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Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Monitoring of Falun Gong Practitioners outside of China

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a lecturer of Chinese politics at the University of Auckland, who has researched and written on the treatment of Falun Gong/Dafa practitioners by Chinese authorities, stated that "very little documentary evidence exists" concerning the monitoring of Falun Gong/Dafa practitioners outside China and the potential consequences they face upon their return to the country (Lecturer 17 Sept. 2016).

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, the Director of the Australian Centre on China in the World at Australia National University, whose research interests include religious and spiritual movements in China such as Falun Gong and who provided information after consulting with his own contacts who are long-term practitioners, indicated that "Chinese citizens and Australian citizens (particularly those who were previously Chinese citizens) who are Falun Gong practitioners

are certainly monitored [in Australia], especially if they are at all active in Falun Gong activities" (Director 22 Sept. 2016). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a representative of Friends of Falun Gong USA (FoFG USA), a US-based NGO created in 2000 whose "mission is to support the freedom of belief of persons who practice Falun Gong" (FoFG USA n.d.), noted that "[t]here are pro-communist people in the [Chinese] community openly warning practitioners that their names are on a list" (ibid. 22 Sept. 2016).

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a representative of the Falun Dafa Association of Canada (FDAC) stated that "we do not expect [that the Chinese authorities'] policy of monitoring practitioners has changed" and that the authorities continue to use the same tactics as previously employed (FDAC 27 Sept. 2016). For further information on the monitoring of Falun Gong practitioners outside China from 2008 to 2012, including in Canada, refer to CHN104187 of October 2012.

According to the Director, one of the methods used by Chinese authorities is "photographing practitioners who protest outside the embassy or consulates" (Director 22 Sept. 2016). The same source added that "[p]ractitioners are also certain that members of the Chinese community report to the embassy about their activities" and that "some practitioners believe that the Chinese government plants people in Falun Gong groups to report on them and to create internal division" (ibid.). As an example, the Director brought forward an instance in which a practitioner told him "that his wife, who is not a practitioner, was even approached by the Chinese security authorities to report on his activities when she was in China to visit her family" (ibid.). The same source also provided an example in which a non-practitioner couple were warned by the Chinese embassy to stay away from their best friends, a couple who practiced Falun Gong (ibid.). According to the FoFG USA representative, Falun Gong practitioners are under surveillance outside of China, notably "[i]f there is a public Falun Gong/Dafa event (protest, parade, practice, celebration, etc.)" (FoFG USA 22 Sept. 2016). The same source indicated that

[p]ractitioners' family members living in China get visits from public security. Family members have reported[ly] been told that they are aware of their family members' activities in the country [where] they currently are residing. (ibid.)

According to the FoFG USA representative, "[p]ractitioners' phones and emails are monitored" (ibid.). The Director likewise indicated that

[p]ractitioners suspect, though they have no proof, that the Chinese authorities may hack their computers. Some have received threatening anonymous phone calls they suspect are made from China. Thus, their mobile phone numbers are known. (Director 22 Sept. 2016)

According to the Lecturer,

one method [of monitoring] takes place through reports allegedly delivered to the embassy by students who attend universities in cities known to have significant FG communities... [there are] allegations surrounding the Confucius Institutes in this regard (i.e. that they collect information on campuses concerning dissident activity [...]).(Lecturer 17 September 2016)

Media sources have reported on allegations of the Chinese government-funded Confucius Institutes using their influence to curb criticisms towards topics the government finds sensitive and to

advance the agenda of the state (BBC 22 Dec. 2014; CBC 29 Oct. 2014; The Telegraph 18 June 2014). In a 2014 article published on its website, the CBC indicated that the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) cut its ties with the Confucius Institute, noting that

[t]he move follows similar cancellations of Confucius Institute programs at universities in Canada and the United States amid concerns they restrict academic freedom, conduct surveillance of Chinese students abroad and promote the political aims of China's ruling Communist Party. (CBC 29 Oct. 2014).

In a report presented to the TDSB, a security consultant who is the former Chief of Asia/Pacific for the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) stated that

the Confucius Institute and the people and groups promoting its arrival at the TDSB are not simply acting on their own behalf. There is evidence that the Chinese Government, and especially the Chinese Intelligence Services, are behind this project and these groups. (Juneau-Katsuya 1 Oct. 2014)

According to the FDAC representative, "the regime uses so called 'Canada Chinese community groups' to monitor and pull the party line here in Canada" (FDAC 27 Sept. 2016). The Lecturer noted that he was aware of "a DVD that, it was said, was distributed by Chinese operatives seeking to infiltrate and monitor the [Falun Gong] in Toronto" (Lecturer 17 Sept. 2016). The DVD was reportedly a piece of "anti-Falun Gong propaganda" and showed "Falun Gong practitioners celebrating the deaths resulting from the Sichuan earthquake" (ibid.).

Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2. Treatment of Falun Gong Practitioners upon Return to China

According to the Director, practitioners believe that Chinese authorities are able to check whether someone is known or suspected of practicing Falun Gong/Dafa and "[b]ecause of this, they recommend to their fellows that they do not try returning to China" (Director 22 Sept. 2016). The same source, citing information gathered from his personal contacts, stated that Falun Gong practitioners abroad would not try to return to China "as they would expect to be arrested as they cross the border"(ibid.). Likewise the FoFG USA representative stated that "practitioners have been advised not to return to China due to safety and security concerns" (FoFG USA 22 Sept. 2016). The Lecturer noted that "those known to be practitioners and [who] have practiced on the mainland are in violation of the law, and many will have police records. This [is] cross-checked during the visa issuance process just as in any other country" (Lecturer 17 Sept. 2016). According to the FDAC representative, "we don't know the details of how the database works but it's pretty clear that some such system for keeping tabs on who is known to practice Falun Gong exists, though it may have occasional loopholes" (FDAC 27 Sept. 2016). The same source added that

[p]ractitioners generally do not return to China due to the persecution that is ongoing. Those who have citizenship in other countries could be coerced or threatened, to spy on Falun Gong [...]. Others could be detained and their families pressured for them to stop the practice. (ibid.)

An article published on Minghui.org, "a website dedicated to reporting on the Falun Gong community worldwide" (Minghui.org n.d.), provides the personal account of a Chinese practitioner studying in the US who was detained at the Beijing Airport, along with her fiancé, after their passports were scanned by a customs officer (ibid. 16 Oct. 2013). According to her account, the student was arrested, detained and interrogated by the police for a few weeks and coerced into agreeing to spy on fellow practitioners on her return to the US (ibid.).

Further information on specific instances of treatment upon return or entry into China could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The Lecturer indicated that

[p]ossible consequences can be severe. Those found to be in possession of FG literature or video material may be detained, often in psychiatric facilities, black jails, or other so-called "transformation centres" (political re-education sites, usually re-purposed public buildings) as part of local 6-10 initiatives. Several mass campaigns to crack down on FG by seizing literature and obtaining a centrally-set target for conversions are still ongoing. (Lecture 17 Sept. 2016)

According to the FoFG USA representative,

[a]most all that return [such as due to visiting ailing parents], are "interviewed" by the public security officials when they re-enter China. Based on what we have been told by those practitioners that have been interviewed, the security officials possess a substantial amount of detailed information about their activities in the countries where they reside. They have reported being told that their emails have been monitored and that their phone calls to family members have been tapped. Their interrogation techniques use the information they have gathered to intimidate practitioners; i.e. the practitioners do not know what they know or what they do not know [which] makes them vulnerable to the interrogation. (FoFG USA 22 Sept. 2016)

The same source added that

[t]he Chinese Communist Party mostly seems to be gathering information that can be used against Falun Gong; for their propaganda, to disrupt organizations, infiltrate, etc. If they judge a practitioner to be sufficiently intimidated or compliant they will try to recruit the practitioner or [get them to] cooperate in various ways [depending on the situation]. (ibid.)

For further information on the situation and treatment of Falun Gong practitioners in China by state authorities refer to Response to Information Request CHN105282 of October 2015.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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