

Beleaguered Chinese Church Offers Members Legal Aid

Leaders of the troubled Shouwang house church in Beijing have established a legal committee to assist church members facing arrest or house arrest, the loss of employment or homes and forced relocation to their home towns.

In a press statement issued Tuesday, the unregistered church described the forced relocation of one church member to Shandong province as “a flagrant violation of the law.”

Leaders charged the committee, composed of legal experts within the church and officially formed last week, with collecting evidence of “citizens of faith being forced to leave their jobs or being evicted because of their religious belief.” The church would hold officials legally responsible for these violations, as outlined in an earlier press statement on May 12.

For the past three months, Shouwang church members have committed to meet in a public square in Zhongguancun, northwestern Beijing, in response to repeated attempts by the government to deny them access to a permanent worship venue.

Shouwang represents the “third church” phenomenon in China—consisting of large Protestant or Catholic churches functioning openly rather than underground, but refusing to register with government approved bodies such as the Three-Self Patriotic Movement or the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association.

China is also currently embroiled in a tense debate with Vatican leaders over the unauthorized ordination of Catholic bishops within the CCPA, according to a Union of Catholic Asian News report on Tuesday.

Pressure Mounts

On Sunday, police arrested 15 people who showed up at Shouwang's designated outdoor worship venue, including several from other house churches. Many church leaders remained under permanent house arrest, while scores of church members were detained in homes or hotel rooms, according to a China Aid Association report.

One of those detained on Sunday had traveled all the way from Henan province to express her support, the CAA said.

Two other women from Shuangshu house church in Beijing had planned on traveling to the venue, but police prevented them from leaving home. Within 24 hours their landlord also asked them to move out of their rented apartment, according to CAA.

CAA also claimed that officials pressured the management of the Beijing office of World Vision to dismiss employee and church member Xia Xiao, a claim that World Vision refutes.

"World Vision has fired no one and has come under no pressure to fire anyone," World Vision spokesperson Cynthia Colin said in a press statement. "The staff member in question has in fact been working as normal out of her office this week."

For the second week in a row, pastors from TSPM were called in to "counsel" Sunday's de-tainees, according to the CAA.

In mid-May the director of the State Administration for Religious Affairs convened a meeting of Three-Self leaders from 15 provinces and municipalities, asking them "not to heed Shouwang church's statement of faith," and repeatedly slandering Shouwang church, according to Bob Fu, president of the CAA.

The national daily *Xinhua* published an article on Monday extolling the freedom of TSPM churches. As evidence, the article listed several TSPM churches around the country with congregations of over 4,000 people; the construction of 11 new

churches in Nanjing, including one with seating for 5,000 people; the “abundant” provision of Bibles through China’s Amity Printing Press, and the training of over 2,000 TSPM clergymen through the government approved Nanjing Union Theological Seminary.

“I feel that the most pressing issue for Chinese churches is to figure out how they can be helpful to society, and how they can become integrated with traditional Chinese culture,” Pastor Kan Renping of St. Paul’s Church in Nanjing province told *Xinhua*.

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