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CHINA | Christian Couple Sentenced, Lawyer Criminally Detained

On Feb. 25, Pastor Bao Guohua and his wife Xing Wenxiang were convicted of the criminal charges of “corruption” and “gathering people to disturb social order” and sentenced to 14 and 12 years in prison respectively.

According to media reports, Bao, Xing and their son Bao Chenxing were detained July 26 and held for six months before being sentenced. In addition to their sentences, the court ordered assets totaling 600,000 yuan (approximately \$92,000) in value be confiscated from each of them.

In addition, Bao was fined 100,000 yuan (approximately \$15,000), and Xing was fined 90,000 yuan (approximately \$14,000). The corruption charges against them pertain to the alleged embezzling of money from their congregation.

Bao Guohua is pastor of Jinhua Christian Church in Jinhua City, Zhejiang Province. He is also a member of the China Christian Council (CCC), one of two state sanctioned associations which oversee Protestantism nationwide. Pastor Bao is one of several pastors from government-approved religious organizations who have spoken out against the demolition of hundreds of crosses in Zhejiang Province since early 2014.

Reportedly up to 10 other church members from Bao’s church were sentenced, as well as his son, Bao Chenxing, who was reportedly sentenced to three years in prison. Further information is unavailable at this time.

The sentencing of the Jinhua Church members occurred the same week state media broadcast the televised “confession” of the prominent human rights lawyer Zhang Kai, in which he admitted to “disturbing social order,” “endangering state security” and behaving in an unprofessional manner. He has been criminally detained.

Zhang had been providing legal advice and support to Christians in Zhejiang Province prior to his detention Aug. 25. Before his criminal detention, Zhang had already spent six months detained under the measure “residential surveillance at a designated location.”

Mervyn Thomas, Chief Executive of Christian Solidarity Worldwide, said, “We are deeply concerned to hear of the sentencing of Bao Guohua and Xing Wenxiang. The authorities have claimed that the forced removal of hundreds of crosses from churches in Zhejiang Province is aimed at illegal structures and is nothing to do with religion; yet pastors and Christians who have peacefully opposed the cross removals have been detained and in some cases given long prison sentences. Pastor Bao, and Pastors Li Guanzhong and Gu Yueese detained in January this year, are accused of various crimes, but all have one thing in common: they opposed the removal of crosses from Zhejiang churches. We call on the Chinese authorities to release immediately all those detained in connection with their peaceful opposition to restrictions on their religious freedom, and to uphold the right to freedom of religion or belief for people of all faiths in China.”