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# *amnesty international*

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## @Christians Imprisoned in China

### Appeal for Members of the "Jesus Family" Jailed in Shandong Province

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According to Protestant sources in Hong Kong, 37 Chinese Christians from a Protestant community called the Jesus Family were arrested in Shandong province last year and sentenced to terms of imprisonment or re-education through labour for their involvement in peaceful religious activities<sup>1</sup>.

In September 1992, Zheng Yunsu, the leader of a Jesus Family community in Weishan county, Shandong province, was sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment, the sources said. Four of his sons were reportedly sentenced to terms of imprisonment ranging from five to nine years and 32 other community leaders received sentences of three years' reeducation through labour".

The Jesus Family is an evangelist community which is not recognized by the government-sanctioned Protestant church. According to Protestant sources in Hong Kong, the community, founded in the 1920s, is largely made up of poor peasants who live a simple, communal life. It was banned by the government in 1952 and its members suffered persecution for many years. During the Cultural Revolution many Jesus Family leaders were imprisoned and church buildings were confiscated. Jesus Family communities reappeared in the late 1970s and since then have been subjected to harrassment by the authorities.

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<sup>1</sup> See *Bridge*, No.59, May-June 1993, pp.13-19

Before the 1992 arrests, the town of Duoyigou in Weishan county, in the south of Shandong province, was the site of an expanding Jesus Family community which was founded in 1980 by Zheng Yunsu. Now aged in his 60s, Zheng Yunsu founded the community after being released from long-term imprisonment during the Cultural Revolution. The Duoyigou community comprised about sixty people who lived in seven thatched houses, raising money by making and selling shoes, and raising long-haired rabbits. The Duoyigou community church had attracted hundreds of followers to its monthly communion service.

Since its formation, the church in Duoyigou has been searched and fined by the authorities and its leaders have reportedly been harassed and ill-treated by the police on several occasions. In early 1992 the congregation reportedly had to pay a fine of 10,000yuan (US\$1,750) to keep their church open after they had been threatened with closure by the authorities.

According to Amnesty International's source, Zheng Yunsu was arrested in Jinan in May 1992 and, in June, the Duoyigou church was raided by the Public Security Bureau (police) during the monthly communion service. The church was reportedly torn down by a bull-dozer and everything inside the church was taken away by police. Zheng Yunsu's four sons, all members of the Jesus Family, were arrested along with 32 other church leaders.

Zheng Yunsu was reportedly tried in Hanzhuang town, Shandong province, in September 1992 and sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment. It is believed that he is being held at the Shengjian Motorcycle Factory, a prison near Jinan city.

Zheng Yunsu's sons, Zheng Jiping and Zheng Jike, were both sentenced to nine years of imprisonment. Two other sons received sentences of five and six years' imprisonment. It is not known where any of Zheng Yunsu's sons are being detained. The other 32 members of the Jesus Family were taken to Hanzhuang town where they received three-year sentences of "reeducation through labour", an administrative punishment imposed without charge or trial. They are believed to be imprisoned near Zaozhuang city, Shandong province.

The exact charges brought against the Christians are not known. However, according to Protestant sources in Hong Kong, they were accused of being "swindlers" (900yuan [US\$160] was found by the public security bureau when they searched Duoyigou village) and of "disturbing public order". According to sources, this second charge could relate to the fact that the Duoyigou church building had nine loudspeakers mounted outside to ensure that the large congregation could hear the service. It is possible that some of the Christians have been charged under articles of China's Criminal Law which provide for crimes of "disturbing social order". Amnesty International has no further details about their trials but it is concerned that the 37 Christians are reported to have been jailed for the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of religion.

Other incidences of harassment of members of the Jesus Family have been reported in other areas. For example, a Jesus Family house-church leader called Feng, from Pingyao town, Shaanxi province, has been reportedly detained on several occasions by the police

without being charged and then released. In early 1993, Public Security Bureau officers reportedly broke in to a meeting of about 300 Christians in Pingyao town, handcuffed Feng and took him to a waiting police car. They released him when the congregation protested by holding up their hands and indicating that they also wanted to be handcuffed, but police warned the congregation not to attend any more "illegal" meetings. In a separate incident in 1993, a female member of the same Jesus Family community in Pingyao was arrested and detained, but was released after refusing to eat for five days. The police were reportedly worried that she might die in detention.

Many other incidents of harassment, arrest and ill-treatment of Christians have been reported in various provinces during the past year. For further information about such incidents, see Amnesty International's reports *China: Update on Torture* (ASA 17/12/93, March 1993), *China: Gross Violations of Human Rights Continue* (Weekly Update of 27 May 1993, ASA 17/WU 05/93), *Urgent Actions on Lai Manping and other Christians* (ASA 17/18/93, 19 May 1993, and ASA 17/25/93, 18 June 1993), *Persecution of Christians in China: Appeal for Zhang Lezhi, Yan Peizhi and Xu Zhihe* (ASA 17/23/93, June 1993).

*Please send telexes/express or airmail letters in English, Chinese or your own language:*

- ◆ **Expressing concern that Zheng Yunsu, four of his sons, and over 30 other Christians of Duoyigou town, Weishan county, Shandong province, are reported to have been sentenced in September 1992 to terms of imprisonment or reeducation through labour ranging from three to 12 years for their involvement in peaceful religious activities. Urge the authorities to disclose information about their trials and whereabouts and to ensure that they are released unconditionally if they have not been charged with recognizably criminal offenses in accordance with international human rights standards;**
  
- ◆ **Express concern that Christian groups in various areas have been subjected to harassment by police and periods of detention for their involvement in peaceful religious activities during the past year. Urge that they be granted freedom of religion as guaranteed by international human rights standards and in Article 36 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of China (1982).**

*Please send appeals to:*

Premier of the People's Republic of China

**Li Peng** Zongli

Guowuyuan

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People's Republic of China

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**(via Ministry of Foreign Affairs)**

**Telegram: Premier Li Peng, Beijing, China**

**Salutation: Your Excellency**

Director of the Shandong Provincial Department of Justice

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**Telegram: Director of the Provincial Department of Justice Jiang Renbao, Jinan, Shandong Province, China**

Director of the Shandong Nationalities Affairs Commission Division of Religious Affairs

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