

China closing churches, seizing Bibles in 'ambitious new effort' to eradicate religion



A demolished house church in Zhengzhou in central China's Henan province, June 3 2018. (PHOTO: [Ng Han Guan](#))

Originally published in [Christian Headlines](#)

China is in the midst of an “ambitious new effort” to lessen or even eradicate the influence of Christianity and religion from the country, according to an investigation by the Associated Press.

An in-depth story by AP described churches being shut down, Bibles being seized and restrictions being placed on other religions, too. Crescents have been removed from mosques and Tibetan children removed from Buddhist temples and placed in public schools.

One Christian named Guo [described](#) an incident in which Chinese

officials interrupted a church meeting and told everyone to leave. They then ordered church leaders to remove a cross, a Bible verse and a painting of the Last Supper off the wall. Guo didn't give his full name out of fear of government repercussions.

"I've always prayed for our country's leaders, for our country to get stronger," he told AP. "They were never this severe before, not since I started going to church in the 80's. Why are they telling us to stop now?"

In recent months, Chinese authorities have:

- Shut down hundreds of Christian house churches.
- Seized Bibles and forced e-commerce retailers to stop selling Bibles.
- Prevented children from attending church in some areas.
- Urged Christians in one location to replace posters of Jesus with pictures of President Xi Jinping.
- Raided church meetings and interrogated hundreds of Christians from one congregation.

The AP story further said that under Xi, Christians "are seeing their freedoms shrink dramatically even as the country undergoes a religious revival." Experts said Xi is "waging the most severe systematic suppression of Christianity in the country since religious freedom was written into the Chinese constitution in 1982," according to AP. The goal is to "Sinicize" the nation's religions with "Chinese characteristics." First among these is loyalty to the Communist Party.

"Xi is a closet Maoist – he is very anxious about thought control," Willy Lam of the Chinese University of Hong Kong told AP. "He definitely does not want people to be faithful members of the church, because then people would profess their allegiance to the church rather than to the party, or more exactly, to Xi himself."

Thai soccer team speak of cave rescue for first time after being released from hospital



The rescued Thai soccer team holding a press conference.

Originally published in [Faith Wire](#)

The entire Thai soccer team who were trapped within a flooded cave network for two weeks have spoken for the first time since being rescued from a flooded cave in Northern Thailand. Press questions have been carefully scrutinised and monitored by psychologists before being asked to ensure that the boys do not undergo any further trauma.

“Their mental state is quite good. They should be able to handle any stress when returning home. They are also physically strong. There is nothing to worry about,” said one

of the doctor's present at the press conference Wednesday.

The three Navy SEAL's who stayed back with the boys in the cave were also introduced, though their identity remains protected.

"I am the prettiest gentleman that was in the cave," said one of the unidentified SEALs, which was met with laughter from the assembled journalists.

The press conference host then asked one of the boys what it was like when the British diver emerged from the water and discovered the team huddled on a rock deep within the underwater caves.

The boy talked of his shock when he heard someone speaking in the dark. "We waited and listened because we couldn't believe that there was someone there," he explained, adding that the rescuer appeared from the depths and said "Hello."

The boy continued, saying that he "was quite surprised because it turns out that the rescuer was not Thai."

"We said "Hello" to each other.""

"This was a miracle moment," the boy added.

The reason behind going into the cave

So, why did the boys go in the cave in the first place?

"Everyone agreed we will go to Thaum Luang. I had never been to the cave before, but others had. We experienced some water as we came into the cave. But we discussed whether or not to stay or go further into the cave, and it was said that we had one hour," explained the 25-year-old coach, Ekkapol Ake Chantawong,

"On the way back we realised we couldn't get out," he continued. "We got trapped."

“It was not anyone’s birthday,” the coach added, responding to speculation that the cave trip was done in celebration of a team member’s birthday.

The coach also clarified: “We all can swim,” correcting early reports that many of the team members did not possess this skill. He noted that when the group realised that the water levels were rising, they decided to find some high ground and stay the night.

“Before we went to sleep, we prayed. I was not worried or scared at that time. I believed that tomorrow the water would lower.”

17.000
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– ThaiPBS News (@ThaiPBSNews) [July 18, 2018](#)

How they survived

So how did they survive, and what did they do as they awaited rescue?

“I went every day with the team to find a way out,” one of the boys explained. “I also looked to find water sources that were flowing down from higher up in the cave,” another added.

“We just drank water,” the boy noted, adding that they did not have any food. He recalled that they were OK for a day or two, but then began to feel weak due to lack of food. The coach advised the boys to stay very still to conserve vital energy.

“I felt very weak and hungry,” said the youngest and smallest member of the team. “I made sure not to think about food – I didn’t think about fried rice!”

Another member of the group said he would spend his free time

attempting to dig a tunnel to freedom. "I could dig two or three meters deep," he said. Another team member confirmed this, saying that as the water was visibly rising, the group felt they were doing something productive by digging into the cave wall with sharp rocks.

Honouring Lieutenant Commander Saman Kunan

The boys also took a moment to honour the ex-Navy SEAL who lost his life during the rescue operation.

"We are sorry about the loss of Lieutenant Commander Saman Kunan," the coach explained. "He was really sacrificial in his rescue of all of us. We were all shocked. We couldn't believe what had happened. Everyone was saddened by the news and felt guilty that we were the cause of his death."

The boys also talked about being sent an image of the heroic rescue diver and explained how they penned various messages of condolence to his family while confined in the hospital together.

"We decided to write some messages to the Commander. And we will send this to his family."

One message reads "I would like to express our condolences. May you rest in peace. Thank you very much for your sacrifice."

"We have to be more careful and check everything more carefully about whether different activities should be done or not," the coach explained. The coach, along with most of the team, said they would love to be both professional soccer players and Navy SEAL's in the future.

"I want to be a Navy SEAL because I want to help others," one of the players added.



The team recovering in hospital.
(PHOTO: Thai Public Health Ministry)

Apologising to their parents

Every member of the team said they wished to apologise to their parents for not informing them that they were headed to the caves on that fateful day. Most of the players said they told their parents they were going to soccer practice.

“I’m in big trouble with my mother,” one of them noted.

“The reason to hold this evening press conference is so media can ask them questions and after that they can go back to live their normal lives without media bothering them,” chief government spokesman Sunsern Kaewkumnerd said prior to the conference, according to the [BBC](#).

The team have been quarantined in the Chiang Rai Prachanukroh Hospital since they were freed by an international team of rescuers on July 10. Several of the youngsters were treated for lung infections and minor injuries. But aside from some mild illness, the boys remained miraculously unharmed after coming through a perilous rescue operation that involved them diving through narrow underwater tunnels.

“They are likely to return home immediately after the press conference,” he added.

Chiang Rai's provincial governor Prachon Pratsukan noted that it would be the team's "only official media interview", adding that there would "be no more speaking with the press after this." According to [the Guardian](#), a number of journalists have submitted questions which have been carefully vetted by psychologists – only approved questions will be put to the boys during the media appearance.

Mental health experts have advised the boys to avoid journalists for at least a month after returning home, highlighting the risk of dredging up traumatic memories of their terrifying experience.

Twenty Christians severely injured in assault on prayer gathering in India



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[Christian Headlines](#)

International Christian Concern (ICC) has learned that last Monday, July 2, 20 Christians were seriously injured in an

assault on a prayer meeting in Raikashipur village, located in the Pratapgarh District of India's Uttar Pradesh State. According to local reports, a mob of 35 Hindu radicals stormed the meeting and beat the group of over 150 Christians gathered for prayer. Following the assault, the village Pradhan (village president) filed multiple false criminal charges against six of the Christian victims.

Ram Kumar Gautam, a 42-year-old Christian, has led prayer meetings in Raikashipur village every Monday for the last five years. On average, 300 people participate in these services in a makeshift shed.

On July 2, around 2pm, the mob arrived at the prayer meeting in several vehicles. The radicals stormed inside the meeting hall and beat the Christians gathered there with wooden lathies and sticks. The attackers also fired a gun into the air five times to frighten the Christians. When the attack ended, 20 Christians were seriously injured, 10 motorcycles were damaged, and the furniture inside the makeshift shed, including musical instruments and chairs, was destroyed.

"I didn't sleep or eat properly for nearly a week now," Ram Kumar Gautam told ICC. "The attack on our prayer meeting last Monday has had devastating consequences. Many have serious injuries with their limbs being broken. Also, a false case was booked against six of us under stringent IPC sections."

The radicals lodged false criminal charges against six Christians, including Gautam. These charges have reportedly been lodged by the village Pradhan, under Indian Penal Code (IPC) sections 147, 148, 149, 307, 452, 323, 504, 506, 392, and 295A.

"We peacefully conduct prayers every Monday and people voluntarily attend these prayers," Gautam explained. "We don't even talk about conversions, but I am accused of converting people. People come to our prayer and get healing. That's why

people choose to regularly attend the prayers.”

Rev Sanjay Robinson, President of Massih Seva Dhal, said, “There is no Freedom of Religion Act, popularly known as an anti-conversion law, in place in Uttar Pradesh, yet pastors and Christian workers are being frequently harassed by Hindu hardline groups with accusations of forced conversion. The gruesome incident on Christian worshipers in Raikashipur village reflects the pattern and plot of the Hindu hardline groups.”

William Stark, ICC’s Regional Manager, said, “We here at International Christian Concern are concerned by the recent upsurge in attacks on Christians and their places of worship in India. Article 25 of India’s constitution says that every individual has the right to freely profess, practice, and propagate the religion of their choice. For more than 150 Christians, this right was violated last Monday when Hindu radicals assaulted them for merely practicing their faith. India’s authorities must bring these 35 Hindu radicals in Raikashipur to justice. Until then, India’s religious freedom rights will remain only words on paper and attacks on Christians and other religious minorities will continue to rise in both number and severity.”

Asia Bibi marks nine years since arrest for blasphemy in Pakistan



The daughters of Pakistani Christian woman Asia Bibi pose with an image of their mother while standing outside their residence in Sheikhpura located in Pakistan's Punjab Province. Standing left to right is Esha, 12, Sidra, 18 and Eshum, 10. (PHOTO: Reuters)

Originally published in Persecution.org

Yesterday (June 19 2018) marked the ninth anniversary of the arrest of Asia Bibi, a Christian woman sentenced to death for allegedly committing blasphemy in Pakistan.

The case against Bibi remains the highest-profile blasphemy case in Pakistan and has claimed the lives of several prominent Pakistani politicians.

In 2009, Bibi was accused of blasphemy following a dispute between herself and a group of Muslim co-workers harvesting berries in Sheikhpura. An argument broke out when Bibi drank from the same water basin as her Muslim co-workers, because she was a Christian and considered by the Muslim women to be unclean.

A few days later, it was reported to a local cleric that Bibi had blasphemed against Islam by saying: "My Christ died for

me, what did Muhammad do for you?"

Since her arrest, Bibi's case has become symbolic of the persecution facing Pakistani Christians and the widespread abuse of the country's blasphemy laws. Bibi was convicted and sentenced to death on blasphemy charges in November 2010 by the Session's Court in District Nankana, Punjab.

Governor murdered by bodyguard

Months later, the governor of Punjab, Salman Taseer, visited Bibi in prison. Upon leaving the jail, he made a statement that the blasphemy laws had been misused in her case. Within days, he was murdered by his bodyguard, Mumtaz Qadri, who had been convinced by radicals that this was an attack on Islam.

Two months after this murder, in March 2011, the Federal Minister of Minorities' Affairs, Shahbaz Bhatti – the only Christian in the Pakistani cabinet – criticised the country's blasphemy laws, noting that they are easily manipulated. In Islamabad, shortly after the statement was made, an attacker sprayed his car with bullets. Police found a letter at the crime scene from the Tehrik-e-Taliban claiming responsibility for the murder, adding that Bhatti was killed for opposing Pakistan's blasphemy laws.

In October 2014, Bibi's appeal hearing was held in the High Court of Lahore. At that appeal, Justice Anwar-ul-Haq, one member of a two-judge bench, passed a short order on October 16, 2014, confirming Bibi's death sentence. On July 22, 2015, the Supreme Court of Pakistan accepted Bibi's petition for her case to be reviewed and suspended her death sentence.

Case indefinitely adjourned

On October 13 2016, the Supreme Court of Pakistan indefinitely adjourned Bibi's appeal after one of the three Supreme Court Justices hearing the case decided to recuse himself. Justice Rahman recused himself from the case, stating, "I was part of the bench that was hearing the case of Salman Taseer and this

case is related.” Since then, Bibi’s final appeal has yet to be rescheduled by the Supreme Court.

William Stark, International Christian Concern’s (ICC) Regional Manager, said: “It is disappointing to see Bibi mark her ninth year in prison. It has been nine long years since Asia had this false blasphemy accusation completely change her life.

“We here at ICC are hopeful that the Supreme Court will hear this final appeal at the soonest possible date. It is ICC’s hope that when the appeal is heard, the Supreme Court will resist outside pressure from extremists and decide Asia’s case on the merits.

“If decided on the merits, we believe that the court’s only conclusion will be to acquit. We also hope that the Supreme Court’s decision will lay a foundation for reforming Pakistan’s notorious blasphemy laws. This will be a signal to both Pakistan and the world that justice will prevail over extremism, even when a religious minority is accused of blasphemy.”

Indonesian pastor sentenced to prison for evangelising to Muslim cab driver



Pastor Abraham Ben Moses (left) talks through a translator (right) from inside of a prison in Tangerang, Indonesia on May 6 2018. (PHOTO: screenshot Voice of the Martyrs)

Originally published in [The Christian Post](#)

An Indonesian court sentenced a Protestant pastor to four years in prison and slapped him with a hefty fine on Monday simply because he shared his faith with a taxi driver.

The Jakarta Post [reports](#) that a district court in Tangerang, Java, issued the four-year sentence and a fine equivalent to \$3 565 to Rev Abraham Ben Moses, a well-known former Muslim apologist.

Moses, who was arrested last December, was detained after a video was widely circulated that showed him sharing his faith with a Muslim taxi driver.

Reportedly asked driver to accept Christ

According to [Voice of the Martyrs](#), Moses can be heard in the video speaking about the Muslim prophet Muhammad and his teaching on marriage. In the video, he is also reportedly shown asking the driver to accept Christ.

Because of the video, Muhammadiyah, one of Indonesia's largest Islamic organisations, filed a blasphemy complaint against

Moses.

According to the Jakarta Post, the presiding judge, Muhammad Damis, stated that Moses was convicted under an Electronic and Information Transactions Law on grounds that he spread information that was intended to incite hatred on the basis of religion.

Moses' legal team will reportedly file an appeal.

"The sentence is too heavy for the defendant," Maxie Ellia, one of the evangelist's lawyers, said, according to the Jakarta Post.

According to the United States-based watchdog group [International Christian Concern](#), the sentencing was praised by Muhammadiyah.

"This decision should be appreciated and should serve as a valuable lesson for all parties," Muhammadiyah official Pedri Kasman was quoted as saying.



Abraham Ben Moses (right) is seen meeting with a visitor before a verdict hearing at the Tangerang District Court in Banten on May 7 2018. (PHOTO: [Jakarta Post](#))

Ranked 38th on World Watch List

Indonesia, where eight out of 10 citizens are Muslim, ranks as the 38th worst country in the world when it comes to Christian persecution, according to Open Doors USA's 2018 World Watch List.

In a [video testimony](#) shared by Voice of the Martyrs earlier this week, Moses stated from prison that the "strength that I get is from Jesus who strengthens me."

"He is a very good friend. He never leaves us. His promise is 'Yes' and 'Amen,'" Moses said through his translator. "He will take care of you and your whole family."

Other Christians have also been victimised by the nation's blasphemy law. Most notably, former Jakarta Gov Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, a Christian also known as "Ahok," was accused of blasphemy during the middle of his re-election campaign after a [doctored video](#) emerged in the fall of 2016. He was [sentenced last May](#) to two years in prison.

"The Indonesian government should revisit the country's blasphemy law, as it is increasingly being exploited by radical Muslim groups to target individuals who they find to be offensive and theologically 'out-of-line,'" ICC Regional Manager Gina Goh said in a statement. "To honour religious freedom as enshrined in Indonesia's constitution, the government must respect all religions and stop criminalising Christians when they are merely exercising their right to free speech."

Open Doors USA, which is a prominent persecution watchdog organisation, reports that the situation for Christians in the past several years in Indonesia has "deteriorated."

"This is especially true in hot spots like West Java, where radical Islamic groups are powerful, exerting heavy influence on society and politics," Open Doors [warns](#). "These radical groups cause problems for churches that proselytise Muslims

and often pressure government officials to ignore applications for construction of church buildings. Meanwhile, converts from Islam usually face persecution from their own families, particularly in the form of isolation and verbal abuse.”

North Korea: US citizens set for release ahead of Trump-Kim talks



The three Americans have been detained on charges ranging from committing ‘hostile acts’ against the regime to spying for a foreign country

Originally published in [World Watch Monitor](#)

Three American citizens detained in North Korea seem set to be released ahead of a meeting between the two countries’ leaders next month.

The BBC reported that the three men had been “relocated to a Pyongyang hotel and are receiving good food and medical care”.

US President Donald Trump tweeted yesterday (May 2) that the US “has long been asking for three hostages to be released from a North Korean Labour camp, but to no avail. Stay tuned!”



Who are the Americans?

Kim Dong-chul, a pastor in his early 60s, was arrested in 2015 and sentenced to 10 years’ hard labour after admitting spying for South Korea, which Seoul denied.

Tony Kim (also known as Kim Sang-duk) was detained in April 2017 for “committing criminal acts of hostility” against the North Korean government. Kim, in his 50s, had been involved in humanitarian work with orphanages and taught at the Pyongyang University for Science and Technology (PUST), which trains the children of North Korea’s elite and has a volunteer staff that includes many evangelical Christians.

Kim Hak Song was arrested two weeks later, in May 2017, as he prepared to leave the country after working for several weeks as a lecturer at PUST. He was arrested on charges of “hostile acts” against the regime. *Reuters* reported that in 2015, he had posted a message on the website of a Korean-Brazilian church in Sao Paulo, saying “he was a Christian missionary planning to start an experimental farm at PUST and was trying to help the North Korean people learn to become self-sufficient”.

Others released

In August last year Hyeon Soo Lim, a Korean-Canadian church leader sentenced to life in prison with hard labour, was released “on sick bail”. Detained since February 2015, he was convicted later that year of numerous charges, including an attempt to overthrow the government.

Pakistan supreme court offers sign of hope in Asia Bibi execution case



Asia Bibi

Originally published in [Charisma News](#)

Finally, after things have looked so bleak for Asia Bibi, the Christian mother of five sentenced to death by hanging in Pakistan on absurd blasphemy charges, there has been a sign of hope.

Asia Bibi was convicted of blasphemy in 2010 for offering a Muslim coworker a glass of water, and has since languished on death row, separated from her heartbroken family, and waiting for news of her appeal.

According to new reports, the chief justice of Pakistan's Supreme Court, Mian Saqib Nisar has now promised that the court will take up Bibi's appeal. The Chief Justice assured Bibi's attorney that he will be presiding over the appeal in her case personally.

"Your appeal in Asia Bibi [case] is going to be fixed soon as I myself will preside [over] the bench," the chief justice told Saiful Malook, the counsel for 51-year-old Bibi, on Saturday.

According to her attorney, the appeal is likely to be reviewed and a decision made possibly as soon as this summer.

Malook expressed the hope that the case might be listed for hearing in the next couple of weeks as the CJP [Chief Justice of Pakistan] had also assured him that all criminal appeals would be decided by July.

This is a significant development in her case. One year ago, we reported that "the Chief Justice of Pakistan has declined [Asia Bibi's] request for an early hearing for the final judicial appeal of her death sentence." Since that time, no legal progress had been made on her case. She was in legal limbo, sitting on death row in Pakistan because of her Christian faith, with no end in sight. Now there may be new hope.

We have mobilised our global offices, aggressively advocating before the UN to intervene for Asia in this clear human rights atrocity. We've sent multiple legal letters to Pakistan, demanding her immediate release. She has committed no crime—especially not one for which she should die and her children be made motherless. It's an atrocity. She is on death row for her Christian faith.

We are hopeful that the chief justice will soon schedule the review of the case and Asia Bibi's plight, and release her without delay.

While Pakistan claims to protect all religious minorities, it currently has a horrible track record for its treatment of Christians and other religious minorities. Violence against Christians in Pakistan just keeps escalating, and the government continues to look the other way. We recently told you about a Christian family of four who went in town to visit relatives for the Easter holiday and was gunned down a day later by jihadists on motorcycle.

Bloodthirsty mobs threaten the safety of entire towns full of peaceful Christians, driving them from their homes with threats of violent attacks and murder. Multiple churches have been attacked and bombed. In one horrifying case, a Christian boy in eighth grade was dragged from his school and beaten to death by the local police.

But there have been small glimmers of hope. In the case of the murdered schoolboy, the court agreed with the prosecution that there was “tangible, convincing, and cogent evidence” against the police officers involved. Seeing that the legal system wasn’t going to look the other way this time, the men agreed to pay a \$30,000 restitution to the boy’s family.

Even in Asia’s case, we’ve seen small, but positive signs. Just recently we told you prison authorities allowed her to keep a crucifix given to her by the pope as a token of his prayers for her release. It was the first time she was allowed to keep any religious symbol in her cell. We pray this decision by Pakistan’s chief justice results in our ultimate goal—that Asia is set free and allowed to return home to her family.

We are actively monitoring Asia’s case and vigorously advocating across the globe on her behalf. We will also continue to appeal to the world’s leaders to intercede with Pakistan and demand that they abide by their international agreements to protect religious minorities and bring violent agitators to justice.

China bans online purchases of the Bible



Catholic worshippers attend a mass on Holy Saturday, March 31, as part of the Easter celebrations at Beijing's government sanctioned South Cathedral. China has banned the sale of online Bibles, as part of its increasing crackdown on Christianity. (PHOTO: Greg Baker/AFP/Getty Images)

Originally published in [The Blaze](#)

In its ongoing crackdown on Christianity, the Chinese government has banned sales of the Bible by online retailers including Amazon.

Taoist and Buddhists texts are still available online, as is the Quran.

While Buddhism and Taoism are both encouraged by the Chinese government as traditional Chinese belief systems, other religions not viewed as historically Chinese, including Islam

and to a greater extent Christianity, have been targeted.

What's the story?

China had already heavily restricted the in-store sale of Bibles, but the arrival of online ordering created a loophole that has not been closed until now. Searches for Bibles on Amazon or other online retailers like JD.com and Taobao from China now come up empty, according to The New York Times.

This is not the first time that the Chinese government has cracked down on its Christian population.

The New York Times reported in May 2016 that “[f]rom 2014 to 2016, more than 1 500 crosses were removed from churches in one Chinese province with close ties to [Chinese President Xi Jinping].” The government said that the crosses were removed “for the sake of safety and beauty.” In January, the Chinese government demolished a well-known Christian megachurch.

A report by the US-based organisation Freedom House found that: “Since Xi Jinping took the helm of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in November 2012, the authorities have intensified many of their restrictions, resulting in an overall increase in religious persecution.”

How many Christians are in China?

The number of Christians living in China is hard to pin down. Reports put the number of Catholics in the country anywhere between 5 million and 12 million, and the number of protestants at around 38 million. Other estimates put the total number of all types of Christians in China as high as 100 million.

The Vatican is currently negotiating to come up with a deal regarding Chinese Catholic bishops. As of now, bishops appointed by the Chinese government have been in conflict with bishops appointed by Rome, who are largely forced underground.

In a statement on Tuesday, Chinese senior official Chen

Zongrong said that there was no place for Vatican influence over a church on Chinese soil.

“I think there is no religion in human society that is above the state,” he said. “Foreign forces cannot be allowed to interfere with China’s religious environment and religious affairs.”

What about other religions?

In a 2016 speech, Xi told members of the Communist party that they needed to “resolutely guard against overseas infiltrations via religious means.”

But even Protestant churches with their lack of a foreign authority are targeted by the government. In 2016, senior Pastor Gu Yue-se was arrested on trumped-up charges after he publicly opposed the removal of crosses from churches. The Chinese government sees Protestant Christianity as a “western” value inherently at odds with China.

This persecution has led to the formation of hundreds of underground home churches in the capital city of Beijing alone.

While Islam seems to be viewed more favorably by the government, China has also cracked down on the wearing of long beards or headscarves, and restaurants that don’t serve pork in accordance with Islamic dietary restrictions.

14 Christian house church leaders abducted in china

amid Communist crackdown on faith



Chinese police arrest an activist who was reportedly calling for more transparency and less corruption in the government. (PHOTO: Reuters via [The Christian Post](#)),

Originally published in [The Christian Post](#)

Fourteen Christian house church leaders who are part of the Middle Eastern evangelism network have been abducted by government security agents in China.

[ChinaAid](#) reported on Wednesday that the Christians, who weren't named, are being held captive at an undisclosed location by state authorities in the coastal Zhejiang province.

“This massive, enforced disappearance of 14 peaceful church leaders shows the Communist Party has no regard to rule of law and its citizens’ religious freedom rights,” said ChinaAid President Bob Fu.

The group, which monitors the crackdown on churches and arrest of Christians and human rights activists in China, said the

Communist government continues to deny believers religious freedoms and basic human rights.

“ChinaAid urges international leaders to speak out against this blatant abuse against religious freedom and human rights, and calls on China to immediately and unconditionally release these innocent Christians,” the group declared.

Back in January, Christians shared their fears that the persecution could get worse following the government’s [destruction of an evangelical megachurch](#) in the northern Shanxi province.

Chinese military police detonated explosives inside the Golden Lampstand Church in Linfen, destroying the house of worship which was owned by the Christians who worshiped there.

A video of the demolition was shared worldwide, showing the moment the church collapsed.

“My heart was sad to see this demolition and now I worry about more churches being demolished, even my own,” a local pastor who wasn’t named said at the time. “This church was built in 2008, there’s no reason for them to destroy it now.”

A Catholic church was also destroyed in a similar fashion in December, while at least 1,200 church rooftop crosses have been forcefully removed in Zhejiang province since 2015.

Chinese authorities have been known to raid worship services and detain dozens of Christians at once, such as what happened to [13 believers](#) in Guangdong province in November.

Police officers raided Qingcaodi Church, a small house church in Jingmen, with believers seeing their Bibles and other church-owned material confiscated.

Chinese lawyers who have stood up for Christians have also been persecuted. Several attorneys who sought to represent 40 Christians who were arrested over “cult” activities last year

were told in January that their legal certifications [could be taken away](#).

Xiao Yunyan, one of the lawyers under government review, vowed that he and his colleagues will continue representing the Christians, with the lawyers working on a contingency plan.

China is listed No 43 on Open Doors USA's [World Watch List](#), which states that church life is heavily controlled by the government.

The watchdog group explains that Christians are “hedged in by authorities,” since at 100 million strong, they are the largest social group that is not controlled by the state.

Six Chinese Christians jailed for being part of ‘evil cult’



Christians pray together in Beijing.
(PHOTO: World Watch Monitor)

Originally published in [Charisma News](#)

A Chinese court in the southwestern province of Yunnan sent six Protestant Christians to prison last week for their membership of an “evil cult.”

The verdict comes as part of a provincial crackdown on cults, as the ruling Communist Party continues its national campaign to restrict unregistered churches before new religious regulations come into force next week.

The six Christians received long sentences of up to 13 years by a court in Lincang City, west Yunnan, which found them guilty of being part of a sect called the Three Grades of Servants and of “using an evil cult to organise to undermine law enforcement”, their lawyer, Xiao Yunyang, told [Radio Free Asia](#).

According to [Release International](#), since 2016, China has used its campaign against the sect “as a pretext to round up about 200 Christians across Yunnan: some Christians have already been convicted, while others are awaiting trial”.

A local source told World Watch Monitor that the authorities “seldom give such long prison sentences for just religious reasons, even in a sensitive region like Xinjiang [in the Uyghur Autonomous Region]. But both the Three Grades of Servants and Falun Gong are well-known cults in China and leaders of [these movements] are subject to heavy punishment”.

The six men and women, who belong to an unregistered church group, denied all charges and, according to their lawyer: “The judges in Yunnan were really evil. They didn’t pay any attention to the arguments that no illegal acts had been committed, and that there was no harm of any kind to society.”

According to RFA, Xiao has been notified that his license to practice law will be reviewed to see if he was “illegally” defending his clients.

Prominent churches targeted

Meanwhile two pastors in neighbouring Guizhou province, Su Tianfu and Yang Hua of Huoshi Church, [were fined](#) the equivalent of more than \$1 million US earlier this month, after the money they received in collections and offerings from their congregation was deemed “illegal income.”

Huoshi Church and its leaders have clashed with the authorities before. In 2015 the church [was raided](#) by police during the opening ceremony of its new venue, which was attended by hundreds of guests, including some foreigners. The high-profile church was forced to close and its pastor, Yang Hua, was detained. The church did reopen but was then put under pressure to register as a state-sanctioned entity.

Yang Hua was last year [sentenced to two and a half years](#) in prison, while Su Tianfu remains under house arrest. A church deacon, Zhang Xiuhong, was also detained for more than two years before his release in August 2017.

A local source told World Watch Monitor the government specifically targets high-profile churches, but that many other congregations do not experience the same level of harassment.

“You have a high profile if you gather a big group of people – in particular in sensitive areas where there are minority people groups,” the source said. “Another thing [that creates this high profile] is if you have close contact with overseas groups, e.g. receive financial support from overseas, or, thirdly when you advocate in overseas media and draw the attention of human-rights agencies.”

Last week a high-profile church in northern China was [demolished](#), the second in less than a month. World Watch Monitor’s source said the order seemed to have come from the top, illustrated by the fact the state-run newspaper reported on it.

Another cultural revolution?

“These cases are consistent with a new focus on the control and management of religious activities by the government”, according to [Christian Solidarity Worldwide's](#) chief executive, Mervyn Thomas. “Different approaches are being taken by different provincial authorities, but taken together these cases may suggest a long-term plan to target independent religious communities.”

According to British peer [David Alton](#), the Chinese government is orchestrating a “determined crackdown of all unregistered churches. It will be a real test of the British government’s avowed commitment to freedom of religion and belief to see what steps they and Washington take to monitor this repression. Is this not another Maoist ‘Cultural Revolution’?”

In his speech at the Communist Party Congress in October, President [Xi Jinping reiterated](#) the importance of Chinese nationalism, saying the government would “uphold the principle that religions in China must be Chinese in orientation, and provide active guidance to religions so that they can adapt themselves to socialist society”.

The [new regulations on religious affairs](#) are due to come into force on February 1. They include guidelines on religious education, the types of religious organisations that can exist, where they can exist and the activities they can organise.