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China Exchange

Columban Mission Institute
Centre for Promoting Communion with
the Church in China

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EDITORIAL

At the beginning of a New Year it is always helpful to remember the important things that have happened in the year just ended. Looking back and remembering is always helpful in preparing for the future. An article from a recent issue of *Sunday Examiner* gives an overview of the important things that happened for the Catholic people of China over the last year.

China –Vatican relations continue to unfold with many promising signs especially in the sensitive area of the appointment of bishops. With seminaries closed for well near twenty years, a whole generation of clergy have not appeared. Younger newly appointed bishops are in their 40s, while those they replace are well in their 80s and 90s. An encouraging report tells of a study tour to Belgium by younger bishops and Church officials from China.

Whatever happens in the life of the Church in China is directly or indirectly connected with other questions of the day in national life. The Olympic Games Beijing 2008 has caught the world's attention. As has also the question of human rights and freedom of speech and association – not only in China, but in other places where China has considerable influence – notably in Darfur, Sudan. "China is a leading oil customer and supplier of weapons to Sudan and critics accuse Beijing of providing diplomatic cover for Khartoum as it stonewalls international efforts to send peacekeepers into Darfur" (Reuters,19/02/'08). Very high profile leaders and Nobel Laureates, together with politicians, athletes and human rights activists have published an open letter urging China to work for peace in Darfur.

Severe snowstorms prevented many workers from returning to their families to celebrate Spring Festival – Chinese New Year – for many it would have been the only opportunity for a family reunion for the whole year. Local Catholic communities have risen to the occasion to help and accommodate stranded travelers.

Indicating a shift in feeling on the part of the government, Liu Bainian, vice president of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association has said that he would welcome Pope Benedict XVI to China, should a papal visit become a possibility in the near future Vatican sources have said, however, that it is impracticable at the present time because of the lack of religious freedom in China.

Rev Paul McGee ssc

DIFFERENT VIEWS ON THE NEWS IN CHINA IN 2007

CHINA BRIDGE

Sunday Examiner

13 January 2008

What was the biggest story in China last year? That depends on who is answering the question. Let's review 2007 from various viewpoints.

Government Meetings

The party and the government, which are practically the same entity, held three major meetings in Beijing, with more than 2,000 delegates in attendance at each one. From March 5 to 16, the Fifth Session of the 10th National People's Congress heard the Premier, Wen Jiabao emphasise, once again, "building a socialist harmonious society." Two Catholic representatives attended the congress, while four bishops, one priest and two laypeople took part in the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, which was held at the same time.

From October 15 to 20, the 17th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party met. The newly elected Central Committee appointed a new Standing Committee as well as a politburo of nine members. Aware of the problems of pollution and the environment, the stress is now on scientific development.

The congress passed a resolution to amend the Party Constitution, incorporating for the first time, guidelines for work related to ethnic and religious affairs. This was to promote the policy of religious freedom and to assure an active social and economic development.

Two months later, the president, Hu Jintao, stressed that religions will be part of socialist China for a long time to come. So it is important to respect religious affairs according to the law. *Don't forget that the party and the government define all these terms.*

Economics impacts the masses.

Economic changes kept sweeping over China. Some were good, such as better roads in the countryside and more people connected to the Internet. Yet material progress has its dark side. For example, the increase in the number of automobiles has led to worse traffic jams and more. Corruption and greed were contributing factors to mining and industrial accidents, shoddy products and workers enslaved in a brick kiln.

While it helps to pass more safety regulations and to increase the number of inspectors, external restraints are not enough. A depressing number of adults seem to live only for money, prestige and pleasure. People tragically discover at a young age that these do not produce enough reason to get up in the morning. Suicide is now the leading cause of death for those between the ages of 15 to 34.

Resources for coping

Perhaps a revival of ancient wisdom will help. One best selling book in 2007 summarised Confucianism for modern life. A children's primer from a thousand years ago *The Three Character Classic* also attracted favourable publicity. Traditional festivals and customs are receiving more attention. The Golden Week for Labour Day, May 1, will shrink starting this year and three ancient observances, Tomb Sweeping Day, the Dragon Boat Festival and the Mid-Autumn Festival will be made public holidays. The observance of such "intangible cultural heritages" will not only generate tourism but also give people a sense of belonging to something greater than themselves.

Religion received better media coverage last year. High officials were more open in admitting that religion will be part of the Chinese scene for a long time to come and spoke favourably of the contributions of believers to a harmonious society.

Religious activity, like the Internet, continued to be closely monitored. But are more people employed supervising official religious organizations and tracking down unregistered believers, or in policing cyberspace and updating the "great firewall of China?" Both numbers are top secret. However, it is no secret that China, as part of the global economy, cannot live without the Internet, despite spam, viruses, computer addiction and bad websites. Nor can China afford the enormous disruption of a futile effort to abolish religion by administrative means. The authorities have even learned not to waste their breath arguing against *feng shui*. Feng shui is now a thoroughly private or at most a family matter. It is not sufficiently organised to present a threat to social harmony.

Catholic News

From July 24 to 25, about 500 participants, including 37 bishops celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Chinese Patriotic Association (CCPA) with speeches and a visit to the Great Hall of the People.

Over the past 50 years, 170 bishops have been elected and consecrated, 1,800 priests ordained, 3,000 sisters trained, 12 major seminaries and 18 minor seminaries established, 70 convents opened, and 200 people – priests, sisters and laypeople – sent abroad for further studies. As a bridge between the government and ancient Church structures, such as dioceses and parishes, the CCPA has the most to lose from the biggest Catholic story of 2007.

Five new bishops were ordained in 2007: Paul Xiao Zejiang 40 of Guiyan, Guizhou on 8 September; Li Shan 42, of Beijing on 21 September; Lu Showang 41, of Yichang Hebei on 30 November; Gan Junqiu 43, of Guangzhou on 4 December; and Li Jing 40, of Yinchuan, Ningxia on 21 December. All five of these young bishops are acceptable to Rome and to Beijing.

Ten bishops died in 2007, at an average age of 88. Age-wise, the new bishops could easily be the grandsons of their deceased predecessors. Closing the seminaries for over 20 years led to a missing generation of clergy. The old bishops will be mostly gone within five years and thus many priests in their early 40s will have to be ordained as their replacements.

Two Letters from the Pope

A historic papal letter of June 30 was addressed specifically to the Church in China. November 30 saw the release of *Spe Salvi*, a reflection on Christian hope. Encyclicals are addressed to the whole Catholic world, or sometimes to the entire human race.

Christian hope is not just an individualistic hope that ignores one's neighbours, but rather a hope that moves us to help our world, even though we cannot create heaven on earth. The Holy Father examines how faith in God started to shift to faith in progress about 400 years ago. Advances in science and technology fuelled progress and led to hope for a better world through reason and greater freedom. Humanity would acquire increasing dominion over creation, original sin could be conveniently forgotten and a bright future was guaranteed.

In China, this attitude is captured in a slogan: "science is all powerful." Yet pollution and looming shortages of energy and raw materials, not to mention loss of meaning in material possessions, lead many to question the saving power of science and technology. *Spe Salvi* will inspire many homilies in 2008, not only in China but everywhere. In the long run, *Spe Salvi* may prove to be a more sweeping challenge to China's ideology than the contents of the Pope's *Letter to China*. - MJS ♦

COADJUTOR BISHOP REAFFIRMS CHURCH PRINCIPLES – WILL CONTINUE PROMOTING RELATIONS WITH MAINLAND UCA News – www.ucanews.com February 11, 2008

Newly installed Coadjutor Bishop John Tong Hon of Hong Kong has emphasized that he would not sacrifice Church principles in exchange for improved relations with China.

"We have to make greater efforts, to implement what Pope Benedict XVI wrote in his pastoral letter to mainland Chinese Catholics," Bishop Tong told UCA News and other media after his installation Mass on February 10. The letter published on June 30, 2007, presents a theological framework within which current difficulties in the China Church are to be viewed and resolved.

Bishop Tong said that he and Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kiun of Hong Kong would continue to focus on different aspects of the Church, a matter both had agreed upon when they were ordained bishops together in 1996. Cardinal Zen would continue his "prophetic role" of commenting on social affairs in Hong Kong, while Bishop Tong would focus more on the "bridging role" of building relations with the mainland Church.

Since 1980, Bishop Tong has headed Hong Kong diocese's Holy Spirit Study Centre, which researches and documents Church life in mainland China.

On January 30, the Pope appointed 68-year old Bishop Tong, until then auxiliary bishop of Hong Kong, as the coadjutor bishop, placing him in line to succeed Cardinal Zen once the 76-year old prelate retires.

Bishop Tong said he believed the appointment shows the Holy See's respect for Cardinal Zen's request for a successor. However, Bishop Tong said he thinks the Holy See would not approve the cardinal's retirement in a hurry since he is still healthy and capable. Cardinal Zen told UCA News after the installation Mass that he had written again to the Pope in December requesting his retirement. The cardinal said the next step would be to request an auxiliary bishop to assist the diocese's next leader.

More than 1,000 people attended the installation Mass at Immaculate Conception Cathedral. When the liturgy began, Cardinal Zen, the main celebrant, presented his new coadjutor with the apostolic bull, or formal papal decree, conveying the appointment. They then embraced and exchanged a sign of peace. Bishop Tong also exchanged a sign of peace with members of the Board of Diocesan Consultors, who represented the entire diocese.

Cardinal Zen, in the homily, said he hoped Bishop Tong could lead the diocese to help people reject materialism

and not side with the rich and powerful. The local Church should spread the Good News to foster a more caring society, he added.

Towards the end of the Mass, Bishop Tong asked the congregation to pray for the Church to be “a greater witness of the love of God through its service to the poor and weak.” Alluding to the Pope’s letter to Chinese Catholics, he said he hoped all mainland Catholics could be “free and united” in the near future. ♦

MAINLAND CHURCH LEADERS HOPE FOR - INCREASED EXCHANGES

UCA News – www.ucanews.com - 15 February, 2008

Leaders of the Catholic Church in China hope that newly installed Coadjutor Bishop John Tong Hon of Hong Kong will strengthen his role of building relations with the mainland.

Bishop Tong is concerned about the Church in China, and keeps in touch with many of its dioceses, Coadjutor Bishop Paul Xiao Zejiang of Guizhou told UCA News. “I haven’t had much personal contact with Bishop Tong, but he impresses me as he cares for young mainland clergy,” said Bishop Xiao, 40.

He and Bishop Anicetus Wang Chongyi of Guizhou sent a floral arrangement for Bishop Tong’s installation Mass at the Hong Kong Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception on February 10. Their diocese is in southwestern China.

Anthony Liu Bainian, vice chairman of the Beijing-based Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association told UCA News on February 13 that he hopes the actions of both Hong Kong Church leaders will help boost the development of the China Church and China-Vatican relations ..under the “one country, two systems” principle espoused in the Basic Law of Hong Kong, the former British colony’s mini-constitution since its return to Chinese sovereignty in 1997, which stipulates the principle of non-interference, non-subordination and mutual respect between religions in Hong Kong and their counterparts on the mainland.

Kwun Ping-hung, a Church-in-China observer in Hong Kong, believes Bishop Tong’s appointment will strengthen the role of the Hong Kong Church in China-Vatican relations. Hong Kong diocese has served as a bridge to the mainland Church in the past two decades, and the two Hong Kong Church leaders are known to be key figures in this, he said. The Holy See would attach importance to their advice, he told UCA News on January 31.

Some mainland priests who had met Bishop Tong shared with UCA News their impressions and expectations of the new coadjutor.

A priest from the government-approved, or “open” Church community in northern China, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Cardinal Zen and Bishop Tong “both love the China Church but in different ways.”

He pointed out that Bishop Tong is mild-mannered, humorous and tends to keep a low profile, while the cardinal is more direct. The priest who has met Bishop Tong a few times, praised the new coadjutor as talented, and familiar with the China Church situation.

A priest from the “underground” Church community in northern China said Bishop Tong’s concern for the mainland Church has impressed him. He has met the prelate twice and recalled that the first few questions the bishop asked were about the situation of the local Church and relations between the open and underground communities.

The priest told UCA News in early February that Bishop Tong could help the Holy See and the Universal Church clear up misunderstandings regarding China. He hoped that like Cardinal Zen, Bishop Tong could also help Hong Kong diocese support the mainland Church, especially in enabling the voice of the underground community to be heard. The outside world has neglected or forgotten this community, he added.

A leader of the underground Church community in eastern China also said he hopes Bishop Tong, who has a quieter disposition than Cardinal Zen, will speak out more for the mainland Church. ♦

POPE HOPES FOR CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE WITH CHINA

By Gerard O’Connell

(Sunday Examiner 6th January, 2008)

VATICAN CITY (UCAN) : Pope Benedict XVI has reaffirmed the Holy See’s willingness for “a serene and constructive dialogue” with Chinese authorities towards finding a solution for problems affecting the Catholic community in China.

Speaking to officials of the Roman Curia on 21st December, he recalled his 30th June letter to Catholics in China. He said he wished to express his “profound spiritual affection for all the Catholics in China and a cordial esteem for the Chinese people” as well as recall some principles relating to ecclesiology.

The Pope explained that “in the light of the ‘original plan’ which Christ had for his church, I indicated some guidelines for confronting and resolving, in a spirit of communion and truth, the delicate and complex problems of the life of the Church in China.”

He also “indicated the willingness of the Holy See for a serene and constructive dialogue with the civil authorities with the aim of finding solutions to the various problems relating to the Catholic community in China.”

Pope Benedict concluded with the hope that, “with the help of God, the letter may produce the desired fruit.” ♦

**MAINLAND CLERGY BENEFIT
FROM BELGIUM VISIT**
(Sunday Examiner 6th January, 2008)

Leuven (UCAN) Ten Church leaders from mainland China studied the spirituality and pastoral work of bishops and their concerns for the Universal Church during a 16-day visit to Belgium at the invitation of the Ferdinand Verbiest Institute of the Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium.

They also made pilgrimages to Marian shrines in Belgium, and to Lourdes and Lisieux, France between December 9 and 15.

The programme focused mainly on the 2004 Vatican document *Apostolorum Successores* (Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops), published in 2004 by the Congregation for Bishops.

Six Belgian Bishops, including Godfried Cardinal Daneels of Mechen-Brussels, along with Church experts, guided the visitors in studying the 250-page document. The Cardinal who visited China in 2005, opened with a talk on *The Identity of the Bishop and his Mission within the Mystery of the Church*.

In all, 18 theologians engaged the group in discussion on a bishop's spirituality as well as his work within the diocese, concern for the Universal Church, relations with the bishops' conference and with the Pope.

Immaculate Heart of Mary (CICM) Father Jeroom Hendryckx, an organizer and former director of the institute, described the discussions following the presentations as "dialogue without prejudice." Fr. Hendrickx said that the desire for unity between unofficial and official Church communities in China was constantly expressed. He said that this is to be expected in light of Pope Benedict XVI's 30th June 2007 pastoral letter to the Church in China and pointed out that this is a priority on the pastoral agenda.

Fr. Hendrickx cited one participant saying that "a bishop in China, no matter if he previously belonged to the official or unofficial community, must be a good shepherd who walks in front of his flock to guide it, but also constantly walks right behind the flock so as to protect and care for the sheep."

The visitors also appreciated the wide scope of *Apostolorum Successores*, which deals with the workings of a local Church and its service to society. The Chinese Church leaders expressed hope that all clergy from both Church communities could study it. The delegation spent one week at the Benedictine monastery of St. Andrew in the northwest of Belgium, then another at the Trappist Abbey in Eastern Belgium.

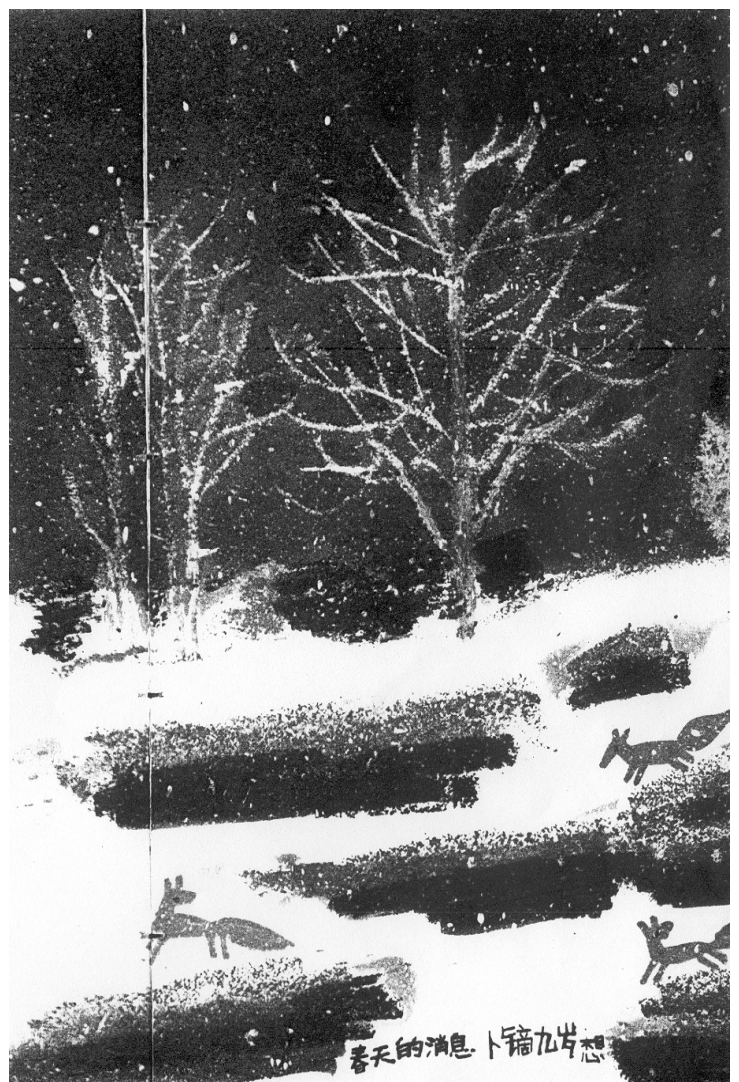
On 30 November, the feast of St. Andrew, the visitors took part in a Mass with their European hosts, but Fr. Hendrickx noted, they did not concelebrate. He said this expressed their unity with the Universal Church, but also showed "juridical unity has not yet been realised for some." Two of the bishops were illicitly ordained.

When the delegation visited the photo gallery of the CICM headquarters in Scheut, Bishop Pei noticed a picture of Father Andre Baert, who had been a missionary in his home parish. The bishop reportedly said he did not know Father Baert, but recalled his parents speaking about the missionary's generosity and courage in the most difficult circumstances.

The group also visited the tomb of Father Theophiel Verbiest, the CICM founder, and remembered the 679 Belgian and Dutch missionaries who had brought Catholicism to China.

The clergy, from the official Church, included Bishop Joseph Ma Yinglin of Kunming and Bishop Joseph Xu Honggen of Suzhou, coadjutor Bishop Paul Pei Junmin of Liaoning and coadjutor Bishop John Wang Renlei of Xuzhou and auxiliary Bishop Paul He Zeqing of Wanzhou (Wanxian), together with Father Yue Fusheng of Harbin, Father Paul Meng Qinglu of Hohhot, Father Yao Shun of Jining (Wumeng), Father Peter Luo Xuegang of Leshan, and Father Joseph Chen Gong'ao of Nanchong.

The bishops aged between 37 and 42, were ordained in 2005 and 2006, while the priests are either diocesan administrators or hold key diocesan positions. ♦



**PUSH TO REOPEN BEATIFICATION CAUSE
OF STUDIUM BIBLICUM FOUNDER**
Sunday Examiner 13th January, 2008.
Hong Kong (UCAN)

A signature campaign to reopen the beatification cause of a Franciscan friar, who pioneered the translation of the Bible into Chinese, was the highlight of the celebration of the centenary of his birth.

About 200 people attended a special Mass, celebrated by the Bishop of Hong Kong, Joseph Cardinal Zen Ze-kium, together with 10 other priests – seven of them Franciscans, at St. Bonaventure's Church on December 26 in honour of Venerable Gabriele Allegra, who founded Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, the biblical institute and publisher in Hong Kong.

Before the Mass, many signed the petition at the church entrance for the reopening of his beatification cause. The Holy See originally opened the cause for his beatification in 1984 and declared him venerable 10 years later. A Decree of Beatification was promulgated in April 2002, after the Holy See recognized a miracle attributed to the intercession Venerable Allegra, but the beatification, which was set for 26th October of that year was postponed indefinitely.

In his homily, Bishop Zen acknowledged Venerable Allegra's accomplishments and remarked that "he was a hard-working person who accomplished the translation of the Bible with the help of his confreres."

Venerable Allegra was born in 1907 and joined the Order of Friars Minor (OFM) at the age of 16. After his priestly ordination in 1930, he went to China as a missionary and was rector of Hengyang Minor Seminary in Hunan province. Known for his linguistic skills and biblical knowledge, Father Allegra worked to translate the Bible from the original Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek into Chinese, and to produce an accompanying commentary and introduction. He set up the Studium Biblicum in Beijing in August 1945 to pursue this work. The institute relocated to Hong Kong in 1948.

Father Allegra completed the translation of the Bible in 1968. In 1975, the Studium Biblicum also published a Bible dictionary. The missionary, who directed the institute and was superior of the Franciscan community in Hong Kong, died in 1976.

Lucilla Fu, a member of the Secular Franciscan Order, told UCA News she believes that declaring Father Allegra a saint would result in more people coming to know of his accomplishments and how the Bible came to be translated into Chinese. ♦

**STATE MEDIA CLAIMS CHINESE
'DISGUSTED'**
BY SPIELBERG'S BOYCOTT

AsiaNews – www.asianews.it 02/14/2008

Beijing (AsiaNews)

There has been no official reaction so far to filmmaker Steven Spielberg's decision to boycott the Beijing Olympics and refuse the role of advisor on the Games opening and closing ceremonies. Only a tabloid, the Global Times, published by the Communist Party mouthpiece People's Daily, accused the West of using the Olympics to put pressure on China, a move which has "disgusted" the Chinese people. Even Chinese citizens who complain about losing their homes to the Olympic Games opposed Western pressure, the paper said.

With patriotic emphasis, the paper claimed that for the "vast majority of Chinese people it's absolutely absurd to place the Darfur issue, so many thousands of miles away, on the head of China."

Spielberg decided against playing any role in the Games after his efforts to put pressure on Beijing's leadership in favour of Darfur proved fruitless.

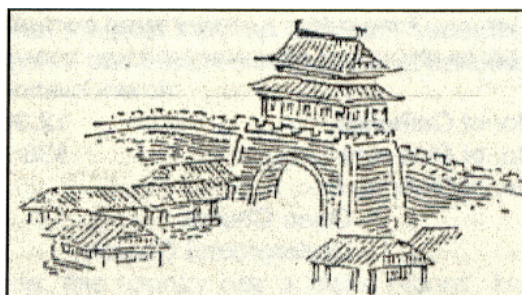
The Chinese Embassy in Washington, whilst not directly referring to Spielberg's decision, called on "relevant parties" to respect the facts about the "positive role played by China on the Darfur issue."

"As the Darfur issue is neither an internal issue of China, nor is it caused by China, it is completely unreasonable, irresponsible and unfair for certain organizations and individuals to link the two as one," the embassy said.

China is Sudan's main trading partner and an important weapons supplier.

In the African country, government-backed militias, the Janjaweed, are responsible for the deaths of some 200,000 people and 2.5 million refugees.

Jacques Rogge, head of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), signed yesterday an appeal to China by Nobel Laureates and others to do more to end the conflict in Sudan's Darfur region. ♦



Mothers of those slain in protests in China call for Tiananmen talks

The Associated Press
Thursday, February 28, 2008

BEIJING: Mothers of those killed in China's 1989 crackdown on pro-democracy protests have joined the list of groups invoking this summer's Beijing Olympics to draw attention to their causes.

In an open letter: released Thursday, the Tiananmen Mothers warned the Games would be dogged by lingering guilt and mistrust unless China confronts the truth about the crackdown.

"Is it really possible that, as the host of the 2008 Olympic Games, the government can be at ease allowing athletes from all over the world to tread on this piece of blood-stained soil and participate in the Olympics?" the letter asked.

The group is named after the square in central Beijing where the student-led protests against corruption and closed politics were centered.

China's leaders deemed them a threat to Communist Party rule, sending tanks and troops to crush them on the night of June 3-4. Hundreds? possibly thousands? were killed, mostly ordinary citizens seeking to protect the students, although the government has never allowed a full, impartial accounting of the events.

The mothers have released a version of the letter every spring since 1995 ahead of the annual session of the National People's Congress, China's rubber stamp legislature, which has steadfastly refused to accept a copy.

In the letter, they call for a dialogue with the legislature, an investigation into the crackdown, an official apology, compensation, and the punishment of those guilty of crimes related to the events.

A long list of rights groups and activists have conjured up the prospect of a tarnished Games to pressure Beijing into changing its policies on issues from Tibet to political prisoners and Sudan's troubled Darfur region.

CHURCH LEADERS JOIN APPEAL TO CHINA TO ACT ON DARFUR BEFORE OLYMPICS

Independent Catholic News 2008
London – 14 February 2008

Nobel Peace Laureates Bishop Carlos Belo and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Lord Alton and Baroness Shirley Williams have joined around a hundred Nobel laureates, Olympic athletes, politicians, artists and human rights activists in a petition urging China to work for peace in Darfur, today's Independent reports.

The open letter comes a day after Steven Spielberg resigned as artistic adviser to the Beijing Olympics in protest at China's increasing trade with Sudan, which is funding and arming the war on Darfur.

The letter states: "As the primary economic, military and political partner of the government of Sudan, and as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, China has both the opportunity and the responsibility to contribute to a just peace in Darfur. Ongoing failure to rise to this responsibility amounts, in our view, to support for a government that continues to carry out atrocities against its own people. As host of the 2008 Olympic Games, China has a special role to play in ensuring that its actions this year are commensurate with the Olympic ideals of peace and international co-operation."

It continues: "Of the seven million inhabitants of Darfur, hundreds of thousands have already died due to the conflict and 2.5 million have been displaced. Rape and sexual violence have been and continue to be used as weapons of war against untold numbers of girls and women. The government of Sudan has also been involved in the forced relocation of people from refugee and internally displaced people's camps. Without homes to return to, those displaced are left vulnerable to further attack."

We have also been disheartened by your government's action since resolution 1769 was passed. Your government has remained silent as Sudan continues to block the effective deployment of UNAMID and engages in violent actions that violate the spirit of the mission. Given the severity of the crisis in Darfur, and the nature of the China-Sudan relationship, we are calling for more serious action by your government in support of the full, immediate and unimpeded deployment of UNAMID."



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The letter concludes: "As the 2008 Olympic Games approach, we will continue to call on the Chinese government for action. We are aware of the tremendous potential for China to bring an end to the conflict in Darfur. We will continue to watch for concerted and consistent Chinese action to ensure rapid deployment of UN-AU peacekeepers, progress in peace talks, and an end to the use of rape as a weapon of war." ♦

AsiaNews -www.asianews.it
01/04/2008 13:37
CHINA -VATICAN

Bishop of Shanghai: with thanks to the Pope in 2008 we will celebrate 400 years of Catholic faith

by Justin Qiang

In his pastoral letter Msgr Jin Luxian thanks missionaries for their religious and cultural commitment to China and asks the faithful to be evangelisers of the city and not "to let the Pope down": in fact on May 24th, as set out by the pontiff, a Day of Prayer for the Church and China will be celebrated, centred on the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Sheshan, a short distance from the metropolis.

Shanghai (AsiaNews) - In a Christmas pastoral letter Msgr. Aloysius Jin Luxian officially opened celebrations for the 400th anniversary of Catholicism in Shanghai. He invites the faithful of the diocese to a spiritual renewal and asks them not to "let Benedict XVI down", who in his Letter to China's faithful, invited Catholics to make May 24th - feast of the sanctuary of Our Lady of Sheshan, which lies within the diocesan territory - World Day of Prayer for the Church and China.

The pastoral letter which was published on December 24th last, begins by outlining the history of Catholicism in Shanghai.

It all began with the conversion and baptism of Xu Guangqi, a Shanghai mandarin who worked for the Emperor in Beijing. There he became a friend of the Jesuit priest Matteo Ricci and was baptised. In 1608 Paul Xu returned to Shanghai for his father's funeral and invited Italian Jesuit Father Lazare Cattaneo to preach to his family. After they all eventually received baptism, the priest, who was based in nearby Nanjing, baptized 200 others, and more Jesuits were sent to Shanghai in eastern China, giving birth to the first nucleus of the Church there.

Msgr. Jin recalls that, another Italian Jesuit, Father Francesco Brancati, baptized 2,300 people here. He died in southern China but was buried in a Catholic cemetery in Shanghai that would host hundreds of missionaries' graves in following centuries. During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), these graves were desecrated.

The bishop asks the faithful to "not forget the missionaries" because they have made an enormous contribution to local arts and sciences including astronomy and medicine.

Thanks to the Jesuits and other missionaries, Shanghai enjoyed advanced education through schools universities libraries, art galleries, astronomic and meteorological observatories, hospitals where modern medicine was practised.

In a departure from the official Communist interpretation - which considers missionaries as agents of western colonialism - Msgr. Jin underlines that already 400 years ago those missionaries were already using enculturation in their approach to evangelization and were training the laity to manage their churches.

In the second part of his letter, the prelate sets out some guidelines to render evangelisation more dynamic in the diocese. "Evangelization is the work of all Catholics," he said, urging his flock not to focus merely on the sacraments and charitable works. Msgr. Jin affirms that today, there are about 150,000 Shanghai Catholics compared to 100,000 before the Communist takeover of mainland China in 1949, but Protestants have grown from 30,000 to more than 200,000 during the same period.

In a Chinese world where interest in religions and in Christianity has grown, Catholics must use all means at their disposal to witness to their faith: churches must be kept open in the daytime for worshippers and visitors (usually, in China they are only opened for religious services -ed). Religious personnel should welcome and share their faith with visitors, he urged, lamenting that some priests and nuns would rather spend time watching television or on the Internet.

Concluding, Msgr. Jin referred to Pope Benedict's Letter asking Catholics worldwide to pray for the China Church on May 24, feast of Our Lady, Help of Christians and Our Lady of Sheshan. "As Shanghai Catholics [Sheshan lies circa 30 km outside Shanghai - ed], we feel honoured. We thank our pope, but feel pressured." The prelate said he anticipates many foreign Catholics will visit the Sheshan shrine this year, and he urged local Catholics to show them hospitality.

Bishop Jin also recalled how Archbishop Celso Costantini, the first apostolic delegate to China, summoned the First Catholic Synod of China in Shanghai in 1924 and led the bishops to dedicate the Church in China to Our Lady of Sheshan.

Encouraging his flock to pray to Mary and the foreign missionary-saints, Bishop Jin concluded "We will not let the Holy Father down". ♦

News of Spring

Don't run - don't run so fast
All you skittish little foxes!
There is no lion - there is no tiger
It's only me - just me
Gently falling snow - light rain
Bringing you news - telling you
Spring is coming