

China Arrests U.S. Christian Aid Worker Near North Korea Border

China arrested on Friday a Korean American Christian aid worker who was being held near the country's border with North Korea, signaling a toughening crackdown on Christian activists in the sensitive region.

Peter Hahn, 74, is being charged with embezzlement and counterfeiting receipts, his lawyer, Zhang Peihong, told *Reuters*.

Zhang said he believed authorities were targeting Hahn because of his Christian faith and because he ran a non-governmental organization.

"The charges leveled against him are just excuses," Zhang said.

Hahn, who ran a vocational school in the border town of Tumen, had been under investigation for months, along with several colleagues. In an interview last month, Hahn's wife, Eunice Hahn, said the building that houses the school was a "mission base camp for our missionaries."

Eunice Hahn said those under investigation among Hahn's staff included two U.S. nationals and three South Koreans. Both Zhang and Eunice Hahn said Hahn had aided North Korean defectors more than a decade ago, but he was no longer doing so.

China has long worked to curb the flow of North Koreans who flee persecution and poverty in their homeland and illegally enter China before going on to other nations, usually ending up in South Korea.

A spokesman for the U.S. embassy said he could not comment on

the matter. Both Zhang and Eunice Hahn said U.S. consular officials had been able to meet Hahn.

In August, sources told *Reuters* hundreds of Christian missionaries had been forced out of China, most by having their visas refused, in a far-reaching crackdown.

China said in August it was investigating a Canadian Christian couple who ran a coffee shop in Dandong, further south near the North Korean border, on suspicion of stealing state secrets.

China's Foreign Ministry confirmed the charges against Hahn in a statement, but said he was criminally detained. Zhang said law enforcement authorities in Yanbian prefecture, where Hahn is being held, told him on Friday Hahn had been formally arrested—a more serious status than criminal detention.

Zhang said police had been allowing Hahn to see a doctor regularly. Eunice Hahn said her husband had diabetes and had two strokes this year.

"I just want to bring this to some sort of conclusion," she said.

Eunice Hahn said she had asked a U.S. diplomat to deliver a letter to her husband with Christian messages but Hahn had not been allowed to read it.

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