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Situation of Catholics and treatment by authorities, particularly in Fujian and Guangdong (2005 - 2010) [CHN103501.E]

Catholicism is one of the five officially recognized religions in China (US 10 Oct. 2009, 111; Pew 2 May 2008; HRWF Int'l 2008). Religious groups in China must be registered and have their activities sanctioned by authorities (Human Rights Watch Jan. 2010; US 10 Oct. 2009, 111; Freedom House 2009). The Catholic Patriotic Association (CPA) is the state-sanctioned association that oversees registered Catholic churches in China (US 10 Oct. 2009, 116; AI 2010; HRWF Int'l 2008).

Sources note the difficulty in estimating the number of Catholics in China, although they similarly indicate that there are fewer Catholics than Protestants (ANS 9 Dec. 2008; Pew 2 May 2008; Lee 1 Apr. 2007). There are approximately 5 million officially recognized Catholics in the country (China 24 Mar. 2009, Para.112; Pew 2 May 2008; HRWF Int'l 2008). In a 2009 report submitted to the United Nations (UN) Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), the Chinese government indicates that there are 97 Catholic parishes, which include "more than 6,000 churches, over 60 bishops and more than 1,800 priests" (China 24 Mar. 2009, Para. 112). However, sources agree that there are many more Catholics in China who belong to unregistered churches (Pew 2 May 2008; ANS 9 Dec. 2008). Sources estimate that there are approximately 12 million (Pew 2 May 2008; NCR 2 Aug. 2007; Lee 1 Apr. 2007) to 14 million registered and unregistered Catholics in the country (*La Croix* 22 Jan. 2010; ANS 9 Dec. 2008).

In a 9 June 2010 telephone interview with the Research Directorate, the President of the American-based Chinese Aid Association (CAA), a non-governmental organization (NGO) that seeks to advance religious freedom in China by exposing abuse of Christians in China (CAA n.d.), stated that unregistered Catholics are seen as a political threat by the Chinese government due to their connection to the Vatican and the Pope (CAA 9 June 2010). Similarly, a graduate student in history at the University of Alberta, who is also a research associate with the Global China Institute, a research institution with an emphasis on Chinese Christianity (Global China Center n.d.), also stated that "[t]he Chinese government is more antagonistic to the Catholics than the Protestants, in part for historical reasons, and in part because the underground Catholic churches are allied with a foreign religious body, the Vatican" (Graduate Student 12 June 2010).

The Vatican and the Chinese government do not have official diplomatic relations (US May 2010, 109; ANS 9 Dec. 2008; HRWF Int'l 2008). According to the United States (US) Commission on International Religious Freedom, the CPA forbids official relations or communication between its members and clergy and the Vatican or other non-Chinese Catholic organizations (US May 2010, 109). Sources report that the Vatican has secretly ordained or appointed some bishops in China (*ibid.*; HRWF Int'l 2008), while the Chinese government has appointed bishops against the Vatican's wishes (US May 2010, 109; Hudson Institute 20 June 2008). In some cases in recent years, both sides have collaborated in the appointment of mutually acceptable bishops (US May 2010, 109; HRWF Int'l 2008).

This conflict between the Chinese government and the Vatican has caused divisions between the unregistered and registered churches and congregations (US May 2010, 109; NCR 2 Aug. 2007). Sources report that Pope Benedict has made efforts to encourage unity between regulated and unregulated churches (US May 2010, 109; Hudson Institute 20 June 2008; HRWF Int'l 2008), notably through a 2007 open letter to Chinese Catholics (US May 2010, 109; HRWF Int'l 2008). The US Commission on Religious Freedom states that the Pope's letter called for reconciliation and asked Chinese Catholics "to adopt the approach of 'respectful and constructive dialogue'," while noting that, despite some improvements, the Church could not accept the existing limitations on religious freedom (US May 2010, 109). According to Human Rights Without Frontiers International (HRWF Int'l), a Belgium based NGO which monitors human rights (HRWF Int'l 27 Apr. 2008), the letter was also an overture for talks aimed at restoring diplomatic ties (ibid.). However, the Chinese government's official position is that relations can be normalized only if the Vatican severs its relationship with Taiwan and agrees not to use religion to interfere in Chinese internal affairs (US May 2010, 109; HRWF Int'l 2008).

Catholicism in China and treatment of Catholics

Catholics, especially unregistered Catholics, face harassment by authorities (Cardinal Kung Foundation 7 June 2010; US May 2010, 109; HRWF Int'l 2008; Hudson Institute 20 June 2008). In 7 June 2010 correspondence with the Research Directorate, the President of the Cardinal Kung Foundation, an NGO which seeks to "promote the Roman Catholic Church in China" (Cardinal Kung Foundation n.d.), stated:

It is extremely difficult and risky for unofficial priests to administer their pastoral duty. It is also equally difficult and risky for underground or unofficial Catholics to fulfill their religious and Sacramental obligations. Many unofficial religious and laypersons are arrested for their religious activities, and let go only after a large sum [is] paid to government officials. These paid government fines are generally without official receipts. There is simply no freedom of practicing religion in China, and [...] the persecution of the underground or unofficial Catholic church is ongoing in China. (ibid. 7 June 2010)

In contrast, the Executive Secretary of the Hong Kong Christian Council, an ecumenical grouping of Christian churches and organizations in Hong Kong (World Council of Churches n.d.), stated in 14 June 2010 correspondence with the Research Directorate, that he believes that Chinese authorities have demonstrated a

high degree of tolerance towards Christian activities in general and particularly towards those non-registered groups [...]. There are indications to suggest that the Government wants to have those non-registered Christian groups to gradually register with the Government. Therefore the Christians in China in general are able to have more space to express their faith and to have a much wider range of diverse expressions during the past few years.

Sources report that a number of Chinese Catholic clergy have been jailed or detained by Chinese authorities (Cardinal Kung Foundation 7 June 2010; US May 2010, 109-110; Hudson Institute 20 June 2008). The *National Catholic Reporter* (NCR) reports that "a significant number" of Chinese Clergy have been detained or are under surveillance (NCR 2 Aug. 2007). The US Commission on International Religious Freedom gives details on several cases of clergy and parishioners being detained and states that there were over forty bishops in detention in 2009 (US May 2010, 110). Some clergy are under surveillance (Cardinal Kung Foundation 7 June 2010; NCR 2 Aug. 2007; HRWF Int'l 2008) or in hiding (ibid.; Cardinal Kung Foundation 7 June 2010). Several sources mention the case of a Catholic bishop detained in 1996 or 1997 whose whereabouts are unknown (AI 2010; Cardinal Kung Foundation n.d.; Hudson Institute 20 June 2008). The Cardinal Kung Foundation also lists eight priests who have been in jail for more than 3 years as of May 2009 and provides details on three detained bishops (Cardinal Kung Foundation 27 May 2009).

Sources note that the treatment of Catholics, like the treatment of members of other religious groups, may vary depending on the tolerance shown by local authorities (Cardinal Kung Foundation 7 June 2010; US 26 Oct. 2009, Intr.). According to the US Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report 2009*, officials have wide latitude in interpreting what constitutes the "normal religious activities" that are sanctioned by the State (ibid.). The report also notes that

[I]n some locations, local authorities reportedly forced unregistered Catholic priests and believers to renounce ordinations approved by the Holy See, join the official church, or face a variety of punishments including fines, job loss, detentions, and having their children barred from school. (ibid., Sec. 2)

In particular, the US Congressional-Executive Commission on China's (CECC) *Annual Report 2009* states that in 2009 there were coordinated efforts by authorities in Shaanxi and Hebei provinces to "suppress the activities" of unregistered Catholics and to pressure clergy to join the official CPA (US 10 Oct. 2009, 116). The CECC cites a 2009 report from the Shaanxi Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission which describes the success the Shaanxi government has had in "suppressing unregistered Catholics through using coercive tactics" (ibid.).

The *Annual Report 2009* provides details on the re-education of unregistered priests and the detention of unregistered Catholic parishioners (ibid., 117-118; ibid. May 2010, 109-110). The US Commission on International Religious Freedom reports that "[Communist] Party and government officials continued to label unregistered Catholics as a threat to 'social stability' and called for increased efforts to 'transform...underground communities'" (ibid.).

Fujian and Guangdong Provinces

Information on the specific situation of Catholics in Guangdong and Fujian provinces was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate. However, several sources stated that they believed that authorities in Guangdong and Fujian provinces might be more tolerant than those in other Chinese provinces (Hong Kong Christian Council 14 June 2010; Graduate Student 12 June 2010).

The Executive Secretary of the Hong Kong Christian Council expressed the opinion that officials in Guangdong and Fujian provinces have good relations with government-recognized bishops and have allowed non official bishops to operate openly (14 June 2010). Conversely, according to an article in *La Croix*, a daily newspaper published in Paris, Fujian is, alongside Hebei, Zhejiang and Liaoning, one of the provinces where the most unregistered Catholics are located and that they are [translation] "tightly controlled" by local authorities (*La Croix* 22 Jan. 2010). The President of the Cardinal Kung Foundation likewise stated that Fujian province was one of "the worst" provinces for the "persecution" of the unofficial Catholic Church (Cardinal Kung Foundation 7 June 2010). On the other hand, the President described Guangdong as "comparatively quieter" in its treatment of Catholics (ibid.).

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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Oral sources: Attempts to contact an academic specialist on Catholics in China were unsuccessful.

Internet sources, including: Amity Foundation, Amity News Service (ANS), Australia - Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT), Beijing Information, China Partner, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), Chinese Government's Official Web Portal, Christianity in China, European Country of Origin Information Network (ecoi.net), Information Center for Human Rights and Democracy (Hong Kong), International Christian Concern (ICC), Ireland - Refugee Documentation Centre (RDC), Office of the United Nations (UN) High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), United Kingdom (UK) Home Office, UN Refworld, UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief.