

## 4 Articles

Compass Direct News Service  
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### CHINA: OFFICE BECOMES NEW FORCE FOR RELIGIOUS REPRESSION

Government seminar on house churches, once considered encouraging, results in crackdown.

DUBLIN, July 2 (Compass Direct News) - Amid vigorous debate among scholars in China on the status of house churches, one prominent scholar has suggested the government offer more openness and legal standing to house church Christians, but authorities have reacted with raids, arrests, forced church closures and a ban on the Chinese Federation of Christian House Churches.

Scholar Yu Jianrong and others have concluded that house churches are a positive influence on society, but the government is wary of such influence, particularly since Yu's research estimated the total number of Protestant house church Christians at between 45 and 60 million, with another 18 to 30 million attending government-approved churches - potentially putting the number of Christians higher than that of Communist Party members, which number around 74 million.

The one-year, government-commissioned study by Yu and associates suggested that officials should seek to integrate house churches and no longer regard them as enemies of the state.

Yu, a professor at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Rural Development Institute, used a combination of interviews, field surveys and policy reviews to gather information on house churches in several provinces from October 2007 to November 2008.

After comparing various research statistics, Yu determined that Protestant house church members numbered between 45 and 60 million, with another 18 to 30 million attending government-approved churches. He acknowledged in one interview, however, that the total number of Protestant Christians might be as high as 100 million.

Highlighting discrepancies between government figures and those from other sources, Yu claimed that some official churches under-reported attendance to deflect government scrutiny, while some Christian organizations working in China inflated house church figures to attract support from foreign donors.

Yu then examined the rapid growth of house churches and concluded that love and concern for fellow believers and the evangelistic nature of Christianity were key factors driving the growth of the church.

Yu's team found that most house or "family" churches fit into one of three

broad categories: traditional house churches, open house churches or urban emerging churches. Traditional house churches were generally smaller, family-based churches, meeting in relative secrecy. Though not a Christian himself, Yu attended some of these meetings and was impressed by the religious devotion of church members; he also noted that the focus was not on democracy or human rights but rather on spiritual life and community.

The "open" house churches were less secretive and had more members, sometimes advertising their services and holding public gatherings, he found. Urban emerging churches functioned quite openly but independently of government-approved Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) churches. In some provinces such as Wenzhou, these churches had constructed their own buildings and operated without interference from local officials.

While some house churches actively seek registration with authorities to avoid arrests and harassment, they would like the option of registering outside the government-approved TSPM structure, as they disagree with TSPM beliefs and controls. Many unregistered evangelical Protestant groups refuse to register with TSPM due to theological differences, fear of adverse consequences if they reveal names and addresses of church leaders or members or fear that it will control sermon content.

In a speech at Beijing's Peking University last December, Yu noted clear differences in the training of TSPM and house church clergy and suggested that legal acceptance of house churches would lead to more balanced, transparent training of house church leaders. Secrecy and suspicion on both sides had made the issue unnecessarily sensitive, Yu added, calling on the government to initiate dialogue so that tensions could be resolved.

"I think we have reason to use Christianity to advance the democratization of China," Yu said in closing.

#### Government Seminar on House Churches

A summary of Yu's findings was presented at a government seminar on "Christianity and Social Harmony - Special Session on the Chinese House Church," organized by the China State Council Development Research Center on Nov. 21-22, 2008.

The seminar was the first of its kind organized by the government, and some house church leaders were encouraged by the move. But shortly afterwards, the Ministry of Civil Affairs banned the Chinese Federation of Christian House Churches on grounds that it lacked proper registration.

Studies had shown that there were 10 times as many unregistered Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) as registered ones, and that NGOs run by house churches had played a significant role in relief work after the May 2008 earthquake in Sichuan province.

In a commentary on "Religious Demography and House Churches" that appeared online in February, scholar Yantao Bi said the Ministry of Civil Affairs, in banning the Federation, had become "the third major force along with public security bureaus and the department of religion in repressing house

churches," and that a large sector of civil society had now been defined as illegal.

The November seminar resulted in a new crackdown on house churches in December, Yantao said, but it at least stimulated discussion on the issue.

A second meeting on Dec. 1, 2008, organized by Beijing academic Dr. Fan Yafeng, brought together only a group of NGO representatives to discuss issues relating to house church identity in China, according to a Voice of America report in January. The meeting was later mistakenly portrayed in international media as being authorized by the Chinese government.

Participants had intended to "indirectly pass our opinions to the government and appeal for a legal identity for the house church," Wang Shuangyan, a Beijing house church leader, told Voice of America in January. "It's true, the government has not responded. But this is our attitude - we will not give up on negotiation and legal identity."

Said another participant who requested anonymity, "We hope that, through discussions on the relationship between the house churches and the government, we will impact future policy on religion."

#### Confused Approach

More raids over the past month illustrate what scholar Yu described as a confused approach to religion, with authorities leaving some house churches to operate openly while other churches were specifically targeted for arrests and closure.

On June 24, police released house church leaders Liu Caili and Huang Shumin of the Taochuan Village church in Shaanxi province after 10 days of detention for engaging in "illegal religious activities," while a third leader, Xu Fenying, was released on June 19 after five days of detention, the China Aid Association (CAA) reported.

Police had arrested the leaders at their homes or places of business on June 14; all three were shown in handcuffs on a local television broadcast. Earlier, on June 5, authorities declared the church closed after Christians advocated for justice on behalf of peasants in the village.

Authorities in Langzhong city, Sichuan province on June 20 released 18 house church leaders arrested on June 9. Police had initially arrested a total of 30 house church leaders who had gathered at the church of Pastor Li Ming, but 12 were released later that same day.

On June 14, officials from the Zhengzhou Municipal Bureau of Religion and Bureau of State Security forcibly interrupted services of the Rock house church in Zhengzhou City, Henan, CAA reported. Officials occupied all the rooms and took video footage and photos of those present, before detaining six Christians, including pastor Dou Shaowen and his wife Feng Lu.

Officials also read out a public notice from the local Ethnic Religious Affairs office stating that, "it has been found through investigation that

Dou Shaowen, Feng Lu and other individuals who call themselves missionaries have established a site for religious activities without approval ... where they engage in illegal religious activities ... Dou Shawen, Feng Lu and others are hereby ordered to immediately stop all the illegal religious activities at this site."

Church members insisted on finishing their worship service even after officials cut off the electricity supply. Officials then sealed off the building and declared the Rock church abolished.

Finally, on June 4, authorities began disrupting services of the Autumn Rain church in Chengdu, Sichuan province, preventing members from entering their rented facilities for Sunday worship, according to CAA. On June 21, as church members gathered for a conference in a nearby hotel, at least 10 police officers entered the building and called the meeting to a halt. Officer Huang Wei then read out a statement declaring Autumn Rain Church to be an "unregistered social organization," making it subject to administrative penalties such as the confiscation of church property and the cessation of all church activities.

Church members had initially planned to continue the conference on the banks of a nearby river, but this proved impossible as approximately 100 riot police and plainclothes officers were deployed both inside and outside the hotel.

Autumn Rain church has decided to continue holding services, appeal the imposed penalties and publicly apply to register the church at the Chengdu Municipal Bureau of Civil Affairs, in the hope that this may resolve ongoing difficulties with local authorities.

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**NTDTV - New Tang Dynasty Television**

**Over 1,000 Beijing Lawyers Have Their Licenses Suspended**

28.06.2009

China's Ministry of Justice abolished a widely criticized "annual registration" system for lawyers last year. But the Beijing Administration of Judicial Lawyers has devised a tactic to block lawyers who handle so-called "sensitive" cases from practicing.

A large number of human rights lawyers have emerged in China in recent years.

They take on "sensitive" cases prohibited by the communist regime such as Sanlu milk poisoning, HIV rights, and church-related cases.

The Beijing Administration of Judicial Lawyers has suspended the licenses of over 1,000 lawyers and around 90 law firms for failing to pass a concocted annual registration examination.

All the lawyers who failed the exam have handled "sensitive" cases.

[Zhang Jiankang, Human Rights Lawyer]:

“Because they handle 'sensitive' cases, more than 1,000 lawyers have lost their legal careers. This is likely to provoke China’s human rights movement even more.”

Shanghai human rights lawyer Ma Tianlin believes the suspension of licenses is retaliation by the Beijing Justice Bureau over the fact that many Beijing lawyers have demanded direct election of members to the Beijing Bar Association.

[Albert Ho, Chairman, Hong Kong Democratic Party]:

“The internal assessment system in China is not fair. Lawyers' human rights are also damaged. It now appears that (assessment) will be used by the authorities to suppress lawyers who have different opinions. Of course, this should be noticed. I have already told our local Bar Association about our concerns and put forward their demands.”

French-based Lawyers Without Borders is concerned over the issue.

[Nathalie Muller, Lawyers Without Borders]:

“At present, some international organizations have begun to defend the rights for lawyers which are under risky circumstances. I am a member of Lawyers without Borders from France. For the lawyers’ problems happening in China, I am very concerned about it.”

Several human rights lawyers appealed in person to the Beijing Justice Bureau and the Beijing Bar Association.

They tried to negotiate with officials about the cancellation and suspension of lawyer’s licenses and requested a stop to the illegal assessment in accordance with the law.

The Beijing Justice Bureau said the matter had nothing to do with them, while the Beijing Bar Association said they would have an answer after an investigation.

Well-known jurist Professor Yuan Hongbing believes that this is not a decision made by the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Justice or the Beijing Bar Association.

[Professor Yuan Hongbing, Jurist]:

“Based on our understanding of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), this must be the work of the Political Science and Law Committee in Beijing, and maybe even the Political and Legal Committee. This matter shows the hypocrisy of the Chinese Communist dictatorship with regard to the law. It shows that under the legal system of the CCP, the political interests of the Communist Party are above all else.”

A June 26th Washington Post article points out that Beijing’s use of administrative procedures to decline annual registrations avoids crackdowns and police action to handle those whom the communist regime considers troublemakers.

\_\_ AsiaNews - [www.asianews.it](http://www.asianews.it)

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CHINA

China: three lawyers arrested for defending the rights of Falun Gong members

CHRD denounces "a progressive deterioration of the situation" for lawyers

who fight for human rights in China". One of the three arrested had already been sentenced in 2005 to one year of re-education through forced labour for the same reason.

Beijing (AsiaNews / Chrd) - The Chinese authorities have arrested three lawyers in north-eastern China. The root cause for the arrests, their commitment to the defence of followers of Falun Gong, a movement outlawed by Beijing. The group for the Protection of Human Rights Chinese Human Rights Defenders (CHRD) revealed the news today; they are Ruping Liu, Wang and Wang Ping Yonghang.

The arrests occurred between July 2 and 8. Renee Xia, director of international CHRD, has expressed "concern" and stressed that "these actions could signal a gradual deterioration of the situation, for lawyers who fight for human rights in China."

The arrest of Liu Ruping dates to July 2 last. He had been working in Jinan, a town in the province of Shandong and already in 2005 was sentenced to one year's imprisonment in the laogai, camps for re-education through forced labour, for his commitment to helping Falun Gong followers. The man was seized near his home by public security officers, who also ransacked his apartment. It is likely that he is being held in a prison in the city, specialized in the detention of pro-Falun Gong members and activists.

On 4 July 20 plainclothes security officers (NSU) and a group of policemen from the city of Dalian, Liaoning Province, raided the house of Wang Yonghang. Without a search warrant, the ransacked his house and beat his wife and 80 year old mother. Wang and his wife were brought to prison. The woman was released the next day, the man is still being held in prison in Dalian, but there has been no official confirmation.

The third arrest dates back to July 8. Wang Ping, a lawyer from Pingdu in Shandong province, was kidnapped by local police agents. Currently no one knows the reasons behind the arrest, but it appears likely that the motives are bound to his defence of the rights of believers of Falun Gong.

Confirming the climate of intimidation in China, in recent days the government "warned" lawyers not to take up the defence of human rights activists and demonstrators, referring in particular to the demonstrators of Urumqi. Recently, many lawyers involved in cases of political significance have been arrested, beaten and the Beijing authorities have threatened their removal from the professional role, controlled by the Communist Party of China. These include lawyers who are defending Tibetans, the followers of Falun Gong, Sichuan earthquake victims and parents of babies who died in the melamine to milk scandal.

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Bishop Tong supports arrested Charter 08 signatory

HONG KONG (SE): Bishop John Tong Hon called on the Beijing government on June 26 to allow freedom of speech, as Liu Xiaobo, a prominent signatory of Charter 08, a comprehensive document demanding an improvement in human rights, democracy and the rule of law, drafted by members of civil society in mainland China and released on December 10 last year, was formerly charged by authorities in Beijing on June 23 with inciting subversion and conspiracy to subvert the state.

The Church-affiliated human rights organisation, the Asian Centre for the Progress of Peoples (ACPP), claims in a June 26 appeal that he is in grave danger of receiving a harsh sentence.

Liu was detained by authorities in Beijing on December 8 last year, just two days prior to the release of the Charter 08 document, timed to coincide with the 60th anniversary of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, the 30th anniversary of the birth of the Democracy Wall, the 100th year of the Chinese Constitution and the 10th year since China signed the Covenant of Civil and Political Rights.

Since he was picked up by police, the writer and political commentator has been held under residential surveillance away from his home, a breach of China's own law regarding house arrest.

His wife, Liu Xia, has only been allowed access to him on two occasions. She said she believes that her husband was detained on suspicion of conspiracy to subvert the state, a charge that is commonly used by authorities to silence dissidents. However, no formal reason was given for his detention at the time.

Xinhua News Agency quoted police on June 23 as saying, "Liu has been engaged in agitation activities, spreading rumours and defaming the government, aimed at subversion of the state and overthrowing the socialist system in recent years."

The state-run media outlet also reported that Liu had confessed to the charge. His lawyer, Mo Shaoping, commented that Liu could get anything up to 15 years in jail.

Other signatories to Charter 08 have also been harassed by police. During the mid-February visit to the mainland by the United States of America secretary of state, Hillary Clinton, several signatories of the charter were placed wither under house arrest or surveillance. ACPP reports that as of April this year, 143 of the 300 signatories had been interrogated by authorities.

Amnesty International is calling for the immediate release of Liu and urging authorities in China to stop the harassment, detention and imprisonment of human rights defenders and advocates.

This use of state security charges to punish advocates for merely expressing their views must stop. This is another act of desperation by a regime that is terrified of public opinion," Roseann Rife, the deputy

director of Amnesty's Asia-Pacific programme was reported as saying on June 24.

ACPP commented in an appeal for people to write letters of concern to the president, Hu Jintao, and minister of Public Security, Meng Jianzhu, that freedom of expression is not only a human right, but also a pivotal safeguard for all human rights.

ACPP adds, "It is not only guaranteed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which China is a signatory, it is also stipulated in the constitution of the People's Republic of China" (articles 35 & 41).

The Hong Kong-based human rights watchdog concludes that by arresting Liu, the Chinese government is trampling on its own constitution.

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