



Home Office

Country Information and Guidance

China: Christians

Version 2.0

March 2016

Preface

This document provides country of origin information (COI) and guidance to Home Office decision makers on handling particular types of protection and human rights claims. This includes whether claims are likely to justify the granting of asylum, humanitarian protection or discretionary leave and whether – in the event of a claim being refused – it is likely to be certifiable as ‘clearly unfounded’ under s94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

Decision makers must consider claims on an individual basis, taking into account the case specific facts and all relevant evidence, including: the guidance contained within this document; the available COI; any applicable caselaw; and the Home Office casework guidance in relation to relevant policies.

Country Information

The COI within this document has been compiled from a wide range of external information sources (usually) published in English. Consideration has been given to the relevance, reliability, accuracy, objectivity, currency, transparency and traceability of the information and wherever possible attempts have been made to corroborate the information used across independent sources, to ensure accuracy. All sources cited have been referenced in footnotes. It has been researched and presented with reference to the [Common EU \[European Union\] Guidelines for Processing Country of Origin Information \(COI\)](#), dated April 2008, and the European Asylum Support Office’s research guidelines, [Country of Origin Information report methodology](#), dated July 2012.

Feedback

Our goal is to continuously improve the guidance and information we provide. Therefore, if you would like to comment on this document, please [e-mail us](#).

Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

The Independent Advisory Group on Country Information (IAGCI) was set up in March 2009 by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration to make recommendations to him about the content of the Home Office’s COI material. The IAGCI welcomes feedback on the Home Office’s COI material. It is not the function of the IAGCI to endorse any Home Office material, procedures or policy.

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Information about the IAGCI’s work and a list of the COI documents which have been reviewed by the IAGCI can be found on the Independent Chief Inspector’s website at <http://icinspector.independent.gov.uk/country-information-reviews/>

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Guidance

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1. Introduction

1.1 Basis of Claim

- 1.1.1 Fear of the Chinese authorities due to the person's Christian faith and/or involvement with unregistered Christian churches.

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2. Consideration of Issues

2.1 Credibility

- 2.1.1 For further guidance on assessing credibility, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).
- 2.1.2 Decision makers must also check if there has been a previous application for a UK visa or another form of leave. Asylum applications matched to visas should be investigated prior to the asylum interview: see the [Asylum Instruction on Visa Matches, Asylum Claims from UK Visa Applicants](#).
- 2.1.3 Decision makers should also consider the need to conduct language analysis testing: see the [Asylum Instruction on Language Analysis](#).

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2.2 Assessment of risk

- 2.2.1 The number of Christians in China is unknown but is estimated by various sources to be up to 100 million. Officially registered churches lack sufficient capacity to meet the demand; consequently illegal, unregistered churches have mushroomed (see [Protestant and Catholic Christians](#)).
- 2.2.2 As was noted in the country guidance case of [QH \(Christians - risk\)\(China\) CG \[2014\] UKUT 86 \(IAC\) \(14 March 2014\)](#), there has been a rapid growth in the number of Christians in China, both in the three State-registered churches and the unregistered or 'house' churches. Individuals move freely between State-registered churches and the unregistered churches, according to their preferences as to worship (para 137(2) of determination).
- 2.2.3 The Chinese constitution guarantees freedom of religion for 'normal religious activities' but does not define 'normal.' The Chinese authorities seek to control all aspects of religious worship. Restrictions on religious freedoms and activities are widespread, but there are also widespread regional variations in severity. All religious groups are required to register with the authorities. Protestant groups unaffiliated with the official patriotic religious association and Catholics professing loyalty to the Vatican, are not permitted to register as legal entities. Some are able to meet quietly with the tacit approval of local authorities, but other 'house church' gatherings are raided or evicted from their meeting locations (see [Overview](#) and [Legal Framework](#)).

- 2.2.4 In 2014, harassment of both underground and state-sanctioned churches increased, especially in Zhejiang Province where at least 400 churches were torn down or had crosses forcibly removed and/or demolished in 2014. Hundreds of people have been detained for short periods and some remain in custody, accused under ambiguous crimes more often used to punish political dissidents. Leaders and members of both registered and unregistered churches have faced increased harassment and arbitrary arrests; typically leaders of house churches are more vulnerable to these types of charges, but in 2014 pastors of sanctioned churches also faced detention or arrest (see [Protestant and Catholic Christians](#)).
- 2.2.5 Some Christian groups are banned as 'cults' and their members face harassment, imprisonment, and torture. On 3 June 2014, the government published a list of 20 'cults' and began a crackdown against these organizations. The security forces are likely to keep a record of people who are detained at underground Church meetings. Lawyers who advised Christians on resisting the demolition of churches were arrested by the authorities and were often held under 'residential surveillance' outside the formal detention system. The Chinese government's persecution of house churches was most severe in north, northwest, south, and southwest regions of China (see [Legal Framework](#) and [Protestant and Catholic Christians](#)).
- 2.2.6 Detained church leaders and Christians who are associated with them have experienced harassment, intimidation and in some cases physical attacks. Christians from a Muslim or Tibetan background also face an increased risk of violence (see [Violence against Christians](#)).
- 2.2.7 In the country guidance case of [QH](#) (March 2014) the Upper Tribunal found that:
- in general, the risk of persecution for Christians expressing and living their faith in China is very low, indeed statistically virtually negligible. The evidence does not support a finding that there is a consistent pattern of persecution, serious harm, or other breach of fundamental human rights for unregistered churches or their worshippers (paragraph 137 of the determination).
 - in general, any adverse treatment of Christian communities by the Chinese authorities is confined to closing down church buildings where planning permission has not been obtained for use as a church, and/or preventing or interrupting unauthorised public worship or demonstrations (paragraph 137 of the determination).
 - There may be a risk of persecution, serious harm, or ill-treatment engaging international protection for certain individual Christians who choose to worship in unregistered churches **and** who conduct themselves in such a way as to attract the local authorities' attention to them or their political, social or cultural views (paragraph 137 of the determination).
 - Exceptionally, certain dissident bishops or prominent individuals who challenge, or who are perceived to challenge, public order and the operation of the Religious Affairs Regulations 2005 – which set out the conditions under which Christian churches and leaders may operate

within China – may be at risk of persecution, serious harm, or ill-treatment engaging international protection, on a fact-specific basis (paragraph 137 of the determination).

- 2.2.8 For further guidance on assessing risk, see section 6 of the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.3 Protection

- 2.3.1 As the person's fear is of ill treatment/persecution at the hands of the state, they will not be able to avail themselves of the protection of the authorities.

- 2.3.2 For further guidance on assessing the availability or not of state protection, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.4 Internal relocation

- 2.4.1 The Upper Tribunal in [QH](#) held that in the light of the wide variation in local officials' response to unregistered churches, individual Christians at risk in their local areas will normally be able to relocate safely elsewhere in China. The exception to this would be where the person is the subject of an arrest warrant, or their name is on a black list, or they have a pending sentence. Given the scale of internal migration, and the vast geographical and population size of China, the lack of an appropriate hukou alone will not render internal relocation unreasonable or unduly harsh (paragraph 137 of the determination).

- 2.4.2 Decision makers must give careful consideration to the relevance and reasonableness of internal relocation on a case-by-case basis taking full account of the individual circumstances of the particular person.

- 2.4.3 For further information on the hukou residence registration system and internal relocation see country information and guidance on [China: Background including actors of protection and internal relocation](#).

- 2.4.4 For further guidance on internal relocation, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.5 Certification

- 2.5.1 Where a claim falls to be refused, it is likely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

- 2.5.2 For further guidance on certification, see the [Appeals Instruction on Certification of Protection and Human Rights claims under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 \(clearly unfounded claims\)](#).

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3. Policy Summary

- 3.1.1 In general the treatment faced by Christians in China, including those from unregistered churches, is unlikely to amount to persecution. Caselaw from early 2014 established that in general, the risk of persecution for Christians expressing and living their faith in China is very low.
- 3.1.2 There may be a risk of persecution or serious harm for dissident bishops or certain individual Christians who choose to worship in unregistered churches **and** who conduct themselves in such a way as to attract the local authorities' attention to them or their political, social or cultural views.
- 3.1.3 However, in the light of the wide variation in local officials' response to unregistered churches, most individual Christians at risk in their local areas will be able to relocate safely elsewhere in China where it would not be unreasonable or unduly harsh to expect them to do so. The exception would be those who are the subject of an arrest warrant, or whose name is on a black list, or where the person has a pending sentence. The security forces are likely to keep a record of people who are detained at underground Church meetings (see [Protestant and Catholic Christians](#)).
- 3.1.4 Generally, a person who fears persecution in China on the basis of their Christian beliefs is unlikely to qualify for a grant of asylum or humanitarian protection although full account must be taken of the individual circumstances of each case.

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4. Overview

4.1.1 Christianity is a fast-growing phenomenon in China¹, and notwithstanding a variety of official and social sanctions against it, the majority of Christians are able to worship and practise without facing serious difficulties. Millions of Chinese Christians manifest their beliefs openly, and senior government officials have praised religious communities' positive role in society, and urged approved religious groups to promote 'economic and social development' and 'socialist principles'.²

4.1.2 The Council on Foreign Relations Backgrounder on Christianity in China of 7 May 2015 noted:

'China has witnessed a religious revival over the past four decades, in particular with the significant increase in Christian believers, accounting for 5 percent of the population, according to Pew Research Center data. The number of Chinese Protestants has grown by an average of 10 percent annually since 1979. By some estimates, China is on track to have the world's largest population of Christians by 2030. Though the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is officially atheist, the rise of Christianity presents Beijing with challenges as well as new options for contributing to services, such as health care and education, to an increasingly demanding public. The government recently launched a series of initiatives to further regulate, and at times restrict, Christian adherents.'³

4.1.3 The US Department of State 2014 International Religious Freedom Report, released 14 October 2015, noted:

'The government exercised state control over religion and restricted the activities and personal freedom of religious adherents when these were perceived, even potentially, to threaten state or Chinese Communist Party (CCP) interests, including social stability. Only religious groups belonging to one of the five state-sanctioned "patriotic religious associations" (Buddhist, Taoist, Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant), are permitted to register with the government and legally hold worship services.'⁴

¹ Christianity Grows in China: FCW:The Business of Federal Technology - September 20 2013
<http://fcw.com/blogs/lectern/2013/09/china-christians.aspx>

² US Commission on International Religious Freedom 2012: China 30 April 2013
<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2012/eap/208222.htm>

³ Council on Foreign Relations Backgrounder – Christianity in China, 7 May 2015
<http://www.cfr.org/china/christianity-china/p36503> date accessed: 12 November 2015

⁴ US Department of State 2014 International Religious Freedom Report, released 14 October 2015
<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper> date accessed: 13 November 2015

- 4.1.4 The Congressional Executive Commission on China 2015 Annual Report, released 8 October 2015, noted:

‘The Chinese government and Communist Party continued to restrict freedom of religion for Protestants in China. For example, officials in various locations in China called on the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) and China Christian Council (CCC)—the official organizations that manage registered Protestants under the leadership of the government and Party—to work toward government and Party goals, such as to “hold on to a proper political orientation,” to facilitate and liaise about the Party’s policy on religion, and to assist with economic and social development.’⁵

- 4.1.5 In its annual report ‘Freedom in the World’, covering 2014, Freedom House reported:

‘Religious freedom is sharply curtailed by the formally atheist CCP. All religious groups must register with the government, which regulates their activities, oversees clergy, and guides theology. Some groups, including certain Buddhist and Christian sects, are forbidden, and their members face harassment, imprisonment, and torture. ... Other unregistered groups, including unofficial Protestant and Roman Catholic congregations, operate in a legal gray zone. Some are able to meet quietly with the tacit approval of local authorities, but other “house church” gatherings are raided or evicted from their meeting locations.’⁶

- 4.1.6 In its 2015 World Report, covering events of 2014, Human Rights Watch stated: ‘any religious activity not considered by the state to be “normal” is prohibited. It audits the activities, employee details, and financial records of religious bodies, and retains control over religious personnel appointments, publications, and seminary applications. In 2014, the government stepped up its control over religion, with particular focus on Christian churches.’⁷

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5. Legal framework

- 5.1.1 The US Department of State (USSD) 2014 International Religious Freedom Report, released 14 October 2015, noted:

‘The constitution states citizens have “freedom of religious belief,” but limits protections for religious practice to “normal religious activities.” The constitution does not define “normal.” The constitution provides for the right to hold or not hold a religious belief and states that state organs, public organizations, and individuals may not discriminate against citizens “who

⁵ Congressional Executive Commission on China - 2015 Annual Report, released 8 October 2015 <http://www.cecc.gov/sites/chinacommission.house.gov/files/2015%20Annual%20Report.pdf> date accessed: 13 November 2015

⁶ Freedom House: Freedom in the World 2015 - China, 28 January 2015 https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/01152015_FIW_2015_final.pdf date accessed 18 January 2016

⁷ Human Rights Watch World Report 2015: China Events of 2014 <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2015/country-chapters/china-and-tibet> date accessed 19 January 2016

believe in, or do not believe in, any religion.” The law does not allow for legal action to be taken against the government on the basis of the religious freedom protections afforded by the constitution. Criminal law allows the state to sentence government officials to up to two years in prison if they violate a citizen's religious freedom. There were no reported cases of such prosecutions during the year [2014].

‘The government has signed, but not ratified, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which provides all individuals the right to “adopt a religion or belief” of choice and manifest belief through “worship, observance, and practice.”

‘CCP [Chinese Communist Party] members are required to be atheists and are forbidden from engaging in religious practices. Members who belong to religious organizations are subject to expulsion, although these rules are not universally enforced. The vast majority of public office holders are CCP members.

‘Only religious groups belonging to one of the five state-sanctioned “patriotic religious associations” (Buddhist, Taoist, Muslim, Roman Catholic, and Protestant) are permitted to register with the government and legally hold worship services. Other religious groups, such as Protestant groups unaffiliated with the official patriotic religious association or Catholics professing loyalty to the Vatican, are not permitted to register as legal entities. Proselytizing in public or meeting in unregistered places of worship is not permitted... Religious groups independent of the five official government patriotic religious associations have difficulty obtaining any other legal status and are vulnerable to coercive and punitive action by SARA, the Ministry of Public Security (MPS), and other party or government security organs.

‘All religious organizations are required to register with SARA [the State Administration for Religious Affairs] or its provincial and local offices. Registered religious organizations are allowed to possess property, publish approved materials, train staff, and collect donations. According to regulations, religious organizations must submit information about the organization’s historical background, doctrines, key publications, minimum funding requirements, and a government sponsor. Due to the difficulty of fulfilling these requirements, many religious organizations either remain unregistered or register as commercial enterprises.

‘In addition to the five nationally recognized religions, local governments have legalized certain religious communities and practices, such as Orthodox Christianity in Xinjiang, Heilongjiang, Zhejiang, and Guangdong provinces.⁸

5.1.2 The same USSD report stated:

⁸ US Department of State 2014 International Religious Freedom Report, released 14 October 2015 <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper> date accessed: 26 November 2015

‘Certain religious or spiritual groups are banned by law. The criminal law defines banned groups as “evil cults,” and those belonging to them can be sentenced to prison. A judicial explanation states this term refers to: “those illegal groups that have been found using religions, ‘qigong’ [a traditional Chinese exercise discipline], or other things as a camouflage, deifying their leading members, recruiting and controlling their members, and deceiving people by molding and spreading superstitious ideas, and endangering society.” There are no published criteria for determining, or procedures for challenging, such a designation. The government maintains a ban on the Guanyin Method Sect (Guanyin Famen or the Way of the Goddess of Mercy), Zhong Gong (a ‘qigong’ exercise discipline), and Falun Gong. The government also considers several Christian groups to be “evil cults,” including the Shouters, Eastern Lightning, Society of Disciples (Mentu Hui), Full Scope Church, Spirit Sect, New Testament Church, Three Grades of Servants (or San Ban Pu Ren), Association of Disciples, Lord God Sect, Established King Church, Unification Church, Family of Love, and South China Church.

‘The religious and social regulations permit official patriotic religious associations to engage in activities, such as building places of worship, training religious leaders, publishing literature, and providing social services to local communities. The CCP’s United Front Work Department, SARA, and the Ministry of Civil Affairs provide policy guidance and supervision on the implementation of these regulations, which are often enforced in an arbitrary manner. Most leaders of official government religious organizations serve in the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), a CCP-led body that provides advice to the central government from business leaders, academics, and other segments of society.

‘SARA has stated through a policy posted on its website that family and friends have the right to meet at home for worship, including prayer and Bible study, without registering with the government.

‘The law permits domestic NGOs, including religious organizations, to receive donations in foreign currency. The law requires documented approval by SARA of donations from foreign sources to domestic religious groups of more than one million renminbi (RMB) (\$161,160). Overseas donations received by religious organizations receive favorable tax treatment if the funds are used for charitable activities’.⁹

5.1.3 The same USSD report added:

‘The government offers some subsidies for the construction of state-sanctioned places of worship and religious schools.

‘The government and the Holy See do not have diplomatic relations, and the Vatican has no representative in the country. The CPA does not recognize

⁹ US Department of State 2014 International Religious Freedom Report, released 14 October 2015 <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper> date accessed: 26 November 2015

the authority of the Holy See to appoint bishops; approximately 40 Catholic bishops remain independent of the CPA and operate unofficially. Several of those bishops have been detained for many years or are under close government surveillance. In April 2013, the CPA promulgated the Regulation on the Election and Consecration of Bishops, requiring candidate bishops to publicly pledge support for the CCP. The CPA allows the Vatican discreet input into selecting some bishops, and an estimated 90 percent of CPA bishops have reconciled with the Vatican. Nevertheless, in some locations local authorities reportedly pressure unregistered Catholic priests and believers to renounce all ordinations approved by the Holy See. Most of the Catholic bishops previously appointed by the government as CPA bishops later were elevated by the Vatican through apostolic mandates.

‘By regulation, if a religious structure is to be demolished or relocated because of city planning or construction of key projects, the party responsible for demolishing the structure should consult with its local Bureau of Religious Affairs (administered by SARA) and the religious group using the structure. If all parties agree to the demolition, the party conducting the demolition should agree to rebuild the structure or provide compensation equal to its appraised market value.

‘Registered religious organizations are allowed to compile and print religious materials for internal use. To distribute religious materials publicly, an organization must follow national printing regulations, which restrict the publication and distribution of literature with religious content. Under the law, religious texts published without authorization, including Bibles and Qurans, may be confiscated and unauthorized publishing houses closed.

‘Parents are permitted to instruct children under the age of 18 years in the beliefs of officially recognized religious groups and children may participate in religious activities. Xinjiang officials, however, require minors to complete nine years of compulsory education before they can receive religious education. The law imposes penalties on adults who “force” minors to participate in religious activities.

‘...The law states job applicants shall not face discrimination in hiring based on factors including religious belief.’¹⁰

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6. Protestant and Catholic Christians

6.1.1 A Guardian article of 30 July 2015, ‘China doesn’t want to suppress Christianity-just control it’, noted:

‘...in China... there are already thought to be more Christians there (some 100 million) than members of the Communist party (87 million).

¹⁰ US Department of State 2014 International Religious Freedom Report, released 14 October 2015 <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper> date accessed: 26 November 2015

'...China is on course, over the next 15 years, to become the world's most populous Christian nation.

'...New conversions to Christianity in China are mostly found among the educated and striving classes. About half of the country's few human rights lawyers are Christians, as are many of the leaders of the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong.

'This growth means the real fight is not over whether China will become a country with a significant Christian presence, but who will control the burgeoning churches.

'The Vatican knows this well. I have been told by insiders that the strategic thrust of Pope Francis's diplomacy is all directed eastwards, towards the emergence of China as a great religious power. Chinese relations with the Vatican have long been fraught because of conflicts over the control of the Church, and in particular the control of appointments. The Communist party, like Henry VIII, wants to decide who runs the church in its country. The Pope, now as then, is not going to concede the point.

'This is one reason why the great majority of Chinese Christians are Protestants of one sort or another, most deriving ultimately from Presbyterian missions in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The decentralised structure of this form of Christianity helps it to grow and spread, but also makes it much harder for governments to cut lasting deals with it.'¹¹

6.1.2 A Financial Times Magazine report of 7 November 2014, 'The rise of Christianity in China', noted:

'The government claims China only has around 23 million Protestants and Catholics but even the officials responsible for compiling and publishing these figures acknowledge this is a ludicrous underestimate, concocted mostly for political reasons. Not only are there far more than 23 million worshipping at official "legal" congregations but China also has tens of millions more believers attending underground "house churches" not recognised or approved by the state. These tens of thousands of underground congregations (both Catholic and Protestant but mostly Protestant), while technically illegal, are often tolerated by local officials and sometimes even allowed to operate openly as long as they are not explicitly "political".'

The same article continued: 'The demolition of the Sanjiang church in Wenzhou marked the start of a state campaign to rein in the rise of Christianity. This has included harassment, detentions, removing crosses and destroying churches in Wenzhou and throughout Zhejiang Province.' It quotes Fenggang Yang, director of the centre on religion and Chinese

¹¹ The Guardian - 'China doesn't want to suppress Christianity-just control it', 30 July 2015 <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jul/30/china-christianity-removal-crosses-communist-party-churches> date accessed: 26 November 2015

society at Purdue University as saying ‘ “the party still sees Christianity as a very serious threat that it needs to suppress.”’

‘The government demolition in April [2014] went ahead despite protests by thousands of local Christians who camped out for weeks in the shadow of the Sanjiang church... Since then, several more churches have been knocked down and prominent crosses on as many as 300 others throughout Wenzhou and the surrounding Zhejiang Province have been removed by the authorities, sometimes following violent confrontations with parishioners. Hundreds of people have been detained for short periods and some remain in custody, accused under ambiguous crimes more often used to punish political dissidents.’¹²

6.1.3 The US Department of State 2014 International Religious Freedom Report, released 14 October 2015, noted:

‘The 2011 Blue Book of Religions, produced by the Institute of World Religions at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, a research institution directly under the State Council, reports the number of Protestants to be between 23 and 40 million. A June 2010 SARA report estimates there are 16 million Protestants affiliated with the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM), the state-sanctioned umbrella organization for all officially-recognized Protestant churches. According to 2012 Pew Research Center estimates, there are 68 million Protestant Christians, of whom 23 million are affiliated with the TSPM.

‘According to SARA, more than 5.5 million Catholics worship in sites registered by the Catholic Patriotic Association (CPA). The Pew Center estimates there are nine million Catholics on the mainland, 5.7 million of whom are affiliated with the CPA.’¹³

6.1.4 The US Commission on International Religious Freedom 2015 Annual Report, released 30 April 2015, noted:

‘In a striking development, at least 400 churches were torn down or had crosses forcibly removed and/or demolished in 2014, a notable increase over previous years. Most of these incidents occurred in Zhejiang Province and included both underground and state-sanctioned churches, though incidents were reported in other places as well. In Zhejiang Province, these actions can be attributed to the “Three Rectifications and One Demolition” campaign, the provincial government’s March 2013 plan purportedly aimed at building code violations and illegal structures. Many religious believers in Zhejiang, particularly Christians, regarded the campaign as directly targeting their religion. The city of Wenzhou, home to China’s largest Christian community, known as “China’s Jerusalem,” saw a particularly high number of

¹² FT Magazine - ‘The rise of Christianity in China’, 7 November 2014
<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/a6d2a690-6545-11e4-91b1-00144feabdc0.html#axzz3scAozSlq> date accessed: 26 November 2015

¹³ US Department of State 2014 International Religious Freedom Report, released 14 October 2015
<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper> date accessed: 26 November 2015

demolitions. Registered churches in Wenzhou also faced demolitions, including the Protestant Wuai Church and the Liushi and Longgangshan Catholic Churches. In general, conditions faced by registered and unregistered churches across the country vary widely and are often subject to the inconsistent discretion of local and/or provincial officials.

‘Leaders and members of both registered and unregistered churches have faced increased harassment and arbitrary arrests. Typically leaders of house churches are more vulnerable to these types of charges, but in 2014 pastors of sanctioned churches also faced detention or arrest. The Chinese government generally claimed these actions were to maintain social order, but there were multiple reports that Christians and religious activists were unfairly targeted. In July 2014, Pastor Zhang Shaojie of the Nanle County Christian Church, a registered church in Henan Province, was convicted on trumped-up charges and sentenced to 12 years in prison. The government also began classifying house church leaders as alleged “cult” leaders.

‘Pope Francis has opened the door for improved relations with China, reportedly inviting President Xi Jinping to the Vatican. Additionally, the Chinese government granted the Pope permission to fly through Chinese airspace following his January 2015 trip to the Philippines. (In the past, China has refused to allow papal aircraft to fly through its airspace; it is common practice for sitting popes to send messages to the countries over which they fly.) However, shortly thereafter, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson reiterated calls for the Vatican to cut ties with Taiwan and to stop interfering in China’s internal affairs in the name of religion. Moreover, according to a 2015 working plan of the State Administration of Religious Affairs, China still insists on electing and ordaining bishops completely independent of the Holy See.’¹⁴

6.1.5 A January 2015 Freedom House Special Report, ‘The Politburo’s Predicament’, noted:

‘Harassment of both underground and state-sanctioned [Christian] churches increased, particularly in Zhejiang Province. A government campaign against “illegal structures” led to the removal of religious symbols and the demolition of many church buildings, including facilities that were previously approved by the government. In an unusual development, Zhang Shaojie, a pastor from a state-sanctioned church, was detained in November 2013 and sentenced to 12 years in prison in July 2014, apparently in retaliation for his defense of the church’s land rights and assistance to congregants seeking justice for official abuses.’

The report also stated that ‘Underground Christian congregations also reported growing harassment, ranging from arrests to indirect pressure on utility companies to deny them services.’¹⁵

¹⁴ The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom - 2015 Annual Report, released 30 April 2015 <http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/China%202015.pdf> date accessed: 27 November 2015

¹⁵ Freedom House – ‘The Politburo’s Predicament’, January 2015

6.1.6 Christian Solidarity Worldwide stated in April 2015:

'On 25 March 2015, eight Christians accused of obstructing the government and organising "illegal assemblies" for members of Sanjiang Church were found guilty on charges of "illegal occupation of farmland" and "gathering a crowd to disturb public order." They received sentences ranging from several months to three years, with reprieves of up to four years... A timeline of incidents related to the provincial government campaign, collated by CSW, shows over 400 cases of whole or partial demolition of a church or church-run building, forced removal, demolition, modification or covering of a cross, notice of demolition or cross removal, and related injury, and detention, arrest or summons. However, the actual number of incidents is likely to be higher.'

6.1.7 In its 2015 Annual Report the US Commission on International Religious Freedom stated:

'Under Article 300 of China's Criminal Law, those who participate in so-called "superstitious sects or secret societies or weird religious organizations" or other similar activity are subject to imprisonment. In 2014, the Chinese government took its broadest steps yet to designate and criminalize some groups as "cult organizations." On June 3, 2014, the government published a list of 20 "cults" and began a sweeping crackdown against these organizations. House churches were targeted because they lack any official protection. In September 2014, more than 100 Christians were arrested during a raid on a house church in Foshan City, Guangdong Province, with eyewitnesses claiming that more than 200 officials took part in the raid. As part of the "anticult" effort, China's government issued a directive to "eradicate" unregistered churches over the course of the next decade, resulting in unregistered church members facing an increased number of arrests, fines, and church closures in 2014.'¹⁶

6.1.8 In July 2015 the UK Foreign Office stated:

'Reports of detentions and restrictions connected with freedom of religion or belief continued. Wenzhou Pastor Huang Yizi was convicted in March of "gathering crowds to disturb social order", reportedly for opposing the demolition of church crosses in Zhejiang Province. In Shandong Province in May, Christians Zhao Weiliang and Cheng Hongpeng were sentenced to four and three years' imprisonment respectively for "utilising a cult to obstruct justice".'¹⁷

6.1.9 In August 2015, the BBC reported:

'Seven Christians have been detained in China accused of embezzlement and disrupting social order. Pastor Bao Guohua, his wife and five church

https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/12222014_FH_ChinaReport2014_FINAL.pdf date accessed: 27 November 2015

¹⁶ Christian Solidarity Worldwide – More crosses removed from Zhejiang churches, 29 April 2015 <http://www.csw.org.uk/2015/04/29/news/2571/article.htm> date accessed: 19 January 2016

¹⁷ Foreign and Commonwealth Office Human Rights and Democracy Report 2014: China -in-year update 15 July 2015

employees were detained in Jinhua, in eastern Zhejiang province. But the church's lawyer Chen Jiangang told the BBC he believed they were being punished for protesting against the removal of their church cross.

...Christians have said the crackdown is an attempt to rein in the influence of Christianity. Chinese state media on Wednesday said that Mr Bao and his wife, Xing Wenxiang, who are pastors at the Holy Love Christian Church, had embezzled hundreds of thousands of yuan in church funds and "conducted illegal business."¹⁸

6.1.10 A Radio Free Asia report of 25 September 2015, 'China Holds Two Christian Preachers in Unknown Locations on Spying Charges', noted:

'Authorities in the eastern Chinese province of Zhejiang have confirmed that they are holding two Protestant preachers under residential surveillance on suspicion of espionage, relatives and lawyers told RFA.

'The wife of Pingyang county pastor Zhang Chongzhu received notification from police on Friday that her husband is being held at an unknown location on suspicion of "gathering, stealing, buying and illegally providing state secrets" as well as "espionage."...The notification from police comes after three weeks of uncertainty after Zhang Chongzhu "disappeared" en route home from Shanghai amid an ongoing crackdown on Christians opposed to the provincial government's demolition program targeting visible crosses on places of worship.

Zhang Zhi, a preacher from Pingyang county's Xianqiao Church, is also being held under residential surveillance on the same charges after being detained on Sept. 7 [2015].'

'...Churches in and around Zhejiang's Wenzhou city have waged widespread civil disobedience campaigns in the face of the demolition campaign, which is part of a three-year urbanization and beautification campaign requiring local governments to demolish illegal structures by the end of 2015.

'Zhejiang authorities have said they are merely "relocating" the crosses from the roofs of churches to the interior, while analysts say the sheer profusion of Christian worship in a region known as "China's Jerusalem" has rattled the ruling Chinese Communist Party.

'Churchgoers have written open letters, sung hymns to armed security officers, staged sit-ins in churches and on rooftops, and displayed small red-painted wooden crosses on buildings and on T-shirts in protest at the move.

'Churches are also being subjected to audits and financial reviews, with some pastors detained on suspicion of "embezzlement" after they resisted the demolition of crosses.

'A Wenzhou Protestant church member told RFA on Friday that a total of 18 people have now been detained in the crackdown, including rights lawyer

¹⁸ BBC news China detains Zhejiang Christians amid cross removal dispute 5 August 2015 <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-33783463> date accessed 19 January 2016

Zhang Kai, who was advising local Christians in their bid to resist the demolition of crosses... Zhang is being held on suspicion of "gathering a crowd to disrupt public order," "spying" and illegally gathering, buying and supplying state secrets overseas." Zhang Kai had offered pro bono advice to more than 100 Protestant churches facing the removal of their crosses and the detention of pastors, lay preachers, and church members.' ¹⁹

6.1.11 A September 2015 statement by Amnesty International noted:

'A prominent human rights lawyer and his two assistants have been detained in China as part of a wider crackdown on activists who are resisting the removal of crosses from churches. Zhang Kai has been placed under "residential surveillance" in an unknown location, which means he can be held for up to six months without access to his lawyers or family... Zhang Kai was taken away by police from a church in Wenzhou, Zhejiang province, in south-east China on 25 August [2015]. Two legal assistants of his, Liu Peng and Fang Xiangui, and several members of a local congregation, including pastors, were detained at the same time.' ²⁰

The statement continued:

'Over 200 human rights lawyers and activists were detained, missing, or brought in for questioning as part of an unprecedented nationwide crackdown which began in July [2015]. Thirty people are still in detention or are unaccounted for. At least ten people are being held on suspicion of "inciting subversion of state power," which carries a prison sentence of up to 15 years. The crackdown was accompanied by a smear campaign in state media, with lawyers and activists accused of being part of a criminal operation to "undermine social stability.'" ²¹

6.1.12 The US Congressional Executive on China 2015 Annual Report, released 8 October 2015, noted a number of cases for both protestants and catholics whereby:

'...the Chinese government and Communist Party continued to harass, detain, or hold incommunicado Catholics who practiced their religion outside of state-approved parameters.

'...[the]... Authorities continued to restrict freedom of religion for Protestants in China, including by harassing and detaining Protestants from registered and unregistered churches who worshipped outside of state-approved parameters.' ²²

¹⁹ Radio Free Asia - 'China Holds Two Christian Preachers in Unknown Locations on Spying Charges', 25 September 2015 <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/china/china-holds-two-christian-preachers-in-unknown-locations-on-spying-charges-09252015102911.html?searchterm:utf8:ustring=Christians+China> date accessed: 27 November 2015

²⁰ Amnesty International Lawyer Supporting Churches in China Detained 4 September 2015 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa17/2370/2015/en/> date accessed 18 January 2016

²¹ Amnesty International Lawyer Supporting Churches in China Detained 4 September 2015 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa17/2370/2015/en/> date accessed 18 January 2016

²² Congressional Executive Commission on China - 2015 Annual Report, released 8 October 2015 <http://www.cecc.gov/sites/chinacommission.house.gov/files/2015%20Annual%20Report.pdf> date

In September 2015 the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada issued information on whether a person detained at an underground church meeting would have his or her name placed in the Public Security Bureau (PSB) databases, and quoted correspondence with the President of China Aid, an international Christian human rights organization as saying that “individuals detained at underground church meetings would have their names placed in PSB databases (ibid. 26 Aug. 2015)... [and] that "usually the first thing the officers from the PSB or [Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB)] would do when they raid a house church is to collect ID numbers, ID names, and personal data such as date of birth and home and work ... addresses"... individuals' information is then stored and classified under one of five "security and political threat" levels within a national "dynamic stability control maintenance database", which is accessible by all officers within China's "security apparatus" (ibid.)." ... An official at the Embassy of Canada in Beijing similarly stated that "it is most likely that PSB would keep a record of people who are detained, including at an underground Church meeting" (Canada 10 Sept. 2015).’²³

6.1.13 The China Aid 2014 Annual Report on Religious and Human Rights Persecution, released April 2015, noted:

‘In 2014, Christians and practitioners of other faiths in China experienced the harshest persecution seen in over a decade, including draconian measures taken by Xi Jinping’s administration to eliminate all religious, political and social dissent...China Aid predominately receives reports of abuse from Christian communities in China...The increase in government-sanctioned persecution against religious practitioners and human rights lawyers and advocates reflects the overall political transformation that is occurring within the Communist Party in China, namely an orchestrated effort to consolidate power and suppress dissent and any perceived threats to the Chinese government, including the growth of religion in China.’

The report stated: ‘According to unverified local reporting in Chinese media outlets, as many as 1,000 crosses were forcibly removed across Zhejiang province, approximately 50 churches, particularly those in rural areas, were forcibly demolished, and at least 1,300 Christians were detained, arrested, or held in custody for protesting or attempting to prevent the destruction of churches or crosses.’²⁴

accessed: 13 November 2015

²³ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Whether a person detained at an underground church meeting would have his or her name placed in the Public Security Bureau (PSB) databases, 23 September 2015, CHN105283.E, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/563c704b4.html> date accessed: 18 January 2016

²⁴ China Aid - Aid 2014 Annual Report on Religious and Human Rights Persecution, April 2015 <http://www.chinaaid.org/p/annual-persecution-reports.html> date accessed: 27 November 2015

The same report states that 'In reviewing statistics, it appears that the Chinese government's persecution of the house church was most severe in north, northwest, south, and southwest regions of China.'²⁵

The index to the same China Aid annual report listed religious persecution abuse cases by region and the resulting mode of persecution by the Chinese government.²⁶

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7. Violence against Christians

7.1.1 The undated Open Doors Country Profile of China noted:

'While in most regions Christian activities are being watched rather than controlled, in Tibet and Xinjiang Christian converts experience greater control by government and family. Persecution is mostly not violent in the rest of China, but in these hotspots, every change of religion is seen as a disgrace to the family and even treason against the community.'²⁷

7.1.2 The Open Doors World Watch List of 2015 (covering November 2013 – October 2014) stated: 'Christians from a Muslim or Tibetan background face more violence. Families, friends and neighbors not only put pressure on them to re-convert, but sometimes also resort to physical or psychological violence. This can include violent actions like abductions.'²⁸

7.1.3 In its January 2015 report, Freedom House reported: 'Falun Gong practitioners, Tibetans, Uighurs, and to a lesser degree, Christians were more likely than other categories of victims to be subjected to long prison sentences of 10 years or more, systematic torture, and death in custody.'²⁹

7.1.4 A CNN report of 6 August 2015, 'More violence against Christians in China', noted:

'A video shows Christians in China's Zhejiang province pushed back by security forces armed with batons.

In the beginning of the video someone yells: "They are hitting people!" The man shouts through the amplifier: "Surround the church!"

A cross on the rooftop of a church can be seen in the background, with people on it, probably trying to prevent security forces from tearing it off.

The chaos caught on film is part of the onslaught of a massive campaign to

²⁵ China Aid - Aid 2014 Annual Report on Religious and Human Rights Persecution, April 2015 <http://www.chinaaid.org/p/annual-persecution-reports.html> date accessed: 19 January 2016

²⁶ China Aid - Aid 2014 Annual Report on Religious and Human Rights Persecution, April 2015 <http://www.chinaaid.org/p/annual-persecution-reports.html> date accessed: 27 November 2015

²⁷ Open Doors – China, undated <http://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/worldwatch/china.php> date accessed: 27 November 2015

²⁸ Open Doors – China WorldWatch 2015

<https://www.opendoors.no/folderPersecution/3583584/3583910/topp50-full-version> date accessed: 19 January 2016

²⁹ Freedom House Special Report The Politbureau's Predicament, January 2015 page 27

https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/12222014_FH_ChinaReport2014_FINAL.pdf

Date accessed 19 January 2016

tear crosses off churches in China. The campaign started in 2014. Over 1800 churches in Zhejiang province have been assaulted leaving many Christians injured, detained and threatened. Many pastors have also been arrested on trumped up charges. The campaign is targeted towards Protestants and Catholics alike. The reporter can identify this as taking place in Zhejiang, because the Chinese characters on the uniform of the security forces is the name of a security company based in the city of Wenzhou.’³⁰

7.1.5 A World Watch Monitor report of 22 September 2015, ‘Analysis: What to make of China’s demolition of crosses’, noted:

‘Some Christians fear that the Chinese central government is testing how Christians in Zhejiang respond to this pressure. They are concerned that this is an early stage of a new, nationwide wave of discrimination against Christians. Other Christians disagree. While it’s true that a small number of “house churches” were closed down recently, most church leaders outside Zhejiang don’t report any difference in government attitude towards them. Meetings and gatherings for training have continued as usual. There’s no evidence that points to an increase in discrimination on a national level.

‘In a recent private meeting between central government officials and 20 pastors of unregistered churches, the Christians were told the central government had nothing to do with the “anti-cross campaign” in Zhejiang province. This could well be true, since there’s often a disconnect between what the Chinese administration wants and what regional and local authorities implement. Besides, there are also struggles among officials within the Chinese government, especially since President Xi Jinping’s anti-corruption campaign is in full swing.’³¹

In its submission to the UN Committee against Torture in October 2015, Christian Solidarity Worldwide raised individual cases of people persecuted for their Christian beliefs. These include ‘the disappearance of the human rights lawyer Li Heping, a Christian who has worked on numerous cases defending Christians and other religious communities. Li Heping has been missing since 10 July 2015. CSW fears that Mr Li is being held at an extra-legal detention facility where he is at risk of torture and ill-treatment. CSW notes with concern that he has been in detention well over the 37-day maximum period of police custody, and his whereabouts are still unknown. Mr Li’s wife, Wang Qiaoling, has not seen him or received word from him since he was taken from his home by two plain clothed men.’³²

³⁰ CNN - ‘More violence against Christians in China’, 6 August 2015 <http://ireport.cnn.com/docs/DOC-1262342> date accessed: 27 November 2015

³¹ World Watch Monitor - ‘Analysis: What to make of China’s demolition of crosses’, 22 September 2015 <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2015/09/4021651/> date accessed: 27 November 2015

³² Christian Solidarity Worldwide: Stakeholder Submission to Committee against Torture 56th session, October 2015 – China http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CAT/Shared%20Documents/CHN/INT_CAT_CSS_CHN_22112_E.pdf date accessed 19 January 2016

7.1.6 The World Watch Monitor - 2015 List of Violence Against Christians reported that no Christians were killed for faith-related reasons and 258 churches were attacked in the period between 1 November 2013 and 31 October 2014.³³

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³³ World Watch Monitor – 2015 List of Violence Against Christians, undated
<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/research/WWL15Violence.pdf> date accessed: 27 November 2015

Version Control and Contacts

Contacts

If you have any questions about the guidance and your line manager or senior caseworker cannot help you or you think that the guidance has factual errors then email [the Country Policy and Information Team](#).

If you notice any formatting errors in this guidance (broken links, spelling mistakes and so on) or have any comments about the layout or navigability of the guidance then you can email [the Guidance, Rules and Forms Team](#).

Clearance

Below is information on when this version of the guidance was cleared:

- version **2.0**
- valid from **11 March 2016**
- this version approved by **Sally Weston, Deputy Director, IBPD**
- approved on: **25 February 2016**

Changes from last version of this guidance

[List key changes to this guidance from last version here]

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