



3.22.13

CHINA | Buddhist Leader Faces Exorbitant Fine Despite Completing Prison Sentence

Chinese Buddhist leader Wu Zeheng has been ordered to pay a fine of 2.5 million yuan (approximately \$344,000) in relation to his conviction for “economic crimes” in 2000, three years after he completed his 10-year prison sentence. His supporters claim the fine is a further attempt to restrict his freedom of movement by delaying his passport application in order to prevent him meeting and teaching his religious followers overseas.

In 1999, Wu was arrested and went on to serve a 10-year sentence for "economic crimes" after writing a letter to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and State Council denouncing human rights violations and calling for reform. Since his release from prison in 2010, he has been under close surveillance by the authorities and has experienced beatings, harassment and arrest in connection with his religious activities.

He applied for a passport at the Huilai Public Security Bureau (PSB) of Guangdong Province in 2010. Since then, he has repeatedly been told that his application is still being processed.

In September 2012, Wu submitted letters to the Huilai and Jieyang PSB in order to enforce his rights through domestic legal channels, in accordance with China’s relevant laws and regulations. Having received no reply, Wu submitted litigation proceedings to the courts in Huilai and Jieyang on Dec. 20, 2012.

Wu then received a notice from Zhuhai Middle Court ordering him to pay the fine on March 9, 2013. The notice said the order came from Beijing First Intermediate Court, however, When Wu's lawyer contacted the court in Beijing on March 18, it denied issuing the order. Two days later, his lawyer was told the court had issued the order after all.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide’s (CSW’s) 2012 report on religious freedom in China noted the Chinese authorities’ policy of imposing fines and other penalties for religious activities. In July 2012, for example, nine Christian women were ordered to pay fines for “gathering teenagers for

illegal Christian training activities” at a summer camp in Xinjiang, Northwest China. Those challenging or refusing to pay such fines risk further harassment by the authorities. Wu Zeheng’s attempt to claim his rights to freedom of movement and freedom of religion or belief through legal means present an important test for rule of law in China.

Wu has managed to raise the cost of the fine through donations and loans from his followers and supporters but is currently waiting for confirmation of the legality of the order from Beijing or Zhuhai.

CSW’s Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, “CSW is deeply concerned at the restrictions on Wu Zeheng’s right to peacefully teach and practice his beliefs. The confusion surrounding this fine suggests that this is another attempt to prevent Wu from pursuing his rights through legal domestic channels. We call on the Chinese government to hold the local authorities responsible for these actions to account and to guarantee the right to freedom of religion and belief for people of all faiths in China.”