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CHINA Deputy Chairman of Chinese House Church Alliance criminally detained

Pastor Shi Enhao has been criminally detained on suspicion of “using superstition to undermine national law enforcement”, in the first step towards a criminal trial. Pastor Shi previously disappeared on June 12 before police confirmed his detention on June 21.

According to China Aid, the detention notice from the Sucheng district office of the Suqian City Public Security Bureau in Jiangsu Province briefly outlines the reasons for the detention of the prominent house church leader. In the past, the charge of “using superstition to undermine national law enforcement” has been used to convict practitioners of the banned spiritual practice, Falun Gong.

Pastor Shi is deputy chairman of the Chinese House Church Alliance, a large umbrella organization for many thousands of house churches across China. Leaders from the group have faced severe persecution in the past, including arrest, imprisonment and harassment. Pastor Shi has been under scrutiny for some time. He served a 12-day administrative detention sentence after he was arrested on May 31 in Jiangsu province. On 1 June Pastor Shi’s home was raided by police, who took away books and papers.

Pastor Shi’s criminal detention comes as a prominent Beijing house church faces ongoing repression. The 1000-member independent Shouwang Church currently has four of its leaders under house arrest. Church members are being detained weekly as they attempt to worship outdoors, after their landlord was pressured to evict the congregation from his building. Unofficial or ‘house’ churches in China are those congregations that choose, often for reasons of conscience, not to join the officially recognized Three-Self Patriotic Movement, or official Protestant Church. House churches can face persecution from authorities due to their de facto illegal status.

Stuart Windsor, Special Ambassador for Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), said, “CSW calls upon the Chinese government to uphold the right to freedom of religion for its citizens by releasing Pastor Shi Enhao from criminal detention and to allow all its citizens to practice their religion within an organization of their choice.”