

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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UA 26/92 "Disappearance"/legal concern

24 January 1992

People's Republic of China:

Bishop Paul Li Zhenrong
Wang Gensheng

Paul Li Zhenrong, a 72 year-old Roman Catholic bishop from Hebei province in north China, was reportedly arrested by police on 11 December 1991 in a hospital in Tianjin after undergoing an operation for cancer a few days earlier. An official Chinese news agency denied on 31 December 1991 that he had been "arrested", although unofficial Catholic sources have since confirmed his arrest and given specific details about it. There has been no news of Bishop Li since 11 December 1991. It is believed that he is being detained for questioning, although he may not have been formally charged.

Li Zhenrong has reportedly been wanted by police since he attended an unofficial Chinese Bishops Conference held in November 1989 by Roman Catholic prelates loyal to the Vatican. Shortly after it took place, the conference was declared an "illegal organisation" by the authorities and many of those involved were subsequently arrested. Li Zhenrong reportedly went into hiding after the conference. Born in 1919, he was ordained a priest in 1951 and clandestinely consecrated Bishop of Xianxian, in Hebei province, in 1983.

On 22 November 1991, Bishop Li was hospitalized under the name of Li Mu at Tianjin No 2 hospital to undergo surgery for stomach cancer. The operation took place on 4 December 1991. On 8 December, his hospital bed was reportedly surrounded by plainclothes police from Cang Zhou county Public Security Bureau (Hebei province). They reportedly arrested him at the hospital in the morning of 11 December, together with Wang Gensheng, a seminarian from Xianxian who had temporarily taken care of the bishop. According to unofficial sources, two other Catholics who had helped or taken care of Bishop Li disappeared in Tianjin on 8 December, a third had his house searched by police, and a doctor from Tianjin No 2 hospital who knew Bishop Li was summoned by Tianjin police for questioning on the same day.

On 31 December the official news agency China News Service in Beijing cited an unidentified "authoritative source" as saying that Li Zhenrong had never been arrested. However, there has been no official confirmation of this report nor any official information about Li Zhenrong's whereabouts and legal status.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Scores of Catholic priests and bishops who remain loyal to the Vatican and refuse to join the government-sponsored Catholic Patriotic Association have been arrested in China in the past few years. The crackdown against independent religious groups - particularly those suspected of having foreign connections - has intensified in

the past few months and arrests of independent religious leaders have been carried out in various provinces.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Telegrams/telexes/faxes/airmail letters:

- expressing deep concern about reports that Bishop Li Zhenrong of Xianxian (Hebei) was arrested in Tianjin No 2 hospital by officers from Cang Zhou Public Security Bureau on 11 December 1991, shortly after he had undergone an operation, and that he has been missing since then;

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- urging the authorities to investigate these reports and disclose Li Zhenrong's whereabouts and legal status and, should he be detained or restricted in any way, to release him immediately and unconditionally;

- urging the authorities to clarify the whereabouts and legal status of the people who reportedly "disappeared" in connection with Li Zhenrong's arrest, including that of seminarian Wang Gensheng who was reportedly arrested by Cangzhou police on 11 December 1991 in Tianjin.

APPEALS TO:

1) Minister of Public Security of the People's Republic of China:

TAO Siju Buzhang

Your Excellency

Gong'anbu

14 Dongchang'anlu

Beijingshi 100741

People's Republic of China

Faxes: + 86 1 421 4222

2) Mayor of Tianjin City:

NIE Bichu Shizhang

Dear Mayor

Tianjinshi Renmin Zhengfu

167 Dagulu, Hepingqu

Tianjinshi 300040

People's Republic of China

Telexes: 23242 TJMPG CN (Please forward to NIE Bichu Shizhang)

3) Governor of Hebei Province:

CHENG Weigao Shengzhang

Dear Governor

Hebeisheng Renmin Zhengfu

10 Weiming Jie

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Hebeisheng

People's Republic of China

Telegrams: CHENG Weigao Shengzhang, Hebeisheng Renmin Zhengfu, Shijiazhuangshi, China

Telexes: 26229 HBFOE CN or 26323 SHMPG CN

(Please forward to Governor CHENG Weigao)

COPIES TO:

The Director of the State Council Bureau of Religious Affairs:

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and to diplomatic representatives of the People's Republic of China in your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 6 March 1992.