

News and Current Events :: New Campaign to Eradicate House Churches Launched by Chinese Government

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New Campaign to Eradicate House Churches Launched by Chinese Government

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MIDLAND, TEXAS (ANS) -- According to ChinaAid (www.chinaaid.org) for many years, China's house churches, which uphold religious freedom and hold fast to the true faith, have been viewed by the Chinese government as a hostile group of dissenters and have become the target of persecution and crackdowns.

"Furthermore," the organization says in a communiqué to Western media, "these vile acts of the government, which blatantly violate the Constitution of the People's Republic of China, have increased in frequency and severity year after year."

ChinaAid says that in December 2010, the Communist Party Central Committee's Public Security Commission issued a secret document to target China's "house churches" in implementing its special suppression campaign "Operation Deterrence."

Government officials of all levels were told to "guide" Christians attending those unregistered churches to worship in Three-Self churches, and to "break up" large churches like Shouwang Church into small groups, the organization says.

"Soon thereafter," ChinaAid states, "beginning on Easter 2011, Beijing Shouwang Church was forced to hold its Sunday worship service outdoors, and various government agencies have joined together in continuous attacks on the church, which has had its former large-scale Sunday worship services 'broken up' into small groups meeting separately."

"The so-called 'house churches,' this problem does not exist," Wang Zuo'an, head of the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) said in an interview with Wu Xiaoli on her show "Q & A about Shenzhen," which aired on Hong Kong's Phoenix Satellite Television on the afternoon of Oct. 21, 2011.

"According to the Regulations on Religious Affairs promulgated by State Council, religious groups need to follow the related regulations and register with the government. Nevertheless, a well-known fact is that many Christians of China spontaneously get together and meet at illegal and unregistered locations. The number of these believers is not clear to us. They call themselves 'house churches.' Western countries call them 'underground churches.'" ChinaAid says this remark of Wang's signaled the Chinese Communist government's new round of initiatives to eradicate house churches.

At the National Work Conference on Religious Affairs on Jan. 9, 2012, SARA deputy director Jiang Jianyong said that SARA in 2010 had started the process of certifying and creating files on clergy, and that the process is supposed to be completed in 2012. This was the starting point for promoting the implementation of the "Regulations on Religious Affairs." The plan is to systematize and computerize the management of clergy in three years.

ChinaAid goes on to say that as a matter of fact, SARA is certifying and creating files only on clergy from government-approved religious groups; the purpose of this is to target religious groups unwilling to become part of the government-approved religious entities, to exclude them and purge and eradicate them. In this way, thousands of "house churches" in China will become "illegal" religious groups, and thousands of "house church" ministers will become "illegal" clergy.

ChinaAid states that at the same time, SARA held the first training class for "Patriots in the Christian Community" in Beijing in September 2011, and in 2012 a second class is planned for the near future. During this time, the China Christian Council and the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (CCC/TSPM) across China have been holding "Training Sessions for Ministerial Certification," in which "patriotic" education is conducted.

Reports of these sessions have appeared on many religious websites, in the media and in periodicals. In some CCC/TSPM "Training Sessions for Ministerial Certification" that ChinaAid's reporter has attended, the local religious bureaus had all made special arrangements for officials of the deputy bureau chief level or higher to speak on "Regulations on Religious Affairs" and "patriotism."

According to ChinaAid sources, SARA's certifying of and creating files on ministers and its pervasive "patriotic" education are aimed at consolidating the joint forces of the CCC/TSPM and the Communist government so as to further eradicate the foundation upon which house churches stand. The government is calling this "solidify the foundation and reinforce the framework."

In the course of reporting, ChinaAid's reporter learned that in September 2011, when SARA held its first training class for "Patriots in the Christian Community," a secret document issued jointly by SARA and the ministries of Public Security and Civil Affairs was released that addressed the issue of completely eradicating "house churches."

Its main points were:

1. Phase One: from Jan. to June 2012, conduct thorough, intensive and secret investigations of house churches throughout the country and create files on them.
2. Phase Two: in two to three years, concentrate on cleaning up the "house churches" that have been investigated and have had files created.
3. Phase Three: in 10 years' time, completely wipe out "house churches."

The main strategies for implementing the above are:

1. Incorporate denominationally affiliated "house churches" into the CCC/TSPM management system.
2. Comprehensively implement the management model of "meeting sites attached to churches". Within the CCC/TSPM system, register those "house churches" that are willing to register and eradicate the "house churches" that do not want to register.
3. Ban the words "house church" as well as all reports on "house churches" from all websites, media and documents, and use "house gatherings" instead of the term "house church," that is, call "house churches" "house gatherings."
4. Implement humane law enforcement measures for "house churches".

ChinaAid went on to say: "We have noticed since the beginning of 2012 an increase in the frequency of persecution and suppression of house churches by the Chinese Communist government. In addition to the continuing persecution of Beijing Shouwang Church which has lasted for more than a year, the number of other similar cases has risen 20 percent over last year and has spread into other areas, including Christian education publication and bookstores.

The group added: "In a recent random survey conducted by this reporter in several provinces, cities and regions, over 95 percent of house church ministers surveyed said they had strongly felt the impact of the relevant government departments launching intense investigations into and creating files on the house churches, which has extended to grassroots-level villages and towns. Over 85 percent house church ministers said that their local religious affairs departments had already created files on them. A house church pastor from Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, said he had received reliable information that the provincial government had issued secret documents regarding the eradication of house churches. He said, 'The situation this year is especially tense.'"

The ChinaAid reporter has observed that the implementation of Phase One of the eradication of "house churches" as described in the secret document issued jointly by SARA and the ministries of Public Security Civil Affairs not only has already begun but has entered an intense phase. According to the main points of this secret document, this new round of the Chinese government's campaign to eradicate "house churches" will be rolled out in three stages of six months, three years and ten years. Compared with Operation Deterrence launched in December 2010, it is gentler, longer, and more sustained, as well as being full of "united front" strategy.

ChinaAid asked how will this new Chinese government campaign to eradicate "house churches" impact house churches that are seeking a path to religious freedom and holding fast to the true faith? "We'll wait and see."

"Meanwhile, we also pray for China's house churches, asking that God protect them as they journey on the path to religious freedom. May God bless the house churches that proclaim the truth of the Gospel and may God strengthen Beijing Shouwang Church in the midst of severe persecution."

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