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CHINA | Timeline Charts Year of Zhejiang Province Church Demolitions

A new interactive timeline released by Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) collates over 400 reports of incidents related to whole or partial demolitions of churches or church-run buildings in China's Zhejiang Province in 2014.

Reports of the following incidents are included in the timeline:

- Whole or partial demolition of a Catholic or Protestant church or church-run building;
- Notice of demolition or cross removal;
- Forced removal, demolition, modification or covering of a cross;
- Related injury, and detention, arrest or summons in connection with demolitions in Zhejiang Province.

In 2013, the Zhejiang provincial government in China launched the “Three Rectifications and One Demolition” campaign, with the reported aim of demolishing illegal structures which violate law and regulations relating to land management and urban and rural planning.

In 2014, hundreds of churches and church-run buildings in the province were wholly or partially demolished, or threatened with demolition, apparently in connection with this campaign. In the vast majority of cases, it is the church's cross which has been removed, and where whole buildings have been demolished, the cross has usually been removed first. Many Christians in the province believe the churches are being deliberately targeted for demolition.

Zhejiang Province, which is also known for its entrepreneurial spirit and rapid economic development, is home to the city of Wenzhou, sometimes referred to as “China's Jerusalem” due to its significant Christian population. Until last year, Wenzhou's churches were considered to be some of the most wealthy and influential in China.

The recent events in Zhejiang came as a complete surprise both to Chinese Christians and to foreign observers. Some believe the demolitions are a response to the growth and wealth of churches in Zhejiang. Others believe this is part of a centrally-orchestrated, top-down plan to be rolled out across the country, which aims to bring in line those registered churches which have become “too independent” and pressure unregistered churches to register. The government maintains this is all part of a campaign to target illegal structures and has nothing to do with religion.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, “Although the Chinese government claims that the church demolitions have nothing to do with religion, the scope of the demolitions indicated

by the **timeline** tells a different story. The unease felt by Christians in the province and elsewhere in the country is also very real. We renew our call for the Chinese authorities to make consistent efforts to enter into dialogue with religious leaders, with a view to promoting mutual trust and positive relations; to provide clear instructions about the process of applying for permission to build a religious structure; and to establish a complaints mechanism for religious buildings which have been refused permission to build.”