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UCA News - www.ucanews.com

VATICAN *Vatican denounces Chinese bishop's arrest*
By Gerard O'Connell, Special Correspondent in Rome April 3, 2009
ZY06990.1543

VATICAN (UCAN) -- The Vatican has denounced the March 30 arrest of a Catholic bishop in mainland China, and lack of religious freedom among clergy, as "obstacles" to dialogue between the Holy See and Beijing.

Pope Benedict XVI approved a statement containing the denunciation, released to international media on April 2, the day after a three-day plenary meeting of the Commission for the Catholic Church in China ended. The statement in Italian says the commission, a consultative body, "learned with profound sorrow the news of the arrest" of Bishop Julius Jia Zhiguo of Zhengding, 74.

Bishop Jia, who is not affiliated with the government-approved Church community in China, was taken from his residence in Hebei province, northern China.

Reflecting the mood of the commission's meeting, the Vatican statement avoids euphemisms and uses the word "arrest." It says "situations of this kind create obstacles to that climate of dialogue with the competent authorities" which the Holy Father had keenly desired in

his 2007 letter to the Catholics in China.

It pointedly notes that "sadly this is not just an isolated case -- other ecclesiastics too are deprived of their liberty and are subjected to undue pressures and limitations in their pastoral activities."

The more than 30 members of the commission -- Vatican officials, five Chinese bishops, members of Religious orders involved with China -- extended to all those who suffer in this way "the assurance of their fraternal closeness and their constant prayer in this Lenten period."

The statement says that "the participants, drawing on their own sometimes painful experiences, highlighted the complex problems of the present situation of the Church in China, which derives not only from difficulties internal to the Church but also from the not-easy relations with the civil authorities."

UCA News learned that participants devoted about half their meeting to this issue. They discussed,

among other things, the commemoration in Beijing on Dec. 19, 2008, of the 50 years of "self-election and self-ordination of bishops," and the elections later in the year of the chairpersons of the government-recognized Catholic Patriotic Association and Bishops' Conference of the Catholic Church in China.

The commission was concerned about participation of Vatican-approved bishops in these events, which contradicts what the Pope wrote in his letter to Catholics in China.

In the first half of the meeting, the commission focused on what was designated as the main topic: formation of seminarians and consecrated persons, and ongoing formation of priests.

The Vatican statement says the commission will seek to promote a more adequate human, intellectual, spiritual and pastoral formation of the clergy and consecrated persons in union with the bishops of China,

continued

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"who bear the prime responsibility for the ecclesial communities."

It said Pope Benedict offered guidance in his 2007 Letter, when he reminded Catholics in China that "The Church, always and everywhere missionary, is called to proclaim and to bear witness to the Gospel. The Church in China must also sense in her heart the missionary ardor of her Founder and Teacher.....Now it is your turn, Chinese disciples of the Lord, to be courageous apostles of that Kingdom. I am sure that your response will be most generous."

UCA News learned that the quotation was chosen because it highlights the call to Chinese Catholics "to be courageous apostles."

The Vatican described participation in the meeting as "intense." Some participants told UCA News the discussion was "passionate" and "frank," and described the meeting as "very fruitful."

Pope Benedict spoke at the closing session, during which he underlined "the importance of helping Catholics in China to make known to others the beauty and reasonableness of the

Christian faith, and to present it as a proposal that offers the best answers from the intellectual and existential points of view."

He greeted participants individually and thanked them "for their commitment in the field of formation" and "encouraged them to continue their service for the good of the Church in China." ♦

UCA News - www.ucanews.com
CHINA HK Catholics appeal for religious freedom on mainland
May 25, 2009 | CH07288.1551

HONG KONG (UCAN) -- The Hong Kong diocese's Justice and Peace Commission (JPC) has made an appeal to the Chinese government to ensure the people's rights to religious freedom and a halt to persecution of mainland Catholics.

About a dozen JPC members and supporters protested and prayed outside China's Liaison Office of the central government here on May 23, the eve of the World Day of Prayer for the Church in China, declared by Pope Benedict XVI in his 2007 papal letter.

The date is chosen "to show we did not forget our brothers and sisters who are suffering persecutions on the mainland," Lina Chan Li-na, JPC executive secretary, told UCA News.

The JPC also announced the release of the second edition of their book, "Birds in a Cage: Freedom of religious belief in China."

"We hope the book will persuade China's national leaders to look squarely into the issues," and to "halt human rights violations," a JPC statement read at the protest said.

The letter points out that since Pope Benedict sent a letter to the Catholics of the China Church in 2007, some clergy from the underground and government-approved Church communities had strived to reconcile with each other.

However, the authorities have deliberately damaged or limited their efforts, which hurt not only the Church but also interfered with the freedom of religious belief of the citizens, the JPC statement said. ♦



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UCA News - www.ucanews.com

CHINA Catholics grateful for Vatican's concern regarding detained bishop
April 7, 2009 | CH07007.1544

ZHENG DING, China (UCAN) -- Catholics of Zhengding diocese in Hebei province have expressed gratitude for the Holy See's concern for their detained bishop.

Bishop Julius Jia Zhiguo of Zhengding, who is not affiliated with the government-approved Church community, is still under



Bishop Julius Jia Zhiguo
Photo: UCAN Photo Service

after police took him from his Christ the King Cathedral in Wuqiu village near the provincial capital Shijiazhuang on March 30.

The Vatican's Commission for the Catholic Church in China, after its March 30-April 1 plenary meeting in Rome, issued a statement saying it "learned with profound sorrow the news of the arrest." Pope Benedict XVI approved the commission's statement.

Zhengding Catholics have been praying for the 74-year-old prelate who suffers from poor health.

Some priests of the diocese have also expressed their gratefulness to the Pope and the Vatican for their concern and support regarding Bishop Jia. "We priests and 150,000 faithful of Zhengding always support our Pope and Bishop Jia in walking the way of justice and truth. We are ready to suffer, sacrifice, be imprisoned and die for our faith," one of the priests shared.

All parishes in the diocese have been organizing novenas prayers for the

detention of Bishop Jia has a special meaning. Jesus Christ invites us to walk the Way of the Cross. Bishop Jia follows him and we shall also model ourselves on the prelate," the priest stated.

He noted that religious activities in parishes have been proceeding normally in the wake of the bishop's detention.

"Underground" Church communities in other parts of China have also shown solidarity with Bishop Jia and expressed concern for other detained bishops.

Father Joseph of Shanghai diocese, eastern China, said, "Our hearts are always united with the Pope and Bishop Jia."

He suggested the Vatican start "formal and effective negotiation" with the Chinese government, and clearly state its position of opposing the practice of having "self-elected" and "self-ordained" bishops, and government-sanctioned Church authorities. He said he hopes the Pope "would listen to our voice, as our current situation is very difficult."

A priest from Baoding diocese, another stronghold of the underground Church community in Hebei, criticized the government's detention of Bishop Jia and its putting of pressure on his priests to elect a new bishop for Zhengding. He said that "any priest who has studied ecclesiology would not take any action that would destroy the Church hierarchy."

Other Catholics said that Bishop Jia's detention has become a hot topic in

Catholic chat rooms as they feared the prelate may face the same fate as Hebei Bishops James Su Zhimin (Zhemín) of Baoding, who has been detained since 1997, and Cosmas Shi Enxiang of Yixian, who has been detained since 2001. Their whereabouts are still unknown. ♦

UCA News - www.ucanews.com

CHINA Baoding Catholics remember detained clergy during Holy Week

April 9, 2009 | CH07025.1544

HONG KONG (UCAN) -- Catholics of Baoding diocese in the northern Hebei province have spent Holy Week praying for their bishop, vicar general and seven other priests who have been detained for years.

The whereabouts of Bishop James Su Zhimin (Zhemín), 74, and Vicar General Father Joseph Lu Genjun, 46, are unknown. They were detained in 1997 and 2006 respectively. Both have refused to join the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association. The other Baoding priests were detained at different times and are being held without trial at Qingyuan county detention center, sources said.

Church sources have described Baoding as "a stronghold of the underground Catholics" and that the authorities want to reduce the influence of their priests.

Baoding Catholics have always prayed for the safety and return of their detained bishop and priests, and such prayers were more fervently offered during Holy Week, which started on Palm Sunday, April 5. A layperson named James said families are taking turns praying for this intention from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. from April 6 through Good Friday, April 10. ♦

UCA News - www.ucanews.com

*CHINA Retired Cardinal Zen will focus more on mainland Church
April 15, 2009 | CH07054.1545*

HONG KONG (UCAN) -- Retired Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kium of Hong Kong says he will continue to be concerned with the Church in China and with key issues concerning the country, such as the June 4 Incident.

Pope Benedict XVI on April 15 approved the 77-year-old cardinal's resignation as bishop of Hong Kong. Coadjutor Bishop John Tong Hon, 69, succeeds the cardinal as head of the diocese.

On April 9, Holy Thursday, Cardinal Zen released his "Family Letter for Easter" in the English and Chinese diocesan weeklies. In it he bade farewell to all his priests, Religious, seminarians and laypeople, who "have stuck with me, appreciated me, obeyed me and loved me" from when he became coadjutor bishop of Hong Kong 12 years earlier.

In the letter and on other occasions, he said his future plan is to focus on China Church affairs, believing the Pope made him a cardinal in 2006 for this reason. He will reside and work at Holy Spirit Seminary, where the Holy Spirit Study Centre is located. The center researches on and documents Church life in China.

In an earlier interview with UCA News, the prelate said being elevated to a cardinal was a grace and an honor, but he began to find it "thorny" because the Church in China is "so complicated." He said he needs time to concentrate on this complex matter.

His close relations with the China Church began when he was teaching in mainland seminaries 1989-1996, "a joyful time as I could teach others what I had learned," he recalled.

Moreover, he later learned that reports he wrote for his Salesian superi-

ors, who reported on the China Church to the Vatican, were carefully read by Vatican officials, who through them gained more understanding about the Church in China.

Church observers have regarded Cardinal Zen as a catalyst in the establishment of the Vatican's Commission for the Church in China. He had pushed hard for the Vatican summit on China in 2007, after which the Pope established the commission to look into the Church life of Chinese Catholics.

Cardinal Zen hopes the clarity of Church principles articulated in the 2007 papal letter to the China Church will be observed, and the principles implemented.

Locally, Cardinal Zen's concern on social justice issues has won him both friends and foes, even within the Church. He spoke out on and defended human rights and religious freedom, spanning issues including the right-of-abode for mainland-born children of local residents, the right of Church-run schools to manage their affairs, the government's retraining levy on foreign domestic workers and China-Holy See relations.

In recent years, he has joined prayer gatherings to commemorate the Chinese government's crackdown at Beijing's Tiananmen Square on June 4, 1989, and the annual July 1 demonstrations for democracy and universal suffrage for electing Hong Kong's chief executive and legislature.

At his farewell press gathering after Mass on April 9, reporters asked the retiring cardinal if he felt reluctant to let go when many causes he championed have yet to be achieved.

Cardinal Zen explained that what he has done was "not for success but to

be faithful and honest," although he admitted to feeling helpless against the political realities and government policies that limit change in Hong Kong.

Reiterating his intention to focus on mainland concerns, he clarified that this is not a plan to help build China-Holy See ties, a matter that belongs to the diplomatic sphere.

He also expressed several hopes, wishing that: the China Church will stand firm on Church principles, the "underground" Catholic community will not feel discouraged, the "open" Catholic community will be brave, and the Chinese government will not fear the Catholic Church.

Born into a Catholic family in Shanghai, eastern China, Cardinal Zen said he was blessed to have received the Catholic faith as a child. He joined the Salesians and studied for nine years in Italy, where he witnessed the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). He was ordained a priest in 1961 and received his doctorate in Rome in 1964.

When UCA News asked in the interview if Jesus' parable in Saint Matthew's Gospel about the master who entrusted his servants with "talents" (coins) resonated with his life, he responded affirmatively. In the parable, the master commends two servants -- one who received five talents and earned another five, and one who received two and earned another two -- for their initiative, but condemns the servant who buried his one talent, for safekeeping.

Asked how many talents he has received from the Lord, the cardinal answered "five," smiling. He went on to say he believes he has earned at least four more "for the Master." ♦

UCA News - www.ucanews.com

HONG KONG New bishop comments on China-Holy See relations, human rights issues

April 16, 2009 | HK07058.1545

HONG KONG (UCAN) -- Bishop John Tong Hon shared his views on various issues including China-Holy See relations and human rights at his first press conference as bishop of Hong Kong.

The prelate spoke to reporters from about 50 local and international media outlets on the afternoon of April 16, the day he took office as the seventh bishop of Hong Kong diocese. He said the Holy See and the Chinese government have had contact through informal channels and dialogues, and his contribution to this diplomatic issue could be limited.

However, should either side need the local Church to channel any message, it is very willing to do so, the Church-in-China expert assured. He added that he is open to dialogue with Chinese government officials and has met some of them in the past.

Internally, he said, the local Church will help promote dialogue and unity within the China Church while holding to the principles Pope Benedict XVI set forth in his 2007 letter to Chinese Catholics.

Hong Kong diocese will also try its best to help raise the quality of formation of clergy, seminarians and nuns in mainland China, he said.

Many journalists tried to draw out

comparisons between Bishop Tong's leadership and that of his outspoken predecessor, Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kiun. They asked about his stand on the June 4 Incident (the Chinese government's crackdown at Beijing's Tiananmen Square on June 4, 1989), universal suffrage for electing Hong Kong's chief executive and legislature, and other social justice issues that the cardinal was actively involved in.

Bishop Tong made it clear he shares the same positions as Cardinal Zen, because both of them follow papal and other Church teachings, which he said are derived from the Bible. He will encourage all Catholics "to learn the social teachings of the Church, speak up on justice issues and participate in politics, because life today cannot be separated from society," the bishop continued.

"Life is most precious in the eyes of God. People are born free and human rights should not be restricted by any political government," he said.

Asserting that he "fully supports" universal suffrage in Hong Kong and the striving for democracy behind the June 4 Incident, he nevertheless said

he would not take to the streets to protest but would pray for the people.

"The Church does not rely on just one person. We are all the people of God.

We count on collective wisdom," he stressed. "And we should not forget to pray."

Commenting on the current financial crisis, he called it an opportunity to rediscover the values of simplicity, friendship and unity in the global human family, as well as an ethical approach to economics.

At the beginning of the press conference, Bishop Tong read out a prepared statement on his new role as the bishop of Hong Kong. He explained his coat-of-arms and motto "Dominus Pastor Meus" (the Lord is my shepherd). He said his motto, which draws on Saint John's Gospel (10:14-16) as well as Psalm 23, is to remind him to be a good pastor and a faithful servant, contributing toward building the Church as one body and the whole of humanity as one family.

The picture of Hong Kong's Victoria Harbour on the coat-of-arms, he explained, stands for love for Hong Kong and the Great Wall of China for solidarity with China, while the dove, symbolizing the Holy Spirit, highlights the mission to proclaim the Good News.

Hong Kong diocese has about 450,000 Chinese and foreign Catholics. ♦

Ecumenical News International

Daily News Service

25 May 2009

H. Kong weekly criticises Catholic government head on Tiananmen

ENI-09-0419

By Francis Wong

Hong Kong, 25 May (ENI)--Some Roman Catholic leaders in Hong Kong have criticised one of their faithful, the head of the government there, for making what they say is a distorted moral judgment on the 4 June 1989 massacre in Beijing's Tiananmen

Square.

Hong Kong Chief Executive Donald Tsang Yam-kuen had said that an objective assessment was needed about the event in view of China's economic development.

In its 24 May issue, the Hong Kong Catholic weekly newspaper Kung Kao Po strongly criticised Tsang as a Catholic for claiming to represent Hong Kong people in his remarks made in the Hong Kong Legislative Council over the 1989 crackdown on

continued

thousands of students and civilians who had gathered in Beijing's Tiananmen Square to call for democracy and clean government

"I understand Hong Kong people's feelings about June 4, but the incident happened many years ago. The country's development in many areas has since achieved tremendous results and brought economic prosperity to Hong Kong," said Tsang. "I believe Hong Kong's people will make an objective assessment of the nation's development."

Tsang, who was speaking at a 13 May session of the governing body, said, "My view represents the opinion of Hong Kong people in general, and

the opinion of citizens has affected my view. What I have just said is how I feel about the views of the people of Hong Kong."

The remarks triggered an outcry in the legislative chamber. Tsang later apologised, while the Hong Kong described the remarks a slip of tongue.

The Catholic weekly's editorial stated, "Any comment made about June 4 cannot ignore the fact that the repression is still going on, as evidenced in the refusal to allow people in exile to return home, and groups like the Tiananmen Mothers to mourn their dead children publicly."

The official Catholic newspaper as-

serted, "while it is true that both the mainland and Hong Kong have experienced continued and considerable economic growth in the 20 years since Tiananmen, neither Tsang nor the authorities in Beijing can argue that there is a causal connection between the crackdown and the prosperity of a later age."

The editorial noted, "It is strange that the chief executive of Hong Kong would presume that a criminal act could somehow be justified by economic gain." It continued, "To attempt to justify any atrocity involving the blatant taking of human life ... reflects a confused value system and a distortion in moral judgement. ♦"

Agenzia Fides - www.fides.org

*Fides: Chinese Catholics of Sichuan praying for the victims, survivors, and aid workers of the Abruzzo earthquake
ASIA/CHINA - 9 April 2009*

Chinese Catholics in the earthquake zone of Sichuan are praying from inside their tents for the victims, survivors, and aid workers of the Abruzzo earthquake; Chinese living in Italy also encouraged to be generous "because Italy is our second home"

Rome (Agenzia Fides) – Jinde Charities, the Chinese Catholic charity association has informed Agenzia Fides that Chinese Catholics, especially those in the area that suffered the terrible earthquake in May 2008, join the Holy Father and the Universal Church in praying for the victims, survivors, and rescue workers affected by the earthquake that struck the Abruzzo region in Italy. They have also composed a special prayer, inviting all people to join in prayer as the great family of God. This gesture takes on special meaning in light of the Paschal Mystery. On the Faith Website (www.chinacatholic.org) and that of Jinde Charities, ample news is being provided on the earthquake in Italy, with the same degree of coverage that was given the Wen Chuan earthquake in Si Chuan, which took place on May 12, 2008.

A statement on the site says: "we call

upon the consolation of the Holy Spirit, that He may heal their wounds and give them the strength and grace they need to face this tragedy, with the help of all men of good will, so that they may trust in God in rebuilding their homes."

One Jinde Charities volunteer commented: "We are united to all those who are suffering from this event, especially in the most difficult and dramatic moments. We feel united in prayer, in suffering, and in pain. We cannot forget the prayers and aid that our Italian friends offered us when we found ourselves in difficulty. There is a Chinese proverb that says that one drop of goodness should be repaid with an eternal fountain." In the makeshift chapel that has been prepared in one of the tents in the earthquake zone of Si Chuan (where many of the victims of the May 2008 quake are still living), the Jinde Charities volunteers have been praying and saying the Rosary for the victims of the earthquake in Italy and for all the poor and suffering, in this moment of difficulty.

The President of Jinde Charities, ♦

Bishop Feng Xin Mao of Jing Xian, has sent a message to the President of Caritas of Italy, expressing their solidarity with the Italian people and expressing their great admiration and support for the rescue workers: "we pray for all the people affected and we hope that through everyone's collaboration they may overcome the present difficulties and be able to rebuild their homes soon."

The Chinese community in Italy has taken immediate action, as is reported on the site "Tempo Europa China," the main media agency for the Chinese living in Italy, with a website and newspaper in Chinese. "Italy is our second home. The peace, security, and prosperity of the Italian Republic are also important to us. We are united...We launch an appeal to all Chinese people living in Italy, to be generous in offering a donation...It is also an opportunity to participate in the society that has welcomed us." Within 12 hours of the earthquake, the Chinese community in Prato had already presented the first donation of 27,000 Euros to the Government of Prato. (NZ) (Agenzia Fides 7/4/2009).

UCA News - www.ucanews.com

*CHINA Church battles suicides among quake victims
May 11, 2009 | CH07180.1549*

SHIJIAZHANG, China (UCAN) -- A Catholic nun who helped in relief work in the quake-hit areas said that some survivors had hanged themselves at home or from trees, or jumped from cliffs or buildings.

The Church-run Jinde Charities in Shijiazhuang, northern China, which sent the first group of medically trained nuns to the disaster area four days after the 8.0-magnitude quake struck on May 12, 2008, is dedicated to counseling survivors and helping them to rebuild their homes.

Father Paul Han Qingping, Jinde's deputy director, said that Jinde is providing counseling and other services at several makeshift schools and shelters.

Two local government officials in Beichuan have killed themselves, one last October and another in April, according to media reports. No one knows exactly why, but the two men, aged 33 and 40, were grieving over the deaths of their sons in the quake and also burdened by the heavy responsibility of reconstruction.

Chinese psychologists estimate that three to five percent of the victims are suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, about 360,000-600,000 people. Of these, about 10 percent would have suicidal tendencies.

The psychologists say the quake's first anniversary might trigger more suicides from people who have lost family members than during celebrations of Chinese festivals that remind them of their families.

Catholic nuns and workers have responded by giving regular counseling to victims. They say the victims need love and care to overcome the terrifying experience of the quake.

Father Han said quake-related suicides "make us more conscious of the significance and urgency of our work."

"Even if our intervention helps only one person, it would be a success," said Father Han, who visited Sichuan several times after the quake struck. Jinde workers often work with the local government and other non-religious agencies in doing relief work. They also cooperate with the Institute of Psychology of the Chinese Academy of Sciences in holding psychological counseling courses for local officials and teachers in order to help quake victims and students.

Father Han said that Jinde workers do not explicitly express their religious identity while helping out in relief work, but when "we get in touch with and accompany the psychologically wounded victims, our faith would be shown naturally."

As of March 31, Jinde had given 23.3 million yuan (US\$3.4 million) for earthquake relief work. This is 93.5 percent of the financial donations it received from within and outside China, including from the Holy See and member organizations of the Caritas network. ♦

Vatican Information Service

*COMPENDIUM OF HOLY FATHER'S LETTER TO THE CHURCH IN CHINA
26 May 2009*

VATICAN CITY, 23 MAY 2009 (VIS) - The Holy See Press Office today released a note concerning the publication on the Holy See website, as of 24 May, of the Compendium of the Letter of the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI to the Church in China.

The note recalls how on 27 May 2007 the Pope sent a Letter to the bishops, priests, consecrated persons and lay faithful of the Catholic Church in the People's Republic of China.

Through that Letter, the Holy Father intended "to offer some guidelines concerning the life of the Church and the task of evangelisation in China, in order to help Chinese Catholics dis-

cover what the Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, 'the key, the centre and the purpose of the whole of human history', wants from them", the English-language note says.

The usefulness of the Letter has been confirmed by the highly favourable reception given to it by the Chinese Catholics who had access to it. From the information that is arriving from China, it is clear that the papal document has given rise not only to study sessions exploring its content but also to many pastoral initiatives: it is becoming a reliable point of reference for the resolution of the various problems that the Catholic community is having to address on both the doc-

trinal level and the practical, disciplinary level.

On the second anniversary of the publication of the papal Letter, the Holy See is offering the Church in China a 'Compendium' which, following the catechetical literary genre of questions and answers, presents once again the basic elements expressed by Benedict XVI.

The Compendium faithfully reproduces, both in structure and language, the content of the original Letter, quoting extended passages from it. ♦

*Ecumenical News International**Daily News Service**12 May 2009**Chinese Christians urge prayers to mark 1989 crackdown**ENI-09-0377**By Francis Wong*

Hong Kong, 12 May (ENI)--More than 80 Chinese Christians have urged churches around the world to mark the 20th anniversary on 4 June of the suppression of protesters who had joined thousands of students and civilians in Beijing's Tiananmen Square to call for democracy and clean government.

"The fact that this tragic massacre happened 20 years ago and is still not allowed to be commemorated in China by the Chinese government should remind the international community that the road toward true freedom for the Chinese people is not an easy one," said Bob Fu, founder of Texas-based ChinaAid, who had been one of the student leaders in the Tiananmen Square movement.

Signatories to the declaration requested prayers between 12 May, the first anniversary of the earthquake that struck in Sichuan province, and 4 June, the 20th anniversary of the crackdown.

The group also asked the Chinese government to reveal the truth about the crackdown, to commemorate victims and to compensate their families.

Signatories described the event as an ugly symbol of "political sin", and said that Christian faith gave them the drive to seek social justice. "We believe it is the unshirkable social responsibility of Christians ... to espouse and promote righteousness, care for the weak, reprimand sin, and to forgive enemies."

The signatories come from mainland China, Canada, the United States, Taiwan and Hong Kong, Australia, France, Japan and Singapore. ChinaAid said many signatories had, like Fu, been directly involved in the 1989 protests, and have since converted to Christianity.

They said that the Tiananmen crackdown had caused a number of social ills, including the "indifference and

numbness to morality, the rampant corruption of government officials, the rapid escalation of social disparity."

ChinaAid said that according to the Chinese government, the official death toll from the crackdown was between 200 and 300, while the Chinese Red Cross, however, estimated that the actual number of deaths was 10 times higher.

Separately, the Justice and Peace Commission of Hong Kong's Catholic diocese has asked for fasting and prayers for the victims of the crackdown and for democracy in China.

The Hong-Kong based Asian Center for the Progress of Peoples launched an appeal to demand accountability for the suppression of the Tiananmen Square protests, urging Beijing to stop harassing dissidents, and to release all prisoners of conscience jailed in relation to the 1989 pro-democracy movement. ♦

人民
共和国
万岁

South China Morning Post
June 4 mothers mourn children

Choi Chi-yuk
May 19, 2009

世界
人民
大团结

Photo: iStockphoto.com

Dozens of elderly parents in Beijing have gathered to mourn their children who were killed in the June 4 crackdown at Tiananmen Square, a local rights group says.

The meeting was held on Sunday at the Chaoyang district home of Zhang Xianling, who lost her 19-year-old son Wang Nan, according to a report released yesterday by the Hong Kong-based Information Centre for Human Rights and Democracy.

The centre said a couplet hanging in the sitting room where the service was held

read: "Seeking truth is the basic right of Tiananmen mothers" and "Upholding justice is the hope in the deep darkness of the night".

Ms Zhang yesterday confirmed the ceremony had taken place and said that several days beforehand Ministry of State Security officers made her agree to several conditions.

"They wanted us to make sure no outsiders, particularly foreign journalists, took part in the mourning ceremony," she said. "Besides, they also warned us to stay inside. I agreed to their condi-

tions and they said we could proceed with the gathering.

"Up to 50 bereaved parents from 40 families attended the gathering, held once every five years. Most were in their 70s or 80s and some were wheelchair-bound. "We began observing silence and bowing in front of our children's photos at roughly 3pm," Ms Zhang said.

One absentee was Ding Zilin, founder of the Tiananmen Mothers organisation. "Ding Zilin was supposed to deliver a memorial speech, but police wouldn't let her leave home," Ms Zhang said. ♦