

## WRITTEN EVIDENCE FOR THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION INQUIRY ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN CHINA 2013-2016

### INTRODUCTION

There has been a marked deterioration in the protection of human rights in China from 2013 to the present. Individuals on the frontlines of defending human rights have long encountered oppression from the government in the form of harassment, intimidation and imprisonment. However, under President Xi Jinping, this oppression has not only increased for these groups, but has expanded to include a wide range of civil society and business sector actors – including journalists, academics, religious communities, internet personalities, labour activists and factory workers, environmental activists, and non-governmental organisations and associations.

This submission looks specifically at the situation of religion and belief communities and individuals in China, and the impact that restrictions on civil and political rights have had on these groups. The submission also considers specific cases of violations against religious communities, and explores the cross section between the right to freedom of religion or belief and other fundamental rights and freedoms.

### CONTEXT: HUMAN RIGHTS IN CHINA

Human rights defenders inside and outside China agree that there has been a significant deterioration in the human rights situation in China since 2013. For activists and foreign analysts, the timing of this downward spiral corresponds with President Xi Jinping taking office. Some observers have remarked that Xi is still very popular among ordinary Chinese people. The assumption is that Chinese citizens not involved with the rights movement have been left untouched by the crackdown on civil society and in particular the legal rights defence community; however, this trend is changing as the clampdown on dissent expands to include other areas of society.

Over the past three years observers have witnessed the further erosion of mainstream and social media freedom, to the point of drawing [criticism](#) even from a delegate from the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) who is also a university professor.<sup>1</sup> The government has made no secret of its aim to control the media. On 19 February 2016, Xinhua [reported](#) that Xi, following a tour of China's three leading news providers, had directed all news media run by the Party to 'work to

work to speak for the Party's will and its propositions and protect the Party's authority and unity'.<sup>2</sup>

While such comments may come as no surprise when directed at Communist Party of China (CPC) and government-run media, other parts of Xi's speech seemed to be addressed to journalists and the media in general. According to Xi, "The journalism industry should accelerate its progress in fostering workers with firm political beliefs," adding that "managing journalism and publicity" is "crucial for the Party's path...as well as the future and fate of the Party and the country." On 21 March the chief editor of the Party-run People's Daily reinforced Xi's message and [warned](#) against losing control of the media, particularly new forms of media which are harder for the government to manage.<sup>3</sup>

Beijing's attempts to stifle negative media portrayals of the state or Chinese leaders have even extended to Hong Kong, where five people associated with a Hong Kong-based bookshop and publishing house went missing in November and December 2015. One of the booksellers, Swedish citizen Gui Minhai, appeared on state-run television confessing to a fatal drunk-driving accident which occurred more than ten years before. Televised confessions are one way in which the media is serving the interests of the Party; they are also a gross violation of the right to a fair trial. Activists and lawyers have appeared in these confessions prior to being tried or even prior to being formally arrested and charged, leading some to describe the phenomenon as 'trial by media'. The circumstances around the statements are not known, and observers suspect that the confessions are made under duress.

The oppression of dissenting or critical voices has also extended to academia. University professors and international academics say that 'liberal' Chinese

<sup>2</sup> Xinhua, 'China's Xi underscores CPC's leadership in news reporting', 19 February 2016 [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-02/19/c\\_135114305.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-02/19/c_135114305.htm)

<sup>3</sup> *Wall Street Journal*, 'People's Daily Chief Warns of "Historic Mistake" if China Loses Grip on New Media', 21 March 2016 <http://blogs.wsj.com/chinarealtime/2016/03/21/peoples-daily-chief-warns-of-historic-mistake-if-china-loses-grip-on-new-media/>

<sup>1</sup> BBC, 'China magazine Caixin defiant on censorship of article', 9 March 2016 [www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-35761277](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-35761277)

intellectuals are being censored, or forced to self-censor. Those who overstep the mark by writing about or teaching topics perceived to threaten the Party order are forced to resign, or are restricted in other ways. If they lose their jobs, they are faced with the challenge of finding a university who will risk employing someone seen to be at odds with the government.<sup>4</sup> The Party has also warned against the dissemination of 'mistaken views and ideas', which deviate from socialism with Chinese characteristics, through university classrooms and class discussion forums.

This warning comes from Document 9, a notice from the Central Committee of the CPC's General Office issued in April 2013.<sup>5</sup> The document outlines current 'ideological problems' and solutions. Document 9 presents Western values, Western constitutional democracy and Western-style media as being at odds with the Chinese socialist system of government and the Party's own values. The notice specifically claims that letters and petitions calling for human rights and political reform are the work of 'Western anti-China forces' – including Western embassies and consulates – and internal 'dissidents'. Echoes of Document 9 appear in the televised confessions mentioned above, and in the state media's condemnation of lawyers and activists.

Alongside these actions against individual civil society actors, the government has introduced draft legislation on civil society organisations. A draft law on foreign non-governmental organisations (NGOs) operating in China has been heavily criticised by domestic and international NGOs, and has drawn concern from governments and regional institutions. The president of the European Union Chamber of Commerce predicted that the conditions created by the law would mean that "foreign NGOs will find it ever less appealing to stay in China".<sup>6</sup> Additionally, a new Charity Law appears to acknowledge, to some extent, the need for some kinds of NGO, at the same time as manoeuvring organisations into areas of work acceptable to the CPC. As the economy slows and environmental concerns increase, charities and social projects are needed to fill the welfare gaps left by the state. However, through strict restrictions on fundraising and registration, the government can directly provide incentives for 'approved' NGOs working on projects considered useful to society and the Party, while simultaneously setting up

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4 *Guardian*, "'It's getting worse": China's liberal academics fear growing censorship', 6 August 2015 [www.theguardian.com/world/2015/aug/06/china-xi-jinping-crackdown-liberal-academics-minor-cultural-revolution](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/aug/06/china-xi-jinping-crackdown-liberal-academics-minor-cultural-revolution)

5 For an English translation, see [www.chinafile.com/document-9-chinafile-translation](http://www.chinafile.com/document-9-chinafile-translation)

6 European Union Chamber of Commerce in China, 'European Chamber submitted comments on draft foreign NGO management law', 4 June 2015 [www.eurochamber.com.cn/en/national-news/2282/european\\_chamber\\_submitted\\_comments\\_on\\_draft\\_foreign\\_ngo\\_management\\_law](http://www.eurochamber.com.cn/en/national-news/2282/european_chamber_submitted_comments_on_draft_foreign_ngo_management_law)

huge obstacles for those working in areas that challenge Party rule. Finally, ordinary workers are also being affected by the suppression of dissent. As the economy slows, labour unrest is rising. Factories, mines and other employers are reacting to the slowing growth rate by laying off workers and withholding pay, and workers are becoming bolder as their livelihoods are threatened. The government has responded by promising structural reform on one hand, and clamping down on unrest on the other. The China Labour Bulletin has tracked the detention of labour activists in Guangdong Province and other areas, observing that 'The Guangdong authorities are unable to cope with the rising tide of labour unrest in the province: Their only response so far has been to threaten and intimidate workers and detain the labour activists and labour relations experts who could actually help.'<sup>7</sup>

The circle of individuals and communities affected by Xi Jinping's emphasis on security and stability over rights and freedoms is growing ever larger. An understanding of this context is important for examining the situation for freedom of religion or belief in China.

## **FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF IN CHINA**

As outlined in the previous section, under Xi Jinping there has been tighter control over the limited space for freedom of expression, freedom of association and other human rights. The shrinking space for civil society, and in particular the Party's real or expressed fears of foreign infiltration into Chinese society, are also resulting in tighter management of religious organisations and activities.

Firstly, the CPC has been looking at religious belief internally. The CPC's rules already state that members may not hold religious beliefs or take part in religious activities. However, an opinion piece published in a newsletter of the party's Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI) in May 2015 admitted that some Party members do hold religious beliefs. The piece stated that a small number of Party members had 'turned to religion...attracting serious concern, to the extent that it now falls within the purview of disciplinary work'.<sup>8</sup>

Also in 2015, Party authorities in Zhejiang warned that applicants to the CPC would be rejected if they were found to have 'embraced religious beliefs', while existing Party members would need to submit 'a written promise rejecting religion beliefs'. In an article in the *Global Times*, a daily paper under the official *People's Daily*, Professor Li Yunlong of the CPC Central Committee's Party School also reiterated that, "Party members are banned from joining religions. Believing in communism and atheism is a basic requirement to become a Party member," adding that,

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7 China Labour Bulletin, 'Guangdong labour activists detained for 100 days as worker unrest continues', 11 March 2016 [www.clb.org.hk/content/guangdong-labour-activists-detained-100-days-worker-unrest-continues](http://www.clb.org.hk/content/guangdong-labour-activists-detained-100-days-worker-unrest-continues)

8 Radio Free Asia, 'Warning Over Religious Believers in Chinese Communist Party Ranks', 25 May 2015 [www.rfa.org/english/news/china/china-religion-05252015112309.html](http://www.rfa.org/english/news/china/china-religion-05252015112309.html)

"This could be a part of efforts against the penetration of Western hostile forces."<sup>9</sup> These notices and articles can be read as a reaction to the growing prevalence of religious belief within the Communist Party.

The remainder of this submission will focus on issues concerning violations on the right to freedom of religion or belief in general society.

### **REGISTRATION AND RELIGIOUS PRACTICE AND IDENTITY: CHRISTIANITY**

Zhejiang Province in south-east China is known for its relatively large Christian population. Both Catholic and Protestant traditions are thriving, though the Protestant churches are larger in number and more visible. Since early 2014 the authorities in Zhejiang have removed hundreds of crosses from churches in the province, in some cases destroying part or all of the church at the same time.<sup>10</sup> Some estimates put the total number of churches affected at over 2,000; conservative estimates are between 1,500 and 1,700. Throughout the campaign, crosses have been removed from both Catholic and Protestant, registered and unregistered churches.

2016 has also seen the detention and imprisonment of several pastors, notably from registered, state-sanctioned churches. On 27 January 2016 Chinese pastor Gu Yue-se, senior pastor of one of the largest, if not the largest, registered church in China, was detained and accused of misuse of funds.<sup>11</sup> Two days later, Pastor Li Guanzhong, also the leader of a state-sanctioned church, was placed under criminal detention.<sup>12</sup> Around one month later, on 25 February, Pastor Bao Guohua and his wife Xing Wenxiang were sentenced to 14 and 12 years for 'corruption' and 'gathering people to disturb social order'.<sup>13</sup> On 9 March Pastor Zhang Chongzhu, who has been held under criminal detention since 5 February, was formally arrested on charges of 'stealing, spying, buying, or illegally providing state secrets or intelligence to entities outside China'.<sup>14</sup> All these individuals are believed to have been detained in connection with their opposition to the authorities' campaign to remove crosses from churches in Zhejiang. Pastors Gu and Li held positions in the China Christian Council (CCC), one of two state-sanctioned associations which oversee Protestant activities in China, the other being the Three Self Patriotic Movement (TPSM). The

9 *Global Times*, 'Zhejiang CPC bans religious beliefs among applicants', 1 February 2015 [www.globaltimes.cn/content/905305.shtml](http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/905305.shtml)

10 See also: CSW, *China: Freedom of religion or belief, rule of law and civil society*, 14 September 2015 [www.csw.org.uk/2015/09/14/report/2761/article.htm](http://www.csw.org.uk/2015/09/14/report/2761/article.htm)

11 CSW, 'China: Senior Zhejiang pastor detained', 2 February 2016 [www.csw.org.uk/2016/02/02/press/2971/article.htm](http://www.csw.org.uk/2016/02/02/press/2971/article.htm)

12 CSW, 'Chinese pastor detained and another released in Zhejiang', 8 February 2016 [www.csw.org.uk/2016/02/08/press/2976/article.htm](http://www.csw.org.uk/2016/02/08/press/2976/article.htm)

13 China Aid, 'Updated: Pastor, wife sentenced to 10-plus years in prison', 26 February 2016 [www.chinaaid.org/2016/02/pastor-wife-sentenced-to-10-plus-years.html](http://www.chinaaid.org/2016/02/pastor-wife-sentenced-to-10-plus-years.html)

14 China Aid, 'Radio Free Asia: Accused of "divulging state secrets" for exposing cross demolitions, Pastor Zhang Chongzhu from Wenzhou, Zhejiang, has been formally arrested', 23 March 2015 [www.chinaaid.org/2016/03/radio-free-asia-accused-of-divulging.html](http://www.chinaaid.org/2016/03/radio-free-asia-accused-of-divulging.html)

five officially recognised religious traditions (Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Protestantism and Catholicism) are each overseen by their respective state-sanctioned associations: 'normal' religious activities under the supervision or management of these associations are protected by the Chinese constitution (Article 36). Activities and organisations outside this system of management may or may not be tolerated: they are not protected by law.

The legal grey space for such religious activities by churches expanded in the 1980s and 1990s, and Christianity grew rapidly in both registered and unregistered or 'house' churches, particularly in urban areas. However, incidents of harassment and restrictions still occurred in certain areas, notably in restive regions like Xinjiang where rule of law is especially weak and government control is very strong. These also occurred in traditionally conservative provinces where local authorities still see Christianity as a 'foreign' religion; and thirdly in isolated cases where relations between the local authorities and a particular church were poor or suffered some clash.

The churches in Zhejiang Province do not fit into any of these categories. Churches there generally enjoyed a good relationship with local officials prior to 2014; the province is not a troubled or inharmonious area, and its famed entrepreneurial spirit has contributed greatly to its economic development. Furthermore, many of the churches affected by the cross removal campaign are registered churches, and the pastors detained, as mentioned above, are members of the state's patriotic associations.

Although there are different theories about the Zhejiang cross removals, most agree that the campaign was launched by the provincial authorities, rather than at the central government level. Nevertheless, the cross removals have provoked a strong reaction from both local Christians and the international community. The fact that the campaign has continued in the face of this opposition suggests that it has the approval of the central leaders, even if it did not originate in Beijing.

It is notable that among Catholic clergy in China, both bishops recognised by the Vatican and those ordained without papal mandate have publicly opposed the cross removals in Zhejiang, through calls to prayer and public letters. On 24 July 2015 Catholic Bishop Vincent Zhu Weifang of Wenzhou, who was secretly ordained in 2009 and later recognised by the government,<sup>15</sup> led a protest outside government offices in Wenzhou. Three days later Bishop Zhu and the Wenzhou clergy circulated a

15 UCAN Directory, Bishop Vincent Weifang Zhu <http://directory.ucanews.com/bishops/bishop-zhu/225>

public letter alleging that the authorities' campaign had become 'a naked attempt to rip down the crosses atop every single church'.<sup>16</sup> Following the release of Bishop Zhu's letter, Bishop Yang Xiangtai of Handan in Hebei Province publicly criticised the cross removal campaign for infringing on the right to freedom of religion or belief, and called on all Catholics in his diocese to pray and fast for the Church in Zhejiang. Bishop Vincent Zhan Silu of Mindong, Fujian Province, a bishop ordained without papal mandate, criticised the campaign on his personal blog.<sup>17</sup>

The situation for Catholics in China continues to be complicated for both lay people and leaders. As with other religions recognised by the Chinese government, state-sanctioned associations exist to oversee Catholic practice, but congregations also exist outside this system. As a result, observers often categorise Catholic congregations in China as belonging to one of two groups: those under the state-sanctioned Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA), and those which belong to the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) recognised by the Vatican. However, the reality is even more complex, and at the root lies the question of leadership. The government insists that all religious groups must be 'independent and autonomous', without foreign oversight; the Vatican maintains that a church independent of the Holy See is incompatible with Catholic doctrine.

This disagreement over the leadership of the church is manifested in the complex issue of the ordination of bishops. Before 2010 several bishops were appointed with the approval of both the Chinese government and the Vatican. However, in 2010 the government ordained a bishop without papal approval, and furthermore forced bishops who had been approved by Rome to attend the ordination ceremony. There now exists a complex situation in which some bishops have been approved by Rome, some by the government, some by both, and some who were first approved by the government and later reconciled with Rome. It would be a mistake to think that this is a question of politics rather than one of freedom of religion or belief. Many Catholics see their connection with Rome, facilitated by the bishop, as central to their belief and identity as a Catholic.

It should also be noted that, while many Catholic clergy have been released and rehabilitated after spending years in prison, several remain in detention or missing. Bishop James Su Zhimin (also known as Su Zhemin) was detained on 8 October 1997 in Hebei; prior to this, he had been arrested at least five times and spent nearly 27

16 UCANews, 'Chinese bishop, clergy speak out against cross-removal campaign', 29 July 2015 [www.ucanews.com/news/chinese-bishop-clergy-speak-out-against-cross-removal-campaign/73999](http://www.ucanews.com/news/chinese-bishop-clergy-speak-out-against-cross-removal-campaign/73999)

17 *ibid.*

years in prison. At the time of writing, the whereabouts of Bishop Su are still unknown. More recently, in July 2012 Mgr Thaddeus Ma Daqin, auxiliary bishop of Shanghai, was effectively placed under house arrest after he publicly resigned from the CCPA at his ordination Mass; and on 7 August 2013 a Catholic priest from Xiwanzi diocese was arrested in Hebei province by at least ten Public Security officers. His current whereabouts are unknown.

### **RESTRICTIONS ON PLACES OF WORSHIP: TIBET**

In March 2016 it was reported that Chinese authorities had that month imposed new restrictions on Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in a Rebgong (Tongren) county in Qinghai province. According to RFA, the authorities issued four restrictions which require monasteries to 'strictly follow the leadership of local management committees in implementing rules and regulations'. The restrictions make temple custodians directly responsible for implementing the committees' instructions. Monks responsible for temples and shrines are charged with preventing other monks from putting up posters opposing Chinese policy in Tibet, and from engaging in other activities that might 'disgrace' the monastery. In line with this directive, all images and statues of the Dalai Lama must be removed. Temples which disobey these instructions may be closed.<sup>18</sup>

These instructions are a continuation of the Chinese authorities' ongoing attempts to gain further control over the religious life of Tibetan Buddhists. The organisation Free Tibet claims that the Chinese government has closed over 99% of Tibet's monasteries over the past 50 years. The groups says that under the Chinese government nunneries and monasteries are kept under tight surveillance; some are required to fly the Chinese flag, and monks and nuns may be forced to participate in 'patriotic re-education programmes'. Those who refuse to cooperate, or refuse to denounce the Dalai Lama, are subject to expulsion or beatings, and monks who have peacefully protested for religious freedom have been detained, tortured and imprisoned.<sup>19</sup>

Despite heavy restrictions, religion remains an integral part of many Tibetans' culture and identity, and monks are important cultural figures. The government's attempt to force Tibetans to break all allegiance with the Dalai Lama appears to have backfired, creating deep distrust of the Party which 'friendly' propaganda and promises of economic benefits to the area have failed to alleviate. Some reports claim that Tibetans worship the Dalai Lama at secret shrines, since they are not allowed to do so at public monasteries.<sup>20</sup>

18 Radio Free Asia, 'Chinese Authorities Slap New Constraints on Tibetan Buddhist Monasteries', 29 March 2016 [www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/chinese-authorities-slap-new-constraints-on-tibetan-buddhist-monasteries-03292016132055.html](http://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/chinese-authorities-slap-new-constraints-on-tibetan-buddhist-monasteries-03292016132055.html)

19 Free Tibet, 'Religion in Tibet' <http://freetibet.org/about/religion>

20 International Campaign for Tibet, 'The Issues: Marginalisation and Exclusion' [www.savetibet.org/resources/all-about-tibet/the-issues/#sthash.ocY79bA5.dpuf](http://www.savetibet.org/resources/all-about-tibet/the-issues/#sthash.ocY79bA5.dpuf)

Under Xi Jinping, measures to curtail religious freedom at Tibetan monasteries have become more severe, and the government's policies have been marked by the often brutal suppression of religious and political dissent. James Leibold, an author and lecturer in Politics and Asian Studies at La Trobe University in Melbourne, Australia, argues that there are two main schools of thought on ethnic issues in China, which determine the government's policy on Tibet and other non-Han majority regions. One approach favours accommodation and protection (to some degree) of ethnic differences, and the other promotes centralisation with the long-term goal of eliminating policymaking based on ethnic differences. Mr Leibold believes Xi tends toward the second approach, but has failed to end this debate or to frame any new kind of policy. Instead, Xi's approach to ethnic issues is defined by stability maintenance and security.<sup>21</sup>

### **RELIGION AND LEGISLATION ON NATIONAL SECURITY: UYGHUR ISLAM**

On 7 July 2015 the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, expressed concern about the human rights implications of the national security law adopted on 1 July. The High Commissioner said the law's 'extraordinarily broad scope' and vague terminology left 'the door wide open to further restrictions of the rights and freedoms of Chinese citizens, and to even tighter control of civil society' by the government.<sup>22</sup>

Article 27 of the national security law concerns religion and belief. The Article reaffirms the state's protection of citizens' freedom of religious belief and 'normal religious activities': as previously outlined, this is generally interpreted as referring to activities conducted by recognised religions operating under the supervision of the state-sanctioned religious associations. The inclusion of religious activities in a law concerning national security gives weight to existing policies and measures curtailing freedom of religion or belief, by making these activities a national security issue.

Nowhere is this felt more keenly than in Xinjiang. In a June 2013 report on freedom of religion or belief in Xinjiang, Tibet and Inner Mongolia, CSW noted that Xinjiang is a special case when it comes to application of the law. Amnesty International reports that Uyghurs in Xinjiang are subject to methods of torture which are not generally used elsewhere in China.<sup>23</sup> The restrictions placed on family visits for Uyghur church leader Alimujiang Yimit (Alimujiang Yimiti) and human rights lawyer Gao Zhisheng further demonstrate the abnormal status of prisoners, and indeed all citizens, in Xinjiang.

21 Jamestown Foundation/China Brief, 'China's Ethnic Policy Under Xi Jinping', 19 October 2015, [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=44496&cHash=ff9ccea85bb7d17f906a992105f75603#.VvwJbpyLO2w](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=44496&cHash=ff9ccea85bb7d17f906a992105f75603#.VvwJbpyLO2w)

22 OHCHR, 'UN human rights chief says China's new security law is too broad, too vague', 7 July 2015 [www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=16210&LangID=E#sthash.92J1K4iR.dpuf](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=16210&LangID=E#sthash.92J1K4iR.dpuf)

23 Washington College of Law, Amnesty International cited in *Human Rights Brief*, Volume 8 Issue 1, <http://www.wcl.american.edu/hrbrief/08/1muslims.cfm>

The report also asserts that Xinjiang is a 'blind spot' for freedom of religion or belief. During Ramadan Muslims are subject to varying degrees of restriction on their religious practice. Local authorities issue notices discouraging and in some cases banning Party members, civil servants, students and teachers from fasting, which is integral to the observance of Ramadan. According to AFP, in 2012 one statement from Zonglang Township in Kashgar district issued a directive stating: 'It is forbidden for Communist Party cadres, civil officials (including those who have retired) and students to participate in Ramadan religious activities.'<sup>24</sup>

The new legislation appears to continue the practice of approaching religion as a security issue, and follows the launch of a 'strike hard' campaign in Xinjiang allegedly aimed at combating religious extremism and other security threats. As part of the campaign, police have raided so-called illegal religious meetings. In May 2015 Imam Eziz Emet was arrested and later received a nine-year sentence for 'teaching religion illegally'. Eight farmers arrested in connection with the 'illegal teaching' were sentenced to seven years each, according to RFA's Uyghur Service. According to local reports received by RFA, political prisoners in the men's village, Peyshenbazar, number one in every three families. The village's security chief said that the authorities interpreted private prayer sessions at places they had not officially designated for worship as 'a sign of religious extremism'.<sup>25</sup>

### **CONCLUSION**

The UK has stated that respect for human rights is fundamental for growth and stability, and has reiterated that the UK government's approach to human rights in China is one of engagement. However, the management of relations with China is not simply a question of engagement or detachment.

When British diplomats speak of a 'golden era' of UK-China relations, this is often interpreted as referring to economic relations. Trade is clearly an important concern for both the UK and China in this relationship, but trade interests alone should not dictate British foreign policy on China. At the same time, all areas and forms of engagement with China should visibly and genuinely reflect the values the UK claims to uphold.

24 *Guardian*, 'China steps up campaign against Ramadan in Xinjiang', 3 August 2012 [www.theguardian.com/world/2012/aug/03/china-restriction-ramadan-xinjiang-uyghurs](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/aug/03/china-restriction-ramadan-xinjiang-uyghurs)

25 Radio Free Asia, 'Uyghur Imam, Farmers Sentenced For Illegally Practicing Religion in China's Xinjiang', 16 March 2016 [www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/uyghur-imam-farmers-sentenced-for-illegally-practicing-religion-in-chinas-xinjiang-03162016112010.html](http://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/uyghur-imam-farmers-sentenced-for-illegally-practicing-religion-in-chinas-xinjiang-03162016112010.html)

CSW believes it is in the interests of the UK and British citizens to partner with a China which is committed to strengthening rule of law, rather than rule by law. Legislation which sees independent expression, conscience and belief as a threat; and security apparatus which uses the law to eliminate political and civil opposition; do not inspire confidence in potential partners, whether they are businesses, charities, universities or governments. A UK which guarantees the rights of its people is a stronger, more stable and more innovative partner for China: the same is true of China for the UK.

If the UK is to be a 'best friend' to the Chinese nation, the UK should do everything possible to urge China to end practices and policies which violate the right to freedom of religion or belief and other human rights. This is in the interests of both the Chinese and the British people.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY OR ACTION FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM**

- Strongly urge the Chinese government to set out a clear timetable for ratification of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR): this should be set out as a benchmark for progress at all human rights dialogues and other bilateral meetings
- Strongly encourage China to extend protection of the right to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) to religions and beliefs not included in the list of five recognised religions, and review registration requirements and all legislation pertaining to religious activities in consultation with religious communities and legal experts
- Demand the immediate release of all prisoners of conscience detained in connection with their religion or belief, including those detained solely because of their affiliation with banned religion or belief groups such as Falun Gong, and urge the authorities to fully investigate cases of suspected wrongful imprisonment
- Regularly and thoroughly evaluate the effectiveness of the UK-China human rights dialogue; ensure that dialogues include both clear and specific benchmarks for progress and 'red lines' corresponding to serious escalations in human rights abuses; further ensure that each dialogue includes an evaluation of whether the benchmarks have been reached. 'Red lines' should be monitored throughout the year, between dialogues, and breaches should be reported immediately

- Ensure that issues and cases concerning FoRB are raised consistently in high level visits and other bilateral exchanges with China
- When high level visits take place, ensure that China's human rights record and specific incidents are raised both in public and in private, naming perpetrators where appropriate. During high level visits, wherever possible, include opportunities for civil society actors with information and concerns about human rights violations in China to brief ministers and civil servants
- Strongly encourage the participation of civil society in China in preparations for bilateral human rights dialogues and other human rights-related reporting, including the UN Universal Periodic Review process
- Advise embassies and delegations in China to develop relationships with registered and unregistered religious leaders and communities
- Encourage delegations to China, including religious groups, trade delegations and other non-government visitors, to meet and engage with both registered and unregistered religion or belief communities, in order to give legitimacy to independent religious practice
- Advise embassies and government delegations to meet with the families of prisoners of conscience in China, and to request visits to prisoners of conscience
- Encourage and support training for local officials and police on the right to freedom of religion or belief in international law, and urge China to hold to account any officials whose actions are found to be in violation of the law
- Continue to monitor cases of religious freedom violations, and meet with lawyers and activists working on relevant cases when it is safe to do so
- Explore new ways of supporting lawyers defending victims of violations of the right to FoRB, including overseas exchanges and training, and the provision of 'safe spaces' for discussion either online or in person.

Submitted by:

Christian Solidarity Worldwide  
PO Box 99  
New Malden  
Surrey  
KT3 3YF  
+44 (0) 20 8329 0064  
[chloe@csw.org.uk](mailto:chloe@csw.org.uk)

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Registered Charity No. 281836

PO Box 99, New Malden, Surrey, KT3 3YF, United Kingdom  
T: +44 (0)845 456 5464 F: +44 (0)20 8942 8821  
E: [admin@csw.org.uk](mailto:admin@csw.org.uk) [www.csw.org.uk](http://www.csw.org.uk)