

Table of Contents

- ***Chinese bishops deported to attend Patriotic Assembly***
- ***China church ordains bishop over Vatican objection***
- ***Story of ordinary religious repression in China***
- ***China church raided, pastors missing***
- ***Chinese Christians blocked from attending Lausanne congress***
- ***Hong Kong Catholics say prayer meeting blocked***
- ***Chinese pastor suffers unjust detention***
- ***Xuchang: two Christians appeal laogai sentence***
- ***Church in Talks to "Regularize" Activities in China***
- ***Chinese regime officials banned by International Cultic Studies Association***
- ***Priest and nun of underground diocese of Ningxia are killed***
- ***Beijing warns US over Falun Gong***
- ***Protestant clergyman arrested in Guangzhou***
- ***The cross at the border: China's complicity in refugees' suffering***
- ***Two Falun Gong lawyers face permanent disbarment***
- ***Arrests of Buddhist monks in Tibet continue***
- ***Bishop placed under house arrest for refusing to co-celebrate Mass with excommunicated bishop***
- ***Beijing tightens controls over religious groups, now required to declare each financial transaction***
- ***China names its own lama to top body of advisers***
- ***China pledges more investment, religious controls in Tibet***

Chinese bishops deported to attend Patriotic Assembly

W. Zhicheng and Z. Yuan

AsiaNews (07.12.2010) – HRWF (08.12.2010) www.hrwf.net - AsiaNews sources say that dozens of bishops of the official Church have been forcibly deported to the capital to ensure their participation at the Assembly of representatives of Chinese Catholics, which the pope considers incompatible with Catholic faith.

The Assembly opened today in Beijing on a low profile and is being shrouded in secrecy: it is impossible to contact anyone and not even Xinhua is reporting on the event. The meeting should lead to the election of the national president of the Patriotic Association and president of the council of Chinese bishops, two bodies that are unacceptable to the Catholic Church because they aim to build a separate Church, detached from the pope. "It's just an election of a new round of leadership," said Liu Bainian, vice president and chairman of the PA Assembly. In fact, the gathering is the "sovereign body" of the official Chinese church in which bishops are a minority among Catholics and government

representatives. Ecclesial decisions are made on the basis of rigged elections. Ahead of today's meeting, Liu Bainian had sent all participants clear indications of what to do and what to vote.

The Assembly has been postponed for at least four years because the official bishops, in obedience to the Holy See's, have consistently refused to participate.

AsiaNews sources report that many bishops from different provinces, to avoid being dragged to Beijing, have gone into hiding or declared themselves too ill to attend. Others have been taken by government representatives and dragged against their will to the Assembly. Some bishops who knew they could not escape, agreed to come to Beijing, but decided not to celebrate the Assembly masses together, because of the presence of excommunicated bishops.

However the same sources claim that there are bishops who did not oppose any resistance. The Diocese of Beijing, in its newsletter, published two articles in honor of the event.

The most serious and obvious violence occurred in Hengshui (Hebei), where Mgr. Feng Xinmao was seized by about 100 police officers and government representatives, who fought for hours against the faithful and priests who were shielding their bishop in an attempt to ensure his freedom. One faithful was injured in the shoulder during the assault. In recent days, the bishop had been kept in isolation, away from his home. The faithful succeeded in snatching him from police control, to take him back to his residence. After a siege lasting hours, the bishop was again arrested and last night at 20:30, Mgr. Feng Xinmao was dragged to Beijing to attend the meeting. One of the faithful, weeping, as the bishop was escorted away, said: "Our poor bishop has no freedom."

Another prelate, Msgr. Li Lianghui Cangzhou (Hebei) has disappeared to escape the meeting in Beijing. The police has threatened the diocese, that if the bishop does not surrender, he will be hunted throughout the country like "a dangerous criminal."

This Assembly and the forced deportation of bishops cast a dark shadow on relations between China and the Vatican, after years of detente. The situation has precipitated in recent weeks, after the illicit ordination of Fr Guo Jincal Bishop of Chengde, on 20 November. The PA forced eight official bishops to attend the ceremony, against the wishes of the Holy See, which condemned the incident as "a serious violation of religious freedom."

China church ordains bishop over Vatican objection

Isolda Morillo

AP (20.11.2010) – HRWF (23.11.2010) www.hrwf.net - China's government-backed Catholic church ordained a bishop who did not have the pope's approval Saturday, despite objections from the Vatican and comments by a key papal adviser that the move was "illegitimate" and "shameful."

The Rev. Guo Jincal's ordination at Pingquan Church in Chengde city was carried out amid strong security, with dozens of police blocking the building and denying entrance to reporters. But there was also an air of festivity, with colorful banners and traditional Chinese lanterns hanging outside the church and worshippers posing for photos.

China's first ordination without papal approval in almost five years threatens to hurt the officially atheist country's already shaky relations with the Vatican, and the Holy See had warned reconciliation efforts would be set back if bishops were forced to attend.

Eight Vatican-approved bishops participated in the ceremony, according to AsiaNews, a Vatican-affiliated missionary news agency that closely covers the church in China. Three of them, Monsignors Jei Junmin of Liaoning, Li Lianggui of Cangzhou and Feng Xinmao of Hengshui, had been sequestered by the government a few days ago to pressure them into participating, AsiaNews said, citing Chinese Catholic sources.

Communist China forced its Roman Catholics to cut ties with the Vatican in 1951, and worship is allowed only in state-backed churches, although millions of Chinese belong to unofficial congregations loyal to Rome.

In recent years, under Pope Benedict XVI, relations have improved. Disputes over appointments in China's official church have been avoided by quietly conferring on candidates, leading to several ordinations of bishops with the Holy See's blessing.

However, Guo does not have the pope's approval and it was perhaps his role as deputy secretary of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, the state-controlled group that runs China's Catholic churches, that raised Vatican concerns.

Liu Bainian, vice chairman of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, said the Vatican knew about the need for a bishop in Chengde two years ago.

"I believe the pope loves China. I believe just a handful of people in the Vatican are hindering the improvement of relations," he said.

The Vatican had no immediate comment Saturday.

Liu had said attendance by bishops at the ceremony would be voluntary.

"A Catholic diocese cannot be without a bishop, or the Gospel cannot be spread," Liu said. "We should not let any political reasons interfere with the spread of the Gospel in China."

He said that in time, China would elect bishops for more than 40 Catholic dioceses that are currently without them and expressed hope that the Vatican would endorse them.

Guo's ordination is the first without papal approval since 2006, when three bishop ordinations in China drew Vatican criticism, said an expert at a Catholic research center in Hong Kong who declined to be named.

The move came ahead of a meeting to choose the leadership of the government-backed church.

Recent estimates by scholars and church activists put the number of Chinese Catholics loyal to the pope as high as 60 million - three times the size of the official church.

Hong Kong's Roman Catholic Cardinal Joseph Zen, a key adviser to the pope, praised the Holy See for speaking out against the ordination as he arrived Friday at the Vatican for a meeting of cardinals to discuss religious freedom and other issues.

Zen, an outspoken advocate of democracy and religious freedom in China, has long been mistrusted by Beijing.

"It is really shameful, such an attempt to make another illegitimate ordination," Zen said. "It's against the whole civilization of today."

Story of ordinary religious repression in China

Threats, physical and psychological violence and, finally, the simple restriction of freedom: this is how the regime in Beijing treats Chinese Christians, the story of a delegate who wanted to attend the Protestant conference on evangelisation in South Africa

AsiaNews (22.10.2010) – HRWF (25.10.2010) www.hrwf.net - Wang Shuangyan, a Protestant Christian, was one of the 200 delegates who wanted to attend the 3rd World Congress on Evangelization in Lausanne, which began in Cape Town on 17 October. Chinese police have banned their participation. Wang was stopped, beaten, tricked into a "domestic prison". She succeeded in returning home a few days ago, and decided to speak out against the religious repression in China. Here is her story.

"By now, I should be now in Cape Town, South Africa attending the Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization. Instead, I am at home in Beijing, writing about what I have experienced over the past few days. I feel that this is somewhat a luxury, considering my freedom was taken from me for two days.

On September 29 and October 12, 2010, government agents invited me to "have a talk with them." They basically told me that the government thinks our participation in this congress would endanger the security of the state, and then they advised me to decline the invitation. I told them since the government has failed to provide any evidence or documentation that indicated our attendance would endanger the security of the state, I would still attempt to leave, and if customs officials stopped me, I would have to stay in China.

I was originally scheduled to leave for the congress on October 15. When we gathered that the delegates in Beijing were under surveillance, we decided to meet up on October 13 -- the date when the first delegate from Beijing was to begin his trip. Therefore, I left home at 9 o'clock in the morning on October 13, and planned to meet other delegates at Terminal 3 in Beijing Capital Airport. As I exited the front door, I saw two people sitting outside.

Despite their efforts to stop me, I escaped them and got on the elevator. As I left the building, more people tried to stop me as they gave each other instructions on how to stop me. Without talking to them, I fought my way forward. When I was depleted of energy in the tussle, I began to shout for help, and then made my way to the subway station.

Once I arrived at the subway station, several security guards approached me and again I shouted for help. I took the opportunity to get to the boarding place. Probably because they knew it was their last chance to stop me, they began to use brutal force. The three young men stood in my way so I could not enter the subway train. Simultaneously, my parents arrived to help me with my luggage (as we had discussed earlier) and I told them what just happened. After the tension subsided, together with my parents we boarded a subway train.

Immediately after we got on someone yelled, 'Pull her out!' The three young men got into the subway train and tried to forcibly remove me from the car. I resisted with all my energy and refused to be taken off. My parents could not endure seeing them attack me and my father yelled to them. Because my parents intervened, I was not dragged out of

the train When the door of the train finally closed, I thought they would continue in their attempts to stop me from going. Thankfully, they only followed me until the train arrived at the airport's fast rail station before turning back. Because my parents still worried about my safety, they went with me until I arrived at Terminal 3 at the airport, and they did not leave until I met up with the other invitees who were still in China.

Before any of these things happened, I considered the possibility of being stopped at the door of my house and made up in my mind that I would not resist. Little did I know that when the time came and people tried to prevent me leaving, I would be resisting with all my strength. I felt extremely miserable because my parents saw their child being harmed by other people and I wondered how many parents could endure such a thing.

During the four previous days, we had started out in six groups and all of us were stopped by customs. The customs officials stopped us because we would 'endanger the security of the state.' Not one of us exited the country. After that, we the Beijing delegates, along with delegates from other places of China who tried to depart from the airport in Beijing, stayed in a hotel in a nearby suburb. We planned to study the Bible passages from and some special topics as arranged by the Lausanne Congress over a few days.

The morning of October 17 agents from the Domestic Security Protection Squad and the Bureau of Religion came in and announced that we were engaging in "an illegal gathering at a venue for non-religious activities. They removed the four pastors in charge of our meeting and spoke with them. While they were speaking, the rest of us prayed and sang hymns together, After the four pastors came back, we had some difficult discussions. We unanimously agreed to leave on our own volition. The officers, however, did not give us the option of returning home in taxis. Instead, government agents arrived from our respective districts to take us home, and I was forced to get into the vehicle from my district.

The atmosphere in the vehicle was relatively friendly. One of the officers in charge took the initiative and began to speak about the incident on October 13. He said the security guards did what they did without authorization and asked for our understanding Although I knew he was one of the officers at the scene that day, but I didn't want to go into details with him. I just told him that I knew that their job was hard on them, too. After a while, I noticed that the vehicle was not headed in the right direction to take the delegates home.

That evening, we arrived at a guest house located in the mountains. Two other Lausanne invitees from my district who arrived in separate vehicle. Upon arrival, our cell phones and computers were confiscated, and we were told not to leave the compound. Several people followed us everywhere and did not allow us to see or talk to each other. In each guest room, someone was there to spy on us.

On the morning of October 18, I protested that the officers were acting beyond their authority because they restricted our freedom without reason. I locked myself in the guest room and did not let them in. I did not eat, leave the room, or speak with anybody until they released me on the morning of the 19th. I arrived home at noon. I thought they would release me after the Lausanne Congress ended, but surprisingly, I am already in my own home.

"Except for failing to exit the country successfully, things happened just as I expected. What astonished me was my response to the events. Many responses are not preplanned, but are forced spontaneous responses. I am currently struggling, and feel totally Awestruck. What if this incident has not yet ended? What if something like this happens to me again? How should I respond?"

China church raided, pastors missing

By Marshall Ramsey II

BosNewsLife (14.10.2010) – HRWF (21.10.2010) www.hrwf.net - Two foreign pastors, one from the United States and the other from Russia, remained missing Thursday, October 14, after they were detained along with their translator in China's Henan province during a police raid on a Chinese house church, a well-informed advocacy group said.

China Aid Association (CAA) told BosNewsLife that Ma Hanzhong, a member of the house church in the Wancheng District of Nanyang City, was also arrested and beaten in the late September incident. CAA did not reveal the names of the two pastors, apparently amid security concerns. "The location of the two foreign pastors are unknown at this time," CAA added.

"All occupants of the church were arrested except for one elderly woman," the group explained.

Henan province officials have threatened to sentence the detained believers for "re-education" to one of China's notorious labor camps, in an effort to get them to renounce their faith in Jesus Christ, according to CAA investigators.

More Incidents

There was no comment from officials, but the raid on the church was the latest in a series of similar reported incidents in China, a communist-ruled nation where the government only recognizes official churches.

Earlier on September 26 police raided the Youqing Church in Qu County of Da Prefecture area in Sichuan province, Christians said. Objects of value to the church were broken, books were confiscated, and members of the congregation were arrested and taken to the local police station, CAA said. "Family members of those arrested were requested to pay bail money to get the detainees out of jail."

The exact amount of the bail was not immediately released.

Three days later, on September 29, four church members tried, unsuccessful, to negotiate with Sichuan police about having their belongings back, referring to Chinese laws regarding places of worship CAA said. "Instead of having the items returned to them, the members themselves were arrested," CAA added. The situation was not immediately clear Thursday, October 14.

Most of China's estimated 130 million people prefer to worship in house churches, named this way as they are often held in homes of individual believer. China's government has denied religious rights abuses, saying Christians are free to worship in the government-backed churches.

Chinese Christians blocked from attending Lausanne congress

Police threaten or detain some 200 house church members who planned to attend

By Sarah Page

Compass direct (15.10.2010) - HRWF (18.09.2010) - www.hrwf.net - As organizers prepared for the opening of the Third Lausanne International Congress on World Evangelization tomorrow in Cape Town, South Africa, Chinese police threatened or detained some 200 delegates who had hoped to attend.

After receiving an invitation to attend the event, house church groups in China formed a selection committee and raised significant funds to pay the expenses of their chosen delegates, a source told Compass. Many delegates, however, were "interviewed" by authorities after they applied to attend the Congress, the source said.

When house church member Abraham Liu Guan and four other delegates attempted to leave China via Beijing airport on Sunday (Oct. 10), authorities refused to allow them through customs, reported the Chinese-language Ming Pao News. Officials detained one delegate and confiscated the passports of the other four until Oct. 25, the closing date of the conference.

China's State Administration for Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Public Security had notified border control staff that the participation of Chinese Christians in the conference threatened state security and ordered them not to allow delegates to leave, Liu told U.S.-based National Public Radio (NPR).

Officials also prevented two house church Christians from Baotou City, Inner Mongolia, from leaving the country, and on Oct. 9 placed one of them in a 15-day detention, the China Aid Association (CAA) reported.

When Fan Yafeng, leader of the Chinese Christian Legal Defense Association and winner of the 2009 John Leland Religious Liberty Award, discussed the harassment with NPR on Tuesday (Oct. 12), officials assigned some 20 police officers to keep him under house arrest.

On Wednesday (Oct. 13), approximately 1,000 police officers were stationed at Beijing International Airport to restrain an estimated 100 house church members who planned to leave for the Congress via Beijing, according to CAA.

CAA also said authorities over the past few months had contacted every delegate, from Han Christians in Beijing to Uyghur Christians in Xinjiang, for questioning, and threatened some family members.

Normal church operations were also affected. The Rev. Xing Jingfu from Changsha in Hunan province told NPR that authorities cited the Lausanne Congress when they recently ordered his church to close.

China's Foreign Ministry spokesman, Ma Zhaoxu, in a statement issued to NPR, accused the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization of communicating secretly with members of illegal congregations and not issuing an official invitation to China's state-controlled church.

According to the Ming Pao report, the Lausanne committee said members of the Three-Self Protestant Movement had asked if they could attend. Delegates, however, were required to sign a document expressing their commitment to evangelism, which members of official churches could not do due to regulations such as an upper limit on the number of people in each church, state certification for preachers, and the confinement of preaching to designated churches in designated areas. House church Christians faced no such limitations.

The first such conference was held in Lausanne, Switzerland in 1974, which produced the influential Lausanne Covenant. The second conference was held in 1989 in Manila. Some 4,000 delegates from 200 countries are expected to attend the third conference in Cape Town.

Progress or repression?

China watchers said there has been a slight easing of restrictions in recent months, accompanied by a call on Sept. 28 from senior Chinese political advisor Du Qinglin for the government to allow the independent development of the official church. Du made the remarks at the 60th anniversary celebrations of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, according to the government-allied Xinhua news agency.

The BBC in August produced a glowing series on the growth of Christianity in China after Chinese authorities gave it unprecedented access to state-sanctioned churches and religious institutions. Religious rights monitor Elizabeth Kendal, however, described this access as part of a propaganda campaign by the Chinese government to reduce criticism of religious freedom policies.

NPR also produced a five-part series on Chinese religions in July. The series attributed the growth of religious adherence to the "collapse of Communist ideology" and pointed out that growth continued despite the fact that evangelism was "still illegal in China today."

The claims of progress were challenged by an open letter from Pastor Zhang Mingxuan, president of the Chinese Christian House Church Alliance, to Chinese President Hu Jintao on Oct. 1, China's National Day.

In the letter, published by CAA on Oct. 5, Zhang claimed that Chinese house church Christians respected the law and were "model citizens," and yet they had become "the target of a group of government bandits ... [who] often arrest and beat innocent Christians and wronged citizens." Further, he added, "House church Christians have been ill-treated simply because they are petitioners to crimes of the government."

Zhang then listed several recent incidents in which Christians were arrested and sent to labor camps, detained and fined without cause, beaten, interrogated and otherwise abused. He also described the closure or demolition of house churches and the confiscation of personal and church property.

He closed with a mention of Uyghur Christian Alimjan Yimit, "who was sentenced to 15 years in prison because he evangelized among Uyghurs – his very own people."

Hong Kong Catholics say prayer meeting blocked

Min Lee

AP (30.09.2010) - HRWF (30.09.2010) - www.hrwf.net - Roman Catholic activists accused Hong Kong's government on Thursday of trying to block an upcoming prayer meeting aimed at showing solidarity with underground believers on the Chinese mainland.

The Hong Kong Diocese's Justice and Peace Commission tried to reserve a public park for the Oct. 16 gathering but was turned down and told the event was too politically sensitive, said Jackie Hung, a commission organizer.

Hong Kong Cardinal Joseph Zen, a harsh critic of Beijing, was scheduled to attend, Hung said.

Hong Kong's Beijing-backed government, however, denied censorship, saying the application was rejected because the park was too small for the expected crowd of up to 200 people.

"The decision was not related in any way to religious or political considerations," the Leisure and Cultural Services Department said a statement.

China's Communist government does not have diplomatic ties with the Vatican. It only allows worship in state-approved churches, but many Catholics belong to unregistered congregations. Such "house churches" are subjected to varying degrees of harassment by authorities.

But the Roman Catholic Church has the right to operate freely in Hong Kong, a former British colony promised Western-style civil liberties, including freedom of religion, as part of its special semiautonomous status.

Hung criticized the move as part of a recent government campaign to block events that may offend Beijing.

Earlier this year, Hong Kong officials also confiscated statues honoring pro-democracy protesters killed in the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown in Beijing, saying activists didn't have permits to display them. The Chinese government still considers the 1989 demonstrations "counterrevolutionary."

"This type of self-censorship, this culture of fear is now so common in Hong Kong," Hung said in a phone interview.

Hong Kong Human Rights Monitor Director Law Yuk-kai said the territory's government was "using legal and administrative means to achieve political goals."

Hung said organizers plan to proceed with the prayer meeting but haven't decided on an alternative venue.

Cardinal Zen, the territory's highest Roman Catholic clergyman, couldn't immediately be reached for comment.

More than 60 million Christians are believed to worship in China's independent churches, compared with about 20 million who attend state-sanctioned churches, according to scholars and church activists.

Chinese pastor suffers unjust detention

Allvoices.com (21.09.2010) / HRWF (28.09.2010) – Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - A Chinese pastor, Zhang Mingxuan has suffered an unjust detention in the hands of the Public Security Bureau (PSB) when he came to witness the trial in court of two detained pastors in Xuchang City.

China Aid www.chinaaid.org, an organization working with the persecuted church in China said that, Pastor Zhang Mingxuan, also known as "Bike" for riding his bike across the country on missions of encouragement, was detained and released same day adding that he has been arrested, and interrogated countless times over the past 10 years in his efforts to strengthen house church Christians.

It observed that the Pastor, who's the Chairman of the China House Church Alliance (CHCA), was said to be around the court premises to witness the trial of Yunhua and Gao Jianli of Xuchang City, Henan province when he and his wife was arrested by the PSB.

"Pastor "Bike" and his wife arrived at the court to watch with the audience, but were detained by the local PSB of Xuchang City and were released after a time," China Aid said.

According to the report, other Christians from Yucheng, Hennan, who came to see the trial, were also detained by the Yucheng PSB on their way home. They are Liu Fulan, Hua Cuiying, Li Yuxia, Ma Keai, Liu Sen (the son of the defendant Liu Yunhua). There is as of yet no record of their release.

The report said that Pastor Zhang Mingxuan as the current and founding President of CHCA has been a primary target for religious persecution by the Chinese Government for more than 10 years.

It noted that the pastor and his wife are well-known for their travels throughout the provinces, regularly visiting member churches within the CHCA to help with training and spiritual growth. "Pastor Zhang earned the nickname "Bike" from his renowned bicycle ministry, where he cycled throughout the countryside in Henan and throughout China, to share the Gospel.

The report further stated, "He has been detained and released repeatedly for the purposes of intimidating the church over the last few years. In 2009 alone, Pastor Bike was detained three times. On March 21, 2009, he was arrested for a day, and his debit card containing 150,000 Yuan was confiscated. It was returned on April 17, 2009."

It noted that on the morning of July 6, 2009 Pastor Mingxuan and 50 other senior house church leaders were taken in a raid stressing that they were released that afternoon due to immediate international pressure.

"From September 25 - October 4, 2009, Pastor Bike and his wife were taken on a "forced vacation" to lower the risk of unwanted trouble to the communist party during the National Day festivities. They were put under house arrest in an undisclosed location, where all their movements were supervised," the report said.

"ChinaAid protests the actions of the government officials in detaining Pastor Bike and his wife again. We urge Xuchang local government to respect Pastor Zhang Mingxuan ("Bike") and his wife's rights as citizens, and we call on the Yucheng local government to release the house church members who are still detained. We ask Christians worldwide to join us in prayer for their protection and encouragement," it also added.

Xuchang: two Christians appeal laogai sentence

Two members of a house church were imprisoned after they refused to pay a "fine" following their arrest. Family and supporters are prevented from entering the courtroom during their appeal trial. Their lawyer says they should not be convicted for being members of an "evil cult"; doing so is an abuse of power.

AsiaNews (22.09.2010) / HRWF (27.09.2010) – Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - The appeal process for two members of an underground Protestant house church began in Xuchang (Henan) today, amid tight security. They had originally been sentenced to a

forced labour camp for their beliefs. Relatives and supporters of Gao Jianli and Liu Yunhua complained they were not allowed to enter the courtroom.

Rev Zhang Mingxuan, head of the China Association of House Churches, said he was detained by police outside the Intermediate People's Court in Xuchang city after he took photos of police with his mobile phone. "I was there watching with our brothers and sisters, and plainclothes police from Shangqiu and Xuchang threatened us and stopped us from taking photographs with our cell phones," he said. One agent "told me that if I took a photo of him, he would call for me to be detained and I wouldn't be allowed inside to hear the trial."

Gao Jianli and Liu Yunhua were first detained in March for 15 days alongside other members of their congregation for refusing to pay "fines" to police officers who raided their group.

They were handed a one-year sentence of "re-education through labour" on 25 March, but promptly appealed, forcing the process into open court.

Beijing-based rights lawyer Yang Huiwen, who represents Gao and Liu, said that Zhang's detention and the refusal to give passes to visitors was against the law.

Yang noted that the key points of his appeal case were centred around the lack of due process, on the failure to uphold correct procedures, and on the lack of sufficient evidence to send Liu and Gao for a year's "re-education through labour."

"Thirdly, we argued that it was inappropriate to style a Protestant church as an 'evil cult,'" he said, referring to a term usually reserved for the banned Falun Gong spiritual movement, and based on secret guidelines that are internal to the police force and carry no academic or legal weight.

"Such criteria cannot therefore be used as a basis for punishment," Yang said. "In doing so, the authorities have exceeded the limits of [their] executive power."

Church in Talks to "Regularize" Activities in China

LDS newsroom (30.08.2010) / HRWF (07.09.2010) – Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - A series of high-level meetings between The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon) and an official from the People's Republic of China is expected to lead to "regularized" operations for the Church in China.

A statement from the First Presidency of the Church disclosed today that a senior representative of the People's Republic of China – the highest ranking representative from Beijing to meet with Church leaders – has visited with the First Presidency.

That meeting in the Church Administration Building in Salt Lake City on Tuesday, August 24, followed meetings in February and May in Beijing, attended by Church apostle Elder Dallin H. Oaks and Elder Donald L. Hallstrom, who are responsible for overseeing the Church in Asia, on assignment from the First Presidency. These meetings were initiated by the Chinese representative.

Elders Oaks and Hallstrom represent two of the most senior councils of the Church -- Elder Oaks, of the Twelve Apostles, and Elder Hallstrom of the Presidency of the Seventy. "It is important to understand what the term regularizing means, and what it does not mean," Church spokesman Michael Otterson said. "It does not mean that we anticipate sending missionaries to China. That issue is not even under consideration.

"The Church deeply appreciates the courtesy of the Chinese leadership in opening up a way to better define how the Church and its members can proceed with daily activities, all in harmony with Chinese law."

Otterson said that many details need to be worked out in further discussions with Chinese officials, but that the pending developments were the result of 30 years of building mutual trust with the Chinese.

"They have become thoroughly familiar with us through numerous contacts, and they have seen how we and our members operate in China. They know that we are people of our word when it comes to respecting Chinese law and cultural expectations," he said.

The formal, brief statement from the First Presidency said that they and other senior leaders at Church headquarters in Salt Lake City "have had discussions with a senior official of the People's Republic of China from Beijing, and have established a relationship which we expect will lead to regularizing the activities of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in China."

Otterson said that given the importance of understanding and complying with various Chinese laws and the need for ongoing cooperative efforts, the Church does not plan to comment further on the discussions for the time being.

"At the conclusion of the meeting in Salt Lake City, it was agreed that it would be appropriate for this information to be announced publicly," Otterson said.

Chinese regime officials banned by International Cultic Studies Association

Chen Shu & Xu Zhusi

Epoch Times (08.07.2010) / HRWF (13.07.2010) – Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - For years Chinese Communist Party (CCP) officials have tried to use the meetings of an association devoted to helping cult members as a platform to attack Falun Gong, but have been rebuffed. On the July 4 weekend, three CCP officials tried once again to do so and have now been banned from making any future presentations to the association.

The International Cultic Studies Association (ICSA) aims to research cults and to help members of cults who have been harmed. The ICSA does not support the Chinese regime's persecution of Falun Gong.

During the 2010 ICSA annual conference held in Fort Lee, New Jersey, three CCP officials who presented themselves as experts gave a "research report" on the "caring, transforming, and educating of cultic members in China."

The three CCP officials are in fact directly involved in the persecution of Falun Gong practitioners. They are Cheng Ningning, deputy secretary-general of the China Anti-Cult Association; Wang Wenzhong, a psychologist; and Chen Qingping a specialist from the 610 Office under the Shaanxi Province Communist Party Central Committee. The 610 Office was established by then-CCP head Jiang Zemin on June 10, 1999 for the purpose of eradicating Falun Gong.

According to Michael Langone, ICSA managing director, these CCP officials have routinely submitted abstracts of papers to the conference as researchers and psychologists. In past years, their submissions were rejected due to their having Falun Gong content.

However, this year there was no mention of Falun Gong in the paper's abstract. Instead the term "cults in China" was used, and they were granted permission to speak during the conference.

During their presentation, Cheng and Chen did not mention Falun Gong at all. However they showed a photo of a "Caring Heart Center" in Nanjing City, which, according to the China Anti-Cult Association website, was established in June 2005 specifically for "transforming" Falun Gong practitioners. "Transforming" is the word used by the Chinese regime for brainwashing Falun Gong practitioners and compelling them to give up their belief in Falun Gong.

When asked about the subject of her research, Cheng struggled to answer and eventually replied "I don't know." When again asked if the subjects were Falun Gong practitioners, Cheng responded with a tacit affirmative.

When Mr. Langone asked them what other "Chinese cults" they are researching and the status of the cults, none of them could provide an answer. Wang admitted that since 2000 he has been exclusively involved in Falun Gong "research."

After the conference, Mr. Langone told an Epoch Times reporter: "When we got these proposals, we have rejected them in the past... The proposals [for this conference] were to talk about treating cult members and I would expect China to have many cults, just like we do and Europe does. What I wanted to hear was about other groups. I didn't want to hear about Falun Gong..."

"We learned a lesson here. They admitted that they're talking about Falun Gong. This is not what we wanted to hear. We were looking for other groups. I'm very disappointed because I've had some dealings with these people. What's sad about this is that the authoritarian system in China constrains me."

One of the ICSA committee members Mr. Mike Kropveld told the reporter, "When there is bad research [like this] in conferences, it is so obvious, everyone can see that. We all know about the oppression of Falun Gong by the Chinese government. We do not agree with it." Mr. Kropveld also said that there will not be another chance for these CCP officials to attend an ICSA conference.

Experienced 'Transformation' Techniques

Attending the conference was Mr. Charles Li, a Falun Gong practitioner who was held and persecuted in prison for three years by the CCP. He said he is very familiar with the communist regime's so-called "caring" and "transformation" methods.

"I am a U.S. citizen. They forced me to watch anti-Falun Gong and pro-CCP videos over and over again. If I did not comply, they would beat me. They did not allow me to defend myself in court. They even used my mother's illness to pressure me," Mr. Li said.

"The CCP's multitude of brainwashing techniques has inflicted tremendous pain on many people. Some were even tortured to death. I have evidence to prove this. These three people work for the 610 Office. Their goal is to persecute and eliminate Falun Gong practitioners like myself. I believe they have no right to speak here," Mr. Li added.

China Anti-Cult Association

The China Anti-Cult Association was established on Nov. 13, 2000. It is directly controlled by the CCP Central Committee.

"The purpose of this Association is to persecute Falun Gong and make false statements about Falun Gong to international and domestic audiences. It utilizes government and media channels through the participation of so-called religious and scientific members," said Mr. Wang Zhiyuan, a representative of the World Organization to Investigate the Persecution of Falun Gong (WOIPFG).

Mr. Wang said that this is not the CCP's first attempt to deceive the international community using the cover of human rights and opposition to cults.

During the period between 2001 and 2003, the China Anti-Cult Association held anti-Falun Gong conferences in Geneva. They sent letters to the United Nations' Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) extolling their accomplishments in brainwashing Falun Gong practitioners.

Mr. Wang indicated that Wang Wenzhong has colluded with the 610 Office in persecuting Falun Gong practitioners.

According to Wang, Cheng Ningning, as the head of the China Anti-Cult Association, has participated in the planning and promotion of the persecution against Falun Gong on a long-term basis.

"Because of this, Wang Wenzhong and Cheng Ningming have been under investigation by WOIPFG since 2004," Wang said.

Chen Qingping works for the 610 Office under the Shaanxi Province Communist Party Central Committee and is a special expert responsible for providing theories to support brainwashing and spiritual persecution.

Wang said that Cheng, Chen and Wang have committed the crime of genocide and will one day be put on trial.

Priest and nun of underground diocese of Ningxia are killed

Zhen Yuan

AsiaNews (06.07.2010) / HRWF (07.07.2010) – Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Fr Joseph Shulai Zhang, vicar general of the underground diocese of Ningxia (Inner Mongolia) and Sr. Mary Wei Yanhui were stabbed and killed last night in the district of Wuda, Wuhai, Inner Mongolia. The two religious worked in a hospice for the elderly which is housed in the residence of the local church.

Local sources said this morning, the hospice staff, not seeing them appear at daily mass of 6.30, went to their rooms, finding the bodies of Father Joseph and Sr. Mary in a pool of blood, apparently stabbed to death. The murder was reported around 7 to the police, who cordoned off the area around the church complex and tapped telephone calls. Currently the motives behind the murder and identity of the assassin remain unknown.

Local Catholics tell AsiaNews that the body of Father Zhang has 7 deep knife wounds and signs of struggle. Sister Wei was instead killed by a stab wound to the chest.

Sister Wei, a native of Inner Mongolia, was the director of the nursing home that houses about 60 elderly people. The 32 year old nun professed her vows in 2001. She lived in rooms above the hospice. Father Zhang, 55, was originally from the diocese of Xianxian

(Hebei) and has been a priest since 1985. He began his service in Inner Mongolia about 20 years ago. His room was on the ground floor of the building.

The underground Church in Wuda is led by Mgr. Joseph Ma Zhongmu of Ningxia. He is the only ethnic Mongolian prelate in China and lives in the town of Chengchuan, Inner Mongolia. The official Church of Wuhai is instead under the diocese of Bameng, Inner Mongolia.

Beijing warns US over Falun Gong

Agence France-Presse (14.05.2010) / HRWF (18.05.2010) – Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Beijing has warned the United States against associating with the Falun Gong after Washington said it may fund a group linked to the spiritual sect, which is banned on the mainland.

The comments came as the two sides prepared for a human rights dialogue in Washington after a two-year hiatus.

"We firmly oppose any government or organization providing support to anti-Chinese forces in their anti-China activities," said Foreign Ministry spokesman Ma Zhaoxu after a State Department official confirmed the US government was in talks on funding an internet freedom group composed mainly of Falun Gong practitioners in exile.

The Global Internet Freedom Consortium offers software to circumvent internet censorship worldwide.

"The process is ongoing," State Department spokesman Philip Crowley said of the possible funding plan. "They have submitted a proposal, but no final decisions have been made."

The Falun Gong, whose Buddhist-inspired teachings focus on martial arts-like exercises, was banned by Beijing in 1999 and branded an "evil cult."

The group alleges its practitioners are treated brutally in China or even killed.

Ma said he hoped the two-day rights dialogue could lead to better relations but also indicated that Washington must respect China's position.

"China would like to work on the basis of equality and mutual respect to conduct dialogue and communication with the US in the field of human rights," he said.

The talks will be the first under President Barack Obama. He has been criticized by activists, who say he has played down rights in his quest for broader ties with Beijing.

Protestant clergyman arrested in Guangzhou

AsiaNews (11.05.2010) / HRWF (17.05.2010) – Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Police in Guangzhou (southern China) on Saturday arrested a clergyman from an underground home church; it also stopped a religious service held in a public park. Such actions have raised concerns that they might herald a new crackdown against religious groups that do not accept to be under state control.

Police took Rev Wang Dao from his home for questioning. Police raided the couple's home in the afternoon, taking away a computer, Wang's travel documents and bankcards. She said they had also detained her on Saturday night, and that he was still in police custody. "When they released me, they handed me a notification of the criminal detention of my husband," she said. The notification said Wang had been charged with "gathering a crowd to disrupt social order".

"I am rather worried because criminal detention is quite a serious measure," she said.

Wang was involved in the 1989 Tiananmen pro-democracy movement. At the time, he was a student and known as Wang Tongjiang. He was released after a year in prison and then assumed the name Wang Dao.

Wang's wife said all this was not enough. He was summoned several times in the past few months and was told to leave the city. In fact, "They said it's even better if you leave the country."

Last Sunday, police also arrested dozens of Christians from Rev Wang's Liangren congregation. They were meeting in a park to pray because police had closed down its church, forcing them to hold their services outdoor.

Some believe that the reason for the crackdown lies in real estate speculators who are interested in the land where the church is located.

In an open letter dated 3 May, the pastor appealed for support from other Christian Churches, saying his Church had become a target for police investigation after it became actively involved in aid work in the aftermath of the Sichuan earthquake in 2008.

"The room for survival for Chinese house churches is shrinking," Wang wrote.

Government repression appears to be increasing. Last November, the Shouwang Church in Beijing was shut down; a few days later, the same happened to Shanghai's Wanbang Church.

Beijing has allowed Protestant Christianity to exist but only within the framework of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM), which Communist authorities set up in 1950 soon after Mao took power and had missionary and Church leaders, including those born in China, expelled.

Officially, the TSPM has ten million members. Unofficial, underground home Churches have an estimated 50 million members.

The cross at the border: China's complicity in refugees' suffering

By Sarah Page

Compass Direct (26.04.2010) / HRWF (28.04.2010) – Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) estimate anywhere from 30,000 to 250,000 refugees from North Korea are living in China, either in border areas or deeper inland. Few are Christians when they emerge from North Korea, but the whispered advice among refugees is to "head for a cross," signaling a Chinese church that may assist them, according to a February 2009 National Geographic report.

Since China will not allow the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees access to border areas, Chinese Christians work with Christian NGOs to provide an "underground railroad" moving refugees via several routes to safety, most often in South Korea.

Chun Ki-Won, director of Christian NGO Durihana, admits that some of the refugees adopt Christianity to win favor with their rescuers, but others retain and strengthen their faith on arrival in South Korea.

China insists that the refugees are economic migrants and pays police a bounty to arrest and return them to North Korea. On arrival, North Korean officials pointedly question the refugees about contact with Chinese Christians or Christian NGOs. If any contact is admitted, execution or imprisonment is likely, according to David Hawke's 2005 report, "A Prison Without Bars."

As one refugee told Hawke, "Having faith in God is an act of espionage."

Still others choose to return to North Korea with Bibles and other Christian resources at great risk to themselves. For example, officials in June 2009 publicly executed Ri Hyon-Ok, caught distributing Bibles in Ryongchon, a city near the Chinese border, South Korean activists reported.

China remains impervious to the refugees' plight.

"China fears being flooded by refugees if they show compassion," said Suzanne Scholte, co-chair of the North Korea Freedom Coalition. "But refugee flows aren't going to collapse the [North Korean] regime. If that was going to happen, it would have happened already during the famine, so their argument doesn't hold water."

She added that North Koreans don't want to leave. "They leave because of Kim Jong-Il," she said. "Those [North Korean refugees] in South Korea want to go back and take freedom with them."

Two U.S. Christians entered North Korea in recent months with the same goal in mind. Robert Park, an evangelical Christian missionary, crossed the border on Dec. 25 with a letter calling for Kim Jong-Il to resign. Officials immediately arrested Park, according to the regime's Korean Central News Agency. He was later sentenced to eight years of hard labor but released in late February after making what many experts believe was a forced confession.

Fellow activist Aijalon Mahli Gomes entered North Korea on Jan. 25, the same news agency reported. Officials sentenced Gomes to nine years of hard labor and fined him 70 million new Won (US\$518,520). At press time Gomes remained in detention.

Two Falun Gong lawyers face permanent disbarment

Edward Wong

New York Times (21.04.2010) / HRWF (22.04.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Two Chinese lawyers who represented a follower of the banned Falun Gong spiritual movement could have their licenses permanently revoked in an administrative hearing on Thursday. The action against the lawyers is the latest move in an increasingly harsh government crackdown on lawyers who take on human rights cases.

The lawyers, Tang Jitian and Liu Wei, said in a written statement that they were accused by the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Justice of having "disrupted the order of the court and

interfered with the regular litigation process.” The charge against the lawyers is based on accusations from the Luzhou Municipal Intermediate People’s Court of Sichuan Province, where the lawyers defended Wang Ming, the Falun Gong practitioner, nearly a year ago. Lawyers in China are usually barred from practicing for life only if they are convicted of a crime. If Mr. Tang and Ms. Liu have their licenses permanently revoked, then this would be a rare occasion, perhaps the first of its kind, when a disruption-of-court charge has led to such harsh punishment, said Eva Pils, a law professor at the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

The two lawyers said in their written statement that the justice bureau’s charge “is obviously factually unsound and lacks legal basis.” The lawyers said it was in fact the judge in the court in Sichuan who was a disruptive element during the trial on April 27, 2009. The judge, Li Xudong, interrupted statements made by the defense lawyers or by Mr. Wang, the lawyers said, “so that the defense was extremely difficult to carry out.” The judge also allowed people to film the lawyers in the courtroom, even though this is usually prohibited.

“As an organ with public power, the Luzhou Municipal Intermediate People’s Court should examine its own unlawful acts,” the lawyers said.

The Chinese government has been relentless about quashing any defense of Falun Gong, which is considered one of the most sensitive topics in China, along with independence for Tibet and Taiwan and the Tiananmen Square crackdown in 1989. The movement was banned as an “evil cult” in 1999 after followers staged a silent protest at the Chinese leadership’s compound in Beijing. Since then, practitioners have been subjected to imprisonment and torture.

The government has been clamping down on rights lawyers over the past year. In July 2009, the Beijing authorities, citing tax issues, shut down the office of Gongmeng, also known as the Open Constitution Initiative, a prominent legal research organization.

In May 2009, the licenses of 53 lawyers in Beijing were not renewed, making it impossible for the lawyers to work legally. Mr. Tang and Ms. Liu, who were among them, still have not received the proper stamp that would allow them to resume practicing but have so far managed to avoid having their licenses permanently revoked.

Last month, Gao Zhisheng, an outspoken rights lawyer who had defended Falun Gong practitioners, resurfaced at a Buddhist monastery after being held in custody for a year. He said in news interviews that he wanted to lead a quiet life for now. Last year, Mr. Gao’s wife and two young children fled to the United States a month before Mr. Gao was detained. Previously, Mr. Gao had had his law license permanently revoked after being convicted on a charge of subversion and being sent to prison.

Human Rights in China, an advocacy group, called on the Chinese authorities to conduct a fair investigation of what took place in the Sichuan court during Mr. Yang’s trial.

“Instead of the progressive strangulation of rights defense work, the Chinese authorities need to demonstrate their commitment to respect the professionalism and independence of the legal profession, a critical requirement for a true rule of law,” said Sharon Hom, the group’s executive director.

Arrests of Buddhist monks in Tibet continue

AsiaNews (13.04.2010) / HRWF (15.04.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> – The campaign of arrests of Buddhist monks in Tibet, launched in recent months by Beijing to

"reassure" the province and prevent further mass protests, is intensifying. After numerous arrests in early April, police from the Office of Public Safety in Nyagrong County – the Tibetan Prefecture of Kardze in the northern province of Sichuan - arrested yet another monk on April 8. The arrest is reported by the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy (Tchrd), which has been monitoring the situation in the area.

Abo Tashi, a Buddhist religious aged 22, is accused of publicly protesting against the Chinese presence in the area along with three other compatriots. Abo was arrested along with Tsering Gyatso, 19; Wangchuk Tsering, 22 and Rinzin Dorjee, 24. The first two are from the monastery of Guru, as does Abo, while the fourth is from the Lamasery of Jamchon.

The four presented themselves in the village square of Serwoe, County Nyagrong, wearing national flags of Tibet: the symbol is banned by the Chinese since the region brought about by the People's Liberation Army led by Mao Zedong in 1949. Moreover, the young monks exhibited handwritten signs seeking the return of the Dalai Lama in Tibet, the independence of the region and the end of mining in the area.

500 residents joined the protest, expressing their support for the monks. According to local sources, the police fired to disperse the demonstration: it is not clear whether the shots were fired into the air or against the crowd. Abo was arrested, and there is no news of him since. The Tchrd in its newsletter, describes itself as "concerned" about the fate of Monk and asks the Chinese government for his immediate release. (N.C.)

Bishop placed under house arrest for refusing to co-celebrate Mass with excommunicated bishop

by Wang Zhicheng

AsiaNews/Agencies (08.04.2010) / HRWF (13.04.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net>
– The bishop was officially installed today, but refused to co-celebrate Mass with Ma Yinglin, who was ordained in 2006 without the permission of the Holy See. Forced to attend the ceremony, the bishop was still able to say publicly that he was taking part in the ceremony against his will.

Beijing (AsiaNews) – Mgr Matthias Du Jiang, bishop of Bameng, is under house arrest, local sources told AsiaNews. Today he was officially installed in his office. Sources said that he was placed under house arrest because of his refusal to co-celebrate Mass during his installation ceremony with a bishop who was excommunicated in 2006 because he was ordained without Holy See approval.

Mgr Du has been bishop of Bameng (Inner Mongolia) for the past six years. He was ordained in secret, with Vatican approval, and without permission by the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA), an agency that is trying to set up a national Catholic Church, separate from Rome.

Mgr Du, 47, has not been able to speak in public as bishop until now, nor was not able to wear his Episcopal biretta and pectoral cross in public.

Today's ceremony in Sanshenggong Cathedral was designed to show that he was being recognised by the government as well. However, the CCPA demanded that Mgr Joseph Ma Yinglin, unlawfully consecrated on 30 April 2006, be part of the service. A latae sententiae excommunication hangs over the latter.

Recently, the Vatican Commission on the Catholic Church in China issued a statement, calling on bishops to avoid acts (for example, sacramental celebrations, Episcopal ordinations or meetings) that contradict their communion with the Pope. For this reason, Bishop Du refused to take part in the service in the presence of Ma Yinglin.

During the ceremony, he publicly said that he was forced to take part in the Mass with Ma Yinglin. Now, he is under house arrest.

For the past few days, security forces have been out in force policing the city. Internet and telephones have also been placed under surveillance.

"Mgr Du's courage is inspiring. Let us hope that other bishops follow his example," a number of Chinese Christians told AsiaNews. However, "There are rumours that more ordinations are on the way and that Ma Yinglin wants to preside over all of them".

For the past two years, the CCPA has tried to convince official bishops to accept Ma Yinglin as CCPA president.

Beijing tightens controls over religious groups, now required to declare each financial transaction

AsiaNews/Agencies (19.03.2010) / HRWF (22.03.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - China's State Religious Affairs Administration has issued new, more restrictive financial accounting rules for religious organisations. For experts, the new regulations give the authorities more tools to limit the latter's activities.

After decades during which religion was banned, China's constitution now recognises the principle of freedom of religion. However, the authorities expect religious groups to operate within state-sanctioned organisations, set up along confessional lines but managed by government officials.

Each group must be formally authorised by such bodies, which can exercise a great deal of discretionary power over their members. In practical terms, this has given the Chinese Communist Party the power to appoint Catholic bishops as well as the top clergy of other denominations.

Under the new rules, all "religious institutions" must hire accountants and file annual financial reports to the authorities, Xinhua news agency said.

The rules are aimed at building a system under which the government can better supervise the finances of the nation's 130,000 religious institutions and help prevent embezzlement and the misappropriation of public funds, it said. After all, under Chinese law, religious organisations are seen as public institutions.

Few details of the rules have been release, but experts believe they are motivated by the same attitude that has led the government to ban fund raising by private groups without prior authorisation.

In both instances, the authorities want to control the activities of various groups and the best way is through constant supervision of their financial operations.

Religious persecution is widespread in China, especially against Tibetan monks and followers of the Falun Gong spiritual movement. Officially sanctioned institutions are not spared either. In October, the US State Department released a report alleging continued religious persecution in a number of nations, including the People's Republic of China.

China names its own lama to top body of advisers

By ANDREW JACOBS

NYT (01.03.2010) / HRWF (10.03.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - China's handpicked Panchen Lama, the teenage religious figure whose legitimacy is a matter of dispute among many Tibetan Buddhists, has been appointed to the country's top advisory body, the state media have announced.

Although membership in the advisory group, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, is of nominal interest to Chinese, the appointment of the Panchen Lama, 19, on Sunday ratchets up the government's efforts to elevate his stature among Tibetans. Because he was appointed by Communist Party authorities rather than by Buddhist leaders, many Tibetans reject his religious authority as the ranking leader after the Dalai Lama, who has lived in exile since 1959.

Born as Gyaltzen Norbu, he was anointed the 11th Panchen Lama in 1995, after the Dalai Lama identified a different child as the latest incarnation of the Panchen Lama. A few weeks later, that boy and his family vanished. The government has said that they are in "protective custody," but their whereabouts have been a mystery for 15 years.

According to Xinhua, the official news agency, the official Panchen Lama, just shy of his 20th birthday, is the youngest person ever appointed to the conference, which convenes this week as part of the annual pageant that includes meetings of the National People's Congress, the country's main legislative forum.

The advising conference is made up of wealthy businessmen, sports celebrities and prominent members of China's ethnic minorities. It is also cynically viewed as a reward for retired officials. Among the 13 new members appointed Sunday was Li Changjiang, the former head of China's food safety administration, who was forced to resign over the scandal involving melamine-contaminated milk.

Bkra-lo, a Tibetan scholar at the state-run Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing, said there was nothing surprising about Gyaltzen Norbu's appointment to the advisory conference.

"He has a lot of influence and popularity among the Tibetan people, so it makes sense," he said. "Although he is very young, he is also very learned."

Last month, the state media liberally featured his elevation as vice president of the government-run Buddhist Association of China. In an address, he swore to uphold the leadership of the Communist Party and promised to "adhere to socialism, safeguard national unification and strengthen ethnic unity."

Despite its stated devotion to atheism, the Communist Party has struggled to offer a counterweight to the immense stature of the Dalai Lama, whom it views as a separatist eager to sunder Tibet from China. The Dalai Lama says his only interest is greater religious and cultural autonomy for Tibetans.

Tsewang Rigzin, president of the Tibetan Youth Congress, an exile group in India, said no amount of grooming would burnish Gyaltzen Norbu's reputation among Tibetans.

"If you look at the Tibetan struggle for the last 60 years, neither torture nor financial incentives by the Chinese have been able to win the hearts of the people," he said. "Tibetans will never accept him as the Panchen Lama."

Zhang Jing contributed research.

China pledges more investment, religious controls in Tibet

Reuters (11.01.2010) / HRWF (12.01.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - Chinese leaders have pledged to increase investment in Tibet this year while keeping the restive region's Buddhist monks on a tight leash, state media have reported, in an effort to use economic growth to quell dissatisfaction.

Demonstrations in Lhasa that turned deadly on March 14, 2008 made the Chinese central government more aware of the economic roots of unrest in Tibet, although widespread demonstrations across the plateau were officially blamed on separatists loyal to the Dalai Lama, Tibet's exiled spiritual leader.

Economic growth for the remote region is targeted at 12 percent, and fixed asset investment at 18 percent in 2010, regional governor Qiangba Pingcuo announced this weekend, following estimated economic growth of over 12 percent in 2009.

Qiangba also said that the government planned to finish registering the qualifications of all living Buddhas, monks and nuns, in a speech on priorities for the upcoming year.

Tibet's monasteries are kept under a close watch by Chinese authorities, since the monks and nuns have often called for more freedoms for Tibetans as well as maintaining links to the exile community.

Tibet's economy has grown more quickly than the rest of China, sped by the completion of a railway to Lhasa and large mining projects, but those projects have also brought more Chinese migrants to Tibet, leading to many Tibetans' perceptions that they have been left out of economic growth.

Since the demonstrations, the government boosted training programs and subsidies to raise employment in Lhasa, the Xinhua news agency said in a separate report Monday, which also implicitly recognized the economic roots to the unrest.

The new investment targets helped lift Tibet-related stocks on Chinese stock markets Monday. Engineering and construction firm Tibet Tianlu jumped by over 7 percent on Monday, while Tibet Tourism and agriculture-to-Internet conglomerate Tibet Galaxy rose by 10 percent.

The train line to Lhasa, which officially opened in mid-2006, has enabled large-scale mining projects in Tibet, including the Yulong copper deposit, under development by Western Mining and Zijin Mining Group Co Ltd. Spurs to other Tibetan cities are expected to be completed this year.

The Tibetan demonstrations were followed by far more violent riots in July 2009 in Urumqi, capital of another ethnically distinct region where locals feel they are not benefiting from China's economic development.
