

International officials urge China to release jailed pastor

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SICHUAN, China (BP)—The United States and the European Union are urging China to free Pastor Wang Yi, sentenced to nine years in prison in what religious liberty advocates call Christian persecution.

China pronounced Wang guilty Dec. 30 of “illegal business operations” and “inciting subversion of state power”—convictions religious liberty advocates say stem solely from his leadership as founding pastor of Early Rain Covenant Church in Chengdu, Sichuan.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo expressed alarm at Wang’s sentence on charges that Pompeo called “trumped up” and issued with no defense lawyer present.

“We call for his immediate and unconditional release,” Pompeo said in a statement Dec. 31. “This is yet another example of Beijing’s intensification of repression of Chinese Christians and members of other religious groups. We continue to call on Beijing to uphold its international commitments and promises made in its own constitution to promote religious freedom for all individuals, including members of ethnic and religious minorities, and those who worship outside of official state-sanctioned institutions.”

E.U. spokesman Peter Stano issued a similar appeal Jan. 1.

“The E.U. is concerned about restrictions on freedom of religion and belief in China and calls for immediate release of Pastor Wang Yi, who was tried in secret and sentenced to nine years in prison in connection to his peaceful advocacy of freedom of religion,” Stano tweeted.

‘I will resist in meekness’



Pastor Wang Yi preaches at Early Rain Covenant Church . (Photo distributed by BP)

Wang responded to his sentence in a message Early Rain church posted on Facebook, religious liberty advocate Open Doors USA reported Dec. 30.

“I hope God uses me, by means of first losing my personal freedom, to tell those who have deprived me of my personal freedom that there is an authority higher than their authority,” the church quoted Wang, “and that there is a freedom that they cannot restrain, a freedom that fills the church of the crucified and risen Jesus Christ.

“Jesus is the Christ, son of the eternal, living God. He died for sinners and rose to life for us. He is my king and the king of the whole earth yesterday, today, and forever,” Wang said on Facebook. “I am his servant, and I am imprisoned because of this. I will resist in meekness those who resist God, and I will joyfully violate all laws that violate God’s laws.”

China also stripped Wang of his political rights for three years and will seize nearly \$7,200 of his assets, the *New York Times* reported.

‘Unjust religious persecution’

Religious liberty advocate Bob Fu, founder and president of ChinaAid, called Wang’s imprisonment “a pure case of unjust religious persecution against a peaceful preacher of a Chinese reformed church.”

“This grave sentence demonstrates (Chinese President Xi Jinping’s) regime is determined to be the enemy of universal values and religious freedom,” Fu said Dec. 30. “We call upon the international community to stand up to the Chinese Communist Party and hold this evil regime accountable.”

Open Doors CEO David Curry said China is trying to turn both state and underground churches into “a Chinese church, not a church of Jesus.”

“There will be even more pressure on the body of Christ in China,” Curry said in a press release. “The government is trying to force out unregistered churches.”

Wang’s sentence is one of the latest moves in China’s systemic persecution of Christians, Muslims and other religious minorities there.

Wang had been imprisoned nearly a full year before the Dec. 26 trial, detained after officials raided the church in late 2018.