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Religious persecution in China: The case of the Church of Almighty God

Submission by

Omnium des Libertés

(가나안인권)

Canaan Human Rights



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Introduction: Omnum des Libertés was founded in July 1998 as a reaction to the growing governmental and institutional intolerance towards spiritual organizations and spiritual practice the last decades, escalating after 2001. In the same time-period spirituality was embraced world-wide by ever more people as a basis for self-understanding and visions in life. Le Pont du secret – 35 380 – PAIMPONT dubreuiljacques.omnum@orange.fr +336 80 33 47 54 <http://www.omnum-des-libertes.com/>

Introduction: 가나안인권, Canaan Human Rights, located at Building A, 24-6, Gurojungang-ro 8-gil, Guro-gu, Seoul, Republic of Korea, is a Korean NGO, which started its operations in 2013 and was incorporated in its present form in 2018. Canaan Human Rights is a public interest group and a voice for human rights and religious freedom in China. It asks the international community to pay attention to China's violation of religious freedom and human rights, and provides supports and humanitarian aid for the Chinese Christians who fled overseas. Official Website in Korean: <https://www.canaanhr.org/>

1. Historical Background

1.1 The Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s program is to ultimately extinguish and ban all religious beliefs. Since it came into power, the CCP has carried out full-scale suppression and banning of religious beliefs. Millions of Christians have been criticized and denounced at public meetings, incarcerated and tortured after being labeled as “counter-revolutionaries” or “cultists,” etc.

1.2 This submission focuses on a particular and most urgent case, concerning a Christian religious movement known as The Church of Almighty God. Among all the Christian churches and movements in China, The Church of Almighty God (CAG) has been persecuted most severely. There have been more than 400,000 CAG Christians arrested and imprisoned to date. Nearly 50,000 have been subjected to cruel torture. 44 have been tortured to death according to the documented materials we collected. It can be reasonably guessed that the number of CAG Christians who were persecuted is in fact much higher, because of the Chinese government's control of all information about its violations of religious liberty and human rights.

1.3 The Church of Almighty God (CAG) is a new Christian church that emerged in China in 1991. The CAG believes that Jesus Christ has returned to Earth and incarnated as Almighty God, whose work is aimed at purifying and ridding humankind of their sins, and finally would create a transformed new world. CAG Christians seek to follow God's way and establish a correct outlook on life, values, and goals, based on both the Bible and *The Word Appears in the Flesh*.

2. A Brief Overview of the Persecution From 2014 to 2018

2.1 From 2014 to 2018, the CCP has continued its systematic persecution of CAG. Upon information and belief, on June 16, 2014, the 610 Office, i.e. an agency directly affiliated to the CCP in charge of cracking down on “cults,” conducted a nationwide teleconference discussing strategies against CAG (610 Office 2014), proclaiming the “eradication” of CAG as a primary political task. In 2017, Chinese President Xi Jinping personally instructed to maintain a persistent “high pressure, strike-hard” posture against CAG (The Office of the CCP Henan Provincial Committee 2017). In January 2018, the CCP launch a nationwide operation of crackdown on CAG in Hainan and Hubei. (People's Daily 2018; Chinese Government Network 2018; Hunan Province Government Network 2018).

2.2 According to incomplete statistics, from early 2017 to the end of September of the same year alone, at least 4,000 CAG members suffered persecution at the hands of the CCP.

3. Legal Framework

3.1 China has signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, thus promising to protect religious freedom. It is also stipulated in Article 36 of the Constitution of People's Republic of China: “Citizens enjoy freedom of religious belief.” But the CCP has never carried out its promise.

3.2 The CCP has imposed arbitrary arrests, imprisonment, cruel torture, humiliation, forced conversion, extrajudicial killings, etc. on CAG Christians due to their participation in peaceful and proper religious activities, such as gathering together and spreading the Gospel, or distributing religious literature. The CCP has tried to force the CAG Christians to renounce their beliefs, which seriously violates Articles 3, 5, 9, 18, 22, 23, 26 of the

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and Articles 3, 7, 9, 17, 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as well as Article 50 of the Criminal Procedure Law of the People's Republic of China and Article 36 of the Constitution of People's Republic of China.

4. Using Cruel Torture

4.1 The CCP authorities and government agents are using cruel forms of torture to force CAG Christians to renounce their beliefs and extract from them information about other CAG Christians and the church's financial resources. Due to the fact that secret detention and private torture were mainly conducted in hotels, basements and other strictly controlled premises, it is very difficult to collect evidence concerning the crimes of torture.

4.2 The Chinese authorities torture the CAG Christians with dozens of cruel methods. Some of them are listed as follows:

- a. beating/whipping torture: punches, kicks, striking with electric batons, sticks, iron rods, and rubber truncheons; whippings with V-belts, rubber tubes, and electric wires;
- b. electricity shocks;
- c. burning/scalding torture: scalding victims with hot water, burning them with cigarette ends or a lighter, and so on;
- d. freezing torture: stripping off their cotton-padded clothes and freezing them in the environments with the temperature below zero, pouring cold water over them, freezing them in the snow, and so on;
- e. handcuffing torture: handcuffing them behind the back, wrist handcuffing, feet shackling, death penalty shackling (hands and feet shackled together), suspending and hanging, and so on;
- f. stabbing torture: stabbing them into the fingertips with bamboo sticks, toothpicks, and needles;
- g. sitting torture: forced sitting on a hard board, tiger bench, iron chair, small stool, and so on;
- h. sexual abuses;
- i. direct bright light into eyes;
- j. long-time forced painful postures;
- k. other types of torture: forced feeding; long-time deprivation of sleep, water and food; poisoning; injection of psychotropic drugs; forced feeding of chili oil and mustard oil; spraying poisonous liquid into eyes; using chuan xin bars, board torture, stretching torture, and shocking until numb, and so on.

4.3 Two typical examples:

On June 19, 2015, Mr. Cui Shuya, a CAG Christian, was arrested in Beijing for his spreading Gospel. The police officers tortured him with various means including slapping his face, delivering a heavy blow on his chest, using a police pepper spray against his mouth and nose, hitting his back of hands, teeth and private parts with an electrified baton, etc. (see Affidavit A).

on March 28, 2017, a CAG Christian whose name cannot be revealed because of fears of retaliation on his family, was arrested in Zhoukou City, Henan Province. The police agents tortured him by grinding his toes, slapping his face, whipping his back with a belt, pinching his mouth and face with pliers, shocking him with electricity, and so on.

4.4 The Chinese authorities encourage and justify the use of torture against CAG Christians tacitly or explicitly, and the persecutors are not subjected to any due punishment for their crimes. On the contrary, those who succeeded in "converting" the believers and getting more information on the CAG would get promotions and bonuses. The impunity of the persecutors seriously violates Article 247 of the Criminal Law of the People's Republic of China.

5. Extrajudicial Killing

5.1 In order to force the CAG Christians to renounce their beliefs, the CCP has arrested them, set kangaroo courts, tormented them wantonly, and even tortured some to death, depriving them of their right to life. The cases we have received and examined reveal that from 2014 to 2018, at least 15 CAG Christians died in abnormal circumstances due to the CCP's arrests and imprisonment; six victims died because of cruel torture and mistreatment in custody; five victims returned home and died after being mistreated during their imprisonment; four victims died by

succumbing to the pressure from the CCP's constant harassment and threat. There is no evidence showing that the Chinese authorities have investigated the CAG members' deaths in custody, or the persecutors have been subjected to due punishment.

6. Degrading Treatment of Christians' Dignity

6.1 Almost all the CAG Christians are forced to strip themselves naked for body searches before interrogation, and some are even photographed naked. During the interrogation, the police abuse CAG Christians and injure their private parts. After being sent to the detention jails or detention centers, some Christians are stripped naked by the guards forcibly and demanded to do some movements before other people or under the video surveillance, for instance, spin, squat down with hands on the head, and stand up repeatedly, jump high, or squat jump, etc.

6.2 CAG Christians in the 17–70 age range have been paraded along the streets by the CCP. During the parade, the CCP police kept spreading rumors to defame the CAG Christians before the onlookers, with all actions by which the police attempted to force them to renounce their beliefs.

7. Forced Conversion

7.1 The CCP emphasizes in many documents the need to strengthen the “conversion” of the CAG Christians. In 2017, Chinese President Xi Jinping personally instructed to achieve these “conversions” by strengthening the use of special spaces, special teaching materials, and special working groups (The Office of the CCP Henan Provincial Committee 2017). The CCP commands its members of the 610 Office to enter the houses of those CAG Christians who are kept under control and to conduct forced conversion face to face. At the same time, the bureaucrats threaten and incite their family members to participate in the “conversion,” claiming to realize the conversion to the utmost (610 Office, Rizhao City 2016).

7.2 CAG Christians are also forced, extrajudicially, to participate in “study groups of legal education,” yet another attempt at forced conversion. CAG Christians are monitored 24 hours a day, and prayers are prohibited. They are forced to repeat words of blasphemy against Almighty God and tear up and trample upon the scriptures including Almighty God's words. One CAG Christian who was submitted to forced conversion attempts stated, “It's better to sentence me to imprisonment than be instilled with those atheistic fallacies. The process of forced conversion is really a mental breakdown.”

7.3 After CAG Christians are sentenced to prison, the prison guards use methods including torture, forced overloaded labor, and incitement of inmates to abuse and discriminate against CAG Christians, to force them to sign the Three Statements (Statement of Repentance, Statement of Break-up, Statement of Guarantee) to renounce their beliefs.

7.4 For example, Mr. **Zheng Yang**, a CAG Christian, was 23 years old when arrested. He was forced to write monthly “thought reports.” Due to his refusal of “converting,” the prison guards tortured him with multiple high-voltage electric batons and confined him for one month. After being released upon completion of his sentence in December 2015, Zheng was diagnosed with schizophrenia (see **Affidavit B** by Zhang Yaguo, with enclosures, Zheng's Certificate of Release and Certificate of Diagnosis).

Ms. **Xiong Changzhen**, a CAG Christian, was arrested and sentenced to three and a half years of imprisonment because of her belief in Almighty God. During her imprisonment, in order to make her sign the Three Statements, the authorities of the prison forced her to take psychotropic drugs. Afterwards, they forced her to watch propaganda videos of forced conversion. When she refused, they handcuffed and suspended her, and instigated prisoners to beat her up. They also deprived her of sleep for several days and forced her to do intensive labor. Released from prison in June 2016, she turned dull and obtuse from a person of intelligence and capability (see **Affidavit C** and Certificate of Release).

8. Violation of Privacy and Personal Liberty

8.1 The State Security Force of the Public Security Bureau have united with the Household Registration Office, Network Security Department, Intelligence Agency, etc. to gather information about the CAG Christians in Mainland China and have set up an “Information Control System on Cult Members” (“database”). They have managed to unite the networks of 610 Office and the Public Security Organs to make preparations for arresting CAG Christians in unison. They have monitored CAG Christians' phone calls and set sensitive words on the

Internet to track CAG Christians. They have assigned plainclothes police officers and undercover agents, and incited neighbors and idle people to secretly monitor, shadow, and report CAG Christians, and established award mechanism for reporting information. Surveillance cameras and tapping devices are forcibly installed inside or outside of CAG Christians' houses, where they are monitored 24 hours a day. CAG Christians are required to show up at a certain time, write reports, and come clean about their whereabouts. They are harassed, interrogated and arrested frequently. Many CAG Christians are found missing (Donghe Sub-Bureau of Baotou City Public Security Bureau 2017). Many CAG Christians (including those who have been released) and their family members live under the CCP's long-term surveillance, and their normal life is completely obstructed.

8.2 From early 2017 to the end of September the same year, at least 2,122 CAG members had lived under the CCP's surveillance and 204 CAG members' houses were raided for extrajudicial searches.

9. Deprivation of Social, Economic, Occupational, and Social Security Rights

9.1 The CCP police has arbitrarily plundered the church money, searched, confiscated, and extorted CAG Christians' personal property. They have tried to force CAG Christians to renounce their beliefs by depriving them of personal property, and some elderly CAG Christians' lifetime savings were plundered. On July 2, 2017, 128 CAG Christians in Huzhou City, Zhejiang Province were arrested; more than 800,000 RMB and 2,000 grams of gold were confiscated and never returned to them (Huzhou Government Network 2017).

9.2 CAG Christians and their family members are discriminated in their employment (see e.g. Maoming City Public Security Bureau 2017). They are even deprived of their jobs, pension payments, subsistence allowances, and many have lost their sources of income. CAG Christians' offspring and relatives are deprived of their opportunities to attend higher education, apply for civil servant posts, study and work abroad.

10. Conclusion and Recommendations

10.1 Conclusion

From 2014 to 2018, the CCP has continued to issue documents, arrest, torture, forcibly convert, deprive of their economic right, etc. CAG Christians to force them to renounce their beliefs. There is no sign that CCP and the Chinese government may change their attitudes toward CAG Christians. The situation of religious freedom in China, if any, is deteriorating.

10.2 Recommendations

–The Chinese authorities must abide by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and respect the right to freedom of belief of CAG Christians.

–The Chinese authorities must immediately cease their persecution of CAG and release all CAG Christians who are detained and imprisoned.

–The Chinese authorities must immediately cease using torture and take legal actions against the crimes of the abuse of torture.

—The Chinese authorities must immediately cease their practice of forced conversion of CAG Christians.

–The Chinese authorities must immediately cease their monitoring of CAG Christians, and restore the proper rights to work and study of CAG Christians and their family members.

–Member states of the United Nations should fulfill the obligations of the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and grant asylum and support to CAG Christians who have fled abroad due to persecution in China.

Enclosures:

Affidavit A by Meng Chiheng

Affidavit B by Zhang Yaguo

Affidavit C by Xiong Juan

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