



General Assembly

Distr.: General
20 February 2019

English only

Human Rights Council

Fortieth session

25 February–22 March 2019

Agenda item 6

Universal Periodic Review

Written statement* submitted by Coordination des Associations et des Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[11 February 2019]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



Limitations of religious freedom in China are now worse than they even were since the Cultural Revolution.

China allows only a few religious organizations controlled by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to operate, but even these groups are subject to limitations: for example, they cannot involve minors in their activities nor have any missionary outreach. The new law on religion that came into effect in 2018 makes repression of all groups outside the CCP-controlled religious bodies, including Protestant house churches, much harsher. Notwithstanding the agreement signed with the Holy See, Catholic priests who refuse to join the CCP-controlled Patriotic Association are still harassed and in some cases arrested. And some groups, such as Falun Gong or The Church of Almighty God, are outlawed entirely, meaning that their members are mercilessly hunted, with tens of thousands of them arrested, sentenced for no other reason than being active in a prohibited group, and in several documented cases even tortured and killed. Their persecution is justified by massive campaigns of fake news, accusing them of crimes they have never committed.

The situation of The Church of Almighty God (CAG) is particularly alarming. That the CAG is ruthlessly and cruelly persecuted in China is an established fact, although it kept a low profile in the West until recently and may have escaped the radars of some media. The CAG claims that more than 300,000 of its members have been arrested, and scholars regard the figure as credible based on the frequent references in Chinese media that hundreds or thousands of CAG members have been apprehended in a certain province. The Chinese government maintains a data base of selected court decisions, and there are hundreds of them there showing that CAG members have been sentenced to heavy jail penalties for the only circumstance of being active on a banned religious organization (*xie jiao*). Common members are also arrested and sentenced, not only leaders. NGOs have also reported instances of torture, extra-judicial killings, and organ harvesting.

Most CAG members are sentenced under Article 300 of the Chinese Criminal Code, which makes it a crime, punished with imprisonment from 3 to 7 years “or more,” to “use,” interpreted by the courts as “to be active in,” a religious group included in the periodically updated lists of *xie jiao*. The Chinese expression *xie jiao* is often translated as “evil cults” or “evil sects,” but a more literal translation is “heterodox teachings.” Lists of *xie jiao* have been compiled since the Ming Dynasty era, and they have included groups regarded as theologically “heretic” and hostile to the government. The CAG has been continuously listed as a *xie jiao* since 1995. *Xie jiao* are treated differently from the Protestant house churches not included in the *xie jiao* list. While, to the extent that they refuse to join the government-controlled Three Self Church, house churches are also discriminated and persecuted, the persecution of groups listed as *xie jiao* such as the CAG or Falun Gong is much more severe, is grounded in a specific article of the Criminal Code and in documents issued by the Central Committee, and is carried out by a specialized unit called Office 610, in coordination with the national security forces. In December 2018, the pro-government newspaper *Caixin News* reported that in Qinghai province, “within the past eight months, 1,500 police officers have been deployed in anti-cult projects that target the Church of Almighty God.”

The extent of the CCP control of Tibetan Buddhism remains intolerable to believers, and Buddhist and Daoist statues are being destroyed all over China under various pretexts. Scholarly studies have concluded that at least one million of Uighurs and other Muslims are detained in the “transformation through education” camps. While the CCP has claimed they are “schools,” the human rights magazine *Bitter Winter* has posted videos proving they have all the trappings of a jail. The CCP argues these camps are needed to prevent “terrorism,” but the same Chinese authorities admit Uyghurs suspected of terrorism are a few hundreds, hardly a reason to keep imprisoned a million of them, including journalists, intellectuals, and artists who have always opposed fundamentalism.

China’s violations of religious liberty are getting every day worse. The international community can no longer ignore this situation.
