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China: Treatment of children of members of underground Christian churches; whether children of members of underground Christian churches are subject to sanctions, including reduced access to education and to health care

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

According to the United States (US) Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report 2007*, in certain areas of China, local authorities have placed pressure on members of unregistered, unofficial churches [also known as "underground" churches (Reuters 4 Dec. 2007; BBC 23 Sept. 2007) or "house" churches (CAA 19 May 2008)] to join registered churches or face certain consequences, including having their children's access to schooling restricted (US 14 Sept. 2007).

In 2 June 2008 correspondence, a representative of China Aid Association (CAA), a US-based, non-profit organization that investigates and advocates for religious freedom in China (CAA n.d.), indicated that "while there are no specific laws or regulations concerning the cessation of rights for children of house church Christians, there have been several instances of persecution amongst children of house church pastors and Christians" (ibid. 2 June 2008a). In separate correspondence on the same date, another representative of CAA said that the organization had received reports indicating that "children of the underground church were discriminated [against], even expelled from schooling" (ibid. 2 June 2008b).

Press releases on the CAA website report that Chinese authorities have arrested children following raids on Sunday schools or bible studies at unregistered churches (CAA 4 Apr. 2008; ibid. 19 May 2008; *The New York Times* 18 Aug. 2006; AFP 4 Aug. 2006). On 30 March 2008, four children were reportedly arrested with several underground church leaders following a Sunday school service in Qu County, Sichuan Province (CAA 4 Apr. 2008). The children were apparently released after interrogation (ibid.). One month earlier, the authorities reportedly arrested eleven minors and two adults at a house church bible study in Huocheng County, Xinjiang Province (ibid. 28 Feb. 2008; ibid. 19 May 2008). Information on when the children were released could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

Cited in two other news sources, the CAA reported that in August 2006, 90 children and 40 adults were arrested in Tongwei Village in Anhui Province after their Sunday school was raided (*The New York Times* 18 Aug. 2006; AFP 4 Aug. 2006). The children and most of the adults were reportedly released once the authorities had registered their personal information (ibid.).

On 1 May 2007, Mission Network News (MNN), a Christian news service "dedicated to keeping Christians informed on evangelical mission activity around the world" (MNN n.d.), reported that the authorities had arrested two children of underground Christians following a raid on a religious gathering that was attended by their parents (ibid. 1 May 2007). Further details on this case, including when or whether the children were released, could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

In January 2008, local authorities reportedly evicted several children and their caretakers from a Christian

orphanage in Hubei province as part of a "crackdown on Christian activities" (BosNewsLife 13 Jan. 2008). The authorities also reportedly "threatened" landlords to prevent the orphanage from obtaining another rental space (ibid.).

Information on whether access to health care is restricted for children of house church Christians could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

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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Internet sites, including: Amnesty International (AI), The Cardinal Kung Foundation, Christian Monitor, Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), The Dui Hua Foundation, European Country of Origin Information Network (ecoi.net), Forum 18, Freedom House, Human Rights in China (HRIC), Human Rights Watch (HRW), OpenDoors, Persecution.org, United Kingdom Home Office, United States Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC).

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