

# ChinaAid 对华援助协会

**AN INQUIRY INTO HUMAN RIGHTS IN CHINA 2016-2020**

**The Conservative Party Human Rights Commission**

**Subject: Christian Persecution Overview 2016-2020**

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*It is worth noting that while ChinaAid has received information about and reported on a number of religious freedom abuse cases suffered by people of a variety of different faiths, most of our information centers on the Chinese government's abuse of Christians. As such, this report primarily focuses on Christian persecution cases. Other religious practitioners persecuted between 2016 and 2020 include but are not limited to Uyghur Muslims and Tibetan Buddhists.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

As the decade drew to a close, China intensified its persecution of religious practitioners. Under the direction of Chinese President Xi Jinping, the nation’s officials began the “Five-Year Plan for the Sinicization of Christianity” in 2018, which aims to shape the faith into a “religion with Chinese characteristics.”

By this, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) intends to bring Christianity under the full control of the government. Already, officials have forced Christians in state-run churches, also called Three-Self Churches, to demolish their crosses and fly the national flag, sing patriotic songs, and listen to secondary sermons extolling the government.

Non-government churches, called “house churches,” have been outlawed completely. Many of them are ordered to join the official church system and submit to government censorship. Often, authorities inform these church leaders that their congregations are “illegal” and accuse the Christians who attend these churches of various crimes.

## II. ESCALATION OF PERSECUTION

### i. Comparison of the number of people persecuted in 2018 and 2017

**Table 3-1: Comparison of persecution by year in six categories**

Year	2017	2018
No. of persecution cases	1,265	> 10,000
No. of people persecuted	> 223,200 (church leaders > 1,900)	> 1,000,000 (church leaders > 10,000)
No. of people detained	> 3,700 (church leaders > 650)	> 5,000 (church leaders > 1,000)
No. of people arrested	347	> 500
No. of abuse cases	> 300	> 2,000
No. of people abused	> 2,000	> 50,000

More than 1,000,000 people were persecuted in 2018, which is three-and-a-half times more than those recorded in 2017. Of those, more than 10,000 church leaders were persecuted, which is five times greater than those recorded in 2017.

The number of people arrested—more than 5,000—went up by 35 percent. This includes more than 1,000 church leaders, an increase of 54 percent from 2017.

More than 500 people were sentenced to prison terms, an increase of 44 percent from 2017.

More than 50,000 people were abused, constituting an increase of 25 percent from 2017.

### ii. Comparison of persecution cases in 2018 and 2017



There were more than 10,000 persecution cases documented in 2018, which is 36 times greater than those recorded in 2017.

In 2018, there were more than 2,000 abuse cases, including physical, verbal, mental abuse and torture, which is five times more than in 2017.

### iii. Basic annual analysis

When juxtaposed with 2017, information garnered about persecution in 2018 charts an increase of at least 35 percent in the six categories mentioned above, among which the number of persecution cases and the number of people abused record an exponential rise, the number of persecution cases being 36 times greater and the number of people abused being 25 times greater than in 2017. The number of abuse cases increases by five times, and the number of people persecuted, especially church leaders, also shows a remarkable growth. It is fair to say that in the four decades since 1978, the severity of the persecution of churches and Christians in mainland

China is unprecedented under Xi's sinicization.

#### **iv. Key findings for 2019**

As an agency that closely monitors the government persecution of churches and Christians in mainland China, ChinaAid has gathered information from church leaders, church staff, and ordinary Christians from both house churches and state-run Three-Self Churches, as well as individuals concerned with religious rights. After reviewing this information, ChinaAid has concluded that the persecution that occurred in 2019 exceeds that which happened in 2018.

The data and information collected by ChinaAid in 2019 may only represent a fraction of the actual abuses that occurred in China. Though not comprehensive, these cases cover a wide range of Chinese provinces and municipalities, are diverse in nature, and represent a variety of backgrounds, including urban and rural house churches and Three-Self Churches, and individual religious practitioners, such as pastors, evangelists, missionaries, ordinary Christians, Christians in public realms (human rights lawyers and political dissidents, etc.), college students, high school students, children, business owners, and ethnic minority Christians.

Many persecuted churches, obviously pressured by the authorities, dared not disclose details of their persecution to us. As a result, it was extremely difficult to collect data this year, making a detailed analysis difficult. However, this is a marked difference from previous years, and the reports ChinaAid has received indicate that persecution is not relenting. Instead, authorities have continued to carry out the central government's orders to force religion to place the Chinese government's ideals at its center, and officials arrest those who resist. This leads ChinaAid to believe the Chinese government is threatening or otherwise intimidating Christians into not reporting the abuses to international media. China's lack of openness on this matter causes ChinaAid to believe that the persecution of Christians and Christian churches in mainland China worsened in 2019.

### **III. CONTROL AND REFORM OF CHRISTIANITY**

2018 was the first year of implementing the CCP's "Five-Year Plan for the Sinicization of Christianity." In summary, ChinaAid sees the CCP's persecution of Christianity and Christians in 2018 as an experiment or rehearsal to construct a new model (the "para-Cultural-Revolution" model) for controlling religion, especially Christianity, in the context of Xi Jinping's New Era. This era is characterized by the ideology that "the CCP rules all" and the implementation of the Regulations on Religious Affairs. This new model shows the following trends and characteristics.

#### **i. Alienating Christianity and Faith in Jesus**

In China, the government has designated politics to command and lead religion, guiding Christianity and Christians to shift from "Obey the Lord, follow the Lord" to "Obey the Party, follow the Party." Examples of this shift include: the Ten Commandments became "the Nine Commandments" in Henan province due to Xi Jinping's opposition to the first commandment;

the CCP's version of the "Three Character Canon" appeared in Jiangxi province to proclaim and promote the new Regulations on Religious Affairs, and the portraits of Jesus or Mary at believers' homes were forcibly removed and replaced with Xi Jinping's portrait. Some churches' worship service programs were forcibly revised in Anhui province, and at some churches in Henan province, the pictures of Xi Jinping and Mao Zedong were posted on the left and right side of the cross, and a flag of China was put next to them.

"Red" ideological logos and symbols replaced Christian and Jesus-related symbols, which manifested as the following:

Besides extensive cross demolition, Christians were forced to remove Christian folk artwork from their homes and forbidden to post Chinese New Year door banners with Christian messages. Tiles and door banners with Christian messages on believers' doorways were removed or painted over with black paint, and the word "Immanuel" posted on the walls of believers' homes was scratched. Christian books and publications were confiscated, and the printing and posting of Jesus' portrait was also forbidden. On the other hand, the "Four Entries" campaign was conducted across the nation, i.e. the entering of the flag of China, the entering of the Constitution, laws and regulations, the entering of core socialist values, and the entering of excellent traditional Chinese culture into churches. Posters about "core socialist values" and Xi's portraits were hung in churches, and the CCP even established its branches in some churches and organized for the congregation to sing revolutionary songs.

Full control was exercised over the Three-Self Churches in the name of standardizing management, including religious activity sites, personnel, funding, and church activities. For example, evangelists were reevaluated, and restrictions were placed on the number of evangelists and the method of evaluation, and even the content of sermons was monitored. Churches were asked to make a plan for developing new converts and surveillance cameras were installed all over churches. The Three-Self Church network of Henan province even proposed "nine forbidden practices."

## **ii. Persecution methods: illegal and radical**

The use of violence (beating, smashing, and robbing) was on the rise, including forcibly demolishing churches, even by use of dynamite; forcibly demolishing crosses, even by setting them on fire; forcibly outlawing and shutting down churches, accompanied by raiding, searching, and smashing church buildings and even openly burning Bibles.

"Falsified" accusations and completely illegal means were employed, including raiding church gatherings and disrupting church services; summoning and interviewing believers to utter threats; pressuring landlords into evicting churches and openly appropriating church properties; fabricating criminal charges to detain, arrest, and sentence church leaders and lay believers; persecuting pro-democracy Christians and Christian dissidents and even kidnapping them; and preventing lawyers from intervening in cases related to churches and Christians.

## **iii. Christianity perceived as an enemy**

Attempts were made to eliminate all house churches, including outlawing influential mega house churches across the nation, removing their presence on the internet, and forbidding evangelistic organizations from proclaiming the Gospel online; having pilot house churches either join the Three-Self Church or disband; disqualifying house church clergy for evangelism; and misusing fines and other administrative penalties on house churches in the name of “illegal religious activities” to exhaust churches financially.

A discriminatory and even anti-Christian social atmosphere was fostered by: (local governments in many places) forbidding the celebration of “foreign holidays,” particularly Christian holidays and mainly Christmas, and openly forbidding the sale of the Bible in online stores; forbidding citizens to believe in Christianity, which has extended from CCP members, civil servants, and military servicemen to non-CCP members and average citizens, and from inside the government system to outside the government system, and forcing people to sign a statement promising not to follow the Christian faith; dramatically increasing the range of people banned from churches, especially children; placing unprecedented restrictions on schools with a Christian background, forcibly suspending business operations with a Christian background, and imposing restrictions on Christians’ daily living; and discriminating against them in their access to social security, employment, and bank loans. It showed a comprehensive persecution of Christians in economic, social, and cultural arenas.

Attempts were made to wipe out the Christian faith, as evidenced by forcing adult believers to leave their faith and sign a statement to promise not to practice it and even requiring schools and parents to make children give up their Christian beliefs. Officials also forbade children’s access to the Christian faith on all fronts and entirely deprived them of their right to believe in Christianity.

#### **IV. KEY CASES**

##### **Gao Zhisheng**

As an attorney, Gao served people prosecuted by the Chinese Communist Party for decades. For his work, he was twice nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. China, however, targeted him, and he spent years locked away.

While behind bars, he suffered multiple counts of torture, which he described in his piece “Dark Night, Dark Hood, and Kidnapping by Dark Mafia.”

Gao was released from one of his sentences in 2014, but authorities monitored him closely in his home, even blocking him from receiving dental care. During the three years he lived in that apartment, he secretly penned *Unwavering Convictions*, a book that describes atrocities committed by the Chinese Communist Party. ChinaAid smuggled the book out of China and published it with the Carolina Academic Press and the American Bar Association. The book, which has been translated into English, can be purchased [here](#).

On Aug. 23, 2017, two of Gao’s supporters sneaked him out of his house and brought him to the

neighboring Shanxi province. There, they hid for 23 days, but officials eventually found them, and Gao vanished into police custody again.

He has never been found.

Because of the pressure placed on his family, Gao's wife and children fled to the United States in 2009.

### **Li Baiguang**

Dr. Li began defending victims of human rights abuses, such as impoverished farmers, in March 2001, for which he was detained on Dec. 14, 2004. He continued his work after his release on Jan. 21, 2005, and a Beijing church baptized him as a Christian later that year.

After his release, he took on more cases, defending some of his fellow persecuted human rights lawyers and members of China's house church. Months before his death, he was dragged into a forest in Zhejiang province and beaten by his kidnappers, who threatened to kill him if he didn't leave the area by 10 a.m. the next day. After he reported the case to the police, he received anonymous death threats. Nevertheless, Li never wavered in his decision to fight Communist Party abuses.

Dr. Li passed away mysteriously just hours after being admitted to the hospital for a stomach ache on February 25, 2018. His death was confirmed at 3 a.m. China Standard Time the next day. The Chinese government hastily cremated his body before an autopsy could be done and claimed he died of liver disease despite no previously known medical conditions.

During his career, Li took multiple trips to Washington, D.C., with ChinaAid delegations, meeting with prominent officials, many of whom were in attendance at the D.C. memorial. In addition, he also met twice with President George W. Bush. His last trip occurred in February just weeks before his death.

His legacy lives on as a champion of religious freedom and the rights of minorities.

### **Pastor John Cao**

Pastor John Cao served as a missionary in Myanmar's Wa State, transforming the lives of more than 2,000 impoverished minority children by building 16 schools and worked to fight poverty in the region. Chinese officials knew that he repeatedly crossed the border between China and Myanmar because of his work and allowed him to do so for three years.

However, on March 5, 2017, authorities in China's Yunnan province intercepted Cao and his colleague, Jing Ruxia, and placed them in prison on illegal border crossing charges, despite the fact that they had never had trouble before. Later, they changed Cao's charge to "organizing illegal border crossings," and he was sentenced to seven years in prison in March 2018.

Cao is married to an American citizen, Jamie Powell, and is a legal resident of North Carolina. When faced with the option of obtaining American citizenship, he chose not to so as to better be able to serve the persecuted Chinese church.

Those observing Cao's case believe that his imprisonment does not come from the violation of any border law, but rather arose from China's ongoing campaign to suppress the Chinese church.

### **Pastor Wang Yi and Early Rain Covenant Church**

Months-long persecution of Early Rain Covenant Church, a large house church in Chengdu, culminated on December 9, 2018 in an overnight mass arrest, with around 100 people in custody. Within a week, an estimated 160 members of Early Rain Covenant Church had been imprisoned, including one of its pastors, Wang Yi, and Jiang Rong, Wang's wife, along with several elders. Wang was later placed under criminal detention for "inciting subversion of state power."

The Chinese government has continued their harassment of members of the Early Rain Covenant Church by arresting 44 more church attendees at two worship venues on February 24, 2019.

Most of the Christians have been released, but Wang was sentenced on Christmas day 2019 to nine-years in prison for "inciting subversion of state power" and conducting "illegal business operations." Officials accused him of these crimes because of his ministry and opposition to the rule of Chinese President Xi Jinping.

Police are currently surveilling Wang's wife, Jiang Rong, and their son. In addition, Wang's parents' home is closely watched by the authorities.

Pastor Wang Yi penned ["My Declaration of Civil Disobedience"](#) before his arrest in December 2018, anticipating that he might be someday imprisoned. He asked that it be distributed should he be incarcerated for more than 48 hours.

## **V. CONCLUSION**

Regardless of China's attempts to block information on persecution from reaching the outside world, ChinaAid's research shows that the oppression of Christians continues to increase with each passing year since 2017. As China advances its plan to Sinicize Christianity, authorities all over the country are interfering with normal church operations and seizing Christians for their religious activities. Given the observed universality in which both house churches and Three-Self Churches were persecuted, ChinaAid has concluded that the Chinese Communist Party's war on religion will continue to grow unless there is intervention.

## **VI. RECOMMENDATIONS**

From William Wilberforce to Lord David Alton, the United Kingdom has a rich history of standing for minority rights. ChinaAid urges the UK government to push back against the Chinese Communist Party's abuses and continuous suppression of religious freedom.

[Bishop of Truro's Independent Review](#) for the Foreign Secretary of Foreign Commonwealth Office concluded that the UK government's opportunities for independent action on the global stage have been under-utilized, and that the UK's changing relationship with the European Union

provides an opportunity for the Foreign Office to do more to preserve the rights of persecuted Christians.

ChinaAid urges the UK government to implement and utilize the ‘Magnitsky amendment’ to the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act in order to hold the bad actors accountable for their actions. However, there should be an expansion of the amendment to explicitly include those who commit violations of freedom of religion and belief that go against Article 19 of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In September 2019, Foreign Minister Dominic Raab stated the UK government will implement a [UK Magnitsky Act](#) after Britain exits the European Union.

The British government can also push back against the abuses as a Permanent Member of the United Nations Security Council. Considering China’s history of ignoring and blocking UN independent experts has been [well documented](#), there has been no repercussions against the China mission in Geneva.

It is vital to continue to tell the stories of those persecuted and to advocate on their behalf. It is a common tactic used by Chinese prison guards to tell the prisoners of conscience that they are forgotten by the world. To bring their names, voices, and families to the forefront is one of the best strategies to combat persecution because it can give hope where none should be found.