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## **CHINA | Harassment of Lawyers, Church Members Christmas Week**

Church members, lawyers and Christians visiting the family of detained Protestant Pastor Zhang Shaojie were beaten, harassed and detained by “hired thugs”, police and government agencies in December.

On Dec. 23, Pastor Cao Nan of Shenzhen, who had travelled to Nanle in Henan province to conduct a service to pray for and rally support for Pastor Zhang’s case, was dragged from his car by local police, who beat him. He was then taken to a police station where he had pepper spray sprayed into his eyes, according to an interview with Radio Free Asia and reports by Chinese Human Rights Defenders.

On Dec. 24, lawyers representing the Nanle church detainees, along with some Christians, were prevented from leaving Pastor Zhang Shaojie’s home. When one of the lawyers tried to leave the next day, a group of “hired thugs” surrounding the house forcibly took away his legal documents, mobile phone, identification papers and other items. Others were physically attacked when they tried to leave.

Pastor Zhang and over 20 members of Nanle County Christian Church, Henan, which belongs to the state-sanctioned Three-Self Patriotic Movement, were detained without formal documentation on Nov. 16, 2013. Since Pastor Zhang’s detention, lawyers representing the detainees have repeatedly been prevented from meeting their clients and foreign journalists covering the case have also been intimidated and harassed.

According to further reports from China Aid, Pastor Zhang’s family and the church itself are under constant surveillance, and government agencies have blocked church members and visiting Christians from entering the church building. In addition, China Aid reported several cases of harassment and restrictions against unregistered churches in other provinces, including warnings from authorities (Guangdong), pressure to cancel Christmas events (Shandong), and disruption of meetings using tear gas (Sichuan).

CSW’s Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, “The harassment, intimidation and physical attacks against lawyers and church members in Nanle is a clear violation of their human rights and further undermines the rule of law. Rather than responding swiftly to the lawyers’ requests to meet with their clients, local officials have used violence, threats and intimidation to attempt to silence them. We urge the relevant authorities to immediately cease all attacks on the Nanle church members’ lawyers, relatives and visiting Christians, to grant lawyers access to their clients, and to allow the church to meet together freely.”