

Market Drayton Churches Together: Prayer for Persecuted Christians - 17 July 2019

The People's Republic of China

16 July - ChinaAid: Chinese Officials Crack Down On Christian Fellowship, Detain Believers

www.chinaaid.org/2019/07/chinese-officials-crack-down-on.html

ChinaAid recently learned about activity by authorities in Beijing against believers who attended a Christian fellowship in a restaurant on April 1.

Reports say an Assembly of God Church in the area held a women's fellowship at Jinshilin Restaurant in Chaoyang District, Beijing, on the first day of April. 22 attendees prayed together and welcomed four members who returned from an Israel trip.

According to a believer named Ms. Yin, servers often came in and out of the room unprompted. The next day, Yin and another believer were detailed and interrogated at the Chaoyang Police Station. Yin managed to flee to the United States after her administrative detention expired.

However, those close to the other believer still have difficulty locating her.

Yin says police accused her of attending unlawful gatherings, including events associated with the Shouters. The group is a Christian sect operating out of Taiwan and considered a cult by Chinese authorities. Officials have long used accusations of cult participation to detain Christians.

Beijing has long been a hotbed for Christian persecution. Extensive coverage by ChinaAid reveals struggles by the leadership and congregates of Zion Church, one of the biggest underground churches in the capital, as they grappled with authorities who tried to force surveillance camera installation and ultimately shut down the house of worship last September.

14 July - ChinaAid: Pastor of Zion Church pens letter describing family's persecution

www.chinaaid.org/2019/07/pastor-of-zion-church-pens-letter.html

Note: The following is a letter written by Jin Mingri, also known as Ezra Jin, who serves as the pastor of Zion Church in Beijing. As one of China's large, unregistered megachurches, Zion Church has suffered much at the hands of the authorities. Now, Jin writes of the difficulties his daughter, Grace Jin, is facing as she attempts to travel to the United States for school.

First Prayer Letter from Pastor Jin Mingri (Ezra Jin)

Dear Fellow Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I am Ezra Jin, senior pastor of Beijing Zion Church. I became a Christian in 1989 and began serving the church the same year. This year marks the thirtieth year of my ministry in the church. As many of you already know, Beijing Zion Church was shut down forcibly by the government on September 9, 2018. At that same time, my personal life was also greatly affected.

My daughter, Grace Jin, has graduated from University of California-Los Angeles (UCLA) and received a master's at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. She currently has applied and received an offer from Washington and Lee Law School. She has originally planned to return back to the United States in August to further her education.

However, the border security informed her that she was not allowed to leave the country for the crime of "having the risk of harming the country abroad."

Last year, due to the increasing pressure with the domestic environment, my wife and my two sons have left China to study in the United States. In order to support my children's education, I need to sell my house in Beijing. However, I was also informed that my house has been frozen. At the time, I have attempted to go through all the legal processes. They all met dead ends.

I feel uneasy and angry by this disregard of law and justice. This is not only a matter of my personal experience, but also I worry for the future of this country.

I specifically ask you to pray for me and my family, and to pray for the rule of law and justice in our country. May God keep us able to learn patience and restraint in the midst of hardships, and may God open the way for us to lift administrative restrictions as soon as possible, and lead a path for my daughter to be able to go abroad to complete her studies.

May God bless everyone and God bless China.

Pastor Ezra Jin, brother in Christ

13 July - ChinaAid: Bureau chief forbids children from singing hymns

www.chinaaid.org/2019/07/bureau-chief-forbids-children-from.html

The director of the Dafang County Ethnic and Religious Affairs Bureau in China's southern Guizhou province told a church in the region that it is illegal for parents to teach Christian hymns to their children and spread Christian thought.

The church, which is located in the countryside, was raided by a law enforcement officers recently, according to a video clip posted online. The officials gave the church an administrative penalty notice, and when the Christians asked what law they broke, the Bureau's director, Xie Mingxing, said, "It is illegal for you to teach your children to sing hymns and to spread [Christian] thoughts."

Religious persecution throughout Guizhou has escalated in the past few years, with provincial authorities devising a new rule that all certified members of Christian clergy should renew their certification each year in order to more strictly oversee compliance with the Communist Party. Dafang County also requires that church personnel should also participate in an annual inspection, renew their certificates, and participate in training, self-evaluation, and exams as part of a holistic evaluation. The content of the training includes familiarization with China's state-run Christian church network, the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, China's religious rules and policies, and the nation's attempts to "Sinicize" Christianity.

The Sinicization of religion has been a common theme under the administration of current Chinese President Xi Jinping. Referring to "religion with Chinese characteristics," Sinicization endeavors to alter religion and religious practice in order to coincide with Communist Party ideals and implant nationalism in the center of religious life. In order to do this, the Chinese government has been imposing increasingly strict measures on religious sites and forcing Christians who attend government-run churches to sing patriotic songs in their worship services and hear government affiliates preach propaganda alongside the pastor's regular sermon. Additionally, all church activities must be approved by the government, and children under the age of 18 are not permitted to attend a service or practice a faith.

Dates of next meetings: Wednesdays 21 August, 18 September & 16 October - IDOP 16 November

11 July - ChinaAid: ‘God grant the right of worshipping,’ Guizhou Church stands firm against harassment by authorities

www.chinaaid.org/2019/07/god-grant-right-of-worshipping-guizhou.html

On Sunday, June 30, authorities in Guizhou province broke into Zion Reform Evangelical Church during worship. Officials reportedly subjected congregants to inquiry and confiscated some church possessions.

When asked to sign official documents, church leader Zhu Jieheng wrote down “God grants the right to worship” to demonstrate the church was not subject to the mindsets and activities of the authorities.

According to reports, Zhu received a notice of rectification and reform from the Kaili Municipal Ethnic and Religious Affairs Bureau. Officials say the organization of religious events at the church violates regulations.

As ChinaAid has reported, authorities across China often operate to shut down churches. Reports say officials in Sichuan might force Baihua Church, a campus of Chengdu’s Early Rain Covenant Church, to close down after an investigation.

A Henan Christian named Mr. Huang says officers are often pressured by their bosses to visit churches on Sunday if they do not have the day off.

Information from an anonymous pastor details strict religious policies from the government that are even impacting churches associated with the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, China’s state-run, technically legal church network.

Such churches are being subjected to constant surveillance, with officials even installing facial recognition cameras. In addition, many of them must sing nationalistic songs as a part of their worship services, and individuals affiliated with the Chinese government will preach propaganda from the pulpit alongside the pastor’s sermon.

These congregations are often viewed by non-government churches as an instrument for the secular government, due to this continued politicization of the religious field.

According to the pastor, fewer people are speaking out against persecution as a whole because anyone who does so will face trouble. Instead, “many people hide themselves and exist peacefully.”

10 July - ChinaAid: Chinese authorities continue to threaten landlords so they will never rent property to church

www.chinaaid.org/2019/07/chinese-authorities-continue-to.html

Chinese officials continue to crack down on underground churches by threatening landlords.

In late June, the Xuzhou Municipal Ethnic and Religious Affairs Bureau in Jiangsu Province issued a 100,000 yuan (roughly £12,000) fine on June 26 to two landlords who rented venues to a house church meeting at Wanda Plaza, Tongshan, according to reports.

Officials say the landlords have been providing a place for illegal religious events that have been “attended by a large number of people, been of large scale, and have had bad effects.”

A Christian named Mr. He believes activity by authorities is to strike fear into landlords “so they will never rent their property to a church.”

He says most people do not speak out despite their anger to avoid getting in trouble with police. According to him, some landlords work with authorities to drive churches away.

Jiangsu authorities banned Dao En Presbyterian Church in late June after harassing the church. Officials in the province also destroyed 5,911 Taoist temples in February and March.

Chinese officials experiment with incentive programs to shut down house churches and religious events.

Reports say the Guiyang Municipal Ethnic and Religious Affairs Bureau and Finance Bureau launched a program so people can report information about house church activities. Incentives for clues range from 100-6,000 yuan (roughly £12-700).

Past reporting by ChinaAid discusses cash rewards doled out by authorities to residents who report on “suspicious illegal religious sites and activities.”

A government office in Henan province announced in late January the opportunity to trade factual tips about “illegal religious activities” for cash rewards.

Reports also say new religious requirements were announced in Henan province. Requirements include applying if church clergy is organizing an event.

Activities deemed as “underground” are banned, along with believers who are “young” or of an ethnic minority background. Chinese religious regulations forbid children under the age of 18 from participating in religious activities.

8 July - ChinaAid: Early Rain Covenant Church members recount persecution, attend worship In Taiwan

www.chinaaid.org/2019/07/early-rain-covenant-church-members.html



Liao and family - Photo: Radio Free Asia / Reporter Xia Xiaohua

Liao Qiang and several family members arrived in Taiwan last week after fleeing China.

His attendance at a Sunday church service in Taipei represents the first time Qiang worshiped publicly since authorities shut down Early Rain Covenant Church last December, the Associated Press reports.

Liao and his family hope to reside in Taiwan as they seek asylum in the United States. Questions as to whether or not they will be able to stay in the country long enough to do so remain unanswered, since they only have a 15-day Taiwanese tourist visa.

Hopes are the government will provide more time for the family to stay and go through the proper procedures, according to Radio Free Asia.

In the meantime, Liao and his daughter, Ren Ruiting, have been describing living under constant surveillance in China and some of the tactics authorities have used against church members.

On Dec. 9, 2018, ChinaAid broke the news that more than 100 Early Rain Covenant Church members had been taken into custody during an official crackdown on the church. By the end of the week, that number had risen to more than 150.

ChinaAid has extensively reported on persecution against Early Rain Covenant Church since the December arrests. In mid-June, Jiang Rong, the wife of Pastor Wang Yi, received a bail release after months behind bars.

Yesterday, news broke that authorities held a Christian man affiliated with Early Rain Covenant Church under secret incarceration for months inside the basement of a local public security bureau office.

Liao says police tried to convince him to denounce the church via written statement.

He says he would accept a decision by elders to break up the church, but refused to comply with demands by authorities since it's not up to them to deem the church "evil or illegal."

Radio Free Asia reports Liao says he and his family members have been illegally summoned and harassed countless times, and that many other members of the church experience similar persecution. According to Ren, officials summoned believers to try and frame Pastor Wang and others.

Ren also told the Associated Press she was forced to report her location to police anytime she went out. Otherwise, they said her safety could not be guaranteed.

That's when Liao decided that "it was no longer safe for us here, and that my children were most in danger."

Still, Ren maintains hope she will return to her native China. "Whether it's five years, or even 10 years, we'll eventually make our way back to where God wants us to serve," AP quotes her as saying.

7 July - ChinaAid: Early Rain Covenant Church affiliate held in office basement for months

www.chinaaid.org/2019/07/early-rain-covenant-church-affiliate.html

Chinese authorities held a Christian man under secret incarceration in a basement for months, not allowing him to see the sunlight, according to a recent report received by ChinaAid.

The man, Gou Zhongcan, was detained and held in the basement of a public security bureau office when he refused to reveal the passwords to his computer and cell phone. When his father was finally allowed to meet with him, the elder man reported that his son did not look well, but that he has been singing hymns and worship songs in the police station. Allegedly, when he does so, the station's whole environment changes.

Gou is affiliated with Early Rain Covenant Church, a church located in Chengdu, Sichuan, that has been under intense government persecution.

6 July - ChinaAid: Police form human wall surrounding Xunsiding Church after shutdown

www.chinaaid.org/2019/07/police-form-human-wall-surrounding.html

Police and security officials staked out the location of Xunsiding Church for at least a month after the house of worship was shut down in May.

Previous reporting from ChinaAid focuses on administrative actions against Xunsiding Church.

The wife of Xunsiding Church's pastor brought friends to the church's location on June 30. A large group of police and other officials formed a human wall to prevent entry and exit.

According to reports, the human wall of officials occurred for at least a month after police arrived at the location on May 31.

Pastor Yang Xibo posted video of his wife questioning police about why they were at the location even though the church was shut down. The wife asked why friends could not come to the venue for dinner.

According to reports, one officer said only family could enter, stay, and live in the building and it could not be used for religious events. Police also say they maintain the right to check IDs of each person who enters.

Pastor Yang's wife criticized police action as "simple and rude and not based on laws."

Reports say the local ethnic and religious affairs bureau issued a penalty on Xunsiding Church on May 18. Authorities broke in the next day for inspection. Worship was halted as the shutdown notice was posted along with a fine of 250,000 Chinese Yuan (roughly £29,000).

Pastor Yang refused to give in, issuing an appeal on May 20 for a hearing. A hearing occurred on May 31 in Siming District, but authorities officially shut down the church in the evening after prohibiting entry.

On July 1, the Gulou District Ethnic and Religious Affairs Bureau declared Jumu Church in Nanjing shut down.

According to reports, the bureau claims church property was "established as a venue for religious events without authorization" and needed to be closed in accordance with law.

7 July - Bitter Winter: 100 Shanxi House Church Believers Forced to Renounce Faith

bitterwinter.org/house-church-believers-in-shanxi-threatened

On the morning of June 16, about 60 Public Security Bureau officers raided a meeting venue of Cornerstone Church (Fangjiaoshi Church), located in the Dingtaifenghua residential area in Taiyuan city of the northern province of Shanxi.

A member of the church who requested anonymity told Bitter Winter that the venue was attacked at around 9 a.m., as the pastor led believers in singing hymns praising the Lord. The leading police officer shouted, "No one move! You're not allowed to take photos. Place your mobile phones and bags by your feet."

The local Ethnic and Religious Affairs Bureau shut down the venue already on December 16 last year, but the congregation continued their meetings. The authorities asserted that Cornerstone Church was an illegal meeting venue that violated the Regulations on Religious Affairs and said that believers "severely disturbed public order," so the church must be sealed off and shut down.

Cont/... with videos

9 Mar - Bitter winter: Christians Sing Hymns as CCP Removes Cross from Church

bitterwinter.org/christians-sing-hymns-as-ccp-removes-cross-from-church

The stand-off between Christians of a Three-Self church and the government of Fan county under the administration of central Henan Province's Puyang city lasted well past 3 a.m. on September 20, 2018. The scuffle was over the church's cross, which the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) had ordered to be dismantled.

But the believers weren't having it, especially after a number of other local churches had already had their crosses taken down.

At about 5 p.m. on September 19, personnel from various departments – including the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Committee of Puyang city and the Religious Affairs Bureau of Fan county – came to the Three-Self church in Luji township's Luji village. They brought along two large cranes and two hired workers to remove the church's cross because the church didn't have a property deed and the designer responsible for building it didn't have a certificate of assessment required by the state.

Cont/... with video

10 July - ChinaAid: Extradition bill deemed a “total failure” according to Hong Kong chief executive

www.chinaaid.org/2019/07/extradition-bill-deemed-total-failure.html

On Tuesday, Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam said the bill that would allow residents to be extradited to China is dead.

Work on the legislation was deemed a “total failure,” according to her.

Initial news about the legislation sparked massive protests against the government. Many experts believe the bill would give the Chinese Communist Party easier access to dissidents taking advantage of Hong Kong’s laws for freedom and protection.

In mid-June, ChinaAid reported how Lam responded to protests by suspending the legislation, but indicated at the time lawmakers would listen to criticism and mold the bill for improvement.

Some demonstrators remain unconvinced about Lam’s recent announcement and will continue to protest.

Fox News writes how opposition leaders continue to ask for the formal withdrawal of the bill and call for an investigation into the brutal tactics police demonstrated against protesters.

According to protest leaders Jimmy Sham and Bonnie Leung, as cited in Fox News,

“We cannot find the word 'dead' in any of the laws in Hong Kong or in any legal proceedings in the Legislative Council...how can the government tell us what we should preserve our rule of law, when [Lam] herself does not use the principle of the rule of law?”

Both say Lam has not directly spoken to protestors despite claiming to have met their demands. Lam, who faces calls to resign as Hong Kong’s chief executive, remains resolute in her job.

“I myself still have the passion and undertaking to service Hong Kong people,” she says.

4 July - BBC News: China Muslims: Xinjiang schools used to separate children from families

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-48825090>

China is deliberately separating Muslim children from their families, faith and language in its far western region of Xinjiang, according to new research.

At the same time as hundreds of thousands of adults are being detained in giant camps, a rapid, large-scale campaign to build boarding schools is under way.

Based on publicly available documents, and backed up by dozens of interviews with family members overseas, the BBC has gathered some of the most comprehensive evidence to date about what is happening to children in the region.

Records show that in one township alone more than 400 children have lost not just one but both parents to some form of internment, either in the camps or in prison.

Formal assessments are carried out to determine whether the children are in need of “centralised care”.

Cont/... with video

16 July - Bitter Winter: 37 Countries Support Xinjiang Camps for Uyghurs at the United Nations

bitterwinter.org/human-rights-foes-support-chinas-xinjiang-camps

At the United Nations, 22 countries sign a letter condemning the CCP transformations through education camps, 37 answer praising China’s “remarkable achievements” in human rights.

The week that concludes today was one of the most important in the fight for exposing to the world the atrocities of the transformation through education camps, where the CCP detains three millions of Uyghurs, ethnic Kazakhs, and other Muslim minorities in Xinjiang.

The week started with a letter by 22 countries to the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva, denouncing the mass detention and the atrocities in the camps. The list of signatories is available: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. The United States did not sign, as they had walked out of the Human Rights Council for unrelated reasons.

Bitter Winter commends these brave countries, but notices that, contrary to some statements, joining the Belt and Road initiative often comes with a political price. Italy and Greece, who are part of Belt and Road, did not join their traditional European Union partners in signing the letter. Switzerland recently joined Belt and Road too, but its strong human rights traditions prevailed and, laudably, it did sign. Notable for its absence is also South Korea, a country with a significant number of Chinese refugees escaping religious persecution. And diplomatic sources told Bitter Winter they would have expected Turkey to support the Uyghurs victims of persecution – but, on the other hand, China is working hard towards better relations with the Erdogan government.

On July 12, some of the worst human rights violators in the world joined other friends and clients of China in signing a shameful and scandalous letter from 37 countries to the same Human Rights Council, praising alleged and non-existing “remarkable achievements” of China in the field of human rights, and claiming that detaining Uyghurs and other Muslims in the camps is necessary in order to fight “separatism” and “terrorism.”

Some countries probably understand that signing this letter means being remembered for years to come as part of an axis of shame. Chinese sources did not disclose the full list, noting that Russia was the first signatory and mentioning “Russia, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Cuba, Algeria, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Nigeria, Angola, Togo, Tajikistan, Philippines, Belarus and a number of other countries,” which in all likelihood asked not to be mentioned. Bitter Winter is in a position to confirm that Zimbabwe, Bahrain, Oman, Kuwait, Venezuela, Syria and Myanmar also signed.

Three important political considerations may be derived from this week’s events. First, there is an axis of shame of countries that try to violate human rights with impunity, led by China and Russia, and including North Korea, Syria, and Venezuela. Muslim-majority countries that have a very bad human right record have joined this axis, regarding as more important impunity for their human rights violations than protection of fellow Muslims persecuted in China. The same applies to countries such as Myanmar, Belarus, and the Philippines, also under heavy international criticism for serious violations of human rights.

Cont/..

See also: China.org.cn: Ambassadors from 37 countries issue joint letter to support China on its human rights achievements www.china.org.cn/world/2019-07/13/content_74988069.htm