

## September 4, 2000: Commission Statement on Religious Persecution in China

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In a Los Angeles speech two weeks ago, Bishop Michael Fu Tieshan of the government-controlled Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association claimed that China is entering a "golden age" for religion. At a Washington press conference later the same week, Bishop Fu asserted that "there is no religious persecution in China." The facts say otherwise. Just since the May vote in the U.S. House of Representatives on granting Permanent Normal Trade Relations (PNTR) status, China's record on religious freedom, already deplorable, has further deteriorated. There are reliable press reports of the following: The brutal campaign against the Falun Gong and Zhong Gong spiritual movements continues. Estimates of the number of Falun Gong practitioners who have died as a result - usually from police beatings - ranges from 27 to more than 30. At least 35,000 have been detained, with 5,000 sent to labor camps without trial. Several leaders have received prison terms of more than a decade. Zhong Gong's founder, Zhong Hongbao, has fled to Guam, where he has filed an asylum request, while the Chinese authorities have charged him with sexual crimes. An estimated 600 Zhong Gong organizers have been detained and 3,000 businesses linked to the group shut down, leaving some 100,000 people jobless. In July, Chinese authorities arrested Shen Chang, leader of the Shen Chang Body Science meditation group, and charged him with "disrupting social order" and tax evasion. At least eight Uighur Muslims from the Xinjiang Autonomous Region were executed in June and July on charges of "splitting the country." Muslim Uighur businesswoman Rebiya Kadeer remains in jail serving an eight-year sentence for "harming national security." Her crime: sending her husband in the U.S. clippings from Chinese newspapers, on which he commented over Radio Free Asia. Harassment of Protestant and Roman Catholic Christians who refuse to join state-controlled organizations proceeds apace. Dozens of Protestants have been arrested for participating in unauthorized house-church services, including 31 in Hubei Province on Aug. 2, 12 in Henan Province on Aug. 10, and 24 in Shanxi Province on Aug. 24. On Aug. 23, police in Henan arrested 130 evangelical Christians of the China Fangcheng Church at a religious meeting, along with three visiting Chinese-American evangelists. The Chinese government has banned the Fangcheng Church as an "evil cult," but American evangelicals say it follows traditional Christian beliefs. The three Americans were beaten, released, and deported, and 70 of the Chinese Christians were jailed. On June 24 and Aug. 6, Bishop Fu ordained a number of bishops and priests without Vatican approval. An underground Vatican-recognized priest was arrested in Fujian Province Aug. 19 for celebrating Mass in a private home. He was released Aug. 29, but the next day police in Fujian arrested another priest, a seminarian, 20 nuns, and two laypersons. Two nuns were released after parishioners paid police a large sum of money, but the other 22 persons were still detained as of Sept. 1. Police have ransacked homes in Tibet, seizing and destroying Buddhist religious objects and pictures of the Dalai Lama. Thirty monks were expelled in July from the Jokhang Temple, one of Tibetan Buddhism's holiest shrines. The Tibet Daily newspaper on July 4 published an article threatening government officials who participate in religious activities, along with a phone number for informants to call and report them if they do. In August, authorities expelled the German and Portuguese directors of the Tibet Heritage Fund, an international agency working in Lhasa, the capital, to restore Tibetan cultural sites, including monasteries. China successfully lobbied the organizers of the Millennium World Peace Summit of religious leaders to exclude the Dalai Lama, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, from events scheduled in the United Nations building in New York. Perhaps most incredibly, Chinese customs officials seized 16,000 copies of a book of photographs of President Clinton by Robert McNeely, his official photographer, because one of the photos showed the President meeting with the Dalai Lama. The books, which were printed in Hong Kong and sent to China for binding, were published by a New York firm for sale in the U.S. As the sharp deterioration in freedom of religion in China continues unabated, if not at a stepped-up pace, the U.S. government has a moral obligation to speak out and let the Chinese government know that these abuses are unacceptable. On the eve of the Senate debate on granting China PNTR status, the Commission reiterates the recommendations from its May 1 Annual Report that Congress should grant PNTR status only after China makes substantial improvement in respect for religious freedom, measured by the following standards. China should: a) open a high-level and continuing dialogue with the U.S. on religious freedom-issues; b) ratify the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, which it has signed; c) permit the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom and international human rights organizations unhindered access to religious leaders, including those imprisoned, detained, or under house arrest; d) respond to inquiries regarding persons who are imprisoned, detained, or under house arrest for reasons of religion or belief, or whose whereabouts are not known, although they were last seen in the hands of Chinese authorities; and e) release from prison all religious prisoners. Also, before granting PNTR, the U.S. Congress should: a) announce that it will hold annual hearings on human rights and religious freedom in China; and b) extend an invitation to the Dalai Lama to address a Joint Session of the Congress. Further, the United States should use its diplomatic influence to ensure that China is not selected as a site for the Olympic Games until it makes significant improvement in human rights, including religious freedom.

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