

Chinese Christians: We Are Ready to Be Imprisoned and Die for Our Faith

At 3 a.m. (Beijing time) on Monday, during the 32nd night of a vigil of Christians guarding their church cross, about 400 police officers attempted to forcibly remove the cross of ShuiTou Salvation Church in Pingyang, Wenzhou City.

Police beat Christians with iron batons, severely injuring at least four. Bloody pictures and videos of riots from the incident are circulating on China's social network. Local Christians reported that 1,000 Christians formed a human blockade and guarded the church and that even though the police retreated after a one-hour attack, the Christians remain ready for continuous attacks from the government.

Continuous Cross Demolition and Harassment

The ongoing anti-church campaign in Zhejiang Province has seen more than 360 churches completely or partially demolished under the guise of "removing or modifying illegal constructions." In a news release International Christian Concern (ICC) reported, and later *The New York Times* corroborated, that religious buildings have been targeted at the exclusion of all others.

Since 9 p.m. on Sunday, police started to harass churches close to ShuiTou Salvation Church in Pingyang County, Wenzhou City. At 3 a.m. the next day, the police suddenly concentrated its force to attack ShuiTou Salvation Church itself. A local contact told ICC that while it was unclear how many Christians were injured, at least four were severely injured, two of whom were transferred to the First Provincial Wenzhou Hospital of Zhejiang.

"We will continue to guard our church cross to the end," said a local co-worker of Pingyang County. "We divide people into two groups and take turns to guard the church through the night."

ICC heard from local Christians that local government officials are even "competing" to be the champion of removing church crosses for the purpose of bolstering their own political careers.

"Guarding the church cross that is not against any law, Christians are publicly harassed by government officials," said a local Christian.

Ready to Sacrifice for Faith, Like the Three Friends of Daniel

Faced with repeated injustice from the Chinese government's massive anti-church campaign for months, three Christians, Zhan Yingsheng, Zhang Zhi, and Ye Wanjing, issued three public letters on July 16 with farewell notes, claiming that they are ready to die for their faith if necessary. Ye Wanjing wrote: "I am not going to die for the physical cross on my church and, to be honest, I rarely paid attention to the physical cross on the top of the building. However, faced with injustice, my conscience of being a Christian pressured me to do my responsibility. I hope to learn more about Jesus Christ's calling of 'die to myself.'"

"My heart is bleeding when I see hundreds of church crosses fall one by one in Zhejiang Province," Ye Wanjing wrote. "Facing the fierce attack, my co-workers and I do not have confidence that we are able to guard the church cross from being demolished; as an individual, I pray that the Lord gives me the will to be a martyr."

"I have packed clothes and toiletries, ready to go to prison anytime," Zhang Zhi wrote in the public letter. "I have told my wife and parents. Even though they are worried, they understand."

ICC's Regional Manager for Southeast Asia, Sooyoung Kim, said, "Zhejiang provincial authorities have carefully planned and carried out their systematic attack against Christianity and churches. We call on the government of China in the strongest possible terms to immediately stop the anti-church campaign that hurts its own people's heart. The world needs a peaceful China that respects human dignity and freedom of religions."

This article originally appeared on .