



## RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

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22 June 2007

**CHN102492.E**

China: Reports of raids on Protestant house churches; frequency and location of raids (2005 - 2007)  
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

Following the introduction of China's Regulations on Religious Affairs in March 2005, there was reportedly a "crackdown" on the activities of house churches in parts of the country (HRW 1 Mar. 2006; CSW 26 Sept. 2005). A 26 September 2005 article by Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), "a human rights organisation specialising in religious freedom" (ibid. n.d.), indicates that, according to commentators, "the overall repression of the house church is the most intense since 1996" (ibid. 26 Sept. 2005). In 2005, there were reports of house church crackdowns in the provinces of Shanxi, Henan, Hubei, Jiangxi, and Jilin (ibid. Nov. 2005, 1; HRW 1 Mar. 2006). In May 2005, Chinese officials coordinated raids on 100 house churches in Jilin province [northeast China], arresting approximately 600 Christians (ibid.; see also CSW Nov. 2005, 1; ibid. 26 Sept. 2005). During the year, there were also reports of similar incidents in Hebei, Xinjiang, Beijing and Shanghai (CSW Nov. 2005, 1). A 1 March 2006 Human Rights Watch (HRW) report notes that in 2005, mainly large-scale house church meetings were raided.

According to China Aid Association (CAA), a United States (US) based non-governmental organization (NGO) that investigates and advocates religious freedom in China (CAA n.d.), in 2006, there was a decline in the number of house church raids in the country compared with previous years (ibid. Jan. 2007, 2). CAA reports that the greatest "persecution" of house churches in China in 2006 took place in the provinces of Zhejiang and Henan, where the house church movement is said to be "particularly strong" (ibid.; 2, 20). In its *Annual Report on Persecution of Chinese House Churches by Province*, the CAA indicates that the provinces with the second greatest "persecution" of house churches during the year included Anhui and Xinjiang (ibid.). *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2006* identifies the provinces of Hubei and Yunan as additional locations of house church raids (US 6 Mar. 2007, Sec. 2.c). According to CAA's *Annual Report*, in 2006, based on the NGO's sources alone, there were more than 650 arrests of house church Christians across 17 of China's 22 provinces (Jan. 2007, 19). Approximately 100 of these Christians were detained for over 10 days, while 18 were sentenced to jail terms exceeding one year (CAA Jan. 2007, 19). Raids on house churches have continued to be reported in 2007, including one in Jiangsu province (ibid. 8 Feb. 2007) and one in Henan province (ibid. 6 Mar. 2007).

According to CAA, while the number of reported raids on house churches in China declined in 2006, there was an increase in the number of house church demolitions and forcible closures compared with the previous year (Jan. 2007, 19). In the province of Zhejiang, three house churches were apparently demolished during the year (ibid.; see also AFP 23 Dec. 2006; ibid. 4 Aug. 2006; *The Washington Post* 1 Oct. 2006). There were also reports of house churches being destroyed in the provinces of Jilin and Fujian (CAA Jan. 2007, 19). Forcible closures of house churches were reported in Anhui province (ibid.; AsiaNews 12 Dec. 2006), as well as in Guangdong province, Shandong province, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region and Shanghai (CAA Jan. 2007, 19).

The treatment of house churches in China by government officials varies by region (US 15 Sept. 2006;

ibid. 6 Mar. 2007, Sec. 2.c; Forum 18 1 Sept. 2005; *The Standard* 3 Oct. 2006). In some regions of China, house churches with memberships in the hundreds are able to operate openly with the knowledge of the authorities; however, in other areas, small gatherings with a "handful" of members are not allowed (US 6 Mar. 2007, Sec. 2.c; ibid. 15 Sept. 2006). Local officials reportedly have "great discretion" in deciding whether house churches are in violation of religious regulations (ibid.; see also *The Standard* 3 Oct. 2006). According to a 3 October 2006 article in *The Standard*, a Hong-Kong-based English language newspaper (*The Standard* n.d.), "religious freedom seems to vary according to the whims of local authorities and the extent to which unregistered Christians are viewed as potential political threats" (ibid. 3 Oct. 2006).

The *International Religious Freedom Report 2006* states that

[h]ouse churches often encounter difficulties when their membership grows, when they arrange for the regular use of facilities for the specific purpose of conducting religious activities, or when they forge links with other unregistered groups or with coreligionists overseas (US 15 Sept. 2006).

The report notes that house church meetings in urban areas are usually small and limited to "a few dozen members or less," while attendance at meetings in small cities and rural areas "may number in the hundreds" (ibid.). However, according to a 27 June 2006 article by the Christian news service Compass Direct (Compass Direct 4 May 2007), Chinese officials in rural areas are "far more likely to attack and raid house church meetings, beating pastors and interrogating church members" (ibid. 27 June 2006).

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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