

Chinese Church Elder Sentenced to 4 Years; Founding Pastor Expected to Be Sentenced by Christmas

A church elder in China has been sentenced to four years in prison after being charged with “illegal business operations” for possessing books for the shuttered Chinese Christian megachurch, Early Rain Covenant.

The Christian Post has reported that “Qin Defu was sentenced to prison due to his involvement with 20,000 Christian books used by the 5,000-member church.”

The media outlet relied on information from ChinaAid, led by Bob Fu, who also serves on the board of directors for Save the Persecuted Christians (STPC).

The elder, Qin Defu, and his pastor, Wang Yi, founder of Early Rain, were arrested just over a year ago on Dec. 9, 2018, along with about 100 additional congregants. While the pastor’s wife and most others were released, Wang and Qin are still being detained. In fact, Wang was taken to an undisclosed location, and his lawyers and family have been unable to locate the pastor, even after a year.

As Wang awaits his own sentencing, a recent, new charge of “illegal business activity” could carry up to 10 years in prison, The Christian Post previously reported. Wang had already been charged with “inciting subversion.” Advocates say his sentencing could come on or near Christmas Day.

“At brother Qin’s trial,” said Wang’s lawyer, “we learned that the charge of ‘illegal business operations’ only concerned 20,000 books for the church’s own use (most of these were

small gospel tracts like 'The Good News You Don't Want to Hear'), and Pastor Wang Yi actively took most of the responsibility for this in his testimony. Based on this, I estimate that Pastor Wang Yi will be sentenced to no less than 10 years in prison."

The Christian Post also reported that according to the U.N.'s Human Rights Council working group, it is estimated that up to 13 members of the church are still being detained. The targeting of Early Rain Covenant Church comes amid the Chinese Communist Party's ongoing crackdown on religion. In May, authorities also shut down Shouwang Church in Beijing, said to have been attended by over 1,000 people.

Leaders of STPC, which advocates on behalf of hundreds of millions of Christians facing heavy persecution worldwide, is increasingly concerned about ongoing severe persecution of people of many faiths in China.

"Although the stories of these pastors and church leaders are heartbreaking, they are just a few among tens of thousands of Chinese Christians who suffer in silence and live in danger daily at the hands of a communist government," said Dede Laugesen, executive director of Save the Persecuted Christians.

This past spring, Save the Persecuted Christians and 45 other civil society leaders representing Christians, Muslims, Falun Gong practitioners, Buddhists and other persecuted faith communities signed a joint letter asking Squire Patton Boggs to stop promoting the interests of Communist China—as well as Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Palestinian Authority and Cameroon—known for gross violations of human rights and oppression of religious freedoms. More than 5,000 on Capitol Hill, including members of Congress, their staff and others, have also received the letter and have been informed about the accountability campaign to implore the law firm to stop its representation of these nations.

For believers around the world, Save the Persecuted Christians also seeks to bring awareness about targeted Christians through the “People of the Cross” exhibit, which features images, facts and quotes about the persecution of Christians in multiple countries.

The banner highlighting China reports that Christians in China are tracked and powerless to stop the destruction of their churches. The banner quotes Gordon G. Chang, commentator, essayist and author of “The Coming Collapse of China.”

“The Communist Party’s totalitarian ‘social credit’ system—made possible by artificial intelligence, camera surveillance, data mining and other tools—will also be used to repress Christians and others outside China,” Chang says.

The banner continues: “The Communist Party represses its citizens, imprisons human rights lawyers and pastors, demolishes churches, and has engaged in large-scale forced abortions and organ harvesting. China forbids religious education, collects DNA and biometric data from religious believers, and tortures and kills prisoners of conscience, including many Christians.”

Additional banners in “The People of the Cross” exhibit feature countries such as Turkey, where just .02% are Christian due to brutal persecution—down from 20% in 1902—as well as North Korea, Nigeria and India. A majority of the countries highlighted in the banners are high on Open Doors’ 2019 World Watch List, on which China is listed as No. 27. “The People of the Cross” exhibit has toured the United States, reaching tens of thousands, and is available for churches, public venues and special events. To learn more about hosting the exhibit, contact Save the Persecuted Christians or visit the website, where panels are available to view online.

This exhibit has been joined by another, “Warfare on Women,”

released during the 2019 U.S. Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom, which reveals the specific terror-tactic used to demean and degrade female believers to instill fear into the heart of Christian communities. To learn more about hosting a traveling exhibit contact Save the Persecuted Christians or visit the website, where panels are available to view online.

Reported in Aid to the Church in Need's biannual report on Religious Freedom in the World, at least 327 million Christians experience persecution—a number roughly equal to the current U.S. population. They report 11 Christians are killed every day.

According to Open Doors USA World Watch List, 245 million Christians are victims of high to extreme levels of persecution (such as torture, rape, sex-slavery, expulsion, murder and genocide), *an increase of 14% over 2018*. Open Doors also estimates 1 in 9 of the world's Christians experience persecution and that every month: 345 Christians are killed, often in public and without regard to gender or age; 219 Christians are abducted and imprisoned indefinitely without trial; and 106 churches are demolished.

Save the Persecuted Christians has developed a dedicated news aggregator—to capture current instances of persecution and to provide readers with an easy way to share these heartbreaking stories with others. Stories are categorized and resource reports are easily accessible.

With so much of the world's Christian population being attacked, imprisoned and/or exiled for their beliefs, such as Christians in China, the need has never been greater for the sort of grassroots campaign STPC's SaveUs Movement is working to foster. Its efforts are modeled after a miraculously successful one that helped free another population suffering from heavy persecution—Soviet Jews—by penalizing those in the Kremlin responsible for such repression. Through this movement, Save the Persecuted Christians endeavors to provide

American policymakers with the popular support they need to effect real change worldwide and alleviate *systemically* the suffering being experienced by so many of those following Christ. {eoa}