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CHINA | Imprisoned Christian Sees Family Visits Cut

The wife of imprisoned Christian and former house church leader Uyghur Alimujiang Yimiti (also known as Alimjan Himit/Yimit) has been informed by the prison authorities that her monthly visits are being reduced to one visit every three months.

Gulinuer went to visit her husband at Xinjiang No. 3 Prison on Jan. 23, but was refused entry. Their last meeting in November 2012 lasted just 15 minutes. Since then she has spoken to her husband once by phone, on New Year's Day.

Alimujiang Yimiti is a Muslim convert to Christianity from the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of China. He was detained in January 2008 and on March 16, 2010 he was sentenced to 15 years in prison and five years deprivation of political rights for illegally providing “state secrets” outside China. His former lawyer, Li Dunyong, believes he was actually detained for speaking to foreign Christians. The United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has stated that “the deprivation of liberty of Mr. Alimujiang Yimiti is arbitrary, being in contravention of [...] the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.”

In 2007, the Kashgar Municipal Bureau for Ethnic and Religious Affairs in Xinjiang ruled that Yimiti had “engaged in illegal religious infiltration activities in Kashi area in the name of work. He preached Christianity, distributed religious propaganda materials and converted people to Christianity among ethnic Uighurs.”

Two appeals filed by Yimiti's lawyers in January 2010 and March 2011 were rejected. Gulinuer believes the prison authorities' decision this week could be connected to her husband's current appeal. Lawyer Li believes the restrictions are illegal and “made up”, since the normal allowance for visits is one per month. Yimiti's wife remains hopeful that the appeal will succeed.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide Advocacy Director Andrew Johnston said, “CSW is extremely concerned about the reduction in the number of family visits allowed for Alimujiang Yimiti. This appears to be a sudden decision with no legal basis, and is very distressing for Yimiti's wife and sons. We call on the Chinese authorities to reverse this decision immediately and to drop the arbitrary charges against Alimujiang Yimiti, securing his unconditional release.”