

China Uses Explosives to Annihilate 4,000-Seat Church Building

Chinese authorities in Zhejiang province used explosives to demolish the Sanjiang Christian Church in Wenzhou, China. The demolition reportedly took place at 8:35 p.m. on Sunday, Beijing time, after protesters—including church members—were dispersed by police.

The church became the center of a tense standoff after thousands of church members formed a human shield on April 4 in an effort to save the newly constructed church from demolition.

International Christian Concern (ICC) sources also report that Christian leaders had been detained or arrested in cities throughout the province, including Wenzhou, Rui'an, Yueqing, and Zhoushan. The arrests appear to be a part of a province-wide effort to clamp down on possible dissent over the destruction of the Sanjiang Christian Church. Local Christians in Wenzhou interviewed by ICC reported being "heartbroken" at the news of the demolition, and many feared a widespread campaign to demolish churches was underway.

"Local believers universally think that more severe persecution may be around the corner, but they do not really know how to face the coming challenge, except for praying," said one ICC source close to the situation.

In 2000, hundreds of churches and temples were reportedly destroyed by government officials across Zhejiang province.

The standoff over the church reportedly began after a Communist Party secretary visited the area and insisted the cross atop the Sanjiang Church was too large.

“When the Party secretary Xia Baolong visited the local areas, he found the cross on top of the church very conspicuous,” Zheng Leguo, a young leader at Sanjiang Church in Wenzhou, told ChinaAid. “So he ordered that it be demolished. Then, the officials from Yongjia county demanded that the church tear down the cross and the top floor of the church.”

When members of the church refused to remove the cross, authorities then threatened to demolish the entire structure, sparking the formation of a human shield earlier this month by thousands of Chinese Christians. A compromise ending the standoff was reportedly reached, until authorities canceled the agreement last week.

It was not immediately clear how authorities had managed to disperse the church members remaining at the site, though earlier reports claimed that SWAT teams had been brought in and that police had cordoned off roads around the area. In addition, locals reported that electricity at the church had been cut and cellphone reception was being jammed in the area around the church.

According to a blog post by *The New York Times* on April 4, local families had financed the construction of the \$4.8 million church building.

“Many of us donated our life savings. ... This is our home,” Li Xile, a local from Wenzhou, told the *Times*.

“The annihilation of the Sanjiang Christian Church only a few hours ago should be a wake-up call not only for Christians around the world, but for the international community at large,” says Ryan Morgan, International Christian Concern’s regional manager for East Asia.

“The government of China demonstrated today just how willing it is to use violent repression, not to mention explosives, in order to try and contain the growth of Christianity within its borders,” he continues. “A truly open and strong society has

nothing to fear from the stability and prosperity that inevitability result when religious minorities are protected and allowed to thrive free from persecution.

“Only dictatorships feel the need to forcibly crush the growth of people of faith who are simply looking to peacefully practice their religious beliefs. This morning, tragically, the government of China showed it cared very little for the desperate pleas of thousands of its own citizens, or even the glare and condemnation of the international media spotlight.”