

Government Sentences Pastor, Wife to 14 Years for Corruption

A Chinese court sentenced a pastor and his wife to more than a decade each in prison for resisting the removal of crosses, according to the *New York Times*.

Pastor Bao Guohua and his wife Xing Wenxiang were sentenced to 14 years and 12 years respectively, some of the “harshest imposed” punishments, the *Times* reports.

Bao and Xing were among several pastors arrested and detained for resisting the removal of crosses on Chinese churches. Their son was also detained.

The Chinese government convicted them on claims the two “had embezzled hundreds of thousands of yuan in church funds and “conducted illegal business.”

Their sentences come down after prominent Christian human rights lawyer Zhang Kai was shown confessing to encouraging Christians to “protect their rights” after the cross removals.

“He was one of the most courageous lawyers in defending Christian churches in Wenzhou whose rooftop crosses were facing forceful removal by the authorities,” Purdue professor Dr. Fenggang Yang says.

“It is apparent that all Zhang Kai did was providing legal counsel to the willing churches, encouraging their leaders to use the existing law and regulations to defend their own rights. He urged both Christians and government officials to abide by the law and do not do anything beyond legal boundaries.”

The persecution of Chinese churches has been on the rise in recent months.

China Aid recently reported a 300 percent increase in religious persecution of Christians since 2013. Among the victims were 17,884 believers, including 1,592 church leaders, according to the 2014 China Aid annual report.

“The Chinese government has intensified its persecution against practitioners representing all religions in China. In the case of Christianity, both the government-sanctioned Three-Self church and the house church movement experienced unprecedented persecution. The Chinese government’s persecution campaign included forced demolition of churches and crosses, the detention and imprisonment of pastors and church members on criminal charges, forcing churches into bankruptcy by confiscating church property and imposing fines, and manipulating state-run media to label house churches as ‘cult’ organizations,” according to their website.

Even the *Times* reports the increased pressure Christians face under communist regime.

“Communist Party officials have increasingly been accusing foreign nongovernmental groups of trying to foment political dissent among ordinary Chinese and overthrow the party. Government officials have proposed a law that would strictly curb and control the work of nongovernmental organizations and their Chinese partners. Senior American officials have expressed alarm at the draft law,” the *Times* reports.