

# Human Rights Without Frontiers Int.

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## European Parliament

12<sup>th</sup> July 2006

## Delegation EU-China

## Hearing

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### Religious Freedom in China in 2006

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Vice-Chairman, Ms Vice-Chairwoman,  
Honorable members of the Delegation EU-China,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

I thank you for your invitation to this meeting of your delegation and I feel honored to have the privilege to be voice of the believers of all faiths in China who do not have the possibility to come here and testify about their daily life in their country.

The government of China recognizes five religions: Protestantism, Catholicism, Buddhism, Taoism and Islam. Noteworthy is the fact that Falun Gong was banned on July 20, 1999.

State recognition is all the more important since only state-sanctioned groups are afforded protection under China's religious freedom rules. The counterpart of this so-called protection is however that they must accept strict government supervision and they can only preach inside designated temples, churches and mosques.

The registration of particular religious groups is a prerogative of the state. For each of the five officially recognized religions, there is a government-affiliated association that monitors and supervises its activities: the *Chinese Buddhist Association*, the *Catholic Patriotic Association*, the *Protestant Three-Self Patriotic Movement*, the *Chinese Islamic Association* and the *Chinese Taoist Association*.

All religious groups must register with the appropriate religious organization to be allowed to carry out their activities legally.

### ***Instrumentalization of the national religious leaderships***

The *State Council's State Administration for Religious Activities* (SARA) is responsible for monitoring and judging the legitimacy of religious activity. The SARA and the CCP *United Front Work Department* (UFWD) provide policy "guidance and supervision" on the implementation of government regulations regarding religious activity, including the role of foreigners.

Using the national religious leaderships as the advocates of the government's religious policy is one of the missions of the state control agencies. A recent example among others. At a press conference in April, the Rev. Cao Shengjie, president of the state-backed China Christian Council, endorsed the limitations on religious freedom in China, saying that by limiting worship to authorized venues and forbidding it in public places the government wanted to protect the rights of others and to avoid religious disharmony.

### ***Recent cases of violations of religious freedom***

On the morning of March 23, 2006, about 120 police officers took part in a raid on a conference center outside Kunming, in the southwest of the country, and arrested five US citizens, two Taiwanese nationals and eighty Chinese citizens from Protestant congregations worshipping outside the tightly state-controlled *Protestant Three-Self Patriotic Movement*. Interrogators accused the five US citizens of being "foreign religious infiltrators." They were released after five hours of interrogation. The *Protestant Three-Self Patriotic Movement* kept silent about this crackdown.

The relations between the Dalai Lama and the Chinese authorities are still in a total deadlock. The Buddhist leader is persistently denied any pastoral visit to his community in Tibet. Since he appointed Gendun Choekyi Nyima, 17, as the 11th Panchen Lama in 1995, the latter's whereabouts are one of China's most keenly guarded secrets. Moreover, for ten years, the Chinese authorities have been defying the Dalai Lama's successor with a challenger, Gyaltzen Norbu, they have endorsed as the next Panchen Lama. Surprisingly, the Chinese-appointed Panchen Lama made his debut on the world stage in April last at China's first international religious forum since 1949 organized by the state-controlled *Chinese Buddhist Association*. The 16-year-old youth is reviled by Dalai Lama loyalists as a pretender and security is extremely tight wherever he goes.

Chinese strategy consisting in taking the full control of all religions, including those whose spiritual leader is residing abroad was confirmed by the last arm-twisting between Beijing and Rome. In May, the state-controlled *Catholic Patriotic Association* appointed a number of bishops without the Pope's consent. The Pope reacted by excommunicating those who ordained the bishops as well as the new bishops. The Holy See criticized China for allegedly forcing bishops and priests to participate in "illegitimate" ordinations that "go against their conscience."

On May 30, 2006, three adult children of Rebiya Kadeer, the famous emblematic figure of the Uyghur Muslim community, were arrested in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Province to try to prevent them from meeting with a US Congressional team carrying out a fact-finding in the region for the US Congressional Human Rights Caucus. Two of them were severely beaten by police officers. The *Chinese Islamic Association* failed to condemn this act of violence. On the same day, on the eve of the Dalai Lama's visit to the European Parliament, MEP Simon Coveney was hosting a press conference on religious freedom in China, during which Mr Erkin Alptekin, president of the World Uyghur

Congress, unaware of the aforementioned event, stated that Muslim Uyghurs not involved in any separatist or terrorist activities continued to be the target of systematic religious intolerance and persecution. Despite concerns expressed by the international community, the Chinese authorities are continuing to use the war against international terrorism as an excuse to crackdown on Muslim Uyghurs.

Since the beginning of this year, there have been repeated allegations that the Chinese authorities are harvesting organs from Falun Gong prisoners. Apart from Falun Gong sources, it must be noted that on March 24, 2006, *The Washington Times* published an article entitled "China harvesting inmates' organs". The American newspaper was saying a Chinese journalist had uncovered a secret detention center in northern China that is being used by a hospital to harvest human organs for sale to domestic and international buyers. On the prisoners' abuse, the journalist who fled China recently said that he first learned of the harvesting operation between October and December 2005 and that the prisoners used were members of the outlawed Falun Gong religious group. On June 27, 2006, a seminar dealing with this issue was organized in Strasbourg by the Swedish member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Göran Lindblad.

For years, despite repeated requests, UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion and Belief, Asma Jahangir, has failed to receive an invitation from the Chinese government to carry out a fact-finding mission about the alleged violations of religious freedom in China.

### ***Concerns of the European Parliament and MEPs***

I salute the interest that the European Parliament manifests about violations of religious freedom in China, in particular through the resolution adopted in September 2005 in which it called on the Chinese government to provide information about the situation of a number of Catholic clerics and demanded the unconditional release of all Chinese Catholics and other Christians incarcerated on account of their religious convictions and that the authorities cease immediately all kinds of violence towards them.

I salute the interest of a number of MEPs who have addressed the European Commission and the Council with written and oral parliamentary questions on the lack of freedom of religion in China, on the condemnation of pastor Cai Zhuohua to three years in prison for having printed Bibles without authorization, on the torture of Christians and Falun Gong practitioners in prison, on the arrest of Tong Qimiao, who was interrogated and tortured by security agents on account of his relationship with a house church in Kashgar.

I thank the MEPs who hosted conferences on human rights and religious freedom in China these last two years.

I salute Mr Edward McMillan-Scott, Vice-President of the European Parliament, who wrote an open letter on June 4, 2006 to the famous Chinese human rights advocate and dissident Gao Zhisheng in which he was saying: "The condition of prisoners in China is increasingly well-known but it is only in recent months that a particular mistreatment - of Falun Gong practitioners - has come to light, namely the selection of prisoners for 'reverse-match' organ and tissue transplants, leading to their deaths."

I thank your delegation for inviting me to this hearing before your next dialogue with China.

Last but not least, I call upon the members of the delegation to use their dialogue with China

- to address the numerous and persistent violations of religious freedom in China
- to ask for the release of pastor Cai Zhuohua sentenced to three years in prison for having printed Bibles without authorization
- to ask for the release of house church pastor Zhang Rongliang sentenced to seven and a half years in prison two weeks ago
- and last but not least to support the repeated and unsuccessful requests of UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion and Belief, Asma Jahangir, to receive an invitation from the Chinese government for a fact-finding mission in China before the Olympic Games.