

Country Advice China

China – CHN40285 –Christians in Henan and Zhengzhou 26 April 2012

1. Please provide information on the current treatment by authorities of Christians in Henan Province, and if available, specifically about Zhengzhou City.

Overview of Christians in Henan Province

Henan, the second most populous province in China, is one of the great centres of Protestant Christianity in China. One estimate put the number of Christians in the province in 2001 at almost 10 million, or 10.4% of the province, with the majority belonging to unregistered house churches, and even government sources placed the number at up to 5 million in 1998. Henan is characterised by the presence of several strong house-church networks and a number of schismatic groups and sects, and has seen a high level of conflict between Christians and the authorities in some areas. Tony Lambert gives this profile of the province in his 2006 *China's Christian Millions*:

Henan is a centre of Christian revival and powerhouse of evangelism. The unregistered house church movement is very strong in this province, but so, sadly, are a number of sects and cults. Henan has seen astronomic church growth since the Cultural Revolution. In 1949 there were about 100,000 Protestants. On the eve of the Cultural Revolution in 1965 that number had decreased to 78,000. However, in 1990 a local government handbook estimated the number of Christians had risen to 800,000!

In 1996 TSPM sources in Henan estimated the church had grown to a staggering 3.5 million of whom only 1.5 million had been formally baptised – the remaining 2 million were classified as "seekers". This was probably a way of admitting the existence of large numbers of unregistered house church believers who had not been baptised in registered TSPM churches or meetingpoints. In October 1998 a TSPM pastor in Henan told a Western visitor that there were "between 3 and 5 million" Protestants in Henan. In 2004 Amity News Service, based on TSPM sources, estimated 4,585,000. This must be very conservative.

A house-church estimate in the late 1980s put the figure at 10 million. However, even if we accept a figure of only 5 million then this is evidence that the church in Henan has grown fiftyfold over the last thirty years!

In October 2001 the TSPM magazine *Tianfeng* stated there were 1,100 registered churches and 5,000 registered meeting points in Henan. This is a massive increase over only five years from 600 churches and 3,400 meeting-points in 1996. There is a grave shortage of pastors, as in late 2001 there were only 100 in the entire province (one to every 50,000 believers!) They are aided by 394 elders and some 3,000 registered evangelists.

¹ Johnstone, P. and Mandryk, J 2001, *Operation World*, WEC International, UK, p.172

² Lambert, Tony 2006, *China's Christian Millions*, 2nd edn,OMF Publishing, Monarch Books, London, p.249.

These figures do not include the very large number of unregistered house-church preachers in Henan. In late 1988 an internal government news report stated there were at least 2.200 unregistered house churches in the province. The huge "Born Again", Fangcheng and Tanghe networks all started, and are based, in Henan. The Tanghe network (also known as the China Gospel Fellowship) had 2.3 million members nationally in 2004, according to its leaders. The Fangcheng network is reputed to be bigger, and in 2005 may have 5 million members nationally, according to a Hong Kong organisation in close contact. The "Born Again" has fractured into five to seven smaller factions, has come under severe government pressure, and is widely regarded as extreme, or even heretical, by mainstream house churches.

Henan is a centre both for house-church growth, and also for heretical sects, which feed upon the poverty and ignorance of many of the peasants.³

Lambert expands in a chapter on Christians in Henan⁴, noting that the remarkable growth in numbers of Christians in the province since the 1970s:

house church leaders in Henan have remarked on the suddenness with which revival came and summed up the phenomenon succinctly as:

- 1.Mass conversions in the villages
- 2. The conversion of many Communist Party cadres
- 3. Miracles and healing.

By the time (1979-80) the first few State churches were opened in the main cities of Henan such as the provincial capital in Zhengzhou, house churches were already flourishing throughout the province. Henan became a powerhouse of revival and evangelism which the authorities and the Three Self Patriotic Movement have tried to limit and control largely in vain.

The rapid growth in the numbers of Christians in Henan has been responded to by periodic government campaigns to close illegal churches and arrest leaders of groups considered disruptive, such as the anti-Local Church ("Shouters") campaign of 1983-4.⁵

In 1998-99, a number of Henan-based churches were declared "heretical organizations" and a crackdown on these and other prominent house-churches occurred, with a large number of arrests. In 2000, Amnesty International reported:

Recently, the crackdown in the name of "heretical organizations" appears to have spread to more mainstream but unregistered 'house churches' who have long feared such classification. In late December 1999, six people who were among over 40 reportedly detained on 24 August during a raid on a house church meeting in Nanyang County, Henan province, were reportedly assigned without trial to terms of re-education through labour for "using a heretical organization to undermine the implementation of the law". Zhang Ronglian⁶ and Zheng Shuqian were reportedly assigned to three years, Shen Yiping and Wang Jiasheng to two years, Feng Jianguo and Jing Rongyi to one year. Several of them were high profile representatives of two large house churches in Henan, the Zhongguo Fangcheng Jiaohui (China Fangcheng Church) and the Zhonghua fuyin tuanqi (Chinese Evangelical Fellowship).

Lambert, Tony 2006, China's Christian Millions, 2nd edn,OMF Publishing, Monarch Books, London, pp.249-251.
 Lambert, Tony 2006, China's Christian Millions, 2nd edn,OMF Publishing, Monarch Books, London, Chapter 6 'The "Jesus Nest" – Revival in Henan', pp.85-97.

⁵ Lambert, Tony 2006, *China's Christian Millions*, 2nd edn,OMF Publishing, Monarch Books, London, pp.93-97.; Human Rights Watch 1994, China: Persecution of a Protestant Sect, June

⁶ Zhang Ronglian is the leader of the Fangcheng network who was later imprisoned from 2004-2011 – see pp.7-8.

⁷ Amnesty International 2000, People's Republic of China: the Crackdown on Falun Gong and Other So-Called "Heretical Organizations", 23 March, ASA 17/11/00

The report names and profiles the following Henan-based groups which were labelled "heretical organizations" in 1999:

- Lingling Jiao (Spirit Church)
- Chongsheng Pai (Rebirth faction/born again movement), also known as Ku Pai (Crying faction), and Quanfanwei Jiao (Holistic Church)
- Dongfang Shandian (Oriental Lightning)

Since 2000, there has been regular local harassment and arrests of Christian leaders in Henan, but no mass campaigns have been reported against Christians in Henan.

Recent reports of Christians in Henan Province

Henan was identified as one of six areas in China in which the most severe harassment and targeting occurs in the China Aid 2010 annual report, although the report also noted that "persecution in Henan province ... dropped dramatically" in 2010. There are regular reports of arrests of mainly high-profile house church leaders in Henan, but no evidence of large-scale systematic campaigns against Christians in the province since 2000.

The following recent examples of police harassment of Christians in Henan were located.

2012

• On 14 April 2012, 53 local house church leaders were arrested in Ye county, Henan province, while holding a Bible study. 20 people remained in custody at the end of April.⁹

2011

• In April 2011, the president of the Chinese House Church Alliance, Pastor Zhang Ming claimed that "House churches in Henan Province also experienced recent crackdowns from the authorities". 10

• On 4 March 2011, Pastor Shi Enhao vice president of the Chinese House Church Alliance was arrested while preaching in Nanyang, Henan and later sentenced to a two-year labour camp term. Afterwards, police confiscated 140,000 yuan (US\$22,160) of offerings to the church, along with a church vehicle, musical instruments and the church choir robes. He was released early in January 2012.¹¹

2010

In September 2010, Henan police raided a house church meeting and detained over 30 people, including a Russian and an American pastor. One of the church members was reportedly assaulted by police during the raid. Those arrested were sentenced to 10 days

⁸ China Aid Association 2011, 2010 Annual Report Chinese Government Persecution of Christians & Churches in Mainland China, China Aid website, 31 March, p.5 http://www.chinaaid.org/p/annual-reports.html Accessed 20 September 2011

⁹ 'House Churches in Multiple Provinces Attacked by Local Government' 2012, China Aid Association, 27 April http://www.chinaaid.org/2012/04/chinaaid-news-briefs-house-churches-in.html Accessed 30 April 2012 ¹⁰ 'Police Seriously Injured Two Christian Leaders in Shaanxi and Henan with Electric Baton and Block Door with Bricks' 2011, Radio Free Asia, China Aid Association website, 12 April http://www.chinaaid.org/2011/04/police- seriously-injured-two-christian.html> Accessed 1 May 2012

^{11 &#}x27;Under International Pressure, China Releases Pastor Shi Enhao' 2012, China Aid Association, 23 January http://www.chinaaid.org/2012/01/news-flash-under-international-pressure.html Accessed 1 May 2012

detention, while according to one church member, the church has no information on the location or situation of the foreign pastors. 12

- On 2 August 2010, the Weidu District Court of Xuchang city, Henan province reportedly refused to hear an administrative lawsuit filed by Gao Jianli and Liu Yunhua, two members of a Henan house church that authorities in Shangqiu municipality had deemed a "cult" on the basis of an internal document, thereby effectively upholding an administrative punishment of one year of re-education through labour (RTL) for each of the two men. 13
- In March 2010, officers from the Yucheng County Public Security Bureau (PSB) in Henan arrested several local 'house church' Christians without legal documentation, releasing them only after a fine was paid. While one of the detainees was released after her family paid the fine, those unable to pay were subsequently sent to a detention centre. After the detainees' families received notices of their relatives' detention, they were informed that they were required to provide bedding for those in detention, as well as a "living expense" of 500 yuan in order to see them. 14
- In March 2010, police and government officials raided a training session on law and theology organized by a Christian house church in Henan's Fangcheng County, according to Human Rights Watch.¹⁵

2008-9

- In 2009, four women from Yucheng (in eastern Henan) were arrested and sentenced to 15 days' gaol for "organizing illegal religious activities". 16
- In 2008 the China State Council's Research and Development Centre arranged meetings with "academics and lawyers, many of them house church members, and a delegation of six Protestant house church leaders from Beijing, Henan and Wenzhou". Church leaders involved in the talks were reportedly 'cautiously optimistic' at the time, with one leader stating that the government "wanted to evaluate whether house churches posed a threat to the regime and to ask why they rejected the leadership of the Three Self Patriotic Movement". However, despite these talks, raids on house churches and arrests of members reportedly continued.
- In December 2008, members of the Taikang County Domestic Defence Protection Squad reportedly raided a house in Henan province and arrested 50 Christians; an estimated 20 were sentenced to 15 days' administrative detention, while three leaders were sentenced to one year of labour and re-education. In January 2009, officers from the Public Security

^{12 &#}x27;House Church in Henan Raided on Mid-Autumn Festival Day' 2010, China Aid website, source: Voice of America, 29 September http://www.chinaaid.org/2010/09/house-church-in-henan-raided-on-mid.html Accessed 21 September 2011

¹³ US Congressional-Executive Commission on China 2010, Annual Report 2010, 10 October p.111

^{14 &#}x27;Henan Police Unlawfully Fine, Sentence Believers to Labor Camps' 2010, China Aid Association website, 9 April < http://www.chinaaid.org/2010/04/henan-police-unlawfully-fine-sentence.html Accessed 22 September 2011 Human Rights Watch 2011, World Report for 2011 – China, 24 January < http://www.hrw.org/en/world-report-2011/china Accessed 31 January 2011

16 'Beijing does not recognize domestic churches, and persecutes them' 2009, *Asia News*, 16 January

http://www.asianews.it/index.php?l=en&art=14230&geo=6&size=A Accessed 20 January 2009

Bureau forcibly removed a pastor from his colleague's house in Beijing, reportedly placing him on a bus to Henan, and warning him not to return.¹⁷

For reports of other arrests of Christians in Henan prior to 2009, please see RRT Research Response CHN34076 (2008) and RRT Research Response CHN30919 (2006).

Christians in Zhengzhou City.

Zhengzhou City is the capital and largest city of Henan province. It consists of the main city of 4 million plus six surrounding counties (and 'county-level cities') totalling 7,500 sq.km, with another 4 million inhabitants living in smaller cities, towns and villages. No reliable figures were found for the number of Christians in the city, though Lambert reported there were 100,000 TSPM Christians there in 1993, which excluded a probably larger number of unregistered Christians. 20

Few reports were found of Christians in Zhengzhou City, and some of these concerned trials of Christian leaders from other parts of Henan. There are occasional reports of arrests of mainly high-profile house church leaders, but no systematic campaigns against Christians.

The following reports were found:

2011-2012

- In September 2011, Zhang Rongliang, leader of the Fangcheng Mother Church was released from prison nine months before the end of his prison sentence, after being imprisoned in 2004. ²¹
- On 10 May 2011, public security officials in Zhengzhou interrupted a Bible study gathering of members of the Chinese House Church Alliance (CHCA) which associates with unregistered Protestant congregations in multiple provinces and took into custody 49 people. The 49 included 3 persons who were previously detained in April after having contact with CHCA leaders, as well as Korean pastor Jin Yongzhe (pinyin name), and Jin's wife Li Sha.128 All but Jin and Li were released by the following day; Jin and Li were released on May 15. Since late 2010, authorities in various locations have harassed and detained CHCA leadership, including president Zhang Mingxuan and vice president Shi Enhao. ²² Further reports were found on this raid. ²³

2009

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¹⁷ 'Officials in China grapple with spread of Christianity' 2009, Compass Direct News, 5 February

http://www.compassdirect.org/english/country/china/1981 Accessed 5 February 2009

¹⁸ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zhengzhou for details.

¹⁹ The Three Self Protestant Movement (TSPM) is the officially approved Protestant Church in China.

²⁰ Lambert, Tony 2006, *China's Christian Millions*, 2nd edn,OMF Publishing, Monarch Books, London, p.250. ²¹ 'Prominent House Church Leader Zhang Rongliang Released Early from Prison' 2011, China Aid Association, 15

September http://www.chinaaid.org/2011/09/prominent-house-church-leader-zhang.html Accessed 30 April 2012 US Congressional-Executive Commission on China 2011, Annual Report 2011, 10 October p.104

²³ 'House Church Christians Detained in Hubei Province & Zhengzhou Released' 2011, China Aid Association, 27 May http://www.chinaaid.org/2011/05/house-church-christians-detained-in.html Accessed 1 May 2012; 'While U.S. talks tough on human rights, China continues to raid churches & detain Christians' 2011, China Aid Association, 10 May http://www.chinaaid.org/2011/05/while-us-talks-tough-on-human-rights.html Accessed 1 May 2012

• On 14 June, government officials forcibly abolished and sealed the Rock (Panshi) Church, a house church in Zhengzhou City. ²⁴ Pastor Dou and Feng Lu received one-year re-education through labour sentences, while the five other believers were each sentenced to 15 days detention and a 500 yuan fine. The Pastor was released in April 2010. ²⁵

2004

• Zhang Rongliang, leader of the Fangcheng Mother Church in Henan province and the leader of the China for Christ Church, one of the largest house church networks with an estimated membership of more than 10 million, was arrested and later sentenced in Zhengzhou to seven and a half years in prison. Zhang was charged with "attaining a passport through cheating" and with "illegal border crossing" for his international traveling including to the US, Australia, Egypt and Singapore for world mission conferences.²⁶

2. Please provide information on the current treatment by authorities of family or relatives of Christians.

The family or relatives of imprisoned or released Christian leaders are sometimes subject to harassment, surveillance, arbitrary detention, arrest or house arrest and even physical mistreatment. The US Department of State's annual *Human Rights Report: China*, includes the following information each year:

Human rights activists, journalists, **unregistered religious figures**, and former political prisoners **and their family members** were among those targeted for arbitrary detention or arrest.

The government continued to use house arrest as a nonjudicial punishment and control measure against dissidents, former political prisoners, **family members of** political prisoners, petitioners, **underground religious figures**, and others it deemed politically sensitive. ²⁷

Similarly they have stated in their 2010 *Religious Freedom Report* report that "family members of some religious leaders and religious freedom activists were also harassed or detained." Further, in 2008, they reported that: "Prominent house church leaders and their family members continued to serve time in prison".²⁹

²⁴ 'UPDATE: Rock Church of Zhengzhou, Henan Banned; 7 Christians Still Detained' 2009, China Aid Association, 23 June <http://www.chinaaid.org/2009/06/update-rock-church-of-zhengzhou-henan.html Accessed 1 May 2012

²⁵ 'Rock Church Pastor Dou Shaowen Released' 2010, ChinaAid, 17 April < http://www.chinaaid.org/2010/04/rock-church-pastor-dou-shaowen-released.html Accessed 1 May 2012

²⁶ 'Prominent House Church Leader Zhang Rongliang Sentenced to Over Seven Years in Prison; Family Members Concerned for his Health' 2006, Christian Newswire, (Source: China Aid Association), 8 July http://www.christiannewswire.com/news/82672492.html Accessed 30 April 2012

²⁷ US Department of State 2011, 2010 Human Rights Report: China, 8 April, Section 1d & 1f.

²⁸ US Department of State 2011, *July-December*, 2010 International Religious Freedom Report – China, 13 September, Section II 'Abuses of Religious Freedom'

²⁹ US Department of State 2008, 2008 International Religious Freedom Report 2008 – China, 19 September, Section II 'Abuses of Religious Freedom'

The China Aid Association³⁰ provides the following information on the families of imprisoned Christians in China:

Many imprisoned Christians leave behind families. Spouses and children of prisoners are often abandoned by other family members, even persecuted by their community. They may lose jobs and be unable to support themselves. Sometimes, both husband and wife are incarcerated. Often, the prisoner's house church is too poor to help financially.³¹

Jerome Cohen, a Chinese law expert at New York University, commented on the case of Christian lawyer Gao Zhisheng (see below), and gave this assessment in 2009:

Now, as a matter of practice, not as a matter of law, the Chinese government seems to be bringing back collective punishment, often punishing not just the alleged offender, but also their entire family — children as well as spouses".³²

Families of imprisoned or released Christian leaders are often kept under surveillance or followed. For example:

- Gao Zhisheng, was a dissident lawyer and devout Christian who represented "persecuted Christians" and "fought to protect those who engage in peaceful spiritual and religious practice in China". ³³ He was arrested in 2007, then released and kept under police surveillance at home: "The surveillance proved almost harsher than prison. In fact, a member of the communist police moved into their living room, prevented his daughter from going to school; his 16-year-old daughter barred from attending schools. 24-hour surveillance." ³⁴ Another report claims Gao's daughter was beaten by officers and the entire family endured harassment and abuse. ³⁵ The treatment of Gao Zhisheng's family led them to leave China.
- Open Doors USA³⁶ reported that the family of imprisoned Christian Shi Weihan were kept under surveillance and followed wherever they went. Shi Weihan was detained in a Chinese prison in 2008 for publishing Bibles and Christian literature.³⁷

³² Lim, Louisa 2009, 'Family Of Chinese Activist Lawyer Escapes To U.S.', *National Public Radio*, 16 March http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=101865588 Accessed 2 July 2009

³⁰ The organisation give this description of themselves "ChinaAid Association (ChinaAid) is an international non-profit Christian human rights organization committed to promoting religious freedom and the rule of law in China." http://www.chinaaid.org/p/mission.html Accessed 1 May 2012

<http://www.chinaaid.org/p/mission.html> Accessed 1 May 2012
31 'Families of the Persecuted' (undated), China Aid Association website
<http://www.chinaaid.org/qry/page.taf?id=52> Accessed 2 July 2009.

^{33 &#}x27;Senator Dorgan's Speech on the Floor of the United States Senate, April 23, 2009', China Aid Association website, 23 April http://www.chinaaid.org/qry/page.taf?id=135&function=detail&sbtblct_uid1=1184 Accessed 2 July 2009

³⁴ 'Senator Dorgan's Speech on the Floor of the United States Senate, April 23, 2009', China Aid Association website, 23 April http://www.chinaaid.org/qry/page.taf?id=135&function=detail&sbtblct_uid1=1184 Accessed 2 July 2009

³⁵ 'Chinese Embassy Responds Regarding Kidnapping Christian Attorney Gao Zhisheng' 2009, China Aid Association website, 12 June <, http://www.chinaaid.org/qry/page.taf?id=105& function=detail&sbtblct uid1=1216 Accessed 2 July 2009

³⁶ "An international non-profit ministry which supports and strengthens persecuted Christians"

³⁷ Moeller, Dr. Carl 2008, 'Despite Some Improvements, China Still Persecuting Believers in Wake of Olympics', *The Christian Post*, 12 July < http://www.christianpost.com/article/20080712/despite-some-improvements-china-still-persecuting-believers-in-wake-of-olympics/index.html; and

- Underground Christian Zhang Mingxuan and his family were also kept under surveillance, their phone was bugged and they were frequently evicted, according to a 2008 report.³⁸
- The family of Christian activist Hua Huiqi reported being watched by police in 2007.³⁹

Some family members of Christian leaders are also arrested or imprisoned:

- Pastor "Bike" Zhang Mingxuan was accused by officials of engaging in "illegal business operations" for distributing free silicon prayer bands in 2008. Bike was held between 16 and 27 October 2008 by authorities. During this time, his family was evicted from their homes, his sons were beaten, and his wife and her sister were also placed under arrest. After international outcry, authorities released Pastor Bike, his wife and her sister. Authorities then refuse to allow Pastor Bike and his family to stay in Beijing. 41
- The wife of Pastor Dou Shaowen was also sentenced to one year of re-education through labor for "engaging in illegal religious activities" in 2009.⁴² She was later released to serve her sentence at home so she can care for their 12-year-old daughter, but had to report weekly.

Some family members of Christian leaders report being beaten or abused:

 The China Aid Association reported that after house church leader, Pastor Lou Yuanqi of Uygur Autonomous Region, was arrested the Pastor's daughter was beaten by court police when she tried to speak to her father.⁴³

An Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada response dated 26 June 2008 looked at the treatment of children of members of underground Christian churches in China, and provided similar reports to those above.⁴⁴

< http://www.christianpost.com/article/20080712/despite-some-improvements-china-still-persecuting-believers-in-wake-of-olympics/page2.html > Accessed 2 July 2009

⁸⁸ Osnos, Evan 2008, 'Life on the Edge', Frontline/WORLD, 22 June

http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/china 705/history/excerpt Accessed 2 July 2009

³⁹ 'Activist beaten as rival police clash in melee – Campaigner knocked unconscious' 2007, *South China Morning Post*, 12 October, SinOptic website http://www.sinoptic.ch/embassy/presseschau/2007/20071006-1012.htm Accessed 2 July 2009

⁴⁰ 'Pastor "Bike" Zhang Accused of Illegal Business Operations for Giving Away Prayer Bands' 2008, China Aid Association website, 24 November

http://www.chinaaid.org/qry/page.taf?id=105&_function=detail&sbtblct_uid1=355&_nc=c063f8248d5f847993ff40
http://www.chinaaid.org/qry/page.taf?id=105&_function=detail&sbtblct_uid1=355&_nc=c063f8248d5f847993ff40
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⁴¹ 'More Than a Dozen PSB Officers Force Pastor Bike Out of Beijing' 2009, China Aid Association website, 16 January < http://www.chinaaid.org/qry/page.taf?id=105&_function=detail&sbtblct_uid1=1127 Accessed 2 July 2009

⁴² Rock Church Pastor and Wife Sentenced to One Year of Labor Camp in Henan' 2009, China Aid Association website, 1 July

http://www.chinaaid.org/qry/page.taf?id=105& function=detail&sbtblct_uid1=1235&month=07&year=2009& nc=550bc70e671d55a250dc50e7a3ef1621 Accessed 2 July 2009

^{43 &#}x27;Insufficient Evidence for Pastor Lou Yuanqi's Case, Yet Authorities Continue to Keep Him in Prison' 2009, China Aid Association website, 6 March

 $< \underline{\text{http://www.chinaaid.org/qry/page.taf?id=105\& function=detail\&sbtblct uid1=1155\& nc=1a0b382de6d125a0e1a9b724829cced8} > Accessed 2 July 2009$

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- 'More Than a Dozen PSB Officers Force Pastor Bike Out of Beijing' 2009, China Aid Association website, 16 January http://www.chinaaid.org/qry/page.taf?id=105% function=detail&sbtblct uid1=1127> Accessed 2 July 2009
- 'Officials in China grapple with spread of Christianity' 2009, Compass Direct News, 5 February http://www.compassdirect.org/english/country/china/1981 Accessed 5 February 2009
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⁴⁴ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2008, CHN102868 – China: Treatment of children of members of underground Christian churches; whether children of members of underground Christian churches are subject to sanctions, including reduced access to education and to health care, 26 June

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