



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on May 11, 2012

China Launches Campaign to Eradicate House Churches

The Chinese government is pursuing an extensive strategy to close down Protestant house churches throughout the country, a Christian human rights organization has reported. According to [China Aid Association](#), a group “committed to promoting religious freedom and the rule of law in China” its website explains, in 2010 the Chinese government launched a three-phase campaign to stamp out “illegal” churches, and to move all Protestant congregations under the umbrella of the government approved system known as the [Three-Self Patriotic Movement](#).



“In December 2010, the Communist Party Central Committee’s Public Security Commission issued a secret document to target China’s ‘house churches’ in implementing its special suppression campaign ‘Operation Deterrence,’ ” explained a China Aid report. “Government officials of all levels were told to ‘guide’ Christians attending those unregistered churches to worship in government-approved Three-Self churches, and to ‘break up’ large churches like Shouwang Church into small groups.”

In early 2011 the world began to get a sense of China’s renewed animosity toward churches that refuse to toe the Communist Party line as government authorities launched a systematically assault on the Shouwang Church, a thriving congregation in Beijing. The congregation of over 1,000 worshippers had been regularly harassed since its launch in 1993, being thwarted in its attempts to rent or purchase a building in which to hold services. Beginning on Easter Sunday 2011, the congregation was forced to hold its services outdoors, and in the ensuing months the congregations pastors were placed under house arrest and its members forced to meet in secret house meetings.

Most recently, in April 2012, police detained 12 church members who had attempted to gather for an outdoor service, according to China Aid. While three members were quickly released, the others held for several hours of interrogation, and separate member was detained in a hotel for two days. “In the past year ... our experience of the Lord differs every week,” one of the pastors wrote of the persecution the church has faced. “It is His grace and peace that have protected us and sustained us until now. May the power and glory of the Lord become our strength while waiting for God in this difficult circumstance.”

China Aid recalled that during a radio interview in October 2011, Wang Zuo’an, head of the Chinese government’s State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA), confirmed China’s renewed attack on Protestant churches. “According to the Regulations on Religious Affairs promulgated by State Council, religious groups need to follow the related regulations and register with the government,” Wang emphasized in the interview. “Nevertheless, a well-known fact is that many Christians of China spontaneously get together and meet at illegal and unregistered locations. The number of these believers is not clear to us. They call themselves ‘house churches.’ Western countries call them ‘underground churches’ ”



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As reported by Compass Direct News Service, the government's eradication plan was outlined in a document released last September during a training class for "Patriots in the Christian Community," run by SARA. In the first phase of the crackdown, from January through June 2012, local authorities were being ordered to conduct a thorough investigation of house churches throughout China, creating extensive file on each them. In phase two, over the ensuing two or three years, government officials will be expected to pressure churches not yet registered with the government to affiliate with the Three-Self Patriotic Movement. In phase three, to be completed within ten years, churches that do not comply with the government's wishes will be shut down.

According to the document, the government is also banning the use of the term "house church," as well as all websites and other media related to the unapproved congregations, and will implement the use of the official term "house gatherings," which refers to groups meeting under the umbrella of the Three Self Patriotic Movement.

A recent survey conducted by the China Aid Association found that over 95 percent of house church leaders in China said they had already been impacted by the government crackdown, with 85 percent saying that local religious affairs offices had created investigative files on their groups.

"Since the beginning of 2012, we have noticed an increase in the frequency of persecution," China Aid said in a press statement. "In addition to the continuing persecution of Shouwang Church in Beijing, the number of similar cases has risen 20 percent over last year and has spread into other areas, including Christian education, publication, and bookstores."

The government crackdown, known as "Operation Deterrence," calls for the creation of files on all Protestant clergy in order to facilitate the implementation of China's Regulations on Religious Affairs. "Churches led by clergy who are not certified under this system will then be at greater risk of being shut down," reported Compass Direct. At the same time, the China Christian Council and the Three Self Patriotic Movement are introducing joint "Training Sessions for Ministerial Certification" across China. According to China Aid, these training sessions include instruction on China's Regulations on Religious Affairs and an emphasis on the need for patriotism among church members.

Photo: Plainclothes security personnel film as they gather to load detained worshippers onto a waiting bus near a building that leaders of the unregistered Shouwang house church had told parishioners to gather in Beijing, China, April 10, 2011: AP Images



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