



Australian Government
Refugee Review Tribunal

Country Advice

China

China – CHN37814 – Fujian Province –
Christians – Christian Assembly Church

30 November 2010

1. Deleted.

2. Please advise whether there have been any significant changes in the treatment of the Christian Assembly church since 2007.

Limited information could be located on the treatment by authorities of the Christian Assembly church (also known as Little Flock) in Fujian, indicating that there have not been any significant changes since 2007. The most recent information states that the authorities in Fujian adopt a fairly tolerant approach to unregistered house churches, including the Christian Assembly. Fujian is not highlighted as a particular area of concern in China regarding religious freedom in general. It is therefore considered likely that Fujian falls into the category of a more permissive environment for unregistered Christian house churches, of which the Christian Assembly church is a sub-set.

No recent reporting was located about Fujian as a site of arrests, detention and church closures. A 2009 profile of the Protestant Church in Fujian Province by *Global Ministries* noted that there are large numbers of unregistered house churches in Fujian, including those of the Christian Assembly (referred to as Little Flock), some of which hold their meetings on TSPM (Three-Self Patriotic Movement) premises:

There are also large numbers of independent house churches in Fujian. The Fuzhou region saw the rise in the 1930s of the independent church movement known as the “Little Flock” associated with Watchman Nee (Ni Tuosheng).... **Today some in this movement hold their own meetings on TSPM church premises – others continue as unregistered house churches.** The Little Flock churches are particularly strong in Fuqing County, where probably about half of the more than 100,000 believers belong to this grouping. In fact, Fujian seems to be home to a large number of independently-minded Christians. Apart from the Little Flock there are at least 80,000 members of the True Jesus Church in the province – this is another indigenous Chinese church which was founded nearly a century ago. **In general, local government in Fujian seems fairly tolerant of unregistered believers as it is rare that one reads of cases of persecution of house-church Christians in this province.**¹

¹ The Protestant Church in Fujian Province’ 2009, *Global Chinese Ministries* (newsletter), April, Overseas Missionary Fellowship International website
http://www.omf.org/omf/us/resources_1/newsletters/global_chinese_ministries/gcm_newsletter_2009/global_c

Recent human rights reports that focus on religious freedom indicate that in some parts of the country (not specified) authorities tacitly approved the activities of unregistered groups and did not interfere with their operations. These reports do, however, note that in other areas repression occurred. For example, the *International Religious Freedom Report 2010* states:

In some parts of the country, local authorities tacitly approved of the activities of unregistered groups and did not interfere with them. In some rural areas, unregistered churches held worship services attended by hundreds. In other areas, local officials punished the same activities by confiscating and destroying property or imprisoning leaders and worshippers.

No references were found in this report to the Christian Assembly church (or Little Flock) nor Fujian. While the report details incidents of arrests, detention and church closings, Fujian is not referred to as an example where such events occurred throughout the period October 2009 to November 2010.²

Similar descriptions of increasing official tolerance for unregistered Christian groups appeared in the 2009 US Department of State (USDOS) *International Religious Freedom Report – China*, which stated that generally there is increased official tolerance for unregistered Christian groups (cults excepted) that are not challenging the authority of the state. It added that the level of tolerance varies by location:

Government officials allowed increased space for some unregistered religious groups it viewed as non-threatening. A branch of the State Council also held an unprecedented meeting with a delegation of "house church" leaders...The ability of unregistered religious groups to operate varied greatly depending on their location.

...

Local regulations, provincial work reports, and other government and party documents continued to exhort officials to enforce government policy regarding unregistered churches and illegal religious activities, although the extent to which officials interfered with the activities of unregistered churches varied and depended largely on local conditions.

As in the 2010 report, the 2009 USDOS report also lists government actions taken against religious members, including arrests, detention, and church closings; however, none of the examples occurred in Fujian Province.³

While there is evidence that, at least in some regions of China, authorities are more permissive than others of unregistered religious activities, the 2010 *Annual Report of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom*, also highlights that “[u]nregistered religious groups, or those deemed by the government to threaten national security or social harmony, face severe violations, including fines, confiscation of property, imprisonment, and the destruction of religious sites”. The report does not,

[Chinese ministries apr 09/the protestant church in fujian province](#) – Accessed 2 November 2009 – Attachment 3.

² US Department of State 2010, *International Religious Freedom Report 2010 – China*, 17 November – Attachment 4.

³ US Department of State 2009, ‘Abuses of Religious Freedom’, *International Religious Freedom Report 2009 – China*, 26 October – Attachment 5.

however, include Fujian when describing instances of restrictions on religious activity and makes no specific reference to the Christian Assembly church (or Little Flock).⁴

Given the consistent lack of reporting about Fujian as a site of arrests, detention and church closures associated with unregistered Christian churches, Fujian may be one of the locations in which authorities adopt a more tolerant approach.

Another indication that there is greater religious tolerance in Fujian was provided in a 2009 report from an external expert. Mr Philip Yee, Elder of the “The Church in Melbourne” (Local Church) advised that even unregistered groups labelled as cults by the government, which generally draw harsh attention from authorities even in Fujian, have also experienced greater tolerance recently. On 9 February 2009, Philip Yee provided updated advice on the situation of the Local Church (“Shouters”) in Fujian in *Research Response CHN34321*:

As we understand it, the local churches in China are viewed differently in each province. Certain provinces allow the local churches to register with the authorities and once they have done so, they are allowed to worship. However, in other provinces, including Fujian province, the local churches are regarded as illegal gatherings, however as we understand from some members who come from this province, there is not much arrests as before. There is now more dialogue between members of the local church and the authorities.

...

The same situation applies, as far as we understand from speaking to members who come from Fuqing city, that while the authorities do not recognise the local churches, there is not much arrests as before.⁵

A November 2008 report by the Country Research Section of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), *China's Protestants and Catholics*, provides a similarly positive description of the level of tolerance shown towards Christians in Fujian, excepting those groups labeled cults such as “Shouters” and Eastern Lighting.⁶ The most recent reference to Christians in Fujian in this DIAC paper is to an August 2008 report by *UCAN (Union of Catholic Asian News)* on the situation of Catholics in the lead up to the Olympics. This paper stated that “local officials have not imposed restrictions or given warnings to underground communities in Fujian...but that priests there are conscious of not organizing large-scale activities during this sensitive time”.⁷

Attachments

1. Deleted.
2. Deleted.

⁴ US Commission on International Religious Freedom 2010, ‘China’, *Annual Report of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom*, May – Attachment 6.

⁵ Yee, P. 2009, Email to RRT Research & Information ‘Re: Request for information from the Refugee Review Tribunal, Sydney’, 9 February – Attachment 7.

⁶ DIAC 2008, *China's Protestants and Catholics*, CIS Resources, Issues Brief CHN 251108, November, pp. 39-41 – Attachment 8.

⁷ DIAC 2008, *China's Protestants and Catholics*, CIS Resources, Issues Brief CHN 251108, November, p. 46 – Attachment 8; ‘Restrictions placed on ‘underground’ priests as Olympics loom’, 2008, *Union of Catholic Asian News (UCAN News)* website, 7 August <http://www.ucanews.com/2008/08/07/restrictions-placed-on-underground-priests-as-olympics-loom/> – Accessed 17 February 2009 – Attachment 9.

3. The Protestant Church in Fujian Province' 2009, *Global Chinese Ministries* (newsletter), April, Overseas Missionary Fellowship International website
http://www.omf.org/omf/us/resources_1/newsletters/global_chinese_ministries/gcm_newsletter_2009/global_chinese_ministries_apr_09/the_protestant_church_in_fujian_province
– Accessed 2 November 2009.
4. US Department of State 2010, *International Religious Freedom Report 2010 – China*, 17 November.
5. US Department of State 2009, *International Religious Freedom Report 2009 – China*, 26 October.
6. US Commission on International Religious Freedom 2010, 'China', *Annual Report of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom*, May.
7. Yee, P. 2009, Email to RRT Research & Information 'Re: Request for information from the Refugee Review Tribunal, Sydney', 9 February.
8. DIAC 2008, *China's Protestants and Catholics*, CIS Resources, Issues Brief CHN 251108, November. (CISNET - CHN 251108)
9. 'Restrictions placed on 'underground' priests as Olympics loom', 2008, *Union of Catholic Asian News (UCAN News)* website, 7 August
<http://www.ucanews.com/2008/08/07/restrictions-placed-on-underground-priests-as-olympics-loom/> – Accessed 17 February 2009.