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CHINA | Three Nanle Church Members Released, Six Still Detained

Three members of Nanle County Christian Church detained since November 2013 were released on June 11, according to reports from China Aid Association.

Fan Ruiling (also known as Fan Ruizhen), Yan Beibei and Zhao Zhijun were among over 20 members of Nanle County Christian Church detained in November and December 2013. Yan Beibei, 23, was the youngest church member detained.

On Nov. 15, 2013, several church members, including Yan Beibei and Zhao Zhijun, were detained after petitioning a higher authority about a land dispute involving the church, which belongs to the state-sanctioned Three-Self Patriotic Movement. The following day, police detained the church's pastor, Zhang Shaojie, without any formal documentation. Fan Ruiling was detained after attending a church service on 17 Nov. 17. 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 2013.

The release of Fan, Yan and Zhao leaves six church members in detention, including Pastor Zhang Shaojie and his sister, Zhang Cuijian. Although some lawyers have met with their clients, so far only Zhang Shaojie has been to trial. He faces charges of "fraud" and "disturbing public order."

Mervyn Thomas, Chief Executive of Christian Solidarity Worldwide, said, "We welcome the release of Fan Ruiling, Yan Beibei and Zhao Zhijun from detention in Henan Province. At the same time, we remain concerned about the six church members still detained, in particular those detained at an unknown location. We are especially concerned that the majority of the detainees have not been allowed to meet with their lawyers. CSW therefore calls on the Chinese authorities to allow all the lawyers to meet with their clients. We further urge the relevant authorities to urgently review each detainee's case without delay and in accordance with the law, with a view to securing their release."