



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on April 11, 2014

## Chinese Christians Protest Government's Planned Destruction of Churches

The provincial government of China's eastern coastal province of Zhejiang is conducting a three-year campaign to eradicate "illegal" structures — a program that Christians believe will give the government carte blanche to demolish some Christian churches.

The China Aid Association revealed documents originating within Zhejiang's provincial government outlining its "Three Rectifications and One Demolition" program. China Aid describes itself as "an international non-profit Christian human rights organization committed to promoting religious freedom and the rule of law in China."



An April 10 report posted by *China Aid News* notes that privately established Christian gathering sites are listed as the top priority for demolition under the program. The organization, founded by Pastor "Bob" Xiqiu Fu, translated a notice published by the Shamen Town Committee of the Chinese Communist Party in Taizhou in December 2013 that was officially entitled "Implementation Plans for Rectification of Illegal Structures at Sites for Religious and Folk Faiths Activities in Shamen Town."

The local Communist Party document states:

It is now decided to unfold the exclusive rectification work on illegal structures throughout the town at the sites for religious activities and folk faiths activities.

Attaching a great importance to doing a good job in the rectification of illegal structures at sites for religious activities and folk faiths activities in the 'Three Rectifications and One Demolition' campaign are the actual actions in deeply carrying out the spirit of the notice from the Central Executive Committee and the State Council on resolutely curbing the willful construction of temples, monasteries and outdoor religious statues.

There is a blatant admission that religious activities in China are regulated by the state:

These tasks are also the actual action in deeply implementing the State Council's "Regulations on Religious Affairs," "Regulations on Religious Affairs of Zhejiang Province," and other religious codes and regulations.

Recognizing that overt persecution of religion invites charges of human rights violations, the notice pretends that the government's interest in restricting churches is based on architectural, rather than religious, grounds:

Illegal structures at the sites for religious activities and activities of folk faiths are not an issue of religious faiths or folk faiths: you should not mix faiths with illegal structures, and you should not



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solve non-religious issues as if they were religious issues.

The document nevertheless pulls no punches in calling for the destruction of churches:

Illegal structures at sites for religious activities and sites for folk faiths must be demolished and the regulation of “Seven types of structures that must be demolished” must be followed. [Among the] seven types of structures that must be demolished are: 1) Christian gathering sites that are privately established without approval and are unregistered and other illegal sites for religious activities.

The China Aid Association said worshippers in the eastern province of Zhejiang had urged local authorities to stop dismantling crosses and churches on the grounds that they violate building codes.

An AFP report carried by the *Malay Mail Online* referred to a report in the *Chinese Global Times* newspaper on April 10 stating that “Christians familiar with the matter” said that the government had ordered at least five churches in Zhejiang, with four of them in being in Wenzhou, to be demolished or to remove prominent crosses from their rooftops.

A Wenzhou religious official denied that there is a government campaign to demolish churches and remove crosses, saying that demolition activities are aimed at illegal structures that present “safety hazards,” the *Global Times* said.

*The Telegraph* (U.K.) reported on April 4 that thousands of Christians had maintained an around-the-clock presence around the Sanjiang Christian Church in the city of Wenzhou that the government had scheduled for demolition. Government officials had posted a demolition notice on the church and had painted the words “Demolish” and “Illegal Construction” in red letters on its outside walls. In addition to the thousands surrounding the church, hundreds more have occupied it.

“There are bad people out there trying to damage our church so we must defend it,” the *Telegraph* quoted Li Jingliu, one of the occupiers, as saying.

Jin Yufu, another supporter occupying the church, said, “I’ve come here today to show my support. A church is a sacred place and we are all brothers and sisters. Christianity has made a big contribution to society in many ways.... Christians are good people.”

Zhang Biyao, identified by *The Telegraph* as a woman who introduced herself as a local government representative, dismissed claims that the Communist Party was persecuting local Christians, saying: “They can believe. This is free. We can’t control them.”

She then fell back on the official line that the demolitions have nothing to do with religion, claiming that the church was structurally unsound and that the government simply wanted to protect the “people’s safety.”

*The Telegraph* also quoted a statement made by Feng Zhili, the chairman of Zhejiang’s ethnic and religious affairs committee, who said Christianity’s growth had been “too excessive and too haphazard.”

A report in the *Washington Post* on April 4 observed that communist officials had expressed concerns that that Christianity was growing too fast and in an “unsustainable” manner. Today, there are thought to be more Chinese Christians than Communist Party members, with up to 100 million believers, according to some estimates.

Further aggravating the communists, though, is that fact that Chinese Christians have become too visible, especially by erecting crosses prominently on or near their churches. The *Post* cites several



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Christian leaders who believe that the provincial Communist Party secretary objected to seeing so many large crosses during a recent drive along a major highway, and ordered some to be removed.

Since the party official made his objections known, at least six crosses have been taken down in the province including some in Hangzhou and Zhoushan.

The *Post* cited a statement from Zheng Leguo, an evangelical church leader from Wenzhou, who said that officials had demanded that the church remove several small spires on the rooftop, but when church leaders refused, officials threatened to tear down the entire building.

Like all communist nations, China is an officially atheist state, yet it formally recognizes five religions: Buddhism, Catholicism, Islam, Protestantism, and Taoism. However, recognition does not preclude the government from controlling, or even officially taking over, some churches.

The communist officials' apparent targeting of the Sanjiang Christian Church has not escaped the attention of Christians worldwide, who recognize that they must stand in solidarity with their spiritual brethren. A commentary written about the incident in Britain's *Catholic Herald* by Father Alexander Smith on April 11 noted:

The persecution of Christianity is flourishing in certain parts of the world — if that is the correct term for it. The Chinese government, no friend to what it cannot control — seems to have embarked on a campaign of church demolitions....

The church in Zhejiang is a Protestant one, and the majority of China's Christians are Protestants. While on the subject of Chinese Christianity, let us not forget the plight of the Catholics in China, who are forbidden by the state to have ties with Rome, and are only recognized by the state if they join the state-sponsored Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association. This represents blatant interference in religious matters by an avowedly atheist government, which is not just illogical, but betrays the Chinese government's flagrant disregard for the rights of conscience. Religious people should be allowed to organize themselves as they please without interference from the state.

Father Smith obviously recognizes that it will take a unified effort on the part of all Christians to counter the atheistic regime that is the enemy of all who believe that God is supreme, not the state. While today's Chinese communists may take a more subtle approach than the mass killings of Christians and those of other religions that took place under the brutal tyrant Mao, they will always regard God-fearing Christians as threats to their absolute rule. As well they should.

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