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## **USCIRF: China's religious liberty and "malignant influence" getting worse**

***The 2024 USCIRF report notes a deteriorating situation in several countries. "Bitter Winter" remains a trusted source.***

by Massimo Introvigne

[Bitter Winter](#)(07.05.2024) - Every year, the yearly reports of USCIRF are mandatory reading for those interested in [religious liberty](#) throughout the world. The USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan U.S. federal government commission created by the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA). Its Commissioners are appointed by the President and by Congressional leaders of both political parties.

The [2024 report](#) continues a tradition of excellency. We at "Bitter Winter" are pleased of being consistently referred as a trusted source in these reports. Within the framework of an editorial choice of shorter entries on each country, in the two pages devoted to China eighteen articles from "Bitter Winter" are referenced. We are also referenced as a source for Pakistan and Russia. We are also happy to note that the situation of the [Ahmadi Religion](#)

[of Peace and Light](#), a Shia-derivative group whose story we have told recently, has been mentioned in the USCIRF 2024 yearly report, with reference to its persecution in Algeria and thanks to the work of our friend Willy Fautré and [Human Rights Without Frontiers](#). USCIRF also continued to express its concern about France's targeting of "religious minorities it pejoratively labels as 'sects' or 'cults.'" Among the final general comments, a mention of the crisis in Japan involving the Unification Church/Family Federation and now also the Jehovah's Witnesses is, however, missing and would have been appreciated.

While recommending to read the whole report, we summarize here its main findings about China, supporting the conclusion that, "In 2023, religious freedom conditions in China deteriorated." "[Sinicization](#) of religion" is correctly described not as adapting religions to Chinese culture but as "demanding that all major religious groups obey the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and its ideology and policies. [Sinicization](#) requires groups to follow the [CCP's](#) Marxist interpretation of religion, including by altering religious scriptures and doctrines to conform to that interpretation."

In 2023, the report continues, "Authorities demolished and forcibly modified Christian churches and Muslim mosques because of architectural features they deemed 'foreign.' In the ethnoreligious minority regions of [Xinjiang](#) and Tibet, [sinicization](#) entailed forced assimilation of local populations that threatened their religious and cultural identities." In [Xinjiang](#), [Xi Jinping](#) personally "vowed to strengthen repressive policies and continue sinicizing Islam in [Xinjiang](#). Authorities continued to detain and imprison [Uyghurs](#). According to reports, some became critically ill in custody while others died in prison or shortly after release. The government continued to subject [Uyghurs](#) to forced labor, including in prisons. Authorities heavily surveilled and prevented [Uyghurs](#) from fasting during Ramadan and rebranded [Xinjiang](#) as a tourist destination." Outside [Xinjiang](#), [Hui Muslims](#), once tolerated as friendly to the regime, were also subjected to increasing restrictions.

In Tibet, "Authorities increased surveillance and security measures on [Tibetan Buddhists](#), restricting their peaceful religious activities, arresting and imprisoning them for engaging in such activities and possessing the Dalai Lama's portraits or teachings, and placing them in 'political re-education' camps to prevent self-immolation. Some Tibetan Buddhist monks died in prison. The government separated one million Tibetan children from parents, putting them in state-run boarding schools to forcibly assimilate them. Some local authorities banned parents from teaching religion to Tibetan children. The government controlled the ordination of Tibetan monks and reiterated its intent to interfere in the Dalai Lama's reincarnation and appoint his successor."

The report also notes that, "In September, the government implemented its new Measures for the Management of Religious Activity Venues, further restricting religious freedom," and that the results of the Vatican-China agreement of 2018 continue to appear as negative for the Catholic community in China.

Persecution of Protestant [house church](#) Christians also "intensified. The government continued its nationwide crackdown on [house churches](#), detaining, arresting, and sentencing independent Protestants on security and criminal charges. Authorities tortured Christians held in secret detention centers and prisons."

New religious movements experienced the most severe repression. "The government continued its persecution of [Falun Gong](#) and [the Church of Almighty God](#) (CAG), often using 'anti-cult' provisions under [Article 300](#) of China's Criminal Law. In 2023, [Falun Gong](#) sources documented 6,514 cases of harassment and arrest, 1,190 prison sentences,

and 209 deaths because of persecution. Across China, authorities arrested and tortured thousands of CAG members, some of whom reportedly died due to abuses.”

The document also denounced the organized “malignant influence” of China abroad. The Chinese regime “engages in sophisticated and comprehensive campaigns of transnational repression, using a wide array of physical, digital, and psychological tactics to attempt to silence those it views as threats, such as [Uyghurs](#),” Hong Kong pro-democracy expatriates, and asylum seekers who are members of religion persecuted in China.

The USCIRF continues to recommend to the U.S. government and diplomacy to vigorously denounce the assault on freedom of religion or belief in China, as well as in other countries “of particular concern,” a list that also includes, in the American continent, Cuba and Nicaragua. The USCIRF performs an essential function, whose beneficial effects go beyond the United States. It also has enemies, who would like to see it defunded or even eliminated. It needs the support of all friends of [religious liberty](#).

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## **Religious persecution and issues – Bimonthly Digest April 15-29**

### **General**

#### **19.04.2023 - A new round of restrictions further constrains religious practice in Xinjiang**

China File - Authorities in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region rang in 2024 by announcing an update to the region’s strictures on religious practice. Changes include new rules to ensure that sites of religious worship, like mosques, look adequately “Chinese,” and to mandate the cultivation of “patriotic” religious leaders.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **Buddhists**

#### **23.04.2024 - Massive Chinese cyber espionage of Tibetan diaspora revealed**

Bitter Winter - We all knew that Chinese intelligence agencies keep the Tibetan and Uyghur diasporas under surveillance and harass them in many different ways. However, a data leak from the private company Shanghai Anxun Information Technology Co., Ltd. (i-Soon), which occurred on February 18, 2024, probably thanks to an anonymous whistleblower within the corporation, revealed that cyber surveillance has now escalated to a higher and much more dangerous level.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **22.04.2024 - Released from arrest, tortured Tibetan monk committed suicide**

Bitter Winter - There are Tibetans who decide to die through self-immolation to protest the cultural genocide of their people. For others, suicide is not a form of protest but the consequence of torture and terror.

Only on April 15, 2024, the parents of monk Tenzin Dorjee from Nubling township, Dingri county, Tibet, informed human rights organizations that their son had committed suicide last year, on May 25, 2023.

A learned 50-year-old monk of Shelkar Monastery from Dingri county, Tenzin Dorjee was accused of studying and explaining forbidden texts by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Shelkar is an important learning center founded in 1385 by Lotsawa Drakpa Gyeltsen of the Sakya school and converted to Geluk in the 17th century. It still commands considerable local prestige.

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### **16.04.2024 - Campaign against "cults" launched in Lhasa—But what is a "cult" in Tibet?**

Bitter Winter - On April 4, the Lhasa Public Security Bureau issued a strange document on repressing "xie jiao," a term that really means "heterodox teachings" and was originally used by Taoists in the Middle Ages to slander Buddhism, but is today translated by the CCP in languages other than Mandarin as "cults."

The document, whose translation we offer here below, would be perfectly predictable in other areas of China where fighting groups listed as "xie jiao" such as Falun Gong and The Church of Almighty God is a national security priority. The document incites Tibetans to inform on the activities of the "xie jiao" promising monetary rewards.

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## **Xie Jiao**

### **18.04.2024 - Once popular, Deng Haipeng's "Soul Shaping" is liquidated as a Xie Jiao**

Bitter Winter - Recently, the Xiamen Intermediate Court confirmed on appeal a verdict of seventeen years and six months in jail against the "xie jiao leader" Deng Haipeng, and lesser penalties for eight of his co-workers. "Xie jiao" is often translated as "cults" or "evil cults" but means "heterodox teachings" and is a label used in China since the Middle Ages

to designate religious groups whose teachings are regarded as dangerous and subversive by the state.

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## Falun Gong

### 27.04.2024 - Meizhou City, Guangdong Province: 14 Falun Gong practitioners arrested in three days

Minghui - A total of 14 Falun Gong practitioners in Meizhou City, Guangdong Province were arrested for their faith over the course of three days in mid-April 2024. At the time of this writing, two practitioners have been released due to their poor health, eleven practitioners are still held in custody, and the situation of one practitioner isn't clear.

Ten Arrested on April 17, 2024

Around 13 officers from the Meixian District Domestic Security Division and Chengjiang Township Police Station broke into **Ms. Zeng Xiuqiong's** home at around 2 p.m. on April 17, 2024 and arrested her and her seven guests, including **Ms. Xie Guofang, Ms. Zou Xiufen, Ms. Zeng Xizhen, Ms. Liu Haibo, Ms. Liu Biqing, Ms. He Xinfeng, and Ms. Fan Laiying.**

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### 19.04.2024 - Horror continues in the Heilongjiang Provincial women's prison

Bitter Winter - "Bitter Winter" has reported previously on the dreadful situation of women prisoners of conscience in the Heilongjiang Provincial Women's Prison, nicknamed "the cemetery of Falun Gong ladies." Two female Falun Gong practitioners were persecuted to death there this year.

Notwithstanding the international protests, the horror continues. Human rights organizations have now received the testimony of Liu Jinping, a 43-year-old female Falun Gong practitioner from Jiamusi City, Heilongjiang, who has become another inmate in the notorious jail.

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## Muslims

### 25.04.2024 - Hui Muslims mobilized to chase "spies"

Bitter Winter - April 15 in China is National Security Education Day. "Bitter Winter" received several reports on how "national security education" became mandatory around that date in Hui Muslim mosques, under the guidance of the government-controlled China Islamic Association.

Preachers were told that they should focus their sermons on explaining to Muslim devotees the new Law on Guarding State Secrets, which comes into force on May 1 and includes a greatly expanded, if vague, definition of what a "state secret" is.

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### 23.04.2024 - How the Chinese state is hollowing out religion in Xinjiang

Economist - New religious regulations in Xinjiang stipulate that mosques should look Chinese and religious figures should behave patriotically. What do those rules look like on the ground, and did they affect Ramadan celebrations for Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities this year?

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## Protestants

### 29.04.2024 - Hohhot Christians' trial: Ban Yanchao gets 5 years for distributing bibles

Bitter Winter - In March, "Bitter Winter" reported about the arrest and prosecution of ten Christian believers from Hohhot, the capital of Inner Mongolia. They were accused of illegal sales of Bibles, but the peculiarity of the case was that the Bibles had been legally published in Nanjing with the government's authorization. The prosecutor's argument was that sales of Bibles by an illegal house church not affiliated with the government-controlled Three-Self Church is a crime even if the Bibles are in themselves "legal."

[Continue reading...](#)

### 24.04.2024 - School education in China: choices among Christian families

Christian Daily - Christian school education has a long history in China, going back at least to Robert Morrison's Anglo-Chinese College in Malacca in 1818. In fact, thirteen of the country's premier universities were once Christian. That all changed after the current government took power in 1949, when Christian schools and universities were closed, merged with other schools, or secularized in other ways. By 1952, Christian schools in China were basically gone. Revival came to the Chinese countryside in the 1970s and 1980s, and the 1990s saw it come to the cities as well. By 2000, China's cities had millions of young, educated believers who were just out of college and beginning to start families. They wanted something different for their children's education than they had experienced themselves.

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### 15.04.2024 - Sichuan's Qiuyu Qingcaodi Church: Elders Wu Jiannan and Hao Ming sentenced to jail terms

Bitter Winter - On April 9, 2024, the Jingyang District Court of Deyang City, Sichuan, rendered its decision on the case of elders **Hao Ming and Wu Jiannan** of Sichuan's Qiuyu Qingcaodi Church. Both elders were sentenced to three years in prison with a suspended sentence of five years and were fined 30,000 yuan. Elder Wu was also ordered to return the 100,130 yuan given to his family by the church.

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## Religious persecution and issues – Bimonthly Digest April 01-15

### Buddhists

#### 09.04.2024 - China gives monks a list of things they can't do after the Dalai Lama's death

RFA - In the event of the Dalai Lama's death, Buddhist monks are banned from displaying photos of the Tibetan spiritual leader and other "illegal religious activities and rituals," according to a training manual Chinese authorities have distributed to monasteries in Gansu province in China's northwest, a source inside Tibet and exiled former political prisoner Golok Jigme said.

The manual, which lists 10 rules that Buddhist clergy should follow, also forbids disrupting the process of recognizing the Dalai Lama's reincarnation, said the source from inside Tibet who requested anonymity for safety reasons.

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#### 09.04.2024 - Monk arrested for holding Dalai Lama's portrait during protest

RFA - Chinese police arrested a Tibetan monk from Kirti Monastery for staging a solo protest while holding a portrait of the Dalai Lama on the streets of Ngaba county in southwest China's Sichuan province in March, two sources from inside Tibet and one from the exile community told Radio Free Asia.

**Buddhist monk Pema**, who was working as a teacher for the preliminary Buddhist study section at Kirti Monastery, also shouted slogans against Chinese policies in Tibet during his protest on Pawo Road, or Martyrs' Road, and was immediately arrested, said the sources who requested anonymity for safety reasons.

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### Falun Gong

#### 14.04.2024 - 87-year-old woman faces prison sentence for distributing informational materials about Falun Gong

Minghui - More than ten people from the Daxing District Court in Beijing descended on the home of 87-year-old Ms. Ma Xiuying on March 25, 2024, and threatened to have her sentenced to one year for her faith in Falun Gong.

Since the Chinese Communist Party began to persecute Falun Gong in 1999, **Ms. Ma** has been repeatedly targeted for upholding her faith. This latest episode stemmed from her arrest in August 2021 for distributing informational materials about Falun Gong at Daxingtuanhe Market. Due to her advanced age, the market's security released her.

After that, the police and residential committee staff members frequently went to harass her, either demanding to take photos of her or ordering her to sign certain documents. The police forcibly collected a sample of her blood during one visit, threatening to take away the portrait of Falun Gong's founder if she didn't comply. After the police left, Ms. Ma noticed that her copy of Zhuan Falun, the main teaching of Falun Gong, was missing. She ran after the police and got it back.

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### **11.04.2024 - Heilongjiang woman dies over a year after serving four years for her faith**

Minghui - A Harbin City, Heilongjiang Province, resident became incapacitated after serving four years for her faith in Falun Gong. After struggling with failing health for over a year, Ms. Ren Rujie passed away in early March 2024. She was 74.

Ms. Ren, a retired employee of the Tahe County Post and Telecommunications Bureau, took up Falun Gong in 1998. She thanked the practice for helping her better handle interpersonal conflicts and become more gentle.

Ms. Ren later moved to Russia with her son to do business and stopped practicing Falun Gong. In late 1999, she was found to have late-stage cancer with severe complications. The doctor predicted that she only had a few months left. With no other options, she resumed practicing Falun Gong and recovered.

In November 2000, Ms. Ren went to Beijing to appeal and was arrested. She told the police how she recovered from cancer by practicing Falun Gong. The police were touched by her story and released her.

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### **06.04.2024 - Three Liaoning women sentenced from 4.5 to 8 years for practicing Falun Gong**

Minghui - Three Shenyang City, Liaoning Province, residents were recently sentenced to prison for practicing Falun Gong.

**Ms. Yu Guichun**, 72, was sentenced to eight years. **Ms. Li Yongmei** was given five years. **Ms. Zhang Yujin**, 79, a retired professor at Shenyang Ligong University, was sentenced to four and a half years.

The police revealed that they had been following the three women and monitoring their phone calls for six months before arresting them over the course of two days in September 2023.

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## **Muslims**

### **11.04.2024 - What Ramadan is like in Xinjiang**

Economist - China's communist party has a message for Muslim citizens. It holds their religious freedoms dear—with a special emphasis on the freedom not to believe. The right to be secular runs like a thread through religious regulations enacted this year in Xinjiang,



the far-western region that is home to 12m Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities. The revised rules impose new controls on everything from religious teaching to mosque architecture, which should reflect Chinese style. The regulations talk of extremists warping minds and promoting terrorism. To prevent this, the rules state, no organisations or individual shall induce or coerce locals to believe or not believe in any religion.

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### **08.04.2024 - Yuxi, Yunnan: Ramadan fasting prohibited to minors and party members**

Bitter Winter - "Bitter Winter" has received from Muslim believers in Yuxi, Yunnan, copy of a document issued by the Yuxi Ethnic and Religious Affairs Bureau, prohibiting CCP members and minors from fasting during current Ramadan.

The translation of the document is as follows:

"Urgent notice on the investigation of party members and minors participating in religious activities such as fasting.

Party committees and governments of each county (city, district), municipal units and relevant municipal enterprises should note:

Fasting is one of the religious practices of Islam and belongs to religious activities. At present, it is the month of Ramadan in Islam. In order to prevent Party members and minors from participating in religious activities such as fasting, the relevant matters are hereby regulated as follows:

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## **The Church of Almighty God**

### **02.04.2024 - CCP launches 3-year "tough battle" against The Church of Almighty God**

Bitter Winter - After a previous three-year "general battle" failed to eradicate the banned religious organization, a new plan has been set in motion in 2024.

After conducting a three-year "general battle" against The Church of Almighty God (CAG), the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) initiated another three-year "tough campaign," aiming at "completely eradicating" the CAG. Local authorities were tasked with comprehensive investigations as a preparation for coordinated arrests.

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## **Protestants**

### **15.04.2024 - Sichuan's Qiuyu Qingcaodi Church: Elders Wu Jiannan and Hao Ming sentenced to jail terms**

Bitter Winter - After a persecution that started in 2018, the two elders were sentenced to three years in jail with a suspended sentence of five years.

On April 9, 2024, the Jingyang District Court of Deyang City, Sichuan, rendered its decision on the case of elders **Hao Ming** and **Wu Jiannan** of Sichuan's Qiuyu Qingcaodi Church. Both elders were sentenced to three years in prison with a suspended sentence of five years and were fined 30,000 yuan. Elder Wu was also ordered to return the 100,130 yuan given to his family by the church.

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### **09.04.2024 - Pastor Zhang Sen detained for leading prayers outside the detention center**

China Christian Daily - On March 28, 2024, Pastor Zhang Sen from Fuyang Maizhong Reformed Church was taken away by Quanying Police Station of Yingquan Sub-bureau and subsequently administratively detained for 15 days. The reason for the detention was that on the morning of March 24, Pastor Zhang Sen and members of his church went to the Fuyang Detention Center to welcome eight released believers who had been administratively detained for 13 days for attending Sunday gatherings, and he led prayers outside the detention center. The police accused him of "organizing illegal assembly" and subjected him to a 15-day administrative detention. Officers from the Fuyang Public Security Bureau stated their intention to crack down on Maizhong Reformed Church, saying that as long as two or three people gathered, they would be detained upon capture.

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### **09.04.2024 - Christians in China threatened after arrest for printing devotionals**

Christian daily - Authorities in China issued threats of a long prison sentence and loss of property to Christians charged with "illegal business operations" for printing devotional materials intended only for their church, their attorney said.

Arrested and charged last year, elder Zhu Longfei, Pastor Deng Yanxiang, deacon Zhu Longjiang, deacon Wang Weicai and Zhu Qiaoling of Shengjia Church in Shunde, Guangdong Province, told their attorney in late March of the threats, according to advocacy group China Aid.

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### **04.04.2024 – Three Ministers from Xi'an Church of Abundance are facing up to 5 years of imprisonment**

China Aid - On March 25, 2024, the Xi'an Church of Abundance issued a prayer request letter, revealing the latest development in the case involving Pastor **Lian Changnian, Lian Xuliang, and Preacher Fu Juan**, who were accused of "fraud." The case entered the court at the end of January 2024, with the court's prosecution against the three Christians the amount of ¥390,000 yuan(\$54,030 U.S. dollars), and the suggested sentences of 5 years.

The Xi'an Church of Abundance that Pastor Lian Changnian ministers is affiliated with the "China Gospel Fellowship," a house church with 10,000,000 congregants originated from the Tanghe area of Henan Province. China Gospel Fellowship has developed and become a national house church system with evangelical and Pentecostal features, consisting of a few hundred pastors, and a few dozen missionary teams, so it is one of the most developed house churches in China. The China Gospel Fellowship has long faced persecution from the government, being categorized as one of the several banned cult organizations. There have been numerous large-scale arrests of pastors, co-workers, and congregants. Pastor Lian Changnian himself has been imprisoned multiple times.

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### **03.03.2024 - Ji Xiaolong protests at the second trial regarding the abuse he received while in custody**

China Aid - Shanghai activist **Ji Xiaolong** was arrested for speaking out against the humanitarian disaster caused by the lockdown in Shanghai. He wrote a letter to then Shanghai Party Secretary, now Premier Li Qiang, calling for accountability from senior officials. Ji Xiaolong was sentenced to 4 years and 6 months in prison for "picking quarrels and provoking trouble," he disagreed with the verdict of the first instance and appealed. The second trial was held on March 21 at the Shanghai Pudong People's Court. Ji Xiaolong protested in court, claiming he had been abused during his detention.

Ji Xiaolong stated in his appeal that the Shanghai People's Court accused him of posting or reposting false information that seriously damaged the image of the country on Twitter (X). However, the verdict did not specify the content which "damaged the image of the country." He pointed out that the court did not find any trace of logins into Twitter (X) on his phone or computer, yet it concluded that the X account registered under his name belonged to him or was operated by him.

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## **Religious persecution and issues – Bimonthly Digest March 16-31**

### **Buddhists**

#### **25.03.2024 – China releases Tibetan monks and residents held for dam protests**

RFA – Chinese authorities have released hundreds of monks and other Tibetans arrested in February for peacefully protesting the construction of a dam in a Tibetan-populated area of Sichuan province, but are still holding two accused of being ringleaders, two sources inside Tibet said.

Tenzin Sangpo, senior administrator of Wonto Monastery, and a village official named Tenzin, were arrested on Feb. 23 on suspicion of leading protests last month against the Gangtuo Dam project in Dege county, or Derge in Tibetan, in the province's Kardze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture.

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### **Falun Gong**

#### **30.03.2024 – Shoe shop owner sentenced to seven years for practicing Falun Gong**

Minghui – A Dehui City, Jilin Province resident was sentenced to seven years on January 4, 2024 for practicing Falun Gong.

Mr. Zheng Yuming, 67, and his wife were arrested by officers from the Dajiagou Police Station at their shoe shop on February 25, 2023. The police monitored the couple for three days before arresting them. They confiscated their three printers, two computers, and

many Falun Gong books. Mr. Zheng was held at the Dehui City Detention Center but his wife was released.

In addition to the couple, 13 other practitioners in Dehui City were arrested.

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### **28.03.2024 – Belated News: Incapacitated for a decade due to torture, Liaoning Woman dies months after her pension is suspended.**

Minghui – Although a Fuxin City, Liaoning Province, resident survived brutal torture while she was incarcerated for practicing Falun Gong, she remained bedridden for the next 12 years and relied on her husband and mother to care for her. The destitute family was dealt a hard blow when the authorities suddenly suspended Ms. Huo Xiuqin's pension in late 2022. The 63-year-old woman's health deteriorated and she passed away months later.

Ms. Huo was arrested on September 2, 2008, by police officers Gao Nan and Zhu Hongyan in a public plaza for talking to people about Falun Gong. She was held at the Xindi Detention Center and later sentenced to three years by the Haizhou District Court. Although the Liaoning Province Women's Prison initially refused to admit her due to her high blood pressure, the guards took her in after Wang Zhonghong, the director of the Xindi Detention Center, bribed them.

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### **25.03.2024 – Having lost his wife and mother in the persecution of Falun Gong, 58-year-old farmer arrested again for his faith**

Minghui – A 58-year-old resident of Harbin City, Heilongjiang Province, has been detained since his arrest eight months ago for his faith in Falun Gong.

Mr. Zhao Dehua was arrested on July 31, 2023 and is currently held at the Shuangcheng District Detention Center in Harbin City. The details of his arrest and detention remain to be investigated.

Mr. Zhao is not the only person in his family targeted for practicing Falun Gong. His mother, Ms. Wang Ying, and his wife, Ms. Liu Fengjie, were both also arrested for their faith. His wife Ms. Liu died in 2001, at the age of 38. His mother died four years later.

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## **Protestants**

### **28.03.2024 – Father of imprisoned Christian Cao Binting appeals for a fair trial for him.**

China Aid – Recently, Cao Jin, the father of Cao Binting from the Cornerstone Reformed Church in Bengbu, Anhui province, who was charged with "fraud" because of his Christian faith, publicly posted on Weibo. He stated that his son Cao Binting is upright, kind, law-abiding, and was an outstanding student at school. After starting work, he has been diligent and responsible, frequently visiting troubled families in the church with compassion, being charitable in daily life, and not seeking rewards. Cao Jin expressed his inability to accept that his son, who is so good, is wrongly accused of "fraud." He urged the judicial authorities to give Cao Binting a fair trial.

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## **25.03.2024 – A Chinese pastor is released after 7 years in prison, only to find himself unable to get an ID**

Apnews – Unable to buy a train ticket, or even see a doctor at a hospital, a Chinese pastor found that even after his release from prison, he is not quite free.

The Rev. John Sanqiang Cao was arrested and sentenced to seven years in prison while coming back from a missionary trip in Myanmar. Now back in his hometown of Changsha in southern Hunan province, he is without any legal documentation in his country, unable to access even the most basic services without a Chinese identification.

“I told them I’m a second-(class) Chinese citizen, I cannot do this, I cannot do that,” Cao in an interview with The Associated Press. “I’m released, I’m a free citizen, why should there be so many restrictions upon me?”

Cao, who was born and raised in Changsha, had dedicated his life to spreading Christianity in China, where the religion is strictly regulated. He had studied in the U.S., married an American woman and started a family, but said he felt a calling to go back to his home country and spread the faith.

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## **25.03.2024 – Summer training on religion and rule of law recruiting students**

China Christian Daily – A Beijing-based institute has begun recruiting students for the 12th Summer Training Course on religion and rule of law.

On March 20, the Pushi Institute for Social Sciences in Beijing released enrollment guidelines, stating that its aim is to draw on the experiences of varied countries in the field of religious rule of law to train professionals in this area. The curriculum includes topics such as religion and rule of law, comparison of state-church relationship models, religious corporation, religious property, church law, and religion and rule of law in the United States.

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## **21.03.2024 – Fuyang Maizhong reformed church raided and nine Christians detained.**

China Aid – On March 10, Fuyang Maizhong Reformed Church was raided by local police during a gathering at a restaurant. Eighteen Christians were taken away, with eight of them administratively detained for 13 days. Elder Chang Shun was administratively detained for 15 days. This marks the third time he has been detained in the past six months.

On Sunday morning, a group of police officers wearing uniforms but not presenting any identification suddenly stormed into a restaurant. Without providing any reason, they began to interrogate the Christians present. The Christians repeatedly requested the officers to show their credentials but were refused. Later, personnel from the local religious affairs bureau and national security agents also entered the restaurant, walking around and taking pictures.

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## **20.03.2024 – Yet another raid against Fuyang Maizhong Reformed Church**

Bitter Winter – There is no peace for the Maizhong Reformed Church, a house church in Fuyang, Anhui province, which refuses to join the government-controlled Three-Self Church. After the raid of January 18, 2024 during a prayer meeting for children, reported by “Bitter Winter” on January 23, another raid has hit the fiercely independent community.

On March 10, there has been a new police intervention, and Elder Chang Shun has been detained again. As reported by Elder Chang’s wife and local believers, uniformed police officers raised and disrupted a prayer gathering of adults without showing any mandate or document. The devotees who insisted for seeing a mandate were detained. Cell phones and computers were also confiscated.

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**19.03.2024 – The wives of three detained Christians were threatened by police for issuing an appeal letter for their husbands.**

China Aid – On March 9, 2024, Li Shanshan, Chen Ying, and Wen Huijuan, wives of Li Jie, Han Xiaodong, and Wang Qiang from Linfen Covenant House Church, who have been detained for over a year and a half due to their Christian faith, jointly wrote an appeal letter. It was titled “Representatives of the National People’s Congress (NPC) and the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC): please Pay Attention to the Case of Religious Persecution Against Li Jie, Han Xiaodong, and Wang Qiang in Linfen, Shanxi Province,” and addressed to NPC, CPPCC Daily, CPPCC website, Supreme People’s Court, Supreme People’s Procuratorate, Chinese Government website, Shanxi Province People’s Procuratorate, Shanxi Province Public Security, Shanxi Daily, and Shanxi News Network.

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## **Religious persecution and issues – Bimonthly digest March 01 -15**

### **General**

**14.03.2024 - China, you may be pro-CCP but if you organize independently you are still a “cult”**

Bitter Winter - The CCP uses the ancient expression “xie jiao, literally “heterodox teachings,” which Party’s documents in English translate somewhat incorrectly as “evil cults,” to designate religious organizations that operate independently from governmental control. Being active in a “xie jiao” in any capacity is a crime in China.

However, while any form of “illegal” religion regarded as rebellious and dangerous for the CCP is a “xie jiao,” not all “xie jiao” are religious. In the 21st century, the CCP has also called “xie jiao” ideological or political movements the regime does not approve of or does not manage to control. Some of them are so far from religion that they proudly declare their atheism.

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### **Muslims**

## 12.03.2024 - Criminal Law is not retroactive, right? Not true if you are a Muslim in Xinjiang

Bitter Winter - Darren Byler, an anthropologist, is Assistant Professor of International Studies at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, British Columbia, and a specialist of Xinjiang. In new, fascinating research he reports a strange phenomenon. Irrigation channels are clogged in Southern Xinjiang but there have been no landslides or other natural incidents. They are clogged by books. Villagers go there at night and dump all the volumes they kept at home. The police are visiting their homes and would arrest them if they find religious, subversive, or otherwise "dissident" literature. Since they don't know what books may be regarded as subversive, to be on the safer side they dump all of them. Elsewhere, books are dumped in the sewers, and they are also obstructed.

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## Uyghurs

### 15.03.2024 - Abidin Damollam: 96-year-old Uyghur cleric dies in jail

Bitter Winter - The imprisonment, death, and denial of a proper funeral to the respected leader confirm how life is like in an "occupied" region.

Last month, 96-year-old Uyghur cleric Abidin Damollam died in an East Turkistan (Xinjiang to China) prison. Damollam's body was not handed over to his family, which was not allowed to hold a funeral ceremony. The police have kept the family under surveillance for fifteen days.

The surveillance came at a time when Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi was campaigning to deny the Uyghur Genocide at the Munich Security Conference and complaining about "too many lies" circulating on the Uyghur issue.

[Continue reading...](#)

### 05.03.2024 - The CCP's war against religious Uyghur women

Bitter Winter - **Helchem Pazil** will be 92 by the time she finishes her 17-year prison sentence. The 79-year-old Uyghur widow was 75 when in 2019 she, her three daughters and a daughter in law were given harsh jail terms for taking part in religious activities six years before. Her daughter **Melikizat Memet** was sentenced to 20 years.

Disturbing public order, providing a venue for religious preaching, and inciting ethnic discrimination were some of their "crimes." Using Türkiye as a springboard for her non-state-approved Haj would have also been on Helchem's charge sheet.

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## Buddhists

### 07.03.2024 - After protest, Tibetan monastery leader and village official sent to detention center

Rfa - Authorities have transferred a Tibetan Buddhist monastery administrator and a village official – both arrested last month on suspicion of leading protests against the

construction of a dam – to a large detention center in southwestern China’s Sichuan province, two sources with knowledge of the situation told Radio Free Asia.

Tenzin, the senior administrator of Wonto Monastery in Wangbuding township, and a village official named Tamdrin, were transferred from where they were previously detained to the larger Dege County Detention Center Kardze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture on March 3, said the sources who spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals by Chinese officials.

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## Falun Gong

### 12.03.2024 - Targeted for practicing Falun Gong, three Shandong residents sentenced and two others await verdicts

Minghui - Three residents of Longkou City, Shandong Province, were sentenced to prison on December 14, 2023 for their shared faith in Falun Gong, a mind-body practice that has been persecuted by the Chinese Communist Party since 1999. The same Longkou City Court also heard the cases against two other local Falun Gong practitioners, and has still yet to issue a ruling.

**Ms. Ge Lijuan** was sentenced to a 4.5-year prison term and admitted to the Shandong Province Second Prison (also known as the Shandong Province Women’s Prison). **Mr. Wang Zhoulin** was given four years and admitted to the Shandong Province First Prison (also known as the Shandong Province Men’s Prison). Both prisons are located in the capital city of Jinan. **Ms. Wu Jingkun** was given two years with three years probation and a 6,000-yuan fine.

Ms. Chen Guifang and Ms. Jiao Linhui are currently awaiting verdicts at the Yantai City Detention Center.

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### 11.03.2024 - China, two female Falun Gong practitioners persecuted to death

Bitter Winter - As the CCP had to admit that the “total eradication” of Falun Gong, prematurely announced, never happened, its fury targets practitioners in jail, and extra-judicial killings multiply. Two women should now be added to the list.

**Li Yuzhen**, 74, from Daowai District, Harbin City, was tortured to death in the Heilongjiang Provincial Women’s Prison. Li was a veteran of Chinese jails. She was first arrested in 2003 for refusing to give up her practice of Falun Gong, tortured, and sentenced to three years of prison. She was arrested again in 2007, and sentenced to one year of labor camp, then again in 2013, although she was detained for a short period.

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### 01.03.2024 - Death of an insurance salesman: Falun Gong practitioner tortured to death in Jiangsu



Bitter Winter - Sometimes, in present-day China, it takes months to confirm an information. This was the case with the sad story of an insurance salesman called Xia Zhenglun, who was tortured to death in Guanyun County, which is under the administration of Lianyungang prefecture-level city, in Jiangsu province.

Guanyun County is where Xia was born in 1961. Reportedly, he shared the negative opinion about Falun Gong of many Chinese influenced by the government's media until in 2012 he met some practitioners, read the movement's literature, and changed his mind.

[Continue reading...](#)

## Protestants

### 15.03.2024 - Wangfenggang Christian Church in Huainan receives notice of cross removal

China Aid - Another case of cross-removal has emerged in China. Recently, the Wangfenggang Christian Church in Xiejiaji District, Huainan City, Anhui Province, received a notice to remove crosses.

The church received a written notice from the Villagers' Committee of Yongqing Village in Wangfenggang Town, Xiejiaji District, Huainan City, Anhui Province. The village-level management committee, controlled by the Chinese government, ordered the Wangfenggang Christian Church to remove two crosses on the roof and at the entrance of the church by March 10. The authorities could not produce an official legal basis for the notice but cited potential "safety" hazards.

[Continue reading...](#)

### 15.03.2024 - United Church of Christ visits Shaanxi

China christian daily - A delegation from the United Church of Christ (UCC) paid a visit to Shaanxi CC&TSPM.

According to CCC&TSPM, on March 7, Rev. Wangjun, the chairman and president of Shaanxi CC&TSPM, welcomed the delegation from UCC headed by Mr. Derek N. Duncan, the Area Executive for East Asia and the Pacific for Global Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and United Church of Christ.

Rev. Wang briefed the guests on theological education, the sinicization of Christianity, the progress of the new construction of the Shaanxi Bible School, media ministry, and social services conducted by the provincial CC&TSPM in recent years, with a review of the longstanding friendly exchanges between the two parties. The delegation learned about Shaanxi's local conditions and social customs, the history and current development of the churches across the province, and the major work carried out by the provincial CC&TSPM.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **11.03.2024 - Pastor John Cao's first testimony after release.**

China Aid - Pastor John Cao from Hunan, who was imprisoned for seven years in Yunnan, China, was released on March 4, 2024. He was escorted from Kunming, Yunnan province, to Changsha, Hunan province, by four police officers.

The world outside the prison walls changes rapidly, and perhaps Pastor Cao needs to adapt to a new life. His wife awaits to be reunited in the United States, and he will need to apply for travel documents. Local police have disclosed that they will supervise and educate him for five years.

Below is Pastor Cao's first testimony after his release, transcribed and edited by China Aid Association based on an audio recording sourced from the internet. To ensure clarity of the original intent, subheadings, and paragraphs have been added for clarity.

[Continue reading..](#)

### **12.03.2024 – Ding Jiayi is being held in solitary confinement in prison without the right to communicate**

China Aid - Lawyer **Ding Jiayi** is one of the longest-serving civil rights activists repressed by the Chinese Communist Party. Ding Jiayi was sentenced to 12 years, and his companion Xu Zhiyong was sentenced to 14 years. Concerns have been raised about the conditions of the prison where Ding Jiayi is serving his sentence.

According to updates from his wife Sophie Luo Shengchun, who resides in the United States, a lawyer met Ding Jiayi in the meeting room of Jiangbei Prison in Hubei Province on February 29. Ding Jiayi expressed his initial opinions on his appeal and agreed to further discuss the details of the evidence in April. Ding Jiayi said the prison food was better than in the detention center, he could exercise and read, but the selection of reading materials was very limited. He hoped the lawyer could bring him a pair of reading glasses at the next meeting.

Ding Jiayi expressed his gratitude for the concern shown by his relatives and friends.

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## **China's disturbing influence on the UN: A threat to advance human rights**

***A presentation by Christine Mirre, director of CAP/ Liberté de Conscience at the conference organized by Human Rights Without Frontiers at the Press Club in Brussels on 29 February under the title "Unveiling Authoritarianism: Assessing China's Governance and Human Rights Landscape" (Excerpt)***

HRWF (06.03.2024) - Advocating for religious freedom in China is a complex and sometimes a risky endeavor, perhaps more so than in any other country.

As Sir Geoffrey Nice and Mr. Introvigne explained the Chinese government tightly controls religious expression, particularly targeting minority religious groups and unregistered churches. Tibetan Buddhists, Uighur Muslims, Christians, Falun Gong practitioners, the Church of Almighty God and many more face heavy persecution.

The implementation of policies such as " sinicization " of religion and the promotion of state-approved interpretations of faith have further eroded religious liberty.

China has ratified the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the ICCPR and the Chinese Constitution theoretically guarantees freedom of religion but the reality on the ground tells a different story.

The major UN bodies through which we have denounced human rights violations in China are the Human Rights Council (HRC), the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). Moreover, we our ECOSOC status, we are able to participate in the deliberations of member states in these various UN bodies and, most importantly, to raise human rights issues and violations.

### **CAP/LC Religious Freedom Advocacy in China at the UN**

#### ***CAPLC at the Universal Periodic Review***

This year, China is undergoing its 4th Universal Periodic Review.

CAPLC has participated in the last 3 sessions.

In 2013, CAP LC co-signed a submission denouncing crimes against Falun Gong members and forced organ harvesting.

This first submission on China had an impact on CAP LC's ECOSOC status, as I will discuss later in the section on China's subversion of UN bodies.

Then, in 2018, CAP LC led the submission of a coalition of a dozen international NGOs, including CESNUR, to denounce the persecution of the Church of the Almighty God (CAG) and other religious minorities, and to denounce forced labor camps for Uyghurs.

Our denunciations covered the following issues:

- Freedom of religion or belief
- Torture and cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment
- Extrajudicial executions
- Arbitrary arrest and detention
- Freedom of expression, assembly and association
- Freedom from discrimination, right to work, right to education

A side event on the margins of this UPR was organized with HRWF and CESNUR to denounce these same violations by China.

In February 2024, we organized a conference on the sidelines of the 4th UPR cycle on China.

This conference brought together a dozen international experts on the issue of forced organ harvesting from Falun Gong members.

I would like to thank Mr. Benedict ROGERS, who was one of these experts.

## ***CAP LC at the Human Rights Council***

We also denounced China at several Human Rights Council sessions:

At every session of the Human Rights Council since 2016, CAP LC has intervened through written and oral statements on the issue of religious freedom in China. We have denounced the persecution, arbitrary detention, and torture of members of religious minorities, the forced organ harvesting of Falun Gong members, and the treatment of Uyghurs in forced labor camps in Xijiang.

We also organized several side events on the sidelines of the Human Rights Councils, where we gave the floor to experts, academics, and numerous Uyghur victims, Falun Gong members, and members of the Church of Almighty God.

In February 2022, we organized two side events on forced organ harvesting, where experts and politicians from around the world came to testify about this crime against humanity. At the end of these conferences, a coalition of NGOs launched the *Universal Declaration on Preventing and Combating Forced Organ Harvesting*, which has now been signed by hundreds of personalities.

As a result of these numerous advocacy activities and alerts carried out in coordination with other NGOs, several Member States and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights decided to take up the issue of religious freedom violations in China.

### **China's disturbing influence on the UN: A threat to advance human rights**

China's growing influence within the UN poses a significant risk of reshaping the organization to suit its own interests, potentially undermining its core functions.

Currently, Chinese nationals head four of the UN's 15 specialized agencies and contribute 12% of the UN's regular budget, making China the second-largest financial contributor after the United States.

China's expanded leadership role has raised concerns about its agenda, particularly its integration of the Belt and Road Initiative into UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), stifling criticism of its human rights record, and leveraging financial incentives to garner support from member states.

Under China's influence, key UN positions, such as the under-secretary-general for the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, (ECOSOC) have been held by Chinese diplomats since 2007.

As I mentioned at the beginning, our application for ECOSOC status was blocked for more than four years by China, which put us on its "blacklist" of NGOs because of the submission we signed on the persecution of Falun Gong.

It was only thanks to the absence of the Chinese representative at the last review of our NGO that we were granted the status.

Even today, we are under constant pressure from China when we submit our quadrennial reports: China postpones the validation of our reports until the following sessions, asking ridiculous and insignificant questions such as "What have you done for religious freedom at the UN?"

Moreover, China's exertion of pressure within the UN has led to restrictions on human rights groups' participation:

I was myself violently interrupted during an oral statement to the Human Rights Council on the persecution of Church of Almighty God members by the Chinese representative, who shouted in Chinese to the stunned assembly that I should, and I quote: "stop my circus and that I was in the pay of a devil cult."

During the last HRC session on Thursday, March 23, I witnessed China attempted to prevent prominent Uyghur activist Dolkun Isa, President of the World Uyghur Congress, from addressing the Human Rights Council as he called on the body to urgently investigate serious human rights allegations against China.

He was immediately interrupted by the Chinese delegate, Mao Yizong, who questioned his legitimacy as a speaker and referred to him in Chinese as an "anti-Chinese, separatist and violent element."

The President of the Council rejected the Chinese representative's request, and Dolkun Isa was able to finish his speech, in which he regretted that the issue of Xinjiang and the Uyghurs was not on the agenda. He also criticized the damning conclusions of the report by Ms. Bachelet, former High Commissioner for Human Rights, which highlighted "credible" allegations of widespread torture, arbitrary detention, and violations of religious and reproductive rights.

We have also observed in recent years that China uses an unfair trick to mobilize the speaking time allocated to NGOs during Human Rights Council sessions: GONGOS (Governmental Non-Governmental Organizations) register in large numbers to glorify the Chinese model, thus preventing any critical statements by human rights defenders.

### **Conclusion**

In my view, the UN remains an important space for human rights advocacy because, as we have seen, it has special mechanisms for reporting human rights crimes and violations. I think it's important to do whatever we can to protect that institution from being "sinicized" and to continue to expose China's crimes there, despite the political pressure from Beijing. It is the responsibility of all human rights defenders, civil society and member states to protect this ideal conceived in 1948 with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and to keep the space of expression provided by the UN open to all victims deprived of their rights.

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## **The dismantling of Hong Kong's freedoms, the rule of law and autonomy**

***HRWF (29.02.2024) - A presentation by Benedict Rogers, co-founder and chief executive of Hong Kong Watch at the conference organized by Human Rights Without Frontiers at the Press Club in Brussels on 29 February under the title "Unveiling Authoritarianism: Assessing China's Governance and Human Rights Landscape"***

By Benedict Rogers (\*)

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

Let me firstly congratulate the organisers, and especially Willy Fautré and Human Rights Without Frontiers, for holding this incredibly important and timely conference on the human rights crisis in China – and its relevance for us all.

It is a great privilege to speak alongside the other distinguished speakers, especially my friend and a Patron of Hong Kong Watch, Sir Geoffrey Nice, KC, who has pioneered and chaired two very important independent tribunals to investigate firstly the crime of forced organ harvesting from prisoners of conscience in China and then the genocide of the Uyghurs; Dr Massimo Introvigne, whose work I have followed and respected for some years; Christine Mirre; and His Excellency Dr Roy Chun Lee – the representative of Taiwan, a cause very close to my heart.

Although I will focus my remarks specifically and exclusively on Hong Kong, let me say that I am deeply engaged with wider issues of human rights in China – whether it be the genocide of the Uyghurs, the atrocities in Tibet, forced organ harvesting and persecution of Falun Gong, the persecution of Christians and violations of freedom of religion or belief throughout China, and the wider crackdown on dissent, civil society, human rights defenders and freedom of expression by the Chinese Communist Party regime. I am also deeply engaged with support for and solidarity with Taiwan, which is a living example of a vibrant, successful, thriving Asian democracy that – in total contrast to the People’s Republic of China – upholds, respects, defends and promotes human rights. Indeed, in my new book *The China Nexus* I have chapters on all these topics, weaving together a common picture and a shared cause.

But today, my focus is Hong Kong and in particular the broken promises and betrayed treaties.

And what makes today’s conference so timely is that just yesterday, a public consultation period regarding a new domestic security law in Hong Kong, known as Article 23 legislation, launched by the Hong Kong government a month ago, ended. Within the past 24 hours the British Foreign Secretary and Parliamentarians in the UK, USA, Canada and the EU, have condemned this proposed legislation as a very grave deterioration in the rule of law and human rights. And a few days ago the UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights Defenders warned of the dangers of this new law. I will return to this most topical of concerns shortly. Hong Kong has transitioned very rapidly and dramatically over the past four years from one of Asia’s most open cities to one of the region’s most repressive police states. Beijing has torn up its promises under the Sino-British Joint Declaration, an international treaty registered at the United Nations, in which it had pledged to protect Hong Kong’s freedoms, high degree of autonomy and way of life under the “one country, two systems” principle for at least the first 50 years of Chinese sovereignty over the city from the time of the handover – in other words, until 2047. Less than halfway through that period, Beijing ripped up and trampled on those promises, describing the very treaty in which they were set out as merely an historical document of no current relevance.

Similarly, while Hong Kong – unlike the People’s Republic of China – is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and has enshrined the ICCPR into its own mini-constitution under the Basic Law, as well as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, in recent years it has flouted its obligations, as the recent UN treaty body reviews under the UN Human Rights Committee, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women have outlined over the past two years.

But to be very honest, the erosion of Hong Kong’s freedoms, rule of law and autonomy was already beginning some years before that.

I lived in Hong Kong for the first five years after the handover – from 1997-2002. I worked there as a journalist. Hong Kong was where I began my career, and for those very formative years of my life it was my home.

During those early years after the handover, Hong Kong was a very different place. I was able to write and publish articles that today, if I lived in Hong Kong, I would never get published and I would most likely be arrested and jailed for writing.

However, by 2014 I realised things were changing in Hong Kong, with the Umbrella Movement protests. I realised few people at the time in the international community were speaking up, and so I began to advocate for Hong Kong. Over subsequent years I hosted activists visiting London from Hong Kong, campaigned for those who were jailed and co-founded Hong Kong Watch in 2017.

From 2017 until the anti-extradition law protests in 2020 and the imposition of the National Security Law in 2020, the erosion of Hong Kong's freedoms was steady but undramatic. We could see the warning signs and warned of them, but they related to – for example – the disqualification of pro-democracy candidates from the legislature, the imposition of mainland Chinese law in the high-speed rail terminus on Hong Kong soil (a concept known as 'co-location') and harassment of individual activists. But by and large, press freedom, freedom of protest, freedom of expression, assembly and association were largely still in existence.

However, incrementally the warning signs were clear. For example, in 2017 I was denied entry to Hong Kong, becoming the first westerner to face such a ban, and from 2018-2022 I faced a barrage of regular anonymous, threatening letters to my home address, some letters which went to my neighbours and, separately, some which were sent to my mother telling her to tell me to shut up. If they were doing that to me, a British national, in Britain, you can imagine how much more serious the situation is for Hong Kongers in Hong Kong and in the diaspora.

A key turning point came in 2019 when the Hong Kong government proposed introducing a new law to allow extradition from Hong Kong to mainland China – thus shattering the legal firewall of 'one country, two systems' and permitting the extradition of individuals from a system which, at the time, still had the rule of law to a jurisdiction that was entirely ruled by the whims of the authoritarian regime. This sparked enormous protests lasting months – with on one occasion at least one million marching and the following week two million marching: out of a population of seven million.

Those protests were met with unjustifiable, disproportionate and extreme police brutality. The police turned the streets of Hong Kong into a teargas-filled war zone in 2019.

Despite the police brutality, the people of Hong Kong spoke with a loud voice during the elections for the district councils at the end of 2019 – with a turnout of 71% and an overwhelming majority for the pro-democracy parties. That was the last time a genuinely free and fair democratic election was held in Hong Kong.

Since then, Hong Kong has been on a rapid descent from the last vestiges of freedom into authoritarianism.

In July 2020, Beijing imposed a draconian National Security Law on Hong Kong which has destroyed press freedom, freedom of expression, assembly and association. Since 2019, there have been over 10,000 arrests, 2,300 prosecutions and a new climate of fear in Hong Kong.

In November 2020, the entire pro-democracy camp was effectively expelled from the Legislative Council, and in January 2021 55 pro-democracy activists – including former legislators, aides, campaigners – were arrested, accused of committing a crime by holding a primary election to choose their candidates for what should have been the Legislative

Council elections. Of these, 47 remain in jail today, over three years later, awaiting trial and denied bail.

Then came the assault on media freedom.

First, with police raids of the pro-democracy *Apple Daily* newspaper, founded by the 76 year-old entrepreneur and British citizen Jimmy Lai – who is currently on trial and facing the possibility of spending the rest of his life in prison. I wrote a weekly column for the English language online edition of the *Apple Daily* in the last twelve months of its existence, and I can honestly say its spirit of freedom and courage was the most inspiring of any publication I have ever written for. This Brussels Press Club should celebrate the *Apple Daily* and campaign for the freedom of its founder, Jimmy Lai, a champion of press freedom.

*Apple Daily* was finally forced to shut down in the summer of 2021, after further police raids and then eventually the authorities froze the assets of the publishing company, leaving it unable to pay its bills. And Jimmy Lai was arrested in December 2020 and has been in jail ever since.

Since then there has been the closure of *Stand News* and the arrest and trial of its editors; the closure of *Citizen News*; and the shutdown of other independent media. Hong Kong Watch published a report on the assault on media freedom – titled [In the Firing Line](#) – in 2022.

It is important to note that the National Security Law has an extra-territorial clause. That means that my speech today, and this very conference, is in violation of Hong Kong's National Security Law, even though we're 6,000 miles away from Hong Kong in Brussels. I am breaching the National Security Law of Hong Kong by virtue of what I do each and every day – and today, so is the Brussels Press Club and potentially all of you.

Indeed, in 2022, I received an official letter from the Hong Kong Police Force and the Hong Kong National Security Bureau, informing me that my activities and the work of Hong Kong Watch is a serious breach of Hong Kong's National Security Law, even though we have no presence in Hong Kong and what we do is entirely outside Hong Kong, and threatening me with a heavy fine and prison sentence in Hong Kong.

The current trial of Jimmy Lai – which I hope you are following and if you're not, I hope you will – is emblematic of Beijing's assault on all of Hong Kong's freedoms, especially press freedom and freedom of expression. I would recommend you all watch the documentary *The HongKonger* – available for free download from <https://freejimmylai.com/> - or if possible arrange a screening here in the Press Club. I hope you will all follow Support Jimmy Lai on Twitter and as a website, and tweet your own support with #FreeJimmyLai.

I have been named in the trial proceedings, as have other foreign nationals. WhatsApp messages from Jimmy to me – completely innocuous, innocent, normal communications – have been presented as evidence. I am happy to discuss this in more detail in the Q&A.

But it isn't just about Jimmy Lai. There are hundreds of other political prisoners in Hong Kong – some of whom do not want attention, but all of whom deserve our support. People like the brave lawyer Chow Hang-Tung, whose imprisonment for organising a vigil to commemorate the Tiananmen Square massacre has been determined by the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention to be illegal.

And now Hong Kong faces a further descent into the depths of repression, with the introduction of a further security law, Article 23.



The reaction of the Hong Kong government to our statements says it all. Last week we, Hong Kong Watch, led a statement signed by 85 other civil society organisations, including Human Rights Watch, Freedom House and Index on Censorship. The Hong Kong government condemned it, and the Hong Kong Security Secretary Chris Tang described it as a “gangster” tactic aimed at intimidating, harassing and interfering with Hong Kong affairs. When was the last time gangsters prepared a carefully drafted legal and scholarly reviewed statement with over 85 NGOs behind it?

Under this new legislation, a new crime of “incitement of hatred against the fundamental system of the State, such state organs as provided for in the Constitution, the offices of the [Central People’s Government] ... and the constitutional order” of Hong Kong is proposed, under offences relating to “seditious intention”.

Arguably, by its own actions no one has incited such hatred against itself more than the Hong Kong government, the Hong Kong police force and the CCP regime in Beijing.

If Article 23 goes ahead in its proposed form, the free world should act. We can explore how in our discussion. But to allow the repression in Hong Kong to continue with impunity, in total breach of promises made and treaties signed by China, would be dangerous for us all. The assault on Hong Kong is an assault on the international rules-based order – and it is in all our interests to counter that and defend our values.

**(\*) Benedict Rogers is the author of *The China Nexus: Thirty Years In and Around the Chinese Communist Party’s Tyranny*, and is the co-founder and CEO of Hong Kong Watch. Among many other things, he is a member of the advisory group of the [Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China](#) (IPAC) and an advisor to the [World Uyghur Congress](#). He has served on the boards of several other charities and for 30 years was associated with Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) in various capacities. He is a regular contributor to international media, including *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Spectator*, *Foreign Policy* and *The Diplomat*, has testified previously before the US Congress, the European Parliament and the UK Parliament and is a regular speaker at conferences and in the media around the world.**

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## Religious persecution and issues – Bimonthly digest February 16-29

### Muslims

#### 28.02.2024 - Najaying Mosque in Yunnan, others, fully “sinicized”.

Bitter Winter - On June 1 and 28, 2023, Bitter Winter reported on protests over the “Sinicization” of the Najaying Mosque in Yunnan, which led to a temporary suspension of the project that later, however, started again.

The protests notwithstanding, the “Sinicization” has now been completed. The original mosque had four minarets and one dome. They have been replaced by Chinese pagoda-style semi-towers. The fact that the mosque was listed as a protected cultural relic was

ignored. Slogans such as "Listen to the Party," "Thank the Party for its Gratitude," and "Follow the Party" were also depicted at the entrance of the mosque.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **21.02.2024 - Mosque in China remodeled with pagodas, communist slogans.**

Ucanews - The authorities in a Muslim-majority town in southwest China have revamped a popular mosque with Chinese-style pagodas and billboards praising the Communist Party despite strong opposition from local Muslims, says a report.

The government team demolished the dome and minarets of the historic Najiyang Mosque at Nagu town in Yunnan province last May, triggering clashes between local residents and police, Radio Free Asia (RFA) reported on Feb. 21.

Dozens of residents were arrested following the clashes.

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## **Catholics**

### **22.02.2024 - The Holy See has established the Catholic diocese of Weifang in Shandong province.**

China Aid - On January 29, Pope Francis abolished an apostolic prefecture in mainland China and established the Diocese of Weifang. The consecration ceremony for the newly appointed bishop of the diocese, Father Anthony Sun Wenjun, took place on January 29. This comes just five days after the consecration of Bishop Wang Yuesheng on January 25, marking another bishop appointment approved by the Vatican and consecrated in China.

On January 29, Father Anthony Sun Wenjun, 53 years of age, was consecrated as the Bishop of Weifang City in Shandong Province. The ceremony took place at a Church in Yidu County, Qingzhou, Shandong.

According to the government-approved Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association, Bishop John Fang Xingyao, the honorary chairman of the association and the Bishop of Linyi Diocese, presided over the ceremony in Qingzhou. Co-consecrators included Bishop Joseph Yang Yongqiang of Zhoucun and Bishop Joseph Zhang Xianwang of Jinan. Over 300 people attended the consecration Mass, including 44 priests.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **21.02.2024 - The Catholic Church in China, AD 2024: A tale of two sinicizations and two dragons.**

Bitter Winter - The traditional Chinese calendar—a lunisolar calendar combining solar, lunar, and other cycles—marks 2024 as the Year of The Dragon, the fifth of the 12-year cycle of animals of the Chinese zodiac. Each year of that calendar is cyclically associated with one of the five agents constituting "Wuxing" in Chinese philosophy. 2024 is the year of Wood Dragon and connects these ancient Taoist concept with today Chinese Catholicism's struggle to resist the persecution by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). 2024 marks in fact the centennial of the first meeting of all the bishops of China in the

Council of Shanghai (May 15–June 12, 1924) and will see the Vatican-China Deal of 2018, subsequently renovated in 2020 and 2022, becoming permanent or being definitively abandoned.

[Continue reading...](#)

## Buddhists

### **27.02.2024 - Protest against dam Project in Sichuan leads to mass arrests of monks, villagers.**

Bitter Winter - On February 19, "Bitter Winter" was among the first media outlets to report about the unprecedented protests in Derge (Ch. Gengqing), the county seat of Dêgê County, in the Garzê Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, a part of Kham, one of the areas of historical Tibet that the Chinese did not include in the so-called Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) but added to another province, in this case Sichuan.

Tibetans in the county are protesting the constructions of the Gangtuo Power Plant as part of a 25-dams system on the Drichu (Ch. Jingsa) River, i.e., the upper stretches of the Yangtze River. Several other media picked up the news.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **27.02.2024 - Mass detention of Tibetans trying to save monasteries.**

Csw - The Chinese government has reportedly detained more than 1,000 Tibetans amidst protests over a dam project that would force two villages to relocate and destroy six Buddhist monasteries in southwestern China's Sichuan Province.

According to Radio Free Asia, police have detained more than 1,000 Tibetans since 22 February, including monks and local residents, who peacefully protested the dam construction or called for the release of the detained Tibetans. They were held in various locations in Dege county in Kardze Tibetan Prefecture.

[Continue reading...](#)

## Falun Gong

### **27.02.2024 - 70-year-old Ningxia woman detained again for practicing Falun Gong.**

Minghui - A 70-year-old resident of Yinchuan City, Ningxia Autonomous Region was arrested on February 21, 2024 for her faith in Falun Gong.

**Ms. Xin Linyuan** is currently held at the Dawukou District Detention Center in Shizuishan City, which is also in Ningxia and borders Yinchuan City.

The latest arrest of Ms. Xin, a former accountant at the Ningguang Electrical Co., Ltd., was triggered by her prior arrest on May 15, 2022. Officer Liu from the Dawukou District Domestic Security Office led several agents and raided her home that day.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **24.02.2024 - Yilan County, Heilongjiang Province: Four arrested two days before Chinese New Year, three still detained.**

Minghui - Four residents of Yilan County, Heilongjiang Province were arrested at a home on February 8, 2024, two days before the Chinese new Year, for practicing Falun Gong.

The arresting officers from the Yilan County Domestic Security Office, the Guanyue Police Station, and the Dongcheng Police Station raided all four practitioners' homes. They released Mr. Wang Fuyou, 82, later that day, but kept **Ms. Fu Guiqin**, 73, **Ms. Wang Yumei**, 60, and **Ms. Gao Jing** in detention. It's unclear where the three women are being held.

Ms. Fu and Ms. Wang were targeted previously for practicing Falun Gong.

[Continue reading...](#)

## **Protestants**

### **23.02.2024 - Wuhan authorities conducted a specialized inspection of churches for illegal religious publications.**

China Aid - In a major city in China, the government-approved Committee of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches in China and the China Christian Council, referred to as the "Two organizations of Christianity/Lianghui", recently conducted a strict inspection of religious-related publications. A city-wide inspection of religious publications in churches has been conducted, and churches were prohibited from possessing "unofficial versions" of religious literature. It was stated that this action is done to ensure "ideological security."

Members of the inspection team went deep into various churches and major venues for religious activities in the city to gain a detailed understanding of the channels for the obtainment and sales of religious publications at each venue, and to focus on checking whether there were unauthorized printing of books, newspapers, and internal informational publications, and whether there were cases of possession, retention, dissemination, or use of illegal publications. Additionally, they conducted propaganda on relevant laws, regulations, and policies.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **23.02.2024 - Lawyer Yu Wensheng and his wife Xu Yan have been transferred to Jiangsu province for detention.**

China Aid - Human rights lawyer **Yu Wensheng** and his wife Xu Yan have been detained for nearly ten months on charges. In an unusual occurrence, it has been confirmed that

they have recently been transferred from Beijing to Suzhou for detention. Their case has been transferred to Suzhou for review and prosecution.

Human rights lawyer Yu Wensheng and his wife Xu Yan had been living in Beijing before their arrest, and they hold hukou, or household registration, in Beijing. In April of last year, the couple was invited to meet with the EU Delegation to China. On their way there, they were intercepted and summoned by the public security officers. Subsequently, they were criminally detained by the Shijingshan Branch of the Beijing Municipal Public Security Bureau on suspicion of "picking quarrels and provoking trouble." Later, both of them were additionally charged with "inciting subversion of state power" and have been held in custody at the detention center in the same district since then.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **19.02.2024 - Authorities prevent family members from visiting Xu Zhiyong in prison.**

China Aid - **Xu Zhiyong**, a prominent human rights defender who was heavily sentenced by the Chinese government to 14 years in prison, has been transferred to Lunan Prison in Rizhao City, Shandong Province, to serve his sentence after a second trial. He has been in prison for nearly two months, but his family has not been allowed to meet with him.

In a case similar to that of Xu Zhiyong, Sophie Luo Shengchun, wife of human rights lawyer Ding Jiayi, revealed Xu's recent situation on social media platform X on the 23rd. Dr. Xu Zhiyong, who received a heavy sentence of 12 years, has been in Shandong's Lunan Prison for nearly two months.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **15.02.2024 - Chen Yueli arrested for printing children's Sunday school materials**

**China Aid** - Hong Kong Christian **Chen Yueli**, whose English name is Stephen, who was involved in the printing of children's Sunday school materials, was taken away by the police on December 19, 2023, when he entered China through the Shenzhen West Kowloon Customs. At least 8 other Christians were arrested with him. Currently, Chen Yueli has been formally arrested and is charged with "illegal business operations." He is being held in the Chibi Detention Center in Chibi City, Hubei Province. Despite multiple attempts to visit him, his lawyer has been unable to meet with him. His family is very worried about his condition and health.

[Continue reading...](#)

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## **Uyghurs continue to oppose "genocide tours" to Xinjiang**

***American and European travel companies should not directly or indirectly support a genocidal regime, Rushan Abbas told "Bitter Winter."***

By Massimo Introvigne

[Bitter Winter](#) (16.02.2024) - I met Rushan Abbas, the founder and executive director of Campaign for [Uyghurs](#), at the admirable [International Religious Freedom Summit](#) in Washington DC, where she and I were both speakers. We discussed developments

in [Xinjiang](#) (which its non-Han-Chinese inhabitants prefer to call East Turkistan) and how Chinese propaganda is at work to deny the genocide that is happening there. Different kinds of “[useful idiots](#)” are mobilized internationally. Others in the West, however, are not necessarily moved by ideology. They simply found a way of making money out of a genocide.

Abbas criticized in particular the “genocide tourism” promoted by travel companies in the U.S., Europe, and Australia, denounced by two reports of the Uyghur [Human Rights](#) Projects (UHRP), published respectively in [August 2023](#) and [January 2024](#). While some travel companies have direct links to pro-Chinese lobbies and organizations, others do not. They are just interested in selling for significant money “unique travel experiences” to their customers. Abbas told me that this is a subtle, yet extremely dangerous way of manipulating the Western public opinion and normalizing the genocide.

The UHRP second report analyzes and names eighteen European travel companies from France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, and the Netherlands, in addition to another ten tour operators from the UK, the U.S., and Australia listed in the first report. There is nothing “adventurous” in the trips they propose. They are carefully monitored by the Chinese authorities, and organized in cooperation with them. Destroyed mosques and Islamic cemeteries are carefully avoided.

Tourists are told that they will become familiar with the ancient Uyghur identity, with the implication that China is not repressing it. This is, however, a lie. “The Uyghur identity on display in East Turkistan,” states the first UHRP report, “is that which has been permitted by the Chinese state. What the Chinese state has left of public expressions of Uyghur identity has remained for commodification and exploitation not only by visitors on tours from overseas, but also domestic tourists. By visiting these simulacra of Uyghurness, the travel company and visitor on an organized tour are complicit in the denial of the Uyghur people to define their own identity. In addition, tourism is a primary means with which the Chinese state territorializes and securitizes East Turkistan. The tourist presence coerces [Uyghurs](#) to perform a revisioned version of their culture, history, and religion as the security apparatus of the state maintains this fictional depiction.”

A special scandal of the “genocide tours” is that some of them lead tourists to visit “the homes of Uyghur families,” carefully selected by the regime. These are visits, says the second UHRP report, “which families are in no position to refuse given the environment of securitization and state control. This represents a significant violation of privacy and perpetuates the surveillance programs that have been carried out in Uyghur homes. As an example, the French travel company Hasamélis, as part of its La Route de la Soie Chinoise tour, offers dinner in Turpan with a Uyghur family in their home. Other companies offering home visits include EMS Voyage [France], Shiraz Travel Tours [Italy], and Viatgi [Spain].”

Taking tourists to visit “Uyghur family homes” in a context of genocide may not be so much different from a travel agency who would have offered tours to Nazi Germany to visit the homes of more or less genuine Jewish families, which would have assured the naive visitors that all was well for the Jews there.

“By bringing tourists to East Turkistan, these travel companies are implicitly supporting the normalization of genocidal Chinese government policies aimed at eradicating the Uyghur identity, further denying the Uyghur people the ability to define ‘Uyghurness’ for themselves,” the UHRP concludes. “UHRP is clear in its message: we are urging international travel companies in North America, Europe, and Australia to cease profiteering from genocide. We do not advocate for a ban on [individual] travel to East

Turkistan, leaving the decision to visit the region to the conscience of the individual traveler. We recommend travel companies and trade associations call for an end to tours to East Turkistan and to increase due diligence processes and [human rights](#) compliance in line with international standards. Travel companies have the opportunity to turn from selling 'Genocide Tours' to becoming Uyghur allies through publicly canceling tours and condemning China's crimes against humanity."

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## Whatever happened to China's 2024 Universal Periodic Review?

*A hodgepodge of technicalities at Geneva's Human Rights Council is already resulting in nothing. This is how the United Nations functions in 2024.*

by Marco Respinti

[Bitter Winter](#) (20.02.2024) - On January 23, 2024, the [United Nations Human Rights Council's \(UNHRC\) Universal Periodic Review \(UPR\) Working Group](#) examined, for the fourth time, the human records of the People's Republic of China (PRC) at the Palais des Nations, which hosts the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG), Switzerland.

### A forest of confusing acronyms

A "State-led mechanism that regularly assesses the human rights situations of all United Nations Member States," [the UPR is one of chief tools of the UNHRC](#). It was established on March 15, when the United Nations (UN) General Assembly created the UNHRC itself to replace the obsolete UN Commission on [Human Rights \(UNCHR\)](#), founded in 1946.

UNHRC operates in close cooperation with the [UN High Commissioner for Human Rights \(UNHCHR\)](#). Though their mandates may overlap, of course they are different agencies. UNHCHR, "the leading UN entity on human rights," is committed to the promotion and protection of [human rights](#) as per the 1948 "Universal Declaration of Human Rights," while the UNHRC, an intergovernmental body, is mainly a place "to discuss all thematic human rights issues and situations that require its attention throughout the year" as well as "for addressing situations of [human rights](#) violations and making recommendations on them."

But since also UNHRC is "responsible for strengthening the promotion and protection of [human rights](#) around the globe," of course per the 1948 "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" as well, the layperson may easily confuse them (or their acronyms) and not comfortably get who's who at a glance. The scenario is further complicated by the existence of another agency—quite different in itself, but sometimes not straightforwardly perceived as such by the general public—, the [UN High Commissioner for Refugees \(UNHCR\)](#).

### What is the UPR?

UPR "calls for each UN Member State to undergo a peer review of its human rights records every 4.5 years." Since the first periodic review in 2008, "all 193 UN Member

States have been reviewed three times.” The fourth cycle of review began in November 2022 with the 41st session of the UPR Working Group, whose operation of scrutiny is divided in three two-week long sessions per year, each reviewing 14 countries, thus 42 annually. The PRC was in the group of 14 scheduled for review at the 45th session of the Working Group, from January 22 to February 2, 2024.

The first, second and third UPR of the PRC were held in February 2009, October 2013, and November 2018. “Bitter Winter,” a magazine at that time and until December 2020 dedicated only to [religious liberty](#) and [human rights](#) in China, [began its operation under the cogency of the 2018 UPR of the PRC](#). Online since early May that year, one of first participations of “Bitter Winter” in a public event in person was a [pacifist demonstration hosted in Geneva by organizations representing persecuted groups on November 6, 2018](#). It was the very day of the third UPR of the PRC and resulted in a [disappointing document in March 2019](#).

Much of that failure had to do with the UPR machinery itself. The UPR Working Group includes the 47 Member States of the UNHRC. Three of them are chosen randomly for each of the country in review and, known as “troika,” serve as rapporteurs. At the review, the country under scrutiny has abundant time to present a national report. This is examined by all the countries that, out of the 193 Member States of the UN, register to take the floor.

The total time of the review for a scrutinized country is 3 and a half hours; thus, the number of countries that registered to take the floor at the review influences the amount of time that each of them has at its disposal. Then a final report is prepared by the troika and goes for adoption at a UNHRC regular session (they are three per year).

### **Chinese propaganda**

On January 23, the UPR of the PRC was [broadcasted live](#). The Permanent Representative of the People’s Republic of China to the United Nations Office at Geneva, Chen Xu, leading a delegation of representatives from some twenty Chinese ministries and from Xinjiang, Tibet, Hong Kong, and Macao, presented a long national report. It was an exercise in blatant propaganda as usual, exemplified by ridiculous statements like these: “China upholds respect for and protection of [human rights](#) as a task of importance in State governance, fostering historic achievements in the cause of [human rights](#) in China. We have, once and for all, resolved the problem of absolute poverty, thereby attaining our first centenary goal of building a moderately prosperous society in all respects on schedule. We will continue to develop whole-process People’s democracy, promote the protection of [human rights](#) and the rule of law and resolutely uphold social equity and justice. [...] We uphold the equality of all ethnicities, respect the religious beliefs of the people and protect the lawful rights and interests of all ethnic groups” (I, C, 4). “China is developing whole-process People’s democracy in all respects, and its people carry out democratic elections, consultation, decision-making, management and oversight [...]” (II, C, 1, 11).

[Beijing prepared the meeting with the usual, intense lobbying campaign](#). The PRC Ambassador’s speech was 70-minutes long. The 160 registered countries had 45 seconds each for questions and evaluations. Some of them mentioned violations of [human rights](#) and repression on ethnicities, but time limits prevented incisiveness. Many were rather shy, with the possible exception of the United Kingdom, Canada, the United States of America, the Czech Republic, and Slovenia. Some even thanked the Chinese regime for money they received. And the most horrendous methods of persecution operated by the Chinese regime on innocent people went totally unaddressed, for example the dreadful practice of forced organ harvesting (FOH), now fully exposed and documented.



The delusion was evident in all the press releases and comments by the organizations representing the diasporas and the persecuted. Two side-events, held one after the other in the same Room XXVI of the Palais de Nations, went unacknowledged, even if the UNHRC rules admit NGOs' contributions to the debate. [Accompanied by an important document](#), the first of those side-events was [dedicated to FOH—and "Bitter Winter" participated—](#), the second [focused on the persecution of Tibetans](#) (attracting in the audience also other persecuted peoples, such as the [Uyghurs](#)).

### **And now what?**

On October 11, 2023, it was the time to select 15 of the 47 Member States of UNHRC, elected periodically at rotation. The PRC was already one of those 47 before that election and was reelected as one of those 15. Not only the PRC but also others within those 47 have quite peculiar ideas on [human rights](#), a fact that urges all to reflect upon the criteria by which that group is selected.

As to the troika guiding the 2024 UPR of the PRC, and now working on its final report, it is composed by Malawi, Albania and Saudi Arabia. Malawi is one of the many PRC's vassals in Africa, [also severing its ties with the Republic of China \(Taiwan\) in 2008 in favor of Beijing](#). Albania stands on the Balkan route of the PRC's "Belt and Road Initiative." And Saudi Arabia is a notorious partner of the PRC, a Muslim state that even plauds at the Chinese regime's persecution of fellow Muslims, the [Uyghurs](#) and other Turkic people in [Xinjiang](#) (that its non-Han inhabitants call East Turkestan), alongside other Muslim (or Muslim-related) entities like the [Organization of Islamic Cooperation](#) and the [Palestinian Authority](#).

[From its draft](#), it seems that the final report of the Working Group on the 2024 UPR of the PRC will be presented at the UNHRC's 56th regular session, scheduled from June 18 to July 12. But then what?

The final report will contain observations and considerations, evaluations and possibly some criticisms, but it will be a compromise by nature, its actors being the PRC, the registered 160 countries which took the floor, including those which praised the Chinese regime, and the pro-China "troika." So, that document won't affect the PRC in any case and won't change the staggering record of the Chinese regime [in human rights](#).

It already happened before and the interminable [statement read by the PRC Ambassador on January 23](#) confirmed it: "The Chinese Government," he said, "accepted 284 of the 346 recommendations put forward by various countries in the course of the third cycle of the [universal periodic review](#). China attaches great importance to follow-up work. Immediately after the review, the Government brought the relevant domestic departments up to date via a cross-sectoral coordination mechanism, clarifying the division of labour and programme implementation among the various departments. It prepares regular overview reports on the status of implementation, paying particular attention to hearing the views of non-governmental organizations. The resulting advances are reflected in this report" (I, B, 3). The unchanged and worsened situation of [human rights](#) in the PRC from 2018/2019 to 2024 demonstrates that these are only lies hidden under a polished façade.

This is why the PRC doesn't fear the "Chinesely correct" judgment of the United Nations and is quite able to turn to its own advantage also the timid criticism of its acts and policies that at times may come from it. In the meantime, despite all the bureaucratic precision of the UN agencies' rules, procedures and limitations, the summary of the proceedings of the

review process of the PRC [that the Working Group promised for February 9 in its online draft of its final report has still not been published](#)—and this speaks for itself.

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## **Religious persecution and issues – Bimonthly digest February 01-15**

### **General**

#### **13.02.2024 - Zhejiang Province leads in issuing documents to implement a new policy on the management of religious activity venues**

ChinaAid - The Ethnic and Religious Affairs Committee of Zhejiang province has officially launched the "Implementation Measures for the Management of Venues for Religious Activities (Trial Implementation)." The official statement claims that the aim is to standardize the supervision of religious activity venues in the province. Ethnic and religious affairs bureaus of cities and counties have notified and issued the document to the next level of governance, township government, and sub-district offices. Implementation of the Measures took effect on February 1, 2024.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **Uyghurs**

#### **01.02.2024 - Elderly Uyghur women imprisoned in China for decades-old religious 'crimes', leaked files reveal**

The Guardian - Hundreds of thousands of Uyghur women, including religious leaders, are estimated to have been arrested and imprisoned in Xinjiang since 2014, with some elderly women detained for practices that took place decades ago, according to an analysis of leaked Chinese police files.

There is growing evidence of the abusive treatment of the Uyghur Muslim population of the north-west Chinese region of Xinjiang, with their traditions and religion seen as evidence of extremism and separatism.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **Catholics**

#### **05.02.2024 - China arrests 200 Christians for 'defying' state body**

Ucanews - Police in northeast China raided a gathering of Christian villagers and arrested 200 participants for allegedly joining a church that refused to abide by a theological doctrine promoted by a state-sanctioned body, according to a report.

Some 150 police officers stormed the gathering in Xiaotuan, a village in Mudanjiang City of Heilongjiang province on Jan. 27 and arrested the Christian faithful, Bitter Winter, an online magazine covering religious freedom and human rights in China, reported on Feb. 5.

Those arrested were members of a house church that is part of the Sola Fide (Justification by Faith) network. Sola Fide, Latin for "faith only" is a Christian theological doctrine taught by Martin Luther, a German theologian and reformer who started the Reformation Movement in the 16th century.

[Continue reading...](#)

## Buddhists

### **13.02.2024 - Lunar New Year vacation homework for Chinese religions: Teach the "Five Identifications"**

Bitter Winter - The United Front gathered the leaders of the government-controlled five authorized religions to wish them happy Lunar New Year—and to remind them that holidays are opportunities not to be wasted to educate believers to "patriotic values."

The top leaders of China Buddhist Association, China Islamic Association, China Taoist Association, the Patriotic Catholic Church and the Protestant Three-Self Church gathered on February 5 for a "Spring Festival Symposium of Leaders of National Religious Groups."

The meeting was attended by the CCP ideologue-in-chief, Wang Huning, member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee and Chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, who delivered the keynote speech.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **07.02.2024 - Tibetan monk who criticized China's policies released from prison**

RFA - A Tibetan monk who criticized China's restrictive policies in Tibet and was convicted of "inciting separatism" has been released after four and half years in prison.

Rinchen Tsultrim was released from Mianyang prison in Sichuan province on Feb. 1 after completing his prison term, two sources told Radio Free Asia.

Tsultrim was a monk at the Nangzhig Monastery in Sichuan's Ngaba county when he was taken into custody in 2019. He was secretly detained for more than a year and sentenced in a closed trial in 2021.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **06.02.2024 - China urges religious leaders to be more purposeful in the sinicization drive in New Year greetings**

Tibetan review - Signalling full onslaught on Sinicization of religion, China's top leader on religious and minority affairs has on Feb 5 called on the country's religious leaders to be

more purposeful in serving the overall work of the Party and the country to strengthen their communities' identification with the motherland in his Chinese New Year greetings. Both the Chinese New Year, called the Spring Festival, and the Tibetan New Year, called Losar, fall on Feb 10 this time.

Addressing a meeting with leaders of national religious groups ahead of the Chinese New Year, Wang Huning, a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee and chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, called on the country's religious groups to be more purposeful in serving the overall work of the Party and the country, reported China's official Xinhua news agency Feb 5.

[Continue reading...](#)

### 05.02.2024 - Tibetan monk arrested for publishing books on Tibet from exiles

RFA - A Tibetan Buddhist monk was arrested by Chinese police in June 2023 on charges of republishing books from the exiled Tibetan community and for contacting people outside the region, Radio Free Asia has learned.

The whereabouts of **Lobsang Thabkhey**, 54, who served as librarian of Kirti Monastery in Ngaba county in southwest China's Sichuan province, remain unknown, two sources inside Tibet said on condition of anonymity for safety reasons.

Thabkhey, had been summoned several times by Chinese police before his arrest for questioning, one of the sources told RFA.

[Continue reading...](#)

## Falun Gong

### 13.02.2024 - Three Guangdong residents sentenced to up to 8 years for practicing Falun Gong

Minghui - It was recently confirmed that three residents of Heyuan City, Guangdong Province, have been sentenced to prison for their shared faith in Falun Gong.

**Ms. Li Youbin**, around 50, was sentenced to eight years by the Dongyuan County Court. **Ms. Qiu Denong**, 73, was sentenced to three and a half years by the same court. They were both transferred from the Dongyuan County Detention Center to the Guangdong Province Women's Prison after their wrongful conviction.

**Mr. Chen Ruyong**, 51, was sentenced to three years. His family does not know which court sentenced him or when. He spent about a year at various detention facilities before being admitted to Sihui Prison at an unknown date.

The practitioners' families were never notified of their indictments, trials, sentences, or transfers to prison.

[Continue reading...](#)

## **06.02.2024 - After nearly 16 years behind bars for her faith in Falun Gong, Sichuan woman secretly sentenced to another 7 years**

Minghui - It was learned in late January 2024 that **Ms. Hu Yurong**, 54, from Qu County, Sichuan Province, was sentenced to seven years for practicing Falun Gong.

Ms. Hu was arrested on April 24, 2020, by officers from the Qu County Domestic Security Office and its subordinate, the Baocheng Police Station. The police have since kept her family in the dark regarding her case status. Her loved ones recently managed to find out about her prison sentence and learned that she is now held at the Chengdu Women's Prison. They still do not know where she was held before her prison transfer or when she was indicted, tried, or sentenced.

This is not the first time Ms. Hu has been targeted for her faith. She was previously incarcerated for a total of nearly 16 years, including two forced labor terms and two prison sentences.

[Continue reading...](#)

## **Protestants**

### **15.02.2024 - Chen Yueli arrested for printing children's Sunday school materials.**

ChinaAid - Hong Kong Christian **Chen Yueli**, whose English name is Stephen, who was involved in the printing of children's Sunday school materials, was taken away by the police on December 19, 2023, when he entered China through the Shenzhen West Kowloon Customs. At least 8 other Christians were arrested with him. Currently, Chen Yueli has been formally arrested and is charged with "illegal business operations." He is being held in the Chibi Detention Center in Chibi City, Hubei Province. Despite multiple attempts to visit him, his lawyer has been unable to meet with him. His family is very worried about his condition and health.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **09.02.2024 - Three Christians detained for leading children in singing hymns and prayers.**

China Aid - According to an anonymous prayer letter, on January 18, at 10:00 AM, Christians **Dai Chuanli, Wang Dandan, and Ma Jiahui** from the Fuyang Maizhong Reformed Church were taken away by police from the Fuyang Economic and Technological Development Zone Sub-bureau while leading the children of the church in singing hymns and prayer. On the noon of the 19th, police searched their homes, and each was given a 15-day administrative detention. This marks the third time Christians from this church were detained on the same grounds since September 2023. Other believers from the church also frequently face harassment from community management office personnel, including forced prying open doors and pressuring landlords to compel them to move.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **08.02.2024 - Jiangsu provincial authorities banned five Church institutions**

China Aid - The local government's civil affairs department in Jiangsu Province, under the pretext of "illegal social organizations," released the first list of organizations to be banned in 2024. This list includes house churches, as well as other religious and social organizations. According to the official website of Nanjing Daily, on January 4, the Jiangsu Provincial Civil Affairs Department announced eight illegal social organizations that were legally banned, this being the first batch in 2024 to be banned. Along with a list of seven others suspected of being involved.

[Continue reading...](#)

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## **Religious persecution and issues – Bimonthly digest January 16-31**

### **General**

#### **30.01.2024 - China, New White paper hails "deprogramming" of "religious extremists"**

Bitter Winter - Last week, China's human right record was under the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the United Nations. China's UPR is always more interesting for side events and documents filed by China's opponents, which do get some media coverage, than for the official UN reports, documents usually of interest mostly to the Chinese media. Beijing easily manages to control these reports through friendly countries that command a majority in the Human Rights Council.

Not coincidentally, China published a white paper "Legal Framework and Measures for Counterterrorism" on January 23, right in the middle of its UPR. The document is, again, mostly intended for domestic consumption, propaganda, and preaching to the converted, i.e. to the fellow travelers of the CCP and the friendly countries prepared to hail China as a beacon of human rights.

[Continue reading...](#)

#### **26.01.2024 - "Prove your love for the Party": Hui Muslims submitted to "patriotic education"**

Bitter Winter - Earlier this month, "Bitter Winter" published an English translation of the new Guidelines instructing the religious communities of the five authorized religions how they should implement the "Patriotic Education Law" in force since January 1. The statute has been hailed as one the most important recent Chinese laws, as it reorganizes the whole domestic propaganda activity of the Chinese Communist Party.

[Continue reading...](#)

#### **24.01.2024 - Cold genocide: Is the world complicit in Chinese organ harvesting?**

Bitter Winter - Despite its magnitude and seriousness, the crime of organ harvesting in the People's Republic of China is still underreported and underestimated.

A paper presented at the hybrid event "China's Denial of Human Rights," hosted at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland, on January 22, 2024, by CAP-Coordination des Associations & Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience, and supported by other NGOs, during the 45th session of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Working Group Information meeting, on the eve of the UPR of the People's Republic of China (January 23).

[Continue reading...](#)

## **The Church of Almighty God**

### **26.01.2024 - China, more members of The Church of Almighty God arrested and tortured**

Bitter Winter - After the epidemic of COVID-19 was comprehensively eased in 2023, the CCP has launched more frequent crackdowns targeting The Church of Almighty God (CAG). Frequent cases of torture, including of minor, elderly, and disabled believers, were reported to "Bitter Winter."

As "Bitter Winter" had previously reported, on June 15, 2023 alone, at least 1,043 CAG Christians were arrested in Zhejiang Province. One of them died three days after his arrest. There were wounds on his head and bloodstain in his eyes. Relatives and co-religionists believed he had been tortured.

[Continue reading...](#)

## **Muslims**

### **30.01.2024 - China introduces strict rules in Xinjiang on Islam, other religions.**

Rferl - In a move set to tighten government control over practicing religion in China's western Xinjiang Province, the Muslim-majority region will introduce a set of regulations that -- among other things -- will require all new places of worship to reflect "Chinese characteristics and style."

The sweeping legislation will come into force on February 1 as part of a broader multiyear campaign aimed at controlling religion in Xinjiang, which is home to mainly Muslim ethnic groups such as Uyghurs, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, and Hui (aka Dungans).

As part of the new set of "regulations on religious affairs," all new mosques, churches, and other religious buildings must reflect Chinese design elements and any renovations to extant layouts will require approval from Xinjiang's regional authorities. Additional measures include controls on "large-scale" religious gatherings -- which will require approval from the local government at least one month in advance -- and that religious content posted online must be screened by the regional government.

[Continue reading...](#)

## **Catholics**

## **25.01.2024 - Bishop approved by pope ordained in China in apparent thaw in relations**

Reuters - VATICAN CITY, Jan 25 (Reuters) - A bishop appointed by Pope Francis was installed in a diocese in China on Thursday, the Vatican said, in an apparent thaw in relations following friction when government-backed bishops were named without papal permission.

The Vatican said Rev. Taddeo Wang Yuesheng, 58, was ordained as bishop for the diocese of Zhengzhou, in the central province of Henan.

A statement said he was appointed by the pope "in the framework" of a landmark 2018 accord between Beijing and the Vatican on the naming of bishops.

[Continue reading...](#)

## **23.01.2024 - Bishop Peter Shao Zhumin arrested for opposing the CCP'S interference in the diocese**

ChinaAid - Bishop Peter Shao Zhumin is a key figure in the Catholic Diocese of Wenzhou. He was taken away by the Communist Party authorities at the beginning of 2024 for opposing the interference of the Chinese Communist authorities in diocesan affairs. The outside world has lost communication with him. The faithful of the Wenzhou Diocese pray that God will allow him to be released soon.

Bishop Peter Shao Zhumin has consistently remained loyal to the Vatican. Before the signing of the China-Holy See agreement on the appointment of bishops, the "underground" church loyal to the Vatican needed tremendous courage to uphold their faith. Bishop Peter Shao Zhumin has consistently refused to join the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, which is controlled by the Communist Party. As a result, he has not received recognition from the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association.

[Continue reading...](#)

## **Buddhists**

### **29.01.2024 - A New Great Game: China, India, and the Dalai Lama**

Bitter Winter - The Panchen Lama, traditionally the second-highest leader in Tibetan Buddhism, holds immense spiritual and political power. However, this role has become entangled in a political struggle between the Dalai Lama and the Chinese government. Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, recognized by the Dalai Lama as the 11th Panchen Lama, was abducted by the Chinese government in 1995 at the age of six. In his place, the Chinese government appointed Gyaltsen Norbu, who lacks legitimacy among Tibetans and serves more as a political mouthpiece for the Communist Party. Tibetans view Gyaltsen Norbu as a puppet, isolated and controlled by the Chinese authorities. He promotes Sinicization and communist ideology, urging Tibetans to assimilate into Chinese culture and accept the Party's rule. This, naturally, draws ridicule and fuels non-acceptance, highlighting the failure of the Chinese government to gain true legitimacy in Tibet.

[Continue reading...](#)

## **Falun Gong**



## **29.01.2024 - Four Jilin residents stand trial for posting information about Falun Gong on social media**

Minghui - Four residents in Jilin Province stood trial on January 18, 2024 for posting information about Falun Gong on Kwai and TikTok, both short-video sharing platforms.

According to insiders, the Jilin Province 610 Office, an extralegal agency tasked with overseeing the persecution of Falun Gong, ordered the arrests of the four Jilin Falun Gong practitioners. The police monitored them and tapped their phones for months before arresting them on July 12, 2023.

**Mr. Xie Feng**, a resident of Nong'an County (which is under the jurisdiction of the capital city of Changchun), was arrested by the Baicheng City Police Department. They confiscated his Falun Gong books and took him to the Baicheng City Detention Center, which declined to admit him after he failed the required physical examination. He was released on bail.

[Continue reading...](#)

## **17.01.2024 - Falun Gong report on 2023: 1,188 practitioners sentenced, 209 killed**

Bitter Winter - As it does every year, Falun Gong has released the figures of its practitioners sentenced and persecuted to death in 2023 in China. Some may object that these are figures coming from the spiritual movement itself. Yet, on the basis of the number of trials reported by local media and by anti-xie-jiao websites, we regard the figures about those sentenced as believable.

As for the number of practitioners killed, obviously these cannot be confirmed from Chinese governmental sources. However, "Bitter Winter" has reported itself several cases of extra-judicial killings of Falun Gong practitioners, based on accounts by relatives and friends, and what can be said with certitude is that China continues to persecute dissidents to death in various ways.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **Protestants**

## **26.01.2024 - Crime of fraud: A new era of persecution against Christians by the Chinese communist party.**

ChinaAid - For decades, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has sought to dismantle Christian churches who refuse to register with the government-run Three Self Patriotic Movement. In the name of Sincization, that is recreating religion to better align with Party ideals, Christians have been targeted with repeated arrests, raids, and harrassment at the hands of authorities. The CCP ushered in a new era of persecution beginning in 2018 by charging pastors, church leaders, and other Christians with crimes of fraud.

[Continue reading...](#)

## **23.01.2024 - Fuyang Maizhong reformed Church raided again**

Bitter Winter - On January 18, 2024, a gathering of the Fuyang Maizhong Reformed Church in Fuyang, Anhui, province, was raided while children had come together to pray and sing. Police officers from the Economic and Technological Development Zone Branch of the Fuyang Municipal Public Security Bureau detained three Christians who were leading the children, called Dai Chuanli, Wang Dandan, and Ma Jiahui, and searched their homes. The Public Security placed the three Christians in administrative detention for fifteen days, pending further investigations.

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## **A Resolution of the European Parliament condemns the persecution of Falun Gong in China**

***The ongoing persecution of Falun Gong in China, notably the case of Mr Ding Yuande - [Bitter Winter](#): In 2023 1,188 practitioners sentenced, 209 killed***

**[EU Parliament \(18.01.2024\) - European Parliament resolution of 18 January 2024 on the ongoing persecution of Falun Gong in China, notably the case of Mr Ding Yuande \(2024/2504\(RSP\)\)](#)**

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to its previous resolutions on China,
  - having regard to Rules 144(5) and 132(4) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas since 1999, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has engaged in systematic persecution to eradicate the Falun Gong religious movement; whereas freedom of religious belief is deteriorating across the People's Republic of China (PRC); whereas technology-based censorship and surveillance are central to this repression; whereas Article 36 of the PRC's Constitution stipulates that its citizens must enjoy freedom of religious belief;
  - B. whereas it is documented that thousands of Falun Gong practitioners have died as a result of the CCP's persecution since 1999; whereas practitioners are frequently detained and reportedly subjected to torture, psychological abuse and organ harvesting so that they renounce their faith;
  - C. whereas on 12 May 2023 Falun Gong practitioners Mr Ding Yuande and his wife Ms Ma Ruimei were arrested without a warrant; whereas Ms Ma was released on bail, but was then intimidated by police because of a rescue campaign launched by their son abroad;
  - D. whereas Mr Ding was detained with no family visits for eight months; whereas on 15 December 2023 he was sentenced to three years in prison with a CNY 15 000 fine; whereas he appealed the judgment;
1. Strongly urges the PRC to immediately end the persecution of Falun Gong practitioners and other minorities, including Uyghurs and Tibetans; demands the

immediate and unconditional release of Mr Ding and all Falun Gong practitioners in China;

2. Calls for the PRC to end domestic and transnational surveillance and control and the suppression of religious freedom; urges the PRC to abide by its obligations under international law and its own constitution to respect and protect human rights;
3. Calls on the EU Member States to suspend extradition treaties with the PRC;
4. Stresses that respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law should be at the centre of the EU's relations with China; calls for the EU and its Member States to support and facilitate an international investigation into the persecution of Falun Gong practitioners and raise the persecution of religious minorities during all political and human rights dialogues with the Chinese authorities; calls on the Member States and the EU Delegation to the PRC to monitor trials;
5. Calls for the EU and its Member States to publicly condemn organ transplant abuses in China and to use the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime and national human rights sanctions regimes against all perpetrators and entities that have contributed to the persecution of Falun Gong practitioners in China and abroad; stresses that EU measures should include refusing visas, freezing assets, expulsion from EU territories, criminal prosecution, including on the basis of extraterritorial jurisdiction, and bringing international criminal charges;
6. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the EU institutions, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, and the Government and Parliament of the PRC.

#### **HRWF Foonote**

Other Resolution of the European Parliament on China (17 January 2024):  
[Security and Defence Implication of China's influence on critical infrastructure in the EU](#)

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## **Falun Gong report on 2023: 1,188 practitioners sentenced, 209 killed**

***Figures include cases the movement became aware of in 2023. We regard them as believable.***

[Bitter Winter](#) (17.01.2023) - As it does every year, [Falun Gong](#) has released the figures of its practitioners [sentenced](#) and [persecuted to death](#) in 2023 in China. Some may object that these are figures coming from the spiritual movement itself. Yet, on the basis of the number of trials reported by local media and by anti-xie-jiao websites, we regard the figures about those sentenced as believable.

As for the number of practitioners killed, obviously these cannot be confirmed from Chinese governmental sources. However, "Bitter Winter" has reported itself several cases of extra-judicial killings of [Falun Gong](#) practitioners, based on accounts by relatives and friends, and what can be said with certitude is that China continues to persecute dissidents to death in various ways.

Summarizing the [Falun Gong](#) reports, in the year 2023, 209 new cases of persecution to death were reported. They include 88 cases that occurred before 2023 but became known to the movement only in that year. Of the 175 practitioners persecuted to death whose age is known, the youngest was 23 and the oldest was 93; 134 were 60 or older. 130 victims were women and 77 men (for 2, the gender was not reported).

Liaoning was the [province](#) with more deaths reported in 2023. However, the first [province](#) for deaths that occurred during 2023 was Jilin. The figures include both those who died in custody and those who were sent home from jail where they had been tortured or denied medical treatment and died shortly thereafter.

The reports mention a variety of tortures the practitioners had to endure: wearing a straitjacket, being shocked with an electric baton, sprinkled with chili peppers, having their feet burned, being force-fed with mustard oil, or deprived of food and sleep. Several women were sexually assaulted.

In 2023, the movement became aware that another 1,188 [Falun Gong](#) practitioners had been sentenced to jail penalties, in addition to those included in reports released in previous years. Again, some were sentenced before 2023 but [Falun Gong](#) learned of the decisions only in that year. The average jail penalty was three years, but 161 practitioners were sentenced to five years or more. The youngest practitioner sentenced was 22 and the oldest 89. The courts of Shandong [province](#) were the busiest ones in issuing verdicts against [Falun Gong](#) practitioners in 2023.

In addition to those killed or sentenced, in 2023 [Falun Gong](#) added 6,514 names to its list of practitioners harassed through raids, orders to [attend mandatory indoctrination classes](#), loss of their jobs, and other discriminatory measures.

These figures confirm what is often lamented by [CCP](#) bureaucrats, i.e., that notwithstanding periodical proclaims of “victory” in the campaigns aimed at eradicating [Falun Gong](#), the movement remains active in all Chinese provinces. As “Bitter Winter” reported, [Falun Gong](#) gained new members during the COVID-19 epidemic by proposing the “[Nine True Words Meditation](#)” as a way of boosting the immune system and obtaining some protection from the virus.

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## Religious persecution and issues – Bimonthly digest January 01-15

### General

#### 12.01.2024 - China: Guidelines instruct religions how to implement the patriotic law

Bitter Winter - The “Patriotic Education Law”, the brainchild of the CCP Central Propaganda Department, was approved in a revised version on October 24, 2023, by the 14th National People’s Congress Standing Committee and came into effect on January 1, 2024. It has been hailed as one the most important recent Chinese laws, as it reorganizes the whole

domestic propaganda effort of the Party. "Education," as "Bitter Winter" explained when the law was passed, does not refer to schools only.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **09.01.2024 - A pro-China campaign against the Prague inter-governmental religious freedom conference—and Bitter Winter**

Bitter Winter - From November 28 to 30, Prague hosted the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance (IRFBA) conference, which followed similar inter-ministerial meetings in Washington DC and London. It was hailed throughout the democratic world as one of the largest and most successful gathering of governments to promote freedom of religion or belief and denounce its violations.

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### **05.01.2024 - Taiwan's Yiguandao believers arrested as "Cultists" when visiting China**

Bitter Winter - If you are a follower of the large salvationist religion Yiguandao living in Taiwan, you may believe you may safely visit your relatives in Mainland China. True, Chairman Mao hated Yiguandao and in the 1950s and 1960s launched against it the bloodiest, and most forgotten, religious persecution in the history of Communist China. CCP's own sources, perhaps exaggerating, report that under Mao "820,000 leaders and organizers, and 13 million followers" of Yiguandao were arrested, with thousands killed in the Chinese jails and labor camps. Many escaped to Taiwan and Hong Kong.

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## **Uyghur Muslims**

### **08.01.2024 - Coming in February: Harsher religious regulations just for Xinjiang**

Bitter Winter - Special "Regulations on Religious Affairs" for Xinjiang, of which "Bitter Winter" offers a full English translation, will further reduce the possibility of religion to survive, if not as a propaganda mouthpiece of the Communist Party.

From February 1, 2024, Xinjiang will have its own "Regulations on religious affairs," which is harsher than the one imposed on other provinces and regions. Even Chinese propaganda admits that religion will be more tightly controlled in Xinjiang than in "normal" provinces and regions but as usual justifies this with the need of combating "extremism" and "terrorism."

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## **Buddhists**

### **11.01.2024 - China bars Tibetan kids from private classes, religious activities**

Ucanews - Ethnic Tibetans have expressed alarm over door-to-door inspection by China's communist authorities to ensure children are not taking private classes and participating in religious activities during their winter break.

The authorities are conducting random inspections in "residential areas and commercial establishments" in Tibet and other Tibetan-populated regions, Radio Free Asia (RFA) reported on Jan. 9 citing unnamed sources.

"In addition to random door-to-door investigations, local authorities are also carrying out surveys of the Tibetan children," a source in China's southwestern Qinghai province told RFA.

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### 03.01.2024 - No new monks allowed at Buddhist monastery in Tibet

RFA - Chinese authorities have forbidden the admission of new monks of all ages into a Tibetan Buddhist monastery in Chamdo prefecture in eastern Tibet amid growing restrictions on religious activities in the country, two sources familiar with the development told Radio Free Asia.

This is the first time Chinese authorities have prohibited the enrollment of monks of all ages, though previously only minors, or those below the age of 18, were restricted from joining the monastic order in Tibet, said a source from inside the region.

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## Falun Gong

### 14.01.2024 - 70-year-old woman gets three years for talking to people about Falun Gong

Minghui - A 70-year-old Weifang City, Shandong Province, resident is appealing a three-year prison sentence for practicing Falun Gong.

Ms. **Li Xiuzhen** was arrested by officers of the Heng'an Police Station on September 7, 2023, for talking to people about Falun Gong at a community fair. Although the police released her on the same day, they staked outside of her home and monitored her daily activities for over a month and arrested her again on November 21. Her home was also ransacked.

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### 09.01.2024 - After two prior prison sentences totaling 13 years, Jilin Man sentenced to six years for practicing Falun Gong

Minghui - Mr. **Shi Wenzhuo**, 59, from Changchun City, Jilin Province was sentenced to six years in December 2023 for practicing Falun Gong.

Mr. Shi was arrested and had his home raided by two officers from the Tumenling Police Station on the afternoon of March 16, 2023. They confiscated one Falun Gong book and a portrait of Falun Gong's founder.

Six other officers went to the property management office at Mr. Shi's apartment complex earlier that day (at 7 a.m.), demanding to see surveillance videos. They decided to arrest him when they saw him taking out the trash in a video.

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### **07.01.2024 - Sichuan Woman completes second 3-year sentence with severe back injuries due to long-term torture in prison**

Minghui - A Xichang City, Sichuan Province resident completed her second three-year prison sentence on November 4, 2023 with severe back injuries due to long-term abuse in prison. A prison doctor warned her that she was at risk of becoming paralyzed.

Ms. Zhao Jun's latest prison sentence stemmed from her arrest on July 23, 2019 for her faith in Falun Gong, a mind-body practice that has been persecuted by the Chinese Communist Party since July 1999. She was released on bail on August 21, 2019 and taken back into custody around November 2020. She was sentenced to three years in December 2020 and transferred from the Xichang City Detention Center to the Chengdu City Women's Prison on April 27, 2022.

[Continue reading...](#)

## **Protestants**

### **15.01.2024 - Dalian House Church Pastor Kan Xiaoyong Sentenced to 14 Years in Jail**

Bitter Winter - House church pastors in China are getting increasingly heavy prison sentences, as a result of Xi Jinping's instructions to compel all Protestant churches to join the government-controlled Three-Self Church, cracking down on those that refuse. On January 12, 2024, Dalian's Pastor Kan Xiaoyong was sentenced by the Ganjingzi District People's Court to fourteen years in prison. His wife Wang Fengying was sentenced to four years, and co-worker Chu Xinyu to ten years. Other three defendants received three-year verdicts.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **10.01.2024 - Hebei authorities ban children from attending Christmas vigils**

ChinaAid - The Chinese government views Christmas as a form of cultural and religious invasion, local authorities aim to use "the suppression of Christmas" as a way to express patriotism. In Baoding City, Hebei Province, children are prohibited from participating in Christmas vigil activities. The Baoding authorities have taken a series of measures, including traffic blockades and store closures, and students are forbidden from bringing Christmas-related items back to school dormitories.

Baoding is a prefecture-level city not far from the Chinese capital, Beijing, and it is also a place with a large population of traditional Catholics. The Baoding Catholic Diocese has approximately 100,000 parishioners. The current bishop of the diocese is Francis An

Shuxin. The government has kept the diocese's former legitimate bishop, James Su Zhimin, in long-term detention since 1997 and he is still missing to this day.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **03.01.2024 - Chinese Mongolian christian Alamusha is in critical condition after being severely beaten in prisons.**

ChinaAid - Alamus, whose Chinese name is Alamusha, is a Chinese Mongolian Christian who returned home during his university break to attend a classmate reunion when one of his classmates was getting beaten. He went with his classmate to check the situation, and a group altercation ensued. Alamusha did not participate in the fight, but he was inexplicably designated as the main offender and sentenced to 15 years for intentional injury. Alamusha has consistently contested the verdict and has suffered severe injuries due to the beatings of the prison guards. His aunt recorded a video exposing Alamusha's situation, petitioning government officials, and seeking help from the public.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **03.01.2024 - Hefei's Ganquan Church: three released, two remain in jail**

Bitter Winter - At the end of December 2023, thanks to a rare Associated Press story exposing the persecution of a house church, several media throughout the world and those Chinese netizens who access them via VPN learned the story of how Elder Ding Zhongfu of Hefei's Ganquan Church, in Anhui province, had his home raided in the early morning and was detained.

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## **Chinese film accuses Italy-based magazine of promoting cults**

***China has banned dozens of religious movements terming those cults and persecuted their members***

[UCA News](#) (02.01.2023) - A state-run body in China has re-launched a propaganda film targeting Italy-based human rights and religious liberty magazine *Bitter Winter*, and its parent body accusing them of promoting banned cult movements, says a report.

China Anti-Xie-Jiao Association, an anti-cult organization, has been screening the film "*The Bitter Winter of Belief: Sneaking Cults*" across the country since late December, *Bitter Winter* reported on Jan. 1.

The film slams the magazine and its parent body, the Center for Studies on New Religions (CESNUR) as promoters of cults banned by China including the [Church of Almighty God \(CAG\)](#).

The film was first launched in Brussels last June. It has been screened all over China since Dec. 20, the report said.



Massimo Introvigne, head of CESNUR, alleged the film of spreading "bizarre lies" and termed it the "dumbest anti-cult movie ever made" by the country's communist regime.

The film has "a laundry list of accusations" against cults, CESNUR and *Bitter Winter* put together without checking the sources nor giving them any rational order, Introvigne said.

"They [the allegations] are so ridiculously false that they confirm the Chinese propaganda film was hastily produced by low-level operatives," he added.

The documentary is directed by Russian filmmaker Natalia Bashirian.

According to Introvigne Roland Delcourt, "a notorious Chinese Communist Party (CCP) fellow traveler" introduced the film to the 20-member audience during the launch in June.

The film was "deservedly forgotten" forcing the China Anti-Xie-Jiao Association to relaunch it, he said.

Introvigne also refuted allegations that *Bitter Winter* was mostly dealing with the CAG.

The CAG is one of dozens of controversial religious movements known as *Xie Jiao* (evil/heretic cults) and banned in China. Their members face brutal state persecution.

The CAG, also known as Eastern Lightning, is considered a fringe radical movement by mainstream Christian groups. The movement is believed to have 3-4 million members in China, reports say.

Founded in 1991, the movement believes Jesus has been reborn and in the form of a Chinese woman named Yang Xiangbin, the head of the church.

Yang and her partner Zhao Weishan reportedly moved to the US in 2000 and oversee CAG operations from New York City.

The movement has been accused of using illegal recruitment tactics such as kidnappings for expansion.

The group came under fire after Zhao and Yang declared open war against the officially atheist Chinese Communist Party by labeling it the "red dragon."

It was banned and hundreds of its members have been jailed and tortured just like another well-known cult movement, Falun Gong.

*Bitter Winter* often reports the problems faced by the CAG and Falun Gong which are among the most persecuted religious groups in China.

"We do report about it [religious persecution]. However, a simple perusal of our indexes would reveal that in 2022 and 2023 we have published more than 1,500 articles, of which eight deal with the CAG," Introvigne said.

The rights group routinely labels China as one of the world's top violators of freedom of religion or belief.

US-based advocacy group, ChinaAid, in its Annual Persecution Report 2022 released last February blasted the communist regime for multiple forms of persecution against

registered and unregistered religious groups including sinicization, educational reforms, and widespread rights abuses coupled with stringent laws.

CCP officials had engaged in church demolition to [suppress Christianity](#) and its practice in the nation, the report said.

Throughout 2022 churches and worship places of Christians, including Catholics, have been demolished in Dalian, Jiangxi, Tongguan, Shaanxi, and other provinces, the report said.

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