

China pastor & wife forced from home, living on streets

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BEIJING (BP)—A leader among China's unregistered house churches and his wife have been forced from their home and hounded from shelter to shelter by Chinese authorities since July 6, according to the human rights group China Aid Association.

The only explanation given by officials for the couple's treatment was that the pastor "met the Americans and destroyed the harmony of the Beijing Olympic Games."

Pastor Bike Zhang, in a photo taken in 2007, talks about Jesus to children on the street in China. In July he and his wife were forced to leave the home in Beijing and have been hounded by police wherever they try to take shelter. (China Aid Photo)

Bike Zhang, chairman of the Federation House Church and his wife, Xie Fenglan, were forced to leave their home in Beijing's Chaoyang district by officials of the Public Security Bureau, according to a China Aid Association report. When authorities learned the couple had found shelter in the home of a friend, they forced the Zhangs to leave.

A hotel owner in another district allowed the Zhangs to take up extended residence in his facility, but officials with the security bureau in that city threatened the hotel owner with jail if he did not evict the couple. When the Zhangs traveled to another city to find a place to stay, they were stopped en route by police officials and taken to the town's government offices for

interrogation, the CAA report said.

Interrogation

Police officers interrogated the couple constantly throughout the night, without food, drink or rest. At 6 a.m., Xie Fenglan collapsed but was not taken to the hospital until 11 a.m., CAA said.

After she recovered enough to travel, the couple was released from custody and went to a hotel, where they again were accosted and forced to leave town. After police prevented several more attempts to find shelter, Zhang took his wife to her sister's home in another province and found lodging for himself at a local hotel. Police there followed Zhang when he went out to buy medicine for his wife, and she was forced to move out of her sister's home.

At last report, Zhang and his wife were living on the streets, unable to find shelter. When the China Aid Association asked why the couple was being treated in that manner, they were told: "Because Bike Zhang met the Americans and destroyed the harmony of the Beijing Olympic Games."

"This egregious treatment of one of China's most respected and well-loved house church leaders is a shocking and outright violation of basic human rights and rule of law," CAA's Bob Fu said in a statement. "The Chinese government has shown neither remorse nor discretion in violating United Nations and international mandates to grant citizens basic human liberties such as shelter and protection.

"The acts against Pastor Bike Zhang and his wife are unjust and unlawful," the statement continued. "This type of behavior ... is reflective of a dictatorship with no regard for the well-being of its citizens and not a world leader worthy of the honor of hosting the Olympic Games."

Other Christians jailed

Another Chinese Protestant, Shi Weihan, remains in the custody of Beijing Municipal Public Security Bureau on the grounds he is a “dangerous religious element,” the China Aid Association said. Weihan is married with two young daughters, one of whom is an American citizen.

Shi, a Christian publisher, has been held for four months. He was arrested in November 2007 for “illegal business practices” but released in January after authorities determined there was insufficient evidence to support the charge. He was re-arrested March 19 for allegedly printing unauthorized Bibles and Christian literature.

“Despite having held Mr. Shi beyond the time legally allowed, absent formal charges or a court hearing, the PSB still refuses to allow his family or attorney to see him,” a CAA spokesman said. “Claiming an ongoing investigation in what they are calling ‘a complex case,’ they have managed to hold the owner of a legally registered Christian bookstore in an undisclosed location without giving any assurances that he is receiving his needed diabetic medicine.”

The China Aid Association urges the international community and those concerned to voice their objection of these acts to the Chinese government, Fu said.

The Chinese ambassador to the United States, Zhou Wenzhong, can be addressed at Embassy of People’s Republic of China, 2201 Wisconsin Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20007. The telephone number for the embassy is (202) 328-2500. The e-mail address is chinaembassy_us@fmprc.gov.cn.

The China Aid Association website is located at www.chinaaid.org.

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