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CHINA | Hong Kong Christians Demand Information About Imprisoned Bishop

Hong Kong Catholics, including Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kun, have demanded official confirmation of the reported death of imprisoned Chinese Bishop Cosmas Shi Enxiang.

The demand was made at a protest organized by the Justice and Peace Commission of the Hong Kong diocese, which gathered outside the Chinese government's liaison office on Feb. 14.

Various media reports stated that Bishop Shi, who had been detained at an unknown location since 2001, died at the end of January at the age of 94. His family members said they were informed of the death by Hebei provincial officials. However, there are conflicting reports from officials about Bishop Shi's whereabouts and whether or not he is dead. The Justice and Peace Commission of Hong Kong is demanding official confirmation of whether Bishop Shi is alive or dead, and if he is dead, the circumstances surrounding his passing.

Bishop Cosmas Shi Enxiang was ordained in 1947 and was first sent to prison after he refused to submit to government oversight of his activities. He spent over 20 years doing hard labor, first in a labor camp in Heilongjiang province, then in a coal mine in Shanxi Province. In total he spent over 40 years in detention. Most recently, he was taken from his niece's home in Beijing on Good Friday 2001 and transferred to a secret location. His family have not seen him since.

Relatives of imprisoned and forcibly disappeared Catholic clergy and overseas organizations have consistently requested information about the whereabouts and health of detainees.

Another long term detainee in China is Bishop James Su Zhimin, who was detained on Oct. 8, 1997 in Hebei. Prior to this occasion, he was arrested at least five times and spent nearly 27 years in prison. While in hiding, Bishop Su wrote to the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress asking the government to end religious persecution. More recently, the US-based non-profit Cardinal Kung Foundation reported that on Aug. 7, 2013, a Catholic priest from Xiwanzi diocese was arrested in Hebei province by more than 10 Public Security officers. The current whereabouts of both Bishop Su and Father Song are still unknown.

Mervyn Thomas, Chief Executive of Christian Solidarity Worldwide, said, "CSW joins Hong Kong Catholics in calling on the Chinese authorities to confirm the whereabouts and current status of Bishop Cosmas Shi Enxiang. Bishop Shi has spent decades of his life in prison for peacefully opposing the government's handling of religious affairs in China. The local authorities have made it impossible for his relatives to gain information about this situation, and have not

allowed his family to visit him since he was detained in 2001. The current uncertainty surrounding his possible death is extremely distressing for his family. We call on the Chinese authorities to confirm immediately whether Bishop Shi is alive or dead. At the same time, we urge the government to release Bishop Su Zhimin and Father Song Wanjun, and to ensure that the peaceful religious activities of Catholic clergy and lay people are fully protected in line with international standards.”