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## CHINA Sentence upheld for Uyghur Christian detained on account of faith

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CSW has learned that an appeal in the case of Alimujiang Yimiti has resulted in his 15-year sentence being upheld by the Higher People's Court of Xinjiang, China.

The Uyghur convert from Islam to Christianity has been detained since January 12, 2008. He has been convicted of "instigating separatism and revealing state secrets to foreigners". A notice was sent to Mr. Yimiti in mid-February, informing him of the result of the appeal. An earlier appeal in March 2010 had also failed.

In 2009, a United Nations Working Group defined the detention as "arbitrary," concluding that Mr. Yimiti was detained "solely on account of his faith". Those close to the case have always maintained that Mr. Yimiti is innocent and that he would not have had access to state secrets as an agricultural worker. His case has drawn widespread international attention and is the harshest sentence given to a Christian in a decade.

Prior to his arrest, Mr. Yimiti worked as a project manager for Jirehouse, a British company that was targeted in a series of closures of foreign companies belonging to Christians in Xinjiang in 2007. The Chinese government initially accused Mr. Yimiti of illegal religious infiltration. These charges were later changed and he was convicted of the state secrets charges at a closed trial on August 6, 2009. The trial reportedly did not follow due procedure in Chinese or international law and Mr. Yimiti had limited access to his lawyers during this time. Those close to Mr. Yimiti have consistently claimed that there was never any proof of wrongdoing and that he would not have had access to state secrets as an agricultural worker. State secrets charges are ill-defined under Chinese law.

News of the appeal comes as a blow to Mr. Yimiti's family, who has had little contact with him since his detention. In 2009 his wife, Guli Nu'er, made an appeal to the international community for assistance in raising her husband's situation with the Chinese authorities. In 2010, CSW brought Mr. Yimiti's lawyer, Mr. Li Baiguang of Beijing Gongxin law firm to Europe to raise international attention on the case.

CSW's National Director Stuart Windsor said, "The 15-year sentence in Mr. Yimiti's case represents a gross violation of justice. The failure of the appeal represents the difficulty facing the system of the rule of law in China, where there is no independent judiciary and verdicts can be politically motivated. CSW calls on the Chinese government to respect the UN Working Group's ruling that Alimujiang Yimiti is being detained for his faith and release him immediately."