

**Refugee Review Tribunal
AUSTRALIA**

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

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Questions

- 1. Please provide information on the current situation for Christians in China, especially of underground or house churches, or of Christian groups known as "Shouters".**
- 2. Please provide information on whether police have been making arrests of such groups of people in Fuqing area.**

RESPONSE

- 1. Please provide information on the current situation for Christians in China, especially of underground or house churches, or of Christian groups known as "Shouters".**

A number of recent RRT research responses have looked at the situation of Christians in China. A research response dated 23 February 2007 provides information on underground Catholic churches in China (RRT Country Research 2007, *Research Response CHN31415*, 23 February – Attachment 1). The research response includes information from the 2006 annual report of the Congressional-Executive Commission on China regarding the Chinese government's treatment of registered and unregistered Catholic clerics. The annual report also comments on the treatment of "Chinese Protestants who worship in house churches." It is stated in the report that:

The Chinese government continues to repress Chinese Protestants who worship in house churches. From May 2005 to May 2006, the government detained nearly 2,000 house church members, according to one U.S. NGO. Almost 50 percent of the reported detentions of Protestant house church members and leaders took place in Henan province, where the house church movement is particularly strong. In June 2006, Pastor Zhang Rongliang, the leader of one of China's largest house churches, was sentenced to seven years and six months in prison for "illegally crossing the national border" and "fraudulently obtaining a passport."

Authorities have detained or imprisoned Pastor Zhang multiple times since 1976. Pastor Gong Shengliang is serving a life sentence in declining health, and was beaten in prison during the past year (Congressional-Executive Commission on China 2006, 'Congressional-Executive Commission on China Annual Report 2006', GECC website, 20 September, pp. 77-78 <http://www.cecc.gov/pages/annualRpt/annualRpt06/CECCAnnRpt2006.pdf> - Accessed 16 January 2007 – Attachment 2).

A research response dated 18 December 2006 looks at Christian groups operating in Fujian province and the treatment of Christians in China (RRT Country Research 2006, *Research Response CHN31081*, 18 December, (Questions 1, 3 & 4) – Attachment 4). The research response includes information from relevant sections of the US Department of State report on religious freedom in China for 2006 in relation to the treatment of unregistered protestant churches and Christian groups specifically banned by the Chinese authorities (US Department of State 2006, *International Religious Freedom Report 2006 – China (includes Tibet, Hong Kong and Macau)*, September – Attachment 5).

A research response dated 8 December 2006 provides information on the Shouter church in China and also specifically comments on the situation of the Shouters/Local Church in Fujian province (RRT Country Research 2006, *Research Response CHN31015*, 8 December, (Questions 1 & 2) – Attachment 6). The research response includes information from the US Commission on International Religious Freedom annual report dated May 2006 on unregistered churches and groups classified as “evil cults” in China (US Commission on International Religious Freedom 2006, *Annual report of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom* (Excerpt on China pp. 107-117), May, pp. 22 & 110 <http://www.uscirf.gov/countries/publications/currentreport/2006annualRpt.pdf#page=1> – Accessed 18 October 2006 – Attachment 7).

A research response dated 6 November 2006 includes information on the level of supervision of religious activity in China, whether China’s religious policy varies from province to province, whether there is a Chinese government policy regarding religious freedom – i.e. whether there are some religions which are condoned by the government, the growth of Christianity in China, the situation in Henan Province and in Fujian province, the types of controls of the Church in Fujian, the proportion of Christians/Protestants in Fujian, the likelihood of being detained for being an ordinary follower and the likelihood of detention for being a Christian leader (RRT Country Research 2006, *Research Response CHN30801*, 6 November, (Questions 1-10) – Attachment 8).

Another research response dated 20 October 2006 provides information on how house or local churches are currently viewed in China and whether house or local churches are now registered in Fujian province or whether some still operate illegally (RRT Country Research 2006, *Research Response CHN30786*, 20 October, (Questions 1, 2 & 3) – Attachment 9).

A research response dated 13 September 2006 looks at whether there was any information on the treatment of non-Catholic Christians in Fuqing (RRT Country Research 2006, *Research Response CHN30550*, 13 September – Attachment 10).

A research response dated 11 July 2006 includes information on the general attitude of the Chinese authorities to the Shouters and whether there was any evidence of Shouters or other illegal Christians being sent to labour camps from southern China around 2005-2006 (RRT Country Research 2006, *Research Response CHN30336*, 11 July – Attachment 11).

A research response dated 14 June 2006 provides information on the situation of the Shouters in China (RRT Country Research 2006, *Research Response CHN30207*, 14 June – Attachment 12).

A further research response dated 16 June 2006 provides information on the situation of underground Christians in Fujian, particularly in Fuqing (RRT Country Research 2006, *Research Response CHN30274*, 16 June – Attachment 13).

A research response dated 21 March 2006 includes information regarding the situation of Christians in Fujian province (RRT Country Research 2006, *Research Response CHN30047*, 21 March – Attachment 14).

A report dated January 2007 by the China Aid Association provides province by province details of the treatment of Chinese house churches. The report indicates that “According to CAA sources alone, the Chinese government arrested 651 Christians in 17 provinces in 2006, among which about 100 were detained more than 10 days, 18 Christians were sentenced to imprisonment for more than 1 year, 4 churches were destroyed, 4 were closed.” The report also indicates that:

During the period covered by this report, from January 2006 to December 2006, the Chinese government continued its general crackdown on unregistered house churches, but the strategies used have changed to some degree with the shifting domestic and international situation.

Reported incidents of raids on house churches have decreased in 2006 as compared to previous years. This tendency became clear in the second half of the year. Another development is that, although Public Security Officials still held house church leaders detained in the raids for extended periods, most church members were released after short interrogations on the spot. This strategy effectively decreased the number of arrests, but had the effect of transferring the pressure onto the church leaders, who were sometimes held for weeks or months. There is clear evidence that a number of these leaders were tortured and physically abused during the time they were held (China Aid Association 2007, *Annual Report on Persecution of Chinese House Churches by Province From January 2006 to December 2006*, January, pp. 2, 3 & 19 – Attachment 15).

The following articles also refer to members of unofficial churches in China being arrested and/or jailed. An *Associated Press Newswires* article dated 3 January 2007 indicates that the US-based China Aid Association had reported that police had “arrested three Christian church leaders” at an “illegal gathering” in Duolun in Inner Mongolia. Those detained “were sentenced to 15 days of administrative detention” (Bodeen, Christopher 2007, ‘China detains three church leaders after raid on private home, monitoring group reports’, *Associated Press Newswires*, 3 January – Attachment 16).

Another *Associated Press Newswires* article dated 30 December 2006 refers to “A senior official in China’s state-sanctioned Catholic church” denying “his association was cracking down on churches loyal to the Vatican following an unconfirmed media report that nine priests were arrested this week.” According to the article:

AsiaNews, a missionary news service close to the Vatican, reported Friday that nine priests from the underground Catholic church in north China’s Hebei province were arrested by police Wednesday as they gathered to pray near the city of Baoding.

The report called the alleged arrests part of a campaign by the government-backed Catholic Patriotic Association to subdue the underground church in Hebei, a traditional stronghold of Catholic sentiment in northern China.

...Liu Bainian, vice chairman of the association, said he had heard of no such arrests and denied there was a campaign under way to crush the church, which is loyal to the Pope.

“It would be impossible for our association to crack down on illegal or underground churches,” Liu said. “China has always provided education and assistance for underground priests.”

Liu said underground churches that violate the law would be dealt with by police, not the Catholic Patriotic Association (‘Top official at Chinese Catholic church denies crackdown on underground priests’ 2006, *Associated Press Newswires*, 30 December – Attachment 17).

A *Reuters News* article dated 24 December 2006 indicates that state media had reported that a court in Hangzhou in Zhejiang province had “sentenced eight Christians to up to three-and-a-half years in jail for their part in a mass protest against the government demolition of an illegal church” (‘China jails 8 Christians for church protest’ 2006, *Reuters News*, 24 December – Attachment 18).

2. Please provide information on whether police have been making arrests of such groups of people in Fuqing area.

The previously mentioned RRT research response dated 8 December 2006 includes information on the situation of the Shouters/Local Church in Fujian province. The research response notes that “Sources indicate that there have been arrests of Local Church members there from time to time. One source suggests that the Local Church now operates legally in some parts of Fujian; but another suggests that it is still illegal in the province” (RRT Country Research 2006, *Research Response CHN31015*, 8 December, (Questions 1 & 2) – Attachment 6). The research response refers to a DFAT report dated 4 August 2006 that mentions raids on Shouter meetings in Fuqing in 2002. The DFAT report, responding to questions forwarded by the RRT on 11 July 2006 (RRT Country Research 2006, Email to DFAT: ‘Country Information Request – CHN30365’, 11 July – Attachment 19), indicates that “There are several reports of raids on Shouter meetings in Fuqing (as well as in other areas) in 2002 - usually when the raid received some sort of international attention. Post has no specific information on whether or not a raid took place on a Shouter meeting in Fuqing ... [in] 2002 (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2006, *DFAT Report 515 – China: RRT Information Request: CHN30365*, 4 August – Attachment 20).

A RRT research response dated 7 October 2005 refers to Shouters being arrested in Fuqing in 2001 (RRT Country Research 2005, *Research Response CHN17561*, 7 October (Question 3) – Attachment 21).

The previously mentioned RRT research response dated 20 October 2006 looks at the situation of house or local churches in Fujian province and includes the comments of an Elder of “The Church in Melbourne” (RRT Country Research 2006, *Research Response CHN30786*, 20 October, (Questions 2 & 3) – Attachment 9). The Elder indicates that “The Church in Melbourne has the same beliefs and similar practices to the local churches in China.” He also states that “as far as we understand from speaking to members who come

from Fuqing city,” the government was “still persecuting members of the local church there.” It is stated in the Elder’s response that:

1. As we understand it, the local churches in China are viewed differently in each province. Certain provinces allow the local churches to register with the authorities and once they have done so, they are allowed to worship. However, in other provinces, including Fujian province, the local churches are regarded as illegal gatherings and members there are still being arrested.
2. As mentioned above, the local churches in Fujian province are considered as illegal gatherings and as such are not registered.
3. The same situation applies, as far as we understand from speaking to members who come from Fuqing city, that the government is still persecuting members of the local church there (Elder of the church in Melbourne 2006, Email to RRT Country Research: ‘RE: Request for information from the Refugee Review Tribunal’, 18 October – Attachment 22).

Although in relation to Fujian province rather than Fuqing in particular, the US Department of State human rights report on China for 2005 indicates that “In July Fujian Province police reportedly detained and abused a priest, Lin Daixian, and 10 other Catholics” (US Department of State 2006, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2005 – China* (includes Tibet, Hong Kong and Macau), March, Section 2(c) – Attachment 23).

The US Commission on International Religious Freedom annual report dated May 2006 also notes that “Clergy in Hebei, Fujian, and Shaanxi provinces were harassed, detained, and arrested during the past year” (US Commission on International Religious Freedom 2006, *Annual report of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom* (Excerpt on China pp. 107-117), May, p. 111 <http://www.uscifr.gov/countries/publications/currentreport/2006annualRpt.pdf#page=1> – Accessed 18 October 2006 – Attachment 7).

Internet Sources:

Government Information & Reports

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

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

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

United Nations (UN)

UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) website

<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rsd>

Non-Government Organisations

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

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

International News & Politics

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

Region Specific Links

Search Engines

Copernic <http://www.copernic.com/>

Databases:

FACTIVA (news database)

BACIS (DIMA Country Information database)

REFINFO (IRBDC (Canada) Country Information database)

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

List of Attachments

1. RRT Country Research 2007, *Research Response CHN31415*, 23 February.
2. Congressional-Executive Commission on China 2006, 'Congressional-Executive Commission on China Annual Report 2006', GECC website, 20 September
<http://www.cecc.gov/pages/annualRpt/annualRpt06/CECCannRpt2006.pdf> - Accessed 16 January 2007.
3. RRT Country Research 2007, *Research Response CHN31217*, 18 January.
4. RRT Country Research 2006, *Research Response CHN31081*, 18 December.
5. US Department of State 2006, *International Religious Freedom Report 2006 – China (includes Tibet, Hong Kong and Macau)*, September.
6. RRT Country Research 2006, *Research Response CHN31015*, 8 December.
7. US Commission on International Religious Freedom 2006, *Annual report of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom* (Excerpt on China pp. 107-117), May
<http://www.uscirf.gov/countries/publications/currentreport/2006annualRpt.pdf#page=1> – Accessed 18 October 2006.
8. RRT Country Research 2006, *Research Response CHN30801*, 6 November.
9. RRT Country Research 2006, *Research Response CHN30786*, 20 October.
10. RRT Country Research 2006, *Research Response CHN30550*, 13 September.
11. RRT Country Research 2006, *Research Response CHN30336*, 11 July.
12. RRT Country Research 2006, *Research Response CHN30207*, 14 June.
13. RRT Country Research 2006, *Research Response CHN30274*, 16 June.
14. RRT Country Research 2006, *Research Response CHN30047*, 21 March.
15. China Aid Association 2007, *Annual Report on Persecution of Chinese House Churches by Province From January 2006 to December 2006*, January.
16. Bodeen, Christopher 2007, 'China detains three church leaders after raid on private home, monitoring group reports', *Associated Press Newswires*, 3 January. (FACTIVA)
17. 'Top official at Chinese Catholic church denies crackdown on underground priests' 2006, *Associated Press Newswires*, 30 December. (FACTIVA)

18. 'China jails 8 Christians for church protest' 2006, *Reuters News*, 24 December. (FACTIVA)
19. RRT Country Research 2006, Email to DFAT: 'Country Information Request – CHN30365', 11 July.
20. Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2006, *DFAT Report 515 – China: RRT Information Request: CHN30365*, 4 August.
21. RRT Country Research 2005, *Research Response CHN17561*, 7 October.
22. Elder of the church in Melbourne 2006, Email to RRT Country Research: 'RE: Request for information from the Refugee Review Tribunal', 18 October.
23. US Department of State 2006, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2005 – China (includes Tibet, Hong Kong and Macau)*, March.