

90-Year-Old Hong Kong Bishop Arrested for Supporting Democracy

Authorities in Hong Kong arrested a 90-year-old former Catholic bishop over his reported support for a pro-democracy group.

Officials have reportedly detained Cardinal Joseph Zen – the former bishop of Hong Kong – due to his role as a trustee with the group 612 Humanitarian Relief Fund, according to the National Catholic Register. The fund has helped pay legal fees for people who took part in the 2019 pro-democracy protests, which were ultimately quashed by Chinese authorities. The group, it should be noted, closed its doors in 2021.

While the Vatican has not yet addressed Zen's arrest, social media users and thought leaders are urging Catholic leaders to speak out on the cardinal's behalf. Others are urging believers to pray for him.

Sam Goodman, director of policy and advocacy for Hong Kong Watch, told The Globe and Mail, "We hope the Vatican will not only condemn the arrest of Cardinal Zen and call for his release alongside the other activists, but will reconsider its silence regarding the ongoing human-rights violations in Hong Kong and China."

It is worth noting that, in addition to being critical of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), Zen has rebuked the Vatican for failing to take strong enough actions against Beijing.

In the fall of 2020, following a visit to Rome, the cardinal criticized the Vatican for not appointing a new bishop of Hong Kong, which has not had one since 2019, the National Catholic Register reported.

“The Vatican seems to be guessing the mind of Beijing – always seeking to anticipate what Beijing will do, always appeasing,” he told the outlet at the time. “It seems they are afraid to nominate Bishop Ha (Bishop Joseph Ha Chi-shing) as doing so may offend Beijing.”

In a letter to Pope Francis, Zen expressed his belief that the failure to speak out against the CCP is “terrible.”

“We have lost credibility with our people,” he told the pontiff.

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