Repressed, Removed, Re-Educated: The stranglehold on religious life in China

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CSW everyone free to believe



China
Repressed, Removed, Re-Educated

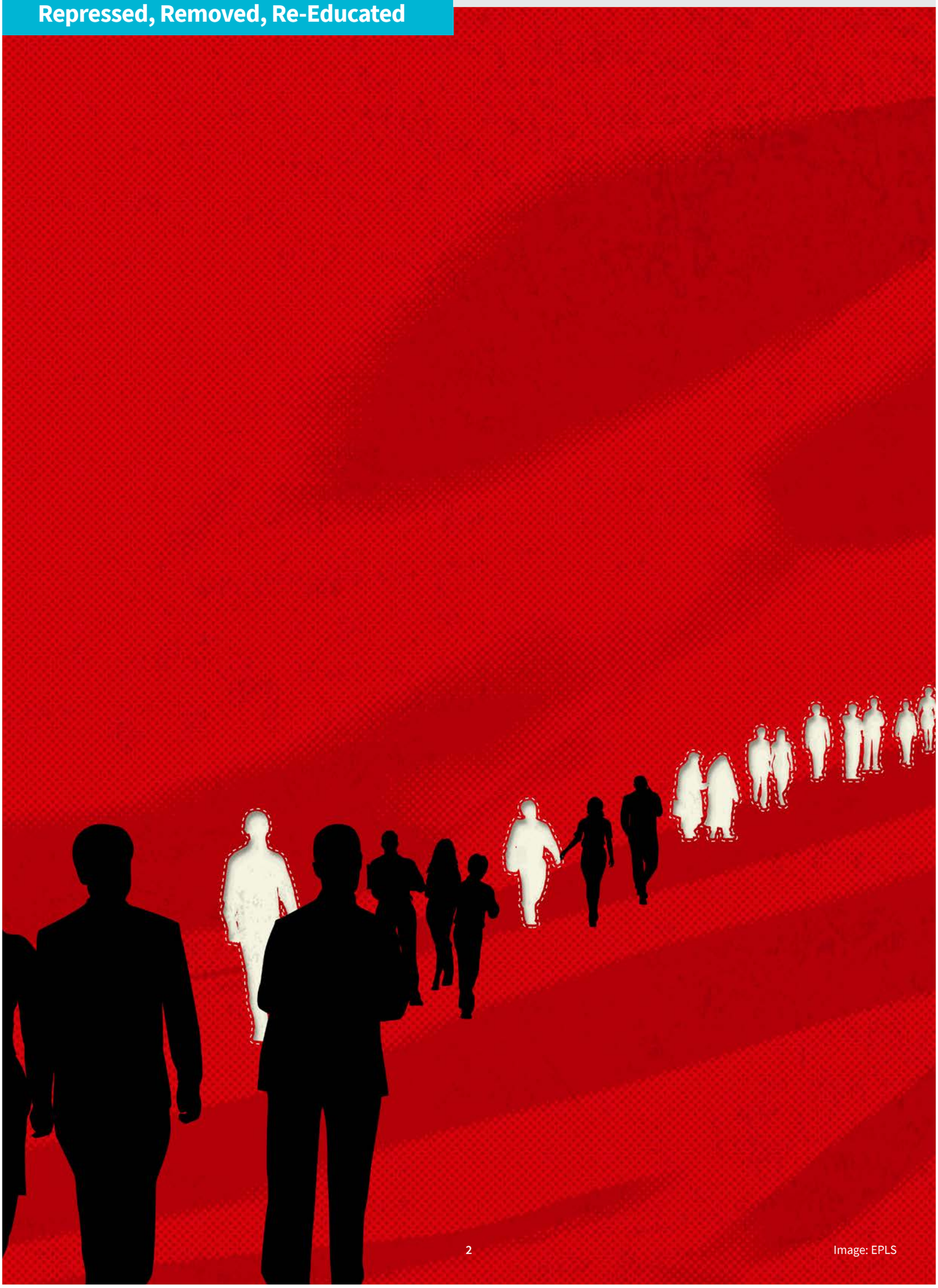


Image: EPLS

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CSW would like to thank Badiucao for his illustrations for this report. Badiucao is a Chinese artist and human rights activist, based in Australia. He stated in a 2016 interview, 'Cartoons and portraits can create a unified visual symbol...in order to create pressure from public opinion. Maybe this pressure can improve the situation for those who are imprisoned, as well as comfort the family members of the persecuted.' (Los Angeles Review of Books, 'Watching Big Brother: A Q&A with Chinese Political Cartoonist Badiucao', 1 February 2016)

Introduction: freedom of religion or belief in China today



Image: EPLS

We will fully implement the Party's basic policy on religious affairs, 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.

Xi Jinping, 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, 18 October 2017[1]

This country is launching a war against the soul…In Xinjiang, in Tibet, in Shanghai, in Beijing, in Chengdu, the rulers of this country are launching this war, but they have established for themselves an enemy that can never be detained, can never be destroyed, will never capitulate nor be conquered: the soul of man...

Pastor Wang Yi of Early Rain Church, 28 October 2018[2]

It seems that the Chinese government is at war with faith. It's a war they will not win. The Chinese Communist Party must hear the cry of its people for religious freedom.

US Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, Sam Brownback[3]

The level of freedom of religion or belief in China is rapidly and significantly decreasing.

There are tangible signs of this, such as the demolition of temples, mosques and churches by authorities, and the removal of religious symbols and pictures from homes and places of worship. There are also less visible changes, however: clergy removed from their positions and replaced with those with government approval; pressure on schools to check up on the religious beliefs of their students and staff; and surveillance cameras installed in and around places of worship. In the most extreme cases, religious adherents are arrested, imprisoned, tortured and even killed in connection with their religion or belief.

This downward trend fits into a broader pattern of increasing human rights abuses under Xi Jinping, accompanied by and manifested through a shrinking space for civil society, a heightened sensitivity to perceived challenges to Party rule, and the introduction of legislation that curtails civil and political rights in the name of national security.

The reality of the right to FoRB for religion and belief communities in China remains a mixed picture, and conditions vary according to religion, location, ethnicity, and attitude of local officials, as well as other factors. It is therefore impossible to describe 'what it's like to be a Christian', or Muslim, Buddhist and so on, in China today. However, under Xi Jinping, there has been a new focus on religion at the highest levels of government,[4] a revision of the Regulations on Religious Affairs, and fresh emphasis put on the requirement that all religious communities in China 'sinicise' by becoming 'Chinese in orientation' and adapting to 'socialist society'. CSW's sources believe the intent behind 'sinicisation' is to eradicate independent religion and bring all religious activities under state control. From thousand-strong urban churches, to village temples hundreds of years old, more and more religious communities are feeling the effects of these developments on everyday religious life in China.

The government has more and more power over education, the media, and now religion. The government wants control over everything, over religion and education and culture. If anyone takes part in activities [outside of the government approved activities] they will be held responsible.

Christian and legal expert

1 China Daily, 'Full text of Xi Jinping's report at 19th CPC National Congress', 11 April 2017 www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/19thcpcnationalcongress/2017-11/04/content_34115212.htm

2 China Change, 'A Brainwashing War: An Appeal for the Poet-preacher Wang Yi', 4 March 2019 https://chinachange.org/2019/03/05/a-brainwashing-war-an-appeal-for-the-poet-preacher-wang-yi/

3 South China Morning Post, '"Chinese government is at war with faith," US envoy for religious freedom Sam Brownback tells Hong Kong FCC' www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/2189169/chinese-government-war-faith-us-envoy-religious-freedom

4 In April 2016, Xi Jinping chaired a two-day national level working conference on religion, where he warned against 'foreign infiltration through religion'. It was reportedly the first time in ten years that China's most senior leader has attended a conference on religion.

Recommendations

To the government of the People's Republic of China

- Ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (CED) and the Optional Protocol of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), and ensure that national laws and relevant policies are in line with these international conventions.
- Revise all regulations and legislation pertaining to religion to ensure they align with international standards on the right to FoRB as set out in Article 18 of the ICCPR and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), in consultation with religious communities and legal experts.
- Repeal laws and regulations pertaining to *xie jiao* (usually translated as 'heterodox teaching' or 'evil cults').
- Protect the right of all people in China to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, in accordance with Article 18 of the ICCPR and the UDHR.
- Ensure that any form of registration system is optional, not mandatory, and is not used as a tool to control religious activities.
- Immediately release all prisoners of conscience detained in connection with their religion or belief and impartially investigate cases of wrongful imprisonment.
- Immediately and completely end all forms of forced organ harvesting.
- End the demolition of religious buildings as a means of limiting religious practice, and establish a complaints mechanism for religious groups affected.
- Immediately release human rights defenders detained or imprisoned in connection with their peaceful defence of the rights of others.
- Provide a safe and enabling environment for human rights lawyers, civil society actors and other human rights defenders.
- Consult with genuine civil society organisations in China and enable participation in preparations for human rights-related reporting, including the UN Universal Periodic Review process.
- Ensure that no citizen is detained incommunicado and that family members of detainees are informed of their whereabouts and the charges against them in good time, in accordance with international standards.
- Abolish and end the use of re-education camps, and all forms of extra-legal detention, enforced disappearance and arbitrary detention.
- Protect the rights of detainees and prisoners and immediately cease all forms of torture and ill-treatment, and impartially investigate allegations and reports of torture and deaths in detention.
- Remove security measures which place restrictions on cultural and religious rights in contradiction of Article 18 of the ICCPR, including in Tibet and Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR)[5], and ensure the rights of all ethnic groups are fully protected.
- Protect the rights of children in XUAR by ceasing the practice of forcibly removing children from their homes and families, and ensuring minors are not detained in adult facilities.
- Grant access to all parts of China, including XUAR and Tibet, to United Nations Special Procedures and other international human rights bodies and experts.

To the international community

- At every possible opportunity, in public and in private, urge the Chinese government to respect, protect and promote the right to freedom of religion or belief for all people in China, and to implement the recommendations provided above.
- At every possible opportunity, in public and in private, condemn the use of re-education camps, and all forms of extra-legal detention, enforced disappearance and arbitrary detention.
- Investigate and monitor cases of human rights abuses including violations of the right to FoRB.
- Support all available means of investigation into human rights abuses in XUAR, including inquiries into whether abuses perpetrated by the Chinese government constitute crimes against humanity and cultural genocide.
- Consider sanctions against policymakers responsible for human rights abuses including those responsible for the abuses in XUAR.
- Given the high risk of arbitrary detention and ill treatment for those returning to XUAR from overseas, individual national governments should also ensure that individuals from XUAR belonging to ethnic and/or religion or belief minorities are not forcibly deported to China.
- Companies operating in China or involved in the sale of surveillance technology to the Chinese government and companies should conduct robust human rights due diligence to assess the impact of their transactions on religious and ethnic minorities, meeting with civil society stakeholders and technology and human rights activists engaged on these issues.

5 Also referred to by many Uyghurs as East Turkestan.

Rhetoric vs Reality

In November 2018, UN bodies and member states expressed concern about FoRB at the third UN Universal Periodic Review of China's human rights record. China received dozens of recommendations relating to FoRB: they considered several of these to be 'accepted and already implemented'. China received at least 15 further recommendations relating specifically to human rights in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (see below), including some relating to both the Xinjiang situation and FoRB. Only two were accepted by China, with the claim that they were 'already being implemented'.

Consistent with the government's usual response to criticism of its human rights record, the Chinese delegation responded to several recommendations from UN member states by reiterating that 'China firmly opposes interference in its sovereignty and internal affairs under any pretext'.

Accepted and 'already implemented' recommendations included:

28.183 Respect, protect and fulfil the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, in accordance with general comment 22 of the Human Rights Committee (New Zealand).

28.195 Respect the rights to freedom of religion or belief, opinion and expression, peaceful assembly and culture, including for Tibetans, Uighurs and other minorities (Germany).

28.322 Fully respect the rights of ethnic minorities, freedom of religion and expressions of cultural identity (Croatia).

As the cases below illustrate, the assertions that the state 'already' respects the right to freedom of religion or belief stands in sharp contrast to the experiences of thousands or even millions of Chinese citizens.



Image: EPLS

The revised regulations: what's new?

Legislation relevant to religion or belief

The law gives us the right to believe. It is in the constitution. But the government tells people you can only have freedom within the boundaries we set out.

Unregistered 'house church' Christian

The Chinese constitution states that 'Citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of religious belief' (Article 36); however, the provisions of the constitution are not justiciable. Moreover, the constitution states that it protects only 'normal' religious activities (Article 36). In practice this refers to activities under the five officially recognised religious traditions (Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Protestantism and Catholicism) which are overseen by seven state-sanctioned associations. Further restrictions have since 2005 been contained in a State Council Regulation on Religious Affairs. Overall, this legislative framework has fallen short of public international law standards for freedom of religion or belief, such as Article 18 of the UDHR.



Image: EPLS

On 1 February 2018 revised Regulations on Religious Affairs (RRA) came into effect, replacing the original 2005 Regulations. The revised RRA further tighten control over religious activities. They state that 'religious groups, religious schools, and religious activity sites and religious affairs, are not to be controlled by foreign forces' (Article 5) without clarifying the meaning of 'control' by foreign forces, and stipulate that religion must not be used to endanger national security (Article 4)[6]. These provisions have the potential to be used to place further restrictions on religious groups. The revised Regulations also place fresh emphasis on the requirement that group religious activities take place in registered sites designated for this purpose, outlined in Chapter IV. Article 20 set out the conditions that religious activity sites must meet in order to be established, including that local religious citizens 'have need to regularly conduct collective religious activities'. In addition, the regulations include new articles imposing restrictive conditions on the communication of religious content (Articles 45-48), religious schools (Chapter III) and charity work (Article 56).

In recent years, human rights experts have repeatedly raised concerns about 'national security' being used to justify the curtailing of civil and political rights. On 7 July 2015, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights expressed concern about the human rights implications of the national security law adopted on 1 July 2015[7] saying the law's 'extraordinarily broad scope' and vague terminology left 'the door wide open to further restrictions of the rights and freedoms of Chinese citizens, and to even tighter control of civil society' by the government. Article 27 of the National Security Law concerns religion. The inclusion of 'national security' in the new Regulations on Religious Affairs, and 'religion' in the National Security Law, combine to give weight to policies and measures which curtail FoRB.

Everyone feels the burden of the new regulations. Before the new regulations, there were rules but they were not strictly enforced. Afterwards, the government began pushing people to only have religious activities at designated sites.

Christian and legal expert

The revised RRA have been accompanied by an increase in restrictions on and violations against religious communities across the country, including both registered and unregistered groups, as described below. In many cases, the authorities' actions have no clear basis in law and do not correspond to the wording of the revised Regulations. Although the content of the Regulations is important, arguably the real significance of the regulations and the subsequent escalation in religious oppression goes far beyond the text itself. The RRA are a declaration of intent: an announcement of a new approach to the management of religious affairs.

Whereas the RRA restrict all citizens' freedom of religion, members of the Communist Party are subject to additional restrictions based on Party rules. While for some years, the Party's attitude towards the religious beliefs of its members was somewhat relaxed, under Xi Jinping there have also been fresh warnings to Communist Party members not to 'follow religion'. Party authorities and official Party communications have stated that members will need to submit a written document rejecting religion. Meanwhile, Party authorities in Zhejiang said that applicants who have religious beliefs will be rejected.[8] One newsletter claimed that the fact that some Party members are turning to religion is 'attracting serious concern, to the extent that it now falls within the purview of disciplinary work'.[9]

In China today, no-one from the most powerful Party member at the top of a Shanghai corporation, to the poorest rural herder in the remote edges of the country, is completely free to follow their conscience.

6 Full sentence: 'Religion must not be used by any individual or organization to engage in activities that endanger national security, disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens or obstruct the State educational system, as well as other activities that harm State or societal public interests, or citizens' lawful rights and interests, and other such illegal activities.' Translation available from www.chinalawtranslate.com/en/religious-affairs-regulations-2017/

7 United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 'UN human rights chief says China's new security law is too broad, too vague', 7 July 2015

8 Global Times, 'Zhejiang CPC bans religious beliefs among applicants', 1 February 2015 www.globaltimes.cn/content/905305.shtml

9 Reuters, 'China targets rumors, religion in updated party rules', 27 August 2018 www.reuters.com/article/us-china-corruption/china-targets-rumors-religion-in-updated-party-rules-idUSKCN1LC0AQ

Religious life with Chinese Communist Party characteristics

'In September, 2017, the State Council issued the new 'Regulations on the Administration of Religious Affairs' and began implementing these regulations in February 2018. Ever since then, Christian churches across China have suffered varying degrees of persecution, contempt, and misunderstanding from government departments during public worship and religious practices, including various administrative measures that attempt to alter and distort the Christian faith. Some of these violent actions are unprecedented since the end of the Cultural Revolution. These include demolishing crosses on church buildings, violently removing expressions of faith like crosses and couplets hanging on Christians' homes, forcing and threatening churches to join religious organizations controlled by the government, forcing churches to hang the national flag or to sing secular songs praising the State and political parties, banning the children of Christians from entering churches and receiving religious education, and depriving churches and believers of the right to gather freely.'[9]

The above quote comes from a joint statement signed by over 400 Chinese Christian leaders, originally issued in August 2018.

This description of violations of religious freedom against Protestant churches is consistent with reports received by CSW and those that have been reported by numerous experts and organisations focusing on churches in China. Further examples of FoRB violations by the authorities include:

- The demolition of unregistered church buildings such as the 50,000-member Golden Lampstand (Jindengtai) Church in Shanxi Province.[11]
- Forced closure of unregistered churches such as 20-plus year old Home of Christ church in Shantou, Guangdong Province; police confiscated more than 5,000 books, electronic devices and religious materials, and later labelled the church an 'illegal religious organisation'.[12]
- Both registered and unregistered churches forced by authorities to install CCTV monitoring inside rooms where church services take place; in September 2018, authorities shut down Beijing's Zion Church after the church refused to install 24 closed-circuit cameras in the building.[13]
- Arrest and detention of unregistered church leaders such as the Pastor of Early Rain Church, Chengdu; Pastor Wang Yi and his wife Jiang Rong were detained in December 2018.[14] In December 2019 Pastor Wang was sentenced to nine years in prison for 'inciting to subvert state power' and 'illegal business operations'.[15] Jiang has been released on bail.
- Banners, posters and tiles with religious messages removed and destroyed from private homes and church buildings.
- Threats to withhold state support from low-income Christian families if they do not give up their religious beliefs.
- Pressure on landlords not to rent meeting space to unregistered churches, and to evict Christians from churches shut down by the authorities.
- Registered Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) churches pressured to demonstrate their loyalty to the Communist Party by singing 'red' songs and flying the national flag.

The newest policy of the government is that they don't want any kind of independent church. They want all the churches to be led by the [Chinese Communist] Party and devoted to the Party.
Unregistered church Christian

These kinds of incidents have intensified since the new RRA, but some cases date back to the earlier years of Xi Jinping's leadership.

10 The St Charles Institute, '439* Chinese Christian leaders – and counting – sign joint statement affirming religious freedom', 5 September 2018 www.stcharlesinstitute.org/voices/2018/9/4/198-chinese-christian-leadersand-countingsign-public-joint-statement
11 CSW, 'Crackdown on Unregistered Churches', 22 January 2018 www.csw.org.uk/2018/01/22/news/3824/article.htm
12 CSW, 'Chinese churches call for rights to be respected', 27 July 2018 www.csw.org.uk/2018/07/27/press/4054/article.htm
13 CSW, 'China: Draft Regulations Limit Sharing Religious Information Online', 13 September 2018 www.csw.org.uk/2018/09/13/press/4069/article.htm
14 CSW, 'Police arrest 100 members of Early Rain Church', 10 December 2018 www.csw.org.uk/2018/12/10/press/4170/article.htm
15 CSW, 'Pastor Wang Yi Sentenced to nine years in prison', 30 December 2019 www.csw.org.uk/2019/12/30/press/4507/article.htm

Case study one: Living Stone Church

Living Stone Church (Huoshi Church) is an unregistered Protestant church in Guizhou which experienced increasingly repressive measures by the authorities to attempt to force the church to join the TSPM. Founded in 2009 in Guiyang city, the church grew quickly and by 2015 it had over 700 members. The church's rapid growth drew the attention of the authorities who said that the church's use of a commercial building for meetings was illegal. Months later Pastor Yang Hua was arrested in January 2016. Yang's interrogators threatened him with torture and death if he refused to cooperate. In December 2016, Yang was sentenced to two and a half years in prison, and on 15 February 2017, Zhang Xiuhong, a former deacon, was sentenced to five years in prison. Zhang's sentence was later reduced to a three-year sentence suspended for five years. The church's other pastor, Su Tianfu, was sentenced to one year's imprisonment suspended for two years, and a further six months' house arrest, in May 2018. (See timeline on following page.)

A member of the church interviewed by CSW described the authorities' actions:

'The problems with the government started around 2015. The authorities began to monitor our activities. They would come to services and were very disruptive. They declared that we were an illegal religious group and tried to force us to close. All the members came under a lot of pressure. Several people were arrested. Both Pastor Su and Pastor Yang were accused of the same crime, revealing state secrets, but this is just an excuse to take away their freedom.

'The church members have now broken down into small groups, a maximum of 20 in each. About half the members have already left though. They felt afraid. The government threatened that they would lose their jobs or warned that their children would not get good educational opportunities. They said anything they could to put them under pressure.'



Image: Badiucao

Timeline of the Living Stone Church case

2018

19 June 2018

Pastor Yang is released from prison after completing a two and a half year sentence, but is in urgent need of medical care.

26 April 2018

Pastor Su Tianfu is sentenced to one year in prison suspended for two years, with a further six months' residential surveillance.

11 February 2018

At the instruction of the court, the confiscated church venue is sold to a state-owned company for over RMB 5 million to pay off the fine; the pastors still owe the courts the remaining amount.

2017

7 August 2017

Zhang Xiuhong is released after spending more than two years in detention.

28 June 2017

Religious Bureau sends a notice to the church leaders stating that they are fined RMB 7 million for collecting 'illegal' donations from members of the congregation from 2009 to 2015.

2016

30 December 2016

Pastor Yang Hua is sentenced to two and a half years in prison.

22 January 2016

Pastor Yang Hua (Li Guozi) is arrested on suspicion of 'divulging state secrets'.

January 2016

The church submits a legal complaint to the Nanming District City Urban Administrative and Law Enforcement Bureau with the assistance of their lawyer Li Boguang.

2015

21 December 2015

Pastor Yang Hua is placed under criminal detention on the charge of illegally possessing state secrets.

14 December 2015

Pastor Su Tianfu is taken into custody for 'disrupting public peace'.

13 December 2015

Two Christians are arrested on charges relating to state secrets, in connection with the case.

9 December 2015

300 police and law enforcement personnel seal off all three Living Stone Church locations; Pastor Yang Hua is placed under administrative detention; two others are also detained.

18 November 2015

Local authorities inform the church that their use of a commercial building as a place of church assembly is illegal. Pastor Su's home is visited by agents.

July, August 2015

Zhang Xiuhong, a deacon, is detained for 'illegal business operations'; accountancy books confiscated and account frozen.

May 2015

Bureau of Civil Affairs declares the church an 'illegal organisation'.

2014

8 November 2014

Authorities mobilise hundreds of government personnel to surround the building.

2009

2009

Living Stone Church is founded.

The church member interviewed by CSW concluded, 'The crackdown on Living Stone Church was like an experiment. Now the authorities see that this is an effective approach, they have adopted this approach in many different regions in China…The new regulations clearly show the government's determination to tightly control the churches. It is very clear – the regulations are a declaration: there will be zero tolerance for churches who want independence from the government.'

Catholic churches, clergy and lay people are experiencing similar restrictions and violations to that of the Protestant community. In Henan Province, for example, both Catholic and Protestant churches have been demolished, to the angry despair of their congregants, in a province-wide crackdown on all Christian communities. The situation for Catholics, however, is also shaped by the historical and current relationship between the Vatican and the Chinese government and the crucial issue of the ordination of bishops. Historically, some clergy and bishops have been appointed solely by the Chinese government without approval from the Pope; others were recognised by the Vatican but not by the Chinese government; and some were recognised by both.

On 22 September 2018, the Holy See and the People's Republic of China signed a Provisional Agreement on the appointment of bishops. Details of the deal remain unknown, but it could be that under the agreement the state-sanctioned Catholic authorities will submit a candidate for bishop to the Vatican, with the Pope having final veto power. The Pope has also recognised seven Chinese bishops who were not previously in communion with Rome.

Some Catholics welcomed the agreement, which they believe could bring greater unity among Catholics in China and internationally. However, many others both inside and outside the country are opposed to the agreement. They are concerned that it creates the perception that the Vatican may appear to have indirectly legitimised the Chinese government's oppressive record against religious groups, including Catholics, at a time when religious freedom is rapidly deteriorating. Critics question what this means for Catholic clergy and lay people belonging to 'underground' churches in China, and especially clergy who have suffered years of detention and house arrest for refusing to join the state-sanctioned patriotic association.

[W]e urge that any agreement must be grounded in the protection of religious freedom, and an end to religious persecution. Unfortunately…we cannot see any possibility that the coming agreement can result in the Chinese government stopping its persecution of the Church, and ceasing its violations of religious freedom.

An Open Letter to Conferences of Catholic Bishops, initiated by university professors, lecturers, researchers, human rights activists and lawyers[16]

Since the agreement, there have been several developments concerning individual clergy:

- Father Su Guipeng of Shadifang parish was placed under house arrest in October 2018, and was released in December 2018 but prohibited from managing parish affairs.[17]
- Father Zhao He of Xuanhua Diocese, Dongcheng Catholic Church, was detained in October 2018 and released in January 2019.[18]
- Father Zhang Guilin and Father Wang Zhong of the Diocese of Chongli-Xiwanzi were detained in winter 2018; their current status is unknown.[19]
- In Zhejiang, Bishop Peter Shao Zhumin of Wenzhou[20] was taken away by authorities on 9 November 2018 and released on 23 November 2018; in the same month authorities released Father Lu Danhua who had been detained for 11 months since December 2017.[21]
- One 'underground' bishop, Bishop Jin Lugang of Nanyang Diocese in Henan, became a coadjutor bishop recognised by the government in January 2019. According to UCANews, he was the first underground bishop to be openly installed after the September agreement.[22]
- Coadjutor Bishop Cui Tai of the Diocese of Xuanhua (Hebei province), 68, who was detained in April 2018, was allowed to visit relatives over the Lunar New Year in 2019. Before his most recent detention, he had been held under house arrest on numerous occasions and imprisoned in a re-education camp.

16 An Open Letter to Conferences of Catholic Bishops Across the World Regarding the Possible Agreement Between the Holy See and the Government of the People's Republic of China (undated, accessed 26 July 2019) freecatholicsinchina.org
17 UCANews, 'Chinese bishop and priests released for Lunar New Year', 8 February 2019 www.ucanews.com/news/chinese-bishop-and-priests-released-for-lunar-new-year/84473
18 ibid.
19 La Croix International, 'A sad tale of two detained Chinese priests', 16 November 2018 https://international.la-croix.com/news/a-sad-tale-of-two-detained-chinese-priests/8872
20 South China Morning Post, 'Chinese bishop "missing" despite historic deal between Beijing and Vatican', 15 November 2018 www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/2173466/chinese-bishop-missing-despite-historic-deal-between-beijing-and
21 UCANews, 'Bishop Shao freed by Chinese authorities', 30 November 2018 www.ucanews.com/news/bishop-shao-freed-by-chinese-authorities/84000
22 UCANews, 'China recognizes underground bishop at tightly controlled Mass', 1 February 2019 www.ucanews.com/news/china-recognizes-underground-bishop-at-tightly-controlled-mass/84429



Two months after the agreement, Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kiun led a service in Hong Kong for Father Wei Heping, whose body was found in a river in Taiyuan in Shanxi province, northern China, in November 2015. Police claimed he committed suicide but this explanation was questioned by church leaders and observers.[23] Another priest, Father Liu Honggen of Baoding, Hebei, went missing on 7 May 2015; church members later found out Father Liu was being detained in a remote area. Some members of the church were able to visit Father Liu, who did not know why he had been detained. In October, Father Liu's mother was due to visit her son but he was moved elsewhere and could not be contacted. Since then, his parents, relatives and friends have had no news of the priest.[24]

Christianity has long been regarded by some in authority in China as a 'foreign' religion, explaining in part why it appears to have been regarded with particular suspicion by the government. Similarly, Islam, despite having a long history in China, is also perceived as a potential tool for foreign infiltration and a threat to national security. This is especially true in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR).

23 CSW, 'Church leaders question reported suicide of priest', 23 November 2015 www.csw.org.uk/2015/11/23/news/2884/privacy.htm
24 UCANews, 'Hebei priest still missing despite China-Vatican deal', 5 October 2018 www.ucanews.com/news/hebei-priest-still-missing-despite-china-vatican-deal/83553

Case study two: Mass Detentions in XUAR

During 2017 and 2018 there were numerous reports of the widespread detention of Uyghurs, Kazakhs and members of other predominantly Muslim ethnic groups in political re-education camps[25] in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR).[26] Information on the camps has been well-documented by human rights organisations,[27] including CSW, drawing on information from interviews with witnesses and family members of victims as well as public recruitment notices, government procurement and construction bids, Chinese state media, testimony from legal proceedings (Kazakhstan), academic research,[28] international media reports[29] and Google Maps images. Then in November 2019, the *New York Times* revealed that they had received over 400 pages of leaked internal Party documents which provided further evidence of a vast and brutal crackdown, carefully and deliberately planned at the highest levels of Party leadership.[30] The strength of the evidence leaves no doubt that mass detentions are taking place in XUAR which violate domestic and international law.

Over one million individuals are believed to have been detained without charge in political re-education camps since 2017. Recent estimates are as high as three million.

Reasons for detention in the camps include:

- Having relatives living abroad
- Accessing religious materials online
- Having visited certain 'sensitive' countries
- Communal religious activities
- Behaviour indicating 'wrong thinking' or 'religious extremism'
- Sometimes no reason is given at all.

Individuals sent to the so-called re-education camps do not have access to legal counsel and there is no mechanism for appeal. Their families are typically not told where they are being held, or when they will be released. Inside the camps conditions are dangerously unsanitary and overcrowded; detainees are subject to beatings, sleep deprivation, forced medication and solitary confinement. At a hearing of the Congressional-Executive Commission on China on 28 November 2018, Mihrigul Tursun described her detention in a camp in XUAR:[31]

'I clearly remember the torture I experienced in the tiger chair the second time I was incarcerated. I was taken to a special room with an electrical chair. It was the interrogation room that had one light and one chair. There were belts and whips hanging on the wall. I was placed in a high chair that clicked to lock my arms and legs in place and tightened when they press [sic] a button. My head was shaved beforehand for the maximum impact. The authorities put a helmet-like thing on my head. Each time I was electrocuted, my whole body would shake violently and I could feel the pain in my veins. I thought I would rather die than go through this torture and begged them to kill me.'

Although not all detainees are Muslim, and ethnicity appears to be the most significant factor linking the detentions, nevertheless there is a significant religious element as well. Not only have some individuals been detained in connection with their peaceful religious activities, but witnesses also report that inside the camps detainees are required to renounce Islam and promise not to follow religion. Detainees have been forced to eat pork or drink alcohol, against their religious beliefs. In 2018 and 2019 reports emerged of camp detainees being transferred to prisons in Heilongjiang, Shandong and other parts of China.

My mother in law…cannot stop crying about all her children who have been locked up in the camps…There is no one to take care of her and she has been left alone… suffering from hunger and pain.

An Australian Uyghur, whose family are in XUAR

Outside the camps, authorities have demolished thousands of mosques in XUAR in what the Uyghur Human Rights Project's Zubayra Shamseden describes as 'a wholesale attack on Uyghur religion, culture and ethnic identity'.[32]

25 Variously known as 'counter-extremism training centres', 'education and transformation training centres' etc. and described by witnesses and family members as 'concentration camps', 'prison camps' and so on.

26 Also referred to by many Uyghurs as East Turkestan.

27 Including:
Human Rights Watch, '"Eradicating Ideological Viruses": China's Campaign of Repression Against Xinjiang's Muslims', 9 September 2018
www.hrw.org/report/2018/09/09/eradicating-ideological-viruses/chinas-campaign-repression-against-xinjiangs
Amnesty International, 'China: "Where Are They?": Time for answers about mass detentions in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region', 24 September 2018
www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/ASA1791132018ENGLISH.PDF
Uyghur Human Rights Project, 'Awaiting "Never again": The Persecution of Uyghur Muslims', 2 October 2018 https://uhrp.org/featured-articles/awaiting-%E2%80%9Cnever-again%E2%80%9D-persecution-uyghur-muslims

28 Including:
Zenz, Adrian, '"Thoroughly Reforming them Toward a Healthy Heart Attitude" – China's Political Re-Education Campaign in Xinjiang', 15 May 2018
www.academia.edu/36638456/_Thoroughly_Reforming_them_Toward_a_Healthy_Heart_Attitude_-_Chinas_Political_Re-Education_Campaign_in_Xinjiang

29 Including: Radio Free Asia, Uyghur News www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur

30 New York Times, ''Absolutely No Mercy': Leaked Files Expose How China Organized Mass Detentions of Muslims', 16 November 2019
www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/11/16/world/asia/china-xinjiang-documents.html

31 Congressional-Executive Commission on China, 'Hearing: The Communist Party's Crackdown on Religion in China, Testimony of Mihrigul Tursun', 28 November 2018
www.cecc.gov/sites/chinacommission.house.gov/files/documents/REVISED_Mihrigul%20Tursun%20Testimony%20for%20CECC%20Hearing%2011-28-18_0.pdf
YouTube, 'Hearing on The Communist Party's Crackdown on Religion in China', 29 November 2018 www.youtube.com/watch?v=1WOem1tgDMc

32 Uyghur Human Rights Project Blog, 'Zubayra Shamseden Speaks at the Second Annual China Human Rights Lawyers Day', 11 July 2018
https://weblog.uhrp.org/zubayra-shamseden-speaks-at-the-second-annual-chinese-human-rights-lawyers-day/

Even small-scale, peaceful everyday religious activities and expressions of religious identity are viewed as suspicious by the authorities. The well-documented and extreme levels of surveillance imposed on XUAR residents, and in particular Uyghur, Kazakh and other non-Han ethnic groups, mean that communal gatherings of any nature are tightly controlled, and religious meetings outside of registered venues, for any community, are prohibited.

Economic exploitation has taken place, almost all the wealth and property of Uyghurs have been seized by the Chinese Government, driving them into abject poverty. The Uyghur language is banned. There are restrictions on religious, economic, social, and cultural freedom.

Uyghur man living overseas

Civil servants are being placed in Uyghur homes to monitor their behaviour day and night. Uyghurs are not allowed to practise their religion, play traditional instruments, or use their language freely. Children whose parents are detained are being taken from their families and placed in state facilities. A Uyghur worker at a regional orphanage told RFA that his facility was seriously overcrowded, with children as young as six months 'locked up like farm animals in a shed.'[33]

The Chinese government claims that the camps are vocational training centres and that they are combating extremism. In fact the mass incarceration of over one million individuals constitutes a human rights crisis and is now increasingly being recognised as such. In October 2019 23 countries issued a joint statement calling on the Chinese government to uphold its national laws and international obligations, and commitments to respect human rights, including freedom of religion or belief, in Xinjiang and across China. The statement was delivered by the UK Permanent Representative to the UN, at the Third Committee session on the Committee for the elimination of racial discrimination.[34]

The government's actions in Xinjiang are an attack on Uyghur identity, culture and religion. They are breaking up families, and leaving children and elderly people alone and vulnerable. The devastating and long-term impact of these actions cannot be overstated.

This whole situation is stressful and the impact on our work, physical and emotional state is horrific, it is a dreadful trauma.

Uyghur woman living overseas whose family members are detained in XUAR

Islam and Christianity are under particular pressure from the authorities as so-called 'foreign' religions, but other faiths are also coming under tighter control, as the government calls on all religious communities to sinicise and show their 'love for the nation', which in reality means loyalty to the Communist Party. According to RFA, in August 2018 the famous Shaolin Temple conducted a high-profile flag raising ceremony, the first such ceremony in the temple's 1,500-year history. The ceremony was overseen by officials from the United Front Work Department.[35] 'Bitter Winter', an online magazine on religious liberty and human rights in China published by CESNUR, the Center for Studies on New Religions, has also reported a crackdown on Taoism[36] and traditional folk religions, including the closure of temples and the destruction of religious statues and materials.[37] Also in April 2019, the Christian human rights organisation ChinaAid reported that authorities in Jiangsu demolished 5,911 temples within one month, describing it as the 'largest mass-destruction of such faiths since the Cultural Revolution'.[38]

Tibetan Buddhism has long been singled out by the government: well-documented and ongoing FoRB violations against Tibetan communities characterise what USCIRF describes as a 'strategy of antagonism and hostility toward Tibetan Buddhists and the Dalai Lama.'[39] Rights groups say the Communist Party conflates 'extremism' and even terrorism with religious belief and accuses the Dalai Lama of 'inciting separatism'. This approach allows the authorities to punish the peaceful expression of Tibetan religious identity or even mild criticism of the government's ethnic and religious policies.

FoRB violations include intrusive military surveillance of monasteries and religious occasions such as important prayer days, which are marked by the presence of armed police in riot gear, which means that religious ceremonies can resemble military exercises. In addition, any activity in association or connection with the Dalai Lama is severely repressed by the authorities. This includes celebrating the Dalai Lama's birthday or possessing Dalai Lama images and teachings in one's home or on one's phone.

The religious landscape of Tibetan Buddhism is scarred by the demolition of monasteries and places of worship, accompanied by the forced eviction of monks and nuns. In July 2016 a 'renovation' campaign by authorities

33 Radio Free Asia, 'Dozens of Uyghur Children of Xinjiang Village Camp Detainees Sent to Live in Orphanages', 2 July 2018 www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/orphanages-07022018143057.html
34 Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 'Joint statement on human rights violations and abuses in Xinjiang', 29 October 2019 www.gov.uk/government/speeches/joint-statement-on-xinjiang
35 Radio Free Asia, 'China's Ruling Party Hoists The Red Flag Over Henan's Shaolin Temple', 29 August 2018 www.rfa.org/english/news/china/chinas-ruling-party-hoists-the-red-flag-over-henans-shaolin-temple-08292018102832.html
36 Bitter Winter, 'Taoist Culture, Traditions Subjected to Religious Persecution', 23 June 2019 https://bitterwinter.org/taoist-culture-traditions-subjected-to-religious-persecution/
37 Bitter Winter, 'Ancient Temple Sealed off on False Accusations', 7 May 2019 https://bitterwinter.org/ancient-temple-sealed-off-on-false-accusations/
38 ChinaAid, 'Jiangsu authorities demolish 5,911 temples', 23 April 2019 www.chinaaid.org/2019/04/jiangsu-authorities-demolish-5911.html
39 USCIRF, Tier 1: China www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/Tier1_CHINA.pdf









Uyghurs around the world have used the Twitter hashtag #MeTooUyghur to call on the Chinese authorities to release videos showing that their relatives are alive. Many of them have had no contact with their relatives for years.

resulted in the demolition of hundreds of homes at Larung Gar Buddhist Institute in Sertar, Sichuan Province. Larung Gar is believed to be one of the largest Buddhist teaching centres in the world, with a population of over 10,000.[40] Up to 1,000 nuns at another Buddhist institute, Yachen Gar, were forced to leave the centre and return to their home towns, following an order by officials.[41] In November 2016, six UN Special Rapporteurs, including the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, wrote to the Chinese authorities about the demolitions and evictions religious practitioners from Larung Gar and Yachen Gar, expressing their concern over reports of 'excessive use of force against, and arbitrary arrest and detention of, peaceful protestors' at the site.[42]

Thousands more monks and nuns have been removed in 2019, and some of those removed earlier are reported to be in detention and subjected to political re-education and beatings, according to sources cited by RFA.[43] Tibetan nuns evicted from Yachen Gar have been forced to 'perform Chinese patriotic songs and learn to dance,' and to watch propaganda. When some of the nuns broke down in tears, guards physically attacked the women, according to RFA.[44]

There are numerous human rights violations against Tibetan Buddhists which intersect with religious freedom, including restrictions on the freedom of movement of clergy and lay people, freedom of assembly and association, freedom of expression, and abuses such as torture, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance. In January 2012 the Chinese authorities detained hundreds of Tibetans returning from a major religious teaching, the Kalachakra, by the Dalai Lama in India. The International Campaign for Tibet believes hundreds of the 7,000-8,000 pilgrims who travelled to India were subject to 're-education' in Lhasa Public Security Bureau detention centre in Gutsa, which is known for its particularly brutal treatment of prisoners.[45]

As with clergy from other religious groups, Tibetan Buddhist monks who are key community leaders or who try to protect human rights are especially targeted. In July 2015, one of Tibet's most prominent political prisoners and religious leaders, Tenzin Delek Rinpoche, died in custody apparently following torture while serving a sentence on trumped-up charges of 'inciting separatism'.[46]

While most of the religion or belief groups described in this report include communities either registered with the government or independent/unregistered, there is a third category of community which are actively pursued and persecuted by the authorities. At least 20 religion or belief groups in China have been labelled as *xie jiao*, usually translated into English as 'heterodox teachings' or 'evil cults'. In 1999 the Public Security Bureau established a special organisation, informally known as the '610 office', with the purpose of eradicting Falun Gong and later other groups classified as *xie jiao*. Individuals affiliated with such groups have been charged under Article 300 of the Criminal Law, which prohibits 'organizing/using a cult to undermine implementation of the law'. Penalties include detention, surveillance, and deprivation of political rights, fines, or combined penalties with fines, up to a maximum sentence of life imprisonment.[47]

In 2017, the non-profit humanitarian organisation Dui Hua examined a new reinterpretation of Article 300 which raised 'the benchmark for evidence' necessary for a sentence of three to seven years, while expanding the category of

40 International Campaign for Tibet, 'Demolitions begin at Larung Gar, "monastery for the world", as religious teachers urge calm', 25 July 2016 https://savetibet.org/demolitions-begin-at-larung-gar-monastery-for-the-world-as-religious-teachers-urge-calm/
41 CSW, 'UK, UN raise religious freedom concerns in China', 20 September 2016 www.csw.org.uk/2016/09/20/press/3260/article.htm
42 Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownLoadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=22816
43 Radio Free Asia, Thousands More Expelled From Sichuan's Yachen Gar Buddhist Center', 18 July 2019 www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/expelled-07182019170932.html
44 Radio Free Asia, 'Tibetan Nuns Beaten by Chinese Guards For "Weeping" in Detention', 11 July 2019 www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/beaten-07112019164921.html
45 International Campaign for Tibet, 'China's Control State in Lhasa' www.savetibet.org/chinas-control-state-in-lhasa/
46 International Tibet Network, 'Joint Submission by Tibet Advocacy Coalition and International Tibet Network Member Groups on China's 3rd Universal Periodic Review 2018' https://tibetnetwork.org/freedom2/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/2018_UN_UPR_TAC-TibetNetwork.pdf
47 Dui Hua, 'Will a New Judicial Interpretation on Cults Lead to Greater Leniency?', 24 February 2017 www.duihuahrjournal.org/2017/02/


Image: Badiucao

'minor offense'. Dui Hua marked a trend towards greater leniency in sentence reductions, and suggested the new interpretation may result in 'a reduction of cult prisoners serving long sentences'. However, Dui Hua also noted that the new interpretation allows for prisoners to be deprived of their political rights for up to five years after the completion of their sentence; previously this only applied to only prisoners sentenced for 'endangering state security' and a number of violent crimes.[48]

Two of the largest groups classified as *xie jiao* are believed to be the spiritual movement Falun Gong and the Church of Almighty God, also known as Eastern Lightning. Both groups are severely persecuted by the authorities.

Falun Gong has been banned since 1999. Practitioners and supporters outside China continue to report the arrest, imprisonment, torture and death in custody of Falun Gong practitioners across the country. Additionally, a series of reports by human rights lawyer David Matas, former Canadian cabinet minister David Kilgour and China analyst Ethan Gutmann, provide evidence to suggest that Falun Gong practitioners and other prisoners of conscience, including other ethnic and religious minorities, have been victims of forced organ harvesting. CSW is not able to independently verify these reports but is deeply concerned by the conclusions of an independent people's tribunal into forced organ harvesting of prisoners of conscience in China, chaired by barrister and former judge Sir Geoffrey Nice QC,[49] which issued its final judgement in June 2019:

> Forced organ harvesting has been committed for years throughout China on a significant scale and that Falun Gong practitioners have been one – and probably the main – source of organ supply. The concerted persecution and medical testing of the Uyghurs is more recent and it may be that evidence of forced organ harvesting of this group may emerge in due course. The Tribunal has had no evidence that the significant infrastructure associated with China's transplantation industry has been dismantled and absent a satisfactory explanation as to the source of readily available organs concludes that forced organ harvesting continues till today.[50]

The Tribunal further concluded that crimes against humanity against the Falun Gong and Uyghurs have been proved beyond reasonable doubt.

The Church of Almighty God (CAG) was labelled a *xie jiao* in 1995 by the Central Committee and the State Council.[51] According to CAG's 2018 annual report, in 2018 alone, 11,111 church members were arrested for engaging in church activities, and as many as 20 individuals died as a result of persecution. The report cites government documents from various provinces which outline campaigns against CAG. The report also details ongoing violations against CAG members, including torture in detention, intrusive surveillance, and intense pressure to recant. Church members who have returned to China from abroad have disappeared.[52] According to research by Dui Hua, CAG members made up the second largest grouping of individuals convicted under Article 300 after Falun Gong.[53]

The US Department of State's 2018 Report on International Religious Freedom cites several reports of violations against CAG members, including the death in custody of a member in Guizhou in March 2018; the authorities told the family she had committed suicide. When the family questioned this determination, authorities threatened them with loss of employment and university access for their children. In another case reported by the Church and cited by the State Department report, one member was arrested and tortured for 25 days before being sent to hospital with severe head injuries to the skull. She died several months later.[54]

48 ibid.

49 Between 1998 and 2006, Sir Geoffrey Nice led the prosecution of Slobodan Milošević, former President of Serbia, at the UN's International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. Since 2007, he has advised and represented (at the International Criminal Court and elsewhere) states, applicants and victims concerning several internal and international armed conflicts. See: https://chinatribunal.com/who-we-are/

50 ibid.

51 Dui Hua, Identifying Cult Organizations in China www.duihuaresearch.org/2014/07/identifying-cult-organizations-in-china.html

52 The Church of Almighty God, 2018 Annual Report on the Chinese Communist Government's Persecution of The Church of Almighty God www.holyspiritspeaks.org/news/annual-report-2018/

53 The Dui Hua Foundation, NGO Submission for the Universal Periodic Review of the People's Republic of China For the 31st Session of the UPR convened by the UN Human Rights Council, March 2018, para. 14 https://duihua.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/201803_UN_UPR-2.pdf

54 United States Department of State, 2018 Report on International Religious Freedom: China (Includes Tibet, Xinjiang, Hong Kong, and Macau) www.state.gov/reports/2018-report-on-international-religious-freedom/china-includes-tibet-xinjiang-hong-kong-and-macau/



Image: Badiucao

Violations against FoRB defenders

In a crackdown beginning in July 2015, dubbed the '709 crackdown', over 300 human rights lawyers and activists, and their colleagues and family members, have been interrogated, detained and in some cases imprisoned or disappeared. Many of these lawyers have represented individuals arrested in connection with their religion or belief.

Case study three: Defending FoRB in China

FoRB cases are politically sensitive in China. Lawyers who take on such cases can face harassment and intimidation from the authorities; those who continuously take on FoRB cases become targets, and can be jailed or disappeared, as mentioned above. Even for less high profile cases, however, there are numerous obstacles to justice. Lawyers report courtrooms full of police armed with guns, the forging of evidence by the authorities, lawyers blocked from meeting with clients, and the use of torture to elicit oral confession during criminal investigation. Sometimes, the authorities pressure the lawyers' firm to persuade them to drop the case.

'Torture mainly happens during the criminal investigation stage, or in the trial stage. The aim of using torture is mainly to elicit oral confession, and make detainees obedient. Sometimes, during detention police order other detainees to abuse detainees.'

Human rights lawyer

Human rights lawyers report that the situation varies depending on location, timing, and the nature of the case. If an important political figure becomes involved in a specific case, then the public security system will exert greater pressure on the lawyers and their law firm. In the face of such pressure, says one experienced FoRB defender, it is up to the lawyer to insist on the rule of law, argue the legality of the lawyer's intervention, refuse to cooperate with any illegality, and insist on carrying out the role of the lawyer.

The possibility of a just outcome is slim: 'It is very rare for a person who has been arrested in a religious case to be found innocent…Abuse of power in FORB cases is ubiquitous,' say lawyers. Nevertheless, for the lawyers, 'exhausting all judicial procedures is a basic principle.'

At the same time, there have been some very limited areas of improvement. Lawyers report that some procedural safeguards have been improved, and, in some types of cases, it is easier for the lawyer to see the case file than previously. However, they stress that conditions vary considerably depending on the area and the religious community concerned.

'Without persistence, lawyers have no access to meet with their clients.'

Human rights lawyer

For the lawyers themselves, overall the pressure is increasing, forcing some to scale back their work on 'sensitive' cases or leave the profession entirely. Four years on from the spate of detentions of human rights defenders in 2015, the situation looks bleak. Nevertheless, a statement by the China Human Rights Lawyers Group on the fourth anniversary of the '709 Incident', offers some cause for hope:

'In the past four years, although the relevant authorities have exhausted all means to discredit human rights lawyers or force detained human rights lawyers to confess guilt, unexpectedly, those human rights lawyers are receiving more and more respect and attention from the people. The deeds of lawyers such as Gao Zhisheng, Tang Jingling, Tang Jitian, Jiang Tianyong, Liu Wei, and others are inspiring one group of human rights lawyers after the next to continue to bravely advance in pursuit of our ideals...we are willing to work together with freedom-loving people all over the world to hold fast to the values of democracy and the rule of law, and respect and defend human rights together.'[55]

55 China Change, 'Statement by the China Human Rights Lawyers Group on the Fourth Anniversary of the '709 Incident' https://chinachange.org/2019/07/08/statement-by-the-china-human-rights-lawyers-group-on-the-fourth-anniversary-of-the-709-incident/



Image: Badiucao

Conclusion

Before, groups in this area didn't really talk about politics and religious freedom. They only focused on the Bible. But [now] they are feeling the pressure … Now things are getting worse for everyone. The churches cannot avoid what's happening. We cannot ignore reality.

Christian activist

Freedom of religion or belief in China is in rapid decline: even in the time taken to write this report, there have been numerous new cases of arrest, detention and intimidation of religious believers. Almost daily new details emerge about the use of technology in surveillance and profiling of Uyghurs in XUAR, alongside news of another church closure, another anti-*xie jiao* campaign, and another flat denial by the government that any of this violates the right to freedom of religion or belief.

The deterioration of religious freedom has not gone unnoticed outside China. As mentioned above, in November 2018, both UN member states and UN bodies expressed concern about FoRB at the third UN Universal Periodic Review of the Chinese government's human rights record, with dozens of recommendations relating to the protection of the right to FoRB, in particular for ethnic minorities. A European Parliament resolution adopted on 18 April 2019 described the current situation in China as a 'new low point' for freedom of religion and conscience, expressing deep concern about the 'increasingly repressive regime that many religious and ethnic minorities, in particular Uyghurs and Kazakhs, Tibetans and Christians face.'[56] Parliamentarians across the world have called on their governments to raise FoRB concerns with the Chinese government, and as mentioned above, in October 2019 23 UN member states came together to issue a joint statement calling on the Chinese government to respect human rights, including freedom of religion or belief, in Xinjiang and across China.

However, even for governments with a long history of advocating for international freedom of religion or belief, the best intentions are complicated, or even eclipsed, by economic concerns. Too often, trade simply trumps human rights.

It is vitally important for the international community to call for freedom of religion or belief in China, and to stand with and support Chinese civil society, the real hope for change.

This report is dedicated to the countless activists, lawyers, religious leaders, journalists and netizens who have chosen to take a stand for freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief. At grave risk to themselves, and with no hope of reward or even thanks, they have refused to accept the growing limitations on this fundamental right, and refused to ignore the suffering of others. Governments, institutions, NGOs, universities and commercial companies must do all they can to support FoRB defenders, and to press the Chinese government to protect the right to freedom of religion or belief for all.

56 European Parliament, 'China, notably the situation of religious and ethnic minorities', 18 April 2019 www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2019-0422_EN.pdf?redirect

CSW everyone free to believe

CSW is a human rights organisation advocating for freedom of religion or belief, and as Christians we stand with everyone facing injustice because of their religion or belief.

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