

**Refugee Review Tribunal
AUSTRALIA**

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

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Questions

1. Please provide current information on the situation and treatment of Christians in Hubei, including any reference to events around the above date?

RESPONSE

1. Please provide current information on the situation and treatment of Christians in Hubei, including any reference to events around the above date?

Little recent information was found in the sources consulted on the situation and treatment of Christians in Hubei province and no reference was found to any events around 22 July 2008. Sources report that in recent years (2007-2009) some Christians were detained and released. Also reported were children being evicted from a Christian orphanage and a Church demolished. In China generally the situation for Christians varies between regions.

Definitive information on the number of Christians in Hubei was not found in the sources consulted. However, one 2004 estimate accessed from the Mission Network News (MNN) states:

[Erik] Burklin shares, “Here in Hubei Province, where I’m currently visiting, there are 500-thousand baptized Christians which only have 60 ordained pastors who shepherd these Christians. That is a ratio of one pastor for every eight thousand three hundred Christians” (‘Chinese Christians march on in their faith’ 2004, Mission Network News website, 4 May <http://www.mnnonline.org/article/5968> – Accessed 19 May 2009 – Attachment 1).

On the MNN information accessed from its website states that it “is a mission news service dedicated to keeping Christians informed on evangelical mission activity around the world” (‘About Mission Network News’ (undated), Mission Network News website <http://www.mnnonline.org/about/> – Accessed 20 May 2009 – Attachment 2).

Also on the number of Christians in Hubei, Tony Lambert in the 2006 publication *China’s Christian Millions* writes:

...In 2002 a leading TSPM [Three-Self Patriotic Movement] pastor in the province estimated that there were about 500,000 Protestants. In early 2003 there were about 400 registered churches open as well as many meeting-points. Also in 2003 the TSPM reported that Wuhan itself had 60,000 Protestants meeting in six large churches...(Lambert, Tony 2006, *China’s Christian Millions*, Monarch Books, Oxford, pp.251-252 – Attachment 3).

No information was found in the sources consulted on the treatment of Christians in Hubei in 2009. The following reports in respect of the years 2007-2008 refer to Christians being detained and released, children being evicted from a Christian orphanage and a Church demolished.

For the year 2008 the China Aid Association (CAA), citing South China Church sources, reported that four members of that church were missing from their house churches in Jingmen and Xiangfan cities in Hubei. They were reportedly taken away by Bureau of State Security officials at the beginning of November 2008. In February 2009 *Radio Free Asia* reported that three detainees in Jingmen were still being held by the authorities. It is of interest that, according to the US State Department, the South China Church is banned in China (China Aid Association 2008, ‘Four Christians Missing in Hubei Since Beginning of November; Many More Persecuted by Authorities’, 12 December http://www.chinaaid.org/qry/page.taf?id=105&_function=detail&sbtblct_uid1=1093&_nc=2817812f55e0501bdad3119b88e001d3 – Accessed 18 May 2009 – Attachment 4; Long, Qiao & Yuan, Fang 2009, ‘No Visits’ For Detained Christians’, *Radio Free Asia*, 2 February <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/china/china-christians-02092009171637.html?searchterm=None> – Accessed 19 May 2009 – Attachment 5; US Department of State 2008, ‘Legal/Policy Framework’ in *International Religious Freedom Report 2008 – China*, 19 September – Attachment 6).

On the CAA the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board has noted that it is “a US-based, non-profit organization that investigates and advocates for religious freedom in China” (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2008, *CHN102868 – China: Treatment of children of members of underground Christian churches; whether children of members of underground Christian churches are subject to sanctions, including reduced access to education and to health care*, 26 June http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/research/rir/index_e.htm?action=record.viewrec&gotorec=451963 – Accessed 20 November 2008 – Attachment 7).

Sources have also stated that in January 2008 Hubei authorities reportedly evicted children from a Christian orphanage in the ‘province as part of a “crackdown on Christian activities”’ (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2008, *CHN102868 – China: Treatment of children of members of underground Christian churches; whether children of members of underground Christian churches are subject to sanctions, including reduced access to education and to health care*, 26 June http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/research/rir/index_e.htm?action=record.viewrec&gotorec=451963 – Accessed

20 November 2008 – Attachment 7; ‘Police arrest a group of orphans “guilty” of living with an underground Christian’ 2008, AsiaNews.it website, 15 January <http://www.asianews.it/index.php?l=en&art=11256#> – Accessed 15 October 2008 – Attachment 8).

The 2008 article from the AsiaNews.it website mentioned above also commented on a document, said to have been leaked by the Chinese Communist Party in Hubei, concerning a campaign to “normalise” underground churches:

According to a secret document of the Chinese communist party of Hubei province, which was leaked to the West last November, there is a campaign underway in China to “normalise” the underground Protestant Churches by offering them two possibilities: either join the Movement of the Three Autonomies (the Protestant communities led by the patriotic associations) or be suppressed (‘Police arrest a group of orphans “guilty” of living with an underground Christian’ 2008, AsiaNews.it website, 15 January <http://www.asianews.it/index.php?l=en&art=11256#> – Accessed 15 October 2008 – Attachment 8).

This appears to be the document reported by the CAA to have been issued at the local level. The CAA stated:

Though this document was issued in a local level, it does reveal that the central government has directed a national campaign specifically against unregistered Christian House churches. According to the document, the secret campaign was launched “based on the relevant documents from the central government, provincial government, and municipal government and the decisions from the working conference on special administration on Christianity throughout our province.” Moreover, according to “Guidelines and General Requirements” of the Work Plan, the whole campaign was urged and instructed by the National Christian Working Seminar and “leading comrades in the central government” (China Aid Association 2007, ‘Secret document reveals Chinese Government’s campaign against unregistered churches’, November <http://thesop.org/index.php?article=8299> – Accessed 19 August 2008 – Attachment 9).

For the year 2007 it was reported that in June 2007 a 73-year old Bishop, Jia Zhiguo of Zhengding, Hubei, was arrested by the police. It was the tenth time he had been arrested since 2004. He was reportedly held by security officials until released on 22 June 2007 (US Department of State 2007, ‘Abuses of Religious Freedom’ in *International Religious Freedom Report 2007 – China*, 14 September – Attachment 10).

The US Congressional-Executive Commission on China, sourcing information to the CAA, stated that one church was demolished in Hubei in 2007 (US Congressional-Executive Commission on China 2008, ‘Freedom of Religion’ in *Annual Report 2008*, 31 October, pp.83,233 – Attachment 11).

The CAA also reported the following incidents in 2007:

- In October 2007: A house church was raided in Wuhan. The church members were banned from using the building and the offertory box confiscated (China Aid Association 2008, *Annual Report of Persecution by the Government on Christian House Churches within Mainland China: January 2007-December 2007*, February, p.15 – Attachment 12; China Aid Association 2008, ‘House Church Building Banned By Government Officials’, 27 January

http://www.chinaaid.org/qry/page.taf?id=105& function=detail&sbtblct_uid1=888&nc=2817812f55e0501bdad3119b88e001d3 – Accessed 18 May 2009 – Attachment 13).

- In September 2007: A house church in Yun County was raided and five people arrested (China Aid Association 2008, *Annual Report of Persecution by the Government on Christian House Churches within Mainland China: January 2007-December 2007*, February, p.15 – Attachment 12).
- In July 2007: A Christian meeting in Enshi prefecture was raided by police. Nine people were said to have been sentenced to education through labour. CAA reported that seven were released in January 2008 (China Aid Association 2008, *Annual Report of Persecution by the Government on Christian House Churches within Mainland China: January 2007-December 2007*, February, p.15 – Attachment 12; China Aid Association 2007, ‘9 House Church Leaders Sent to Labor Camps Secretly in Hubei Province’, 5 October <http://chinaaid.org/2007/10/05/9-house-church-leaders-sent-to-labor-camps-secretly-in-hubei-province/> – Accessed 10 November 2008 – Attachment 14; China Aid Association 2008, ‘3 Female House Church Leaders in Hubei Released Earlier from Labor Camp’, 23 January http://www.chinaaid.org/qry/page.taf?id=105& function=detail&sbtblct_uid1=886&nc=2817812f55e0501bdad3119b88e001d3 – Accessed 18 May 2009 – Attachment 15).

It may be of interest that the US State Department made the following comments on the Chinese government’s attitude towards unregulated religious gatherings and meetings of Christians in China generally:

The Government perceived unregulated religious gatherings or groups as a potential challenge to its authority and attempted to control and regulate religious groups to prevent the rise of sources of authority outside the control of the Government and the CCP [Chinese Communist Party]. In some regions, government supervision of religious activity was minimal, with registered and unregistered churches existing openly and receiving similar treatment by the authorities. In other regions, local officials supervised religion strictly, and authorities placed pressure on unregistered churches. Local regulations, provincial work reports, and other government and party documents continued to exhort officials to enforce government policy regarding unregistered churches and illegal religious activities.

There were reports of repression of unregistered Protestant church networks and house churches during the reporting period. In some areas, government authorities pressured house churches to affiliate with one of the PRAs [Patriotic Religious Associations] and to register with religious affairs authorities by organizing registration campaigns and by detaining and interrogating leaders who refused to register. In other parts of the country unregistered groups grew rapidly and the authorities did not pressure them to register.

The website of SARA [State Administration for Religious Affairs] states that family and friends holding meetings at home (as distinct from formal worship services in public venues) need not register with the Government (the “Family and Friend Worship Policy”). However, there were many reports that police and officials of local Religious Affairs Bureaus (RABs) disrupted home worship meetings claiming that participants disturbed neighbors or social order, or belonged to an “evil cult.” Police sometimes detained worshippers attending such services for hours or days and prevented further worship activities. Police interrogated church leaders and laypersons about their worship activities at locations including meeting sites,

hotel rooms, and detention centers. NGOs reported that church leaders faced harsher treatment than members, including greater frequency and length of detention, formal arrest, and reeducation-through-labor or imprisonment. According to NGO and media reports, in some cases local officials also confiscated and destroyed the property of unregistered religious groups.

Some unregistered religious groups had significant membership, properties, financial resources, and networks. House churches encountered difficulties when their membership grew, when they arranged for the regular use of facilities for the purpose of conducting religious activities, or when they forged links with other unregistered groups or with coreligionists overseas. Urban house churches were sometimes limited to meetings of a few dozen members or less, while meetings of unregistered Protestants in small cities and rural areas could number in the hundreds openly and with the knowledge of local authorities (US Department of State 2008, 'Restrictions on Religious Freedom' in *International Religious Freedom Report 2008 – China*, 19 September – Attachment 6).

List of Sources Consulted

Internet Sources:

Google search engine <http://www.google.com.au/>
BBC News <http://news.bbc.co.uk/>
China Aid Association (CAA) <http://www.chinaaid.org/qry/page.taf>
Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) <http://www.csw.org.uk/portal.htm>
Human Rights in China (HRIC) <http://www.hrichina.org/public/index>
Information Centre for Human Rights and Democracy
<http://www.hkhkhk.com/english/indexen.html>
Mission Network News (MNN) <http://www.mnnonline.org/>
OMF International <http://www.omf.org/>
Radio Free Asia (RFA) <http://www.rfa.org/english/>

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. 'Chinese Christians march on in their faith' 2004, Mission Network News website, 4 May <http://www.mnnonline.org/article/5968> – Accessed 19 May 2009.
2. 'About Mission Network News' (undated), Mission Network News website <http://www.mnnonline.org/about/> – Accessed 20 May 2009.
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14. China Aid Association 2007, '9 House Church Leaders Sent to Labor Camps Secretly in Hubei Province', 5 October <http://chinaaid.org/2007/10/05/9-house-church-leaders-sent-to-labor-camps-secretly-in-hubei-province/> – Accessed 10 November 2008.
15. China Aid Association 2008, '3 Female House Church Leaders in Hubei Released Earlier from Labor Camp', 23 January http://www.chinaaid.org/qry/page.taf?id=105&_function=detail&sbtblct_uid1=886&nc=2817812f55e0501bdad3119b88e001d3 – Accessed 18 May 2009.