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## CHINA | Pastor Detained After Opposing Cross Removals

Pastor Gu Yuese, also known as Joseph Gu, of the state-sanctioned Chongyi Church in Zhejiang Province was detained Jan. 27 and placed under "residential surveillance at a designated location." Gu was publicly opposed to forced cross removals from churches in the province.

Earlier this month, Pastor Gu was dismissed from his post as senior pastor of the state-sanctioned Chongyi Church in Hangzhou. Chongyi Church is reportedly one of the largest, if not the largest, registered church in China. Pastor Gu is also the chair of the Zhejiang branch of the China Christian Council, a state-sanctioned religious organization which, along with the Three Self Patriotic Movement, oversees the practices and organization of registered churches in China.

According to ChinaChange.org, until now, Gu has played a role as a mediator between the government and the churches. His dismissal and detention are believed to be linked to his public opposition to the authorities' removal of hundreds of crosses from Zhejiang churches and in particular, an open letter opposing the cross removals, which was published by the Zhejiang China Christian Council in July.

Gu has been placed under "designated surveillance at a designated location," under which he can be held for up to six months without formal arrest. On Jan. 29, the local state TSPM and CCC issued a notice stating that Pastor Gu is assisting the authorities with an investigation into suspicions of embezzlement and financial problems. On Jan. 31, ChinaChange.org reported that he has been accused of misusing funds.

"Designated surveillance at a designated location" is a measure used against many of the human rights lawyers detained in China's sweeping arrests of over 300 human rights lawyers and activists, which began in July 2015. As the six-month limit expires, many detainees are being formally arrested on security-related charges. On Jan. 29, lawyer Tang Jingling, a Christian human rights lawyer, was convicted of "inciting subversion of state power" and

sentenced to five years in prison.

The two activists arrested with him were sentenced to 2 1/2 years and 3 1/2 years in prison on the same charge. In November 2014, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention found their detention was “conducted as a result of their legitimate exercise of the rights or freedoms,” and stated that the three should be released immediately. Tang’s lawyer managed to meet with him in September and reported that he has not been allowed access to a Bible, his private correspondence, or medical treatment. At least 16 others have been arrested on suspicion of subverting state power or inciting subversion so far this year.

Mervyn Thomas, Chief Executive of Christian Solidarity Worldwide, said, “We are deeply concerned by Pastor Gu Yuese’s detention. As several sources have observed, his detention appears to be linked to his opposition to the forced removal of crosses in his Zhejiang Province. In opposing this campaign, Pastor Gu voiced the concerns and sentiments of Christians across the province. His dismissal and detention send an extremely worrying message that criticism of the authorities’ policy on religious affairs will not be tolerated, even from those within the state-sanctioned structure. Lawyer Tang’s sentencing is another example of authorities’ intolerance of freedom of expression and the defense of human rights. We urge the authorities to release Pastor Gu and lawyer Tang, and the many others detained for their defense of human rights and freedom of religion or belief.”