

**Refugee Review Tribunal
AUSTRALIA**

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

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RESPONSE

1. **Is there information concerning the situation for underground Christians in Tianjin since April 2007?**

Limited information was found amongst the sources consulted on the situation for underground Christians in Tianjin since April 2007. The information provided in response to this question has been organised into the following two sections:

- [Tianjin](#); and
- [China](#).

Tianjin

An article dated 20 August 2008 in *AsiaNews* reports that “in Tianjn bishops and priests are under house arrest.” The article continues:

Double standards: while in the Olympic village foreigners enjoy full (or almost full) religious freedom, the Official and underground Church in China are under strict surveillance from both the police and Patriotic Association, to “avoid mass gatherings” and “guarantee security” during the Games

...According to AsiaNews sources, the situation of the underground Church is far worse: beyond the bishops, who have been missing for years, for the past weeks many other underground bishops and priests are under house arrest and the faithful have been threatened against holding any form of gathering during the period, otherwise "there will be consequences after the Olympics".

...Even in Tianjin bishops and priests are under house arrest. Threatened with heavy fines, the faithful are being "invited" not to host any underground priests. In many regions, the communities which usually hold catechism courses for the youth in the summer have been forced to cancel all of their plans. Other priests have been "advised" by police to go on holidays in order to keep them far from their communities (Zhicheng, Wand 2008, 'Beijing, religious freedom according to the Olympics', *AsiaNews*, 20 August <http://www.asianews.it/index.php?l=en&art=13020> – Accessed 20 November 2008 – Attachment 1).

An article dated 7 August 2008 in *UCA News* reports that in Tianjin "Church sources told UCA News underground bishops have been put under house arrest and strict surveillance, and are forbidden to contact their priests." The article continues:

They also said government officials told underground priests in these areas that clergy without permits from the Catholic Patriotic Association (CPA) are forbidden to celebrate Mass or administer any sacraments, including anointing the sick.

Some priests said they were warned not to leave their hometowns, while Catholic villagers said they were warned not to receive underground priests who usually stay at the laypeople's homes. Anyone violating the orders would be fined heavily, they added ('CHINA: Restrictions Placed On 'Underground' Priests As Olympics Loom' 2008, *UCA News*, 7 August <http://www.ucanews.com/2008/08/07/restrictions-placed-on-underground-priests-as-olympics-loom/> – Accessed 20 November 2008 – Attachment 2).

An article dated 21 July 2008 in *Shanghaiist* reports that on 30 June 2007 the Pope called for reconciliation between underground and open Catholic communities in China. The article reports on Tianjin "where more underground Catholics are attending Masses in Xikai Cathedral." The article continues:

UCAN cites open and underground priests engaging in dialogue with each other, and Shanghai Scrap's Adam Minter points out a significant development in Tianjin, where more underground Catholics are attending Masses in Xikai Cathedral, a cathedral where open-Church priests preside. Underground Tianjin Catholics previously refused to enter the cathedral and instead chose to pray at the Marian grotto outside. Minter regards the Tianjin situation as exemplary in explaining the misuse of the term "underground" Catholics:

the mere use of the term "underground" is misleading, as it suggests a community of believers who meet – and exist – in secret. But, in today's China, nothing could be further from the truth...Just to be clear: the open Catholics pray inside the cathedral, the underground Catholics pray outside the cathedral...if Tianjin's underground Catholics were trying to remain "underground," they couldn't have chosen a more public place to do it.

As UCAN notes, "Underground Catholics have refused to join the open Church because they regard it as controlled by the government-approved Catholic Patriotic Association." While interviews with various Chinese Catholic clergy yielded mixed opinions, Anthony Lam Sui-ki, a senior researcher of the diocesan Holy Spirit Study Centre in Hong Kong, told UCAN that:

... although not everyone is following the letter's guidelines, it has at least laid down some long-term rules. It has also allowed the Chinese government to understand the Church's vision and principles of its structure, he continued. While Lam stressed the letter does not call for unity in the China Church's structures, he sees some attempt at "communion" with underground Catholics now seeming "less resistant about joining the liturgy" in the open Church ('A year after Pope's letter to Chinese Catholics, some positive developments' 2008, *Shanghaiist*, 21 July – Attachment 3).

An article dated 16 July 2008 in *UCA News* reports that in Tianjin "most open-Church priests pledged obedience to underground Bishop Stephen Li Side". The article notes that in Tianjin "more underground Catholics are attending Masses in Xikai Cathedral...and fewer are praying at the Marian grotto outside." The article continues:

In Tianjin diocese, which has no open-Church bishop, most open-Church priests pledged obedience to underground Bishop Stephen Li Side of Tianjin earlier this year, according to Church sources. Bishop Li has allowed those priests to continue to administer their parishes.

Teresa, an underground Tianjin Catholic, told *UCA News* more underground Catholics are attending Masses in Xikai Cathedral at which open-Church priests preside, and fewer are praying at the Marian grotto outside. Previously, they refused to enter the cathedral.

However, another Tianjin underground Catholic complained the local Church is "still under the control" of clergy with links to the Catholic Patriotic Association ('CHINA: Church Observers See Some Positive Results One Year After Pope's Letter' 2008, *UCA News*, 16 July <http://www.ucanews.com/2008/07/16/church-observers-see-some-positive-results-one-year-after-popes-letter/> – Accessed 20 November 2008 – Attachment 4).

An article dated 24 August 2007 in *UCA News* reports that "sources say other members of the underground Church hierarchy in Hebei, from Tianjin and Xiwanzi diocese, have also faced pressure recently." The article continues:

A Church source told *UCA News* that around Aug. 22, some security officers visited Bishop Stephen Li Side of Tianjin, who lives on a mountain, and Coadjutor Bishop Melchior Shi Hongzhen and ordered them to join the CPA [Catholic Patriotic Association]. The officers took away a priest at Bishop Shi's place in the Tianjin area ("Underground' Bishop Jia missing again, other Prelates pressured' 2007, *UCA News*, 24 August – Attachment 5).

China

The US Congressional-Executive Commission on China's *Annual Report 2008* dated 31 October 2008 provides the following general information on freedom of religion in China:

Religious repression and persecution as detailed by the Commission in all previous Annual Reports persisted during this reporting year and intensified in the run-up to and during the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympic Games. In the past year, religious adherents remained subject to tight controls over their religious activities, and some citizens met with harassment, detention, imprisonment, and other abuses because of their religious or spiritual practices. The government sounded alarms against foreign "infiltration" in the name of religion, and took measures to hinder citizens' freedom to engage with foreign co-religionists. Moderate gains in using the legal system to challenge official abuses were offset by the continuation of repressive policies and official harassment of some religious believers.

The Chinese government and Communist Party continued to deny Chinese citizens the ability to fully exercise their rights to freedom of religion. The Chinese government subjects religion to a strict regulatory framework that represses many forms of religious and spiritual activities protected under international human rights law, including in treaties China has signed or ratified. Although some Chinese citizens are able to practice their faith within government confines, where some, but not all, Chinese citizens are allowed to do so, and where members of China's five state-sanctioned religious communities also face tight controls over their religious activities, the Chinese government has failed in its obligation to guarantee citizens freedom of religion.

The government and Communist Party remain hostile toward religion. The government and Party articulate a limited degree of tolerance for religion as a means of mobilizing support for their authority, and not as a commitment to promoting religious freedom.

In the past year, President and Party General Secretary Hu Jintao called for recognizing a "positive role" for religious communities within Chinese society, but officials also continued to affirm the government and Party's policy of control over religion. In 2008, Ye Xiaowen, Director of the State Administration for Religious Affairs, stated, "We should not expand religions, but strive to let existing religions do more for the motherland's reunification, national unity, economic development and social stability" (Congressional-Executive Commission on China 2008, *Annual Report 2008*, 31 October, p.73 – Attachment 6).

The US Congressional-Executive Commission on China provides the following summary on freedom of religion in China for Catholics:

The state-controlled Chinese Catholic church continues to deny its members the freedom to pursue full communion and free communications with the Holy See and other Catholic institutions outside of China. In the past year, the Commission observed ongoing harassment and detention of Catholics in China, especially unregistered bishops and priests; further restrictions on access to pilgrimage sites; continuing negotiations and disputes over the return of confiscated church property; and ongoing tensions with the Holy See, despite a policy shift towards re-accommodating discreet Holy See involvement in the appointment of bishops for the state-controlled church (Congressional-Executive Commission on China 2008, *Annual Report 2008*, 31 October, p.77 – Attachment 6).

For more information please see pages 77 to 79 of Attachment 6 (Congressional-Executive Commission on China 2008, *Annual Report 2008*, 31 October – Attachment 6).

The US Congressional-Executive Commission on China provides the following summary on freedom of religion in China for Protestants:

Members of China's state-controlled Protestant church remain subject to controls over their internal affairs and doctrine, while members of unregistered church communities and members of registered churches who run afoul of state policy remain subject to arbitrary harassment, detention, and imprisonment, as well as closure of churches and confiscation of church property. In the past year, the Commission noted increased repression of unregistered church leaders and members in the run-up to the Olympics, including an increase in the number of reported detentions; increased reports of repercussions for Chinese Protestants who interact with foreign co-religionists or foreign visitors; and ongoing efforts to control Protestant doctrine and co-opt church members to meet government and Communist Party goals (Congressional-Executive Commission on China 2008, *Annual Report 2008*, 31 October, p.82 – Attachment 6).

For more information please see pages 82 to 84 of Attachment 6 (Congressional-Executive Commission on China 2008, *Annual Report 2008*, 31 October – Attachment 6).

According to the US Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report for 2008 – China*, published on 19 September 2008, the Chinese "Government's respect for religious freedom remained poor". The US Department of State provides the following information on unregistered churches in China:

The Government restricted legal religious practice to government-sanctioned organizations and registered religious groups and places of worship, and sought to control the growth and scope of the activity of both registered and unregistered religious groups, including "house churches." Government authorities limited proselytism, particularly by foreigners and unregistered religious groups, but permitted proselytism in state-approved religious venues and private settings.

...Some house churches reported that they were told by authorities not to meet during the 2008 Summer Olympic Games and Paralympic Games. One religious freedom nongovernmental organization (NGO) alleged that authorities demanded at least one house church to sign a written agreement that it would not hold services during the specified period.

...The government perceived unregulated religious gatherings or groups as a potential challenge to its authority and attempted to control and regulate religious groups to prevent the rise of sources of authority outside the control of the Government and the CCP [Chinese Communist Party]. In some regions, government supervision of religious activity was minimal, with registered and unregistered churches existing openly and receiving similar treatment by the authorities. In other regions, local officials supervised religion strictly, and authorities placed pressure on unregistered churches. Local regulations, provincial work reports, and other government and part documents continued to exhort officials to enforce government policy regarding unregistered churches and illegal religions activities.

There were reports of repression of unregistered Protestant church networks and house churches during the reporting period. In some areas, government authorities pressured house churches to affiliate with one of the PRAs [Patriotic Religious Associations] and to register with religious affairs authorities by organizing registration campaigns and by detaining and interrogating leaders who refused to register. In other parts of the country unregistered groups grew rapidly and the authorities did not pressure them to register.

The website of SARA [State Administration for Religious Affairs] states that family and friends holding meetings at home (as distinct from formal worship services in public venues) need not register with the Government (the "Family and Friend Worship Policy"). However, there were many reports of police and officials of local Religious Affairs Bureaus (RABs) disrupted home worship meetings claiming that participants disturbed neighbors or social order, or belonged to an "evil cult." Police sometimes detained worshippers attending such services for hours or days and prevented further worship activities. Police interrogated church leaders and laypersons about their worship activities at locations including meeting sites, hotel rooms, and detention centers. NGOs reported that church leaders faced harsher treatment than members, including greater frequency and length of detention, formal arrest, and reeducation-through-labor or imprisonment. According to NGO and media reports, in some cases local officials also confiscated and destroyed the property of unregistered religious groups.

Some unregistered religious groups had significant membership, properties, financial resources, and networks. House churches encountered difficulties when their membership grew, when they arranged for the regular use of facilities for the purpose of conducting

religious activities or when they forged links with other unregistered groups or with coreligionists overseas. Urban house churches were sometimes limited to meetings of a few dozen members or less, while meetings of unregistered Protestants in small cities and rural areas could number in the hundreds openly and with the knowledge of authorities.

...During the period covered by this report, officials continued to scrutinize, and in some cases, harass unregistered religious and spiritual groups. In some areas government officials abused the rights of members of unregistered Protestant and Catholic groups.

The Government detained, arrested, or sentenced to prison terms many religious leaders and adherents for activities related to their religious practice; however, the Government denied detaining or arresting anyone solely because of his or her religion. Local authorities often used an administrative process, through which citizens may be sentenced by a nonjudicial panel of police and local authorities to up to 3 years in reeducation-through-labor camps, to punish members of unregistered religious groups. During the reporting period, the Government reportedly held many religious adherents and members of spiritual movements in reeducation-through-labor camps because of their religious beliefs. In some areas security authorities used threats, demolition of unregistered property, extortion, interrogation, detention, physical attacks, and torture to harass leaders of unauthorized groups and their followers.

Offenses related to membership in unregistered religious groups are often classified as crimes of disturbing the social order. Religious leaders and worshippers, however, faced criminal and administrative punishment on a wide range of charges, including those related to the Government's refusal to allow members of unregistered groups to assemble, travel, and publish freely or in connection with its ban on public proselytizing. During the reporting period, the Government also used the charge of conducting illegal business operations to detain leaders of unregistered religious groups.

A number of Protestant Christians who worshipped outside of government-approved venues, including in their homes, continued to face detention and abuse, especially for attempting to meet in large groups, traveling within and outside of the country for religious meetings, and otherwise holding peaceful religious assemblies in unregistered venues. According to overseas NGOs, raids by police and other security officials on Protestant religious meetings intensified during the reporting period.

In June 2008 several prominent religious leaders were harassed, placed under surveillance, restricted to their homes, or forced to leave Beijing during the visit of a delegation of foreign officials. These leaders included religious freedom attorneys Li Baiguang and Li Heping and Christian writer Yu Jie. Police also forced Pastor Zhang Mingxuan, president of the China House Church Alliance (CHCA), a network of house church groups that reportedly has 300,000 members, and his wife to relocate from Beijing to Hebei Province after they met with members of the visiting delegation. Authorities also reportedly ordered several Christian leaders to leave Beijing until after the Olympics (US Department of State 2008, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2008 – China*, 19 September, Introduction, Restrictions on Religious Freedom & Abuses of Religious Freedom – Attachment 7).

The US Commission on International Freedom's *2008 Annual Report* dated May 2008 provides the following general information on freedom of religion in China:

The Chinese government continues to engage in systematic and egregious violations of freedom of religion or belief. Yet religious communities are growing rapidly in China and the freedom to participate in officially sanctioned religious activity increased in many areas of the country of the past year.

...However, despite this growing “zone of toleration” for the worship and charitable activities of China’s religious communities, the government continues to restrict religious practice to government-approved religious associations and registered religious venues and seeks to control the activities, growth, and leadership of both “registered” and “unregistered” religious groups.

Religious freedom restrictions and sometimes brutal abuses continued to target unregistered religious groups, those considered by the government to be “cults”, and religious communities associated with ethnic minority groups. Severe crackdowns targeting Uighur Muslims, Tibetan Buddhists, “underground” Roman Catholics, “house church” Protestants, and various spiritual movements such as Falun Gong continued in the last year.

...During the past year, pressure on unregistered groups to register with government-approved associations increased. Protestant “house church” groups and “underground” Catholic priests continue to experience the most intense coercion. Any religious group that refuses to register is technically illegal and subject to various forms of punishment, though in 2007, the response by local officials varied from region to region. In some areas of China, large Protestant “house church” groups met openly and with the knowledge of local officials; in other areas even small, independent gatherings faced detention, closure, beatings, confiscation of personal property, fines, or in some cases, criminal prosecution. Though there were problems throughout China, unregistered religious groups experienced the most abuses and harassment in Anhui, Hebei, Henan, Shanxi, and Xinjiang provinces (United States Commission on International Freedom 2008, ‘China’, *2008 Annual Report*, May, pp.154-155 http://www.uscirf.gov/images/AR2008/chinaar2008_full%20color.pdf – Accessed 26 November 2008 – Attachment 8).

For more information on the situation for underground Catholics and Protestants please see pages 159 to 161 of Attachment 8 (United States Commission on International Freedom 2008, ‘China’, *2008 Annual Report*, May http://www.uscirf.gov/images/AR2008/chinaar2008_full%20color.pdf – Accessed 26 November 2008 – Attachment 8).

- 2. Is access to Tibet through one train line?**
- 3. If so, what stations does it stop at?**
- 4. Does a service leave from Beijing (or Tianjin)?**
- 5. If so, how long does it take to get to Tibet?**

The one train line to Lhasa opened on 1 July 2006 with trains travelling from five cities, Beijing, Chengdu, Chongqing, Lanzhou and Xining to Lhasa along the Qinghai-Tibet railway (‘Fares & Schedules’ (undated), Qinghai-Tibet Train Official website <http://www.chinatibettrain.com/fares.htm> – Accessed 26 November 2008 – Attachment 9; ‘To Tibet by Train’ 2006, China.org.cn website, 28 June <http://www.china.org.cn/english/features/Tibet/173068.htm> – Accessed 26 November 2008 – Attachment 10; and ‘China Rail Network’ 2006, Johomaps.com website, July <http://www.johomaps.com/as/china/chinarail.html> – Accessed 19 November 2008 – Attachment 11).

Train number T27 leaves Beijing for Lhasa daily at 9.30pm and arrives in Lhasa 47 hours and 28 minutes later. The stops for “passenger flow” are Shijiazhuang, X’ian, Lanzhou, Xining, Golmund and Nagqu. Please see Attachment 10 for departure times, time taken and stops for “passenger flow” from Chengdu, Chongqing, Lanzhou and Xining (‘Fares &

Schedules' (undated), Qinghai-Tibet Train Official website <http://www.chinatibettrain.com/fares.htm> – Accessed 26 November 2008 – Attachment 9; and 'To Tibet by Train' 2006, China.org.cn website, 28 June <http://www.china.org.cn/english/features/Tibet/173068.htm> – Accessed 26 November 2008 – Attachment 10).

There are 45 stations along the Qinghai-Tibet railway between Golmund and Lhasa. Wikipedia provides a list of the stations between Xining and Lhasa ('Stations along the Qinghai-Tibet Railway' 2006, *Peoples Daily*, 20 June http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200606/20/eng20060620_275646.html – Accessed 26 November 2008 – Attachment 12; and Wikipedia 2008, 'List of stations on Qingzang railway', 15 November http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_stations_on_Qingzang_railway – Accessed 19 November 2008 – Attachment 13: **Users should be aware that Wikipedia is a Web-based free-content encyclopaedia which is written collaboratively by volunteers.** The Research Service recommends that users of Wikipedia familiarise themselves with the regulatory practices which Wikipedia employs as a preventative measure against vandalism, bias and inaccuracy).

List of Sources Consulted

Internet Sources:

Government Information & Reports

Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China <http://www.gov.cn/>

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/research/rir/index_e.htm?action=search

UK Home Office <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/>

US Commission on International Freedom <http://www.uscirf.gov/>

US Congressional-Executive Commission on China <http://www.cecc.gov/>

US Department of State <http://www.state.gov/>

United Nations (UN)

UNHCR <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rsd>

Non-Government Organisations

Amnesty International <http://www.amnesty.org/>

Human Rights Watch <http://www.hrw.org/>

International News & Politics

China.org.cn <http://www.china.org.cn/>

People's Daily <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/>

Topic Specific Links

Aid to the Church in Need <http://www.aidtochurch.org/>

Amity News Service <http://www.amitynewsservice.org/>

AsiaNews <http://www.asianews.it/>

Cardinal Kung Foundation <http://www.cardinalkungfoundation.org/>

Catholic Citizens <http://www.catholiccitizens.org/>

China Aid <http://chinaaid.org/>

Christian Science Monitor <http://www.csmonitor.com/>

Christian Solidarity Worldwide <http://www.csw.org.uk/>

Forum 18 <http://www.forum18.org/>

Holy Spirit Study Centre <http://www.hsstudyc.org.hk/>

International Christian Concern <http://www.persecution.org/>

UCA News <http://www.ucanews.com/>

Voice of the Martyrs, Australia <http://www.persecution.com.au/>

Worthy News <http://worthynews.com/>

Zenit <http://www.zenit.org/>

Search Engines

Google <http://www.google.com.au/>

Databases:

BACIS (DIAC Country Information database)

REFINFO (IRBDC (Canada) Country Information database)

ISYS (RRT Research & Information database, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, US Department of State Reports)

RRT Library Catalogue

List of Attachments

1. Zhicheng, Wang 2008, 'Beijing, religious freedom according to the Olympics', *AsiaNews*, 20 August <http://www.asianews.it/index.php?l=en&art=13020> – Accessed 20 November 2008.
2. 'CHINA: Restrictions Placed On 'Underground' Priests As Olympics Loom' 2008, *UCA News*, 7 August <http://www.ucanews.com/2008/08/07/restrictions-placed-on-underground-priests-as-olympics-loom/> – Accessed 20 November 2008.
3. 'A year after Pope's letter to Chinese Catholics, some positive developments' 2008, *Shanghaiist*, 21 July. (CISNET China CX210711)
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6. Congressional-Executive Commission on China 2008, *Annual Report 2008*, 31 October.
7. US Department of State 2008, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2008 – China*, September.
8. United States Commission on International Freedom 2008, 'China', *2008 Annual Report*, May http://www.uscirf.gov/images/AR2008/chinaar2008_full%20color.pdf – Accessed 26 November 2008.
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10. 'To Tibet by Train' 2006, China.org.cn website, 28 June <http://www.china.org.cn/english/features/Tibet/173068.htm> – Accessed 26 November 2008.

11. 'China Rail Network' 2006, Johomaps.com website, July
<http://www.johomaps.com/as/china/chinarail.html> – Accessed 19 November 2008.
12. 'Stations along the Qinghai-Tibet Railway' 2006, *Peoples Daily*, 20 June
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13. Wikipedia 2008, 'List of stations on Qingzang railway', 15 November
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_stations_on_Qingzang_railway – Accessed 19 November 2008.