

US Church Leader Dennis Balcombe Under House Arrest in China

Dennis Balcombe, a well-known U.S. church leader who ministers in China, was placed under house arrest Saturday, ChinaAid has learned. Balcombe was detained following a raid on a house-church revival meeting, and his current whereabouts are unknown.

Also in Henan province, seven house-church leaders in Pingdingshan have been sentenced to prison terms ranging from three to 7 1/2 years in prison on cult charges.

In Nanyang, the raid by police, Domestic Security Protection agents and officials from the Religious Affairs Bureau occurred Saturday morning, just hours after the start of what had been planned as a three-day revival meeting, with attendees from the city of Wenzhou and the provinces of Hubei and Henan, among other places.

According to one attendee, the house church that organized the meeting specializes in prayer ministry and calls itself Mt. Prayer Church. He says it is believed to be part of the Fangcheng Fellowship, one of China's largest and oldest house-church networks.

Also at the meeting was Dennis Balcombe, from Hong Kong's Revival Chinese Ministries International, and two of its woman employees. ChinaAid's source about the raid says that when he and local church leaders left, Balcombe and his co-workers were still being held by police under house arrest.

When the 70 revival-meeting attendees gathered Saturday morning, they gave their cell phones to a designated person from the organizing church. This was a security precaution to

prevent the phones from becoming tracking devices that would lead authorities to their meeting site. They then boarded a bus to the meeting venue at a retreat center in the Wolong district of the city of Nanyang.

At about 10 a.m., not long after the meeting began, several dozen police, Domestic Security Protection agents and Religious Affair Bureau officials swarmed into the room. Without showing any identification, the officials began filming and photographing the event. When an attendee tried to videotape them with his digital camera, the camera was confiscated and had not been returned at the time of this report.

The Domestic Protection Security agents said they needed to check on some things in the room, then proceeded to fingerprint and palm print each person at the meeting. Each person was also interrogated, while a written record of the questioning was taken, and each person had to sign police documents.

Seven house-church leaders were sentenced on April 1 to prison sentences ranging from three to 7 1/2 years, according to the well-known Christian lawyer Li Baiguang. Their defense lawyers received the verdict and sentencing papers just last week.

Those who were sentenced include:

- Han Hai, 7-1/2-year sentence, male, 60, previously administratively detained twice, also sentenced to a labor camp for three years, now held in the Ye County detention center.
- Hu Linpo, seven-year sentence, from Singapore, male, 49, the house church's main preacher, detained in 1989 for 30 days, criminally detained April 18, now held in the Ye County detention center.
- Yang Lianbing, three-year sentence, male, 23, working in Zhengzhou, now held in the Ye County detention center.

- Zhang Mian, four-year sentence, female, 37, owner of the residence where the church meets, criminally detained April 20, now held in the Pingdingshan detention center.
- Cao Xia, 3-1/2-year sentence, female, in her 50s, owner of another residence where the church meets. From Xia's home, police seized CDs of Hu Linpo preaching and a computer used to make copies of the sermon CDs. Police also confiscated a Chinese-made Liebao SUV parked outside Xia's home that belonged to a Christian man who was there to listen to the preaching. Xia was criminally detained April 20 and is now held in the Pingdingshan detention center.
- Wang En, three-year sentence, female, in her 20s, taken from Cao Xia's home, said to have helped make copies of Preacher Hu's sermon CDs, now held in the Ye County detention center.
- Li Dan, three-year sentence, female, in her 20s, taken from Xia's home, probably for copying CDs, now held in the Pingdingshan detention center.

"This latest wave of religious persecution shows that the situation for religious freedom in China continues to worsen," says ChinaAid founder and president Bob Fu. "We urge the Chinese authorities to immediately release Pastor Dennis Balcombe and his two co-workers from Hong Kong. The officers who abused their powers by raiding a peaceful prayer service should be held accountable."

ChinaAid is shocked at this incident and will monitor developments in this case closely.

Balcombe has long been in Christian ministry in Hong Kong and speaks fluent Chinese. He is regarded as the main figure behind mainland China's early charismatic movement. In the 1960s, he founded City Revival Church in Hong Kong and later Revival Chinese Ministries International. He not only has been involved with the China's house churches, but he has also

teamed up to do ministry work with the government Three-Self churches, for example preaching at Three-Self churches.

In a late 2011 interview, Balcombe claimed there was a great freedom in China to spread the gospel and that he had seen little persecution in the past several years. To see the interview, [click here](#).