



## RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

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17 August 2004

**CHN42768.E**

China: Whether affiliation with or membership in foreign churches, while abroad, is a violation of government policy; whether a Chinese national who practised a religion abroad (i.e. in Canada) could be accused of violating government policy in China and would therefore be subject to repercussions upon their return to China (2004)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

Information about whether a person affiliated with a foreign church while abroad would violate government policy in China and would therefore suffer repercussions upon their return to China was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

However, on 29 July 2004, the communications director of the New York-based organization Human Rights in China (HRIC) provided the following information to the Research Directorate:

It is of course well known that the Chinese government often takes harsh measures against religious believers in China. However, it is also true that not all religions are banned. People belonging to authorized Catholic and Protestant churches, Buddhist temples and Muslim mosques are allowed to practice their religions under official supervision. The Chinese government on that basis claims that Chinese people enjoy freedom of religion.

It appears that what the Chinese government most fears are religious groups that are not willing to submit themselves to official supervision, and that proliferate beyond official control. If a Chinese citizen became a practicing Christian overseas and was willing to attend an officially sanctioned church upon his return in China, it's unlikely that he would encounter any difficulty. However, if he became an active member of an unsanctioned congregation, and especially if he contributed to the growth of that congregation through evangelizing, he would expose himself to a real threat of persecution.

It is also worth noting that some local governments are more tolerant than others of unsanctioned religious activity, especially if religious belief contributes to a stable social environment. In other localities, where unsanctioned religious groups are viewed as destabilizing elements, practicing religious beliefs exposes one to a much greater threat of persecution.

On the basis of the above background, it seems unlikely that a Chinese who became a Christian overseas would automatically face arrest or persecution upon his return to China. Much would depend on what kind of religious activity he expected to engage in upon his return, as well as the locality he planned to return to (HRIC 29 July 2004).

The *International Religious Freedom Report 2003* also reported that registered religious groups under the supervision of the state were permitted, while unregistered religious groups were not recognized, and depending on the region, were subject to harassment, intimidation and arrest (18 Dec. 2003). For example, according to a March 2004 article about the growth of Christianity in China, government policy towards

followers of this religion "differs dramatically between regions, and even counties" (*Christian Science Monitor* 8 Mar. 2004). For details about the status of religious freedom in China, please consult the "China (includes Tibet, Hong Kong, and Macau)" entry in the *International Religious Freedom Report 2003* at: <<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2003/23826pf.htm>>.

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.

#### References

*Christian Science Monitor* [Boston]. 8 March 2004. Robert Marquand. "China Opens Door to Christianity - of a Patriotic Sort." (Dialog)

Human Rights in China (HRIC). 29 July 2004. Correspondence sent by the communications director of the New York office.

*International Religious Freedom Report 2003*. 18 December 2003. United States Department of State. Washington, DC. <<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2003/23826pf.htm>> [Accessed 29 July 2004]

#### Additional Sources Consulted

**Internet:** Amnesty International, *Country Reports 2003*, Human Rights Watch, World News Connection/Dialog.

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