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## **CHINA | Ongoing Violations Contradict Human Rights Progress Report**

On June 8, China's Office of the State Council issued a white paper praising the "tremendous achievements China has made in its human rights endeavors in 2014. However, recent and ongoing human rights violations, including restrictions on religious communities, contradict many of the authors' assertions.

The paper, entitled Progress in China's Human Rights in 2014, pledges that the Communist Party of China and the Chinese government will "develop various undertakings conducive to the protection and realization of human rights." In a section on ethnic minorities, the paper asserts that "freedom of religious belief of ethnic minorities fully guaranteed." In support, the authors list the number of religious venues and Buddhist clergy in Tibet and states that the Chinese Islamic Association has set up a Uyghur-language website introducing "religious knowledge."

In fact, Uyghur Muslims' religious observance continues to be severely restricted. In 2015, the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief described China's actions against Uighur Muslims as "a major problem," and cited "very disturbing stories" of harassment and intimidation. In Tibet, restrictions on the use of photographs of and references to the Dalai Lama are rigidly enforced, and Tibetan religious sites are subject to heavy surveillance and sometimes military presence.

Although the paper does not specifically mention the situation of other religious groups in China, it does claim that efforts are being made to promote the direct registration of social organizations, allowing citizens to safeguard their legitimate rights and interests and engage in social services. However, a new draft law concerning foreign non-government organizations (NGOs) in China has drawn severe criticism from the international community. According to critics, the proposed law would significantly restrict the activities of foreign NGOs and could affect some academic institutions and religious organizations.

While the paper claims that judicial openness and reform advanced in 2014, rights lawyers in China continue to face significant obstacles. In "sensitive" cases, lawyers are often denied access to clients and can even be harassed and detained themselves. Lawyer Chang Boyang, for example, was detained for defending such cases, including that of Zhang Cuijuan, who served an 18-month sentence for "gathering a crowd to disrupt public order" after her brother, Pastor Zhang Shaojie, and over 20 church members were detained in November 2013.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "While the government's aim to "protect and realize human rights" is commendable, the mistreatment of those advocating for human rights

sharply contradicts this message. Barely a week goes by without reports of lawyers being harassed or detained: increasingly, the crackdown on civil society is spreading to journalists, netizen-activists, academics and NGOs working on a variety of issues. The detention of Christians opposing the removal of church crosses in Zhejiang, the harassment of lawyers defending religious communities, and the imprisonment of clergy who have defended the rights of others, clearly show that key human rights, including freedom of religion or belief and freedom of expression, have yet to be realized. We urge the Chinese government to put into practice what has been set down on paper, to turn words into action, and to allow civil society to participate in the protection of human rights and freedom of religion or belief.”