



11.23.15

## CHINA | Church Leaders Question Reported Suicide

Chinese church leaders question the official explanation of suicide in the case of a Catholic priest reported dead Nov. 11.

According to UCANews, Father Pedro Yu Heping, also known as Wei Heping, departed from Taiyuan in Shanxi province on Nov. 6, bound for Xingcheng, but never arrived. On Nov. 11, police informed his family that his body had been found in the Fen River several days earlier. Church leaders have gathered in Taiyuan to get more information.

According to the Cardinal Kung Foundation, Father Yu, 41, was heavily involved in pastoral work, particularly in poor and remote areas of the country, following his clandestine ordination in 2004 by a bishop from the “underground” church. The foundation has also questioned the authorities’ claim that Father Yu committed suicide and appealed to the Chinese government to thoroughly investigate the cause of death and publish the findings.

Concerns about the circumstances surrounding Father Yu’s death occur against a backdrop of ongoing allegations, ill-treatment of religious leaders, rights lawyers and other prisoners and detainees in China, including the use of torture. In a stakeholder submission to the UN Committee against Torture’s review of China’s report, CSW highlighted torture and ill-treatment in extra-legal detention facilities, otherwise known as “black jails,” the forced repatriation of North Korean asylum seekers and China’s legislative and legal reform concerning torture and ill-treatment. The submission made specific reference to Bishop James Su and rights lawyer and religious freedom defender Li Heping, who are both detained incommunicado at unknown locations, putting them at high risk of ill-treatment.

CSW’s Chief Operating Officer Andy Dipper said, “We are concerned about the circumstances surrounding the death of Father Yu earlier this month and join his friends, colleagues and church leaders in calling for an impartial and prompt investigation. As outlined in our submission to the UN Committee against Torture, we also reiterate our deep concerns about allegations of torture and ill-treatment of religious leaders, rights lawyers and other prisoners and detainees in China, and note that such allegations have often not been investigated and in some cases the alleged victims has been subjected to further periods of enforced disappearance and detention after making the allegations. We call on the government of the People’s Republic of China to promptly and impartially investigate any acts of torture, and to immediately end the use of extra-legal forms of detention.”