

Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom or Belief

Side Event 19 November 2020

Tax Justice and Religious Freedom: The Tai Ji Men Case and Beyond

Organizers: CESNUR - Center for Studies on New Religions and HRWF - Human Rights Without Frontiers

See the event on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JT6ns65FMA4>

Oral presentation by Willy Fautre, Human Rights Without Frontiers

The videos that we have just seen give us a very accurate picture of the persecution Tai Ji Men and its disciples have been experiencing for 24 years.

The last episode of this saga took place a few months ago, in late August, when Taiwan's National Taxation Bureau arbitrarily seized and auctioned properties that belonged to Dr Hong, the founder and spiritual leader of the Tai Ji Men.

This auction was only another episode of the long-term persecution by Prosecutor Kuan-jen Hou, who has abused his power, violated the law, and made false accusations to destroy Tai Ji Men.

However, the video could not show all aspects of the repression, such as the detention conditions Dr Hong was subjected to or the collateral suffering endured by other disciples who were arrested and their families.

117 days in detention and unethical investigation while innocent

While Prosecutor Hou was conducting investigations, **Dr Hong** was detained for nearly four months. During that time, he was transferred to different detention centres and placed in cells with violent criminals, drug addicts and criminals to provoke fear and intimidate him.

This strategy had a dual purpose, as Prosecutor Hou would also ask Dr Hong's cellmates to testify against him. These testimonies often consisted of slander against Tai Ji Men and its leader.

Prosecutor Hou carried out a biased investigation with the sole purpose of justifying alleged charges and excluding evidence that could exonerate Dr Hong.

Prosecutor Hong only interrogated Dr Hong three times for a total of 29 minutes over the course of a 117-day pre-trial detention during which he was under the status of presumption of innocence. He was only asked 13 questions in all. Finally, he was declared innocent of all the imaginary charges arbitrarily pressed against him. During the interrogation, the prosecutor was very rude, would throw files, pound on tables, rant loudly, intimidate and coerce Dr Hong.

After Dr Hong's first appearance in court, the judge refused to release him on bail. Throughout the entire judicial process, Prosecutor Hou did not notify Dr Hong's lawyer about the charges against his client, which made him unable to exercise his right as defense attorney.

Furthermore, the living conditions that Dr Hong endured during detention led to a deterioration in his health. He was held in damp, cold cells. One of his disciples sent him a new quilt, but instead he was given an old and dirty one. It is suspected that the prison authorities tampered with this other blanket so as to make Dr Hong's body itch. It was so extreme that he would scratch to the point of breaking his skin and could hardly fall asleep due to the discomfort. Eventually his feet were so swollen and painful from the damp conditions that he could hardly walk. There were even concerns his feet would need to be amputated due to the damage done.

During the second court hearing on 26 May 1997, the judge noticed his swollen feet and knees and finally decided to release him on bail.

Arrested, demonised and mocked, fired by his employer, and acquitted 3 years later

Another case of injustice is that of **Wan-ding Chang**, a Tai Ji Men disciple, who was arrested during the December 1996 crackdown.

He was then working as assistant vice president for the largest publishing house in Taiwan, supervising over 500 employees. He had been a Tai Ji Men disciple for seven years. A week after Dr Hong's arrest, the police searched his house without a warrant and arrested him. During his detention, he was threatened, intimidated, and coerced in attempts to force him to provide testimonies against Dr Hong.

During Wan-ding Chang's interrogation, the officers contacted his employer, which destroyed his reputation and led to a forced resignation. As his family's sole earner with a salary of around 7,000 USD per month, his family faced a financial crisis after he lost his job. Furthermore, it was challenging for him to find other work after his release due to the negative public attention circulating this case.

At the time, Wan-ding Chang's three daughters were all in school. They were mocked by their classmates. Wan-ding Chang was also ridiculed by friends, relatives, and neighbours.

Later, Prosecutor Hou began another case where Wan-ding Chang was identified as one of the defendants. Although there was no concrete evidence for the charges, Prosecutor Hou did not drop the case but instead sent it to private prosecutors. The defendants were then subjected to a series of lengthy court appearances and hearings. This was very costly for the defendants, as it took immense resources in the form of time and money, as well as causing irreparable damage to their reputations.

After the case had gone on for three years, the court finally declared all the defendants innocent.

See Video:

A Question of Justice: The Tai Ji Men Tax Case in Taiwan

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/19qlx5AApEIBmN0eZ7FTqYGUmEg6OmdQ1/view>