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Questions

- 1. Please find references as to whether 1,000 farmers in Changchunling Village, Fujin City, Heilongjiang Province in December 2007 openly declared that they have the ownership of their farmland.**
- 2. Were they supported by the farmers in Jiangsu, Shaanxi and Sichuan?**
- 3. Can you find any reference to a solicitor having any part in this movement?**

RESPONSE

- 1. Please find references as to whether 1,000 farmers in Changchunling Village, Fujin City Heilongjiang Province in December 2007 openly declared that they have the ownership of their farmland.**

On 14 January 2008 *The Washington Post* reported that on 19 December 2007 approximately 1000 farmers gathered at a Changchunling village meeting and declared individual ownership of their farm plots. The report states that according to the farmers “dozens of police officers burst in and tried to break up the Dec. 19 meeting half an hour after it began”. The article also reports that, according to information from local farmers, over 70 villages in the Fujin jurisdiction have attempted to privatise their land. The report provides the following information on events in Changchunling village and the wider Fujin region:

CHANGCHUNLING, China: About 1,000 farmers gathered in the village meeting hall here at 8 a.m. on Dec. 19 and proclaimed what amounted to a revolt against China’s communist land-ownership system.

The broad, flat fields surrounding Changchunling belong to the farmers who work them, they declared, and not to the local government. The farmers then began dividing up the village's collective holdings, with the goal of making each family the owner of a private plot.

"There is no justification for taking the land away from the farmers," said one of the participating peasants.

...Although much of the communist system has been jettisoned over the years, all of China's rural land is still owned by the state. Farmers have usually been allowed to lease plots for 30 years at a stretch, after which they can renew the lease. But ownership -- and the right to sell -- has remained in the hands of village-level leaders and party secretaries.

Here in the jurisdiction of Fujin, more than 70 villages have tried to privatize their lands over the past month, according to local farmers.

...The Fujin farmers focused on 250,000 acres that had been taken over by local officials in the 1990s for sale to private agriculture companies. Only part of the land was in theory redistributed last month, they said, because police moved in and prevented further allocations. But the farmers have since moved beyond the issue of the seized land and asserted the right to own all the collective farmland that they currently work under lease.

"The encroached-upon collective land should be divided evenly by households and possessed by us farmers," said a statement issued in the name of the Fujin villages and posted on the Internet. "Our farmers' land rights should include the right to use the land, the right to make income from it, the right to inherit it and dispose of it and the right to negotiate over it and set the price of it with developers. So-called collective ownership has actually deprived farmers of their rights as landowners for a long time."

...Because of what appears to be a firm party stand, the farmers' current efforts to change the system might not survive China's repressive security apparatus.

In Changchunling, dozens of police officers burst in and tried to break up the Dec. 19 meeting half an hour after it began, farmers recalled. Yu Changwu, who had helped organize a similar meeting 10 days earlier at nearby Dong Nan'an village, was imprisoned almost immediately, they said. Liu Zhenyu, a fellow activist also taken into custody, was recently released, associates said.

"We are risking our lives to divide up our land," said a Changchunling farmer. "We have stuck out our necks. But no matter what happens to us, no matter what price we have to pay, we must get our lands back."

The Fujin city propaganda department dismissed the farmers' claims as meaningless statements by people who do not represent their villages. The declaration, it said, was "a distortion of the facts, deviating from the facts and intentionally spreading rumors."

Farmers in the Fujin area have become cautious in talking about their movement, demanding anonymity and cloaking visitors from police or possible informers along the snow-blown lanes that connect their low-lying villages. In their view, the police have been ordered to protect not only the socialist system of land ownership but also corrupt officials in Fujin city who have profited from sales of farmland to developers.

"More than half the officials in Fujin city should get the death penalty, they are so corrupt," said a farmer standing in the snow at the main intersection of Dong Nan'gang (Cody, E. 2008, 'Farmers Rise In Challenge To Chinese Land Policy', *The Washington Post*, 14 January <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp->

A 22 December 2007 report by *The Epoch Times* provides further information on the reclamation of land by farmers in Changchunling village and within the Fujin area. The report states that the meeting in Changchunling village took place on 17 December 2007, involved over 500 farmers and was in relation to “property lost to the authorities’ illegal land seizure”. According to the report the government confiscated land in Changchunling village and the Fujin area approximately ten years ago for a joint agricultural project with Korea for which only a small amount of compensation was paid to the farmers. The report provides the following information on the activities of farmers in Changchunling village and the Fujin region to reclaim their farmland and the reaction by government authorities:

On December 17, 2007, over 500 farmers in Changchunling Village, Fujin City, Heilongjiang Province of Northeast China gathered to reclaimed ownership of their property lost to the authorities' illegal land seizure.

Changchunling is the second village announcing land reclamation in this area. Two weeks ago villagers of Dongnangang Village first took autonomic actions, claiming ownership of 100 acres of property.

Since then, 40,000 Fujin farmers have announced their determination online to oust village officials in an effort to retrieve a total of roughly 100,000 acres of land the authorities have taken.

Though Chinese authorities quickly responded with violent suppression, Changchunling farmers have proven that the autonomic land reclamation movement is spreading fast.

Fujin farmers’ fight for land started 13 years ago when the authorities expropriated ten percent of the city’s farmlands to build a farm funded by Korean investors, paying only a trivial amount of compensation to the farmers. Though the Korean farm project was later cancelled, the farmers never had their lands back.

After 13 years’ inconclusive seek for justice, the farmers decided to take active measures. The movement was kindled in June 2007 when farmer representatives approached foreign media and showed them the signatures of support they had collected, and offered the slogan, “We Want Human Rights, Not Olympic Games.”

With the growing mobilization, the Fujin municipal government increased their pressure against the farmers, resulting in the arrest of Yu Changwu, leader and key defender of Dongnangang farmers’ rights.

...Farmers said police drove through the villages and kept a close watch on residents, attempting to threaten and bribe villagers off the land reclamation. After these tactics failed, the authorities are now trying to steal the residents’ land use certificates that determine legal ownership, said the villagers.

Villagers revealed that on December 15, Fujin City police approached the Changchunling Village clerk and ordered him to produce the land use documents on file.

The authorities’ efforts only made farmers fully realize the importance of the certificates for regaining their lands, so they refused to submit these documents that signify legal ownership of the property.

Despite the escalating persecution from authorities, Changchunling villagers began to reclaim land on December 16. On the villager meeting the next day, the village chief was persuaded to support the initiative to take back the land as a collective asset, and agreed to represent the villagers in making specific arrangements. Villagers said that the reclaimed property will be equally divided amongst the 2,200 villagers.

Though all villagers support the plan to equally divide the land, many fear the gang which the authorities have employed for over ten years to suppress villagers. Though many were too afraid to attend the meeting, over 500 villagers bravely did so and publicly demanded that the land be returned to their rightful owners.

Villagers who did not attend the assembly said that they are too scared of the authorities to say anything.

Attendants of the meeting were harassed later. In a telephone interview, Zhang, a villager who attended the meeting said that after the assembly a group of people came to his door. Among the group were policemen, local officials, and Communist Party Committee secretaries.

“They came to ask how we were dividing the land, and according to what documents,” said Zhang. “I replied that we were dividing the land according to the land certificates.”

When asked to hand the phone over to the government officials who were questioning him, Zhang said, “They asked who you were, and said this has nothing to do with you, so will not take the call.”

“The villagers have done nothing wrong,” exclaimed Zhang “The authorities cannot arrest people without reason. There’s nothing to fear.”

Changchunling Village has a vast amount of land. Over ten years ago during a joint venture, in which China was to begin an agricultural project with Korea, the land was taken through what the villagers describe as governmental deception. The project has yet to begin, but the “Fujin City Agriculture Development Company” has been occupying the land the entire time.

The company general manager and assistant general manager both own great amount of land. Fujin city council officials and city hall have also taken land from the farmers. Former Fujin city council member and assistant secretary Ge Qixia, and assistant secretary in charge of agriculture, Guo Fushan, together hold over 1600 acres of stolen land (Xiao, F. 2007, ‘Chinese Farmers’ Land Reclamation Movement Spreads’, *The Epoch Times*, 22 December <http://en.epochtimes.com/tools/printer.asp?id=63195> – Accessed 20 March 2009 – Attachment 2).

2. Were they supported by the farmers in Jiangsu, Shaanxi and Sichuan?

A report by *The Washington Post*, dated 14 January 2008 describes the spreading of the land reclamation movement to other regions in China. The report states that according to local farmers in Fujin “as word of their movement spread on the Internet ... farmers to the south, in Jiangsu and Shaanxi provinces and in the Chengdu and Tianjin regions, followed suit”. *The Washington Post* reports that:

The redistribution exercise at Changchunling was not an isolated incident. Rather, it marked what appears to be the start of a backlash against China’s system of collective land ownership in rural areas.

The uprising began here in the frigid, snow-covered soybean fields around Fujin city, 900 miles northeast of Beijing in Heilongjiang province, close to the Russian border. In a few weeks, it had spread to half a dozen other areas around the country, raising fundamental ideological questions for a government that still describes itself as Marxist-Leninist after 30 years of economic reforms.

...Here in the jurisdiction of Fujin, more than 70 villages have tried to privatize their lands over the past month, according to local farmers. As word of their movement spread on the Internet, they said, farmers to the south, in Jiangsu and Shaanxi provinces and in the Chengdu and Tianjin regions, followed suit. Farmers in 20 other locations have discussed doing so but have been afraid to come out with a public declaration, activists said (Cody, E. 2008, 'Farmers Rise In Challenge To Chinese Land Policy', *The Washington Post*, 14 January http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/01/13/ar2008011302383_pf.html – Accessed 20 March 2009 – Attachment 1).

The Washington Post report above states that according to information from Fujin farmers the land reclamation extended to Chengdu among other regions in China. Information from the *Microsoft Encarta Interactive Atlas* indicates that Chengdu is the capital of Sichuan ('Chengdu/Sichuan/Geography' 2000, *Microsoft Encarta Interactive Atlas* – Attachment 3)

On 14 January 2007 *The Vancouver Sun* reported on the "growing movement demanding the privatization of farmland" in China. The report states that this movement started in Heilongjiang province on 9 December and that subsequent land reclamation activity has been undertaken by farmers in Shaanxi and Jiangsu provinces. The report provides the following information:

The Chinese government has moved swiftly and decisively to try to smother a growing movement demanding the privatization of farmland.

...The government was responding to mounting demands by hundreds of thousands of peasant farmers to acquire freehold ownership of their land. In some cases villages have unilaterally declared ownership of their farmland and have parceled out freehold ownership to farmers in defiance of national law.

The movement, which has surfaced in three provinces, is a reaction to the nationwide problem of the new feudalism that dogs rural China: corrupt local government and party officials seizing farmland to sell to developer cronies for real estate projects.

...The land reform movement surfaced in northeastern Heilongjiang province on December 9 with the posting of a declaration on a Chinese website, Boxun.

...Three days later another declaration was posted, this one claiming to be from 70,000 farmers from three counties in Shaanxi province. They announced "permanent ownership" of nearly 20,250 hectares of land to which they have traditional use rights, but which has been grabbed by local officials.

There are reports that three farmers from the Shaanxi movement have been arrested.

Most recently, farmers in eastern Jiangsu province have announced their ownership of seized land.

In the rural suburbs of Tianjin City in Jiangsu, farmers physically prevented construction of a "Green Ecological Park" -- a revenue-generating theme park -- by the district council.

The 800 hectares of land was seized by the council in 1992, ostensibly for a reservoir. But officials instead created a fish farm from which they are reported to have made millions of dollars in recent years.

Despite official attempts to damp down the land reform movement, it is perhaps the major issue in China today (Manthorpe, J. 2008, 'China fights movement to privatize farmland', *Vancouver Sun*, 14 January

<http://www2.canada.com/vancouversun/news/business/story.html?id=e75d50ca-1fa6-4296-bbaa-008c75b1af93> – Accessed 23 March 2009 – Attachment 4).

On 26 December 2007, *The Epoch Times* reported that farmers from the Sanmenxia Reservoir Area in Shaanxi province posted a notice online proclaiming their ownership of expropriated farmland. The report states the farmers “got inspiration from a similar action taken by farmers in Fujin City, Heilongjiang Province to reclaim land, which was unlawfully expropriated from them”. The following is a brief excerpt of the report:

70,000 farmers from the Sanmenxia Reservoir Area on the Yellow River in Shaanxi Province unanimously decided to make a nationwide announcement, proclaiming their ownership over the land taken from them.

The farmers posted an online notice on December 12, reclaiming their ownership of 150,000 mu (24,705 acres, 1 mu is about 0.1647 acre) of expropriated land.

...According to Zhang Sanmin, a representative of the evacuees in Huayin, 10,627 evictees signed their names to the notice. Meanwhile, Chen Sizhong and Chi Xinji, representatives of the evictees in Huayin, were detained in early December, being charged with distributing leaflets and exercising influence through public opinion.

...In the notice, the evictees declared their ownership over 150,000 mu of land which they are currently contracting. The land shall be used and owned by the farmers for generations. The farmers also claimed their rights to the other 150,000 mu of land which had been expropriated by local officials at all levels. They would organize all the farmers to equally divide the land among themselves, based on per capita farming area, to bring an end to unwarranted land seizures.

...Liu Caomin said that the land was passed down by their ancestors and was considered the farmers' very life; without land, they could not survive. The authorities gave the evictees little compensation, while the local officials carved up the land or sold it for personal interests. The local authorities misappropriated the budget for the settlement of evictees to construct luxurious office buildings and residences for officials; land was the origin of the officials' corrupt behavior, said Liu.

The evictees say they got inspiration from a similar action taken by farmers in Fujin City, Heilongjiang Province to reclaim land, which was unlawfully expropriated from them (Qinger, G. 2007 '70,000 farmers declare to take back their expropriated land', *The Epoch Times*, 26 December – Attachment 5).

3. Can you find any reference to a solicitor having any part in this movement?

No information was found in the sources consulted regarding any individual by name who is a lawyer, solicitor, activist or associated with the land reclamation movement in China.

A report dated 9 December 2007 from the Sound of Hope (SOH) News website states that villagers from Fujin City “appointed a lawyer to defend their rights based on the ‘Rural Organization Law’ and ‘the State Council’s Notice on Rural Collective Work’”. The report does not however, provide details as to the name of the appointed lawyer. The report states that:

On the 5th December, a SOH reporter interviewed the rights representative of the ‘lost-land’ farmers in Fujin city of Hei-Long-Jiang Province, who revealed that on the 30th November 2007, nearly nine hundred villagers of Fujin City have dismissed the Party Chief of their village, because he failed to fulfil his duties. **The villagers appointed a lawyer to defend their rights based on the “Rural Organization Law” and “the State Council’s Notice on Rural Collective Work”.** As a result, they took action in unison to remove the Party Chief and restored their title to nearly 1,000 acres of the fertilized field that has been seized by the local government for 13 years (Ru, F., Ling, T., Toirkens, E. & Wang, S. 2007 ‘Heilongjiang farmers win back their land’, Sound of Hope News website, 9 December <http://sohnews.com/2007/12/09/heilong-jiang-farmers-win-back-their-land/> – Accessed 24 March 2009 – Attachment 6).

List of Sources Consulted

Internet Sources:

Government Information & Reports

Immigration & Refugee Board of Canada <http://www.irb.gc.ca/>

UK Home Office <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk>

US Department of State <http://www.state.gov/>

US Department of State website <http://www.state.gov>

United Nations (UN)

UNHCR <http://www.unhchr.ch/>

Non-Government Organisations

Amnesty International website <http://www.amnesty.org/>

Freedom House <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=1>

Human Rights Watch <http://www.hrw.org/>

International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights <http://www.ihf-hr.org/welcome.php>

Human Rights Internet (HRI) website <http://www.hri.ca>

International News & Politics

BBC News website <http://news.bbc.co.uk/>

The Washington Post <http://www.washingtonpost.com/>

Sound of Hope Radio Network <http://sohnetwork.com/>

Vancouver Sun <http://www.vancouversun.com/>

Region Specific Links

Human Rights in China <http://www.hrichina.org/public/index\>

IHLO <http://www.ihlo.org/index.html>

The Epoch Times <http://www.theepochtimes.com/>

Search Engines

Google search engine <http://www.google.com.au/>

Databases:

FACTIVA (news database)

BACIS (DIAC Country Information database)

REFINFO (IRBDC (Canada) Country Information database)
ISYS (RRT Research & Information database, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, US Department of State Reports)
RRT Library Catalogue

List of Attachments

1. Cody, E. 2008, 'Farmers Rise in Challenge to Chinese Land Policy', *The Washington Post*, 14 January http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/01/13/ar2008011302383_pf.html – Accessed 20 March 2009.
2. Xiao, F. 2007, 'Chinese Farmers' Land Reclamation Movement Spreads', *The Epoch Times*, 22 December <http://en.epochtimes.com/tools/printer.asp?id=63195> – Accessed 20 March 2009.
3. 'Chengdu/Sichuan/Geography' 2000, *Microsoft Encarta Interactive Atlas*.
4. Manthorpe, J. 2008, 'China fights movement to privatize farmland', *Vancouver Sun*, 14 January <http://www2.canada.com/vancouvernews/business/story.html?id=e75d50ca-1fa6-4296-bbaa-008c75b1af93> – Accessed 23 March 2009.
5. Qinger, G. 2007 '70,000 farmers declare to take back their expropriated land', *The Epoch Times*, 26 December. (CISNET China CX190295)
6. Ru, F., Ling, T., Toirkens, E. & Wang, S. 2007 'Heilongjiang farmers win back their land', Sound of Hope Radio News website, 9 December <http://sohnews.com/2007/12/09/heilong-jiang-farmers-win-back-their-land/> – Accessed 24 March 2009.