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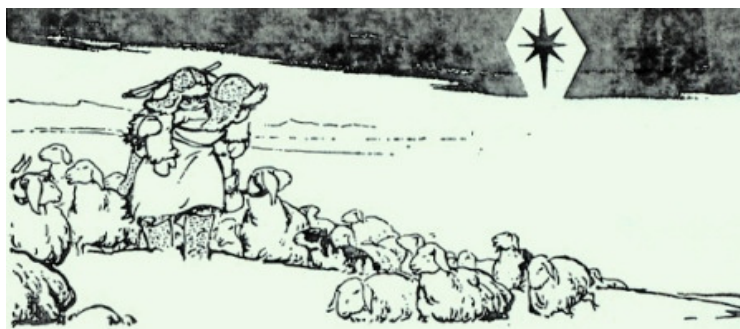
CHINA – VATICAN

### Chinese bishops deported to attend Patriotic Assembly

by W. Zhicheng - Z. Yuan

The gathering, incompatible with the faith of Catholics, aims to elect the Presidents of the Patriotic Association and the Council of Bishops. Some bishops have gone into hiding to avoid having to participate, while others have been taken against their will. The bishop of Hengshui, seized and torn from the safe cover of the faithful, dragged to Beijing.

Beijing (AsiaNews) - AsiaNews sources say that dozens of bishops of the official Church have been forcibly deported to the capital to ensure their participation at the Assembly of representatives of Chinese Catholics, which the pope considers incompatible with Catholic faith.



The Assembly opened today in Beijing on a low profile and is being shrouded in secrecy: it is impossible to contact anyone and not even Xinhua is reporting on the event.

The meeting should lead to the election of the national president of the Patriotic Association and president of the council of Chinese bishops, two bodies that are unacceptable to the Catholic Church because they aim to build a separate Church, detached from the pope. "It's just an election of a new round of leadership," said Liu Bainian, vice president and chairman of the PA Assembly. In fact, the gathering is the "sovereign body" of the official Chinese church in which bishops are a minority among Catholics and government representatives. Ecclesial decisions are made on the basis of rigged elections. Ahead of today's meeting, Liu Bainian had sent all participants clear indications of what to do and how to vote.

The Assembly has been postponed for at least four years because the official bishops, in obedience to the Holy See's, have consistently refused to participate.

AsiaNews sources report that many bishops from different provinces, to avoid being dragged to Beijing, have gone into hiding or declared themselves too ill to attend. Others have been taken by government representatives and dragged against their will to the Assembly.

Continued page 2...

Some bishops who knew they could not escape, agreed to come to Beijing, but decided not to celebrate the Assembly Masses together, because of the presence of excommunicated bishops.

However the same sources claim that there are bishops who did not pose any resistance. The Diocese of Beijing, in its newsletter, published two articles in honor of the event.

The most serious and obvious violence occurred in Hengshui (Hebei), where Mgr. Feng Xinmao was seized by about 100 police officers and government representatives, who fought for hours against the faithful and priests who were shielding their bishop in an attempt to ensure his freedom. One faithful was injured in the shoulder during the assault. In recent days, the bishop had been kept in isolation, away from his home. The faithful succeeded in snatching him from police control, to take him back to his residence. After a siege lasting hours, the bishop was again arrested and last night at 20:30, Mgr. Feng Xinmao was dragged to Beijing to attend the meeting. One of the faithful, weeping, as the bishop was escorted away, said: "Our poor bishop has no freedom."

Another prelate, Msgr. Li Lianghui Cangzhou (Hebei) has disappeared to escape the meeting in Beijing. The police have threatened the diocese, that if the bishop does not surrender, he will be hunted throughout the country like "a dangerous criminal."

This Assembly and the forced deportation of bishops cast a dark shadow on relations between China and the Vatican, after years of detente. The situation has precipitated in recent weeks, after the illicit ordination of Fr Guo Jincai Bishop of Chengde, on 20 November. The PA forced eight official bishops to attend the ceremony, against the wishes of the Holy See, which condemned the incident as "a serious violation of religious freedom."



### **CNS: Chinese officials monitor cathedral in effort to find Catholic bishop**

By Catholic News Service

CHINA-INTIMIDATE Dec-8-2010 (930 words) xxxi

BEIJING (CNS) -- Government officials continued ongoing surveillance of the Cangzhou cathedral because Bishop Joseph Li Lianghui did not show up for the Eighth National Congress of Catholic Representatives in Beijing.

The Asian church news agency UCA News reported Dec. 8 that police cars were patrolling the vicinity of the cathedral and diocesan compound in Xianxian. Move-

ments of all personnel in the cathedral compound were restricted, and even nuns were forced to show identity cards when leaving the compound, UCA News reported. The Dec. 7-9 Congress was expected to elect new leaders for the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and the Bishops' Conference of the Catholic Church in China, amend the constitutions of the two bodies and listen to church reports and speeches by government officials.

Pope Benedict XVI has said the patriotic association and the bishops' conference, whose statutes promote "the principles of independence and autonomy, self-management and democratic administration of the church," are not in line with church doctrine. However, in a 2007 letter to Chinese Catholics, he also recognized the difficult situation of bishops and priests under pressure from the government and said the Holy See "leaves the decision to the individual bishop," having consulted his priests, "to weigh ... and to evaluate the possible consequences" of dealing with government pressures in each given situation.

UCA News reported that in the days before the Congress, clergy in Hebei province -- which surrounds Beijing and has been a stronghold of Catholic communities that have not registered with the government -- reported increased pressure to attend the congress.

Bishop Li has been missing since his appearance at an illicit episcopal ordination in Chengde Nov. 20. Some diocesan priests believed he was detained or unwilling to face priests and faithful.

However, on Dec. 6, dozens of religious officials and police officers went to the cathedral in Cangzhou and gave local priests an "ultimatum" to hand over the bishop, UCA News reported.

The diocesan vicar general, chancellor and two other priests who work at the bishop's house were taken away and questioned for information on Bishop Li's whereabouts. They were warned that if the bishop could not be found his family and the diocese would face trouble.

The following day, officials even entered the bishop's house to question everybody, including the doorkeepers and kitchen staff.

Also Dec. 6, government officials forcibly removed Bishop Peter Feng Xinmao of Hengshui from his house to escort him to Beijing. UCA News reported that when police officers and government officials tried to break into the bishop's house, there were physical conflicts with the nuns and laypeople guarding the building.

"The very crackdown and re-instigation of repressive tactics against the church and the bishops in China testifies to the enduring fidelity of the China church -- espe

cially the so-called 'official' (registered) Catholic communities," said Maryknoll Sister Janet Carroll, who founded and led the U.S. Catholic China Bureau for 20 years and continues to work with Chinese priests and nuns who travel to the United States to study.

"They truly need our prayer and understanding -- not a rush to judgment and condemnation. They also need our prayer for their safety and well-being -- as there is also the anxiety that something terrible can happen, just due to human negligence," she told Catholic News Service, giving the example of a "security guard thinking he can score points for himself by a violent attack on a person in his custody."

UCA News reported that a Chinese Catholic website on the mainland indicated 314 Catholic representatives attended the congress, including 45 bishops. Church sources confirmed to UCA News that Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Xing Wenzhi of Shanghai was among those who attended.

Before the meeting, some people speculated that Bishop Xing, who is known for his strict adherence to church principles, would not attend.

The Beijing congress follows controversy surrounding the November illicit ordination of Father Joseph Guo Jincan -- the first bishop ordained without papal approval in four years. The Vatican called government pressure on other bishops to participate in the ceremony a "grave violation of freedom of religion and conscience." ♦♦♦

AsiaNews - [www.asianews.it](http://www.asianews.it)

12/09/2010 16:46

CHINA – VATICAN

### **Assembly elects new leadership, causing major harm to the Church**

by Zhen Yuan

Ma Yinglin, an unlawfully ordained bishop, will head the Bishops' Conference. Fang Xinyao, a bishop in communion with the Pope, will lead the Patriotic Association. Three unlawfully nominated bishops are in the new leadership. Catholics worry more ordinations without papal mandate will take place in the future. One priest thinks the government has deliberately caused chaos.

Beijing (AsiaNews) –The eighth National Assembly of Catholic Representatives has elected the new leaders of government-controlled organisations. The unlawfully nominated bishop Joseph Ma Yinglin (pictured) of Kunming is the new president of the government-sanctioned Bishops' Conference of the Catholic Church in China (BCCCC), whilst Bishop Fang Xinyao of Linyi (Shandong) is the new head of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA). The assembly, the conference and the association are all irreconcilable with the Catholic faith.

Bishop Fang Xinyao of Linyi, unlawfully appointed Zhan Silu of Mindong, Fang Jianping of Tangshan, Li Shan of Beijing, Pei Junmin of Liaoning and Yang Xiaoting of Yan'an are the BCCCC's new vice presidents. Guo Jincan, who was unlawfully appointed bishop of Chengde, becomes the new BCCCC secretary general, a post formerly held by Bishop Ma.

The CCPA collective vice presidency includes bishops Ma Yinglin, Guo Jincan, Shen Bin of Haimen, Meng Qinglu of Hohhot; Fathers Lei Shiyin of Leshan, Huang Bingzhang of Shantou, Yue Fusheng of Harbin as well as Sister Wu Lin of Hubei province and layperson Shu Nanwu of Nanchang.

Former CCPA vice-president Anthony Liu Bainian becomes honorary president of both the BCCCC and the CCPA, together with the elderly Mgr Jin Luxian of Shanghai.

Bishops Tu Shihua of Huangshi, Liu Jinghe of Tangshan, Li Mingshu of Qingdao and Yu Runchen of Hanzhong, and laypeople Yu Jiadi of Anhui, Lu Guocun of Guangdong, Zhou Xiaowu of Shanghai, Liu Deshen of Chongqing are named advisers to the CCPA and the BCCCC.

Two members of the new leadership are bishops ordained this year with a papal mandate; one was ordained unlawfully.

In his closing address, Ma Yinglin said that the new leadership of the CCPA and the BCCCC would unite China's Catholics behind the principles of autonomy, self-management and democracy to lead the Church, marching together with the universal Church to be God's witnesses. "Catholics," he said, "can write a new chapter in the patriotic work of the China Church."

Speaking to AsiaNews about a new leadership full of unlawfully ordained bishops, some Catholics expressed serious concerns that with unlawfully ordained prelates now acting as president, a vice-president and a secretary general, additional unlawful ordinations will take place in the future.

A priest noted that whilst the Church has always been under the control of the CCPA, the latest events—unlawful ordinations, assembly and new leadership—suggest that the government might be deliberately trying to cause chaos within the Church.

If this is the case, the situation might make the Episcopal nomination process in communion with the Holy Father that more difficult for the Vatican, a source told AsiaNews.

Another priest said the Church seems to have gone back to the old days when government exercised tight

controls over its activities. He also said that he wondered why the government did not dare allow those bishops in communion with the pope to head the Bishops' Conference.

According to the State Administration for Religious Affairs website, the assembly reviewed the Catholic Church's work of the past six years, outlined the tasks and objectives for the next five years, and passed revisions to the constitutions of the CCPA and the BCCCC.

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China Infodoc Service <china.infodoc@online.be>

### **Xinhua: New leadership of Chinese Catholics elected at national congress**

BEIJING, Dec. 9 (Xinhua) -- The new leadership of Chinese Catholics was elected during the 8th national congress of Chinese Catholics which concluded here Thursday after three days of meeting.

Bishop Fang Xingyao was elected chairman of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA), while Bishop Ma Yinglin will head the Bishops' Conference of the Catholic Church in China (BCCCC).

Also, Liu Bainian and Jin Luxian were elected as honorary chairmen of both the CCPA and BCCCC.

Further, vice chairmen and consultants to the two Chinese Catholic organizations were elected at the conference.

The congress approved the CCPA and BCCCC reports on the past six years of work, as well as revisions of the charters of the CCPA and BCCCC.

The 8th national congress of Chinese Catholics, held since Tuesday, was attended by 341 representatives from across China, including 64 bishops, 162 clergy, 24 nuns and 91 lay members.

Jia Qinglin, China's top political advisor, met Thursday with delegates who attended the 8th national congress of Chinese Catholics.

Congratulating the participants on the successful holding of the congress, Jia praised the efforts Chinese Catholics have made in serving China's reform and development and preventing infiltration of foreign hostile elements, according to a statement Xinhua received.

Jia, who is Chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference and also a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist

Party of China (CPC), urged the religious clerics to keep vigilant and prevent foreign hostile elements from using religion to interfere with China's domestic affairs and to safeguard the interests of the entire nation.

He called on Catholics to contribute more to China's scientific development and transformation of its economic growth mode, and play an active role in safeguarding social stability and harmony. ◆◆◆

### **SCMP: Catholic leader not recognised by the Vatican**

South China Morning Post

Catholic leader not recognised by the Vatican

Ambrose Leung

Dec 10, 2010

Beijing appointed a bishop not recognised by the Holy See as head of the mainland's Catholic clergy yesterday in a move likely to jeopardise a continuing Sino-Vatican diplomatic dialogue.

But Beijing also selected a Vatican-approved bishop to be the new leader of the state-backed Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association - a body denounced by the Holy See in 2007 as being incompatible with church doctrine.

As the eighth national congress of Catholics closed yesterday, Bishop Joseph Ma Yinglin - from the Kunming diocese in Yunnan province, who was unilaterally ordained by Beijing without papal approval in 2006 - was selected as president of the Chinese Catholic Bishops Conference.

The bishops' conference and the association are supposed to be the highest governing bodies of the mainland Catholic Church.

But it is the association which holds real power, and Bishop Johan Fang Xingyao of the Linyi diocese in Shandong - a bishop recognised by both the Vatican and Beijing - was selected as its chairman.

The move, which surprised many observers, has added further uncertainty to Sino-Vatican relations which have been deteriorating rapidly in recent months following the ordination of Joseph Guo Jincai by Beijing as bishop of the Chengde diocese in Hebei last month without Vatican approval.

For months, the Vatican has warned mainland bishops against attending the national congress, which is seen as a breach of church doctrine. But 313 representatives - 45 bishops, 158 priests, 23 nuns and 87 lay people, took part in the elections which confirmed Ma and Fang

yesterday.

Anthony Liu Bainian , the most powerful figure in the mainland church and previously the association's vice-chairman, was raised to the positions of honorary president of the bishops' conference and the association.

Catholic Church insiders saw the latest developments as "clear provocation", as installing a bishop not recognised by the Pope as head of the mainland clergy is a slap in the face for the Holy See.

The appointment of a Vatican-recognised bishop to head the patriotic association is a further humiliation.

"It is now very clear that Beijing is not willing to continue its dialogue with the Holy See," a person close to Rome said. "All the efforts in previous years to improve relations have been wasted."

Some observers have warned that the large number of bishops who attended the congress - including some well-respected ones earlier considered loyal to Rome - indicated the success of the pressure Beijing has put on the clergy.

Amid reports that some of the clergy who attended had been forced to do so by mainland police, Ma reportedly told the congress that the mainland church would "steadfastly raise the patriotic standard" and would continue down the path of independence from the Vatican.

The Vatican is expected to issue a statement in the coming days. ♦ ♦ ♦

**Fides: Even the thoughts of Ratzinger**

Agenzia Fides - [www.fides.org](http://www.fides.org)

ASIA/CHINA

Even the thoughts of Ratzinger at the Third Forum on Catholic Studies for young Chinese scholars

Beijing (Agenzia Fides) - Evangelization, Sacred Scripture, the Ratzinger school of thought, interreligious dialogue, historical study, formation and the role of mass media were the main themes discussed at the Third Forum on Catholic Studies for Young Chinese Scholars organized by the Beijing Institute for the Study of Christian Culture in Beijing. According to information gathered by Fides, about eighty academics participated in the Forum, which plays an increasingly important role in the study of Catholicism, which was held 7 to 10 December in Beijing. 72 participants made presentations on this vast array of topics, ranging from evangelization to academic research on Sacred Scripture, Ratzinger's theories, St Thomas, the figure of Matteo Ricci and the question of Chinese rites, the role of formation and the media

in Catholic history, and interreligious dialogue. Fr Peter Zhan, director of the Institute, who is also vicar of the Diocese of Beijing and the deputy dean of Ren Min University in Beijing (The People's University) presided at the opening of the Forum while Professor Yang Hui Lin, in his opening remarks, encouraged the academic study of Christian religion promoted by the Catholic Institution.

Since 2008, the Beijing Institute for the Study of Christian Culture has organized this annual Forum from 7 to 10 December, collecting an ever-growing presence of leading academics and Christian scholars who are also internationally renowned. During the debates, participants offered a number of useful proposals for the future mission of evangelization in modern Chinese society. All papers presented at the Forum are published in the Journal of Catholic Studies, a book published regularly by the Institute. (NZ) (Agenzia Fides 13/12/2010). ♦ ♦ ♦



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**Ecumenical News International  
Daily News Service  
05 October 2010**

**Revised Bible seen as 'uniting point' for all  
Chinese Christians**

ENI-10-0671

By Francis Wong

Hong Kong, 5 October (ENI)--The head of the United Bible Societies has praised the newly released Revised Chinese Union Version Bible, which took 27 years to complete, as a uniting point for Chinese Christians around the world.

Speaking at the dedication service for the revised Chinese Bible on 27 September at St John's Anglican Cathedral in Hong Kong, the global chairperson of the United Bible Societies, Nora Lucero, praised the original version, first published in 1919.

She said it was a tool in "uniting and harmonising the diversified language usage of Chinese people from various regions" and noted that the revised version would continue this mission.

Lucero said that the revision had made the biblical texts "in a manner and format that the modern Chinese will understand and appreciate". It is said that the revised version also benefits from the latest biblical research and archaeological findings.

She said that the revision was carried out by more than 30 Bible scholars with the utmost caution to make the text acceptable to Chinese readers from different denominations throughout the world.

"The revised version has the potential to be the one and only version used by Chinese-reading Christians all over the world," noted Lucero.

She said that Chinese Christians "have paid a high price to own and read a copy of the Chinese Union Version Bible throughout history". Lucero added in an interview that the high price was paid not only in financial terms but also through the suffering of Chinese Christians in recent history.

Delegates attending the dedication service included leaders from the Anglican, Lutheran, Methodist and the Roman Catholic churches, as well as officials from the church in China and the State Administration for Religious Affairs in China.

The Hong Kong Bible Society, which was responsible for

the revision project, revealed that the church in China will publish a parallel edition of both the revised version and the original version of the New Testament in simplified Chinese by the end of 2010.

Some estimates say there are around 100 million copies of the Chinese Bible in the world, including monographs, New Testaments and Old Testaments, and more than 50 million copies in China alone. Four million copies of the Chinese Bible, including monographs, New Testaments and Old Testaments, are published each year.

The Chinese Union Version Bible was created in 1919 jointly by the British and Foreign Bible Society, the American Bible Society and the National Bible Society of Scotland, and involved the assistance of many different associations and Chinese Christians. It is now the most widely used version of the Chinese Bible and is said to have served as a de facto "standard version".

The United Bible Societies is the collective name for 145 individual Bible Societies working in more than 200 countries and territories. It is based in Britain. ♦ ♦ ♦

**Ecumenical News International  
Daily News Service  
14 October 2010**

**World churches' leader praises Nobel Peace Prize  
for Liu Xiaobo**

ENI-10-0696

By Francis Wong

Hong Kong, 14 October (ENI)--World Council of Churches general secretary, the Rev. Olav Fykse Tveit, has welcomed the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to imprisoned Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobo as a support to those struggling for freedom and dignity worldwide.

At the same time, in Hong Kong, Roman Catholic Bishop John Tong has described the award as an honour "for us as Chinese people" and said he hoped Liu would be released soon.

"I consider this recognition of Liu Xiaobo to be an affirmation and acknowledgement of growing respect for human dignity and freedom around the world," Tveit said in a 14 October statement issued from the WCC's headquarters in Geneva.

"It also signifies and underscores the essential parameters that are needed to ensure development, peace and reconciliation among peoples and nations," said Tveit, a Norwegian theologian, in his statement made available

to ENInews.

The WCC groups 349 churches, principally Anglican, Orthodox and Protestant. The Catholic Church is not a member but works with the WCC on some programmes.

Liu initiated the "08 Charter", which urged greater democracy and respect for human rights. More than 10 000 people in China and overseas have signed the charter.

In 2009, one year after the release of the charter, Liu was sentenced to 11 years in prison and two years' deprivation of political rights for "inciting the subversion of State power". The government in Beijing has reacted angrily to the award, describing Liu as a criminal.

In comments to Hong Kong's Catholic Weekly, published on 13 October, Bishop Tong noted that Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao had earlier stated that the wish of the Chinese people for democracy could not be resisted.

The bishop said Liu and all those imprisoned for pursuing democracy and religious freedom should be released, so they "can make their contribution to the country, and the reputation of our nation will go up in the eyes of the world".

Another Beijing-based Chinese Christian dissident Yu Jie, along with other Christians in China and overseas, co-signed a congratulation letter to Liu on 10 October. They said the award of the Nobel prize to Liu is a recognition of the victims of the 1989 suppression of democracy protestors in Beijing's Tiananmen square.

The WCC's Tveit in his statement referred to another Nobel laureate, Indian-born economist Amartya Sen, who has spoken of "development as freedom" and "a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy". "Those societies that commit themselves to human dignity make the possibilities of development and fullness of life available to all", said Tveit.

In order to achieve this potential, the human dignity of each individual should be protected, stated Tveit, a Lutheran theologian.

"Christian faith respects the dignity of each person created in the image of God. Such core values are embodied in other religious traditions as well as in secular philosophies," he asserted.

The awarding of the peace prize to Liu, Tveit said, "is a strong message of support to all those around the world who are struggling for freedom, development and the dignity of all human beings". ♦ ♦ ♦

## UCA News - [www.ucanews.com](http://www.ucanews.com)

### Eye project brings light to the poor in China

**Published Date: November 5, 2010**

**By ucanews.com reporters, Hong Kong and Shijiazhuang**

A Catholic-inspired project in northern China has helped thousands of poor people to have their cataracts removed.

In September 2008, Jinde Charities, a Church-run NGO based in Hebei province, launched a project in cooperation with the Hebei Disabled Persons' Federation and several hospitals to offer free eye surgery to 3,000 poor people.

The Hong Kong-based St. Paul's Charity Foundation, formed by the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres, donated an initial 110,000 yuan (US\$16,500) for the project.

This was followed by another 50,000 yuan (US\$8,000) to mark the golden jubilee of the SPC nuns' arrival in Taiwan.

Representatives of the foundation traveled to Hebei recently to inspect the project.

Sister Marie Jacqueline Ho, the provincial superior of the St. Paul de Chartres sisters, and her collaborators visited eye patients at Xinji Fuming Eye Hospital on Oct. 29.

Fan Lanrong, who cares for two sons with physical and mental disabilities as well as her 99 year old mother-in-law, had the gauze removed from her eyes during the visit of the delegation.

The 75-year-old widow was overjoyed with the results.

"Thank you, thanks to all those who have helped me," she told the visitors repeatedly.

Another delegation member, Sister Winnie Marie Yau lauded the skill and effort of Catholic doctor Luo Yanli, who is responsible for the implementation of the project.

"Many people in the remote area are too poor to afford cataract surgery but we would like to help them to recover their eyesight," Sister Yau told ucanews.com.

Doctor Luo, who is director of the Fuming Group of Hospitals, told ucanews.com that it is the eye hospital's second year of cooperation with Jinde Charities.

*Continued page 8...*

Last year, the hospital offered free surgery to about 1,000 people in Hengshui, one of the poorest cities in Hebei.

Previously Doctor Luo, whose father and sister are also oculists, had offered free eye surgery to poor patients from a village clinic that they opened with 400 yuan.

Lacking resources, they were unable to publicize it or expand its services, she recalled.

As a Catholic, however, Luo felt she was not doing enough "to the least of my brothers and sisters."

Today, the clinic has grown into a group of hospitals while the Luo family continues its charitable work.

As of October 2010, Jinde has received nearly 3 million yuan in donations for the eye project, benefiting 3,000 patients. ♦♦♦

China Infodoc Service <china.infodoc@online.be>  
**ENI: HK Christian groups join in honouring Nobel laureate Liu**

ENInews  
 Daily News Service  
 13 December 2010

Hong Kong Christian groups join in honouring Nobel laureate Liu  
 ENI-10-0803  
 By Francis Wong

Hong Kong, 13 December (ENInews)--About 1000 people in Hong Kong joined a celebration co-organized by Christian groups to honour imprisoned Nobel Peace Prize laureate Liu Xiaobo in a celebration coinciding with the Nobel ceremony in Oslo.

The Hong Kong Christian Institute and the local Roman Catholic Justice and Peace Commission organized the gathering with non-governmental groups to commend Liu, urging Beijing to release him and other political prisoners on 10 December.

Liu has been imprisoned since 2009 as part of an 11-year sentence for "inciting the subversion of State power".

"Beijing should know that to confer the Nobel Peace Prize on Mr. Liu is not to confront the Chinese people. Human rights are universal values, and should be abided by all," Catholic Hong Kong legislator Alan Leong Kah-kit told ENInews at the Hong Kong meeting.

In Beijing, a Foreign Ministry spokesperson had reiterated on 9 December that Liu is in the eyes of the Chinese government a criminal and did not deserve any honour.

In Hong Kong, the Catholic Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kiun linked the empty chair for Liu in Oslo with the empty chairs for Chinese bishops at a Vatican synod in 1998. At that time Bishop Matthias Duan Yin-ming and his assistant bishop were banned from attending the meeting.

The Cardinal wrote on his blog on 13 December that Beijing had "successfully" blocked Liu and Chinese bishops from joining the overseas meeting, but it was actually a "failure" of the government in that it violated its aim to build a harmonious society.

The Christian Institute and the Catholic groups had issued a statement on 7 December criticising Beijing's use of diplomatic pressure "to threaten other countries not to send representatives to attend the award ceremony", and for curbing freedom of speech in China by blocking the flow of information about the first Chinese Nobel Peace Prize laureate.

"The Chinese government has even gone further to continue to badmouth Liu Xiaobo," they said. "All these show to the international community how repressive and arrogant the Chinese government is and they prove to the world how meaningful it is for the Nobel Committee to give the award to Liu Xiaobo."

At the same time, a scholar specialising in Christianity in China said that the Christian faith has influenced Liu in his struggle for human rights and democracy in China.

Professor Ying Fuk-tsang said at an 8 December public forum that Liu has said that he is "a liberal who respects Christianity" and views God as "a spiritual presence on earth".

Ying, the vice-director of the Christian Study Centre on Chinese Religions and Cultures, has studied the writings of Liu and notes that Christianity fostered Liu's personal commitment to non-violence and spiritual growth.

♦♦♦

