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China: Treatment of "ordinary" Christian house church members by the Public Security Bureau (PSB) (2005 - 2007)

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A November 2005 report by the human rights organization Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) that specializes in religious freedom (CSW n.d.) notes that in 2005, there were reports of religious "persecution" of house church leaders and members in China (ibid. Nov. 2005, 1). According to the report, punishments meted out to house church Christians included "imprisonment, torture, humiliating treatment, fines, welfare deductions, withholding of medical treatment, church and business closures and confiscation of valuables and religious materials" (ibid.).

Several 2006 and 2007 press releases by China Aid Association (CAA), a United States (US)-based non-governmental organization (NGO) that investigates and advocates for religious freedom in China (CAA n.d.), report on Public Security Bureau (PSB) raids of house church meetings (CAA 26 Jan. 2007; ibid. 8 Jan. 2007; ibid. 26 Oct. 2006; ibid. 25 Oct. 2006; ibid. 21 July 2006). According to the press releases, during house church raids, PSB officials have detained and interrogated house church leaders and members (ibid.; ibid. 26 Jan. 2007; ibid. 8 Jan. 2007; ibid. 26 Oct. 2006; ibid. 25 Oct. 2006); conducted searches (ibid.; ibid. 21 July 2006); confiscated property (ibid.; ibid. 26 Jan. 2007; ibid. 26 Oct. 2006); handed out fines (ibid.; HRW 1 Mar. 2006; ibid. Jan. 2007); taken pictures of house church members and asked for their identity (CAA 8 Feb. 2007; ibid. 26 Jan. 2007; see also CAA 25 Oct. 2006). PSB officials have also reportedly beaten house church members during interrogation (ibid. 8 Feb. 2007; US May 2007).

According to the 2006 *Annual Report* of the US Congressional-Executive Committee on China (CECC), the Chinese government "targets house church leaders for the most severe punishment" (US 20 Sept. 2006, 92). Criminal charges have reportedly been brought against leaders in order to put an end to unauthorized religious activity (ibid. May 2007, 126). CAA's 2006 *Annual Report on Persecution of Chinese House Churches by Province* indicates that in 2006, PSB officials detained leaders of house churches for extended periods of time, while releasing members shortly after interrogating them on the spot (Jan. 2007, 2; see also CAA 21 July 2006; ibid. 26 Jan. 2007; ibid. 8 Jan. 2007; ibid. 26 Oct. 2006). According to the report, the "[PSB] strategy ... had the effect of transferring the pressure onto the church leaders, who were sometimes held for weeks or months" (CAA Jan. 2007, 2-3). There was also reportedly a decline in the number of arrests of house church Christians in China in 2006, compared with the previous year (ibid., 2). The report notes that during the year, CAA sources alone documented over 650 arrests of house church Christians, the majority of whom were leaders (ibid., 3, 19).

In 26 March 2007 correspondence, however, a representative of the New York-based Human Rights in China (HRIC) stated that

[o]rdinary underground church members can also easily become targets of official crackdowns. Once a person has been rounded up in a church raid, he'll be known to local officials, who will also mark

him as a recidivist if he pops up in future raids. Leaders require followers, and if ordinary Christians are too intimidated to turn up for religious gatherings, the leaders can't accomplish much. So where Christianity (or other religion) is regarded as a "problem," ordinary practitioners are considered an integral part of that problem.

The Representative further noted that, in some areas of China, house church members are viewed as "more of a problem" than in other areas, and that "[w]here the situation is considered 'serious,' you could expect the treatment of Christians to be harsher" (HRIC 26 Mar. 2007).

According to CAA, in 2006, arrests of house church Christians were reported in 17 provinces (Jan. 2007, 19); however the greatest number of arrests occurred in Henan province, Zhejiang province, and Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR) (CAA Jan. 2007, 3). In the provinces of Henan and Zhejiang, the house church movement is said to be "particularly strong" (ibid.).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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