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## **CHINA | CSW Calls on Chinese Government to Respect Rights Ahead of Tiananmen Anniversary**

Ahead of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre, Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) calls upon the Chinese government to respect the rights of its citizens and to allow human rights defenders to defend the rights of others without repercussions.

On June 4, 1989, the government's brutal repression of student-led democracy protests in Beijing demonstrated how far China's leaders would go to eliminate anyone perceived as a threat to their authority, even violating the human rights of its citizens. Violations against the right to freedom of religion or belief and other fundamental rights and freedoms still occur, and those who defend the rights of others face arbitrary detention, imprisonment, intimidation and torture.

In the approach to "June Fourth", Chinese human rights lawyers, activists and artists have been detained and disappeared for offenses as small as gathering to talk about what happened at Tiananmen Square in 1989. Those who have been released have been warned not to participate in any kind of remembrance activity.

In parallel to the repression of freedom of expression, the past two months has seen a spate of forced demolitions of churches and religious symbols in Zhejiang. Dozens of churches in Zhejiang Province have had all or parts of their structure removed or demolished, or have been threatened with demolition. The churches affected include both Protestant and Catholic, registered and unregistered. Some have had signs removed, while others have been completely demolished; almost all have been ordered to remove religious symbols, most often the cross.

Those who defend the rights of others, including the right to freedom of religion or belief, often face severe repercussions. Christian rights lawyer, Gao Zhisheng, well-known for his work defending victims of religious freedom violations and other vulnerable social groups, remains in prison after disappearing in April 2010. No one has been able to visit or contact Gao since Jan. 2013. His family is deeply concerned about his health and his personal safety.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "In the run-up to the anniversary of the Tiananmen Square tragedy, we call upon the Chinese government to fully respect the rights of its citizens, including the right to freedom of religion or belief, and to allow lawyers and activists to defend the rights of others. We also urge the government end the imposed silence on the topic of June Fourth, to allow the relatives of the victims to mourn publicly, and to conduct a full and impartial investigation into the events of June 1989."