

# Imprisoned for 30-Plus Years, Chinese Underground Church Leader Dies

A Shanghai bishop who was imprisoned for decades by Chinese authorities died Sunday evening at his home, a Catholic group said in a statement.

Bishop Fan Zhongliang, 97, was ordained by Pope John Paul II but not recognized by Chinese authorities.

China is home to between 8 and 12 million Catholics, divided between the state-backed Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, which appoints its own bishops, and an “underground” church that is loyal to the Vatican.

Fan spent more than 30 years in prisons and labor camps over the course of his life, starting in 1955, according to the Cardinal Kung Foundation, which reports on the treatment of Catholics in China. He was under house arrest when he died.

Supporters held a mass at Fan’s apartment immediately after his death, the foundation said, but Shanghai government officials ordered the body to be transferred to a funeral home after the service.

The government denied Fan’s supporters’ request to hold his funeral at a large cathedral, instead designating a smaller courtyard at the funeral home, the statement said.

China and the Vatican broke off formal diplomatic relations shortly after the ruling Communist Party took power in 1949.

Both the Vatican and China agreed to ordain a bishop in Shanghai, Thaddeus Ma Daqin, in 2012, but government authorities arrested him after he stepped down from the Catholic Patriotic Association around the same time.

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