



1.27.16

CHINA | Pastor Formally Arrested, Another Dismissed

Pastor Yang Hua of Living Stone Church in Guiyang, Guizhou Province was formally arrested Jan. 22. In an unrelated development, Senior Pastor Gu Yuese was dismissed from his post in Chongyi Church in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province.

Pastor Yang Hua, also known as Li Guozhi, was formally arrested on suspicion of “divulging state secrets” after a period of time in detention. In 2015, Yang was placed in administrative detention for “obstructing justice” and “gathering a crowd to disturb social order,” before being put into criminal detention for “illegally holding state secrets.”

Since mid-2015, Living Stone Church, an unregistered Protestant church with over 700 members, has experienced increasingly repressive measures by the authorities. A “Rectification Order” received by the church on Nov. 18 from the Nanming District City Urban Administrative and Law Enforcement Bureau stated that the church’s use of a commercial building was illegal and gave the church three days to respond or incur fines. An application by the church for a reconsideration of the penalty notice was rejected by Guiyang Municipal People’s Government on Jan. 11. Yang was detained shortly afterwards.

Church members see this as an attempt by the authorities to pressure the church into registering with the state-sanctioned religious associations or face closure. They also note that the church has been instrumental in bringing together lawyers to defend smaller local churches from harassment and restrictions. It also has several social projects and a diverse membership. Members of the congregation are often questioned and harassed, and in some cases, pressured not to attend the church. At least seven people have been detained in connection with the case.

Also this month, Gu Yuese, Senior Pastor of the state-sanctioned Chongyi Church in Hangzhou, was dismissed from his post, according to a notice released by the Hangzhou Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TPSM) and the Hangzhou China Christian Council (CCC). Gu is also Chairman of the Zhejiang CCC provincial branch. The TPSM and CCC are state-sanctioned

religious organizations who oversee the practices and organization of registered churches in China.

His dismissal is believed to be linked to his public opposition to the removal by the authorities of hundreds of crosses from churches across Zhejiang since 2014. The official reason for Gu's dismissal is "to move one step closer towards the proper self-construction and management of church locations by the two Christian organizations [TPSM and CCC] in Hangzhou."

These developments take place against the backdrop of an unprecedented crackdown on and the sweeping arrests of over 300 human rights lawyers and activists which began in July 2015. As the six-month limit to detention without arrest approaches, many detainees are being formally arrested on security-related charges, including Buddhist monk and activist Lin Bin. He was formally arrested on suspicion of "inciting subversion of state power," which carries a maximum 15-year sentence. Lin is the head monk at the Nine Xianchan Temple in Ningde City, Fujian Province. A vocal supporter of rights lawyers and activists, he disappeared July 10 and is being held at Tianjin No. 2 Detention Center.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "We call on the authorities to drop the charges against Pastor Yang and to cease its harassment of Living Stone Church members. The charges faced by Lin Bin, which are being increasingly levelled at activists and human rights lawyers who were detained in the crackdown, are unwarranted and severe. Lin Bin and the hundreds of others who have been detained have only sought to defend the rights of others. Their treatment is a disgrace and flies in the face of the government's avowed commitment to rule of law. We urge the Chinese authorities to act in accordance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, by respecting the inherent dignity of all those detained in the crackdown and the right of Chinese citizens, like the members of Living Stone Church, to the right to freedom of religion or belief."