

Secret Government Report Reveals China's Plan to Oppose Christianity

Released by China Aid Association, the document outlines a plan to promote 'atheism research, propaganda, and education' Despite China's rhetoric concerning religious tolerance, recent arrests and raids reveal an ongoing nationwide crackdown on believers.

In October, Chinese government officials spoke of a willingness to loosen restrictions on religious worship and to reopen dialogue concerning religious freedom and other human rights. However, a secret directive recently released by China Aid Association President Bob Fu directly contradicts such statements and outlines a chilling plan to promote "atheism research, propaganda, and education" in order to combat Christianity.

Fu revealed the secret directive, dated May 27, 2004, during a press conference held in November on Capitol Hill. He was in Washington to testify before the Congressional-Executive Commission on China.

According to China Aid, the directive is responsible for a slew of recent extra-judicial killings and arrests. Along with the directive, the Midland, Texas-based ministry published a partial list of Christian prisoners that names 42 who have been arrested and five who have been martyred.

Among them is Jiang Zongxiu, who was arrested in June for distributing Bibles in a marketplace. Officially charged with

“spreading a superstitious message,” she was beaten to death while being interrogated at the Public Security Office.

“The truth is, there is a systematic persecution of the house church and their leaders,” said Deborah Fikes, spokeswoman for the Ministerial Alliance of Midland, Texas, which co-sponsored the press conference. The alliance has made religious freedom in China a top priority.

News reports verify the overarching nature of the persecution. Compass Direct, a Christian news service, recently released details on three additional directives that were issued in August. These orders indicate the Communist Party’s intent to combat religious “infiltration” of the government and universities and the spread of religion and religious organizations.

China currently contains an estimated 100 million Christians, with more than 86 million belonging to illegal house churches, China Aid reported. For these Christians, religious persecution is not a recent phenomenon. In the last four years alone, more than 6,000 members of the South China Church have been arrested, harassed or imprisoned.

Observers are concerned that the recent crackdown represents a pre-emptive strike against religious dissidence in light of the upcoming 2008 Olympics. With the event being hosted in Beijing, religious-liberty advocates say Chinese officials may be concerned about a repeat of the South East Asian Games held in December 2003 in Hanoi, where protests by persecuted Vietnamese Christians generated international attention.

“The arrest and imprisonment of Christian leaders is one

symptom of an overall aversion to religious belief that includes practitioners of Falun Gong, Tibetan Buddhists and the Muslim Uighur community in western China,” said Joseph K. Grieboski, president of the Institute on Religion and Public Policy, which also co-sponsored the press conference. “We are only asking that China respect religious freedom as stated in their own constitution and the various international agreements to which they are signatories.”

In the meantime, numerous Web sites have been shut down and certain publications banned in the last few months. In one case, pastor Cai Zhuohua was picked up by officers from the Department of National Security in Beijing, China Aid reported. Cai, a well-known house-church leader, was charged with publishing “illegal religious literature,” including Bibles and a Christian magazine. His wife was also arrested, effectively orphaning their 4-year-old son. Both Cai and his wife face possible life sentences.

Of primary concern to Chinese Christians such as Fu is the impact these directives have on potential reform in the communist country. “As a result of these secret policies, free belief means only in your heart or in the bedroom,” Fu said. “We want not only to talk about freedom of religious belief but to make it so that every person can implement their beliefs.”

David Mundy in Washington, D.C.