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XINJIANG: Notices show religious activity restrictions

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Four official notices on display in a mosque in China's north-western Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region starkly reveal the impact on religious freedom of tensions in the region. The documents, seen by Forum 18 News Service and translated here, are displayed in a context of great tension between Uighur Muslims and Han Chinese migrants, and state attempts to control and repress religious activity. Over time, this has radicalised the demands of some Uighur Muslims Forum 18 has spoken to. Islam in Xinjiang, with some exceptions, has been of a moderate variety. Many women go unveiled or just wearing a loose head-scarf, in contrast to the head-to-foot coverage common in nearby Afghanistan. Sufism is popular, as is folk Islam with worship of saints at shrines, which is quite alien to "fundamentalist" Islamic movements such as Wahhabism. China, by its repression of the Islam traditional to the region, is in danger of encouraging radical Islam in the very people it wishes to win over.

Among the casualties of the 'war on terror' are the largely forgotten Muslim peoples of Xinjiang. This huge area is almost as large as the whole of Western Europe and was traditionally inhabited by the Muslim Uighurs, Kazaks, and some smaller groups. However, the last two decades have seen a massive influx of Han Chinese migrants and the native Muslim population is in danger of being outnumbered in its own heartland. Today there are about 8.5 million Uighurs and 1.25 million Kazaks out of a total population of 18 million. Making allowance for some of the smaller groups (Tajik, Kirgiz, Mongol, etc.) it seems that, based on the official census figures, something like 45% of the population are Han Chinese. The real figure may be higher.

Resentment against Han Chinese political and cultural domination simmers and has sometimes erupted into riots and even warfare. The most notable incident was the armed uprising at Baren near Kashgar, in April 1990, which was quickly crushed by the People's Liberation Army (PLA). Local Uighurs have expressed to Forum 18 strong opposition to the way the territory is being exploited by Beijing: it is rich in mineral, oil and natural gas deposits, but these are being siphoned off for the benefit of eastern, urban China. Large PLA garrisons are found in the southern oasis towns. Armoured personnel carriers periodically patrol the desert roads and local people have to prove their identities at PLA checkpoints.

A small number of Uighur terrorists sought training from the Taliban in Afghanistan. But this seems to have become a pretext for the Chinese authorities to suppress any moderate expression for Uighur autonomy. Islam was widely tolerated in the 1980s and there was a spate of mosque building. But, in recent years it has come under increasingly tight control (see F18News 15 August 2006 <http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=829>). Tight censorship has interfered with legitimate publishing by Uighur scholars of historical and cultural works which in any way question the state orthodoxy that Xinjiang has always been part of the Chinese 'motherland'. Amongst some Uighur's Forum 18 has spoken to, it appears that, over time, repression has had the effect of causing a radicalisation of their demands.

(For the situation of non-Muslim religious minorities in Xinjiang, see F18News 15 August 2006 <http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=830>.)

The four Chinese official documents, translated and appended to this article, are clear documentary evidence of the effects of this repression on religious freedom in Xinjiang. (In other parts of China, the situation varies widely - see F18News 8 March 2006 <http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=740> and 1 September 2005 <http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=641>.) All four documents are on public display in a mosque in Xinjiang, and are very revealing of China's major concerns about religion in the region.

Firstly and unsurprisingly the preaching of jihad (holy war) is prohibited.

Secondly, 'unity of the motherland' and 'unity of the nationalities' (the 50 or more ethnic groups officially recognised by the state in China, apart from the Han Chinese majority) are paramount, as are 'social stability' and opposition to 'ethnic separatism'. All religious activities must be subservient to these overall political goals.

Thirdly, while lip-service is paid to "freedom of belief according to the law," it is perhaps noteworthy that this is only mentioned in fourth place after "love for the motherland" and "obedience to the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) policy on religious freedom."

Fourthly, these regulations stand very much in the old "leftist" tradition within the CCP, with its emphasis on control of religion through "patriotic" religious associations (Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Catholicism and Protestantism) firmly controlled by the CCP's United Front Work Department and Religious Affairs Bureau. Only "normal" religious activities, as defined by the Party, not religious believers, are tolerated.

Fifthly, the detailed regulations for the control of religious clergy and for the repair of mosques show clearly that the CCP in Xinjiang claims ultimate control over all religious affairs.

Many of the provisions in these documents clearly target the local Islamic communities in Xinjiang. However, there are general similarities between these documents and the regulations on religion that have been promulgated by the central government and other provincial-level governments (see F18News 8 March 2006 <http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=740> and 1 September 2005 <http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=641>). But despite these regional variations, the state's inherent hostility toward and desire to control religious communities and activities unfortunately remains consistent.

In relation to Xinjiang, the irony is that Islam in this region, with some exceptions, has been of a moderate variety. Many women go unveiled or just wearing a loose head-scarf in contrast to the head-to-foot coverage common in nearby Afghanistan. Sufism is popular, as is folk Islam with worship of saints at shrines, which is quite alien to "fundamentalist" Islamic movements such as Wahhabism. By its clumsy prohibitions, China is in danger of encouraging radical Islam in the very people it wishes to win over. (END)

For analyses of other aspects of religious freedom in China, see <<http://www.forum18.org/Analyses.php?region=3>>.

A printer-friendly map of China, including Xinjiang, is available from
<<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/atlas/index.html?Parent=asia&Rootmap=china>>

1.) _____

WARNING BOARD

"Young children and students under the age of 18 are prohibited from entering the mosques and praying therein."

[by] Yawaz Religious Administration Committee, Kashgar City

2.) _____

Six Prohibitions on Religious Administration

1. Preaching jihad is prohibited.
2. Inciting hatred is prohibited.
3. Dividing the unity of the motherland and spreading damaging information on the unity of nationalities are prohibited.
4. Publishing and producing books, magazines, audio and video materials advocating jihad and religious extremism are prohibited.
5. Utilizing hot issues in society to influence administrative work is prohibited.
6. Cross-regional [i.e. between cities, counties, prefectures, and villages] religious activities are prohibited.

"Limit Three"

1. Friday preaching is limited to half an hour only.
2. Prayer activity is limited to the traditional way of praying.
3. Religious populace is limited to praying in mosques only.

"Support Five"

1. Support the religious clergy's propaganda and education of the religious populace on the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) nationality and religious policies as well as law and order.

2. Support the religious clergy's work on the prevention of religious extremism and corruption among the religious populace, as well as their guidance in exposing bad people and bad acts.
3. Support the religious clergy's teaching of the religious populace to have simple wedding ceremonies and mourning services, as well as their teaching on changing bad customs and contributing to the spiritual culture construction.
4. Support the study and use of science by both the religious clergy and populace and their efforts to reduce poverty and become rich.
5. Support the religious clergy's use of law to administer religious forums and activities.

"Protect Five"

1. Protect both the religious clergy and the religious populace's love for the motherland, obedience to law and religious activities.
2. Protect both the religious clergy and the religious populace's obedience to CCP's policy on religious freedom and respect the citizen's right to believe or not to believe religion.
3. Protect and respect both the religious clergy and the religious populace's observance of religious traditions and ethnic customs.
4. Protect the religious populace's study of religion and their freedom of belief according to the law.
5. Protect and respect both the religious clergy and the religious populace's personal worth from being violated.

3.) _____

REGULATIONS ON REPAIRING AND REMODELLING MOSQUES

These regulations are adopted in order to truly implement Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) policy on religious freedom and guarantee religious populace's safe practice of normal religious activities. Remodelling and repairing religious buildings shall be conducted according to the spirit of the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region Temporary Regulations on the Management of Religious Forums.

1. The mosque to be repaired/remodelled must be certified as an "Excellent in Five Ways" entity for three years, and must have a cash account with enough money prior to its repair/remodelling. The mosque cannot be repaired/remodelled if either one condition is not met.
2. The village, where the mosque needing repair/remodelling is located, shall report the real situation to the United Front Office in the respective township and apply for repair/remodelling. After the United Front Office has filled out the forms and sent them to the concerned County Religious Administrative Office and got approved, then it shall authorize the township to approve the repair/remodelling. Additionally, the United Front Office in the township, the Religious Administrative Group in the village and the Mosque Managing Board shall sign a mosque repair/remodelling responsibility letter.
3. Once the mosque repair/remodelling responsibility letter is signed and the application to repair/remodelling is approved, a member of the village Religious Administrative Group shall monitor and two to three members of the Mosque Managing Board shall oversee the repair/remodelling process.
4. Once the mosque repair/remodelling is completed, the village Religious Administrative Group shall send officials to accept it. If, during the process, the repair/remodelling was outside of the scope and request made in the application, every party signed the mosque repair/remodelling responsibility letter shall be held responsible and punished according to the terms in the letter.
5. These rules shall be enforced by the Political and Legal United Front Office and Religious Administration Office in the respective township.

4.) _____

TEMPORARY REGULATIONS ON THE ADMINISTRATION OF RELIGIOUS CLERGY IN THE HOTAN REGION

(The regulations were adopted by the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region 7th People's Congress 96th Standing Committee Meeting on 23 August 1990.)

1. These temporary regulations were issued according to China's constitution, the Ethnic Autonomy Law and related rules in order to guarantee the people's right to freedom of religion and normal religious activities, to safeguard the unity of the motherland, the unity

of nationalities and the social stability, to promote the positive role of patriotic religious clergy, and to prevent some people from using religion to divide the unity of the motherland, destroy the unity of nationalities, disrupt the social order, and carry out all other kinds of unlawful activities.

2. The term "religious clergy" in these regulations include: imam (akhun) and religious worker in the Islamic religion; monk, lama and nun in the Buddhist (Lama) religion; deacon, pastor, evangelist [chuandaoren] in the Christian religion; deacon and ministers in the Catholic religion; monks in the Taoist religion; and all others belong to the above religions whose primary duties are religious.

3. To be Qualified, the Religious Clergy shall:

a.) Support the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the socialist system, love the People's Republic of China, safeguard the unity of motherland and the unity of nationalities, oppose ethnic separatism, follow the leadership of the people's government, obey the constitution, laws, directives and policies, stand firm in the principle of independent self-governance [self-determination] and prevent the dependence on foreign powers in matters of religion.

b.) Have been investigated for their political disposition, thinking virtues and religious knowledge by the patriotic religious organisations above county level under the leadership of the people's government Religious Affairs Bureaus, and have been deemed competent, must possess a certificate of competence or a certificate of graduation from a religious school.

c.) Possess good moral character, fairness in dealings, relatively good religious education, reputation to a certain extent among the religious populace as well as the ability to closely cooperate with the religious administrative organs in charge of religious forums.

d.) Possess the local resident registration [hu kou] and resident rights.

4. The Procedures that Patriotic Religious Clergy Should Follow:

a.) Religious clergy must be nominated by the democratic organ in the respective mosque, temple, monastery or church and must be reviewed and approved by the majority in the congregation.

b.) Religious clergy must be investigated and approved by patriotic religious organisations.

c.) Religious clergy must be investigated and approved by a Religious Affairs Bureau of that people's government above county level.

d.) A religious clergy must possess a licence (or certificate) to practice religion issued by patriotic religious organisations.

5. The Responsibilities of Religious Clergy:

a.) They must love the motherland, obey the law, follow the constitution, laws, directives and policies, and diligently implement them in the mosque, temple, monastery, or church.

b.) They must follow the CCP's religious freedom policy and respect people's right to believe and right not to believe in religion.

c.) They must organise and direct the religious populace to normal religious activities, and prohibit all unlawful activities.

d.) They must educate the religious populace to obey laws and regulations, to safeguard the unity of motherland, the unity of nationalities and social stability, to encourage them to have simple matrimonial and mourning ceremonies, to reform old rules and customs and create a new atmosphere, and to contribute to socialist physical and spiritual cultures.

e.) They must actively participate in the meetings, the studies, and the social activities organised by patriotic religious organisations or the Religious Affairs Bureaus of the people's government.

f.) They must frequently report activities in the mosque, temple, monastery, or church to the patriotic religious organisations and the Religious Affairs Bureaus of people's governments, and actively and properly deal with certain unusual circumstances with organisations concerned.

i.) They must not get involved in activities that oppose the leadership of the CCP, the socialist system, the people's democratic dictatorship and Marxist forces, and activities that damage social stability as well as the unity of motherland and the unity of nationalities.

ii.) They must not use religion to interfere in the state's administrative work, judiciary, culture, education, marriage and family planning.

iii.) They must not force people who do not believe in religion to believe in religion or participate in religious activities, and discriminate against, ostracise, pressure, or attack them.

iv.) They must not get involved in activities that damage the health of the religious populace, that violate people's human rights and democratic rights, and that disrupt social order, production order, work order and people's life order.

v.) They must not preach, spread religion or promote godliness at any place other than the mosque, temple, monastery, or church; or sell or disseminate religious articles; or propagate teaching on hell [Jahannam] and incite ethnic hatred.

vi.) They must not open religious schools and religious courses (Christian religious course) on their own, and must not disciple others, and must not give religious instruction to young people under the age of 18.

vii.) They must not confuse the religious populace, must not intrude upon the properties of the state, collective or private individuals, and must not collect donations by going to other places.

viii.) They must not receive visits paid by foreigners and foreign religious organisations on their own, and must not accept money or articles in any form from foreigners or foreign religious organisations.

ix.) They must not conduct cross-regional [i.e. between cities, counties, prefectures, and villages] religious activities without the approval of the religious affairs office in the people's government.

x.) They must not restore all the feudal privileges and religious exploitation rules.

6. Reward and Punishment of Religious Clergy:

a.) The work of religious clergy in carrying out these regulations shall be analyzed and evaluated by comparison once a year. The patriotic religious organisations or the Religious Affairs Bureaus in the people's governments above county level shall reward those religious clergy who proved themselves by a general announcement, or by giving them a reward certificate or tangible reward. To receive a certificate of honour or a name of honour, a people's government above county (or city) level must approve it.

b.) The patriotic religious organisations and the Religious Affairs Offices in the people's governments above county (or city) level shall, based on the severity of violations, educate, criticize, advise, warn, suspend, and remove the status to conduct religious activities of those religious clergy who have violated these rule. Religious clergy who have violated the criminal law shall be punished according to law by the Public Security Bureaus and the Prosecutors' Offices. The Religious Affairs Bureaus in the high level people's governments have the responsibility to frequently enquire into the administrative work situation of the patriotic religious organisations, and play a leading role in implementing these regulations as well as to investigate breaches of them.

7. The Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region Religious Affairs Bureau shall be responsible for the interpretation of these regulations.

8. These regulations take effect from the date of announcement.

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