

Worship Site Demolished, Pastors Arrested in China

✖ Following a mob attack on a church in northeastern China and the demolition of their worship site last month, the government put officials on alert to use military force against churches to quell potential “unrest,” according to a leading advocacy group.

Citing reliable government sources, China Aid Association (CAA) reported that the central government on Sept. 26-27 ordered officials in “all relevant government agencies” to prepare to use military force against Christians who might react to the attack on a Fushan Church branch congregation in Linfen city, Shanxi Province.

(Photo: More than 100 people were hurt when 400 police officers demolished this church site in Linfen city Sept. 13. Image courtesy of China Aid Association.)

In the wee hours of Sept. 13 some 400 uniformed police and civilians bearing shovels, batons, bricks, iron hooks and other weapons beat members of the church who were sleeping at the nearly finished factory building used as a worship site.

With several Fushan County officials involved in the attack, dozens of Christians were seriously injured among the more than 100 who were hurt, CAA reported.

According to the Epoch Times, a church member’s relative obtained a license to build the shoe factory and was allowing the group to meet there, as the church was growing too large to meet in homes and the building could hold up to 400 people.

On Sept. 25 Shanxi Province officers of the Public Security Bureau (PSB) detained nine Fushan Church leaders on their way

to Beijing to protest the attack, and the next day authorities placed state military police inside and around the main Fushan Church building in Linfen city, the advocacy organization said.

“To have military police occupy a peaceful church is an unprecedented, tragic development in 60 years of PRC [People’s Republic of China] history, which itself shows the reality of today’s situation regarding religious freedom in China,” China Aid President Bob Fu said in a statement.

Some 5,000 of the 50,000-member Linfen House Church network had worshipped weekly at the main facility, where the central government stationed police to prevent them from entering or holding services.

“Military police now guard the building and the surrounding areas around the clock,” Fu said. “More than 30 daughter churches in nearby townships have been prohibited from gathering to worship in their churches and homes.”

Among the nine Fushan Church leaders arrested without a warrant and held in a secret location was Pastor Yang Rongli, according to the CAA.

Other church leaders and members have been placed under house arrest and are now under constant surveillance, Fu said, adding that local authorities confiscated all church computers, TVs and other valuables as “illegal materials.”

The Beijing PSB has labeled the demolition and attack on the Linfen branch church as a response to a “violent uprising,” Fu said. The branch congregation had gathered at the Good News Cloth Shoe Factory, a building still under construction in

Fushan County, when the government-led mob attacked and took money, Bibles, clothes and cell phones, among other items, he said.

Fushan PSB officials met with church leaders on Sept. 19 and offered 1.4 million yen (US\$20,540) for reparations in exchange for the church not constructing a building for religious purposes, Fu said.

“Under pressure from the central government, the leading Fushan PSB officer expressed a desire to make amends for the agency’s corporate actions, with the goal of preventing any turmoil that could potentially mar the 60th anniversary National Day celebrations,” Fu said in the statement. “Angered by the brutal treatment, but willing to cooperate, the six [church] members raised their concerns, including the continued critical conditions of several hospitalized victims and the destruction of 17 buildings on the factory compound.”

The Christians reached a verbal agreement that the Fushan PSB would pay the reparations fee in exchange for the church not constructing a building, but Fu said continued arrests and state military presence at the main church site confirm the negotiations were insincere, a tactic to delay actions against the central government.

Pastor Arrested

In Beijing, the crackdown ahead of the Oct. 1 National Day included the arrest of a pastor known internationally as a house church rights defender.

PSB and State Security agents from Fengtai district in Beijing seized Pastor Hua Huiqi of Tent-Making Ministry on Sept. 17.

That evening his wife, Ju Mei, received a telephone call from him saying PSB agents had forced him into a car on the highway. She received another call a half hour later saying he had been taken to an unknown location before the phone went dead.

That night a Beijing PSB officer, Ding Xu, went to his home to pick up clothes for him and refused to answer his wife's questions, according to CAA. The director of the PSB's Domestic Security Protection Squad later told CAA that Hua was still in custody but declined to reveal his condition or whereabouts.

"Hua has been repeatedly arrested, beaten, and interrogated by PSB officials within the last two years, and his family has sacrificed their safety for the lawful defense of human rights," Fu said in a statement. "Hua's mother, Shuang Shuying, was released only months ago from her two-year imprisonment for her rights defense work."