

Chinese Christians Support Persecuted Churches

✖ To fight the persecution Christian churches in China are facing, leading Chinese house church pastors started a petition on May 11.

According to BBC News, about 50 million of China's 70 million Christians worship with unregistered groups known as "house churches."

The first-ever petition to the national legislature demands a special investigation into the events that led Beijing's Shouwang Church to a battle against authorities over its efforts to hold outdoor worship services. It also calls for legal protections for the house churches, which operate outside of China's religious system, run by the government. This step represents a further empowering of the house church movement, the *New York Times* reports.

Chinese pastors in the United States and Canada have also shown their support by initiating a worldwide "Help Shouwang" signature campaign.

"Our appeal expresses the views of and is endorsed by churches and individual Christians from around the world," the appeal said. "It is entirely without any political agenda and free from any government involvement.

"It is simply a voice of conscience, a call to respect human dignity and to recognize the inalienable rights accorded to every human being, particularly, in this case, to the leaders and members of Shouwang Church in Beijing," the appeal, entitled "Solidarity with Shouwang Church in Beijing," continued.

In early April the church's landlord canceled its lease under

pressure from authorities, leaving the church and its 1,000 members with no place to worship. Since losing the building, some members have tried meeting outdoors to pray on Sundays, but the government has been adamantly trying to stop them—even going so far as to prevent some from leaving their homes.

Carsten Vala, an expert on Chinese Christianity at Loyola University Maryland, told the *New York Times* that the petition increased pressure on the ruling Communist Party while it was becoming progressively nervous about people challenging its authority. “This shows there is national attention to what’s happening to Shouwang and that there is connection among urban house churches across the country,” he said.