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Centre for Promoting Communion with
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EDITORIAL

All roads lead to Rome. It is an old saying, with many a different telling. Perhaps one of the shortest was Paul's providential arrival in Malta at the time of his and his companions' shipwreck on that island. Other nations have followed sooner or later. Most have had harmonious relations with the Holy See ... but not always.

The road between China and the Holy See has a long and difficult history. Christianity first came to China by the Silk Road. It was brought to China by way of Christian traders and missionary monks from Near Eastern countries notably Syria and Persia.

Later in the 13th century Franciscan missionaries came. This was during the Yuan dynasty. John of Monte Corvino was named the first archbishop of Peking by Pope Clement V. Later in 1369, at the beginning of the Ming Dynasty all Christians were expelled from China. Just more than 200 years later, the Jesuit Matteo Ricci arrived, eventually settling in Peking with the aim of getting Christianity officially recognised.



Many years after Ricci's death, the Emperor Kangxi in 1692 issued the Edict of Toleration, giving Christianity official recognition in China. The Rites Controversy, at about this time, also proved to be a disaster for the cause of the Church in China. It was only finally settled in 1939. The reverencing of Ancestors at Chinese New Year is now a regular feature of Chinese Catholic life.

The last 60 years have not been easy for the Catholic people of China. At the end of June, Pope Benedict XVI issued a letter to the Catholic People of China, first making it available to government officials of China as a mark of courtesy and respect. It has been well received by the Catholic community of China, but with resistance on the part of the Government of China.

China-Holy See relations of course do not exist in a vacuum. They are only one of many issues currently unfolding. With less than one year to go before the Beijing Olympics, the eyes of the world are on not only logistics and venues for the Games, but on the basic rights and freedoms of the people of China.

Some areas of particular concern are: forced evictions and school closures involving thousands of citizens in and around Beijing - labour rights abuses - repression of ethnic minorities - controls on religious freedom - the death penalty and executions - HIV/AIDS rights advocacy obstruction - use of house arrest system - ties with other countries who have a history of human rights violations, notably Sudan and Myanmar (Burma). ♦

Rev Paul McGee, ssc

*PAPAL LETTER TO CHINA'S CATHOLICS
CALLS FOR UNITY,*

*RECONCILIATION AND FRESH DIALOGUE Vatican City (CNS):
Sunday Examiner - 8 July, 2007.*

In a groundbreaking letter to Chinese Catholics, Pope Benedict XVI established new guidelines favouring cooperation between the official and unofficial Churches (sections of the Church).

The papal letter strongly criticized the limits placed by the Chinese government on the Church's activities. But on several key issues, including the appointment of bishops, it invited civil authorities to a fresh and serious dialogue.

Published by the Vatican on June 30, the letter was accompanied by a Vatican Press commentary that reiterated the Vatican's willingness to move its nunciature from Taiwan to Beijing, as soon as diplomatic relations are established with China.

The Pope's letter was also posted on the Vatican's web site in several languages, including traditional and simplified Chinese, and had been sent earlier to Chinese authorities as a courtesy.

Throughout the text, the Pope expressed his appreciation for the suffering Chinese Catholics saying their devotion to the faith and their loyalty to the Pope "will be rewarded, even if at times everything can seem a failure."

The Pope said that although the Church in China enjoys greater religious freedom today than in the past "it cannot be denied that grave limitations remain that touch the heart of the faith and that, to a certain degree, suffocate pastoral activity."

He asked for more direct contacts between Church and state officials to resolve the problems and declared: "The Holy See always remains open to negotiations, so necessary if the difficulties of the present time are to be overcome."

The letter also contained important directives aimed at bridging the gap between the official and unofficial Catholic communities. Most specifically, the Pope formally revoked special faculties and pastoral directives that were previously established for the Church in China. Vatican sources said that this effectively rescinded a 1988 Vatican advisory that had rejected the government-sanctioned Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA) and regarded some of its members as non-Catholics.

The Pope criticized the Chinese government's interference in several areas of Church activity and said its insistence on registering Church communities and declaring them "official" had brought about division and given rise to suspicions, mutual accusations and recriminations. But he effectively opened the door to registration with the government by bishops and Catholic communities, saying this was acceptable as long

as it did not compromise principles of the faith and Church communion.

On the other hand, Pope Benedict observed that registration has required some Church leaders to adopt attitudes and perform actions contrary to their consciences as Catholics. He went on to say that because the correct decision is difficult to determine and depends on local circumstances, the choice should be made by the individual bishop. He added that the faithful should try to maintain unity with their bishop whatever he decides.

Pope Benedict stressed that rebuilding internal Church unity may require the setting aside of "personal positions or viewpoints born of painful or difficult experiences."

Examining the matter of concelebrated Masses, the Pope said it was licit to concelebrate with bishops and priests of the official community as long as they are in communion with the Pope and as long as their relationship with the government does not entail a denial of essential principles of faith and Church communion. He said the lay faithful in China must not hesitate to participate in these Masses and in other sacraments carried out by official bishops or priests.

The Pope said that, whenever possible, Catholics in China should seek out ordained ministers who are in communion with the Pope for the sacraments, but added that when this cannot be done without grave inconvenience, they may turn to those not in communion with the Pope.

While showing flexibility on a practical pastoral level, the Pope was firm on the principle of noninterference by the state in Church affairs saying that the attempt by some state-backed agencies to place themselves above the bishop and guide the life of the Catholic community "does not correspond to Catholic doctrine."

Likewise, he said the idea of an autonomous, self-managing and self-administering Chinese Church is "incompatible with Catholic doctrine," which has always professed the Church to be "one, holy, catholic and apostolic."

The Pope said Catholics should remember that the preaching of the Gospel, catechesis and charitable activity, liturgical celebrations and pastoral decisions are the responsibility of a bishop and his priests acting in "unbroken continuity of the faith handed down by the apostles ... and therefore cannot be subject to any external interference."

Pope Benedict also addressed the thorny question of the selection and ordination of bishops. He emphasized that when a pope names bishops, it is an exercise of "supreme spiritual authority" and not a political act. He also said it is also a question of basic religious freedom. "The Holy See would like to be completely free to appoint bishops," and invited Chinese authorities to reach an agreement with the Church in order to resolve the current situation in which some

bishops continue to be selected and ordained without papa' approval.

Pope Benedict acknowledged that some bishops, eager to maintain loyalty to the Pope, chose to be ordained clandestinely, but that because the "clandestine condition" is not a normal feature of the Church's life, the Vatican hopes they will be recognized by the government. He also noted there are others, who were ordained without papa' approval, but who later sought and obtained communion with the Pope.

Unfortunately, the Pope observed that in most cases, the priests and faithful of the diocese have not been informed of the bishop's reconciliation with the Vatican, giving rise to serious problems of conscience. He said that "for this reason it is indispensable, for the spiritual good of the diocesan communities concerned, that legitimation, once it has occurred, is brought into the public domain at the earliest opportunity and that the legitimized bishops provide unequivocal and increasing signs of full communion with the successor of Peter."

Pope Benedict then spoke of the small number of illicitly ordained bishops who have not sought reconciliation, encouraging them to re-enter the communion of the Church and noting that they exercised their ministry validly, if illicitly.

The Pope said that because the China Catholic Bishops' College includes illicit bishops and excludes some who are in communion with the Pope, it cannot be recognized as a bishops' conference by the Vatican.

The letter, signed May 27, Pentecost Sunday, was addressed to the bishops, priests, religious and lay Catholics of China. At the beginning of the text, the Pope said the entire Church in China was present in his heart and his daily prayers.

Pope Benedict quoted Pope John Paul II's stated hope for a "great harvest of faith" in Asia in the third millennium. Modern China, Pope Benedict said, seemed to be experiencing an increase in spiritual interest on the one hand and a tendency towards materialism on the other.

He said the Church seeks to encourage and awaken the spiritual energies and its evangelization in China will succeed to the extent that it puts love and unity into practice. The Vatican estimates there are currently eight to 12 million Catholics in China.

The Pope also noted the growth of vocations to the priesthood and religious life over the last 50 years, saying it was a sign of the Church's vitality. At the same time, he called for more careful discernment of vocations and better formation of priests, particularly regarding celibacy.

The Pope underlined that the Church is not identified with any political system, nor is it the Church's mission to "change the structure or administration of the state." He stressed that the

Church does not seek special privileges from China and its leaders, "but solely the resumption of dialogue."

At the end of his letter, Pope Benedict established May 24 as a day of prayer for the Church in China, noting that it was the feast of Our Lady, Help of Christians who is particularly venerated at a Marian shrine near Shanghai. ♦



PAPAL LETTER IS A HISTORIC EVENT
Beijing (Agenzia Fides) - www.fides.org
4 July, 2007

"The Papal Letter is a historic event for the Church in China and for relations between China and the Holy See. The Letter will promote unity among Catholics in China," Rev. Zhang Shi Jiang, founder and editor of Faith Magazine issued by Catholics in Hebei told Fides. He was speaking on the day the papal Letter was made public. "This is the first time since 1949 that a Pope has written to Chinese Catholics intervening directly on matters and aspects of the life of the Church in China," said Rev. Zhang Shi Jiang, who underlined the importance of the Chinese presentation of the Letter on the Holy See web site. With regard to the reaction of the faithful, the clergy and civil society, Rev. Zhang said: "The Letter will require in depth reading to understand and apply all it contains which is deeply theological since it was written by a Pope - theologian and philosopher.

It cannot be read or understood in a short time. Even to read it is a challenge. Not all of us priests have a copy yet, but we hope it will make us more united and more active for the good of the Church and solve our difficulties and differences and help us to walk together towards the same goal." ♦

CHINESE PATRIOTIC CATHOLIC
ASSOCIATION (CPCA)
CELEBRATES 50 YEARS AT A LESS THAN
IDEAL MOMENT
AsiaNews - www.asianews.it 26 July, 2007

Founded on August 2, 1957, the association is less and less able to serve its original purpose, namely to manage the Catholic community on behalf of the government. Some 5,000 invited guests are expected for the celebrations but many will be absent.

Quite a few of the would-be-guests will find the right excuse or the courage not to go. In the meantime, both official and underground bishops, priests and faithful are under tighter controls, which show the uniqueness of the Chinese Church, as Pope Benedict XVI recognized in his Letter to Chinese Catholics.

This is not a good time for the powerful CPCA. Created by the Religious Affairs bureau of the People's Republic for the purpose of introducing party ideals into the Catholic Church, it can now boast more than 3,000 secretaries, deputy secretaries and bureau chiefs, plus many more office workers. All these people are in charge of about 5 million Catholic members of the official (section of the) Church. They appoint bishops, give "advice" as to who should be priests, evaluate male and female vocations for seminaries and convents, and supervise diocesan administrations.

In such a supervisory role they have often been accused by underground Catholics of pilfering diocesan property on their own behalf and that of public and private firms and businessmen.

But for Catholics loyal to the Pope, the CPCA is the "enemy". In his recent letter Benedict XVI unequivocally condemned the association. Explicitly mentioned only in a footnote (no. 36), the CPCA is treated as one of those "entities, desired by the state and extraneous to the structure of the Church, which placed themselves above the Bishops To guide the life of the ecclesial community," something which "does not correspond to Catholic doctrine." (no. 8).

The Pope's opposition is based theologically on the notions of communion, hierarchy and Petrine primacy, which clearly contradict a statement made by the CPCA's strongman, deputy chairman Liu Bainian, a member of the laity who in an interview with Italian daily La Repubblica claimed instead that there was "not a shadow of theological controversy" when he spoke about the relations between the CPCA and the Holy See, going as far as to expressing a hope that the Pope might visit Beijing.

A "hope" which yesterday Benedict XVI would not comment on. When journalists, who are following the Pope's period of rest among the mountains of Cadore, broached him on the subject, he limited himself to responding: "I cannot speak on the issue at the moment. The situation is quite complicated and now there is not sufficient time."

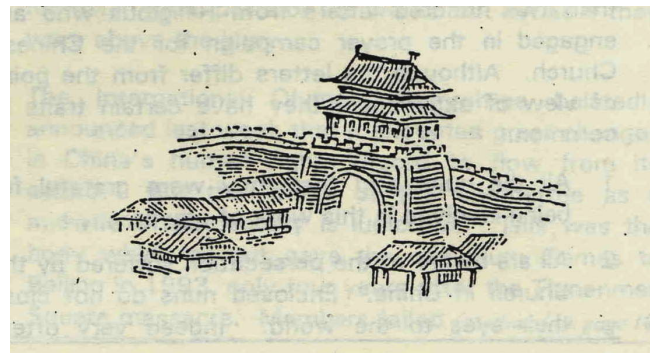
The fact is that there is an ongoing tug of war between the

Vatican and CPCA, despite the open hand of friendship extended to the Chinese government in the form of the Pope's letter.

However, should the government opt to normalize relations with the Holy See for whatever reason, Liu Bainian's head would be the first to roll.

Some 50 years after the People's Republic set up various religious patriotic associations, such entities have become obsolete. According to an official study released earlier this year, their influence is waning, limited to only about a third of the 300 million Chinese who are officially classified as members of religions.

Increasingly they are no longer capable of guaranteeing the much vaunted "social harmony" with which President Hu Jintao wants to build a fairer China and achieve a more balanced development. ♦



262 BAPTISMS ON SUNDAY JULY 1.. DAY AFTER
PAPAL LETTER
Beijing (Agenzia Fides) - www.fides.org
4 July, 2007.

No less than 262 catechumens received the sacraments of Baptism, first Holy Communion and Confirmation at Immaculate Conception parish in Beijing on Sunday 15th July the day after the Papal Letter addressed by Pope Benedict XVI to the Catholics of China was made public. Local sources told Fides, "It was a moving event. The 262 new members of the Catholic family were welcomed by all the parishioners on the most important day of their lives. Some were young workers, others adult intellectuals, whole families including parents and grandparents

The Mass lasted several hours and despite the heat everyone was attentive and took an active part in the celebration. The people who came for the next Mass at 11.00 am, celebrated in English, had to wait for a long time but they participated in the spiritual rejoicing." The newly baptized were overjoyed at becoming members of the Catholic family the day after the publication of Pope Benedict XVI's Papal Letter to the bishops, priests, religious and lay faithful of the Catholic Church in China, a most important event in the history of the Church in China and in the spiritual journey of each individual Chinese Catholic. ♦

BISHOP ZEN DECRIES MISTAKES IN TRANSLATION OF PAPAL LETTER

HONG KONG (SE) Sunday Examiner -
8 July, 2007

Bishop Joseph Zen Ze-kiun of Hong Kong says there are some serious mistakes in the Chinese translation of Pope Benedict's letter to the Catholic faithful in mainland China and the accompanying Explanatory Note, which is part of the actual papal letter.

Bishop Zen notes three instances of error in the translation, the first is in the second to the last paragraph of Section 7, Part 1, where the sentence begins with: "In not a few particular instances, however.." but the succeeding words, "indeed, almost always" are missing.

The bishop also observes that in Section A of the Explanatory Note, at the end of the fourth to the last paragraph, the original phrase, "the legitimatizing of numerous bishops who had been illicitly consecrated confused some sectors of the Catholic community" reads differently in Chinese, saying instead, "disoriented by the numerous illicit ordinations of bishops."

Bishop Zen also notes that there are some inappropriate expressions in the Explanatory Note that are at variance with what Pope Benedict wrote in his letter regarding bishops who, many years ago, were illicitly ordained. The bishop points out that what is written in the letter: "Other pastors, however, under the pressure of particular circumstances, have consented..." (Section 8, paragraph 11) is a neutral expression that avoids making assumptions as compared to the passage in the Explanatory Note which reads: "Others, who were especially concerned with the good of the faithful and with an eye to the future.." (Section A, paragraph 6).



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HK DIOCESE ISSUES REVISED VERSION OF PAPAL LETTER
UCA News - www.ucanews.com - August 3, 2007

The revised text, which contains 20,086 characters including footnotes, was published in the July 15 issue of the Kung Kao Po, the official diocesan Chinese weekly. In addition, 30,000 booklets of the revised text in traditional Chinese characters and another 30,000 in simplified characters were printed for free distribution.

The Vatican officially issued the papal letter on June 30 in the original Italian and in English, French and traditional and simplified Chinese translations. The Chinese versions had 19,763 characters each.

According to Kung Kao Po, the revision used "the Vatican's official Chinese text as the blueprint" and the Italian and English texts. According to Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kiun of Hong Kong, the original Chinese text contains many mistakes. The revision is to "help those (Chinese) who don't know foreign languages to understand the letter's original intentions," he explained to UCA News in mid-July.

The 76-year-old prelate presided over sessions at three parishes here on the evening of July 16, 17 and 18 to explain the papal letter's content and context, and to answer questions. During the July 18 session at St. Patrick's Church, he told 300 people that he had earlier written to the Holy See volunteering to bring experts to Rome "to assist in proofreading the official Chinese version," since "working on an Italian-Chinese translation is not easy." However, he got "no reply" and received the Chinese text only four days prior to its official publication.

Pope Benedict decided to write the letter following a special meeting at the Vatican in January. Cardinal Zen was one of 20 high-level Vatican officials and Chinese bishops at that meeting.

According to Cardinal Zen, the letter has its origins in a document prepared by the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples in 2002. This formed the draft of the papal letter circulated during the January meeting, he said.

He explained that after discussing the Vatican's Chinese translation with his auxiliary, Bishop John Tong Hon, and retired Cardinal Paul Shan Kuo-hsi of Taiwan, both of whom attended the January meeting, all agreed the Chinese translation "is hard to understand and contains mistakes."

On July 3, Cardinal Zen issued a statement pointing out three major errors in the official Chinese text and in the accompanying Explanatory Note. For example, in the second-to-last paragraph of the letter's point No.7, after the words "In not a few particular instances, however", the words "indeed almost always" are missing.

The cardinal spent a week revising the Chinese translation with

experts. One of them, Anthony Lam Suiki, a senior researcher of Hong Kong diocese's Holy Spirit Study Centre, told UCA News on July 19 that the revised text is clearer, more coherent and conceptually more accurate. For instance, Lam said, the revised text now explains more clearly the concept of "state agencies," which the English version describes as "entities that have been imposed as the principal determinants of the life of the Catholic community." (No. 7, paragraph 1).

Cardinal Zen told the July 18 session that the papal letter has great significance for mainland bishops, who are "very lonely and seldom meet with or know what bishops of other dioceses think." He added that the letter could serve as a common reference point when they deal with government officials.

When asked how Hong Kong Catholics can respond to the letter, the cardinal answered: "After reading it several times attentively, one realizes how precious the letter is. Then one will be eager to have more people, especially mainland Catholics read it."

The booklets were distributed to all parishes here. Cardinal Zen expressed his hope that local Catholics would bring copies to their relatives and friends on the mainland.

The diocese will also send copies to the Chinese government, via the central government's Liaison Office here, Cardinal Zen told UCA News.

A mainland bishop told UCA News the Vatican's Chinese translation is acceptable for mainland Catholics who are familiar with Church terminology. However, some government officials told him they have difficulty understanding its "unusual" sentence structure and words. "Such a translation could undermine the Catholic Church's image," added the bishop who requested anonymity. ♦

A mainland bishop told UCA News the Vatican's Chinese translation is acceptable for mainland Catholics who are familiar with Church terminology. However, some government officials told him they have difficulty in understanding its "unusual" sentence structure and words. Such a translation could undermine the Catholic Church's image.

TEXT OF PAPAL LETTER REMOVED FROM CATHOLIC WEBSITES IN MAINLAND CHINA

HONG KONG (UCAN) - Sunday Examiner
8 July, 2007

Catholic websites in mainland China were ordered to taking down Pope Benedict XVI's letter to Catholics in China only, hours after the text was posted following its release.

A few hours after the Vatican issued the letter at 6.00pm on June 30 Hong Kong time (12.00 noon, Rome), UCA New: observed that several mainland Catholic websites had up loaded the simplified Chinese (character) version of the letter.

However, most of those sites, which usually carry news of the Universal Church, the China Church and the Pope, ha(removed the text by the next day. The priest in charge of one website registered with the government said on July ; that he felt helpless because he strongly believes the "China Church websites should publish the Pope's letter."

He pointed out that this was not the first time they had beer told "not to put certain news reports and articles on the Internet, particularly concerning China-Holy See relation, and what Joseph Cardinal Zen Ze-kiun, the bishop of Hong Kong, says." He added that since he had no choice, he re moved the Pope's letter to avoid forced closure or other possible trouble.

Other popular Catholic websites in China were warned to remove or not upload the letter. Some informed their readers on June 29 that the long-awaited letter would be re leased the next evening and they urged them to watch for it as well as related reports. But since then, these websites have carried Vatican news, but nothing on the papal letter.

A Catholic layperson said on July 2, that after browsing the Internet, very few Catholic websites in the mainland seemed to be carrying the papal letter. He concluded that government authorities had acted against the webmasters.

Even so, most mainland Catholic websites did carry a June 30 news report from China's Foreign Ministry in which spokesperson, Qin Gang, responded to a question about the papal letter.

Qin said, "We have taken note of the letter released by the

Pope. China has always stood for the improvement of China-Holy See relationship and made positive efforts for that. China is willing to continue candid and constructive dialogue with the Holy See so as to resolve our differences." He added that "we hope the Holy See takes concrete actions and does not create new barriers." ♦

UNOFFICIAL BISHOP URGES FAITHFUL TO STUDY AND IMPLEMENT THE POPE'S LETTER

Hong Kong (UCAN) Sunday Examiner 29 July, 2007

A bishop with the unofficial (section of the) Church in north-eastern China has issued a pastoral letter that asks his flock to study and act on the letter Pope Benedict XVI recently wrote to the Catholics in China.

Bishop Joseph Wei Jingyi of Qiqihar, Heilongjiang, said the Pope's letter, released on June 30, marks a new milestone in the development of the China Church and his diocese has organized Catholics to study and discuss it.

He told UCA News that his own pastoral letter could help his priests and lay people understand the significance and spirit of the papal document. The bishop's two page pastoral letter was issued on July 12 and sent to parishes in Qiqihar, as well as to neighbouring regions administered by him. The 48-year-old Bishop Wei is concurrently administrator of Harbin diocese and Jiamusi apostolic prefecture, both in Heilungjiang, and Hulun Buir in neighbouring Inner Mongolia.

The bishop asked parish priests to read his pastoral letter to the congregation at Sunday Masses and to consider how each parish should implement it.

In his letter, Bishop Wei admits that the revocation of faculties and pastoral directives previously granted to the unofficial (section of the) Church community is a challenge. He said that though this development is painful, it puts the China Church back on the right track.

Acknowledging the Pope's call for reconciliation between the official and unofficial Church communities, the bishop expressed his wish to reconcile with five priests who rejected his leadership last September. He said he hopes to meet and talk with them "in the new spirit of the papal letter" and "to reexamine the harm we have done to each other."

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to what the Pope said: Catholics can dialogue with the authorities on aspects of Church life that fall within the civil sphere.

The bishop explained that some Church premises in his diocese have been registered since the early 1980s, when religious activities revived in the mainland, but some Catholics perceive such actions as joining the CPCA and recognizing its "independent, autonomous and self-governing" principle.

Bishop Wei's letter insists that such decisions were based on consensus among his priests and in accordance with Catholic doctrine. He is asking his laypeople to understand his goodwill and his difficulties, and to trust the decisions made.

His pastoral letter also says that "we finally know clearly" that Catholics in unofficial communities can be in communication in sacris (sacramental communion) with official Church clergy who are in communion with the Pope.

He says however, that in Qiqihar diocese, official priests are not in communion with him nor as far as he knows, with other bishops recognized by the Holy See. In the official Church, Harbin, Jiamusi and Qiqihar have been merged into Helongjiang diocese, which currently has about 30 priests but no bishop.

According to Bishop Wei, Catholics working in other provinces can now conveniently receive communion, confession and the anointing of the sick from official Church clergy who are in communion with the Pope. He also said he hopes his priests will approach the issue of concelebrating Mass with official clergy with a "positive attitude and the principle of reconciliation."

He urged all priests and laity to read the Pope's letter thoroughly, sum up their feelings and experiences, and engage in discussions to better grasp the Pope's intentions. He also asked them to pray for the unity of the diocese in the next three months, to adore the blessed sacrament and to fast three days per week.

Bishop Wei was ordained coadjutor bishop of Qiqihar in 1995 and succeeded retired Bishop Paul Guo Wenzhi in 2000. Qiqihar now has about 30 unofficial priests serving around 5,000 Catholics from both official and unofficial communities.

**NO PROGRESS ON RIGHTS ONE YEAR
BEFORE OLYMPICS
HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES**

SHADOW COUNTDOWN TO 2008 BEIJING GAMES
Human Rights Watch china.infodoc@online.be
(New York, August 2, 2007)

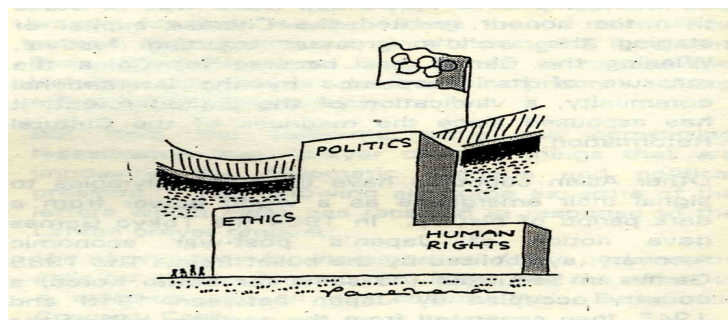
China's dire human rights record and a renewed crackdown on media freedom may spoil the government's hopes of a successful "coming out" party at the Beijing Olympics, which

begin in a year, Human Rights Watch said today.

A year before the August 8, 2008 opening ceremonies for the Beijing Olympics, the Chinese government shows no substantive progress in addressing longstanding human rights concerns. Instead, apparently more worried about political stability, Beijing is tightening its grip on domestic human rights defenders, grassroots activists and media to choke off any possible expressions of dissent ahead of the Games.

"Instead of a pre-Olympic 'Beijing spring' of greater freedom and tolerance of dissent, we are seeing the gagging of dissidents, a crackdown on activists, and attempts to block independent media coverage," said Brad Adams, Asia director at Human Rights Watch. "The government seems afraid that its own citizens will embarrass it by speaking out about political and social problems, but China's leaders apparently don't realise authoritarian crackdowns are even more embarrassing"

China has a well documented history of serious human rights abuses including widespread torture, censorship of the media and internet, controls on religious freedom (and repression of ethnic minorities in Tibet and Xinjiang.



China continues to lead the world in executions. The government classifies the number of people executed as a state secret, but it is believed that China executes many more people than the rest of the world combined each year. Most trials are deeply flawed, as the accused do not often have access to adequate defense counsel, trials are usually closed to the public, evidence is often obtained through torture and the appellate process lacks needed safeguards. China's courts lack independence, as they remain controlled by the government and ruling Chinese Communist party.

But the staging of the Olympics is exacerbating problems of forced evictions, migrant labor rights abuses and the use of house arrests to silence political opponents. The government is continuing its crackdown on lawyers, human rights defenders and activists who dedicate themselves to rule of law and the expose of rights abuses. Fear of citizen activism has led to government obstruction of local activists and grassroots organizations working to stem China's HIV/AIDS epidemic.

China has not ratified the International Covenant on Political and Civil Rights which it signed in 1998. ♦