputs were available since March 2018, did it take until November for the Office to accept them and issue a Corrigendum?
- What specific concerns have led to the submission from Demosistō and the joint submission on Tibet still being excluded, and why have these concerns not been communicated to the NGOs in question?
- Did the delegation or government of China object to the reports or the NGOs which submitted them?

The undersigned organizations therefore call for greater transparency within the UPR stakeholder compilation process including:

1. Prompt notification of exclusion from UPR, Treaty Body or other human rights reviews.
2. Explanation of terminology used to exclude stakeholder information, including, but not limited to, what constitutes ‘politicalised’ information or fails to respect ‘national sovereignty and territorial integrity.’
3. Providing NGOs clear justifications for any concerns, sufficient advance notice, and an opportunity to address any concerns so that their inputs can be duly reflected in the summary of stakeholder submissions.

**List of Signatories:**

Demosistō
Human Rights Watch (HRW)
International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)
Two Chinese priests placed in detention

Underground church crackdown in Hebei province sees more than a dozen religious venues being reportedly seized


The priests from Xuanhua Diocese are Father Su Guipeng and Father Zhao He. The source said Father Zhao, who serves in the Dongcheng Catholic Church, was taken away by the personnel of the United Front Work Department of Yangyuan County on Oct. 24.

Seven unidentified people who went to the church said that they would take the priest to talk to local government officials, but the priest had not returned.

The source said that the priest had been placed in detention at a hotel. His mobile phone had been confiscated and he was under constant guard.

The priest was reportedly asked to study newly revised regulations on religious practice and to recognize the state-controlled Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA).

The government officials were said to have warned that the Catholic Church in China was required to be autonomous from the Vatican.

This was not withstanding a provisional Vatican-Beijing agreement signed two months ago, covering sensitive issues such as the appointment of new bishops in China.

As part of the deal, Vatican recognition had been afforded to eight Chinese bishops who hold important positions in the patriotic association.

Father Su Guipeng, who serves in Shadifang parish, was Oct. 13 placed under home arrest so he could be indoctrinated on government policies.

Meanwhile a source said that in a village of Xuanhua Diocese, families were told that they would be fined and detained for five days if they received priests in their homes.

In addition, the Jingkai District Bureau of Ethnic and Religious Affairs Sept. 25 issued a notice banning what it described as illegal religious activities.

It was reported that more than a dozen religious venues of the underground church in the province had been recently seized.
A church member lamented that restrictions on Catholics had intensified since the China-Vatican agreement was signed contrary to its avowedly "friendly spirit."

A Hebei underground Catholic named Paul told ucanews.com that most underground church members would not accept the government's patriotic association, the CCPA.

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**Lu Yongfeng tortured to death by the CCP**

*Just a few months ago, her husband was arrested and forced to recant his faith in The Church of Almighty God, and now their daughter is detained after attempting to flee to the US*

HRWF (31.10.2018) - Lu Yongfeng, female, born on 16 October 1948, lived at 0422 Group 6, Wulanhesuo Village, Wulanhesuo Township, Chaoyang County, Chaoyang City, Liaoning Province. In 1999, she joined The Church of Almighty God.

At 3:00 a.m. on 27 June 2018, more than ten uniformed officers with the Beipiao City Criminal Brigade of Liaoning Province drove five police cars (two of which belonged to the Special Service) to the home of Lu Yongfeng and her husband. The police surrounded the home, knocked on the door, and then forcefully entered the home without providing any documentation or identification. The police first grabbed the couple's cellphones to cut off all contact with the outside world. Lu Yongfeng was so terrified that she fainted. The police began tearing the place apart, searching the home. They confiscated more than ten volumes of religious literature, one laptop, one tablet, and one MP5 player. After more than half an hour the police forcibly took Lu Yongfeng to the Chaoyang City Public Security Bureau; her husband, Zou Jixue, was taken to the Beipiao City Public Security Bureau.

According to Zou Jixue's recollection, the police locked him in a very small interrogation room. Handcuffed, police began asking him about where they got the religious literature, the number of Church members, and the whereabouts of church money. They tried to force him to give up information on the whereabouts of his three daughters (all members of The Church of Almighty God). Zou Jixue recalls them saying:

"Your oldest daughter [Zou Demei] is a coordinator for the Chuan-Gui Pastoral Area [an upper-level leader in charge of the church work of Sichuan Province, Yunnan Province, Guizhou Province, and Chongqing City] and is a nationally wanted criminal! Your three daughters are listed online as wanted! Not a single one of them will be able to escape our grasp. The national government has its ways-they'll do a clean sweep and get them all! Once they're in our hands we can do anything we like with them; there's no room for leniency. We can treat believers in Almighty God however we want!"

Zou Jixue didn't say a word. The police then took him to the Beipiao Detention Center.

At about 9:00 a.m. on 2 July 2018, four police officers put Zou Jixue into a police vehicle and took him to the Beipiao City No. 2 People's Hospital Intensive Care Unit. The officers led him to the bed where he saw his wife, Lu Yongfeng, lying there - she was not breathing properly. He quickly asked the police what they had done to his wife. The officers didn't respond to him. Officers told the doctor to bring an emergency treatment form to have him sign. In his sadness and anxiety, he signed the form and then fainted.
Later, the officers took him back to the detention center.

The afternoon of 4 July 2018, police with the Chaoyang City Detention Center went to the detention center to tell Zou Jixue that Lu Yongfeng had died. Two officers tried to force Zou Jixue to sign a document without his reading the name or content. Zou Jixue passed out again. While passed out, two officers took the chance to grasp his hand to sign and fingerprint the document.

Someone from within the detention center later revealed that Lu's death had already been confirmed inside of the detention center, but that the police still took her to the hospital in order to create a false impression that they had provided emergency treatment for her.

Sometime after 4:00 p.m. on 5 July 2018, Zou Jixue once again passed out and could not be fully revived. The police had no choice but to take him back to his rented house and toss him onto his bed. When they left, they forbade him from telling anyone about his arrest and his wife's death. They ordered him not to leave Beipiao City but to await trial at any time.

It has since been learned that Lu Yongfeng and her husband Zou Jixue were subjected to the local police's nonstop harassment and intimidation, and that the police had arrested and detained Zou Jixue twice before with charges of "illegal gatherings and preaching." After Lu Yongfeng's entire family joined The Church of Almighty God in 2002, the CCP government began hunting and monitoring them.

Since believing in Almighty God, Lu Yongfeng had been subjected to the CCP government's increasing persecution; officials had carried out multiple operations to arrest her, her husband, and their three daughters.

The CCP government's consistent human rights violations are well known and recorded. Families such as Lu Yongfeng's, have no opportunity to plead their cases within China. Her daughters remain in grave danger in China. It is up to the international community to recognize and respond to such outrageous events.

See HRWF publications: http://hrwf.eu/forb/our-reports/

- Tortured to Death
- NGOs unite against religious freedom oppression in China

Church of Almighty God member Tian Ji’an dies after brutal beating by Chinese communist police

HRWF (31.10.2018) - Tian Ji’an, male, born 27 September 1953, resident of Huafeng Township, Shizhu County, Chongqing Municipality, joined The Church of Almighty God (CAG) on 8 June 2002. On 5 June 2006, he was arrested and brutally beaten by the Chinese Communist police. As a result, Tian suffered from a lacerated lumbar vertebra and a fractured cranium with a bone fragment recessed into his brain. Hardened blood coagulation led
to neurological disorders and impaired reasoning. Tian was left unable to work. After more than nine years of affliction, Tian died on 2 April 2016, at the age of 63.

**Arrested and beaten**

At 16h00 on 5 June 2006, Tian’s wife, Jin Zhenghua, and two other Christians were preaching the gospel to four potential converts in their own house when the front door was suddenly rammed open. Led by Captain Sun Jianming, Director Liu Zhihui, and Secretary Zhou Shicai of the National Security Brigade, Shizhu County, Chongqing Municipality, more than a dozen policemen entered the house, placed the Christians under control, and beat Jin Zhenghua viciously. The police pressed Tian on the floor, handcuffed him behind his back and violently punched and kicked him. A policeman stepped and treaded hard on Tian’s back and shoulders. Another policeman stomped hard on Tian’s lower back and waist while a third policeman stepped on his head. Other plainclothes policemen in leather shoes kicked Tian’s body hard. They yelled as they were beating him, “Kill him! Dammit, kill him....”, Tian shrieked in pain throughout the ordeal, powerless to resist. More than a dozen policemen kept on battering him for more than an hour. Tian Ji’an was beaten unconscious on the spot. He was close to death. His face was ashen and his lips blue.

After the beating, Zhou Shicai and two other policemen ransacked the house and seized four spiritual books, a pack of spiritual compact discs, and other items. The police took Tian, Jin Zhenghua, and the others into police cars and escorted them to the Shizhu County National Security Brigade for interrogation. That night, seeing that Tian was seriously wounded and fearing that he might die at the National Security Brigade, the police sent him home. On the third day after returning home, Tian felt his condition was worsening: he lost a lot of weight, felt it hard to swallow anything, or sleep; he coughed and urinated with thin blood; and even became incontinent. He was too weak to do anything.

**A life in pain**

On 5 July, Tian’s wife, Jin Zhenghua, was sentenced to one-year imprisonment on the charge of “disturbing public order,” serving her sentence outside prison. A month later, when she went home to dress Tian’s wounds with medicinal cream, she saw that his body was covered with bruises as a result of the police’s beatings. There was a fist-sized dented mark on his waist and a large cyst on his shoulder. On his head, there were two large hairless spots and more than a dozen of smaller-sized hairless spots. He looked dazed and his speech was incoherent and hesitant. With the help of friends, Tian’s wife scraped together 1,000 RMB and took Tian to the Shizhu County Hospital. Upon examination by the physician, it was discovered that Tian was suffering from many serious internal injuries. Blood stasis in his brain had pressed the nerves and blocked the cerebral blood vessels which led to a blood clot. The beatings had left Tian with a lacerated lumbar vertebra and fractured cranium with a bone fragment the size of a thumb being recessed into the brain. The blockage resulted from hardened blood coagulation and led to neurological disorders and aberrant reasoning. The doctor said, “The part of the skull where the bone fragment is recessed in the brain is inoperable. To operate on it involves life-threatening risks. Without surgery, he can only live for six to seven years at most.”

Since the beating, Tian experienced severe pain in his spine, chest, and brain. He lost his ability to work and exhibited neurological disorders and impaired reasoning. Even when visiting his own farming land, he was unable to recognize where he was or properly care for his crops.

Because of their poor economic situation, Tian’s family couldn’t afford medical treatment and controlled his condition with medicine alone. His condition grew increasingly worse.
Tian completely lost ability to take care of himself.

On 2 April 2016, Tian Ji’an passed away.

**Supporting documents**

Supporting document 1: Identity card

Translation:

Front:

**Name:** Tian Ji’an

**Gender:** Male  **Ethnicity:** Han

**Date of Birth:** 09/27/1953

**Address:** 390 Huafeng Group, Huafeng Village, Nanbin Town, Shizhu County, Chongqing City

**ID No.:** 513521195309270557

Back:

**Issued by:** Public Security Bureau (PSB) of Shizhu Tujia Autonomous County
Valid Period: 08/19/2006-Permanent

Supporting document 2: Certificate of disability

Tian Ji'an is intellectually disabled, with certificate number: 51352119530927055753. We hereby issue this certificate.

China Disabled Persons' Federation (seal)

Date of issue: August 3, 2010

Validity Period: 10 years
Supporting document 3: Medical certificate (inference) of death
Translation:

Medical certificate (inference) of death

Administrative Area Code:
Certificate Number:

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<th>Tian Ji’an</th>
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<th>Han</th>
<th>Country / Region</th>
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<td>Addres s</td>
<td>Huafeng Group, Huafeng Village, Wan’an Street</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date of Birth</td>
<td>September 27, 1953</td>
<td>Date of Death</td>
<td>April 2, 2016</td>
<td>Place of Death</td>
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<td>Cause of Death</td>
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<td>Name of the family member</td>
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<td>Phone Number</td>
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<tr>
<td>Address or Workplace of the family member of the deceased</td>
<td>Huafeng Group, Huafeng Village, Wan’an Street</td>
<td>Physician’s Signature</td>
<td>Wang</td>
<td>Police Officer’s Signature</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note:
1. The family members of the deceased shall go through the formalities of household registration cancellation in public security bureau with this medical certificate of death.
2. This medical certificate of death is invalid without the signatures of the doctor and police as well as the official seals of the medical and health organization and local police station.
How China uses anti-refugee sentiment

By Massimo Introvigne

The Korea Times (29.10.2018) - https://bit.ly/2OZEXzX - 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.

Massimo Introvigne is a sociologist and the founding director of the Center for Studies on New Religions.

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**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 “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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**China breaks silence on Muslim detention camps, calling them ‘humane’**

By Chris Buckley

The New York Times (16.10.2018) - [https://nyti.ms/2P57MtX](https://nyti.ms/2P57MtX) - BEIJING — Under mounting international criticism, China has given its most extensive defense yet of its sweeping campaign to detain and indoctrinate Muslims, with a senior official on Tuesday describing its network of camps in the far west as humane job-training centers.

Rights groups, American lawmakers and a United Nations panel have assailed the “transformation through education” camps holding Uighurs and members of other Muslim minority groups in China’s far northwestern Xinjiang region. Hundreds of thousands have been held in the camps — one estimate says a million — and former inmates who have fled abroad have described them as virtual prisons that engage in harsh brainwashing.

But the chairman of Xinjiang’s government, Shohrat Zakir, himself an ethnic Uighur, called the camps a “humane” and lawful shield against terrorism in an interview published by China’s official Xinhua news agency. He said the facilities gave Uighurs and other Muslims courses in the Chinese language and taught them to be law-abiding citizens. They also receive training in job skills such as making clothes, e-commerce, hairdressing and cosmetology, Mr. Zakir said.

Mr. Zakir said that “students” in the facilities were provided with free meals, air-conditioned dormitories, movie screenings and access to computer rooms.

“Xinjiang has launched a vocational education and training program according to the law,” Mr. Zakir said. “Its purpose is to get rid of the environment and soil that breeds terrorism and religious extremism.”

Mr. Zakir did not say how many Muslims had been sent to the camps, but he appeared to acknowledge for the first time that people were being held against their will in the facilities for months or years at a time.

He said the program dealt with people suspected of wrongdoing that fell short of requiring criminal convictions, and that they received “graduation certificates” only after signing agreements and meeting certain criteria. Some detainees, he said, were being prepared for release and assignment to jobs at the end of 2018.
Mr. Zakir suggested the campaign would continue for many years. The “deradicalization” program is showing results, he said, “but the duration, complexity and intensity remain acute, and we must maintain high vigilance.”

Omurbek Eli, a businessman who has described his time held in a camp in 2017, scoffed at Mr. Zakir’s description of the indoctrination centers as “colorful” places where students play basketball, watch movies and join in singing contests. His experience, he said, was far harsher, involving long days of marching, singing patriotic Chinese songs and memorizing Chinese laws.

“They’re full of nonsense,” Mr. Eli, who is originally from Xinjiang and obtained Kazakh citizenship, said by telephone. “They say that these camps are to eradicate terrorism, but inside I saw lawyers, doctors, intellectuals, even officials who had nothing to do with extremism,” he said. “They call these vocational training centers, but it was really a prison.”

The publication of the interview with Mr. Zakir confirmed a shift in China’s public relations strategy over the camps, from silence to an unapologetic defense. Mr. Zakir even cited a United Nations resolution on fighting terrorism to justify them.

As criticism of the detentions grew throughout this year, the government first stayed silent. Then it gave sparing acknowledgments of the camps’ existence. Appearing before a United Nations panel in Geneva in August, a senior official in the Chinese delegation defended the government’s measures yet denied that they amounted to mass detention.

But Mr. Zakir’s comments marked the first full-throated defense of the indoctrination program, which grew out of policies launched by Xi Jinping, China’s president and Communist Party chief.

Last week, the Xinjiang government issued amended rules for its “deradicalization” program that for the first time gave clear public authorization for the indoctrination camps.

On Tuesday evening, China’s main state television network, CCTV, broadcast a current affairs program in prime time that praised the camps and depicted them as caring, happy places. It showed a class of Uighur students reading out a Chinese lesson titled, “I am a law-abiding citizen.”

“After a year plus of denial, the Communist Party has decided to get out in front of the story, and put forward its own view over the legality and the nature of these detention camps,” James Leibold, an expert on Xinjiang at La Trobe University in Australia, said by email. “The party’s central leadership now seems determined to ‘standardize’ and ‘legalize’ their approach.”

Mr. Zakir’s comments appeared to be part of China’s preparations for an international meeting that could put the camps under further scrutiny. At a meeting of the United Nations Human Rights Council in early November, foreign governments will have a chance to question officials from Beijing about the detention program and other intrusive security measures affecting Muslim minorities.

“This meeting is a very important occasion to raise the camp issue,” Dolkun Isa, the president of the World Uyghur Congress, an exile group based in Germany, said by telephone. (Uyghur is an alternative spelling of Uighur.) “China has denied the camps, but now it’s something that they just cannot hide.”
Western governments have indicated that Xinjiang will be a priority at the Human Rights Council meeting in Geneva.

“We are deeply concerned by credible reports pointing to a serious deterioration of the human rights situation” in Xinjiang, Federica Mogherini, the European Union’s high representative for foreign affairs and security policy, told the European Parliament earlier this month.

Last week, a bipartisan panel in Washington issued a report condemning the indoctrination camps. Lawmakers on the panel, including Senator Marco Rubio, proposed legislation that would punish China for the detention program.

“In China, the government is engaged in the persecution of religious and ethnic minorities that is straight out of George Orwell,” Nikki Haley, who recently announced that she was stepping down as the United States ambassador to the United Nations, said on Monday, according to Fox News. “It is the largest internment of civilians in the world today.”

But Mr. Zakir’s account indicated that China would maintain that the camps have strong backing in law. Up until 2014, China was beset by a string of violent attacks and riots involving discontented Uighurs.

“Now Xinjiang is not only beautiful,” Mr. Zakir said, “it’s also very safe and stable.”

Still, Chinese officials have not given foreign diplomats or journalists access to the camps, nor have they said how many people they hold. Hu Xijin, a prominent editor of Global Times, a brashly nationalist Chinese newspaper, said on Monday that he knew the number, and denied it was a million.

Rights groups said the existence of the camps exemplified the Communist Party’s use of legal justifications as a sweeping cloak for measures that betray China’s own guarantees of rights and procedural protections, as well as international law.

“The Xinjiang authorities’ clumsy justifications for these camps only serve to illustrate what ‘the rule of law’ in China means,” said Maya Wang, a China researcher for Human Rights Watch. “The party bends it to its will and uses it as a weapon against perceived political enemies.”

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**Twenty banned religious groups**

FOREF (15.10.2018) - [https://bit.ly/2pVeaFS](https://bit.ly/2pVeaFS) - On September 18, 2017, the revamped China Anti-Cult (xie jiao) website reiterated the list of banned groups which had been listed publicly in 2014. Of the total 20 groups, eleven were listed as being “dangerous:”

1. Falun Gong (法轮功)
2. The Church of Almighty God (全能神)
3. The Shouters (呼喊派)
4. The Disciples Society (门徒会)
5. Unification Church (统一教)
6. Guanyin Method (观音法门)
7. Bloody Holy Spirit (血水水圣灵)
8. Full Scope Church (全范围教会)
9. Three Grades of Servants (三班仆人派)
10. True Buddha School (灵仙真佛宗)
11. Mainland China Administrative Deacon Station (中华大大陆行行政执事站)

See the full article (25 pages) as published by CESNUR earlier this year: **The Black-Lists: The Evolution of China’s List of “Illegal and Evil Cults”** by Edward A. Irons

**Abstract**

In China, departments under the central government have published lists of banned and illegal religious groups since 1995. This practice can be seen as an extension of traditional ways of categorizing heterodox associations dating back to imperial times. Groups on the current list are often identified as xie jiao—normally translated as “evil cults.” The list is thus directly connected to questions of the categorization of religion in China. The study of the lists provides insight into the government’s evolving policy on religion, as well as the legal environment for religious activity.

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**The Church of Almighty God: Over 25 years of persecution**

*Religious refugees from China should not be sent back to their country where they would be at risk of being arrested and tortured, sometimes to death. They should be granted political asylum*

HRWF (15.10.2018) - On March 27, 1991, Chen Jun and 13 other Christians from Henan Province went to the city of Harbin in Heilongjiang Province for a religious gathering. They were arrested on their way back and were held in the Henan Labor Camp for two years. Chen Jun was brutally tortured by the police in the labor camp resulting in serious health problems but was denied access to medical care. After his release, he was arrested twice more, and his health condition grew worse and worse. In September 1996, he was brutalized to death by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). He was then only 46 years old.

More than 20 years later, Ms Zhang Xiaoyue, who was born in 1964 and lived in Sankou (Anhui Province), started believing in the message of Jesus Christ in 1996 and joined The Church of Almighty God (CAG) one year later. On September 2, 2014, Zhang Xiaoyue was arrested by the police of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) because she was practising her faith in The Church of Almighty God. She was sentenced to three years in prison. The prison guards deprived her of sleep, food and drinks, and had her tortured by her inmates because she refused to recant her faith. She died from their treatment. She was then 50.

During that period and afterwards, hundreds of Christians belonging to The Church of Almighty God were tortured to death.

Chen Jun, a Christian, died from the CCP’s re-education through forced labor

Condemned as a counterrevolutionary for believing in God—Arrested, tortured, and paraded through the streets

On March 27, 1991, Chen Jun and 13 other Christians went to Yongyuan Town in Harbin, Heilongjiang Province to attend a one-week religious gathering. On his way back, Chen Jun was carrying about 200 copies of spiritual books when he was arrested by the police at the train station and sent to a local detention center.

At that time it was only 4 or 5 degrees Celsius (about 40 degrees Fahrenheit) in Heilongjiang. The police handcuffed his arms behind his back on a concrete column and continually poured cold water over his head, his body, and into his boots. They forced him to sit cross-legged on a cold wooden floor for 33 days in a row and did not allow him to move. When he did, even a little bit, they would punch and kick him, leaving the skin of his ankles peeling off, and even instructed other prisoners to beat him.

On April 8, 1991, the government of Yongyuan Town in Harbin City, Heilongjiang Province hung signs on Chen Jun and the other thirteen Christians and paraded them through the streets for the crimes of “being anti-Party, counterrevolutionary, anti-humanity, anti-government, and attempting to overthrow the regime.” Thirty-three days later, Chen Jun was transferred to the Yongcheng City Public Security Bureau in Henan Province and the other 13 were sent to a local facility for detention.

In late June 1991, Public Security Bureau staff tried to blackmail Chen Jun’s family for 7,000 RMB, but they barely had enough to make ends meet and could not come up with the money.

On July 6, 1991, two officers of the Yongcheng National Security Brigade took Chen Jun back home. His wife saw her husband’s face was pale and gaunt, and he even lacked the strength to walk. The officers exploited that opportunity to extort 350 RMB from her and told her: “If you continue to believe in God, your children will suffer. They won’t be able to join the military or get into college in future.” She had no choice but to give the two children’s tuition and all of their living expenses to the police (she was not given a receipt). But after taking the money, they took Chen Jun back to the Yongcheng Public Security Bureau.

Incredible torture over two years of forced labor

On July 7, 1991, the Yongcheng Public Security Bureau sentenced Chen Jun to two years of hard labor for “disrupting social order, being counterrevolutionary, anti-Party, anti-government, and subverting state power.” They used a coal truck to secretly take him to the labor re-education camp in Henan Province’s Shangqiu City without telling anything to his family. His wife did not find out until late August.

The guards in the labor camp frequently told the other prisoners to punch and kick Chen Jun and snatch his food. He became unbearably hungry. He had to salvage others’ leftover steamed buns from trash cans to take the edge off his hunger. On top of that, he was forced to do very hard labor such as carrying cement. Over time, carrying such heavy loads caused him to become extremely weak.

One day, in August 1992, Chen Jun’s wife visited him and saw that his face and body were swollen. He told her that he could no longer carry cement because he had gotten enteritis and the police forced him to peel garlic every day. If he did not complete a
certain amount per day, he was not allowed to eat or sleep. Layers of skin came off his fingers, but he had no other choice than to tolerate the pain and to continue working....

In late August 1993, Chen Jun was released at the end of his prison term. A medical exam showed that he had gotten hepatitis with jaundice. Because he had not received timely treatment in prison, there was serious swelling in his entire body. He was lacking strength, and had completely lost the ability to do any labor. However, the police still required him to report to the Mangshan Town government once a month and he was also forced to undergo re-education. His condition grew much more serious during that time. His family sold all of their valuable possessions to pay for his treatment and borrowed over 8,000 RMB from others. They were in dire straits.

**Repeated arrests and persecuted to death**

One day in March 1994, at past 12 a.m., three officers from the Mangshan Police Station suddenly came to Chen Jun’s home and without showing any paperwork wantonly searched the house. They came up empty-handed, but arrested Chen Jun again on the alleged ground that someone had reported he had been spreading the gospel. They detained him in a local detention facility. While he was locked up, the police extorted over 100 RMB from his family. After 17 days they saw that his condition had become very serious and feared being held responsible. They then released him to avoid any trouble.

One day in March 1995, during the night, two officers from the Mangshan Police Station jumped over a wall to enter the courtyard of Chen’s home and forcibly took him to the station although he was seriously weak. The next morning, they saw that he was incurably ill and he could die at any moment. Only then they agreed to send him home, warning him not to practice his faith any longer.

In late 1995, Chen Jun became bedridden as a consequence of the Chinese Communist Party’s unrelenting persecution. He passed away on September 19, 1996 at the age of 46.

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**Christian Zhang Xiaoyue died from food deprivation and beatings for keeping her faith**

Ms Zhang Xiaoyue, who was born in 1964 and lived in Sankou (Huangshan City, Huangshan District, Anhui Province), started believing in the message of Jesus Christ in 1996 and joined The Church of Almighty God (CAG) one year later.

On September 2, 2014, Zhang Xiaoyue was arrested by the police of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) because she was practising her faith in The Church of Almighty God. She was sentenced to three years in prison and was killed while serving her sentence. She was then 50. Below is Zhang’s story of her persecution to death.

Around 5 a.m. on September 2, 2014, the police from Huangshan District, Huangshan City (Anhui Province) carried out a concerted operation resulting in the arrest of five local Christians from The Church of Almighty God. Zhang Xiaoyue was one of them.

At about 8 a.m. that morning, Zhang Xiaoyue’s mother went to her home but saw no sign of her. Later on, she received a phone call informing her that Ms Li Ru (alias), a Christian from the same Church, had been arrested because of her beliefs in the teachings of The Church of Almighty God and the police had confiscated a lot of spiritual
books found in her house. After this call, she rushed to her daughter’s house to look for her again and discovered that all her spiritual books had disappeared. She figured out that her daughter had also been arrested by the police.

Three or four days later, Yu Zhe, a village cadre, went with two police officers to Zhang Xiaoyue’s mother’s home and said to her, “Your daughter has been arrested and is being held in a detention center because of her beliefs in The Church of Almighty God. Take some clothing for her.”

Zhang Xiaoyue’s mother became extremely anxious and angrily asked them, “My daughter’s faith does not break any law. Why did you arrest her? She has cerebral atrophy. By arresting her, aren’t you putting her on a path to death?” But the police had no compassion for her and yelled at her, “Your daughter believes in Almighty God, and this is forbidden in China. Her faith is against the law, and she’s even preaching the gospel all over the place. We don’t care whether she has any kind of disease or not. Everyone who believes in Almighty God must be arrested!” Her mother then collected some clothing to bring to her but she was not allowed to see her.

A month later, Yu Zhe, the village cadre, once again asked Zhang Xiaoyue’s mother to bring some winter clothing. She took some warm clothes and went to the Huangshan District Public Security Bureau. The police told her that Zhang Xiaoyue had been given a 3-year sentence for “using a xie jiao organization to undermine the enforcement of the law.” However, they only gave her the arrest notice, not the verdict. Zhang Xiaoyue was later transferred to the Changfeng County Women’s Prison, Anhui Province to serve her sentence.

One day in December of 2015, at 3 a.m. Zhang Xiaoyue’s elder brother received a phone call from the prison saying that she had a serious, life-threatening illness and asking him to take her back home. Zhang’s brother and husband rushed to the prison but when they arrived, the staff told them that Zhang Xiaoyue had already died. Zhang’s family made a request to see her corpse. After her family had identified her remains, the prison guards immediately removed her body for cremation. Her family later took her ashes to their hometown for burial.

According to another Christian who was in prison with Zhang Xiaoyue, the guards pressed her to give up her faith and sign three statements (a guarantee, a statement of severing ties with the Church, and a statement of remorse), but she staunchly refused. The guards then refused to give her anything to eat or drink and ordered the four prisoners sharing her cell to impose their sanctions on her if they did not want to lose points on their behavior card (the attribution of points determines when a prisoner can be released). As they did not want to lose such precious points, the other detainees took turns watching over her day and night.

Because of previous maltreatments, Zhang Xiaoyue was not in good health and could not even walk. Every time she attended an indoctrination class several people had to carry her to the classroom. A prison guard also said that if Zhang Xiaoyue did not sign the three statements, everyone in the cell would lose points and would be hereby penalized. This fanned the flames of the other prisoners’ hatred towards her. They severely beat her, stuffed their shoes into her mouth, hit her in her chest with plastic stools, and forced long-handled shoe brushes into her vagina.

One night in December 2015, Zhang Xiaoyue suddenly started coughing up and defecating blood. The prison guards finally decided to send her to the prison hospital but in an early morning, she passed away in the prison. The guards later spread rumors slandering her, saying that because of her faith she had become possessed by the devil and had harmed herself to the point of death.
Beijing’s attempts to thwart Shen Yun’s tours in Europe and beyond

By Annie Wu

The Epoch Times (10.10.2018) - https://bit.ly/2Rgp0IH - Princess Michael of Kent, a member of the British royal family, once sang high praises for Shen Yun, the New York-based performing arts company that showcases traditional Chinese culture through an annual global tour that has drawn hundreds of thousands of audiences. So have scores of regular arts lovers, dignitaries, politicians, and celebrities around the world who have attended Shen Yun’s performances.

Yet, the Chinese regime has consistently tried to cripple Shen Yun’s presence in the West, out of apparent frustration at its influence and engagement with sensitive contemporary topics in China.

Thus, Chinese consulates and their operatives around the world have for years pressured theaters not to lease their space to Shen Yun, or sought to coerce Western government officials to not attend the performances or voice support for the company.

Despite this international campaign, Western theaters and lawmakers have most often not caved to the pressure, and have instead asserted the value of freedom of expression and rejected the attempts at controlling their conduct.

Holland

During Shen Yun’s most recent 2018 tour, for example, the company was set to give four performances in two Dutch cities during the month of May.

Weeks prior, local media exposed Chinese diplomats’ attempts to convince a local theater to cancel Shen Yun’s appearances.

“Simply because Shen Yun’s program depicts how the Chinese regime suppresses the spiritual group Falun Gong, Chinese diplomats have met with Holland’s foreign affairs minister, requesting that Shen Yun’s performances be canceled,” Dutch newspaper Algemeen Dagblad reported on April 18.

Based on the principles of truthfulness, compassion, and tolerance, Falun Gong, also known as Falun Dafa, attracted tens of millions of adherents in China soon after its introduction in 1992. The popularity of the practice and its failure to conform to communist orthodoxy led the Communist Party leader at the time, Jiang Zemin, to launch a nationwide campaign in July 1999 to eliminate it. The Party’s entire propaganda apparatus was directed to vilify Falun Gong and any who practiced it.

As part of Shen Yun’s representation of modern-day China, some of its dances portray the ongoing persecution. Beijing’s apparent fear of the extent of the campaign being revealed to international audiences has fueled its attempts to stop Shen Yun—often by spreading Beijing’s hate propaganda against it.

Shen Yun was founded in 2006 in New York by artists in exile; its website says that the company aims to revive 5,000 years of Chinese civilization—a feat impossible in mainland China where the Communist Party’s atheist ideology has destroyed elements of Chinese history and culture since it took power.
Holland’s foreign affairs ministry responded that the decision was up to the theater venue, the Nieuwe Luxor theater in Rotterdam.

The theater decided that the show would go on.

A week later, Shen Yun announced that it would extend its engagement to a third city, Breda, performing two showings at the Chassé theater.

**Denmark**

This year, a Danish radio station also exposed the Chinese Embassy’s attempts to stop the Royal Danish Theater from hosting Shen Yun.

According to a report by Radio24syv published on Feb. 19, 2018, local Shen Yun organizers wrote a letter to Danish authorities last September, appealing for the company to be allowed to perform at the renowned Royal Danish Theater.

According to emails obtained by Radio24syv, when Denmark’s Ministry of Culture requested a comment from the Royal Danish Theater, one of its employees revealed to another staff member that he or she had met with the Chinese embassy in August.

“They [the embassy] ended the meeting by asking if we had a dialogue with Shen Yun, and requested that we shouldn’t allow them to rent our facilities,” the email stated.

Theater director Morten Hesseldahl and culture minister Mette Bock denied the accusation and said they were not aware of any pressure from the Chinese embassy.

But upon publication of the news, several prominent Danish figures, including Bente Hagelund, president of the People’s University of Copenhagen, and several lawmakers, expressed outrage at what they perceived as the Chinese regime’s interference in Danish affairs.

**Spain**

In 2014, Chinese diplomats in Barcelona, Spain tried similar tactics.

Consulate officials first appealed to the National Theatre of Catalonia, where Shen Yun was due to perform, demanding that the performance be canceled because it “went against the interests of the Chinese Communist Party,” according to a report by Spanish newspaper El Mundo.

When that failed, the Chinese officials tried to pressure senior officials at Spain’s Foreign Ministry.

If Shen Yun is allowed to perform, relations between Spain and China would be compromised, the Chinese diplomats said, which “subliminally pointed to China’s investments in our country and exports of Spanish products,” El Mundo reported.

Similar stories have been documented wherever Shen Yun performs. In Switzerland in 2011, the Swiss-German newspaper Tages-Anzeiger revealed that the Chinese consul, Liang Jianquan, met with the director of the venue, the Zurich Kongresshaus, directly to try swaying him.

When Shen Yun experienced the same interference this March in Berlin, Germany, local newspaper Der Tagesspiegel likened the Chinese regime’s interference to the heavy censorship of cultural arts and literature in East Germany. “Since East and West Germany
were united, Berlin has never seen such censorship of the arts. Yet, the Chinese consulate has tried to interfere with Shen Yun’s performance in Berlin,” the newspaper article read.

**New Zealand**

In New Zealand in early 2011, Shen Yun encountered a different kind of scare tactic.

The Chinese consul general in Auckland sent letters to dozens of local lawmakers in an attempt to persuade them to not attend Shen Yun’s performances.

“I’m really upset that the consulate should think it can influence elected members in a host country, where they’re our guest,” said Dr. Cathy Casey, then-Auckland City Council member, in an interview with The Epoch Times at the time. “This consul general has no right to tell me not to go to a production in Auckland. How dare they? It’s completely inappropriate behavior as a diplomat in this country.”

At the time, Casey filed formal complaints about the letter to the chief executive of the city council and the head of the consular corps in Auckland.

Around the same time, then-Green Party foreign affairs spokesperson, MP Keith Locke, received a letter signed by local Chinese associations that made similar requests, using the same defamatory comments Beijing uses to describe Falun Dafa and Shen Yun.

The letter demanded Locke not participate in Shen Yun “publicity events, nor consenting to send out any invitations to attend the performances on their behalf.”

“It’s the sort of censorship that goes on in China but it’s not the sort of censorship we should have in New Zealand, and I strongly object to it,” said Locke in an interview with The Epoch Times. “Some Chinese organizations in Auckland may be acting in league with the Auckland consulate in this matter.”

The Green Party later released a press statement expressing concerns about the Chinese regime’s influence on New Zealand politicians.

“While some politicians might laugh off this ham-fisted attempt to stop them from attending a cultural performance, others may feel pressured to avoid the event worried about what their presence at the concert could do to sister city or parliamentary relations with China,” the statement read.

Shen Yun has continued traveling to New Zealand. The company is due to perform at the same Auckland theater Beijing tried so hard to get local politicians to avoid—the ASB Theatre—during its 2019 tour.

Similarly, Shen Yun is due to perform in Zurich, Switzerland again, as well as in Berlin and Essen, Germany. And Paris, France will host Shen Yun twice next year.
Anti-refugees “demonstrations” in South Korea: the real story

On September 2–4, 2018, Austrian journalist Peter Zoehrer was an eyewitness to false “spontaneous demonstrations” staged by the CCP and Korean anti-cultists against asylum seekers of The Church of Almighty God in Seoul. He tells the whole story to Bitter Winter.

By Rosita Šorytė


We also reported that an Austrian journalist, Peter Zoehrer, was an eyewitness to the events. Zoehrer is also the secretary of FOREF (Forum for Religious Freedom Europe) and has uploaded on FOREF’s YouTube channel videos of the events. We have interviewed Zoehrer in Warsaw, where he was attending the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting of the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe).

You interviewed several members of The Church of Almighty God (CAG) about persecution and torture, what was your experience?

Yes, I can tell honestly, that the last four days of my stay in Korea were some of the most intense, exhausting but at the same time enriching days in my entire lifetime. During this period, I interviewed 17 members of The Church of the Almighty God. Not only this: five of them were victims of physical torture. All of them have been persecuted in China. They fled to South Korea to escape permanent surveillance by the CCP (Chinese Communist Party) and in desperate search for religious freedom.
I was shocked when I saw members of an anti-cult group demonstrating outside their church in Seoul and asking their members to be deported back to China where everybody knows they will be arrested, jailed, interrogated and tortured.

During these few days I had the extraordinary chance to meet the members of a religious community that has experienced severe persecution by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) since the early 1990s. It is said that on the CCP index of the twenty most "dangerous cults" The Church of the Almighty God is ranking among the top seven.

Through the interviews, I also had the unique opportunity to hear very personal, often tearful stories of the members who suffered unspeakable persecution because of their faith. The CCP established a nearly perfect system of thought-control by using countless spies as well as their state of the art observation technology. Additionally, they observe believers through neighbours, teachers, and even relatives and family members. Already at elementary school, the CCP instills fear of punishment into children, should they start to believe in God.

Each person I interviewed has a different, unique story, which could probably fill an entire book. Originally, I intended to interview only a handful of people. However, soon more and more would come forward, once they heard from their peers how liberating it is to get things off their chest. They told their story straight, without getting lost in details. The heinousness of the CCP’s big lies that CAG is breaking up families by fleeing to South Korea and other countries made some of the interviewees really angry. With powerful indignation in their voice, they explained their own narrative: if the CCP would grant them religious freedom and basic human rights, they would never have fled from their country. So, who is causing the breakup of families? It is the atheist Communist regime.

Some of them still have family and relatives in China, who could be punished as a consequence of these testimonies. When I asked them if they really want to take this risk, they expressed that it would be more important to let the world know about the atrocities and crimes of the CCP and the unspeakable suffering of believers in China.

For a coincidence—but a believer would call it providence—you were in Seoul when Chinese agents and local anti-cultists organized demonstrations against CAG. What happened, exactly?

Originally I went to Korea to attend an international conference at the Lotte Hotel. My second purpose was to attend the TNKR Speech contest. TNKR, “Teaching North Korean Refugees,” is an NGO that helps North Korean refugees to master the English language so that they can tell their story to the world. My friend Michael is one of the teachers and he invited me to attend their annual speech contest. This was a deeply moving experience for me.

My departure date was September 3. Just two days before my intended departure I got a message from my friend Willy Fautré (the director of Human Rights Without Frontiers, HRWF) that I should meet the members of the CAG. He told me there would be demonstrations against them, organized by the CCP (he had been alerted, in turn, by an article on Bitter Winter). Our human rights coalition in Europe would urgently need photos, videos, and interviews. So, I prolonged my stay in Seoul for another three days. A delegation of the Chinese refugees came to meet me at the hotel and briefed me about their complex situation.

In my capacity as a reporter, I attended three demonstrations against the CAG. The first one was held in front of the CAG premises in Seoul. On the following day, they demonstrated in front of the Blue House, which is the residence of the President of the
Republic of Korea; and the third demonstration was held in front of the CAG worship center, which lies to south of Seoul, in the countryside.

These demonstrations were organized by agents of the CCP in collaboration with South Korean anti-cult activists. The narrative they are trying to convey to the South Korean media and politicians is totally twisted and the opposite from reality. The CCP propaganda is claiming that the CAG is a dangerous cult that is breaking up families. Therefore, they bring some relatives of the CAG refugees from China to join into these demonstrations. It is estimated that only half of the demonstrators were relatives and the other half were paid South Korean “professional protestors,” and anti-cult activists from five different groups.

I was made aware of the hidden agenda of these atrocious actions through articles published by Bitter Winter, which gave me valuable background information; i.e. about the secret CCP strategy memos, which revealed an outline of how the anti-CAG protests should be organized in South Korea, etc. Especially Mrs. O Myung Ok (오명옥, a Korean anti-cultist who served as the local organizing agent of CCP) followed the outline to the letter. She operated with remarkable frankness. We have video footage that shows how she instructed the protesters on where to go, what to do, and even what to shout.

On Sunday afternoon, three members of the CAG picked me up from my hotel and took me to their church. They told me that the protests had already started in front of their premises. When we arrived at our destination, I almost could not believe my eyes. There was shouting, screaming, yelling and waving of posters in front of the entrance gate by around twenty people. They barred the entrance so that our car could not enter the Church’s parking area. I stepped out into the mad crowd, wearing my press-card on my chest. This worked like magic. Being a foreign journalist, they didn’t dare to stop me from entering. However, two young women were still in the car, which was surrounded by the raging mob. Some demonstrators would even lay down in front of the car. Others, including Mrs. O, banged with their fists on the car, shouting that those trapped inside should open the windows. They tried to identify the ladies who were helplessly waiting in the vehicle in fear of what might happen next. Finally, when the police arrived, they could drive unhindered through the gate into the parking lot. Evidence of this can be seen on our videos on YouTube.

On Monday, the protestors gathered in the open area near the Blue House. Their numbers were much less than the day before. The reason for that may have been the pouring rain. I went there with two cameramen, both members of the CAG. One of them wore a white mask over his face, because if he was identified, his parents and relatives back home in China would definitely be in danger to receive reprisals by the CCP. In fact, Mrs. O turned up and very aggressively pushed the young man, challenging him to identify himself. She also turned to me, taking pictures of my press-card and demanding that I hand her my business card, which I of course refused to do. I called her by her name and told her that I knew who she was, and she was not amused. Some media representatives were there as well. Soon the demonstration broke up because of the rain. It was a total flop for the organizers. On the other hand, that again was rather satisfying for the refugees of the CAG.

The next day, on Tuesday, we drove to the CAG worship center lying to the south of Seoul, the location of the final “demonstration.” It was an impressive compound, which included much more than just a hall for worship. There were numerous flats for members, a big kitchen with a spacious canteen, an arts center, a media center, and the lot. The buildings were located at the foot of a hill, near a river with an impressive panorama as a backdrop.
After a delicious lunch, we prepared for the arrival of the demonstrators. In a small facility near the main house, we were able to see on a large screen TV all that was going on in the street outside the security fence.

Although the lawyers had told us that the demonstration was officially registered from 2:00 pm until 4:00 pm, already at 1:45 pm they arrived and started to chant and scream through their loudspeakers turned on maximum volume. That was their first mistake. Their second mistake was to exceed the legal limitation of demonstration, trespassing on the premises of The Church of Almighty God to stage the demonstration. And they even raised banners there to cover the banner with the appeal of the nine NGOs that the Church had exposed. Their third mistake was to park their pickup truck illegally on the private premises of The Church of Almighty God. The two young Korean lawyers hired by the CAG were brilliant. They went out the gate and told the organizers to pack up, since they were violating Korean law. The anti-cult pastor, standing on the pickup, yelled back, refusing to follow the lawyer’s advice. That was their fourth mistake. Without hesitation, the attorneys called the police. The protesters had to take down and roll up their posters, remove the cars, and finally they even stopped screaming.

You were interviewed by the Korean national television KBS and other media. So far, the media coverage of the events has been very much coloured by anti-cult stereotypes. What is your impression of the Korean media?

Interestingly, there were more people from the media than there were demonstrators. I asked the lawyers to negotiate with the KBS (the Korean National TV) a meeting with me. They agreed, and as I went out to meet them, a crowd of journalists encircled me. The reporters fired all kinds of questions at me. I told them that in their previous news coverage they had treated CAG badly by repeating only the narrative of the CCP (“dangerous cult,” breaking up families, etc.). Therefore, I would not talk to them anymore. Only KBS would receive my exclusive interview. That was the end of the demonstration. Together with the national broadcasting team and my translators, we entered the premises and started the interview, which lasted no less than 90 minutes. They asked very good questions and I was happy that I could explain to them that I am representing nine European NGOs, whose members are gravely concerned about the fate of the persecuted Chinese Christians who fled their country in search for religious freedom. Also, I could explain to the journalists about the urgency of granting political asylum to the members of this Church. Should the South Korean government deport them back to China, they would end up in jail or “transformation through education camps” with certainty.

Before this quite positive experience, the members of the CAG told me how distrustful they were towards the media in South Korea. The reason is that several times their story has been totally twisted. They felt totally slandered and betrayed by the journalists who seemed to be taking the side of the CCP and the Korean anti-cultists. This really shocked me. Is the Korean media really becoming a victim of Chinese propaganda? Why are they kowtowing to fundamentalist anti-cult groups? Although I can understand the distrust of the CAG refugees, I still encouraged them to seek contact with the media and give them another chance.

What can NGOs in the West do to support refugees in Korea who flee from religious persecution?

This is a very important question indeed! Most people underestimate the long arm of China. The tremendous influence the CCP is exercising through their economic power and their propaganda... It is a sad fact that the Korean government issued already 187 deportation orders against Chinese refugees who are members of CAG. Time is really against those refugees and so far, in the Korean media, they have no voice to speak in
their defence. Therefore, the international human rights community as well as the international media is challenged to put the spotlight on their pitiable situation.

First of all, we should spread the story of these refugees to the European mainstream and social media. Next, we should make the human rights community in Europe and the United States aware of this serious problem. Another step would be to inform the European Parliament and Dr. Jan Figel, who is the EU special envoy on FoRB (Freedom of Religion or Belief). Our colleagues in the USA could inform the US State Department. Last not least, we should make interventions at the UN in Geneva. Although Korea is in many ways economically and culturally dependent on China, they do respect Europe and the United States.

Our organizations, HRWF and FOREF Europe, had positive experiences with regard to religious freedom advocacy in Japan, where members of the Unification Church and Jehovah’s Witnesses were kidnapped and incarcerated by anti-cult activists until they recanted their new faith or managed to escape. Once a court sentenced them, they got afraid and stopped their criminal activity. Only such threats could stop those anti-cult and anti-human rights activists in Korea.

About the author

Rosita ŠORYTĖ was born on September 2, 1965 in Lithuania. In 1988, she graduated from the University of Vilnius in French Language and Literature. In 1994, she got her diploma in international relations from the Institut International d'Administration Publique in Paris.

In 1992, Rosita Šorytė joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania. She has been posted to the Permanent Mission of Lithuania to UNESCO (Paris, 1994-1996), to the Permanent Mission of Lithuania to the Council of Europe (Strasbourg, 1996-1998), and was Minister Counselor at the Permanent Mission of Lithuania to the United Nations in 2014-2017, where she had already worked in 2003-2006. She is currently on a sabbatical. In 2011, she worked as the representative of the Lithuanian Chairmanship of the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) at the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (Warsaw). In 2012-2013, she chaired the European Union Working Group on Humanitarian Aid on behalf of the Lithuanian pro tempore presidency of the European Union. As a diplomat, she specialized in disarmament, humanitarian aid and peacekeeping issues, with a special interest in the Middle East and religious persecution and discrimination in the area. She also served in elections observation missions in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Belarus, Burundi, and Senegal.

Her personal interests, outside of international relations and humanitarian aid, include spirituality, world religions, and art. She takes a special interest in refugees escaping their countries due to religious persecution and is co-founder and President of ORLIR, the International Observatory of Religious Liberty of Refugees. She is the author, inter alia, of “Religious Persecution, Refugees, and Right of Asylum,” The Journal of CESNUR, 2(1), 2018, 78–99.

Languages (fluent): Lithuanian, English, French, Russian.
A documented history of the Chinese regime’s attempts to undermine Shen Yun performing arts

By Annie Wu

The Epoch Times (01.10.2018) - https://bit.ly/2Ri0Ozr - The performances are lauded by celebrities, influential leaders, and arts aficionados all over. Audiences often come away feeling awed and inspired.

Shen Yun, its Chinese characters meaning “the beauty of divine beings dancing,” according to its website, seeks to revive the 5,000 years of Chinese civilization through music and dance. Founded in 2006 in New York, Shen Yun’s annual productions have toured hundreds of theaters around the world, playing sold-out prestigious venues across North America and Asia.

The company’s founders are artists in exile. Unable to present traditional Chinese arts within Communist China—where the campaign to destroy elements of Chinese history and culture during the Cultural Revolution nearly severed Chinese from their roots—they established Shen Yun so they could freely express their passion for China’s rich heritage.

That is why the Beijing government, with its censorship regime that only allows state-censored performance, has continually tried to sabotage and undermine Shen Yun’s performances in America and beyond.

Since Shen Yun’s early years, numerous cases of attempted interference from Chinese consulates around the world have been documented.

Across cities in the United States, Beijing has enacted different tactics: consulates and embassies have sent letters to theater venues trying to persuade them not to rent to Shen Yun; Beijing’s state-run media have run paid ads in a U.S. newspaper defaming Shen Yun; Shen Yun’s sponsors have been harassed; and internet commenters are mobilized to post negative reviews online.
In spite of Beijing’s efforts, U.S. theaters have remained largely undeterred; rather than caving to outside political pressure, they’ve chosen to support artistic freedom. Shen Yun now tours over 80 cities throughout the United States.

**Threatening Letters**

Beijing has made explicit its stance on Shen Yun. On Dec. 23, 2008, a post in Chinese appeared on the website of the Chinese consulate general in Chicago, calling Shen Yun “anti-China.”

But the efforts to deter Shen Yun’s performances began in earnest around 2010.

In the United States, one of the primary means was through pressuring or threatening theater venues to not lease its space to Shen Yun.

In late January 2010, Shen Yun was due to perform at The Robinson Center Music Hall in Little Rock, Arkansas. That’s when the consulate-general office in Houston, Texas sent an undated, unsigned letter to the music hall, accusing Shen Yun of “undermining China-US relations.”

The letter sought to discredit Shen Yun, claiming that it is “undermining China’s stability and overthrowing Chinese Government,” “spread anti-Chinese propaganda,” and “denigrates and distorts Chinese culture.”

At the end, the letter asks that when Shen Yun requests “for venue rental, endorsement or sponsorship, please just say NO.”

But the theater’s management ignored the letter. Shen Yun’s performances proceeded without a hitch.

An official at the Houston theater venue where Shen Yun was due to perform several months later, the Wortham Center, also received pressure from the Chinese regime. But the official said he was not intimidated.

Instead, the Houston City Council decided to endorse Shen Yun with a declaration designating that July 2 and 3, 2010 are “Shen Yun Performance Days.”

The gesture seemed a pointed response to attempts at interfering with Shen Yun’s performances.

In Seattle, Washington in January 2012, a similar incident occurred as Shen Yun was preparing to perform there. This time, the consulate in San Francisco penned a letter to Seattle city council members, asking them to “not send proclamation or congratulatory letter for the performance, attend the performance.”

Local Seattle media exposed the attempted intimidation tactics, with King 5, the local affiliate of NBC, broadcasting a TV segment on it.

This is a well-established tactic. As early as 2007, Shen Yun staff have reported such pressuring of local officials, such as when the consulate in Los Angeles sent a letter to Orange County officials warning them not to support Shen Yun’s performances.

Then-chairman of the Orange County Board of Supervisors ended up penning a public letter where he denounced Beijing’s attempts at pressuring officials: “Your letter is a formal request that the Orange County Board of Supervisors cooperate with your government’s suppression of Falun Gong...I am personally insulted by your request and will certainly not honor it,” Chris Norby wrote.
Norby was referring to the Falun Gong meditation practice, a spiritual discipline severely persecuted by the Chinese regime since 1999.

As a part of Shen Yun’s portrayal of modern-day China, some of its dances portray the ongoing tragedy of the persecution; many of Shen Yun’s founding artists are also adherents of Falun Dafa.

Based on the principles of truthfulness, compassion, and tolerance, Falun Gong, also known as Falun Dafa attracted millions of adherents soon after its introduction in 1992. Beijing’s atheist regime soon grew concerned that Falun Dafa could pose a threat to the Chinese Communist Party’s ideology.

In July 1999, then-Party leader initiated a nationwide campaign to harass, arrest, and detain Falun Dafa practitioners, while employing the state’s propaganda apparatus to vilify the meditation group and its adherents.

Beijing’s fear of its brutal persecution being revealed to international audiences has fueled its agenda to systematically obstruct Shen Yun wherever it performs.

**A Scheme**

When these attempts at pressuring officials and theater venues didn’t work, Chinese entities tried a different tactic.

In Austin, Texas, in 2010, the Long Center theater where Shen Yun was due to perform received an unusual email.

The correspondence came from a Gmail account called “Jianhai Chao.” In the email, the person begins with discussing an oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. Then, the person claims to be a Falun Dafa practitioner, pleading for the theater’s audiences to channel their thoughts: “by this way, evils could be killed and resolved to blood water,” the email read.

The theater staff, who shared the email with local presenters, suspected that the nonsensical ramblings were from Chinese entities posing as Falun Dafa practitioners in order to discredit them—similar to the propaganda disseminated in mainland China to justify to the public Beijing’s persecution.

That same year in June, the Chrysler Hall in Norfolk, Virginia, which was also due to host Shen Yun, received an email from a purported audience member, who claimed she received emails from Falun Dafa practitioners that gave her a bad impression of them. The sender, bessie35@yahoo.com, ended the letter by predictably urging the theater not to host Shen Yun.

Shen Yun’s performances went ahead anyway. That July, the Austin mayor sent a proclamation to the company congratulating it on successful performances.

In 2015, officials from the Chinese consulate in Chicago met with a manager at the Peabody Opera House in St. Louis, Missouri. In person, the officials demanded that the theater cancel Shen Yun’s booking—or else it would harm relations between the United States and China. Theater managers were not impressed, and did not comply with the demands.

**More Tricks**

In the insert was an article titled, “‘Blasphemy masquerades as art,’” that contained disparaging and false remarks about Shen Yun and Falun Dafa. It was a move meant to discourage U.S. readers from attending Shen Yun’s upcoming performances at Washington DC's well-regarded Kennedy Center.

It seemed DC residents were unfazed by the China Daily ads; Shen Yun's week-long run at Kennedy Center was well-attended, according to local organizers.

Despite Beijing's bid to prevent Shen Yun from telling truthful stories about ancient and contemporary China, they worked to the contrary.

Beijing’s schemes have fizzled, and on the contrary, audience members in the United States often happen to resonate with precisely the portions of Shen Yun’s storytelling that Chinese communist apparatchiks object to.

“Their struggle for freedom was very touching...I think that for me, it renews my prayers for people in China to be free, to know the truth, and to be able to express who they are—to not live in fear of tyranny of the government,” said Rebecca Laird, an audience member during Shen Yun's May 10 performance at the Shea’s Performing Arts Center in Buffalo, New York.

### CCP document exposes strict supervision of preachers

**Chinese authorities are implementing policies to supervise Christian preachers, including evaluation tests and auditing of sermon content**

By Jiang Tao


According to the document, to reduce the number of preachers, Xihua county authorities are evaluating preachers based on their “political leanings, the observance of laws and discipline, and legal compliance in hosting religious activities.” As a result, this “political evaluation” has reduced the total number of preachers by 162.

In the city of Sanmenxia, tests have been carried out to evaluate preachers on their knowledge of traditional Chinese holidays and Party policies. Besides, measures have been taken to “veto the sermons that violate policy statutes or are opposed to ‘sinicization’ of religion.”

The Qingfeng county authorities are taking extraordinary measures to control the content of sermons and implement multi-layered checks strictly. This, first of all, includes the demand that preachers “unify the content and topics of sermons for every Sunday for the entire year across all of the 43 Christian sites.” Authorities have even demanded that sermon plans be presented in a particular format and displayed on churches’ walls, to be checked and recorded by the County Committee for Ethnic and Religious Affairs.
The county is also demanding a “unified sermon file.” The sermons that do not correspond to the requirements are criticized and fined by withholding 50 RMB in sermon subsidies. Also, the Committee for Ethnic and Religious Affairs has started random inspections of churches.

Furthermore, the county is demanding that preachers guarantee that each time before they preach, they study CCP religious policies for 15 minutes. Authorities have even jointly arranged for government employees to listen in on congregations to supervise the content of sermons.

As per some commentators, while the authorities are using evaluations as an excuse to reduce the number of preachers, their real motive is to identify the preachers who “obey the Party.” Those who do not, inevitably, lose their preaching qualifications and could be arrested at any time. The preachers who pass the evaluations become the mouthpieces for the authorities propagating their religious policies and patriotic education.

Reported by Jiang Tao

Jiang Tao

Jiang Tao (uses pseudonyms for security reasons), aged 42, is from Henan Province. He previously served as a magazine editor and has long been concerned about vulnerable groups that are being persecuted in China. He has written a variety of commentaries probing human rights issues in China, and his articles have been published in international journals. After leaving his magazine job in 2015, he started visiting and interviewing persecuted religious groups and other vulnerable groups and gathering information about incidents. He joined Bitter Winter in 2018, and since then is dedicated to reporting the persecution incidents in Henan, Shanghai, Anhui, and other regions.

Pope Francis: "I will nominate the bishops for China"

Talking with journalists, the Pope claimed he was personally responsible for the agreement with China and that he will have the last word in the choice of bishops.

By Massimo Introvigne


A journalist asked, “Three days ago an agreement was signed between the Vatican and China. Can you give us any additional information on its content? Why do some Catholics and in particular Cardinal Joseph Zen accuse you of having sold out the Church to the Chinese government?”

Pope Francis gave a detailed answer, worth quoting in full:

“This is a process that has lasted for years, a dialogue between the Vatican commission and the Chinese commission, to arrange the nomination of bishops. The Vatican team has worked hard, I would like to mention a few names: Monsignor Claudio Maria Celli,
who—with patience—has been in dialogue for years and years. Then, Gianfranco Rota Graziosi, a humble 72-year-old curial who wanted to become a priest of a parish and yet he remained in the Curia to help in this process. And then the Secretary of State [Cardinal Parolin], who is a very devoted man, but has a special devotion for the magnifying glass: he studies all the documents: semicolon, comma, hints. This gives me a great confidence. This team with these qualities has moved forward. You know that when a peace agreement is made, both sides lose something. That is the law: both sides. We went two steps forward, one step back... two steps forward and one step back. Then, months without talking to each other. It is God’s time that resembles Chinese time. Slowly, its Chinese wisdom. The bishops who were in difficulty were studied case by case. Each of their files landed on my desk. I was responsible for signing. Then about the agreement: the drafts returned to my desk, I gave my ideas, they were discussed and they went forward. I think of the resistance, of the Catholics who have suffered: it’s true, they will suffer. There is always suffering in an agreement. But their faith is great. They write to me, they send messages to say that what the Holy See, what Peter says, is what Jesus says. The martyr faith of these people today goes on. They are great. I signed the agreement, I signed the plenipotentiary letters. I am the person in charge, the others have worked for more than ten years. This was no improvisation, it’s a true journey. A simple anecdote and a historical fact: when that famous communiqué of a former apostolic nuncio [Mgr Viganò, the former nuncio to the US who attacked Pope Francis] came out, the episcopates worldwide wrote to me telling me that they felt close and prayed for me. Chinese faithful have written to me and the letter was signed by the bishop of the ‘traditional Catholic’ so to speak, Church, and the bishop of the ‘patriotic’ Church, both together and with both communities of faithful. For me, it was a sign from God.

Then let’s not forget that in Latin America for 350 years it was the kings of Portugal and Spain who appointed the bishops. Let’s not forget the case of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Other eras, thank God, they won’t come back. What is there, is a dialogue on potential candidates, but Rome nominates, the Pope nominates, that’s clear. And we pray for the sufferings of some who don’t understand or who have many years of ‘underground life’ behind them.”

Three points are worth noting here. First, the Pope claims personal responsibility for the agreement. He was not “misled” by clever diplomats. Second, he does not reveal the content of the agreement, whose text is secret, but insists he will have the last word in appointing the bishops in China. Third, he answers critics that agreements where the Holy See negotiates the appointments of the bishops with secular governments are not “unprecedented” but in fact find several historical precedents.

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Members of the Church of Almighty God continue to be arrested

*The CCP further implements its nationwide campaign to persecute The Church of Almighty God in provinces and cities across China, and the number of arrested believers is rising.*

By Lin Yijiang

Bitter Winter (25.09.2018) - [https://bit.ly/2Dukb64](https://bit.ly/2Dukb64) - From September 13 to 18, Jilin Province authorities launched an operation to arrest members of The Church of Almighty
God (CAG). According to initial reports, in just a few days, more than 100 people were arrested in the cities of Jilin and Siping alone.

From August 21 to 22, authorities in Hanjiang district of Fujian’s Putian city dispatched many police offices to raid the homes of CAG members, arresting 16 believers within just two days. To date, their whereabouts remain unknown.

During an arrest operation in Shanghai on August 14, at least 30 members of the CAG were arrested.

On August 2, 11 CAG members in Jiangxi Province’s Ganzhou city were arrested, and about 230,000 RMB (approximately 34,000 USD) of personal property was looted.

The Church of Almighty God is the largest Christian new religious movement in China. Designated as a xie jiao (“heterodox teachings”) by the CCP, the CAG has been brutally repressed and persecuted for years.

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**With Vatican talks and bulldozers, China aims to control Christianity**

By Ian Johnson

New York Times (24.09.2018) - [https://nyti.ms/2pxPyDi](https://nyti.ms/2pxPyDi) - BEIJING — Over the last two years, China’s estimated 60 million Christians have felt the power of a newly assertive government eager to bring their faith to heel.

The authorities have demolished hundreds of Protestant churches, knocking crosses off steeples and evicting congregations. Roman Catholics have faced similar measures, but the government took a different approach this past weekend, striking a diplomatic deal that Vatican officials said was a historic breakthrough — the first formal acknowledgment by Beijing of the pope’s authority in Catholic churches in China.

Beijing’s goal in the agreement, however, appears to be the same as with the church demolitions: greater control over the rapid spread of Christianity, which gained a permanent presence in China in the 16th century.

“We’re at a turning point,” said Ying Fuk-tsang, the director of the divinity school at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. “The administration feels that the government had been too lax in the past and now wants to increase the pressure.”

Under the agreement signed on Saturday, Pope Francis recognized the legitimacy of seven bishops appointed by Beijing in exchange for a say in how future Chinese bishops are named.

The ruling Communist Party sees the compromise with the Vatican as a step toward eliminating the underground churches where Chinese Catholics who refuse to recognize the party’s authority have worshiped for generations. With the pope now recognizing all bishops and clergy members in the official Catholic churches approved and controlled by the party, the underground church may have no reason to exist.

The move is part of a broader push by the government to clamp down on all aspects of society since Xi Jinping took power as the party’s leader in 2012. Mr. Xi has presided
over a far-reaching crackdown on corruption, civic organizations and independent journalism, but his approach toward religion has been more selective.

With many Chinese searching for values and traditions amid a sometimes confusing and chaotic period of economic change, Mr. Xi has encouraged the growth of some religions, such as Buddhism and Taoism, even as he has taken steps to ensure that they toe the party line. Last month, China’s famous Shaolin monastery raised the national flag for the first time in its 1,500-year history.

Mr. Xi has taken a much harsher position on Islam, which the authorities associate with the challenge of governing ethnic minorities, some of whom have embraced separatist or terrorist groups in China’s far west. The government is detaining vast numbers of Muslims for re-education, its most sweeping internment program since the Mao era.

Christianity poses a different set of challenges. It has spread most quickly among white-collar professionals in China’s biggest cities and most prosperous regions, many of whom worship in underground churches outside government control, and the government’s tactics reflect the differing fates of its branches.

Catholicism gave China its first permanent Christian presence 400 years ago and benefited mightily after Western military forces required China to allow in missionaries. The global church poured in talent and money, opening churches, schools and hospitals across the land.

After the Communist takeover in 1949, however, Catholicism’s established hierarchy in China became a weakness. When diplomatic ties were cut in 1951, the government expelled hundreds of foreign priests and bishops. It took control of the church’s top-down structure and began appointing clerics loyal to its vision of a Chinese church with no foreign ties.

Since then, Catholicism has stagnated. The number of Catholics has tracked population growth, rising from three million in 1949 to about 10 million today, making it the smallest of China’s officially approved faiths.

Millions of these believers stubbornly resist government control. In some parts of China, the Catholic populations of entire counties attend underground churches, and the party-controlled churches stand almost empty, their clergy ignored.

All of this could change under the rapprochement between the Vatican and Beijing.

Several underground bishops in China, including two popular bishops in staunchly Catholic parts of the country, are expected to step down to make way for the bishops appointed by Beijing over the past decade whom the pope has agreed to recognize. In exchange, the pope is gaining some role in the appointment of new bishops. There are about 100 bishops and prelates in China, including underground and approved, and a dozen vacant positions.

Exactly how this will work is unclear. Both sides have described the agreement signed on Saturday as preliminary, and neither has released details. But some informal veto system seems likely. The Vatican could reject candidates suggested by the Chinese authorities, although mainly through quiet consultation rather than formal voting.

In the long run, diplomatic ties could be restored between Beijing and the Vatican.

Some Chinese Catholics see this as helping a church that has been unable to respond to changing times. China is rapidly urbanizing, for example, but many rural Catholics find
little outreach when they migrate to take jobs in the cities. A unified church could address that.

“I think if it helps unite the church, then it’s a good thing,” said You Yongxin, a Catholic writer based in the eastern Chinese city of Fuzhou. “If the pope is convinced he can get good bishops appointed through this deal, then we have to trust that he will.”

Indeed, if carried out as advertised, the deal would give the church a formal role in appointing clergy members in party-controlled churches in China for the first time in nearly 70 years. That would be a significant concession by the government. By contrast, Beijing doesn’t give the spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhists, the Dalai Lama, any say over the appointment of monks or abbots.

Still, the deal came as a shock for many Chinese Catholics.

Paul Dong Guanhua, a self-ordained bishop in the underground church in the northern Chinese city of Zhengding, said it made no sense that Beijing would sign on to any deal that could strengthen the church.

“Well, if there’s an agreement, there’s an agreement,” he said in a telephone interview. “But I find it absurd, and I wonder how many other Catholics can agree with this decision.”

Other prominent underground clergy members, like Guo Xijin, one of the bishops who reportedly would have to step down under the deal, could not be reached for comment. In an interview earlier this year, Bishop Guo told The New York Times that he would step down if asked by the pope.

Rome will also have to win over skeptical Catholics in Taiwan and Hong Kong, said Lawrence C. Reardon, a professor of political science at the University of New Hampshire who studies Beijing-Vatican relations.

Many, like Hong Kong’s retired Cardinal Joseph Zen, have vocally opposed a deal with Beijing, arguing that the Communist Party cannot be trusted.

“This is the first step in a dance that they’re going to continue,” Professor Reardon said. “It’s also the reconciliation of the greater Chinese church.”

The situation is quite different for Protestants in China, whose numbers have climbed from an estimated one million believers in 1949 to upward of 50 million now, in part because the absence of church hierarchy allowed for rapid growth even in times of persecution.

Without a diplomatic partner with which to negotiate, the Chinese authorities have employed a different tactic: knocking down a fraction of churches to send a message to many others.

The campaign began in 2014, when the province of Zhejiang demolished a big Protestant church and began removing spires from hundreds of others. By 2016, more than 1,200 mainly Protestant churches had been decapitated in Zhejiang, part of an effort that appeared aimed at reducing the religion’s visibility.

The pace seems to have accelerated this year, with several churches in other parts of the country shut down or demolished, including the Golden Lampstand church in Shanxi Province and the Zion church, a large unregistered church in Beijing known for its Korean- and English-language services.
The government has also banned online sales of the Bible and called for the development of a Chinese-style Christian theology.

The goal appears to be to push Protestant churches to register with the government. “The message is that they can’t be independent,” Professor Ying said. “The question is control.”

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**A Vietnamese model for the Vatican in China? Yes, or perhaps not**

*Chinese academics claim that the Vatican-China Agreement follows the "Vietnamese model." However, they misinterpret it.*

By Massimo Introvigne

Bitter Winter (23.09.2018) - [https://bit.ly/2xJyZLW](https://bit.ly/2xJyZLW) - In 1996, Mgr (now Cardinal) Pietro Parolin, the driving force behind the Vatican-China agreement executed last Saturday in Beijing, was the Holy See’s under-secretary for the relations with the States, a position equivalent to deputy Foreign Minister. In this capacity, he negotiated and signed an agreement with the Communist government of Vietnam. The agreement gave to the Vatican the power to indicate three candidates for the position of bishop of each vacant diocese. The Vietnamese authorities, in practice the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV), would select among the three the candidate to be appointed, and the Vatican would
consecrate him as bishop. The agreement was modified in 2010, but the essentials remained the same.

Cardinal Parolin is now the Vatican’s Secretary of State. It was normal to assume that he would replicate with China his own Vietnam model. Chinese academics said as much. In December 2016, Professor Wang Yiwei, director of the Institute of International Affairs and director of the Center for European Union Studies at Renmin University, stated, “Beijing and the Vatican are very likely to adopt the 2010 agreement between Vietnam and the Vatican, which means that the Vatican will superficially appoint the bishops, but that Beijing will assign the bishop candidates in advance.” In February 2018, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) English-language newspaper, Global Times, wrote that those engaged in the negotiation were “seeking an alternative accepted by both China and the Vatican in the appointment of the bishop. For example, they can refer to the ‘Vietnamese model’ for episcopal appointment, according to which the Pope can select the bishop from a list submitted by the Vietnamese government.”

Actually, the Global Times had it wrong. In Vietnam, it is the government that selects the bishop from a list submitted by the Vatican rather than the other way round. Professor Wang’s comments were also criticized by Catholic experts. They explained that the names submitted by the Vatican to the government are not indicated by the Communist Party of Vietnam in advance. In fact, many candidates are Vietnamese who have made their studies in Italy, France, or United States, not exactly the kind of priest the CPV appreciates. Senior researcher Anthony Lam commented that, “if one says that they were selected by the government, it is a great insult and absolutely unacceptable to the Catholics of the concerned dioceses.” In fact, it has often happened that the government’s choice among the three candidates has been delayed for years, as none appeared suitable to the CPV.

There is, of course, something in common between the Vietnamese model and the agreement between the Vatican and China. In both case, episcopal appointments in the Catholic Church are the result of a negotiation between the Holy See and a Communist party, with the officially atheistic party playing a crucial role in the selection of the bishops. In this sense, those who call the agreement between the Vatican and China as “unprecedented” are not totally right, because there is precisely the precedent of Vietnam.

Chinese academics and media, however, interpreted and distorted the Vietnamese model according to their own agenda. The Global Times stated that in Vietnamese Catholicism, “the bishop just has symbolic religious status,” which is far from being the truth. It is true that the CPV, the more so in recent years, has tightened its control of religion, but bishops are by no means mere figureheads. The same article established a difference between China and Vietnam, reporting that “China still insists that Chinese Catholics select their own bishop. So, there is a possibility that the Vatican will compromise, give up its right to selection and appointment, and recognize the legitimacy of the bishop chosen by China.”

Referring to bishops “selected by Chinese Catholics” is propaganda language for bishops “selected by the CCP.” This is not the Vietnamese model. However, it is what China wanted to achieve in its negotiation with the Vatican. As we know, the content of the agreement is secret. It is speculated that it would be the reverse of the Vietnamese model (or the model of Vietnam as misinterpreted, intentionally or not, by the Global Times): the government will indicate three candidates and the Vatican will select one. Or, alternatively, the government will indicate one candidate but the Vatican will be able to veto him, and in this case the CCP should propose another choice. Time will tell, and very few secret agreements remain secret forever. At first sight, Cardinal Parolin got a worse deal in China than he did twenty-two years ago in Vietnam.
Vatican signs “provisional” agreement with China

Contrary to exaggerated expectations, the Vatican-China agreement has a limited scope—but is described as “the first step in a process”

MASSIMO INTROVIGNE

Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal Pietro Parolin.
(Credits: Sacima – CC BY-SA 2.0)

Massimo Introvigne
On Saturday, September 22, the Vatican announced that it has signed in Beijing a “provisional agreement” with the Chinese government, dealing with the appointment of Catholic bishops in China, whose details remain secret. The international edition of the Chinese official People’s Daily first denied that a Vatican delegation was visiting Beijing, then after the Vatican’s official announcement—mentioning China’s deputy Foreign Minister Wang Chao as the Chinese party who signed it—had to admit that a confidential agreement had been signed. The curious behavior of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) media confirms that there are opponents of the agreement within the CCP itself.

The Vatican press release reads as follows:

“Today, 22nd September 2018, within the framework of the contacts between the Holy See and the People’s Republic of China that have been underway for some time in order to discuss Church matters of common interest and to promote further understanding, a meeting was held in Beijing between Mgr Antoine Camilleri, Undersecretary for the Holy See’s Relations with States, and H. E. Mr Wang Chao, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, respectively heads of the Vatican and Chinese delegations.

During that meeting, the two representatives signed a Provisional Agreement on the appointment of Bishops.

The above-mentioned Provisional Agreement, which is the fruit of a gradual and reciprocal rapprochement, has been agreed following a long process of careful negotiation and foresees the possibility of periodic reviews of its application. It concerns the nomination of Bishops, a question of great importance for the life of the Church, and creates the conditions for greater collaboration at the bilateral level.

The shared hope is that this agreement may favour a fruitful and forward-looking process of institutional dialogue and may contribute positively to the life of the Catholic Church in China, to the common good of the Chinese people and to peace in the world.”

Earlier this week, The Wall Street Journal anticipated a much broader agreement, for which, as Bitter Winter reported, the Beijing authorities were not prepared.

What really happened may be summarized as follows:

1. The CCP favored in 1957 the birth of a “Patriotic Catholic Church,” with bishops theoretically “elected” by the local Catholics but in fact appointed by the CCP rather than by the Vatican, part of the “red market” of the government-controlled religions in China. The Vatican declared this “Patriotic Church” schismatic and excommunicated its bishops, recognizing in China as truly Catholic only an “underground” Catholic Church, with bishops appointed by the Vatican, which was heavily persecuted by the regime.
2. Since the pontificate of Benedict XVI, and in some instances even earlier, the Vatican and the CCP agreed on the appointments of local bishops, which were both selected by the CCP and recognized by the Vatican. The two Catholic Churches, the...
official and the “Patriotic,” did not merge but in many dioceses had the same bishops.

3. This happened in a number of dioceses, while in others the Vatican had strong objections against the bishops selected by the CCP and any agreement proved impossible.

4. What happens with the new agreement, although the details are secret, is that the Vatican and the CCP have agreed to solve the existing problems and to establish a (secret) process to identify together the future bishops of all Chinese dioceses. According to a message of the Vatican’s Secretary of State, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the problems have indeed been solved for all the dioceses where previously there was no agreement, as he announced that “today, for the first time, all the Bishops in China are in communion with the Bishop of Rome,” i.e. with Pope Francis and the Holy See.

5. What is not happening, contrary to exaggerated expectations or fears, is the exchange of diplomatic recognitions between the Holy See and China, which would also mean that the Vatican should terminate its diplomatic recognition of Taiwan—the Taiwanese Foreign Ministry rushed to publish a note explaining that this is not the case.

6. There is no announcement that the underground and the “Patriotic” churches will merge (which was and is opposed by the top leaders of the Patriotic Church and their supporters in the CCP). Immediately, what we may expect is a gradual extension to all dioceses of the situation already existing in many of them, where the two structures are personally connected by having the same bishop at the top.

7. Clearly, in the medium or long term, this process will probably lead to the merging of the two churches, but this requires the negotiation of many further details. Pope Francis’ Vatican has a style of “starting processes” rather than concluding them, and this is yet another example of this strategy.

8. Conservative Catholics, including some in China and Hong Kong, are screaming against the “sell-out” of the Catholic Church to CCP. Their position and concerns are understandable. However, with the new law which came into force on February 1, 2018, the alternative for the “underground” Catholic Church was to come to an agreement with the CCP or being wiped out and heavily persecuted. The “underground” Catholic Church is part of a “gray market” of religion President Xi Jinping vowed to eliminate. While most Protestant house churches, also part of the “gray market,” do not have the possibility of coming to similar agreements, the Vatican is both a religious organization and a State. It obviously believes it is in a unique position to find an accommodation that would avoid the persecution and secure a modicum of religious freedom for Catholics in China. The Vatican, after its experience in countries such as Poland or Lithuania, also believes that these agreements offer to it a latitude to operate openly within Communist societies, and subtly influence their transformation from inside. Whether this is a realistic perspective or a dangerous illusion, time will tell. But this is the very reason while sectors of the CCP oppose the agreement and, rather than a global, final, and public treaty with the Vatican, so far what we have is a partial, provisional, and secret one.
Massimo Introvigne (born June 14, 1955 in Rome) is an Italian sociologist and intellectual property consultant. He is the founder and managing director of the Center for Studies on New Religions (CESNUR), an international network of scholars who study new religious movements. Introvigne is the author of tens of books and articles in the field of sociology of religion. He was the main author of the Enciclopedia delle religioni in Italia (Encyclopedia of Religions in Italy). He is a member of the editorial board for the Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion, and of the executive board of University of California Press’ Nova Religio. He is also a consultant on intellectual property rights. From January 5 to December 31, 2011, he has served as the “Representative on combating racism, xenophobia and discrimination, with a special focus on discrimination against Christians and members of other religions” of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). In June 2012, he was appointed by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs as chairperson of the newly instituted Observatory of Religious Liberty, created by the Ministry in order to monitor problems of religious liberty on a worldwide scale.

China and Vatican to sign landmark deal over bishops

*Under agreement, Beijing would recognize pope as head of China’s Catholics in return for Vatican recognition of excommunicated Chinese bishops*

By Francis X. Rocca and Eva Dou

The Wall Street Journal (14.09.2018) - https://on.wsj.com/2xIIAXh - China and the Vatican are set to sign a landmark agreement later this month ending a long struggle between Beijing’s Communist rulers and the pope over who chooses the leaders of Catholicism in the world’s most populous country, according to two people familiar with the matter.

Reactions to the deal, which gives both sides a say in appointing the church’s bishops in China, are likely to be sharply divided, with some hailing a diplomatic coup by the Vatican that draws China closer to the West and others warning of an important defeat for the principle of religious freedom.

The controversial deal would include the first official recognition by Beijing that the pope is the head of the Catholic Church in China. In return, Pope Francis would formally recognize seven excommunicated Chinese bishops who were appointed by the Communist government without Vatican approval.

“\[It is a baby step by China toward recognizing some of the framework of the Western world,\]” said Francesco Sisci, an Italian who teaches international relations at China Renmin University in Beijing. “\[It doesn’t go as far as recognizing what we in the West call religious freedom but it is a degree of religious autonomy.\]”

Others, including some U.S. diplomats, are concerned the pope is conceding a strong influence over church leadership to an avowedly atheist authoritarian regime.
“This is a strange step backward on terrain over which the church has fought, not for centuries but millennia,” said Sandro Magister, a Vatican expert who writes for Italy’s L’Espresso magazine. “The church has managed to free itself from control of sovereigns and governments on ecclesiastical matters such as the naming of bishops, but now this achievement is clamorously contradicted by the agreement with China.”

The pact with the Vatican could still fall through or be delayed due to unforeseen events, one of the people familiar with the matter said. The two sides are close to signing even though China’s government has recently intensified a crackdown on Christians and other religious groups, through measures including closing churches and removing religious symbols such as crosses and the domes of mosques. The deal is thus expected to stir criticism of the pope already under fire from within and outside the church for his handling of clerical sexual abuse.

In practice, China’s Communist Party is unlikely to give up control over any religion, even Catholicism, which has relatively few adherents in China. Chinese President Xi Jinping has launched a program to “Sinicize” all religions to make sure they don’t offer alternate viewpoints to the Communist Party. As part of that policy, Beijing is strengthening its sway over clerical appointments and religious teachings to emphasize patriotism.

The Chinese leadership has been engaged for years in a campaign to diminish the influence of the Dalai Lama, who remains popular among Tibetans despite nearly six decades in exile. It has also ramped up a mass detention program for Muslims in its northwest region of Xinjiang, where Beijing is worried about violent separatism fanned by militant Islam. Giving the Vatican too much say risks setting a bad precedent in Beijing’s eyes.

The Vatican had hoped to sign the deal in the spring, but needed several more months to overcome resistance from some Chinese Catholics, one of the persons familiar with the matter said. In particular, the bishop of the southeastern diocese of Shantou balked at stepping aside in favor of an excommunicated bishop as part of the agreement, this person said.

Pope Francis’ pursuit of the deal reflects his desire for better relations with China—where Christianity is growing fast, though most new adherents are Protestants—and an end to divisions among Catholics there.

China’s estimated 10 million Catholics are legally supposed to worship only in churches approved by the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association, a state-controlled body not recognized by the Vatican. But many Catholics attend unregistered churches in so-called underground communities led by bishops loyal only to Rome.

Beijing is eager for the publicity boost that mending ties with the Vatican would bring, even as the Communist Party prosecutes a systematic campaign to bring Catholicism and all other religions more firmly under its control.

A new agreement would allow the pope to veto new nominees for bishops proposed by the Chinese government. Beijing’s major condition for signing has been that the pope recognize the seven Chinese bishops excommunicated by Rome over the years.

“The dialogue between the Holy See and the People’s Republic of China continues,” Vatican spokesman Greg Burke said. “There’s nothing else to add at the moment.”

At a routine Chinese Foreign Ministry press conference on Thursday, spokesman Geng Shuang declined to confirm the deal’s status, but said China was sincere in its efforts for better relations with the Vatican.
China broke off diplomatic relations with the Vatican in 1951. In recent decades, the two sides have cooperated informally to agree on most bishops appointments, but Beijing has periodically named bishops without the pope’s approval.

At the last meeting of the negotiating teams, in Rome in June, the Vatican assured the Chinese representatives that Pope Francis would sign the necessary document to lift the excommunications of the seven government-appointed bishops and recognize them as the bishops of their dioceses about a week before the deal is signed, said one of the people familiar with the matter.

That recognition would require two bishops who have shunned government control, in the dioceses of Shantou and Mindong, to step aside in favor of government-appointed bishops. They would be the first so-called underground bishops to be asked to do so by the Vatican.

Shantou Bishop Zhuang Jianjian and Mindong Bishop Guo Xijin couldn’t be reached for comment on Friday.

Also as part of the deal, the government is expected to recognize the “underground” bishop of Qiqihar, near the Russian border, one of the people said. Qiqihar Bishop Wei Jingyi couldn’t be reached for comment Friday.

The agreement is explicitly provisional, meaning that it allows for the possibility of revisions after one or two years if either party sees the need. Both parties have agreed that the text of the agreement won’t be published even after it is signed, one of the people said.

Critics of the prospective deal have cast it as a capitulation by the Vatican.

“\[I would make a cartoon showing the pope kneeling and offering the keys of the kingdom of heaven and saying, ‘Now, please recognize me as pope,’\]” Cardinal Joseph Zen, a former bishop of Hong Kong, told an interviewer in March. “The advisers of the pope are giving him advice to renounce his authority.”

The agreement on bishop appointments would leave unresolved other major questions between the Vatican and China, including the position of most of the more than 30 bishops recognized by Rome but not by Beijing. The reestablishment of diplomatic relations between Beijing and the Vatican remains a distant goal.

—Kersten Zhang contributed to this article.

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Why those fleeing religious persecution in China should be granted asylum


Massimo Introvigne, the repression of religion in China: consequences for OSCE Participating States
On February 1, 2018, a new Religious Affairs Regulation came into force in China. The consensus of legal experts is that it imposed new restrictions on the “gray market” of religions and churches that are not part of the five official government-controlled religious institutions. It also provided new tools for persecuting the religious communities in the “black market,” included in the official list of xie jiao, “heterodox teachings” that are entirely prohibited and persecuted. Being active in a xie jiao is a crime punished by art. 300 of the Chinese Criminal Code with a term to three to seven years “or more” in jail.

Tibet and Xinjiang have special regulations, but the general climate hostile to religion has led to increased persecution of Uyghur and ethnically Kazakh Muslims in Xinjiang and dissident Buddhists in Tibet. Scholars estimate that “transformation through education” camps, which are in fact concentration camps, host 1.5 million inmates, two-thirds of them Uyghurs.

OSCE participating States have multiple relations with China, and we would encourage them to raise human rights and religious liberty issues in a more decisive way in bilateral meetings.

The OSCE space is also affected by the situation in China, as participating States receive a growing number of religion-based asylum requests by Chinese citizens. The largest contingents of them are Uyghurs, particularly in Central Asia, and members of religions listed as xie jiao, particularly in Western Europe and North America. There are still refugees from Falun Gong but in recent years the highest number comes from The Church of Almighty God, a Chinese Christian new religious movement listed as a xie jiao since 1995 and credited by governmental sources with some four million members in China. The Church of Almighty God has been persecuted since 1995 or before, and more than 300,000 members of the Church have been detained in China. Some NGOs have documented several instances of torture and extra-judicial killings. It has also been targeted by consistent campaigns of fake news, accusing it of crimes rigorous investigation by Western scholars proved it has not committed.

Because of the fake news, general hostility to refugees, and confusions about how refugee laws should be interpreted, out of more than 2,200 asylum requests of members of this Church in the OSCE area, excluding the United States, only 320 have been accepted.

We commend Canada and Sweden for its prevalence of favorable decisions and note that the Italian authorities have started a cooperation with scholars for receiving more accurate information on this and other groups.

But in other countries, most of the asylum seekers of The Church of Almighty God and other persecuted Chinese religions are rejected and, in some cases, deported back to China where they quickly “disappear.”

We recommend that serious and fair consideration be given to religion-based asylum requests by Chinese refugees, including those from The Church of Almighty God, in all participating states, and that nobody should be deported without seriously evaluating the risks he or she would face in China, which may include incarceration, torture, and even death.

Rosita Šorytė, Intolerance and Discrimination Against Religion-Based Refugees from China in the OSCE Area: The Case of The Church of Almighty God

These days there are a few issues that are particularly toxic in our societies: refugees and China. And my very young and still very small organization – ORLIR – is dealing with both of them.
We see how the issue of migration is turning apart countries, changing alliances, and helping populists of all kind to rise to power. It took us and media a long time to finally acknowledge that most of those people who massively arriving in Europe are not refugees but migrants. Still in the media confusion persists and very often information is inaccurate and blurred.

We all know that there is a big difference between migrants, searching for a better economic life, and refugees, who for reasons of war and persecution are fleeing their countries of origin. Some of these people have only two choices: to be persecuted, tortured and even killed, or flee their country and try to seek protection.

I perfectly understand the challenge for the authorities of recipient countries to distinguish who is persecuted and in imminent danger, and who is pretending for the sake of getting the right to stay. My humble experience of talking to many refugees shows that those who are pretending being persecuted and are better actors and are getting refugee status. And those who are in real danger very often fail to prove their case and thus are sent back to their oppressors.

I could tell many moving and tragic stories of people who flee severe persecution in China on religious grounds. I will focus today on members of a new Christian group called The Church of Almighty God. The Church of Almighty God is one of the largest and fastest growing religious groups in China. And this is exactly why it is severely persecuted. Any member identified by Chinese authorities would be sent to jail, most of them will be tortured in order to extract information about other members of the Church. They will be sent to re-education camps and, once released, will be kept under watch, and eventually put in jail again if they would not agree to cooperate with Chinese authorities and renounce their faith. Cases of suspect organ harvesting from prisoners of conscience of this Church have also been reported.

Most members of The Church of Almighty God would flee their country only and when they have confirmed information that their arrest is imminent. They do not flee to seek our jobs or get financial or economic benefits but to survive and protect other brothers and sisters of their group. By fleeing China, they lose everything: their families, friends, homes, and jobs. They arrive in our countries with nothing but their faith and their hope that fellow brothers and sisters would support them. They arrive carrying a lot of pain and deep trauma. Very often, out of fear, they are not able to present their cases well enough and end up being denied asylum or even being deported.

On August 31, despite protests by the Red Cross, the German Evangelical Lutheran Church, and several NGOs, including mine, a member of this Church, sister Zhao Xueliang, was deported back to China from Germany. She has “disappeared” in China and her whereabouts are unknown ever since. My pleading today to the representatives of the participating States is, please hear and remember the name of The Church of Almighty God. Please carry out serious research about this group, do not believe what Chinese media, and Western media that copy them, are saying but read reliable information from independent NGOs and academic sources. We have no right to play with people’s lives and we cannot send them to their death.

Another toxic issue is to talk about China. Yes, China spares no efforts and financial means to persuade us that there are no human rights problems there. They bribe and buy everybody they can: politicians, journalists, even academics who would be paid to say that what we are presenting to you today it’s not true. Some of the meetings we organize during international political or academic conferences are half empty because people know: once you will be spotted by Chinese authorities participating in this kind of meetings, you will never go to China again. China plays an important role at the United Nations to kill every mention of human rights, and human rights are rarely part of the
agendas of bilateral meetings either because everybody wants to have good economics contracts with China. But, if we cannot change Chinese politics, perhaps we can at least protect those who flee Chinese persecution. It is not only our moral duty to protect those who are in imminent danger. States have a legal obligation under international law.

Footnote
The paper of HRWF on this issue was already published in our newsletter.

Combating discrimination against The Church of Almighty God in the OSCE space

Statement at the OSCE/ODIHR Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw

HRWF (12.09.2018) - For centuries, the United States and Canada have provided asylum to people from other countries fleeing from religious persecution, intolerance and discrimination. In the 20th century, North America and Europe opened their doors to Armenians and other Christians who were victims of genocide by the Ottoman Empire but also to Christians who were persecuted in Communist countries. In the last few decades, the United States, Canada and EU countries have granted political asylum to Christians fleeing from state repression and social hostility in Muslim majority countries.

In the last few years, an increasing number of believers of all faiths who are persecuted by the Chinese Communist Party have been knocking on the doors of democratic countries and requesting their protection. Unfortunately, they have massively been denied political asylum because the political authorities and the judiciary in OSCE Participating States such as the United States, Canada and EU countries, are unaware of the magnitude and intensity of the religious persecution in China. The main reason is that the state institutions in charge of their requests for asylum in the OSCE space are ignorant about the religious groups to which they belong or are misled by the anti-religious propaganda and the fake news spread around the world by the Chinese Communist Party.

Several thousands of believers from The Church of Almighty, a new religious movement in China, which is dramatically persecuted in that country, have been denied political asylum in the OSCE space and are at risk of being deported back to China where they will be arrested, tortured and sentenced to heavy prison terms as soon as they arrive. A number of those believers have been arrested by the police in member states of the European Union and detained in prison-like facilities while anxiously waiting to be expelled to China.

As of 1 September, the situation of believers from The Church of Almighty God was as follows:

In France, 444 applications, 419 rejection decisions (94%) and 186 departure orders (44%)

In The Netherlands, 48 applications, 31 rejection decisions (64%) and 31 departure orders (100%)

In Switzerland, 33 applications, 29 rejection decisions (88%) and 24 departure orders (83%)
In Belgium, 12 applications, 10 rejection decisions (83%) and 10 departure orders (100%).

In Canada, 223 applications, 24 rejection decisions (11%) and 5 departure orders (21%).

In Sweden, 9 applications, 2 rejection decisions (22%) and 2 departure orders (100%).

In Europe, Austria, the Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain and the UK have also rejected a lot of applications for political asylum introduced by members of The Church of Almighty God.

Many cases are still pending in these countries but the number of positive decisions has been very small, except outside Europe: New Zealand (77%) and Canada (74%).

In Germany, a 27-year old Chinese girl, ZHAO XUELIANG was deported back to China on the last day of August despite the support of the Red Cross and the German Evangelical Church. All contacts have been interrupted since she arrived at the airport in Beijing. Her whereabouts are unknown.

Moreover, in South Korea, where there have been 960 applications there has not been any positive decision at all but 64% of requests for asylum were rejected and 183 people received a departure order.

**Recommendations**

Considering that the discriminatory treatment of applications for asylum introduced by members of The Church of Almighty God in a number of Participating States of the OSCE is based either on ignorance about that religious community or the fake news spread by the Chinese Communist Party to discredit the movement,

Considering that thousands of members of The Church of Almighty are prison in China,

Considering that over 1700 members of this religious community have been denied political asylum and are under threat of being sent back to the country where they were persecuted,

Human Rights Without Frontiers recommends to the state agencies of the OSCE Participating States dealing with applications for asylum from this religious community;

To visit our [online database](#) of religious prisoners around the world in which we have documented 760 cases of prisoners of that religious minority;

To consult the research works of American and European scholars in religious studies [online](#);

To consult the [online submissions](#) of numerous NGOs to the upcoming UPR of China later this year and the brochure “Tortured to Death”;

before taking a decision concerning the applications for political asylum.
China is reportedly burning bibles and making Christians renounce their faith

- **Chinese officials are cracking down on Christians on an unprecedented scale, the Associated Press reported.**
- They have been burning bibles, shutting down churches, and ordering people to renounce their faith, the news agency cited pastors and religious groups as saying.
- It corresponds to a government drive to make sure everyone is loyal to the atheist Communist Party before anything else.
- Chinese law requires religious followers to worship only in registered congregations, but millions of people are in underground churches that defy government restrictions.
- A local official denied accounts of the crackdown on Christianity, saying that the country respected religious freedom.
- **All of China’s officially recognized religions appear to have been affected by the crackdown. About 1 million Uighurs of the Muslim faith are detained in political or re-education camps.**

By Christopher Bodeen, Associated Press

Business Insider (10.09.2018) - [https://read.bi/2CNTLw5](https://read.bi/2CNTLw5) - BEIJING (AP) — China's government is ratcheting up a crackdown on Christian congregations in Beijing and
several provinces, destroying crosses, burning bibles, shutting churches and ordering followers to sign papers renouncing their faith, according to pastors and a group that monitors religion in China.

The campaign corresponds with a drive to "Sinicize" religion by demanding loyalty to the officially atheist Communist Party and eliminating any challenge to its power over people's lives.

Bob Fu of the U.S.-based group China Aid said over the weekend that the closure of churches in central Henan province and a prominent house church in Beijing in recent weeks represents a "significant escalation" of the crackdown.

"The international community should be alarmed and outraged for this blatant violation of freedom of religion and belief," he wrote in an email.

Under President Xi Jinping, China's most powerful leader since Mao Zedong, religious believers are seeing their freedoms shrink dramatically even as the country undergoes a religious revival. Experts and activists say that as he consolidates his power, Xi is waging the most severe systematic suppression of Christianity in the country since religious freedom was written into the Chinese constitution in 1982.

Fu also provided video footage of what appeared to be piles of burning bibles and forms stating that the signatories had renounced their Christian faith. He said that marked the first time since Mao's radical 1966-1976 Cultural Revolution that Christians had been compelled to make such declarations, under pain of expulsion from school and the loss of welfare benefits.

A Christian pastor in the Henan city of Nanyang said crosses, bibles and furniture were burned during a raid on his church on Sept. 5.

The pastor, who asked not to be identified by name to avoid repercussions from authorities, said several people entered the church just as it opened its doors at 5 a.m. and began removing items.

He said the church had been in discussions with local authorities who demanded it "reform" itself, but no agreement had been reached or official documents released.

Chinese law requires religious believers to worship only in congregations registered with the authorities, but many millions belong to so-called underground or house churches that defy government restrictions.

A local official reached by phone at the Nanyang city government disputed the account, saying officials respected religious freedom. The man declined to give his name, as is common with Chinese bureaucrats, while a person answering phones at the local religious affairs bureau said they were "not clear" about the matter.

In Beijing, the Zion church was shut on Sunday by around 60 government workers who arrived at 4:30 p.m. accompanied by buses, police cars and fire trucks, the church's pastor, Ezra Jin Mingri, said Monday. Zion is known as the largest house church in Beijing, with six branches.

The officials declared the gatherings illegal and sealed off church properties, Jin said, after already freezing the pastor's personal assets in an apparent attempt to force him to comply with their demands.

"Churches will continue to develop. Blocking the sites will only intensify conflicts," Jin told The Associated Press by phone.
A notice posted Sunday on the website of the Chaoyang district government in Beijing said the Zion Church had been closed because it failed to register with the government.

All of China's officially recognized religions appear to have been affected by the crackdown. In the most extreme example, an estimated 1 million Uighurs and other members of Muslim minority groups in the country's northwest have been arbitrarily detained in indoctrination camps where they are forced to denounce Islam and profess loyalty to the Communist Party.

The government says it is taking necessary measures to eliminate extremism, but denies setting up the camps.

China has an estimated 38 million Protestants, and experts have predicted that the country will have the world's largest Christian population in a few decades.

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**South Korean false demonstrations against the Church of Almighty God refugees end in disgrace**

*Police intervention stops further false demonstrations by CCP executives and anti-cultists harassing harmless refugees in Korea.*

Bitter Winter (05.09.2018) - [https://bit.ly/2NPBQ9b](https://bit.ly/2NPBQ9b) - Bitter Winter has reported in the last few days about false “spontaneous demonstrations” organized in South Korea against The Church of Almighty God (CAG) by Chinese Communist Party (CCP) executives who came from China for this purpose, with relatives of CAG asylum seekers they had “persuaded” to join them and local anti-cultists led by pro-Chinese activist Ms. O Myung-ok. For a fortunate coincidence, the Austrian journalist Peter Zoehrer, secretary of FOREF (Forum for Religious Freedom Europe), was in Seoul for collecting material about CAG members who suffered torture in China, and was able to document and photograph the events for Bitter Winter.

On September 4, 2018 at 10:00 AM, thanks to the mediation of the police, Ms. O and her colleagues had to allow the CAG members to meet their relatives. As they reported to Peter Zoehrer after the meeting, the CAG members explained to their relatives that it was their own free decision to flee to South Korea, where they can practice their religion openly, because of the Chinese Communist regime’s inhumane persecution of the CAG in China, and that they are totally free to come and go as they please. When in turn CAG members asked their relatives questions, for instance, who told them they were held against their will by the CAG, why the relatives came to Korea now, and who brought them there and paid their tickets, and so on, they just dodged the questions.

At the same time, Ms. O kept making trouble outside the premises of the CAG under the pretext of “seeking for relatives.” On September 4, 2018, at 1:15 PM, led by Ms. O, about twenty demonstrators drove to the CAG worship building located in Chungcheongbuk-do. They hung up banners along the roadsides in front of the Church building and got ready for another demonstration against the CAG. Simultaneously, KBS and CBS, the two leading Korean media, were also on site to follow up and report the demonstration. Unlike the one in Onsu on September 2, this demonstration was not attended by any Chinese relative of the CAG asylum seekers.
At 1:48 PM, a middle-aged demonstrator (male, in his 50s) jumped onto the rear of a truck and yelled, while some others echoed his shouting with sporadic words (in Korean). During the time, Ms. O walked up to the man and kept whispering to him. Then the man took out a prepared paper and shouted out the texts.

Shortly after the demonstration had begun, others came in a vehicle and joined the demonstrators. The women among them were in headscarves, while the men were of tanned skin. They didn't look like Korean. The police officers asked why they were there, and they answered they were “called to come” but didn't know what to do next. The police told them a demonstration was in progress there and that they'd better leave. They quickly left.

At 1:53 PM, a lawyer representing the CAG went out of the building to remind the demonstrators that they had crossed the legal limitations of their demonstration and trespassed on the premises of the CAG. He requested the demonstrators to move away from their truck that was parked in front of the CAG building together with their banners. The leading demonstrator became hysterical and began to yell. He refused to move the truck under the pretext of not having the key and angrily confronted the lawyer. Having no choice, the CAG members had to call the police to solve the problem.

A few minutes later, the police arrived to deal with those demonstrators and asked them to leave.

At 2:21 PM, Ms. O and her people had to move away from their truck and banners. The demonstrators marched to the west. At that time, only a handful of demonstrators remained in front of the CAG building and they were scattered along the roadside opposite the CAG premises. The entire demonstration lasted half an hour only and ended in failure.

At 2:50 PM, Peter Zoehrer appeared at the entrance of the Worship Building. KBS, CBS and other TV stations asked to interview him. Ms. O saw the reporters invited by her surround Mr. Zoehrer for the interview, and soon packed up and left. The presence of a foreign journalist was not part of her, or CCP’s, plans.

At 3 PM, the reporter and the producer of KBS Cheongju conducted an in-depth interview with Mr. Zoehrer at the security office of Worship Building. The reporter raised questions such as, whether the CAG is persecuted in China, whether CAG members fled to South Korea because of the persecution, and what Mr. Zoehrer knows about the human rights situation of CAG refugees. Mr. Zoehrer explained that nobody can seriously dispute that the CAG is persecuted in China and that its members fled to South Korea to escape persecution. Their families were disrupted, but this was the fault of the CCP rather than of the CAG. When he was asked about how he learned about the persecution of the CAG, Mr. Zoehrer replied that he learned it through his studying the CAG for more than a year. He also mentioned that, during his personal interviews with several CAG members, he found their persecution stories very credible. He also explained that CAG members are preparing affidavits about the abuse and torture they suffered in China. Mr. Zoehrer also mentioned the leaked internal document from CCP published by Bitter Winter on how to conduct demonstration against CAG in South Korea, and how his script was faithfully executed by Ms. O. He added that, as an eyewitness to the events, it was pretty obvious to him that most demonstrators were hired thugs with no knowledge whatsoever of the CAG.

Zoehrer concluded: “The Founding Fathers of the US were European Puritans who went all the way to America because they couldn’t have religious freedom in Europe. This is why, especially in America, they never forget the importance of religious freedom. This is no different, CAG members come to South Korea under very difficult circumstances, for
the sake of finding freedom, religious freedom, finding their human rights.” The entire interview lasted for an hour and a half.

**Report on Israel sheds light on how China uses international anti-cultists**

A new report on the Israeli Center for Victims of Cults reveals the links between the Chinese Communist Party and an international network of groups defaming religious minorities as “cults.”

Bitter Winter (04.09.2018) - [https://bit.ly/2oHYdm9](https://bit.ly/2oHYdm9) - The Belgian NGO Human Rights Without Frontiers released on September 4 a report on the Israeli Center for Victims of Cults (ICVC), the Israeli branch of an international network of so-called anti-cult organizations, most of them affiliated with the European Federation of Centres of Research and Information on Cults and Sects (FECRIS). Scholars have studied for many years the international anti-cult movement and its nefarious role on stereotyping unpopular religious minorities as “cults,” claiming that they “brainwash” their members and separate them from their families. Years of scholarly research of new religious movements have debunked anti-cult theories as pseudo-scientific, and simple tools used to discriminate against groups the anti-cultist do not like.

The new report shows of the allegedly secular Israeli Center for Victims of Cults, the Israeli correspondent of FECRIS, has in fact deep ties with Yad L’Achim, an organization officially denounced by the U.S. Department of State as a radical expression of ultra-Orthodox Judaism, which promotes discrimination against religious minorities in Israel and violence against them.

While in its beginnings the international anti-cult networks represented private interests, in the 21st century it is increasingly connected with regimes persecuting religious minorities and relying on international anti-cultists for justifying the persecution.

The report exposes Yad L’Achim’s connections with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which are typical of anti-cultists in several countries. Bitter Winter has recently reported
on how South Korean anti-cultists cooperated with the CCP in organizing false “spontaneous demonstrations” against refugees of The Church of Almighty God seeking asylum in South Korea.

The report notes that “in 2009, Yad L’Achim published a press release in which they boasted the fact that one of their organization’s representatives was invited to participate in a congress in China devoted to the fight against Falun Gong. The propaganda of Yad L’Achim against Falun Gong is accessible on their website,” which also offers “an article on Benjamin Kluger, a convert from Christianity to ultra-orthodox Judaism and a Yad L’Achim activist, who worked in the Department for the Fight against Missionary Activity with Rachel Lichtenshtein, the current director of the ICVC. He was invited by the Chinese embassy in Israel as ‘an expert from Yad L’Achim about destructive cults’ to a CCP conference in China. Rabbi Shalom Dov Lipschitz, Chairman of Yad L’Achim, stated that the government in Israel should have ‘learned from the Chinese authorities how to forcefully fight dubious and destructive cults.’”

The report noted that the CCP also invited other “FECRIS representatives: the ill-famed Alexander Dvorkin from Russia, who fully supports the repression of Falun Gong practitioners in China and campaigns against the movement in his own country, and the well-known deprogrammer Rick Ross, who was prosecuted in several US criminal cases, yet still praised by the ICVC.”

Recent events in Korea prove that the CCP uses anti-cultists as “fellow travelers” to justify its persecution, torture and extra-judicial killings of members of religious movements it classifies as “cults.”

**False demonstrations against refugees in South Korea**

*While Chinese agents, hired thugs and anti-cultists stage false “spontaneous demonstrations” and abuse refugees, hackers launch a massive attack against the Web site of Bitter Winter, obviously trying to prevent its reporting of the events in Korea.*


![The demonstration of September 2](https://bit.ly/2wKyacz)

Bitter Winter (03.09.2018) - [https://bit.ly/2wKyacz](https://bit.ly/2wKyacz) - The Church of Almighty God (CAG), the largest Christian new religious movement in China, is banned there by the Chinese
Communist Party (CCP) and subject to violent persecution, with several instances of torture and extra-judicial killings documented by independent NGOs. Hundreds of its members have escaped to South Korea, where they are seeking asylum.

One month ago, *Bitter Winter* disclosed a secret CCP document detailing a plan to harass CAG refugees in South Korea, by recruiting with threats and coercion some of their relatives in China and bringing them to Korea to demonstrate, with the help of Korean anti-cultists. On August 31, *Bitter Winter reported* that the secret plan was being executed. Prepared by incendiary articles by Ms. O Myung-ok (吴明玉), a Korean pro-Chinese anti-cultist, relatives of CAG refugees were taken to South Korea from China together with Chinese agents, while Ms. O recruited anti-cultists from Christian churches. The latter’s number was minimal and, in order to stage credible “spontaneous demonstrations,” Ms. O had to recruit also local thugs who work as “professional demonstrators” for a fee.

*Bitter Winter’s* article of August 31 was accompanied by a statement by nine NGOs denouncing the Chinese plot and asking South Korean authorities to thwart it. It was the most read article of *Bitter Winter* ever, and visitors to the Bitter Winter Web site skyrocketed in one day. It should also be noted that *Bitter Winter* announced a complete coverage of the events leading to China’s Universal Periodic Review (an assessment of the human rights situation in each member country the United Nations perform every five year) at the United Nations’ Human Rights Council, due for November 6 next, a process that is making Chinese authorities understandably nervous.

The reaction was not late in manifesting itself. Bitter Winter’s English Web site was subject to a hackers’ attack (not for the first time), which shut it down temporarily. Meanwhile, a violent demonstration took place in front of the Seoul church of the CAG. For a fortunate coincidence, Peter Zoehrer, an Austrian journalist and the secretary of FOREF (Forum for Religious Freedom Europe), was visiting the CAG in Seoul to collect testimonies of torture in China and was an eyewitness to the events. He shared his experience with *Bitter Winter*.

On September 2, at 12:30 noon, Ms. O brought to the CAG premises seven relatives of CAG members and a handful of anti-cult activists, as well as about a dozen of paid professional demonstrators. A group of men raised four banners across the entrance of the Onsu Church of Almighty God in Seoul. In addition, several camerapersons wearing surgical masks came to the scene to take shots. At approximately 1 p.m., 30 individuals appeared at the Onsu Church entrance in succession to participate in the demonstration and used megaphones and speakers to loudly insult and abuse both the CAG and the person it worships as Almighty God. According to witnesses who had been on the scene, the decibel level of the demonstration was an assault on the senses, making people feel unwell, and it was probably above the legal noise limit; furthermore, the clamoring and shouting greatly disturbed the activities of the populace in the area, and affected the Sunday services of the local Christian churches as well.

Holding their loudspeakers in hand, with an emotional tone, the professional demonstrators shouted and asked the CAG members to come out to meet their relatives, with sentences such as “Mum is missing you, please come and meet me,” and so on. They tried to create the impression that the CAG stops its members from seeing their relatives. In fact, the contrary is true. The CAG had tried to negotiate with Ms. O, with the help of the Korean police, to have its members meet their relatives coming from China in private, without anti-cultists and Chinese agents present and clearly not within the framework of a violent demonstration, but the request was turned down. The demonstration lasted for more than 5 hours; the demonstrators shouting their slogans...
with the most fervor were two or three Koreans – not Chinese nationals who had come to visit family members.

At 3 p.m., a vehicle that had left to run errands returned to the Onsu Church. As the vehicle pulled up to the entrance, Ms. O instructed the demonstrators on the scene: “Block the car, block the car!” And, in response, more than ten demonstrators surrounded the vehicle from all sides, and they beat at the car’s windows with all of their strength to force the person inside to open them. Then, demonstrators proceeded to take out cameras and take pictures of the inside of the vehicle as it remained still, blocked from moving forward. Ms. O even viciously kicked at the vehicle multiple times. When the CAG members tried to move on, Ms. O waved her hands asking all the relatives come around, and one of the paid professional demonstrators immediately lied down on the ground in front of the car, holding a board with words insulting the CAG, followed by some others, while Ms. O was inciting other to fiercely trample on the car. Finally, before allowing the vehicle to pull into the church, Ms. O demanded that the driver rolled down the windows so that more than ten demonstrators could look in, one-by-one, and see who the persons inside were.

Luckily, Mr. Zoehrer got off the car before the attack and was able to film the process. The deadlock lasted for almost half an hour, and at last, the car was able to move to the parking lot. Mr. Zoehrer was protected by his being a foreigner and showing his card as a journalist, but the CAG members had to be escorted by the police.

Shortly after 4 p.m., an agitated individual among the demonstrators tried to barge directly into the church and was obstructed by CAG members. Not resigned to failure, the individual continued to try to force his way in; and, when one CAG member raised a hand to stop him, the individual fell on his back, then pretended that he had been pushed over and called the police. After the police arrived, CAG representatives explained that the church’s surveillance camera had recorded the whole incident. The surveillance camera footage verified that the demonstrator who had been trying to get into the church had clearly fallen backward on purpose and then pretended to have been thrown to the ground. Once exposed, the person who had tried to break in (a Korean) immediately tried to change his story, stating that he hadn’t been injured and that he just wanted to “let family members see one another.”

During the demonstration, demonstrators illegally attempted to force entry into the church to cause trouble multiple times, and church members had to continually block them to keep them out.

Sometime after 5 p.m., the two sides tried to negotiate a meeting between a relative and a female member of the CAG. The member, her husband, and her mother-in-law, accompanied by the police, went to see her mother, who had been demonstrating outside the church. Reportedly, the member received the news that her mother would be coming to South Korea to see her when her mother was still in China. She called her mother on the phone to tell her that she was in Seoul and that she hoped her mother would be able to fly directly to Seoul so that she could pick her up at the airport. However, at the time, the mother indicated that she was “traveling with a group,” and that “somebody” had already helped them buy plane tickets; thus, they would have to first fly to Jeju island before going to Seoul to see her. Although the mother was clearly free to meet her daughter, after arriving in Seoul, she joined the demonstrators in shouting in front of the church and claimed a member of her family had been kidnapped by the CAG and she demanded to see her daughter. This was, of course absolutely false. Other claims made by the group who came from China are also contradicted by their relatives who are members of the CAG and seek refugee status in Korea.
On September 3, Ms. O had planned to repeat the demonstration in front of the Blue House, the residence of the President of the Republic of Korea, but the weather did not cooperate and, due to the heavy rain, the show was short and did not attract much attention.

We understand that another violent demonstration is planned for September 4 in front of other CAG facilities in Korea.

Photos taken by Peter Zoehrer:

Ms. O, not happy to be photographed by Mr. Zoehrer
False demonstrations against the Church of Almighty God refugees start in South Korea

 Executing a secret plan that Bitter Winter revealed one month ago, the CCP brings to Korea relatives of asylum seekers of The Church of Almighty God and organizes false “spontaneous demonstrations” with the help of pro-Chinese anti-cult activists.

Bitter Winter (31.08.2018) – http://www.bitterwinter.org - On August 4, 2018, Bitter Winter published a secret document by the Chinese Communist Party calling for harassment in South Korea of the asylum seekers of The Church of Almighty God (CAG), a Chinese Christian new religious movement heavily persecuted in China. The CCP called for the recruitment of the relatives of the asylum seekers who still live in China, if necessary through threats and coercion, who would then call for the “return home” of the refugees (who obviously would not return “home” but, once in China, will be arrested and will thus “return” to jail). The plan also sought the cooperation of pro-Chinese activists in South Korea and anti-cultists hostile to the CAG.

Bitter Winter has now learned that the CCP’s plan is being put into execution. On August 27, Ms. O Myung-ok (吴明玉Wu Mingyu), a pro-Chinese and anti-CAG activist, published several reports on some pro-Chinese and/or anti-cult Korean media, including Religion and Truth, releasing fake news claiming that CAG members are false refugees and are abusing the refugee system, and that the belief in Almighty God leads to family disruption. These reports strongly called for the deportation of CAG members back to China.

As these media disclosed, between August 30 and September 4, more than 50 people, including a dozen of family members of CAG refugees who are in Korea, and congregants from five Korean Christian groups active in campaigns against “cults,” will demonstrate against the CAG outside the Jeju court, Jeju Parliament, the CAG community in Onsu, the CAG worship building (i.e. the place where CAG members offer prayers regularly), the Blue House (Cheong Wa Dae, the executive office and official residence of the South Korean head of state, the President of the Republic of Korea), and other places. They
held a press conference on August 31 as well. All this information has been confirmed by confidential sources in Korea and by CAG members Bitter Winter interviewed.

On the afternoon of August 30, one CAG member learned from his mother, who currently lives in China, that CCP officers had gone to his family two months ago, asking his relatives to cooperate with them by going to Korea to get him back to China. At a rough estimate, more than 10 relatives of CAG members were requested by the CCP to do the same thing. The CCP especially opened a WeChat account to have frequent discussions with them about this. This member’s mother also told him that his elder sister and her husband were on the way to Jeju with governmental staff members. They were asked to stay in South Korea for as long as possible. His mother insisted, “Things are getting serious. You’d better come back with them, or else we’ll get into big trouble.”

Another Korean CAG member and her husband, who are Korean Chinese, fled to Korea because of the CCP’s persecution in China. On August 29, when she made a phone call to her mother, who lives in China, she was told that her mother and cousin (male) would come to Korea to visit her and that they were waiting for the plane flying to Jeju at the moment. The CAG member told her mother that they live in Seoul and asked her to fly to Seoul directly. But her mother said she couldn’t do that since they had to stay in Jeju for two days and then go to Seoul later as scheduled, and that their hotel rooms in Jeju had already been booked. The CAG member noticed that her mother hesitated over talking and even left to her cousin the conversation when she couldn’t make herself clear. It is important to note that this cousin is working for a governmental television station in China.

On the afternoon of August 30, Ms. O Myung-ok went to the airport to pick up five cameramen (three males and two females) flying from Seoul. As far as we have learned, some 15 Chinese relatives had arrived in Jeju, while Chinese officers are also coming to Korea to direct the campaign on site. According to their agenda, on August 31 and September 1, they will stage demonstrations at the Jeju court and the Parliament building and organize press conferences; they will stage demonstrations at the CAG community in Onsu on September 2, at the Blue House on September 3, and at the CAG worship building on September 4 respectively.

When CAG refugees learned that their family members were coming to Korea, they asked to meet them as soon as possible. So The Church of Almighty God contacted the Korean police on their behalf, asking for help to arrange meetings with their family members. When the police contacted Ms. O Myung-ok, she said she couldn’t let them meet each other until they finish the demonstrations and press conferences.

We have learned from informed Korean sources that Ms. O and the CCP claim that The Church of Almighty God is trying to prevent its members to meet their relatives coming from China to Korea. This is not the case, and in fact, it is Ms. O who is preventing the relatives to meet the CAG members. Obviously, the CCP and the anti-cultists are interested in their propaganda rather than in the welfare of the families.

Nine international NGOs specialized in the defense of religious liberty, including CAP-LC, which has consultative status at the United Nations’ ECOSOC, have signed an appeal (below), dated August 31, to end this ruthless persecution of harmless refugees, strongly condemning the actions of both the CCP and the Korean anti-cultists.
Henan, Jiangxi, Zhejiang, sinicization advances: crosses burnt, Party flags and slogans on churches

In Shanghai the "basic values of socialism" are exalted on the pediment of the church. A painting of the Last Supper removed in Henan. Communities forced to sing patriotic hymns. Shaolin Monastery in Shaoshan must hold a flag-raising ceremony every morning. "The churches seem more and more like government offices".

See video at: https://bit.ly/2C3qqwW

By Wang Zhicheng

AsiaNews.it (28.08.2018) - https://bit.ly/2C3qqwW - In the name of the sinicization, to create a Christianity with "Chinese characteristics", the government authorities are burning crosses on the bell towers, replacing them with the red flags of China; slogans praising the Party and the values of socialism are exposed on religious buildings, erasing sacred images, that are considered too Western.

In recent days in Henan, the cross of a Protestant church was burned in Anyang, Shuiyi County (see video); another was demolished in Hebei; another one in Luoyang has been replaced with the red flag (see photo 2). Even a Catholic center in Anyang had to display the flag (see photo 3).

In a church in the province, the authorities demanded the removal of the cross, paintings with calligraphy of verses from the Bible and a painting of the Last Supper.

Similar events also take place in Jiangxi. Testimonies gathered by Chinaaid in Xinyu County say that churches are forced to wave the national flag, to display a picture of President Xi Jinping and slogans praising socialism. Many crosses have been destroyed, including that of the evangelical church of Jieken.

At least 40 churches in Shangrao have been forced to display banners that prohibit the preaching of non-Chinese people and prohibit entry to young people under the age of 18.
In Zhejiang, in Legin, the authorities have forced the churches to exalt the Chinese Communist Party, by singing patriotic anthems at a flag-raising ceremony and pushing for concerts with nationalist programs.

In the Pudong region of Shanghai, the Xuanqiao’s Church of Jesus Christ had to display the slogan on the "basic values of socialism".

Dozens of domestic churches have been closed in Shenyang (Liaoning) and Xuzhou (Jiangsu) forcing communities to join the Three-Self Movement, the official government controlled Protestant community.

Sinicization, the slogan launched by Xi Jinping, aims to force all religions to assimilate Chinese culture and above all to submit to the authority of the Communist Party. According to many Chinese faithful, "under the mantle of patriotism, religions are being emptied of the elements of their faith and are seen as political instruments at the service of the government and the Party". A Catholic comments to AsiaNews: "At this stage, with the red flags, the patriotic songs, the ban on young people taking part, the churches seem more and more like government offices".

No religion escapes this homogenization. Since yesterday, the Shaolin Buddhist monastery in Shaoshan (Henan) has also carried out the flag-raising ceremony every morning (see photo 4). The whole Chinese Buddhist Association has decided to join in the initiative.

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**An open letter to the Italian Minister of Economy, Mr. Giovanni Tria**

"While discussing economy with China, do not forget religious liberty"

28 August 2018

Dear Mr. Tria:

We wish you a fruitful visit to China on behalf of Italian economic interests.

Last July, Italy was an official participant in "Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom" in Washington D.C. There, 82 countries solemnly agreed that religious liberty should be regarded as a non-negotiable cornerstone of international relations.

We hope that the good economic relationships between China and Italy may help you in raising the matter of the gross violations of religious liberty in China with your Chinese counterparts, violations that became even worse with the new laws on religion that came into force in 2018.

Reliable academic sources report that one and a half million Chinese are detained in “transformation through education” camps because of their religious beliefs. They include Uyghur and non-Uyghur Muslims, Tibetan Buddhists, Christians of several denominations, and members of new religious movements banned as “heterodox teachings” (xie jiao) and continuously defamed through fake news campaigns, including The Church of Almighty God and Falun Gong. Several NGOs documented numerous instances of mass arrests, extra-judicial killings, and torture. Even in the government-controlled religious communities, religion is treated in the same way as pornography, since it is entirely forbidden to minors, who are not even allowed to enter places of worship.
Laudably, Italy is a leading country in defending religious liberty internationally. We trust that your visit to China will be an opportunity to reiterate this position.

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

**Will Germany deliver another victim to her persecutors on August 31?**

*In April, Germany deported back to China an Uyghur asylum seeker who “disappeared” after his repatriation. Now, Germany has apologized for the “mistake,” yet plans to deport on August 31 Sister Zhao of The Church of Almighty God, who will likely “disappear” as well.*

Bitter Winter (27.08.2018) - [https://bit.ly/2ogX0BT](https://bit.ly/2ogX0BT) - German authorities have announced that on August 31 they will forcibly deport to China Sister Zhao, an asylum seeker currently detained in Ingelheim who resisted repatriation on July 9.

Nine NGOs active in the field of religious liberty wrote on August 1 to German Chancellor Angela Merkel urging her to intervene on behalf of Sister Zhao.

Ms. Zhao is a member of The Church of Almighty God, a Chinese Christian new religious movement founded in 1991, which is heavily persecuted in China and is included since 1995 in the official list of xie jiao.

Xie jiao (customarily 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.”

A confidential CCP document leaked to Western media indicates that a new massive campaign for “eradicating” xie jiao and CAG has been launched in 2018, with the number of arrests and sentences increasing.

In April 2018, Germany deported back to China a Uyghur Muslim asylum seeker. Once he landed in China, he “disappeared,” and his lawyer and family have all reasons to fear the worst. Germany has now apologized calling the deportation “a mistake.” Apologies, however, did not save the Uyghur, and late apologies would not save Sister Zhao.
“Then they came for the Hui”: China tightens its persecution of Islam

The demonstration of August 8, 2018, with 30,000 Muslims preventing the demolition of a mosque outside Xinjiang, proves that China is cracking down on Islam per se, not on “Uyghur separatism” only.

Bitter Winter (21.08.2018) - https://bit.ly/2MLXQo4 - It is very rare to attend a human rights conference throughout the world without hearing somebody mentioning the famous poem “Then, They Came for Me” by German Lutheran pastor Martin Niemöller (1892-1984):

“... they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out—
Because I was not a trade unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—
Because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.”

Less often noted is that totalitarian regimes too learn from Niemöller's poem. Actually, they induce groups that are not yet persecuted to support the persecution of other groups. They do not realize they will be next. Totalitarian regimes always apply the old motto of King Philip II of Macedon (382-336 BCE), the father of Alexander the Great (356-323 BCE), which the Romans translated as “divide et impera,” “divide and rule.”

For example, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) recruits Christian House Church pastors to support its persecution of groups listed as xie jiao. When these pastors will no longer be useful, they will also be arrested, and this has indeed already happened in the past.

We are witnessing in these very days how this strategy works in the Chinese Muslim community. The two largest groups of Muslims in China, each with an estimated population between eight and ten millions, are the Uyghurs and the Hui. Most Uyghurs live in Xinjiang. Hui are distributed all over China, although prevalently in the northwestern part of the country. There are Hui Muslims living outside China and ethnical Hui who are not Muslim, but the great majority of Hui is composed of Muslims living within Chinese borders.

Both Uyghurs and Hui have a history of revolts against Chinese Imperial power. The Hui rebelled repeatedly against the Qing dynasty. However, the CCP built a narrative opposing the Hui and Uyghurs (whose relations had often been tense even before Communist rule, as they speak different languages and follow different interpretations of Islam). The CCP presented the Uyghurs as “bad” Muslims, separatist and inclined to terrorism, while the Hui were the “good” Muslims, integrated into the official system. In Tibet, where there is a sizeable Hui Muslim minority, the regime fomented the tension and created incidents opposing Hui Muslims and Tibetan Buddhists. Conversely, some Hui leaders supported openly the repression of Uyghurs in Xinjiang and Buddhists in Tibet.

For Chinese propaganda, the Hui were very important. They “proved” that Uyghurs were persecuted because they were “separatist,” not because they were Muslim. In fact, the CCP insisted, Muslims who are loyal to the Party and not “separatist” or “terrorist” are not persecuted, as the case of the Hui demonstrated.

All this is now coming to an end. The amendments to the laws on religion that came into force in 2018 signal a deep hostility, and announce massive crackdowns, on all religions.
International media reported that in Linxia, an Islamic region in western China’s Gansu province with a massive presence of Hui, entrance into mosques had been strictly forbidden to minors (just as entrance into Christian churches elsewhere in China), all religious education has been prohibited, and loudspeakers calling to prayers have been removed for all the mosques in the area.

It was easy to predict that Hui mosques demolition would soon follow, just as Uyghur mosques are demolished elsewhere. In August 2018, the government took step to demolish the large Grand Mosque in the town of Weizhou, in Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region. On August 8, 30,000 Huis gathered to protect the mosque in a massive demonstration that took the government by surprise. The protest continued in the following days, until on August 10 a spokesperson for the local government read a document to the crowd announcing that plans for demolishing the mosque would be “delayed.” The document did not guarantee the mosque would not be demolished.

Some Hui leaders, and others in China, may now rightly apply to themselves Niemöller’s famous poem:

“… they came for the xie jiao, and I did not speak out—
Because my religion was not classified as a xie jiao.

Then they came for the Uyghurs and I did not speak out—
Because I was not a Uyghur.

Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.”

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**Hope for Sister Zou Demei: Lawyer files motion to reopen her case**

Bitter Winter (13.08.2018) - [https://bit.ly/2nBFA2w](https://bit.ly/2nBFA2w) - Readers of Bitter Winter may be familiar with the case of Ms. Zou Demei, a Chinese woman detained in Detroit and facing deportation back to China, where she will be arrested and probably executed.

Ms. Zou was until 2016 the regional leader of The Church of Almighty God (CAG), a Christian new religious movement banned in China, in the four provinces of Yunnan, Guizhou, Chongqing, and Sichuan. This made her one of the top leaders of the CAG in China, and one of the most wanted by the authorities, with a substantial bounty placed on her head. As all CAG members, she destroyed all evidence of her true identity and went under the pseudonym of Yao Lu.

In 2016, Ms. Zou was informed that she was wanted not only as a leader of a banned religious movement, which was already bad enough but on trumped up charges of espionage, which might lead to the death penalty. She managed to escape from China with the passport of another person with her picture pasted on it and reach South Korea. Since South Korea, unlike the U.S. and Canada, has not granted asylum to any CAG refugee and it was unsafe for her to live there with a false passport, she decided to move to the U.S. She landed in Detroit on January 24, 2017, where her passport was detected as false and she was arrested.

Language problems prevented her and a few co-religionists who initially tried to help her to make her case understandable to the American authorities, and her asylum request was denied on December 4, 2017, with an order that she should be deported back to China. Her appeal was rejected on May 22, 2018.
At this stage, the CAG contacted several NGOs and instructed a specialized lawyer, Mr. Russell Abrutyn of Detroit, who took over representation of Ms. Zou and was informed that Homeland Security intended to deport her back to China after August 15, 2018.

Mr. Abrutyn has now filed a motion to reopen with the Board of Immigration Appeals, the highest administrative immigration court in the United States. This motion was based on new evidence that only recently became available thanks to the campaign by the international human rights community, a campaign that has drawn increased attention to Ms. Zou’s plight. As a result of this campaign, the people whose lives she touched through her leadership role in China with the CAG recognized her picture (although she had known her under a different name) and came to her defense by corroborating her role within the CAG.

Also, Mr. Abrutyn explained, “the Board of Immigration Appeals has been provided with official government reports, which should have been but weren’t provided before, highlighting the religious persecution in China against the CAG and its adherents.”

Bitter Winter, who has led the campaign in favor of Ms. Zou, trust that, with the new documents, deportation to China, which would lead to her arrest and detention and most probably to her execution, may be avoided. However, Ms. Zou needs any help she may receive from institutional and private advocates for religious liberty and human rights.

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**Thousands of Muslims protest against the demolition of the Weizhou Grand Mosque**

AsiaNews.it (11.08.2018) - [https://bit.ly/2vCGv7w](https://bit.ly/2vCGv7w) - Protests have broken out in the Ningxia Autonomous Region after the authorities decided to tear down the Grand Mosque in Weizhou.

Thousands of ethnic Hui Muslims protested Thursday, when they occupied the square in front of the place of worship. As a result of the rally, the authorities were forced to postpone the demolition.

The head of the county tried to reassure the faithful, telling them that the mosque would not be torn down until a deal is reached to build another one.

The mosque’s management committee said that the authorities sent a demolition notice on 3 August with a deadline for this Friday. According to the order, the mosque, which was completed last year, had not been granted the necessary planning and construction permits.

After days of negotiations between the authorities and religious leaders, it was agreed earlier on Thursday that the government would not demolish the mosque but remove eight of its domes.

The new mosque replaced an earlier one that had been built to replace Weizhou’s 600-year-old Chinese-style mosque, which was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution.

One of two red banners strung from the mosque’s exterior walls read: “Resolutely support the Chinese Communist Party, defend ethnic unity, safeguard the freedom of faith”.

The banner stress subordination to the Party but demand religious freedom as promised by the Chinese constitution.
Tearing down places of worship, including many churches, is part of an ongoing campaign to “sinicise” China’s religions, Christianity included. Churches too have been affected.

“Sinicisation” means submission to the Party and the elimination of foreign influences, including in art and architecture.

In the case of Islam, Muslim icons and Arabic signs have been removed from streets in towns and counties across the region.

For decades, China’s Hui Muslims have been left in peace by the regional government. However, as the government intensifies its crackdown against Uyghurs in Xinjiang, the Hui are also being targeted.

The government fears a rise in radicalism. For this reason, several mosques in Ningxia have been ordered to cancel public Arabic classes, whilst a number of private Arabic schools have been told to shut down.

Children under 16 are no longer allowed to engage in religious activity or study in Linxia, a deeply Islamic county in Gansu, a province next to Ningxia, in western China. The latter had been a haven of comparative religious tolerance for local ethnic Hui Muslims.

Recently the authorities have instructed mosques to display national flags and stop sounding the call to prayer to reduce “noise pollution”.

In view of what is happening, Hui Muslims fear they will be subjected to the kind of surveillance and repression that Uyghurs have to endure in Xinjiang.

In the past year, “The winds have shifted”, said a senior local imam who requested anonymity. “Frankly, I’m very afraid they’re going to implement the Xinjiang model here.”

“They want to secularise Muslims, to cut off Islam at the roots,” he added. “These days, children are not allowed to believe in religion: only in communism and the party.”

More than a thousand boys used to attend his mid-sized mosque to study Quranic basics during summer and winter school holidays but now they are banned from even entering the premises.

Parents were told the ban on extracurricular Quranic study was for their children’s own good, so they could rest and focus on regular coursework.

There are more than 10 million Hui in China, half of the country's Muslim population, according to 2012 government figures.

In Linxia, they are well integrated with the Han ethnic majority and have always had the opportunity to practise their faith freely.
More destroyed mosques in Xinjiang

Seven out of eight mosques in one of the areas of Lianmuqin town in Xinjiang have been demolished; the remaining one is strictly supervised.

The Islamic symbols have been removed from the top of the mosque and the words “Freedom, Equality, Justice, Rule of Law” are written above the entrance.

Bitter Winter (09.08.2018) - https://bitterwinter.org/more-destroyed-mosques-in-xinjiang/ - According to a local source, seven of the eight mosques in the Shanshan county’s 11th Brigade of Lianmuqin town, have already been destroyed. The local Muslims are allowed to attend the remaining mosque, but there are more than twice as many government officers as worshipers inside it during prayers. The local authorities keep some guards in between the prayers as well. “Every time there are 13 Uyghurs practicing namāz, 37 government personnel are on duty,” a local Uyghur Muslim said. “We need to show our ID or give our fingerprints each time we enter the mosque for the five daily namāz prayers. Every time we kneel down and pray to Allah, the government officials stand beside us and stare directly at us. When they’re looking right at you, it’s impossible to feel calm. I finally stopped going.”

The Islamic symbols on the top of the mosque have disappeared, and the words “Freedom, Equality, Justice, Rule of Law” are written on a plaque above the entrance, instead.

Reported by Li Benbo
A mosque used to be on this lot in Lianmu Qinkan village in the 2nd Squad; only the florally-patterned walls remain.

The entrance to the mosque in the 6th Squad. The symbols on the top have been completely dismantled. The mosque’s original appearance is no longer visible.
An empty lot where the mosque of the Experimental Team of the 2nd Squad used to stand. The mosque was demolished in February 2018.

News » Persecution » China

**Underground Catholic priests removed in China**

*Authorities send two priests packing in Gansu province for holding a summer camp for youngsters*
Tianshui Diocese's open church holds a summer camp for young people in 2017. Two underground priests of Maijiqu Ganquan Catholic Church have been removed after being accused of holding a summer camp. (Photo by Faith Weekly)

UCA News (09.08.2018) - https://bit.ly/2MiCyOO - Two underground parish priests in China's Gansu province have been removed after being accused of holding a summer camp for a youth group at their church.

Father Wang Yiqin of Hui county and Father Li Shidong of Leling city of Shandong province were serving Maijiqu Ganquan Catholic Church in Tianshui Diocese.

Tianshui Municipal Ethnic and Religious Affairs Committee has sent a letter asking the local branch of the state-controlled Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association to send personnel to replace the priests, who were accused of holding a summer camp for Bosco Youth Group at the church and sent back to their hometowns.

On July 21, the committee issued a letter stating that no association personnel were involved with the church, which had become a base for underground clergy.

It asked the association to appoint personnel "to strengthen the management of religious affairs in accordance with the law and according to the regulations on religious affairs."

Father Zhao Jianzhang of Tianshui's open church is deputy director and secretary-general of the Gansu Catholic Patriotic Association and Catholic Administration Commission.

He told ucanews.com that he had been informed of the incident and the parish office had received a letter but he was out of town and would handle the incident when he returned.
"There are people in the government who want to break the current situation. They do not allow the underground church to exist and must convert it to be open because only Tianshui in northwest China still has an underground community," a source said.

Maijiqu Ganquan Catholic Church is one of only two underground churches in Tianshui Diocese.

Built in 1921, the church grounds cover 7,000 square meters containing a church, complex buildings and houses. The church has been approved by Yuanbeidao district government.

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**Chinese ministry of state security takes over the campaign against Bitter Winter**

*Since the arrests of reporters did not stop Bitter Winter, China escalates the campaign against our magazine and adopts extraordinary measures to prevent the leaks of secret documents.*

Bitter Winter (03.08.2018) - [https://bit.ly/2MoKieG](https://bit.ly/2MoKieG) - Bitter Winter reported on August 1 that several reporters that have sent information and documents to our magazine were arrested in China. The hunt for our correspondents and the arrests continue, and we are publishing new details on the campaign against Bitter Winter.

The incident that persuaded the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to launch a nationwide crackdown against Bitter Winter was an article we published on May 18, 2018, which included the reproduction of the confidential Plan for the Special Campaign on Legal Investigation and Prosecution of South Korean Christian Infiltrations, directed at the house churches established by South Korean Christian groups in China. We have now learned that the publication of this top-secret document created problems in the relationships between China and South Korea.

As a result, CCP issued another secret document, which we publish today, whose English translation reads as follows:

"Bitter Winter, an overseas hostile website, published an article named ‘CHINA LAUNCHES A SPECIAL CAMPAIGN TO CRACK DOWN ON SOUTH KOREAN CHRISTIAN GROUPS,’ relating to the sub-projects and attaching images of the special campaign conducted in various provinces, cities, and counties. This article has been reproduced and hyped by some hostile media outlets outside the border. The contents published on the website raise the suspicion that they may also have illegally obtained the document “Plan for the Special Campaign on Legal Investigation and Prosecution of South Korean Christian Infiltrations,” which was jointly produced by the Central United Front Work Department, the Ministry of Public Security, and State Bureau of Religious Affairs. According to the demand of the Ministry of Public Security, the Provincial Department of Public Security has filed a special case to trace the source of the confidentiality leakage, firmly crack down on any illegal perpetration on suspicion of lawlessly obtaining the state confidential information, illegally possessing the state confidential information, secret documents, material, items, and intendedly leaking the state confidential information. The special case should be reported to the departmental supervisor. A sub-case should be filed in a unified code, and immediate investigations relating to the special campaign against the confidentiality leakage should be conducted.”

The result of this document was a national manhunt, leading to the arrest of dozens of correspondents of Bitter Winter. The fact that, meanwhile, we published another top-
secret document, the action plan against the movements listed as *xie jiao* (“heterodox teachings”) for 2018-2019, presumably did not endear us to the CCP either.

We are informed that the CCP, following its best traditions, is also preparing a campaign of fake news against *Bitter Winter* and is busy producing false documents “proving” that we are “connected” with several groups included in the list of *xie jiao*.

Our latest information, dated August 2, is that the CCP lost confidence in the ability of the local Public Security Bureaus, and perhaps of Office 610, which specializes in fighting *xie jiao*, to crack down on *Bitter Winter*, and the Chinese Ministry of State Security is now taking over the investigations on the case. This campaign is in turn classified as top-secret, and its details have only been shared with officers ranked at the level above PSB (Public Security Bureaus), including leaders ranked as directors of sections or above in the departments of PSB, Procuratorates, Courts of Law, Justice Bureaus, and so on. Investigations are being conducted on a comprehensive scale.

Due to the leaks to *Bitter Winter*, the CCP is also organizing a new “confidentiality education” programs among the units in the realm of politics and law, asking relevant personnel to take measures to secure confidentiality, and warning that any breach of the security protocol will be severely punished.

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**The denial of religious freedom in China is a challenge to the whole world**

![Image of Aaron Rhodes](image)

*The idea of human rights is founded on the principle of natural rights. But official Chinese human rights principles state that human rights are rights given by society to the individual.*

By Aaron Rhodes
As a human rights activist, I consider the denial of religious freedom, including the persecution of members of the Church of Almighty God, and the denial of other fundamental human rights in China as paramount problems in the world today. These problems have vast implications not only for individual freedom, but for the idea of freedom itself.

First, these problems affect so many millions of our brothers and sisters. China has a population of over 1.4 billion people. That’s more than the total population of North America, South America, Australia, New Zealand, and Western Europe combined.

The mind-boggling numbers translate into huge numbers of victims. According to Human Rights Without Frontiers, which keeps track of prisoners of conscience around the world, China has incarcerated the highest number of believers of all denominations in the world. Experts say the number of people being detained for their religious beliefs and observances is the highest since the Cultural Revolution.

This includes large numbers of Evangelical Protestants and Pentecostal Protestants belonging to underground house churches. Well over half of China’s Protestants belong to such independent house churches. The pressure on these organizations has intensified dramatically. They are being pushed hard to register and knuckle under to government authority, and those that do not are often labeled as “evil cults.” They are facing intensified scrutiny by security forces and seizure of their property, as well as physical attacks and arrests of pastors.

At the same time, the number of Protestant Christians in China is growing at an amazing pace and is considered to amount to a religious awakening. The number of Chinese Protestants has increased by about 10 percent every year since 1979, and given this rate of growth, China will have the largest population of Christians in the world within 12 years.

China’s millions of Protestants do not view themselves or behave as political groups or as a political opposition. But any religious community, in an authoritarian or totalitarian state that demands absolute loyalty, is a threat to the authority of the state. In recent years, the Chinese state has grown more controlling and more intrusive.

Authorities are invoking particular elements of the Chinese social and philosophical tradition to justify their authoritarianism and ethnic nationalism. Religion is a threat to this militantly atheist regime; the authorities even come down on citizens trying to celebrate the Persian festival of Nowruz.

But the pressing problem is what will happen when growing Protestant Christianity collides with a policy of growing state control over individual rights and freedoms, a policy that even extends to establishing loyalty records for each citizen based on monitoring their private reading and communication habits. The Chinese censors are so paternalistic, they have even banned the video game “The Sims” because it depicts same-sex relationships.

China is home to well over 10 million Catholics. A new and highly dubious agreement with the Vatican will bring them further under government control.
Local authorities in China forbid fasting on Ramadan and burn the Koran. According to the Christian nonprofit ChinaAid, the authorities want to eliminate Islam from Xinjiang altogether.

Here again, the regime is willfully and needlessly putting itself on a collision course with Muslims and feeding the Islamic extremism it claims to be resisting. The Uyghur people are the indigenous population of the Xinjiang region, which has only been under Chinese control since the 18th century.

Now the Uyghurs amount to less than half the population. They are subjected to discriminatory profiling using intrusive technology, as well as travel restrictions. But what is most disturbing is that Uyghur Muslims are being forced into so-called “re-education camps.” According to some estimates, about a million people have been detained in these camps and subjected to torture, including being forced to eat pork and drink alcohol.

And of course, we must not neglect to mention the violent oppression faced by practitioners of the Falun Gong spiritual discipline since 1999. A special bureau of the government has been set up with the explicit aim of eradicating them. Indeed, many disappear after being arrested and forced into prisons or labor camps.

China violates religious freedom and other human rights but claims to uphold human rights with policies that have raised the standard of living in the country. Everyone understands that Chinese culture places a great emphasis on collective responsibilities and is not as individualistic as societies in the Western world. But that is no excuse for violating individual rights, and individual rights are not inconsistent with group loyalty.

It is not an exaggeration to say that the Chinese regime does not accept the concept of human rights at all. The regime makes no commitment to upholding the natural rights of individuals, rights that are prior to the state and that transcend, and constrain, the laws made by governments and legislatures.

The idea of human rights is founded on the principle of natural rights. But official Chinese human rights principles state that human rights are rights given by society to the individual. So, if “society,” which means the state, can give rights, then those rights can be taken away. Human rights are thus no different than other laws.

The victims of China’s oppressive policies know this is not true. They understand that human rights exist and are sacrosanct, because they have lost those rights. And as people who understand human rights, they not only need our protection, they need to be welcomed into our pluralistic and free societies, at least until China stops violating international human rights norm and starts truly assisting in the project of building a world of free states, at peace with one another, where all can think and worship as they wish.
Chinese churches ‘more careful who they allow in’, as raids increase

World Watch Monitor (26.07.2018) - [https://bit.ly/2KrEZtg](https://bit.ly/2KrEZtg) - Churches in China are becoming more careful over who they let in to their buildings, as government pressure increases following the implementation of new religious regulations earlier this year.

Local authorities have been pressured to take action. In Guangzhou, for example, the capital of the southern province Guangdong, a local source told World Watch Monitor the authorities are “trying to stir up the larger more influential churches to see what reaction they will get from the people”.

As a result “churches have become more careful in who they allow in”, the source said. “Newcomers are first questioned by the pastor.”

The government is especially wary of “high profile” churches that have access to international networks, draw crowds of people and are very active.

“Churches that hold meetings in commercial buildings are targeted,” the source said. “The authorities close church venues and more landlords refuse to continue rental contracts with churches. Hence, these local churches are forced to return to house meetings.”

Lacking a place to meet, many churches have split into smaller groups. A girl in the Panyu district of Guangzhou told World Watch Monitor that she now attends two different meetings – one small and one larger – which she visits on alternate weeks to make it more difficult for the government to keep track of her movements.

**Ongoing harassment**

Two weeks ago, the Bible Reformed Church in Guangzhou was forced to stop its meeting for a third time in a month following a police raid, during which a number of Christians were arrested for questioning.

“We had just begun [the service] when 30-40 personnel from the State Food and Drug Administration, the cultural law enforcement brigade, as well as the police, came and raided the venue where we gather,” Pastor Huang Xiaoning told China Aid. “We had to
stop our worship. Now, I have to go with them. People from the religious affairs bureau found me to question me.”

That same day local authorities had sent a notice ordering the church to stop its activities, having already issued previous notices to “stop illegal education”. The church was also fined 50,000 yuan (US $7,500) by the local religious affairs bureau.

“This is a new approach,” said World Watch Monitor’s source. ”The local government is no longer demanding churches to register but chooses instead to issue a fine.”

One of the church’s staff members, who wished to remain anonymous, suggested one reason for the ongoing harassment could be the church’s alleged international connections.

Guangdong, because of its position beside the South China Sea, has become China’s economic powerhouse and attracts people from all over the world.

In 2017 Pastor Huang was arrested for organising a training course where “one of the speakers was from an overseas denomination which the government, in their understanding, perceives to be a ‘cult’ and which has international connections”, said the church worker, who was present when police interrupted the event.

‘Dark spirits’

The Bible Reformed Church has refused to officially register with the government, although the authorities have pressed for it since its inception in 2010, according to China Aid.

Many churches in China are reluctant to register as they are afraid the government will use the information they provide to control them.

Beijing has long sought the Sinicisation of religion, through which religions considered foreign to China, whose adherents may attract foreign support, are encouraged to become “more Chinese”.

“The coming years are likely to be very difficult for Christians throughout China, with even more oppressive laws on the agenda,” Paul Hattaway told Christian Today last month, at the release of his book describing Christianity’s growth in China despite attempts by the government to clamp down on religion.

“Many people have mistakenly thought that economic reforms equals the collapse of communism,” he said. “In fact, while China has accumulated wealth and emerged as a major player on the world stage, the underlying dark spirits of atheistic Marxism have not disappeared.”

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**Bitter Winter event opens religious liberty week on Capitol Hill, Washington**
The first side event of a week centered on the meeting of 80 foreign ministers in Washington D.C. was hosted by Bitter Winter and devoted to the persecution of Uyghurs, Falun Gong, and The Church of Almighty God in China.

80 foreign ministers arrived in Washington DC on July 23, invited by U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo for the first ever "Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom," which will continue throughout the week.

In addition to the plenary meeting, a number of side events are also scheduled, some of them on Capitol Hill. The first side event was hosted by Bitter Winter together with a number of religious communities persecuted in China. Editor-in-Chief Massimo Introvigne introduced Bitter Winter, discussed "reformation through education camps" in China and the massive fake news campaigns launched by the Chinese Communist Party to defame The Church of Almighty God and other groups it persecuted as "heterodox."

Rosita Soryte, president of the International Observatory of Religious Liberty of Refugees (ORLIR), called for an increased awareness of the persecution in China, which should lead to asylum being granted to refugees of The Church of Almighty God. She also mentioned the Zou Demei case in Detroit, where a leader of the same Church faces deportation back to China, where she may be executed.

Attorney Alex Amicarelli detailed the cases filed with the U.N. Working Group on Arbitrary Detention in Geneva against China on behalf of two members of The Church of Almighty God detained in China. Before the discussion, the audience heard moving testimonies from and on behalf of victims of torture in China of The Church of Almighty God, Falun Gong, and Uyghurs. Stories of one million Uyghurs detained in the dreaded camps, including soccer stars, actors, intellectuals, of torture and organ harvesting of Falun Gong members, and of systematic violence against the Christians of The Church of Almighty God moved to tears the audience, which included academics, seasoned politicians and diplomats, and human right activists.
Xinjiang’s children in orphanages as their parents held in re-education camps

World Watch Monitor (20.07.2018) - https://bit.ly/2OgGrRN - As a rally in support of China’s prisoners of conscience took place in the streets of Washington DC last week, an ongoing Chinese government crackdown on its Uyghur-people in Xinjiang province is tearing both Muslim and Christian families and communities apart.

The rally, hosted by five rights groups in the United States and held last Thursday (12 July), called for renewed attention to the hundreds of thousands of Chinese held because of their political, religious or other conscientiously held beliefs.

Among them are the ethnic Turkic-speaking Muslim-majority Uyghur people in China’s north-western Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. Ever since ethnic riots in 2009 in the regional capital, and a wave of high-profile Chinese train station bombings attributed to Uyghurs, the area has been restive.

Since 2017 the government has initiated an “anti-terror” campaign here, against what it calls the rising threat of terrorism and separatism.

Hundreds of thousands – reports say it might be over a million – Uyghur and Kazakh men have been rounded up and taken to ‘re-education Centres’, also known as “study centres” or “mind-transformation centres”, where they are detained for weeks or even months.

“The centres are instruments of an unprecedented cultural cleansing of these primarily Islamic ethnic minorities. ‘Inmates’ are forced to abandon their own language, speak only Chinese, sing patriotic Communist songs, renounce their religion, declare allegiance to the Chinese government, and support national unification,” a local source, who did not wish to be named, told World Watch Monitor.

No answer

Although most of those detained have a Muslim background, those who have converted to Christianity have also been caught up in the crackdown.

Many are arrested during surprise raids and taken to an unknown location, leaving wives and children in uncertainty and often without any income, forcing them to live off their savings.

“They are scrambling to make sense of what has happened and are forced to dig deep, to find the faith and courage to push on with life”, according to the source, who recently visited the area.

“They are desperate for news of their loved ones who have disappeared, and wives have to find some kind of work to pay for food and their children’s education. As religious meetings are forbidden, the Christians are scared to even meet in small groups, and feel very lonely without the usual opportunities to meet,” he said.

Women like Patigul*, whose husband was taken to prison because he is a Christian, have to answer their children’s questions about why God would allow their father to be imprisoned. “For a long time Patigul’s young son couldn’t understand why this was happening and repeatedly asked his mother for answers. Patigul’s replies just never seemed to relieve his sadness,” the source, who met with her, said.
Many Uyghur children have been sent to orphanages. (Photo: World Watch Monitor)

Other children, whose parents or guardians have been taken to the camps, end up in orphanages until their parents are released, as Radio Free Asia reported earlier this month. A local police officer told the broadcaster that in one village, where approximately 40% of the more than 1,700 residents had been taken to re-education camps, some 50 to 60 children had been sent to orphanages.

Mental breakdown

Women are also rounded up. Alitenggul* told rights group ChinaAid she did not recognise her sister after she returned from detention in a so-called “re-education” centre. “She’s had a mental breakdown. In prison, she had to stay on duty for two hours each night, standing next to the wall. The guards forced the Uyghur inmates to kick her head if she refused to comply. She was afraid. She stood up immediately as soon as someone kicked her head. Now, she still wakes and stands up during night. We asked her why, and she answered us that she was on duty. She was forced to take medication and receive vaccinations in prison ... Her hair fell out. She is not my old sister anymore. (The government) is so cruel, so cruel,” Alitenggul said.

Although she is no longer in a camp, she is still under surveillance, Alitenggul added. “The family members have to stay with her during the night, because the police break in each night to search her house, suspecting her of hiding guns. The police search the house once a day.”

‘Peaceful and progressing lives’

Helatti Shamarkhan* told ChinaAid that in the camp where he was held, prisoners were divided into three groups: people with religious beliefs, including Christians, people who have travelled abroad, and people who did not comply with government orders.

Many of the vendors who once sold their wares in the Erdaoqiao District and the Grand Bazaar in Xinjiang’s capital Urumqi were also taken to re-education centers because “the police used the excuse that they had been to Turkey years ago”, according to Alitenggul, who said her sister saw some of them in the camp where she was held.

“The government found stamps of the Customs and Border Protection of Turkey on their passports”, Alitenggul said, adding that the gates of both tourist places, famous for ethnic minority souvenirs and clothes, are now closed.
Shamarkhan said that when he returned to his village he found that most of the men had been rounded up and taken to camps and that his relatives had started to speak Chinese instead of their native language.

The clampdown on the Uyghurs in Xinjiang will be discussed at next week’s religious freedom summit in Washington DC, hosted by the US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, as the President of the World Uyghur Congress, Dolkun Isa, will be speaking at one of the side events.

The Chinese government has denied the existence of the camps. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying told Reuters in April: “Everyone can see that people of all ethnicities in Xinjiang live and work in peace and contentment, and enjoy peaceful and progressing lives.”

(*) Real names withheld for security reasons

Half a thousand members of The Church of Almighty God arrested

Bitter Winter (14.07.2018) - https://bit.ly/2LqjZHV - On June 26-28, a full-scale “Operation Thunder” in Liaoning Province resulted in massive arrests of members of this Christian new religious movement. In just three days, more than 500 believers of The Church of Almighty God were arrested all over the province, prompting thousands to flee their homes. The number of arrests continues to grow.

On June 26, Liaoning Public Security Department gathered its police forces and started the arrests by conducting stakeouts and using the information they had previously collected by monitoring and tracking members of the Church. In some cases, they entered homes pretending to be plumbers or couriers.

Nearly 300 people were arrested in Dalian and Panjin, 47 in Dandong, 39 in Chaoyang, 36 in Benxi, 23 in Jizhou, 19 in Shenyang, 14 in Fuxin, nine in Fushun, eight in Huludao, five in Yingkou, two in Tieling, and one in Anshan. Their homes were searched, large amounts of books on belief in God and the Church’s and personal belongings were taken away by the police.

A source in the CCP government revealed that this special operation was classified as top secret. To prevent any leaks prior to the arrests, the government kept information on the targets from police officers and purposefully dispatched them to other areas during the operation. Officers were required to sign a confidentiality agreement. The authorities released the list of names for arrest only in the final ten minutes before the operation commenced on June 26. Officers also received a group notice through WeChat, Chinese social media platform, strictly requiring them to work day and night to complete the arrests.

Based on the information from sources who wished to remain anonymous, as early as February and March, the CCP government issued a number of confidential memos ordering comprehensive punishment and arrests of believers from The Church of Almighty God. They even engaged nationwide forces, ordering the police in different regions, civil affairs bureaus, vice offices, and neighborhood committees to search for members of the Church, mobilizing village cadres, retired workers, cleaners, and building managers to participate in the operation. The CCP government made a plan to register all
The Church of Almighty God members whose cases have been put on record and who are well-known, as well as all family members of those who have escaped abroad and who have applied for asylum in other countries, then arrest them all in one sweep on June 26.

The Church of Almighty God is suffering the toughest and most severe persecutions of all house churches in China. The establishment and rapid growth of this Church have been a constant source of fear for the CCP government, and secret orders have come from top leadership many times to eradicate The Church of Almighty God.

The Church claims that as many as 380,000 its members were arrested in 2011-2013. Another massive wave of arrests followed in 2014. Starting in January 2018, the CCP government has once again rolled out a nationwide operation directly targeting The Church of Almighty God. In May, the Church’s members in Jiangsu Province and Chongqing City suffered concurrent large-scale arrests and suppression: at least 120 people were arrested.

Source: Direct Reports from China.

Over 30 Church of Almighty God members arrested within one month

Bitter Winter (17.07.2018) - https://bit.ly/2LoiNVm - On July 14, the city of Xuzhou issued a notice reporting that from mid-May to mid-June, 32 members of The Church of Almighty God were arrested in Xuzhou, Jiangsu Province, 15 of them are still being detained. The Jiangsu police have been carrying out province-wide, large-scale arrests and suppression targeted at this Chinese Christian new religious movement since May.

According to the available information, members of the Church from nearly all of Xuzhou’s five municipal districts, three counties, and two county-level cities were arrested: ten from Jiawang district, three from Tongshan district, three from Gulou district, eight from the city of Pizhou, four from the city of Xinyi, one from Feng county, and three from Suining county.

One of the arrested is an 80-year old elder who was detained despite her ill health and whose condition has worsened since the arrest on June 15 and subsequent police interrogation. According to accounts by those who saw her at the police station, she could not even walk steadily, and the corners of her mouth were black and blue. She had clearly undergone brutal torture by the police.

Bitter Winter has continuously reported about the continuous persecutions of The Church of Almighty God, in some cases with as many as 500 believers arrested in a short period of time. In just 20 days in May, in Jiangsu’s major cities of Nanjing and Yangzhou, over 70 members of The Church of Almighty God were arrested and their homes were raided by authorities, some of them have not been heard from since. The Church members in Jiangsu are currently living under precarious circumstances, fearing that the number of arrests will most likely continue to climb.

Report by Ling Tian
Arbitrary detention: The attorney who challenged China

The London attorney, and president of the European Federation for Freedom of Belief, has filed a high-profile complaint against China at the United Nations’ Working Group on Arbitrary Detention.


Having earned a doctorate on International Order and Human Rights from La Sapienza University of Rome, with a dissertation on the protection of religious freedom in international law, he has dedicated the last twenty years to issues related to the protection of freedom of religion and belief, the rights of refugee and displaced persons, and other human rights and immigration matters.

He has extensively lectured in human rights, and has also taught a course on Human Rights, Minorities and Religious Freedom at Soochow University, Taiwan (ROC). He is a frequent speaker at academic and legal events and conferences in different countries.

He is the current chairman of the European Federation for Freedom of Belief (FOB), a non-sectarian body independent and autonomous of any faith, which operates throughout Europe advocating full and equal freedom of religion and belief for all individuals and groups.

Amicarelli has recently filed a complaint for arbitrary detention against China on behalf of two members of The Church of Almighty God before the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention of the United Nations. We have interviewed him about this procedure, which is taking place in Geneva, Switzerland.
What is the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention?

The Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD) is a body of the United Nations, established by the former Human Rights Commission with its resolution 1991/42 and entrusted, subsequently, to the Human Rights Council, with a single specific mandate “to receive and examine cases of arbitrary deprivation of liberty,” to use the UN’s own words.

The WGAD is composed of five individual members appointed by the Human Rights Council, in representation of all the five continents.

The WGAD presents annual reports to the Human Rights Council, carries out field missions, issues deliberations, and carries out investigations on individual complaints of arbitrary detention.

How are requests for examining specific cases filed with the WGAD?

Requests for examining complaints of arbitrary detention are filed by following some rules and guidelines provided by the WGAD.

Specifically, with the aim of helping the complainants and their representatives, the WGAD has created a model questionnaire to fill out, in order to provide as much detailed information as possible, so as to smooth the process and allow the WGAD to have all the necessary information about the case in first instance.

Following the model questionnaire is however not mandatory and in most cases, particularly when the complainants are represented by law firms, the complaints are more detailed and not just limited to the representation of facts.

How does the WGAD decide?

The WGAD follows a specific working method with special rules. After reviewing the complaint, the WGAD transmits a communication to the concerned state, giving it a chance to comment and reply to the complaint, and to provide information relating to the actual case.

The WGAD may decide to use the ordinary route, or the urgent one if the case suggests the urgent action would be appropriate in the specific case. The WGAD does take into account all information received in any way from the complainant, and also the views of the governments are considered in order to take a decision on the case. The government may decide not to comment nor to reply, but its behavior will still be taken into account by the WGAD.

Further comments from the complainant, or from the other “source” that submitted the complaint, and from the government, may be solicited by the WGAD, which will then render a final decision based on facts and evidences, and comments from both the source and the government.

How are WGAD decisions enforced?
It is important to bear in mind that even though the WGAD, when deciding on individual complaints, does not act as a jurisdiction or semi-jurisdiction, nonetheless its opinions are in fact decisions of some relevance and value. The WGAD, if a contravention of the Universal Declaration has been declared in the disposition, will detail the actions that the state will have to take to remedy the situation of the complainants, such as by releasing them, by providing effective remedy in form of reparations in accordance with international law, and by other means as well.

The procedure does not end when the opinion is issued by the WGAD. In fact, the working method of the WGAD also includes a follow-up procedure. The source and the government should provide the WGAD with up-to-date information about the actions taken by the authorities following the recommendations made by the WGAD in its opinion. They should report whether the detainee was released, or whether an investigation was conducted into the violations, and the outcome of such investigation, whether there were any changes or amendments in the legislation that had caused the violation, or any other actions were taken.

The WGAD does its best to help the states to comply with its decisions, and in fact does also offer assistance in the form of visits by the Working Group, should the authorities encounter any problems, for instance in amending the legislation or in taking some other actions.

Even though the sources and the governments are expected to follow up providing up-to-date information, however, the WGAD reserves the right to take any further actions following its own decisions, should new concerns be brought to its attention at any time.

We can then say that, while the WGAD officially issues opinions, these opinions are in fact decisions, including details about the actions to be taken by the governments that will have to comply with the WGAD recommendation. The WGAD will inform the Human Rights Council about the progresses, or failure to take actions by the state. Persuasion by the WGAD itself, and by lobbying groups, plays a vital role in the enforcement of the WGAD decisions by the concerned state.

You filed two WGAD requests concerning members of The Church of Almighty God. Can you shortly describe the cases?

The Church of Almighty God (CAG) is a Christian new religious movement that originated in China in the 1990s. Several hundred members of the CAG are detained in China on the ground of their faith only. About one year ago, I was contacted by some members of this group who were seeking some help from the European Federation for Freedom of Belief (FOB), which I am currently chairing, in respect of members escaping from China and willing to get refugee status in Europe. Recently, in my capacity as a lawyer specializing in international human rights law, I was instructed by The Church of Almighty God and filed two complaints on behalf of members of this minority who are being detained in China on the ground of their faith only. No other allegations whatsoever have ever been formulated in their respect, and they were arrested without warrant and detained pending a trial for several months. Both complainants were subject to torture, and denied any contact with their families and co-religionists after their arrest. They were arrested for being members of a xie jiao, the Chinese expression for “heterodox teachings,” often mistakenly translated as “evil cults” in Western literature. Art. 300 of the Criminal Law of the People’s Republic of China punishes activity in a xie jiao, for the sole and only fact of religious activity there. The law refers to “utilizing a superstitious sect or secret society to
sabotage the law,” but there is evidence that simply being an active member is enough to be considered as someone “utilizing” a group to “sabotage the law.”

I offered evidence that the provisions of Art. 300 conflict with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as with the articles of the Constitution of China guaranteeing freedom of religion (art. 36) and prohibiting arbitrary detention (art. 37). More importantly, the provisions of Art. 300 and all arrests made on the basis of this provision of law do conflict with customary international law, by which China is bound.

We understand that collecting evidence is always the main problem in WGAD cases. Totalitarian regimes do not give “certificates of persecution” to their victims... What evidence did you collect in support of these cases?

Collecting evidence is not easy, and it’s not even easy to receive detailed information about these cases, since the authorities prohibit any contact of the families and fellow members of the group with the detainees, to avoid in fact the collection of information. However, in both cases we were able to collect detailed information and affidavits. Very importantly, I was also able to obtain expert opinions by scholars and researchers who have been working in contact with this community for enough time to provide all the necessary information about their systematic persecution in China. They include an expert opinion by Professor Massimo Introvigne, who visited China twice in 2017, invited by the Anti-xie-jiao Association, which has direct connections with the government. I also relied on scholarly works and obviously articulated my legal assertions on the basis of precedents and of international law provisions in this field.

Probably, China will answer that the prisoners belong to a “cult” accused of serious crimes. How do you plan to counter this argument?

Following my method of work, I have anticipated some obvious arguments that the government may raise, including the claim that a “cult” has no right to freedom of religion and that other allegations may justify the arrests and detention. The answer is very clear and that is, being member of a religious group that is disliked by a government cannot justify the denial of basic principles, like the presumption of innocence and the right to a fair trial. Likewise, this does not justify torture, nor justifies forced labour, nor would allow the authorities to erase all basic human rights on the basis of a law that is inherently unjust and relies on discriminatory grounds, to use the WGAD jargon.

Furthermore, in these specific cases, as well as in hundreds of cases concerning members of The Church of Almighty God, the detainees were only arrested and sentenced to several years of detention because of their faith. Every time cases concerning members of The Church of Almighty God are brought to the attention of the People’s Republic of China, its representatives reply that in the past members of The Church of Almighty God were accused of severe crimes, hinting at a case of murder occurred at a McDonald’s restaurant in 2014, which has been proven to have been committed not by this religious community but by another one with a similar name.

Finally, according to international human rights law, all individuals have a right to freedom of religion or belief, no matter what they believe in. Any restrictions must comply with international human rights standards. Obviously, arresting people and detaining them for several years on the basis of their faith only does not comply at all with the international provisions.
I and my team are ready to counter other arguments that may be raised by the state in these matters.

**What do the cases tell us about the situation of religious liberty in China in general?**

China is a great country, with a long history, and where religion and spirituality have developed for centuries positively influencing the society.

Religious liberty is guaranteed by the Chinese Constitution whose art. 36 reads, “Citizens of the People’s Republic of China enjoy freedom of religious belief. No State organ, public organization or individual may compel citizens to believe in, or not to believe in, any religion; nor may they discriminate against citizens who believe in, or do not believe in, any religion. The State protects normal religious activities. No one may make use of religion to engage in activities that disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens or interfere with the educational system of the State. Religious bodies and religious affairs are not subject to any foreign domination.”

Some religious groups have obtained recognition, and are allowed by the state to carry out their activities throughout the country under the direction of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). However also in China, like in some other states, there are issues about some groups that are denied the right to freedom of religion and belief, and whose members are heavily persecuted, tortured, and arrested and detained for many years in contravention to all basic human rights provisions.

The Church of Almighty God is one of the several religious minorities labelled by the Chinese government as xie jiao, and as such part of official lists of xie jiao compiled and updated by the government on a regular basis.

The role played by the WGAD and by other international bodies, primarily at UN level, and by lobbying groups and by scholars and researchers, is vital to foster the change, persuading China to comply with the international human rights standards and stop the labelling, to repeal these lists, to stop persecution and torture, and to finally release all the prisoners of conscience, and allow freedom of religion and belief to all individuals and groups without exceptions.

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**Like a lamb to the slaughter: Will the United States send this woman to her death?**

*An open letter to President Trump*
Dear President Trump:

We are NGOs, some of them with ECOSOC consultative status, active in the defense of human rights and religious liberty, with a special experience and concerns for China, and write to ask for your urgent intervention in a question, literally, of life and death.

It regards an asylum seeker of a Chinese Christian new religious movement, The Church of Almighty God, who is detained in Detroit, Michigan, and threatened with immediate deportation back to China, where she will be arrested and will be at serious risk of being executed.

The Church of Almighty God is a group listed as xie jiao (“heterodox teaching,” often wrongly translated as “evil cult”) and banned in China. Being active in it is a crime under Article 300 of the Chinese Criminal Code, punished with a jail penalty from three to seven years “or more,” but being a leader of it exposes to much harsher punishment. The Chinese government has spread for several years fake news about The Church of Almighty God, accusing it of crimes it has never committed.

Ms. Demei Zou was born on August 14, 1976. She was the leader of The Church of Almighty God in four provinces of China. Because of the severe persecution, somebody in the position of Ms. Zou normally destroys all identification documents and operates under aliases. Her role, however, became known to the police. Illegally, her Church obtained a copy of her “Registration as Fugitive,” a document that reputable scholars believe to be genuine. It accuses Ms. Zou to be indeed the leader of The Church of Almighty God in the provinces of Yunnan, Guizhou, Chongqing, and Sichuan. It also accuses Ms. Zou of being
involved in “stealing and transporting Chinese military secrets abroad,” an absurd accusation for those who know her Church, but one involving the death penalty.

Ms. Zou fled from China to South Korea by using the passport of another person with her photograph pasted on it. From South Korea, she moved to America and arrived at Detroit, Michigan on January 24, 2017. There, her passport was identified as false, and she was arrested. She had her initial master calendar hearing on April 11, 2017, and another one on April 24, 2017. The Court heard testimonies from Ms. Zou and three additional witnesses – two are members of the Church who have been granted asylum in the US on the grounds of religious persecution – at her individual merits hearings on June 13, July 18, and August 29, 2017. She received her notice of losing the case in December of 2017. She took her case to the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA), but again, BIA upheld the Immigration Judge’s adverse decision. She appealed on June 15, 2018. But, according to the account she provided to her co-religionists, immigration officers advised her that she would be deported to China and in fact made attempts to put her on a plane to Beijing last week, attempts she physically resisted.

Ms. Zou does not speak English. Although the Immigration Court in Detroit also cited the fake news about The Church of Almighty God it found on the Internet (although they have disappeared even from Wikipedia, and foreign decisions in parallel refugee cases expose them as mere Chinese propaganda), the main problems were Ms. Zou’s difficulties in proving her identity, her identity documents having been destroyed, and in telling their story in a way understandable to the authorities, although her co-religionists testified of knowing her and about her role in the Church. We understand that American courts claim they cannot be sure the woman in jail in Detroit is really Ms. Zou, since she has no identity documents. But several co-religionists who escaped to the United States are prepared to swear that she is indeed Ms. Zou.

We trust that the appeal will clarify the misunderstandings, vast documentation about The Church of Almighty God and its persecution based on serious scholarly studies will be introduced, and well-known scholars familiar with the issue will be allowed to testify. In the meantime, deportation of Ms. Zou to China should be stopped. There are documented cases of members of The Church of Almighty God who returned to China from foreign countries and were arrested and even tortured, or “disappeared” there. For Ms. Zou, who has already been accused of involvement in espionage and identified as a key leader of the Church, the risk of the death penalty is very high.

It is inconceivable that the United States, a country whose commitment to human rights and religious liberty is well-known and has been solemnly reiterated under your Presidency, would render Ms. Zou to the persecutors of her Church and to the executioner, and immediate action is needed to prevent such a tragic occurrence.

July 4, 2018

Yours faithfully,

CAP-LC Coordination des associations et des particuliers pour la liberté de conscience
CESNUR – Center for Studies on New Religions
EIRFRF 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
Bitter Winter’s Rosita Šorytė calls for protection of Church of Almighty God refugees in Brussels

Bitter Winter (30.06.2018) - https://bit.ly/2Km2Yii - Members of the European Parliament, NGOs, and international institutions expressed great interest for the first Faith and Freedom Summit organized by the Alliance of Conservative and Reformists in Europe, the third largest European political group, at the Solvay Library in Brussels on June 28. A fully packed room welcomed European MPs, international religious liberty advocates and experts, and high-profile U.S. and Canadian delegations.

Rosita Šorytė, associate editor of Bitter Winter, spoke on the situation of religion-based asylum seekers in Europe, with particular reference to the members of The Church of Almighty God, a Christian new religious movement severely persecuted in China. The general theme of the Summit was “practicing what we preach.” Europe advocates religious liberty internationally, but does not always guarantee full religious liberty within its borders. Šorytė, who also serves as president of ORLIR, the International Observatory of Religious Liberty of Refugees, mentioned the reluctance of several European states in granting protection as refugees to members of The Church of Almighty God, based on incomplete information about this Church and what Šorytė characterized as an incorrect interpretation of international conventions. She also noted that, thanks to the efforts of human right activists, scholars, and lawyers the situation is improving, as evidenced by recent decisions in Italy and elsewhere.

“1,5 million jailed for their faith”: Religious persecution in China denounced at the European Parliament

Bitter Winter (28.06.2018) - https://bit.ly/2II2Sfq - The situation of religious liberty in China is the worst ever since the Cultural Revolution. At least one and a half million believers are in jail or in “Transformation Through Education” camps simply because of their faith. This clear message was presented in the European Parliament on June 27, at an event Freedom of Religion and Belief and The Right to Asylum: The Case of China, organized by Human Rights Without Frontiers and Czech European MP, Tomáš Zdechovský.

MP Zdechovský denounced how the voice of Europe is often too weak when dealing with the situation of human rights in China, and Dr. Aaron Rhodes, president of the NGO FOREF Europe, discussed the context of the widespread violation of religious liberty by the Chinese regime. Prof Massimo Introigne, the editor-in-chief of Bitter Winter, explained how the dreaded camps of “transformation through education” work in China, and introduced the case of The Church of Almighty God, a Christian new religious movement whose members are systematically persecuted in China, with several documented issues of torture and extra-judicial killings. Lea Perekrests, deputy director of Human Rights Without Frontiers, presented many such cases that her organization has studied and documented. Rosita Soryte, deputy editor of Bitter Winter and president of the International Observatory of Religious Liberty of Refugees (ORLIR) and Eric Roux, president of EIFRF, discussed the paradox why asylum seekers from The Church of Almighty God, who are obviously persecuted in China, are often refused refugee status in Europe and elsewhere, based on wrong information about their Church and faulty interpretations of international conventions on refugees.

Thierry Valle, director of the ECOSOC-accredited NGO CAP-LC, mentioned the various initiatives NGOs, lawyers, human rights activists, and scholars, have launched to contrast the fake news spread by the Chinese propaganda about The Church of Almighty God and
concluded that thanks to these initiatives, at least in some countries, more refugees are granted asylum. The well-attended initiative called the attention of the European Parliament on a situation that is becoming impossible to ignore.

EU member states urged to consider asylum for religious group members facing "persecution" in China

EU Today (27.06.2018) - https://bit.ly/2Kohki5 - The authorities in China are waging a “new war” on religious minorities, a hearing in the European Parliament was told.

The hearing, organised by the respected Brussels-based NGO, Human Rights Without Frontiers (HRWF), was told by Italian academic Massimo Introvigne, the crackdown is “the worst since the Cultural Revolution.”

Introvigne, director of the Centre for Studies on New Religions, told the meeting that at least 1 million people had been targeted and described the situation as “very alarming.”

The conference focused on one particular group HRWF says is at the forefront of the purge: the Church of Almighty God (CAG) which has some 3m members in China.

Introducing the hearing, Czech centre right MEP Tomas Zdechovsky, a member of the civil liberties committee and the parliament’s China delegation, told the audience another problem linked to the crackdown had been a big rise in the number of asylum applications by CAG members.

The said many member states were reluctant to condemn China over their plight because of the “economic ties” they have to Beijing.

He said, “However, it is vitally important that we have an open discussion about this. This is not an attack on China but a means of speaking out in defence of human rights.”

His comments were endorsed by Introvigne, an expert in the field, who said many CAG members had been forced to undergo “re-education” programmes which had left some suffering mental breakdowns due to the “severe” conditions they were held in.

He said, “CAG is a non-political movement and does not advocate violence of any kind but its members are being persecuted in China.”

His think tank had evidence, he said, of CAG members being tortured and dying while in detention, often on trumped up charges.

“This is happening purely for political reasons and because the Chinese state wants to eradicate this and other religious beliefs.”

“China is waging a war on religion, the like of which we have not seen since the Cultural Revolution, and the CAG is the No. one enemy.”

Another speaker, Rosita Soryte, president of the International Observatory of Religious Liberty of Refugees in Lithuania, said relatively little was known about the situation at EU level but an additional issue was that, apart from the US and Canada, many countries had rejected asylum claims from members of CAG who had fled “torture and persecution” in China.
She had evidence of 400 CAG members who had been detained “arbitrarily” in China, in most cases being wrongly accused of crimes they never committed.

She said, “Another huge problem is that details of those who have sought asylum have been released publicly which puts their lives in real danger.”

Aaron Rhodes, president of the Forum for Religious Freedom in Austria, said the issue was also of “paramount concern” because of the “huge influence” China now commands.

Numbers of people from different religious denominations, including CAG, who were being arrested and imprisoned were at the highest levels for many years in China, he noted.

He told the hearing, “The Chinese state has become more intrusive and surveillance is growing. Its crackdown on Muslims has also put it on a collision course with Islamic radicalisation, the thing it is supposed to be resisting.”

Research on the issue conducted by Lea Perekrests, deputy director of HRWF, was disseminated at the meeting.

The group, she said, has been working to investigate and track the stories of Church of Almighty God (CAG) members over the past months.

She said, “We have closely following the cases of arrest, torture, and asylum processes. What has been discovered through these statistics is that CAG members who remain active in China will likely face arrest and subsequent torture.

“But CAG members are not frequently granted asylum in foreign countries and upon the return to China after failing to receive asylum they will most likely face arrest.”

She related the cases of several members, including a 50 year old female diabetic who was arrested recently at Beijing airport and had not been heard of since, plus a young couple who had been arrested and "tortured for weeks.”

She said, “We have evidence of 31 members, 20 of whom were severely tortured, resulting in 4 deaths.”

In the majority of cases, the members have been arrested on charges of ‘endangering the social stability’, ‘subverting the government’ and undermining state security or law enforcement by use of a ‘xie jiao’ [evil cult] organization.

She said, “Many face long prison sentences, and a number of CAG members have received sentences of over ten years. Furthermore, testimonies from those imprisoned have painted a grim image of their treatment in Chinese prisons.”

Canada has been the largest granter of asylum to CAG members, followed by Germany and Italy. On the other hand, South Korea and France have rejected the most asylum requests and have issued the most departure orders.

She said, “We can conclude that those who are denied asylum status and deported back to China face a high risk of arrest, detention, and torture.

“It is for that reason that Human Rights Without Frontiers urges countries to grant political asylum to members of the Church of Almighty God who have fled China in search of a safe haven.”
**Tortured Chinese church pastor finally released**

Barnabas Fund (26.06.2018) - [https://bit.ly/2KkiCdg](https://bit.ly/2KkiCdg) - A Chinese house church pastor who was tortured into confessing to “divulging state secrets” has been released after two and a half years in jail.

While in detention, Yang Hua contracted vasculitis and diabetes and, at one point, was so unwell he was unable to walk.

The house church pastor and father of two was arrested in 2015 when he attempted to prevent authorities from raiding the church he pastored in Guizhou province, southwest China. He was initially falsely charged with “obstructing justice”, but was later falsely accused of “divulging state secrets” and forced under torture to agree to an untrue confession. His interrogators also threatened that his wife and children would “face problems”. They also said they would make Yang “disappear” and feed his body to pigs.

As he was released on 19 June 2018, Yang Hua began singing worship songs. His wife, Wang, said, “Even though my husband experienced misfortune, his belief remains resolute.”

Most Chinese Christians are part of “house churches”, which are unregistered congregations whose members are at greater risk of arrest, torture and imprisonment by authorities.

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**Whereabouts remain unknown for Church of Almighty God member arrested upon return to China**

*Returning to China to seek medical care, Yang Shihua was arrested in the Beijing Capital International Airport*

HRWF (05.06.2018)- On 23 May 2018, Yang Shihua, member of the Church of Almighty God in South Korea, was arrested in Terminal 3 of the Beijing Capital International Airport (BCIA) upon her return to China from South Korea. Since her arrest, her family has been unable to locate her.

Yang Shihua, born in 1968, joined the Church of Almighty God in 2008, and often hosted church meetings in her home in China. Following the intense persecution by Chinese authorities, Shihua was forced to flee China for South Korea – a stressful move for someone who suffers from various physical ailments including diabetes, hypertension, ulcers, and herniated spinal discs.

On 23 May 2018, Shihua flew back to China for medical treatment. Upon her arrival in the airport, she was detained by the Tianjin Public Security Bureau police in the airport. Her husband waited for her at the arrivals gate for three hours, before seeing her being escorted out of the airport by police. The police did not allow Shihua and her husband to talk and instead also detained her husband. Ten police officers were sent to their home to confiscate laptops, tablets, and cell phones.

When Yang Shihua’s husband inquired about the reason for her detention, they said that she was being detained upon suspicion of ‘membership of an ‘evil cult’”. The police did not give any prior warning or show an arrest warrant. Her husband informed the police about her medical conditions, but they refused to let her leave.
The next day, Shihua’s husband was called at 9:00am to the Baoping Police Station of the Tianjin Public Security Bureau Baodi Branch to collect his wife’s suitcase that had been confiscated. When he arrived, they did not allow him to see his wife. He attempted to bribe the police officers with 3,000 RMB, requesting for them to give his wife her medications. The police refused, and additionally would not allow her husband to take her passport, ID card or bank cards.

In the following days, Shihua’s husband was repeatedly denied contact with his wife. He contacted a lawyer from the Tianjin law firm, who informed him that it would be impossible to see his wife, or have her released on bail, if the charges involved her being a member of an ‘evil cult’. Her husband continued to contact two more lawyers, but they would not adopt her case once they heard her charges. Lawyers told him repeatedly, that a member of the Church of Almighty God had no chance of being released on bail – that a murderer would have better chances.

Yang Shihua, was wrongly arrested and detained by the police for her activities with the Church of Almighty God, and is now held in an unknown location without any communication with her family.

Human Rights Without Frontiers strongly advises countries to grant Church of Almighty God members asylum status in order to avoid their imminent arrest upon deportation and return to China.

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**The list of the Xie Jiao, a main tool of religious persecution**

*Hong Kong scholar Edward Irons explains the historical roots of the proscription of certain groups as xie jiao (heterodox teachings), and how being on the list of the xie jiao means being a main target for persecution.*

By Massimo Introvigne

Bitter Winter (11.06.2018) - [https://bit.ly/2yWPoS](https://bit.ly/2yWPoS) - Edward Irons is a well-known Hong-Kong-based researcher, consultant, and writer on Chinese culture and religion. He specializes in Yiguandao and other Chinese new religions, as well as leadership studies. He obtained his PhD from the Graduate Theological Union in 2000. He is the Director of the Hong Kong Institute for Culture, Commerce and Religion, which he founded in 2003.

Irons has studied in depth the repression of certain religious groups in Nationalist and Communist China, persecuted as “cults” or “heterodox teachings” (xie jiao). These notions are not always clear, even for scholars, and we have asked Dr. Irons to help us clarify them.

*We know that “heterodox” groups were repressed in Imperial China and that the expression xie jiao originated in the Ming era. But today we will not go so far, and start from the crackdown on certain religions in Nationalist China in the 1930s. This may come as a surprise to some, as the Nationalists after all were not the Communists, and were not officially atheistic. Which groups were persecuted and why?*

What happened in the 1930s serves as background to developments under the People’s Republic. We can even go further back, to the late-Qing period, to find the origin of anti-religious sentiment. Anti-superstition and anti-tradition were growing intellectual trends among most educated Chinese beginning in the late Qing, roughly the last half of the 19th century. The version of modernity promoted by many intellectuals left no
room for popular religious practices like spirit writing or cultic worship. The Kuomintang (KMT), which came to power in 1927, offered something else, an ideology of rationality. In addition, organized religions such as Buddhism were widely perceived as being backward, inhibiting China’s transformation into a modern nation. Temples held large parcels of land, which was seen as unfair. And monks were seen as being low-educated and not sincere in religious practice. Article 6 of the Republican constitution guaranteed “freedom of belief.” At the same time the government also maintained a strict separation of church and state.

So between 1927 and 1931 the Republican government launched a formal campaign against superstition and institutional religion. The government waged consistent warfare against Buddhism in particular. There was sporadic but widespread confiscation of the property of Buddhist and local deity temples. This campaign is best seen as an outgrowth of the powerful nationalistic movement dating from 1919. This movement desired for China to become modern. There was strong sentiment against tradition and superstition. The KMT translated this attitude of anti-superstition into policy, as would the People’s Republic after 1949. The campaign against superstition only ended when, in 1934, KMT leader Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石, Jiang Jieshi, 1897–1975) launched his own spiritual program, the New Life Movement (新生活運動, xinshenghuo yundong).

The Nationalist government focus was mainly on established Buddhism. Ironically, many new organized religious groups rose up during the 1920s and 1930s. Some were Buddhist, some Daoist, and some Christian. I don’t think any of these were prominent enough to cause concern in the Nationalist government, except for one, Yiguandao.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) rose to power and there was in the 1950s another massive crackdown on certain religious groups, targeting in particular Yiguandao, a very successful non-Christian new religious movement, millions of members of which were arrested. Why Yiguandao? Can you tell us what happened?

Yiguandao is a Chinese syncretic religion. First established in its modern form in the 1930s, it has deep roots in Chinese popular belief systems. According to some sources, in 1947 it had grown to twelve million members. Yiguandao was outlawed and actively suppressed as part of the Anti-Heterodox Groups and Secret Societies Movement (fandong huidaomen 反動会道門) of 1951–1953. Other groups were suppressed as well, but it appears that Yiguandao was the main target. Millions of devotees were arrested. Yiguandao leaders were thrown into prison and from some accounts killed outright. Within a few years, Yiguandao was extinguished as a religious network in Mainland China, and it remained only as a faint cultural memory from the 1930s and 1940s. It is still active in Taiwan, divided into various branches, with some 800,000 followers. Yiguandao temples and temple networks are also found in Hong Kong, Korea, and Japan; throughout Southeast Asia; and in most countries of Europe and North America.

Why was Yiguandao so severely persecuted? Marxist ideological antagonism toward religion in general is well known. In addition, religious leaders were often personally associated with the ruling classes. In Yiguandao’s case, the movement had grown rapidly throughout the war against Japan, especially in areas of China under Japanese occupation. This rapid growth caused people to wonder if the group had a special relationship with the puppet regime propped up by the Japanese. Immediately after Japan’s surrender, there were rumors of collusion. So Yiguandao was not only a large, well-organized religious group, it was seen as being unpatriotic.

The situation of course changed with the Cultural Revolution, when all religions were persecuted. And then, it changed again...
The early 1960s was a period of overt antagonism to all forms of religion. This hostility relaxed with the economic reforms introduced from 1979. But religion was not a topic that could be overlooked. Religious shocks such as the Falun Gong demonstrations in 1999 and the rapid rise in non-official Christianity in the countryside posed challenges to the government. From the 1990s, the state chose to target specific religious groups. These groups have been prominently declared illegal and suppressed by the various security bureaus. This targeted approach differed from the 1950s and 60s, in which the government made broad proscriptions focused on “religion” as a category of thought and action that was harmful or false. The new focus moved to specific groups that were deemed to be harmful and thus illegal. Of course, individual groups inside China had already been proscribed, starting with the “Shouters” in 1983.

**How did the singling out of certain groups as xie jiao start?**

Following the Falun Gong incident of 1999, the Public Security Bureau established a new organ, the Public Security Anti-Xie Jiao Organization (公安部反邪教组, gonganbu fanxie jiao zu), called informally “the 610 Office,” to focus on xie jiao groups. In November of 2000, another organization was established, the China Anti-Xie Jiao Association, commonly known in English as “the China Anti-Cult Association” (中国反邪教协会, zhongguo fanxie jiao xiehui, abbreviated as CACA). A distinction should be made between such government offices, which may use the term “anti-cult” in their English translations, and overseas civil society groups dedicated to fighting “cults.” The Chinese institutions in fact are all anti-xie jiao. Officially, CACA is a voluntary, non-profit organization. In practice, the media appears to treat its announcements, for instance the June 4, 2014 front-page article on xie jiao groups, as official government notices.

**You have studied extensively the Chinese lists of xie jiao. How did these lists come to be established?**

Since the mid-1990s, illegal and banned groups have been categorized and controlled through designation as xie jiao. At some point in the 1990s, a specific list of exactly which groups are categorized as xie jiao was compiled. This list has generated great interest in the international media. The first extensive compilation included overseas groups such as the Branch Davidians and Aum Shinrikyo. In this initial version, the focus was on potentially dangerous overseas groups; xie jiao became analogous to the term “cult” as used in other countries. But in 1995, the list was expanded to designate groups deemed to be not only dangerous but also heretical. Heretical here means not following doctrine of the five officially sanctioned religious bodies in China—Protestantism, the Three-Self Church, Catholicism, Buddhism, Daoism, and Islam. Many of the unsanctioned groups were homegrown and had evolved out of the Protestant traditions; only one group on the initial list, Supreme Master Ching Hai, was based outside Mainland China. Later that year, the list was expanded by the inclusion of more local Protestant groups and such overseas groups as the Children of God (the Family) and the Unification Church. The Falun Gong incident of 1999, in which thousands of followers surrounded the senior leaders’ compound in Beijing, spurred the government’s thinking on xie jiao. For the first time a well-organized group, one that had been nurtured through government support, was seen as a threat to China and, more seriously, to the CCP. The Ministry of Public Security in 1998 designated Falun Gong as a xie jiao. As if to clarify the implication, xie jiao organizations were formally made illegal by a legislative resolution in 1999. It was at this time that the “610” anti-cult unit was established. The State Council in 2000 followed this up by establishing a separate network of offices to deal with xie jiao. The government had published the updated list of eighteen xie jiao in 1995. The Shouters and The Church of Almighty God were included.
What about the current list?

On September 18, 2017, the revamped China Anti-Cult (xie jiao) website reiterated the list of banned groups which had been listed publicly in 2014. Of the total 20 groups, eleven were listed as being “dangerous:” 1. Falun Gong (法轮功) 2. The Church of Almighty God (全能神) 3. The Shouters (呼喊派) 4. The Disciples Society (门徒会) 5. Unification Church (统一教) 6. Guanyin Method (观音法门) 7. Bloody Holy Spirit (血水圣灵) 8. Full Scope Church (全范围教会) 9. Three Grades of Servants (三班仆人派) 10. True Buddha School (灵仙真佛宗) 11. Mainland China Administrative Deacon Station (中华大大陆行政执事站). In addition, the website warned the public to “be on guard against” an additional nine groups: the Lingling Church, the Anointed King, the Children of God, Dami Mission, the New Testament Church, the World Elijah Gospel Mission Society, the Lord God Sect, the Yuandun Dharma Gate, and the South China Church. From this list it appears there are two categories of groups, eleven major (“dangerous”) groups, and nine others, for a total of 20.

What are the consequences of being included in the list?

Inclusion on the list means the group is not seen as a “religion,” but simply as an illegal organization. So this list has had an immense influence on the perception of new religions. Being on the list means the full weight of state coercion can be applied against any individual associated with any of the groups on the list. Article 300 of the Chinese Criminal Code makes “using,” i.e. being active in a xie jiao, a crime punishable by three to seven years of imprisonment “or more.” This level of severity echoes the nearly absolute suppression of Yiguandao and other religious groups in the 1950s. For Falun Gong, as with Yiguandao before it, the only way to survive was to move overseas, away from the direct influence of the Chinese state. Being seen as an illegal entity forces many groups members to “go underground.” Finally, the xie jiao list also acts as the conceptual opposite pole to allowed religions. As a result, any group not belonging to one end of the spectrum or another is cast into a limbo of uncertainty. Some religious groups have scurried to head off the threat of inclusion on the xie jiao list. Overseas religions, including the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and Scientology, have initiated discussions with the Chinese government to explain their peaceful intentions. Finally, these lists, publicized so widely, have given scholars a valuable window on official policy regarding what counts as acceptable religious behavior, and what is suppressed and persecuted.

Henan persecution targets both official and underground churches

ChinaAid (03.06.2018) - https://bit.ly/2HrVoMK - As of the end of May, almost 100 house churches have been shut down in China’s central Henan province. Additionally, authorities have also ordered official churches to remove the crosses from their buildings.

Henan has been the site of a widespread crackdown against Christians, both within official government-run churches of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement and the unregistered gatherings of underground house churches.
According to a Christian named Chen from Ningling County, the local government ordered all local churches to take down their crosses, otherwise the government would send crews to forcibly demolish them.

Another Christian named Wang confirmed the story. "The government aimed at the Three-Self churches this time. Most house churches do not have their own church buildings. The Three-Self churches feared that the officials would demolish the crosses by force, so they chose to take them down on their own. No one dares defy the orders."

Li, a member of a house church with more than 100 members, said that officials are also destroying decorations. "The officials from the brigade will show up at your door and ask you to remove or cover up Christian decorations. They will damage your house if you dare to say no. Porcelain tiles that said ‘Jesus loves you’ embedded in the wall were gouged out. They also forbade us from singing hymns."

Li also spoke of the restrictions enacted against the local churches to keep them from meeting. No more than five people can meet together at a time without government permission. He also says the government has posted guards at some churches to keep members out.

Two months prior, the town of Shiqiao in Ningling County held a Conference of Ethnic and Religious Affairs. According to the official reports of this conference, the town's officials conveyed the wishes and priorities of the Communist Party in regulating religious matters in 2018.

At this conference, Yan Yunfeng, the Party committee secretary for Shiqiao said that religious affairs in the town had "become complicated" and emphasized that "there is nothing insignificant" in administering ethnic and religious affairs. Staff members were urged to unify their ideologies and be willing to take on additional responsibilities. Conferences like this one are likely the cause of the new intensity with which religious persecution has been carried out across Henan.

ChinaAid reports on instances of religious persecution, such as the forced demolition of crosses and closure of house churches throughout Henan, in order to expose abuses by the Communist Party and promote religious freedom and rule of law.

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**Government incites villagers to block believers from entering a new church**

Direct Reports from China/ Bitter Winter (03.06.2018) - [https://bit.ly/2sB4WAp](https://bit.ly/2sB4WAp) - On May 19, 2018, about 200 believers from Xiangning County, which is part of the prefecture-level city of Linfen, Shanxi Province, gathered at Yingli village to attend an inauguration of the new church building to be held the next day. Incited by the government, local villagers blocked the believers from entering the church, beat and verbally abused them, seriously injuring two female believers.

According to witnesses, at 8 a.m., more than 100 villagers besieged the church building and forbade the believers from entering it, which led to quarreling and fighting. Six policemen from a police station in Changning Township, Xiangning County arrived to resolve the conflict and took the two injured women to the hospital. Some villagers continued to incite the fight by throwing soil clods at the Christians. They tried to force the manager of the building to give them the name of the church leader but failed. The police later ordered the believers to stop the religious activities.
The gathered believers felt upset and refused to leave, they started singing hymns outside the church in the rain. At about 4:30 p.m., to humiliate the singing and praying believers, a 70-something villager brought two buckets of feces and put them among them. Unidentified people took photos of all the believers.

The newly-built church can seat 8,000 people and it is the biggest church in Xiangning County with a striking red cross on the top of this ¥8-million landmark building. A few months ago, a provincial official went to check on environmental issues in Xiangning. Upon entering the county, he saw the eye-catching red cross on the church building and asked local officials why the church was the very first thing one can see when entering the county.

Soon after, the county officials invited a Feng Shui expert to examine the village of Yingli. After the visit, the officials started claiming that the church building was to blame for the recent coal mine accidents in Xiangning. Some villagers took this information seriously and started hating the church and believers.

On May 14, some villagers dumped piles of dirt right next to the gate of the church. On the morning of May 15, some of them hung a banner across the entrance and prevented believers from going inside. On the afternoon of May 16, some of them laid many bricks in front of the gate of the church.

A source revealed that on the morning of May 20, the villagers cut off the church’s power supply and stood guard around the church, not allowing the believers to enter or leave the building. The conflict between the villagers and the believers has not been settled up until now.

**Goodbye to the Religious Affairs Bureau: religions are now under the direct control of the Party**

By Wang Zhicheng

Asia News (22.03.2018) - [https://bit.ly/2pG7w5T](https://bit.ly/2pG7w5T) - The reform, wanted by the Party’s Central Committee, was voted by the National People’s Congress and made public yesterday. Some Christians see no change: the repression continues. A Protestant professor: It’s an important change since the Mao era. What it reveals is the unlimited expansion of Party power. Doubts about the dialogue between China and the Vatican: The Catholic Church will become an instrument of support for the Party. The promotion of Xia Baolong, the destroyer of Zhejiang crosses.

Beijing (AsiaNews) - The State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA), also known as the "Religious Affairs Bureau ", so far under the authority of the Council of State, has passed under the direct rule of the Communist Party. The move is among a detailed program of reforms on the Party and the state institutions released yesterday.

The decision to eliminate SARA was passed in the third plenary session of the 19th Communist Party’s Central Committee in late February. Part of the program was reviewed in the recently concluded National People’s Congress, China’s parliament. Detail of the program was made public on March 21, with indication that the reform should be implemented by the end of 2018.

Among the reforms, religious affairs are now managed by the United Front Work Department (UFWD), an organ of the Communist Party’s Central Committee, whose main function is to manage relations with the non-Communist elite, including individuals and
organizations, such as religious groups. Also now under the management of the UFWD are the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office and the Ethnic Affairs Commission, both also originally under the State Council.

The structural change received mixed views among Chinese Christians and observers. “There won’t be big change to religious environment, neither loosen nor tighten. It is only a change on management structure and they will do the same thing,” said Father Liu, a priest who serves in a Southern province.

“The reform is to put all authority under the Party, no more sharing power with the State Council,” said a Chinese observer who asked not to be named. However, he agreed that there is nothing to surprise as the UFWD has always been the supervising unit of the SARA, adding that the UFWD will still keep the signboard of the SARA as it needs an executive office to implement the work.

“The move could unify different voices on the management of religions,” the observer said, noting that religious management could involve a number of departments, such as national security, public security, buildings and education, etc.

But Eric Lai, a Catholic commentator, sees the move shows the Chinese Communist Party no more regards religion as a target to liaise but actively using it as a tool to maintain stability.

“It is nothing new for an authoritarian government to use religion as a tool for stability. The Russian Orthodox Church actively safeguards the Putin regime is an example. In the future, if the Vatican and China sign an official accord, will the China Catholic Church follow the path of maintaining stability like the Russian Orthodox Church or have true religious autonomy to preach in the country? Under the current situation, no doubt the former is more likely,” said Lai, a Hong Kong native.

Ying Fuk-tsang, director of the Chinese University of Hong Kong’s Divinity School, also questioned on his Facebook if this is “reform or moving backward?”

“Religion is a citizen’s basic rights endowed by the Constitution. If it is assigned as specialized duty of the Party, this is undoubtedly a major change in the religious work since the founding of the Communist-rule China. It reflects the unlimited expansion of the Party’s power, interfering directly the basic rights of citizens. This kind of retrogression is definitely negative for the development of religious freedom in China,” he said.

Following closely recent China-Vatican developments, the Protestant professor said he “could not help but ask whether Vatican recognized these facts or still believe in wishful thinking that China’s freedom of religion is stepping forward to the bright side and that the Chinese citizens’ religious freedom will be fully safeguard?”

“Or will the Holy See make another interpretation to justify the Party’s leadership over religions, and believe that it could bring greater space for freedom of religion in China by its own efforts?”

On the same day of the official announcement, SARA director Wang Zuoan held a meeting for all staff to relate the spirit of the deepened reforms. According to the SARA’s website, he said the decision “fully demonstrates the Party’s central high priority for religious work and is more conducive to strengthening and improving the Party’s leadership in religious work.”

Wang added that it [the reform] will also benefit the implementation of the Party’s central important decision and planning on religious work, he added while urging his staff
to understand the urgency and importance of the reforms by taking a political and overall view.

According to media reports, the main duty of the UFWD after the adjustment is to implement the basic principles and policies of the Party’s religious work, study and formulate policies and measures for religious work and supervise their implementation, coordinate religious works, manage religious administrative affairs according to the law, protect citizens’ freedom of religious belief, consolidate normal religious activities and develop a patriotic united front with the religious communities.

The reform comes as another surprise to Chinese Christians following the news of Xia Baolong, former Party secretary of the Cross-removal Zhejiang province, being elected vice chairman and secretary general of the 13th Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference on March 14. As the CPPCC’s secretary general, 66-year-old Xia is regarded as powerful “housekeeper” of the top advisory body of Beijing.

The promotion of Xia surprised many because when he was transferred to the NPC from his Zhejiang post last April, with many regarded it was the end of his political path waiting for retirement. Furthermore, Xia was not even elected to the Party’s Central Committee during the 19th Communist Party’s National Congress last October.

Xia worked in Zhejiang since 2003, with four years overlapping when Chinese President Xi Jinping was party secretary of the province. Before reassigned to the National People's Congress as a vice chairman and secretary general of the Environment and Resources Protection Committee last year, Xia was party secretary of Zhejiang from 2012 to April 2017, during which there were three years of Cross removal and Church demolition in the name of city planning.

During the campaign that began in late 2013 and gradually subsided around April 2016, about 1,500 Church Crosses were removed, mostly from Protestant Churches. A few dozens of pastors and laypeople who defended their Church crosses were detained, threatened or prosecuted. The authority also prosecuted lawyers who defended them.

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**Dolkun Isa: Beijing also persecutes the Uyghurs abroad**

*Students and activists are targeted. The relatives of Uyghurs in exile are sent to “re-education camps”. The families in China are hostage to blackmail students abroad. The world’s silence favours the Chinese government*

Asia News (21.03.2018) - [https://bit.ly/2ukuNjr](https://bit.ly/2ukuNjr) - Dolkun Isa, president of the Uyghur World Congress, which is based in Munich (Germany), is a Uyghur leader living in exile. His people, who are predominantly Muslim, live in Xinjiang, a province on the border of China with Central Asia.

"Not only are Uyghurs controlled by China at home, but they are also harassed in exile,” Isa told AsiaNews. This, he knows, comes from personal experience.

Isa fled China in 1997, but on 26 July 2017 he was detained by a special unit of the Italian police as he made his way to a press conference at the Italian Senate in Rome to speak about Chinese repression against the Uyghur community.

"They (Chinese authorities) try to monitor all Uyghurs – sometimes directly – especially activists,” he explained. "They say not to try any kind of political activity. They say: 'If
you try to engage in one of these activities, remember your parents and relatives in Xinjiang’.”

"Family members are held hostage to convince Uyghurs living abroad – especially students – to return to China. And if they do not return on schedule, the Chinese government keeps their families hostage. They force parents to call their sons or daughters to tell them to come back."

Once back in China, people are sent to re-education camps, “which are more like concentration camps,” Isa noted. Last December for example, two young Uyghurs men detained upon their return died in suspicious circumstances.

At present, nothing is known about some 20 Uyghurs students held for months. More than 200 have been detained since 4 July, seized in restaurants, at home, or at the airport as they tried to leave for safer places.

The relatives of Uyghurs living abroad or who have lived abroad have also been sent to "re-education camps".

"As for my family – with whom I have no contact –, I have a father who is almost 90. I do not know if he is alive or dead. I know that my older and younger brothers have been arrested and sent to a re-education camp. I do not know how many other relatives are detained.”

“This is my personal story,” but “All Uyghurs living abroad have at least one or more family members in re-education camps.”

For the Uyghur leader, European countries, the United States, the United Nations and the European Union have a responsibility to condemn human rights violations in China and the persecution of Xinjiang Uyghurs.

Oppression, for the latter, occurs in everyday life, from the ban on giving an Islamic name to children, to hardships imposed during the last Ramadan.

"Many [countries] seek economic agreements with China and their silence about this situation sends the wrong message to the Chinese government, which is encouraged in what it does."

International media too should do more. Some cover events "but that is not enough. The situation is terrible. If the world continues to remain silent, it may worsen, even to the point of genocide. The world should stand up and do something."

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**Will France hand over Chinese religious refugees to their persecutors? Appeal to President Macron**

Mr President,

In France, 335 Chinese citizens who are members of The Church of Almighty God (CAG), one of the largest new religious movements in China, have been denied asylum. 156 of them have received a departure order and are now under threat of deportation. Only six applications for asylum have been accepted.
We have been studying the situation of the CAG for several years and we are morally sure that once they are extradited back to China, the CAG members living currently in France will be immediately arrested, tortured and detained for several years.*

The Chinese government considers the CAG « an heterodox belief system » (xie jiao), and article 300 of the Chinese Criminal Code provides prison terms of three to seven years or more for those who “use” a xie jiao – the jurisprudence interprets this as active membership in such movements. The CAG also denounced cases of torture and suspicious deaths in prisons.

The Chinese government accuses the CAG of several crimes but the scholars who have studied these issues have concluded that it is pure propaganda. A French brochure published by the DIDR (the Research and Documentation Branch of the Refugee Office) in 2016 echoed one of these accusations. Four well-known scholars wrote to the DIDR in February to ask for an update of this brochure, published before the CAG started being the object of significant scientific research.

The issue is not purely academic but it is a human rights issue. It is about the protection of the freedom and the life of people who have already suffered a lot and who expect from France the protection they are entitled to.

We call upon you, Mr President, upon the relevant French authorities and upon all the friends of human rights to prohibit the handing over of victims to their persecutors.

Paris, 10 March 2018

Associations

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

HRWF Human Rights Without Frontiers/ Droits de l’homme sans frontières (Brussels)

EIFRF European Interreligious Forum for Religious Freedom

CESNUR Center for Studies on New Religions

ORLIR International Observatory of Religious Freedom of Refugees

Scholars

Marie Holzman – Sinologist, president of the « Association Solidarité Chine »

Bernadette Rigal-Cellard – University Bordeaux Montaigne

Massimo Introvigne – Center for Studies on New Religions, Torino, Italy

Holly Folk – Western Washington University

Susan Palmer – University Concordia and McGill University, Montreal
Jean-Luc Marin-Lagardette – Journalist and essayist

Press Release


Several scholars and representatives of human rights organizations gathered to expose the dramatic situation to which these asylum seekers will be submitted if they are sent back to China.

The well-known Prof. Massimo Introvigne, Director of the Center for the Studies of New Religions (CESNUR) presented the Church of Almighty God from a scholarly perspective, insisting on the fact that several university studies and expertise have demonstrated and confirmed that most of the accusations against this Church were false and were the product of Chinese propaganda.

See the presentation

Mr Willy Fautrê, the director of Human Rights Without Frontiers International (HRWF) presented disturbing statistics about the number of asylum denials concerning members of the Church of Almighty God in European countries, and particularly in France.

See the presentation

Mrs Marie Holzman, a well-known sinologist, writer and journalist who is a specialist of contemporary China and Chinese dissidence, described the political roots of the persecution of religious minorities in China and explained the socio-psychological context which might have created some misunderstanding between the asylum seekers of this Church and French institutions.

Mr Eric Roux, President of the European Interreligious Forum for Religious Freedom (EIFRF) analyzed the difficulties faced by asylum seekers in France and the way French authorities can mistakenly rely on outdated or false information when they take negative decisions.

See his declaration

The participants have also watched a video in which two members of the Church of Almighty God testified about the persecution, imprisonment and torture they were victims of in China.

Mr Thierry Valle, President of the Coordination des Associations et des Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience, CAP LC, and organizer of this event, announced that a Call to President Macron had been launched by a group of human rights organizations, scholars and other personalities to inform him about the tragic consequences entailed by the denial of asylum for the members of this Church in France and to urge him to make sure that they find a safe haven in France.
The persecution of the Church of Almighty God raised in a side-event at the UN

The denial of religious freedom in China and the case of The Church of Almighty God exposed at the 37th session of the Human Rights Council at the United Nations


A panel of international scholars and human rights and freedom of religion experts discussed the dramatic situation of the members of The Church of Almighty God both in China, where they are severely persecuted, and in South Korea and Europe, where their requests for asylum are often denied. The event was introduced and coordinated by Mr Thierry Valle, the president of CAP LC.

Prof Massimo Introvigne, a well-known Italian scholar of new religious movements and managing director of CESNUR (Center for Studies on New Religions), presented the problems of religious liberty in China and introduced The Church of Almighty God, insisting on the fact that scholarly studies have confirmed that most of the accusations against this church found on the Internet are false. See his presentation at https://tinyurl.com/ycn2zpcr.
Ms Lea Perekrests, deputy director of HRWF (Human Rights Without Frontiers), presented both statistics and several case studies of members of The Church of Almighty God who have been arrested, incarcerated, and tortured in China. Some of them died in jail. See her presentation at https://tinyurl.com/yazszc3u.

Ms Rosita Soryte, a former Lithuanian diplomat who is currently president of ORLIR (International Observatory of Religious Freedom of Refugees), insisted on the fact that being a member of The Church of Almighty God is enough for being arrested or worse in China. As a consequence, refugees of that Church have a reasonable fear of being persecuted in China and should be granted asylum. See her presentation at https://tinyurl.com/ybtvul3q.

Mr. Eric Roux, the president of EIFRF (European Interreligious Forum for Religion Freedom), discussed the difficulties of the Church’s asylum seekers in France, and how French authorities often rely on outdated or false information when rendering their negative decisions. See his text at https://tinyurl.com/y86p4wpj.

Attendees also watched a short video with testimonies of three members of The Church of Almighty God who have been persecuted, jailed and tortured in China.

The Church of Almighty God is the largest Chinese new religious movement, with some three to four million members according to Chinese government’s estimates. Its core belief is that Jesus Christ has returned as the incarnated Almighty God, this time in a female form as a Chinese woman. Its brand of Christianity is admittedly non-traditional, but this does not justify persecution in China, nor the lack of understanding for the well-justified refugee claims of its members in other countries.

Xinjiang, crosses, domes, statues destroyed: the new 'Sinicized' Cultural Revolution

By Bernardo Cervellera

Asia News (02.03.2018) - https://bit.ly/2FnM8gp - Crosses removed from the domes and the tympanum of Yining Church as well as external decorations and crosses, and the Way of the Cross within the church. The same happened at the churches of Manas and Hutubi. The Cross represents "a foreign religious infiltration ". Prayer services forbidden even in private houses under the threat of arrests and re-education. Children and young people forbidden to enter churches. Religious revival frightens the Party.

Rome (AsiaNews) - "It's a new Cultural Revolution": this most frequent online comment in reaction to photos of the church of Yining (Xinjiang) stripped of the crosses that stood on the building, of the statues that stood on its tympanum and the decorations and paintings that embellished the facade.

The photo that we published (on the left) shows the color, the momentum, the lightness of the domes and wall decorations, the crosses on the top of the building, before their destruction. The photo on the right shows the "after". Everything was destroyed by order of the government on February 27 and 28, just a few weeks after the meeting between the Chinese and Vatican delegations, which reportedly resulted in the drafting of a "historic" agreement on the nominations of bishops in the Chinese Catholic Church.

Yining, 700 km west of the capital of Xinjiang, Urumqi, has a Catholic community of a few hundred faithful.
The reference to the Cultural Revolution is a must: in the period from 1966 to 1976 the Red Guards led by Mao and the "band of the Four" implemented the most extreme form of communism by destroying churches, temples, pagodas, prayer books, statues, paintings to annihilate all religion.

But the "Cultural Revolution" of these days is justified by another slogan: "syncisation". This implies - as Xi Jinping explained three years ago and reaffirmed at the Party Congress last October - "adhering to and developing religious theories with Chinese characteristics", adhering to the principle of "independence", adapting religion to socialist society and resisting "religious infiltration from abroad".

Now the symbol of the cross represents "a religious infiltration from abroad": from the church of Yining, not only were the two crosses that overlapped the two domes razed to the ground, but also the crosses inside the sacred building have disappeared, including the Way of the Cross and the decorations in the form of a cross have been ripped from the pews.

The iconoclastic fury has also affected other cities. Even before last Christmas, all the crosses from the church of Manas were destroyed and there are rumors that the same happened in the church of Hutubi.

The comparison with the Cultural Revolution does not stop there. Just like then, it is forbidden for believers to pray even in private, in their homes. The police threaten that if they find two people praying together in their home, they will be arrested and forced to undergo re-education.

Under the new regulations on religious activities, proposed last September and implemented last February 1st, worship can only be carried out in church, at the times set by the government. Any other place is considered an "illegal place" and those who break such regulations will be subject to prison, fines, expropriation of the building that houses illegal religious activity. Even private homes are now considered an "illegal place of worship": in every private house religious conversation or prayer is forbidden, under threat of arrest. The faithful can pray only in church, during Sunday service.

All churches must display a sign at their entrance announcing that the building is "forbidden to minors under the age of 18" must be exposed because children and young people are prohibited from participating in religious rites.

It should be noted that the churches mentioned are not illegal buildings, but officially registered churches. The point is that "sinicization" implies submission to the Chinese Communist Party, which must act as an "active guide" of religions, on which their life or death, every construction and every destruction, depends.

The ruthless and suffocating control of the Party on religions can only be explained by fear. It is now everyone's experience in China - confirmed by various sociologists - that the country is in the midst of an impressive religious renaissance, to the point that over 80% of the population has some spiritual beliefs and that at least one fifth of the Party members secretly adhere to some form of religion. All this promises more control and persecution in the future. "I am very sad - a faithful of Urumqi confides to AsiaNews - that the Vatican is compromising with this government. In this way it becomes an accomplice of those who want our annihilation".
Ban on Islamic clothing in Xinjiang

The Dui Hua Foundation's Human Rights Journal (27.02.2018) - http://bit.ly/2g4qXRB -

Pedestrians walk past propaganda posters in Urumqi, Xinjiang. Image credit: The Uyghur American Association.

In April 2011, France became the first Western country to ban the wearing of full-face veils in public. Similar national and regional bans in other secular Western countries soon followed, including in Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, Austria, and Canada. In Australia, there is ongoing legislative debate on the issue. Under these bans, anybody caught wearing a burka (a veil covering the full face and body) or a niqab (a veil covering the face except the eyes) in public can face fines and in some cases even imprisonment.

China is an officially atheist country. Civil servants and teachers across the country have long been prohibited from participating in religious activities or wearing religious clothing in public. In schools, students can be disqualified from scholarships, government subsidies, attending their graduation ceremonies and even face expulsion if found wearing religious clothing on campus. Around the same time when many in the West were busy passing anti-Islamic legislation, China was rocked by the Urumqi Riots of July 2009. Shortly after, the Xinjiang government began tightening restrictions on Islamic clothing on security grounds in the autonomous region, home to a Muslim population of over 13 million.

In enforcing restrictions on Islamic clothing, Chinese officials have denied that veils are a part of Uyghur culture and have attempted to stigmatize wearers as uneducated and sharing a propensity towards religious extremism. A Phoenix News Media article in 2014 reported that veils had historically never been part of Uyghur culture and only first gained traction in southern Xinjiang in the 1980s. While officials argue that veils are unique to uneducated Uyghurs who share a propensity towards extremism, they also blame religious extremism in Xinjiang as deriving from overseas forces – a line of argument frequently used to justify the forced deportations of overseas Uyghurs. A Uyghur researcher from the Xinjiang Academy of Social Science’s Institute of Sociology opined that the phenomenon of religious extremism was largely driven by the high and disproportionate rates of poverty and unemployment among the Uyghur population. As Xinjiang becomes increasingly dominated by a market-oriented economy run by the Han
population, Uyghurs feel they face greater economic, cultural, religious, and political marginalization. The same Uyghur scholar stated that the local Uyghurs’ disillusionment with their future in Xinjiang has led more Uyghur women to adopt the black veil and jilbab in place of their traditional headscarves, especially after the 2009 attacks and the ensuing incidents of ethnic unrest in the region.

Not only has Xinjiang outlawed the wearing of veils in public, but Dui Hua has also uncovered cases of individuals facing criminal charges for wearing veils in their own homes and for selling the banned clothing items.

The “Five Abnormalities”

The restrictions on Islamic clothing in Xinjiang first emerged in a number of localities in province’s southern region. However, after the 2009 Urumqi attacks, similar regulations were implemented in northern Xinjiang. Restrictions in the north remained relatively lax until 2013, when the Xinjiang government issued a provisional-wide directive known as Document No.11. In a question and answer format, the document serves as a set of guidelines for local authorities and as a warning to the public on how “illegal religions and extremism” will be handled; there are three mentions of the ban on the jilbab in the text. The document does not specify what the punishment for wearing a jilbab is. It merely calls on officials to “resolutely handle” violators.

It should be noted that the translation of terms used to describe Islamic clothing under Chinese regulations differ from what is generally used in Islamic communities. In August 2014, authorities in Karamay, a city in northern Xinjiang, banned those wearing Islamic clothing and those with beards from boarding a public bus, including women and girls who were wearing what China calls a niqab, a garment that would generally be referred to as a hijab (a headscarf covering the hair and neck while leaving the face visible) in most Islamic communities.

The ban also prohibits young women from wearing what China calls a niqab, a garment that would generally be referred to as a hijab (a headscarf covering the hair and neck while leaving the face visible) in most Islamic communities.

As a provincial-wide directive, Document No.11 has been introduced in localities across Xinjiang. In Karamay, authorities have banned the jilbab, the niqab, all face-covering...
veils, as well as young men from growing “big beards.” The ban has also outlawed clothes featuring the Islamic star and crescent symbol.

Also in 2013, Xinjiang’s Ili Prefecture issued a provisional rule to proscribe the “five abnormalities” from all public spaces. The 2014 Ili Yearbook reported investigating nearly 1,000 violators and confiscating 7,364 jilbabs and garments with the star and crescent symbol. The following year, the capital of Urumqi followed suit. Instead of using the term jilbab, which opens room for debate about what constitutes a jilbab, the Urumqi regulation has added the more secular-sounding but even vaguer term – “face-masking robes” (蒙面罩袍) – to the Chinese legal lexicon, giving authorities even greater power to determine what garments can be considered illegal.

Effective April 1, 2017, Xinjiang’s “Anti-Extremism Regulations” claimed that the wearing of “face-masking robes” and “abnormal beards” symbolized extremism. The regulations also officially expanded the administrative ban to the entire autonomous region.

**Criminalization of Islamic Clothing**

Violators of the aforementioned bans can face criminal prosecution under a number of offenses. One can be prosecuted for “forcing others to wear terrorism, extremism clothes or symbols,” a new offense that carries a maximum sentence of three years’ imprisonment. It was added to the Criminal Law in November 2015 and can be used in cases where violence or coercion is involved. Dui Hua is unable to find online judgments to understand how often this offense is being used by authorities. Unofficial news media has reported on cases of Uyghur women sentenced for promoting the wearing of headscarves, but the exact charges remain unknown.

Dui Hua has found one case where the charge of illegal business activity was used to prosecute an individual for selling banned Islamic clothing. Yang Bao’an (杨宝安), a Han Chinese man who originally migrated to Xinjiang from Hunan, was sentenced to three years’ imprisonment in April 2015 in Ili Prefecture for selling a hundred niqabs in a shopping center in Korgas (China’s westernmost port bordering Kazakhstan). Twenty-four of the niqabs carried the star and crescent symbol. The court found that Yang violated the “five abnormalities” ban that had been widely enforced in Ili Prefecture. Yang pled innocent on several grounds – 1. He was not aware of the meaning behind the star and crescent symbol; 2. Nobody had purchased any of the garments from him; 3. He did...
not know about the local rules since he had only just arrived in Xinjiang. Given that he had obtained a university education, the court found that Yang should have been aware and cautious about local regulations and that his actions had adversely affected the social stability of the area.

There is also evidence that wearing banned Islamic clothing can fall under the purview of the crime of “picking quarrels and provoking troubles.” In September 2014, the Supreme People’s Court, the Supreme People’s Procuratorate, and the Ministry of Public Security jointly issued a judicial interpretation to expand the applicable scope of this “pocket crime” in cases related to terrorism and extremism. An individual is now punishable for this offense if they disrupt social order by “willfully attacking, chasing, intercepting, and insulting others” while calling others “infidels or religious traitors.”

In March 2015, China Youth Online reported that a court in Kashgar sentenced a group of religious extremists for “picking quarrels and provoking troubles.” The report cited one case in which a Uyghur couple repeatedly refused to comply with “Project Beauty,” a campaign to discourage men from keeping long beards and women from wearing veils and headscarves. The husband was sentenced to six years’ imprisonment for “ignoring the national law.” Not only was he punished for keeping a long beard, but he was also punished for encouraging his wife to wear a veil. As his wife was said to have shown remorse, she was given a relatively lenient two-year imprisonment sentence. The original report was removed the day after it was originally posted. An anonymous source who proclaimed to have written the article allegedly sent an apology statement via WeChat for misreporting the case. Critics remain skeptical of its authenticity, with some suspecting that the apology was made under duress. The article has since been widely circulated online and remains accessible on official news websites.

**Banning Islamic Clothing in the Home**

Although the ban on Islamic clothing has been enforced in the name of “maintaining public order,” Dui Hua has found cases where authorities in Xinjiang have enforced the ban in people’s homes. Dui Hua uncovered a judgment in which a Muslim man, Gong Xiaojun (龚小军, ethnicity unknown), was sentenced to two years’ imprisonment for “disrupting official business” in Urumqi after arguing with community cadres in December 2014. When the community cadres paid Gong a home visit in June 2014, they found that Gong had grown an “abnormal beard.” The cadres admonished Gong for his beard and Gong allegedly responded with “extreme language” insisting that he grew the beard because he simply liked the way it looked.

The cadres informed Gong and his wife about the ban on “black religious clothing,” and accused his wife of wearing a jilbab. Gong argued that his wife was wearing a long loose black robe, not what the cadres were calling a jilbab and that the cadres had no right to intervene in what his family chose to wear at home. He claimed that he had requested his wife to wear the robe and his wife agreed that she had done so voluntarily. Gong was first indicted for “picking quarrels and provoking troubles,” but was convicted of a different charge – “disrupting official business.” The judgment did not explain in what ways Gong’s language was “extreme,” it only vaguely stated that his language was “extreme” and provocative enough to disrupt law enforcement.

**Beyond Xinjiang**

For Muslims who belong to China’s Hui minority, reports suggest that they currently do not face the same intensity of restrictions as Muslims in Xinjiang do. In a propaganda film entitled Leaving Heart in Hezhou (情定河州) about China’s “One Belt, One Road” initiative, the Hui women of Linxia Hui Autonomous Prefecture in Gansu Province are
portrayed in long black garments covering their bodies, hair, and necks. While the same clothes are banned in public and private spaces in Xinjiang and violators can face imprisonment, in Linxia, also known as “China’s Little Mecca,” Hui women are currently free to wear veils in public. However, given the growing restrictions on religious freedom in Linxia, the question remains for how long this freedom will last.

Xinjiang’s ban on Islamic clothing is no less controversial than the anti-Islamic legislation we see in the West and is no less discriminatory to Muslims. Since joining the global ranks of countries that impose restrictions on the appearance of its Muslim citizens, China has been under fire by human rights groups for intruding on its citizens’ religious freedoms. Although transparency of criminal cases involving the ban on Islamic clothing leaves much to be desired in Xinjiang, given what we know about how the sellers of Islamic clothing and those who wear Islamic clothing in their homes have fared, it is likely that those caught wearing Islamic clothing in public are facing increasing risks.

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**Tibetan monk arrested during visit from India, jailed on unknown charge**

Radio Free Asia (09.02.2018) - [http://bit.ly/2EsAeS4](http://bit.ly/2EsAeS4) - A Tibetan monk missing since traveling from India more than a year ago to visit his family in Sichuan has been found jailed by China on an unknown charge, Tibetan sources say.

Tashi Choeying, a monk enrolled at the Ganden Jangtse monastic college in South India, vanished after being taken into custody by police on Nov. 21, 2016, a Tibetan living in exile told RFA’s Tibetan Service, citing contacts in the region.

“He had returned to pay a visit to his family and relatives in Tibet, and one month after he arrived there, the local authorities suddenly arrested him without giving any reason,” RFA’s source said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

“He was held incommunicado until the end of 2017, when a fellow inmate was released from a prison in Dartsedo and was able to take a message to Choeying’s family, letting them know that he was being held in custody,” the source said.

Only then did Choeying’s family learn that he had been handed a six-year prison term on Nov. 21, 2017, after being convicted on an unknown charge, he said.

Choeying, aged 37 and a native of Tawu (in Chinese, Daofu) county in Sichuan’s Kardze (Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, had traveled to his home town on a valid travel document issued by the Chinese embassy in India, the source said.

“But he was illegally held by the Chinese authorities without charge for a year, and then was given his sentence,” he said.

Sources close to Choeying say that during his stay in India he may have spoken to the media about self-immolation protests challenging Chinese rule in Tawu and other Tibetan areas of China, and this may have resulted in his arrest, RFA’s source said.

“Everyone who knows him says that he is a good-mannered monk with impeccable integrity. He is a very kind and patriotic person with a deep love for his people and Tibet’s language and culture,” he said.
Sporadic demonstrations challenging Beijing’s rule have continued in Tibetan-populated areas of China since widespread protests swept the region in 2008.

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**U.S. pastor subjected to China’s unfair trials**


Throughout the proceedings, which lasted from 9:00-11:30 a.m., Lawyer Liu Peifu defended Pastor John Cao by telling the court that he often crossed the border between Myanmar and China to help poor minority children in Myanmar’s Wa State receive an education. Liu added that because of Cao’s efforts, the minority community is thankful towards the Chinese people.

Cao is well-renowned in that area of Myanmar for establishing 16 schools, providing educational resources to more than 2,000 children. Since the border between Myanmar and China has little regulation, he used to pass through with no incident.

However, the prosecution accused Cao of “organizing an illegal border crossing” and pinned an “illegal border crossing” charge to his colleague, Jing Ruxia, who was brought into custody with him on March 5 as they were attempting to enter China from Myanmar.

Shortly after, Cao’s relatives received a detention notice from the Menglian County Public Security Bureau, and his arrest warrant was formally approved by the procuratorate 20 days later. On July 13, his mother, identified only by her surname, Sun, said that the case had been transferred to the procuratorate for prosecution.

Sun, who attended the trial, said her son looked well and hopes for a fair hearing. However, China is notorious for discriminating against Christians in their trials, framing masses of innocent people for crimes they did not commit in order bring the religion under Communist control.

In addition to his educational work, Cao founded a church in Hunan, his home province, and serves as a pastor for China Ministries International. His previous humanitarian work includes helping students and victims rebuild their lives after a devastating earthquake tore through Wenchuan, Sichuan in 2008 and setting up schools for impoverished children in Pu’er, where he is now being held.

Cao married Jamie Powell, an American citizen, in 1988, and he became North Carolina resident. Powell still lives in the United States, along with the couple’s two sons.

ChinaAid exposes abuses, such as those suffered by Cao and Jing, in order to stand in solidarity with persecuted Christians and promote religious freedom, human rights, and rule of law.
14 Christian house church leaders abducted in China amid Communist crackdown on faith

By Stoyan Zaimov

Christian Post Reporter (01.02.2018) - http://bit.ly/2odMPh4 - Fourteen Christian house church leaders who are part of the Middle Eastern evangelism network have been abducted by government security agents in China.

ChinaAid reported on Wednesday that the Christians, who weren't named, are being held captive at an undisclosed location by state authorities in the coastal Zhejiang province.

"This massive, enforced disappearance of 14 peaceful church leaders shows the Communist Party has no regard to rule of law and its citizens' religious freedom rights," said ChinaAid President Bob Fu.

The group, which monitors the crackdown on churches and arrest of Christians and human rights activists in China, said the Communist government continues to deny believers religious freedoms and basic human rights.

"ChinaAid urges international leaders to speak out against this blatant abuse against religious freedom and human rights, and calls on China to immediately and unconditionally release these innocent Christians," the group declared.

Back in January, Christians shared their fears that the persecution could get worse following the government's destruction of an evangelical megachurch in the northern Shanxi province.

Chinese military police detonated explosives inside the Golden Lampstand Church in Linfen, destroying the house of worship which was owned by the Christians who worshiped there.

A video of the demolition was shared worldwide, showing the moment the church collapsed.

"My heart was sad to see this demolition and now I worry about more churches being demolished, even my own," a local pastor who wasn't named said at the time. "This church was built in 2008, there's no reason for them to destroy it now."

A Catholic church was also destroyed in a similar fashion in December, while at least 1,200 church rooftop crosses have been forcefully removed in Zhejiang province since 2015.

Chinese authorities have been known to raid worship services and detain dozens of Christians at once, such as what happened to 13 believers in Guangdong province in November.

Police officers raided Qingcaodi Church, a small house church in Jingmen, with believers seeing their Bibles and other church-owned material confiscated.

Chinese lawyers who have stood up for Christians have also been persecuted. Several attorneys who sought to represent 40 Christians who were arrested over "cult" activities last year were told in January that their legal certifications could be taken away.
Xiao Yunyan, one of the lawyers under government review, vowed that he and his colleagues will continue representing the Christians, with the lawyers working on a contingency plan.

China is listed No. 43 on Open Doors USA's World Watch List, which states that church life is heavily controlled by the government.

The watchdog group explains that Christians are "hedged in by authorities," since at 100 million strong, they are the largest social group that is not controlled by the state.

**Chinese bishop confirms Vatican sacked him in Beijing**

*Vatican also denies claims made by Hong Kong's Joseph Zen that pope's opinion on talks with Beijing differs to his diplomats*

UCANews (1.02.2018) - [http://bit.ly/2rYknF9](http://bit.ly/2rYknF9) - Sacked Chinese Bishop Peter Zhuang Jianjian, who is at the center of the latest storm around the Holy See's controversial talks with China's communist government, has broken his silence on being called in to Beijing by Vatican diplomats.

The confirmation of the Vatican's role in replacing two bishops originally appointed Rome, with two bishops who were appointed by the Communist Party controlled Catholic Patriotic Association — including one who has been excommunicated by Rome — has continued to rock China's so-called underground Catholic Church.

"But these acts, in fact, are scarifying the underground community for the benefit of half the China Church, which is the open community, not the whole," said a researcher who does not want to offend the Vatican.

In a phone call with ucanews.com, 88-year-old Bishop Zhuang of Shantou in Southern Guangdong province admitted that he went to Beijing "in December, where I met with four Vatican officials" but he was reticent to say much more. The Chinese government is well known for its monitoring of the communication devices of its critics or potential critics.

People close to the bishop, not known for his public display of emotions, said he was deeply and visibly upset by the ordeal.

The two-way talks between the Vatican and Beijing, that have now been underway for four years are aimed at ultimately establishing diplomatic relations but at present are solely at the first step focusing on the appointment of bishops in the China Church. The Holy See wants to gain approval of all bishop appointments, at present they are made by the Party and not all are agreed by Rome.

Bishops Zhuang's comment came as the Vatican rebuked Hong Kong Cardinal Joseph Zen, who travelled to Rome to present Pope Francis with a letter from the sacked prelate and to voice his long held view that the Vatican is wasting its time trying to negotiate with Beijing, in the process upsetting about half its 12 million followers who worship in underground churches.

Cardinal Zen has claimed the Vatican was "selling out" millions of Catholics in China who did not worship at the Party controlled version of the church.
A strongly worded statement, issued by Vatican spokesman Greg Burke's office, said some people in the church were "fostering confusion and controversy."

The statement and a loquacious interview with the Vatican's chief diplomat, Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin in La Stamp's Vatican Insider appeared to dispute Cardinal Zen's read out of a private meeting with Pope Francis over the issues.

The statement said that it was "surprising and regrettable" that some were promoting "a presumed difference of thought and action" between Pope Francis and his top aides over China strategy.

In his interview, Cardinal Parolin said: "The Holy Father personally follows current contacts with the authorities of the People's Republic of China. All his collaborators act in concert with him. No one takes private initiatives. Frankly, any other kind of reasoning seems to me to be out of place."

He added that the main purpose of the Holy See in the ongoing dialogue is safeguarding communion within the church, in the wake of genuine tradition and constant ecclesiastical discipline.

"You see, in China there are not two churches, but two communities of faithful called to follow a gradual path of reconciliation towards unity," Cardinal Parolin said.

"It is not, therefore, a matter of maintaining a perennial conflict between opposing principles and structures, but of finding realistic pastoral solutions that allow Catholics to live their faith and to continue together the work of evangelization in the specific Chinese context."

In return, Cardinal Zen disputed the No. 2 official, writing in a fresh blog post that the Vatican had shifted the focus on the issue of appointment of bishops to the relations between the pope and his diplomats.

"In fact, my blog never mentions that the pope does not know (what the Vatican diplomats are doing), but the pope really told (Archbishop) Savio Hon Tai-fai: 'Why the group (Vatican diplomats) never discussed with me (about recent appointments)?'

"What the pope told me is true: That his opinions are different to theirs. Therefore, at the end of the 'statement,' they cannot doubt the pope telling a lie, and then assert that I tell a lie," he wrote.

"I say in my blog that they are doing bad things (wrong things) but not say that they are lying, and now, readers are needed to judge either I or they tell a lie," he wrote.

"Of course I know my [first] statement will cause controversy but not confusion. I hope the result of the controversy is that they admit what they are doing is bad (wrong) and should step back from the precipice."

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**Chinese bishop reshuffle reinforces fears of state meddling**

World Watch Monitor (30.01.2018) - [http://bit.ly/2BHsjKj](http://bit.ly/2BHsjKj) - Fears are growing that China’s communist government may be gaining more control over the Catholic Church
there, as news emerged that the Vatican asked two bishops it had appointed to step aside in favour of ones selected by Beijing.

These developments have taken place following a state campaign against China’s Protestant churches, involving the removal of crosses from up to 2,000 churches and even the demolition of churches, and as a raft of new restrictions on religious practice come into force this week in the name of curbing extremism.

Bishop Peter Zhuang Jianjian of Shantou (Guangdong) was reportedly forced to go to Beijing, where a delegation from the Vatican asked him to leave his post to be replaced by Joseph Huang Bingzhang, a bishop not recognised by the Vatican. According to the Rome-based website AsiaNews, he received the same request last October.

The delegation then asked Bishop Joseph Guo Xijin of Mindong to accept a demotion to become the auxiliary or coadjutor of Bishop Vincent Zhan Silu, who is also not approved by the Vatican.

Hong Kong-based Cardinal Joseph Zen-Zekiun, 86, wrote in a blog post yesterday that the Vatican was at risk of “selling out the Catholic Church in China”. Pope Francis wants the Vatican to reach a deal with the state-backed Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association that oversees the registered Church.

Cardinal Zen was so troubled by the Vatican asking two of its own bishops to step aside that he flew to Rome to pass on a message from one of them, Bishop Zhuang, to Pope Francis and to convey what he later called “the worries of [Francis’] faithful children in China”. In an audience with the Pope, Francis told him: “I told them not to create another Mindszenty case!” (Cardinal Mindszenty was Archbishop of Budapest during Hungary’s communist dictatorship. The regime imprisoned him, but allowed him to flee the country; the Vatican replaced him with a candidate more to the government’s liking.)

From his experience of teaching in seminaries of the official Catholic community in the 1990s, Zen said state-approved bishops there were subjected to “slavery and humiliation”. He likened the Chinese government today to a “totalitarian” regime.

State-approved clergy are less likely to criticise the communist government and are more likely to follow orders than so-called “underground” priests, despite Beijing’s sporadic crackdowns on clergy who question its authority and human-rights record.

Paul, a Catholic quoted by UCA News, criticised the Vatican’s approach. “We can neither bow nor compromise. If the Vatican does not live up to expectations, we have to fight for ourselves,” he said.

President Xi Jinping has said “religions in China must be Chinese in orientation” and independent from outside influence. The state-approved bishops and the Patriotic Association last December passed a five-year plan to “Sinicize” the Catholic Church.

AsiaNews commented: “Sinicizing the Chinese Church means supporting the principle of independence [from Rome] and follow the leadership of the Communist Party.”
Restrictions that come into force this week urge local officials to exert greater control over Christian and Muslim congregations and effectively outlaw “underground” church meetings, threatening church leaders and congregations with large fines and confiscation of assets.

A local source told World Watch Monitor that the restrictions were one of several measures introduced to promote China’s political ideology and increase control over its Christian population, which is fast growing.

“More and more analysts anticipate further tightening of security, control and increased religious restrictions under Xi’s political influence, which might last until the year 2028 or later. Local churches that are closely connected with overseas groups – for example they’re affiliated with overseas denominations or receiving overseas funds – or which have a large congregation size, meet in public areas, or openly advocate against government policies, would likely be the first to be targeted in a crackdown,” the source said.

China is ranked the 43rd most difficult country in which to live as a Christian, according to the World Watch List published annually by the charity Open Doors. “If churches get too large or too political, they are seen as a threat and persecuted,” the charity said, adding: “Communist authorities are increasing restrictions on Christians in order to control society and stay in power.”

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**China’s religious clampdown sparks increasing concern**

*Catholics and academics warn that oppression started even before the announcement of new regulations*


Since Sept. 7, 2017, when Premier Li Keqiang announced the regulations would become effective from Feb. 1 this year, China’s religious measures have become more stringent.

Authorities organized seminars for religious people and government officials across the country to explain the new regulations and even implemented measures to suppress religions and religious practices.

At Christmas, local governments issued a circular to not allow students and party members to participate in religious festivals.

A Catholic source who wanted to be unnamed told ucanews.com that a shopping mall dismantled a decoration featuring Santa Claus.

"The mall is not a place of worship. Santa Claus is not exactly a religious icon, and the amended Regulations for Religious Affairs had not come into effect, but officials still went to request the mall to dismantle the decoration. I find it very strange," he said.

He does not believe the Cultural Revolution will be repeated but expects religious measures to be tightened, extending the government’s control to all levels of society.
Another unnamed Catholic said that before announcing the regulations China's government had already requested all priests, including those from the underground church, to register for a "clergyman certificate" so that the government could monitor them.

"But, after announcing the implementation of the regulations, the government has already put more pressure on underground priests to register. As for what happens after Feb. 1, we still do not know yet. But all local governments will certainly step up efforts to cater to the central government," he said.

Ying Fuk-tsang, director of the divinity school at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, told ucanews.com that the government was always worrying about the beliefs of minors, undergraduates and party members.

It aimed to ban Sunday schools and summer camps for minors, he said, and might step up its interventions more in activities for adolescents and minors.

Ying said the recent ban on Christmas celebrations was the beginning of a policy directed against Christianity.

However, he believes authorities "will not go back to the Cultural Revolution and eliminate religions but will continue to step up their controls and grip the religion firmly under the order of Sinicization."

Ying said authorities might allow certain local churches to develop smoothly and serve as role models in demonstrating that the government's religious policies were feasible.

Authorities understood it was difficult to eradicate religions, so some measures were taken to differentiate them, he said.
Six Christians jailed as pressure on churches increases


The verdict comes as part of a provincial crackdown on cults, as the ruling Communist Party continues its national campaign to restrict unregistered churches before new religious regulations come into force next week.

The six Christians received long sentences of up to 13 years by a court in Lincang city, west Yunnan, which found them guilty of being part of a sect called the Three Grades of Servants and of “using an evil cult to organise to undermine law enforcement”, their lawyer, Xiao Yunyang, told [Radio Free Asia](https://www.rfa.org).

According to [Release International](https://www.releaseinternational.org), since 2016 China has used its campaign against the sect “as a pretext to round up about 200 Christians across Yunnan: some Christians have already been convicted, while others are awaiting trial”.

A local source told World Watch Monitor that the authorities “seldom give such long prison sentences for just religious reasons, even in a sensitive region like Xinjiang [in the Uyghur Autonomous Region]. But both the Three Grades of Servants and Falun Gong are well-known cults in China and leaders of [these movements] are subject to heavy punishment”.

The six men and women, who belong to an unregistered church group, denied all charges and, according to their lawyer: “The judges in Yunnan were really evil. They didn’t pay any attention to the arguments that no illegal acts had been committed, and that there was no harm of any kind to society.”
According to RFA, Xiao has been notified that his license to practise law will be reviewed to see if he was “illegally” defending his clients.

**Prominent churches targeted**

Meanwhile two pastors in neighbouring Guizhou province, Su Tianfu and Yang Hua of Huoshi Church, were fined the equivalent of more than 1 million US$ earlier this month, after the money they received in collections and offerings from their congregation was deemed “illegal income”.

Huoshi Church and its leaders have clashed with the authorities before. In 2015 the church was raided by police during the opening ceremony of its new venue, which was attended by hundreds of guests, including some foreigners. The high-profile church was forced to close and its pastor, Yang Hua, was detained. The church did reopen but was then put under pressure to register as a state-sanctioned entity.

Yang Hua was last year sentenced to two and a half years in prison, while Su Tianfu remains under house arrest. A church deacon, Zhang Xiuhong, was also detained for more than two years before his release in August 2017.

A local source told World Watch Monitor the government specifically targets high-profile churches, but that many other congregations do not experience the same level of harassment.

“You have a high profile if you gather a big group of people – in particular in sensitive areas where there are minority people groups,” the source said. “Another thing [that creates this high profile] is if you have close contact with overseas groups, e.g. receive financial support from overseas, or, thirdly when you advocate in overseas media and draw the attention of human-rights agencies.”

Last week a high-profile church in northern China was demolished, the second in less than a month. World Watch Monitor’s source said the order seemed to have come from the top, illustrated by the fact the state-run newspaper reported on it.

“These cases are consistent with a new focus on the control and management of religious activities by the government”, according to Christian Solidarity Worldwide’s Chief Executive, Mervyn Thomas. “Different approaches are being taken by different provincial authorities, but taken together these cases may suggest a long-term plan to target independent religious communities.”

In his speech at the Communist Party Congress in October, President Xi Jinping reiterated the importance of Chinese nationalism, saying the government would “uphold the principle that religions in China must be Chinese in orientation, and provide active guidance to religions so that they can adapt themselves to socialist society”.

The new regulations on religious affairs are due to come into force on 1 February. They include guidelines on religious education, the types of religious organisations that can exist, where they can exist and the activities they can organise.
Around 120,000 ethnic Uyghurs are currently being held in political re-education camps in Kashgar (in Chinese, Kashi) prefecture of northwest China’s Xinjiang region alone, according to a security official with knowledge of the detention system.

Since April 2017, Uyghurs accused of harboring “extremist” and “politically incorrect” views have been jailed or detained in re-education camps throughout Xinjiang, where members of the ethnic group have long complained of pervasive discrimination, religious repression, and cultural suppression under Chinese rule.

Prior reporting by RFA’s Uyghur Service found that as arrests in Xinjiang increased around the sensitive 19th Communist Party Congress in Beijing in October, the region’s re-education camps have been inundated by detainees, who are forced to endure cramped and squalid conditions in the facilities.

The security chief of Kashgar city’s Chasa township recently told RFA on condition of anonymity that “approximately 120,000” Uyghurs are being held throughout the prefecture, based on information he has received from other area officials.

“I have great relationships with the heads of all the government departments and we are in regular contact, informing each other on the current situation,” he said, adding that he is also close with the prefecture’s chief of security.

Tens of thousands of people are detained within Kashgar city alone, the Chasa township security officer said, citing statistics from the city’s subdistricts.

“Around 2,000 [are detained] from the four neighborhoods of Kashgar city, as well as an additional 30,000 in total from the city’s 16 villages,” he said.

Among Kashgar city’s four neighborhoods, the largest number of detainees—more than 500 people—are from Yawagh, while among its 16 villages, the largest number are from Yengi-osteng, he added, without providing specific details.

Kashgar city is home to four re-education camps, the security chief said, the largest of which was established in the city’s No. 5 Middle School in May 2017.

“It’s located in the Shinka neighbourhood and is newly built,” he said.

“The plan was initially to build the new school in that area and transfer the current middle school students there. That is why it was named No. 5 Middle School.”

Around 80 people are living in the school’s main hall, the security chief said, while 20-25 people sleep in each of its classrooms.

Overcrowded and squalid

Sources say that authorities often convert government buildings and schools into makeshift re-education camps to deal with overcrowding, and routinely shift detainees between locations—that include prisons—without informing their family members.

In Bayin’gholin Mongol (Bayinguoleng Menggu) Autonomous Prefecture’s Korla city—where sources told RFA recently that as many as 1,000 people have been admitted to the city’s detention facilities over the course of a few days—a local government employee named Erkin Bawdun recently said that area re-education camps “are completely full.”
Bawdun said that a friend who spent time as an inmate at a local re-education camp told him he had seen officials from the center tell the police to “stop bringing people ... as it is already too full.”

He described cells that had previously held eight people now accommodating 14 inmates, who “were not allowed pillows” and “had to lay on their sides because there was not enough room to lay flat,” let alone space to turn over or stretch their legs.

Other acquaintances told Bawdun that they had seen “detainees walking barefoot,” and that inmates were “not allowed clothes with buttons or metal zippers,” belts, shoelaces, or “even underwear” in some cases, despite average low temperatures of around 15 degrees Fahrenheit (-10 degrees Celsius) at night in December.

Since Xinjiang party chief Chen Quanguo was appointed to his post in August 2016, he has initiated unprecedented repressive measures against the Uyghur people and ideological purges against so-called “two-faced” Uyghur officials—a term applied by the government to Uyghurs who do not willingly follow directives and exhibit signs of “disloyalty.”

China regularly conducts “strike hard” campaigns in Xinjiang, including police raids on Uyghur households, restrictions on Islamic practices, and curbs on the culture and language of the Uyghur people, including videos and other material.

While China blames some Uyghurs for "terrorist" attacks, experts outside China say Beijing has exaggerated the threat from the Uyghurs and that repressive domestic policies are responsible for an upsurge in violence there that has left hundreds dead since 2009.

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**China jails six Protestants in Yunnan amid massive crackdown on ‘evil cult’**

RFA (18.01.18) - [http://bit.ly/2DpQq6e](http://bit.ly/2DpQq6e) - Authorities in the southwestern Chinese province of Yunnan have jailed a group of Protestant Christians for up to 13 years for involvement in an "evil cult," their lawyer said on Thursday.

The Yun County People's Court near Yunnan's Lincang city handed down a 13-year jail term to Ju Dianhong, 12 years to Liang Qin, and four years to Yang Shunxiang, defense attorney Xiao Yunyang told RFA.

Shorter jail terms were also handed down to Zhang Hongyan, Zi Huimei and Zhang Shaocai, the lawyer said.

The six Protestant church followers had been found guilty of "using an evil cult to organize to undermine law enforcement," he said.

"The judges in Yunnan were really evil," Xiao said. "They didn't pay any attention to the arguments that no illegal acts had been committed, and that there was no harm of any kind to society."

He said the defendants, who have denied being part of a controversial house church group called the Three Grades of Servants, have said they will appeal the sentences.

The sentences come amid a crackdown in Yunnan on the Three Grades of Servants group, which has been designated an a dangerous cult by the ruling Chinese Communist
Some 200 Christians have been detained in the province and falsely accused of being members, according to the U.S.-based Christian rights group ChinaAid.

'Do good deeds'

Ju told the court during her trial that she has nothing to do with the Three Grades of Servants church.

"I am a Protestant Christian believer, and I believe in Jesus," Ju said. "None of my evangelism has contravened any of the principles in the Bible, and my beliefs do not constitute an evil cult."

"I never preached about the Day of Judgement, and all of my books are available in the Three Self Patriotic Association [of government-backed churches bookstore.]," Ju said. "All I ever wanted to do was resolve conflict and do good deeds."

Defendant Liang Qin meanwhile denied taking part in the Three Grades of Servants cult, saying she has never committed a crime, nor caused any harm to society.

She also denied following the teachings of sect founder Xu Shuangfu's group, which has been targeted by Beijing as an evil cult second only to the Buddhism and qigong-based Falungong.

Xu has been arrested more than 20 times and has spent more than 20 years in prison. His group claims millions of followers.

Lawyers threatened

Yunnan authorities also notified the detainees' defense lawyers that they are suspected of "illegally" defending their clients and that their licenses to practice will be subject to review, they said.

Defense attorney Li Guisheng told RFA in a recent interview that lawyers representing a similar group of Christians in Yunnan's Fengqing county had had their status as defense lawyers revoked by the court ahead of their clients' trial.

"Yun county and Fengqing county are acting together on this," Li said. "The families went and hired another six lawyers, but the court revoked their status too, just before the trial."

"There are two rights at stake here, the right of the clients to a legal defense, and the right of the lawyers to carry out their profession," he said.

One of the revoked attorneys, Fan Shiwen, confirm the report.

"According to my knowledge, there aren't any lawyers involved in the case now," Fan said. "The authorities are doing this because they know that the lawyers will be able to prove in court that their clients have done nothing illegal."

Meanwhile, the Yunnan High People's Court rejected appeals from Li Shudong, Li Meihua, and Peng Zhenghua, who were sentenced last June in Yunnan's Shaotong on charges related to participation in an "evil cult."

"We have had a decision in the appeals in the Shaotong case. They were rejected," Xiao said.
Religious persecution

ChinaAid president Bob Fu meanwhile said the crackdown in Yunnan is a form of religious discrimination and persecution.

"This is a historical, massive case of pure religious persecution against peaceful, independent house church Christians," Fu said in a statement on his group’s website.

"The large number of arbitrary arrests and extremely harsh, long sentences imposed on these young church leaders under the guise of being ‘anti-evil cult' shows that [Chinese President] Xi's regime has no interest in respecting its citizens' freedom of religion or belief."

"We call upon the Chinese leaders to immediately release these leaders and make proper amends to those who have been arbitrarily detained and tortured," Fu said.

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Over 600 refugees of the Church of Almighty God persecuted in China threatened to be sent back by South Korea

178 have already received a departure order; arrest, imprisonment and torture are awaiting them

HRWF (18.01.2018) - Seoul has seemingly decided to deport over six hundred Chinese members of the Church of Almighty God seeking a safe haven in South Korea, despite the fact that there is a high risk for them to be arrested, detained, and tortured in China.

Up until now, none of the applicants have been granted asylum, whereas 178 have received a departure order.

Data from South Korea, as of 14 January 2018:

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<th>Refugee status applicants</th>
<th>Granted refugee status</th>
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<th>Case(s) in process</th>
<th>Recipients of notice of non-recognition of refugee status &amp; departure order</th>
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<table>
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<th>Recipients of departure order</th>
<th>Have been targeted by the CCP due to a previous arrest or sentence in China</th>
<th>Have been investigated &amp; remain wanted by the CCP</th>
<th>Have been targeted by the CCP due to previous arrests of relatives</th>
<th>Have been targeted by the CCP due to their open activities in the CAG in South Korea</th>
<th>Others</th>
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<tr>
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<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How have these individuals suffered upon their return to China?
All listed names are aliases.

**Ms. DanChun** was arrested by the Chinese police in Fuling, Chongqing, China on 1 March 2013 and was tortured during interrogation in the Fuling Detention Center.

**Ms. YouXin** was reported and arrested by Chinese police when preaching the gospel and kept in custody at a police station in Hang Zhou, China on December 13, 2012. After being bailed out by the president of her college, she had been kept under surveillance and unable to live a normal life, so she was forced to drop out of school, leave home and live in exile. The Chinese police officers went to her house twice for her whereabouts in June and September 2013 respectively and have been monitoring her mother.

**Mr. Liu Yang** was arrested and interrogated by the Chinese police in Feixi County, Anhui Province, China when preaching the gospel on 12 December 2012, and was detained for 15 days on the charge of "disturbing the social order."

**Ms. Li Chunlian** was arrested by the Chinese police officers from Huichun City Police Station on her way home on 1 June 2005, she was then interrogated under CCP’s Kangaroo Court, tortured and sentenced to one year of re-education through labor, which leads to her lifetime physical disability.

**Mr. XiangXin** was arrested by the Chinese police in Guangyuan City, Sichuan Province, China when preaching the gospel in July 2004, he was tortured for a month and kept in custody for 15 days on the charge of “disturbing the social order” later on.

**Mr. Xu Zhigang** was tortured after being arrested by police officers from the National Security Brigade of Yanji City, Jilin Province, China when preaching the gospel on 29 July 2002, and was then sentenced to three years of re-education through labor on charge of “attending illegal meetings and disturbing the social order” without a public judicial process.

*If CAG members are deported back to China, their arrest is imminent, which is coupled with the strong possibility of subsequent torture, and sometimes even death.*

Three members of the Church of Almighty God were immediately arrested upon their return to China from South Korea.

**Mr. Li ZhenYuan** was arrested by police officers once he went through the security check at Yanji Airport in China on May 18, 2015.

**Mr. Han Feng** returned to China seeking medical treatment for his serious heart disease complications in March 2017. He had been monitored for two months before being arrested by the police in Hubei Province when he showed his ID document during a standard procedure. He was detained and ‘brainwashed’ for a span of two months before being released. Since his release, he remains under police surveillance.

**Ms. Yan Ru** was immediately arrested by the Chinese police upon her return to China from the Church of Almighty God in South Korea on June 2017.

*Human Rights Without Frontiers* has gathered numerous testimonies of arrest and torture from members of the Church of Almighty God in China. Additional testimonies prove that asylum seekers who are ultimately denied asylum status and deported back to China face a high risk of arrest, detention, and torture.

*Human Rights Without Frontiers* urges the member states of the European Union & South Korea to grant political asylum to members of the Church of Almighty God who have fled from China in search of a safe haven.
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**Church of Almighty God members fatally tortured while in custody**

HRWF (17.01.2018) - Since early 2017, the Chinese government has increased nationwide arrests of members of The Church of Almighty God (CAG), under an initiative they call “Door-knocking Action”. Security officials and police officers search from house to house, arresting, detaining and sometimes torturing and even killing members of the Church of Almighty God.

Two official CCP websites report that 204 members of the CAG were arrested by the Public Security Bureau in Zhejiang on 2nd of July alone. However according to the CAG, at least 583 Christians were arrested in that province that day. It is impossible to estimate the total number of members who have been arrested during this campaign against the church.

Reports of torture while in detention are frequent amongst CAG members. Occasionally, such cases result in death.

**The case of Li Qiang**

52-year-old Li Qiang (alias), a member of the Church of Almighty God from Xinyang City, Henan Province, was arrested in December 2012, after proselytizing in Xi County with several other members of the church. The group was arrested and taken to the Xi County Public Security Bureau for questioning and finger-printing. During this period, Li Qiang was forced to point his finger to the Bible while being photographed.

Li Qiang was ultimately detained for fifteen days for ‘illegal preaching’ and ‘disturbing social order’.

**Re-arrested & tortured**

On the morning of 15th July 2017, Li Qiang was listening to recorded sermons alone in his home when three police officers from the Xi County Public Security Bureau knocked at his door. Without an explanation or arrest warrant, they removed Li from his home and took him to the Xi County Public Security Bureau.

There, Li Qiang was questioned about the whereabouts of another CAG member who he had been arrested with back in 2012. That member had escaped police custody.

When Li did not answer the questions regarding other church members, the police force stripped him, kicked him, and beat him with sticks and leather boots while he lay on the ground. The police did not subside until Li lay motionless on the ground.

On 18th July, Li Qiang was escorted back home by police officers. The police told Li that he was there forth required to report to the bureau every Monday, and warned him that if he was caught professing his religion, they would beat him to death. Out of fear, Li went to stay at his uncle's house that night and then went to the home of a Christian couple the next day. Li informed the couple of what happened and showed his wounds on his body to them. The next day, Li left their house so that they could not be associated to Li by the police.

On the evening 23rd July 2017, Li was walking with his bike near his house when two police officers jumped out of a parked car and rushed to him. Li quickly mounted his bike and attempted to escape. After crashing his bike, Li continued his escape on foot, running towards the woods. The police chased him until late that night. Li ran to a three-meter-high wall, jumped off, and lay still, pretending to have died. Seeing this, the police ended their chase.
After the police had left, Li Qiang staggered to his aunt’s house around 4:30am the next morning. According to his uncle, Li was covered in mud and badly wounded on his hands, arms, and face. Li’s uncle took him to a local clinic, where upon examination, the doctor suggested he visit a hospital.

Li however, was worried that if he were to be hospitalized, which requires him to show his ID, the police would be able to easily find him. Despite his severe injuries, Li decided that the risk to seek proper medical treatment was too great.

**Psychological impacts**

On 27th July, Li’s uncle arrived at his house to check on Li. He found him lying in bed with a blue face. It is reported that Li was not in his usual mental state, that he was panic-struck and paranoid, telling his uncle that the police were surrounding his house.

Li’s family said that Li was barely eating and that he was spending the majority of his time pacing back and forth repeating the word ‘police’. Li refused to speak about what had happened to him while in custody and also refused to eat.

In the morning of 5th August 2017, Li Qiang was found dead in his bed by his mother. His family describes that the physical ailments and psychological scars he suffered due to being tortured and constantly chased by the police caused his death.

**Conclusion**

Unfortunately, Li Qiang is only one Church of Almighty God member, among many others, who has been tortured and targeted by Chinese authorities for his religious beliefs.

*Human Rights Without Frontiers* has gathered numerous testimonies of arrest and torture from members of the Church of Almighty God in China. Additional testimonies prove that asylum seekers who are ultimately denied asylum status and deported back to China face a high risk of arrest, detention, and torture.

*Human Rights Without Frontiers* urges the member states of the European Union & South Korea to grant political asylum to members of the Church of Almighty God who have fled from China in search of a safe haven.

**China bans Muslim children from Quran classes**


The notification for the ban has been posted online by the education bureau, as authorities step up their suppression of religious freedoms.

School students in Linxia county in Gansu province, home to many members of the Muslim Hui ethnic minority, are prohibited from entering religious buildings over their break, a district education bureau said, according to the notification.

Students must also not read scriptures in classes or in religious buildings, the bureau said, adding that all students and teachers should heed the notice and work to strengthen political ideology and propaganda. China is an atheist, communist state.

Reuters was unable to independently verify the authenticity of the notice.
The Linxia education bureau has declined to comment on the document’s validity.

Xi Wuyi, a Marxist scholar at the state-backed Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and an outspoken critic of rising Islamic influence in China, shared the picture and welcomed the apparent move by the authorities.

With the notice, the county was taking concrete action to keep religion and education separate, and sticking strictly to education law, she said on the Weibo social media platform.

New regulations on religious affairs released in October last year, and due to take effect in February, aim to increase oversight of religious education and limit religious activities.

Last summer, a Sunday School ban was introduced in the southeastern city of Wenzhou, sometimes known as "China's Jerusalem" due to its large Christian population, but Christian parents found ways to teach their children about their religion, regardless.

Chinese law formally grants religious freedom for all, but regulations on education and protection of minors also say religion cannot be used to hinder state education, or children taught to believe in a religion, rather than communism.

Authorities in troubled parts of China, such as the far western region of Xinjiang, home to the Turkic-speaking Uighur Muslim minority, ban children from attending religious events.

But religious communities elsewhere rarely face blanket restrictions.

Fear of Muslim influence has grown in China in recent years, sparked in part by violence in Xinjiang.

The Chinese-speaking Hui, who are culturally more similar to the Han Chinese majority than to Uighurs, have also come under scrutiny from some intellectuals, who fear creeping Islamic influence on society.

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**Chinese priest goes missing in Zhejiang province**

UCANews (10.01.2018) - [http://bit.ly/2mCP4uc](http://bit.ly/2mCP4uc) - Father Lu Danhua of Lishui Diocese of China's eastern Zhejiang province has been missing since government officials suddenly took him away just after Christmas.

He is the only priest of Lishui Diocese and his predecessor was Kenneth Roderick Turner of Scarboro Foreign Mission Society from 1948 to 1983. Wenzhou Diocese subsequently administered Lishui Diocese.

Father Lu was ordained by underground church Bishop Peter Shao Zhumin of Wenzhou on Dec. 14, 2016, and has served Lishui Diocese up to now.

Bishop Shao was released by authorities Jan. 3 after being detained since May 2017. A source who did not want to be named told ucanews.com that the reason for taking Father Lu away was not related to Bishop Shao.
But he said authorities had stated that Father Lu needed to go to Wenzhou for "re-educating" on new religious regulations coming into effect Feb. 1 and that he would return after obtaining a permit to be a priest.

At noon on Dec. 29, officials of the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) took Father Lu away from a priests' dormitory.

A Catholic who witnessed the incident told ucanews.com that the officials claimed Father Lu was only going for a brief chat.

The next day, the Catholic went to SARA's office where officials claimed Father Lu had already been released. But he remains missing and calls to his mobile phone have not been answered.

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**Chinese authorities jail four wealthiest Uyghurs in Xinjiang’s Kashgar in new purge**

RFA (05.01.2018) - [http://bit.ly/2EfZiH](http://bit.ly/2EfZiH) - Authorities in northwestern China's Xinjiang region have jailed the four wealthiest ethnic Uyghurs in Kashgar (in Chinese, Kashi) city for acts of "religious extremism," according to an official, amid a crackdown he said is unlikely to end any time soon.

A source, who spoke on condition of anonymity, recently told RFA's Uyghur Service that Abdujelil Hajim, Gheni Haji, Memet Tursun Haji, and Imin Hajim—all successful business owners in Kashgar—were taken into custody in May 2017.

The four men, whose last names signify that they have made the Muslim holy pilgrimage to Mecca, were later sentenced to a total of 42 years in prison, the source said.

Chairman of the Kashgar Prefectural Trade Association Abdujelil Hajim—who owns a firm that transports goods between China, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, as well as large tracts of property in Kashgar and Xinjiang's capital Urumqi—was sentenced to 18 years in prison.

Gheni Haji, the owner of the Emin Trading Plaza at Kashgar's Sunday Market; Memet Tursun Haji, owner of Eziz Diyar Plaza at the same market; and Imin Hajim, owner of the Ibsinsa Dental Facility; were each sentenced to eight years in jail, according to the source.
The source’s claims were verified earlier this week by Yasinahun, the chief of security for Kashgar’s Chasa township, who confirmed that the four men topped the list of the city’s wealthiest Uyghurs and that they had all been arrested in May, although he was unable to say where they are being held.

"Gheni Haji, Imin Hajim, and Memet Tursun Haji had displayed signs of religious extremism, so they were arrested," he told RFA in a phone interview, adding that their activities were characterized as "abnormal" by authorities.

"I was told that Memet Tursun Haji did not hold a funeral when his father passed away. Not holding a funeral is one of the signs of extremism. Gheni and Imin prayed only eight times at prayer service, not 20 as others usually do. That is also a sign of extremism."

Imin Hajim, Yasinahun said, is "a man of few words" who normally kept to himself, but had protested police searches of his home.

"He expressed extreme displeasure with our visits to his house related to our security work and said, 'I am a Chinese citizen, why do you conduct so many searches,'" he said.

China regularly conducts "strike hard" campaigns in Xinjiang, including police raids on Uyghur households, restrictions on Islamic practices, and curbs on the culture and language of the Uyghur people, including videos and other material.

While Yasinahun did not provide the specific reason for Abdujelil Hajim's arrest, he said that all four men had also undertaken "unapproved, private hajj" pilgrimages and been involved with imams who were not sanctioned by the state.

**Re-education camps**

Since April last year, ethnic Uyghurs accused of harboring "extremist" and "politically incorrect" views have been jailed or detained in political re-education camps throughout Xinjiang, where members of the ethnic group have long complained of pervasive discrimination, religious repression, and cultural suppression under Chinese rule.

Yasinahun said he was unsure of how many people are currently being held in re-education camps in Kashgar city, but that "around 2,000 people" were being held from Chasa alone.

"Most people are being detained at the Yawagh Street detention facility in Kashgar city," he said.

The security chief also said it was unclear when the campaign of political re-education in Kashgar would end.

"At one of the meetings held in the city, one of the Chinese officials said, 'you can't uproot all the weeds hidden among the crops in the field one by one-you need to spray chemicals to kill them all,'" he said.

"He went on to say, 're-educating these people is like spraying chemicals on the crops. That is why it is a general re-education, not limited to a few people.'"

"The message I got from this was that the re-education will last a very long time."

**Region-wide purge**

Dolkun Isa, president of the Munich-based World Uyghur Congress exile group, told RFA that China has been "targeting all Uyghurs as potential state enemies" since Xinjiang party chief Chen Quanguo was appointed to his post in August 2016.
"Chen has initiated an unprecedented region-wide purge of Uyghur intellectuals, religious figures, businessmen, and any Uyghur who is not pleased with Chinese rule as 'two-faced' people," Isa said.

"He has locked up tens of thousands in the political re-education camps, in much the same way that the Nazis did the Jews, soon after coming to power in Germany," he added.

"The international community should closely monitor what the Chinese government is doing in [Xinjiang] and express concern, because the Uyghur homeland is now simply a massive concentration camp."

While China blames some Uyghurs for "terrorist" attacks, experts outside China say Beijing has exaggerated the threat from the Uyghurs and that repressive domestic policies are responsible for an upsurge in violence there that has left hundreds dead since 2009.