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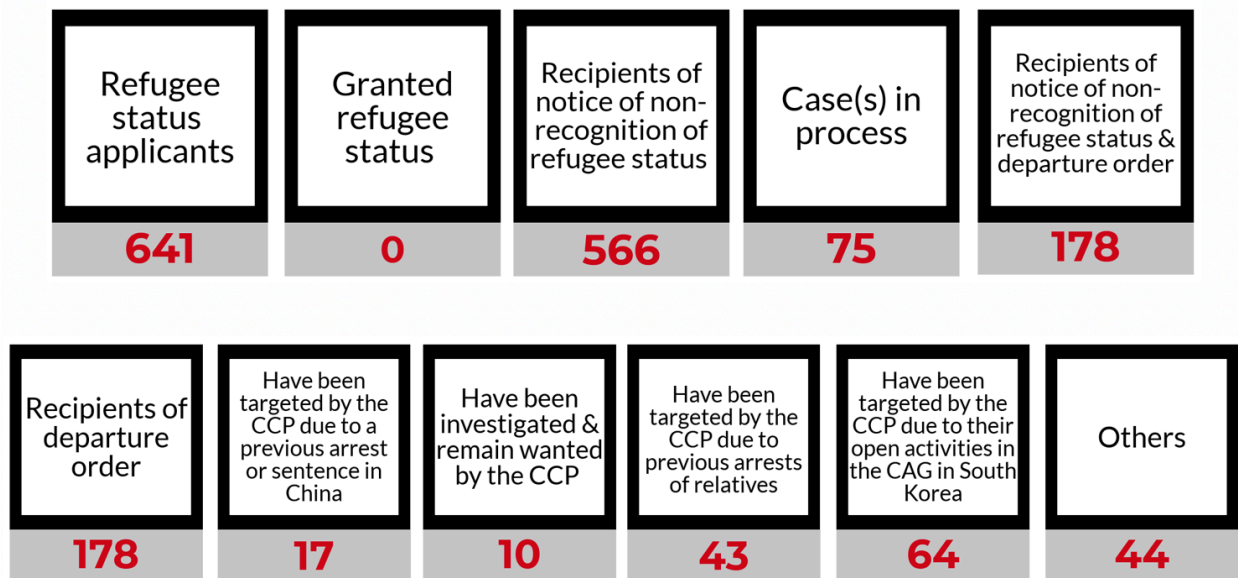
## **Persecution of members of the Church of Almighty God in China** *Behind the Statistics: Stories from China*

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Human Rights Without Frontiers has been working to investigate and track the stories of Church of Almighty God members over the past year or so. We have been closely following their stories of their treatment within China and their asylum processes in other countries. What we have discovered, is that Church of Almighty God members who are denied refugee status and sent back to China face grave circumstances.

*South Korea, as of 14 January 2018:*



The statistics from South Korea alone show that 178 members received a departure order after applying for refugee status.

Of these 178 individuals, seventeen were previously arrested or sentenced in China, and upon their return, have been targeted by Chinese authorities; ten have been investigated and remain wanted by the CCP; forty-three have been targeted by the CCP due to their relations with others who have been arrested; and sixty-four have been targeted due to their open activities related to their church while they were in South Korea.

These statistics, paired with the testimonies of treatment upon return to China clearly display that Church of Almighty God members face strenuous, and sometimes fatal, situations in China, whether they are physically detained by authorities or not.

To both analyse and humanize these statistics, one must examine the testimonies and trends within these testimonies. The following cases highlight three common characteristics of the circumstances for Church of Almighty God members in China.

Those named in the cases of this document are all aliases to protect the individuals.

### ***Church of Almighty God members, 'Wanted' or 'Targeted'***

The following case of Li Qiang illustrates the complications of being 'wanted' and 'targeted' by the CPP. According to the table above, the majority of those who were sent back to China from South Korea were 'targeted' by authorities upon their return.

#### **The case of Li Qiang**

52-year-old Li Qiang (alias), a member of the Church of Almighty God from Xinyang City, Henan Province, was arrested in December 2012, after proselytizing in Xi County with several other members of the church. The group was arrested and taken to the Xi County Public Security Bureau for questioning and finger-printing. During this period, Li Qiang was forced to point his finger to the Bible while being photographed.

Li Qiang was ultimately detained for fifteen days for 'illegal preaching' and 'disturbing social order'.

On the morning of 15<sup>th</sup> July 2017, Li Qiang was listening to recorded sermons alone in his home when three police officers from the Xi County Public Security Bureau knocked at his door. Without an explanation or arrest warrant, they removed Li from his home and took him to the Xi County Public Security Bureau.

There, Li Qiang was questioned about the whereabouts of another CAG member who he had been arrested with back in 2012.

When Li did not answer the questions regarding other church members, the police force stripped him, kicked him, and beat him with sticks and leather boots while he lay on the ground. The police did not subside until Li lay motionless on the ground.

On 18<sup>th</sup> July, Li Qiang was escorted back home by police officers. The police told Li that he was there forth required to report to the bureau every Monday, and warned him that if he was caught professing his religion, they would beat him to death.

On 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2017, Li was walking with his bike when two police officers jumped out of a parked car and rushed towards him. Li decided to run. The police chased him for hours in a nearby wooded-area.

Due to injuries from his chase, Li sought medical help. The doctor suggested that he be hospitalized, but Li worried that if he was required to show his ID, the police could easily find him.

On 27<sup>th</sup> July, Li's uncle arrived at his house to check on Li. He found him lying in bed with a blue face. It is reported that Li was not in his usual mental state, that he was panic-struck and paranoid, telling his uncle that the police were surrounding his house.

Li's family said that Li was barely eating and that he was spending the majority of his time pacing back and forth repeating the word 'police'.

In the morning of 5<sup>th</sup> August 2017, Li Qiang was found dead in his bed by his mother. His family describes that the physical ailments and psychological scars he suffered due to being tortured and constantly chased by the police caused his death.

Li Qiang is only one of many who have been subject to torture, surveillance, and targeting by the Chinese police. The mental strain that comes from this status of being ‘targeted’ is apparent.

The Church of Almighty God members are unable to live in peace whether they are in custody or not. They live in constant fear and avoid situations in which they may have to identify themselves, including for medical treatment.

### ***Forcefully extracting ‘three statements’***

Another frequent element that we have observed during incarceration of Church of Almighty God members is forced repentance.

#### **The case of Bai Rongguang**

Bai Rongguang was arrested in December 2012 in Xinxiang, Henan Province on charges of ‘using an evil cult organization to undermine law enforcement’. While detained, Bai was beaten and subject to brainwashing programmes that encouraged atheism. Through the torture and brainwashing, the authorities were trying to get Bai to sign the ‘three statements’ (a confession, a repentance, and a declaration of breaking off ties). Bai refused, resulting in repeated beatings and starvation. Bai suffered serious mental and physical injuries from the torture he experienced while in custody. He was finally released in December 2016. Five days after his release, his family sent him to get psychiatric help. To date, 47-year old Bai has not been able to take care of himself and live independently.

#### **The case of Zeng Yu**

Zeng Yu was arrested in December 2012 for his belief in the Church of Almighty God. While detained, police tortured him; suspending him from handcuffs, beating him, and forcing him to do manual labour. Zeng Yu was asked to sign the three statements and also to write monthly ‘thought reports’. In one of these thought reports, Zeng Yu had written “All positive things come from God, and all negative things come from Satan”. After submitting this report, the guards beat him with high-voltage electric batons. After his release, Zeng Yu sought medical care and was diagnosed with schizophrenia.

There are many other cases like Bai Rongguang and Zeng Yu, in which torture and brainwashing is used for prisoners to sign Church of Almighty God.

### ***Church of Almighty God members, methods of torture***

For those who are arrested and held in custody, the Chinese police frequently use extreme methods of torture, as is apparent in the next case of Yang Jun and Li Mei.

### **The case of Yang Jun & Li Mei**

On 24 October 2016, two members of the Church of Almighty God from the Pukou District in Jiangsu Province, 46-year-old Yang Jun and his wife, 47-year-old Li Mei (aliases), were arrested by the Chinese police.

At approximately 10:00am, six officers forcefully entered the home of the couple and issued an arrest warrant for Yang and Li. The official charges stated that, “believing Almighty God is a violation of the State law and a disturbance of social security”.

The officers confiscated a laptop, tablet, and two cellphones from the house. They then proceeded to forcefully take Yang and Li to the Tangquan Police Station of the Pukou District in Nanjing City, where they were held in separate cells.

Later that day, officers placed hoods over the heads of the couple and took them by car to a nearby unknown location (it is now believed to have been the basement of the Shixing Hostel).

Here, in this secret location, the couple were separated and interrogated by members of the National Security Group.

Yang was kept in a small room. He was forced to remain standing against the wall and was deprived of sleep. He received three meals per day.

On his third day, Yang noticed a strange taste in his breakfast and immediately felt groggy. Soon after, his vision went blurry and he fell partially unconscious.

Yang Jun was then interrogated by four policemen who asked him for information about the church. When he refused to respond, the police beat him.

Over the following days, Yang Jun continued to eat the food provided, but often suffered hallucinations, blurred visions, and uncontrolled vocalizations. The torture continued, he was beaten by officers and subjected to freezing temperatures; Yang Jun reports being forced to strip naked and stand in front of an air conditioner while guards stood by and laughed.

In a nearby room, Li Mei, Yang Jun’s wife, suffered a similar fate.

For the first two days she was forced to remain standing and was not allowed to sleep. She was repeatedly asked questions about the church.

Following consumption of the food provided, Li Mei found herself unable to control her speech or actions, as if she were intoxicated. At one point she reportedly exclaimed ‘Almighty God’, which resulted in officers beating her until she fell unconscious.

For Li Mei, the beatings, hallucinations, and symptoms of intoxication continued until the 2<sup>nd</sup> of November.

Li Mei’s physical state deteriorated to the point that the National Security Group sought medical help. After a visit to the Pukou Hospital, a doctor suggested that she be hospitalized. The officer who had escorted her to the hospital, denied her entry – seemingly for the reason that if she died, the detention centre would be deemed responsible for her death.

The medical report listed that Li Mei was suffering from a lung infection, acute coronary syndrome, and acute muscular injury amongst others.

Li Mei's health further deteriorated without proper medical attention. Her condition was apparently life-threatening, and the officers decided to return her to the hospital. The medical staff however, required the signature of a family member. The police therefore released both Yang Jun and Li Mei.

A medical examination of Yang Jun, reportedly showed that he had injuries to his scapula ligament, a broken rib, and general bruising and swelling throughout his body.

The couple reported that they had physically fully recovered in February 2017. They, still however remain under the surveillance of authorities.

Li Mei reports that her hospitalization resulted in a 3,800 RMB (approximately 485 Euro) bill.

The means of torture that the authorities in China have used against the Church of Almighty God members are particularly gruesome. The use of physical torture, deemed illegal in international law, has been widely documented amongst the cases we've collected.

Human Rights Without Frontiers has detailed a number of cases such as these and has found that Church of Almighty God members in China face severe consequences for practicing their religion.

Drawing conclusions, the following are some developing trends in treatment:

- Church of Almighty God members are arrested in vast numbers;
- Their charges, if any are even announced, are usually along the lines of 'endangering social stability', 'subverting the government', or 'using an evil cult to undermine law enforcement';
- Those detained may be subject to extreme forms of torture, including:
  - Forced drugging/intoxication
  - Violent interrogations regarding the Church and/or other members of the church
  - Severe beatings
  - Forced confessions
  - Sleep deprivation
  - The use of 'torture racks' in which the individual has to sit on a sharp surface
  - Brainwashing programmes
- Forced renouncement of faith
- No internal investigation regarding allegations of torture against officers

From our cases, we are also aware that arrest upon return is likely. Recently, three members of the Church of Almighty God were arrested immediately upon their return to China from South Korea.

**Mr. Li ZhenYuan** was arrested by police officers once he went through the security check at Yanji Airport in China on May 18, 2015.

**Mr. Han Feng** returned to China seeking medical treatment for his serious heart disease complications in March 2017. He had been monitored for two months before being arrested by the police in Hubei Province when he showed his ID document during a standard procedure. He was detained and 'brainwashed' for a span of two months before being released. Since his release, he remains under police surveillance.

**Ms. Yan Ru** was immediately arrested by the Chinese police upon her return to China from the Church of Almighty God in South Korea on June 2017.

We have collected the information of almost four-hundred arrested and imprisoned members of Church of Almighty God in China. Unfortunately, based on our information, we can assume that the individuals who are denied asylum status and are returned to China, will certainly face arrest and subsequent torture.