



(photo courtesy of China Aid)



1.24.2012

CHINA | House church leader Shi Enhao released from labor camp

Pastor Shi Enhao, Deputy Chairman of the Chinese House Church Alliance, was unexpectedly released from labour camp last Friday, January 20, after serving six months of a two-year re-education through labor (RTL) sentence. The reason for his early release is unknown.

Pastor Shi Enhao was given the two-year sentence in July 2011 for “holding illegal meetings and organizing illegal venues for religious meetings” due to his role in the unofficial Chinese house church network. China Aid reported that he was released on Friday last week and is now safely at home with his family.

The RTL system, through which Chinese citizens can be sentenced without a trial, was given by officials in Jiangsu. Pastor Shi, who oversees several hundred house churches with thousands of members, had previously disappeared on June 12, 2011 before police confirmed his detention on June 21, 2011. Early release from RTL is rare, except in cases of illness.

Pastor Shi is deputy chairman of the Chinese House Church Alliance, a large umbrella organization for house churches. Leaders of the group have faced severe persecution in the past, including arrest, imprisonment and harassment. Pastor Shi had been harassed for some time prior to his arrest.

While many house churches in China operate with relative freedom, there continue to be cases of arrest, disappearance, harassment and confiscation of property among house church Christians in China. 2011 saw a crackdown on any form of dissent, with lawyers, writers, religious leaders, Tibetans, Uyghurs and others affected. The Chinese authorities have been largely immune to international pressure on these issues in recent months.

CSW’s Advocacy Director Andrew Johnston said, “CSW welcomes the release of Pastor Shi Enhao and urges the Chinese authorities to respect the right to religious freedom for all its citizens, as guaranteed in the Chinese constitution, by releasing others including Uyghur Christian, Alimujiang Yimiti, lawyer Gao Zhisheng and legal expert Dr Fan Yafeng.”