

PUBLIC

AI Index: ASA 17/062/2004

14 December 2004

UA 334/04

Fear of ill-treatment or torture/health concern

PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA Zhang Rongliang (m), aged 53, religious leader

Prominent underground church leader Zhang Rongliang was detained by police on 1 December in Henan Province. He is at risk of torture. He is diabetic, and there are concerns that he may not receive the medication or treatment he needs, and that his condition will make him less able to withstand harsh treatment in custody.

Zhang Rongliang the leader of the China for Christ Church, one of the largest "house church" networks in China, and also of the Protestant Fangcheng Mother Church. He was detained in Xuzhai village, where he lives, in Zhengzhou city. According to a church member, the police searched every household in the village and confiscated Christian DVDs, other materials and photos revealing Zhang's "connections with foreigners and foreign agencies that showed Zhang had contacted organisations overseas. Communicating with people overseas can be grounds for imprisonment in China. His wife and child are in hiding.

Zhang Rongliang has already been imprisoned five times for his beliefs, for a total of 12 years, during which he was severely tortured. He is the co-author of *House Churches of China – Confession of Faith and Declaration* and he has been mentioned in a number of international media reports on religion in China. This puts him at greater risk of arrest and torture.

The police also raided at least three unofficial "house" churches in nearby Fangcheng county, at around the time they detained Zhang Rongliang.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Each of the five officially recognised religions in China (Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Protestantism and Catholicism) is administered by a government organization, which controls places of worship, monitors religious activity, implements government policy and ensures that religious practice in China is free of any foreign domination. People who wish to practice a religion can only do so at a state-sanctioned church, mosque or temple. This rigid political control has driven many Christian churches underground: members of these churches meet in private houses rather than state-sanctioned church buildings.

People who practice their religion outside government controls are at serious risk of being detained, and sentenced to prison terms. They are at particular risk of torture while they are in custody awaiting trial. A crackdown on underground churches has been underway since March 2003, and the authorities have demolished many unauthorised places of worship used by Protestants and Catholics.

In September more than 100 pastors of "underground" churches from Kaifeng city, Henan province were detained, 11 of whom are now serving up to three years' "re-education through labour". They were accused of leading an "evil cult" and have reportedly been severely beaten.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language:

- expressing concern for Zhang Rongliang, detained on 1 December in Henan Province, asking why he has been detained and urging that he be released immediately and unconditionally unless he is to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence;
- urging that he be properly treated in custody, and not tortured or ill-treated;

- urging the authorities to give him access to his family, lawyers of his choosing, and any medical attention he may require;
- expressing concern that Zhang Rongliang appears to be one of many people arbitrarily detained and tortured simply for exercising their right to freedom of religion.

APPEALS TO:

Governor of the Henan Provincial People's Government

LI Chengyu Shengzhang
Henansheng Renmin Zhengfu
10 Weierlu
Zhengzhoushi, Henansheng
People's Republic of China
Salutation: Dear Governor

Director of the Henan Provincial Department of Justice

GUO Junfeng Tingzhang
Sifating
8 Jingsilu
Zhengzhoushi 450003
Henansheng
People's Republic of China
Salutation: Dear Director

COPIES TO:

Director of the State Bureau of Religious Affairs
Ye Xiaowen
Guowuyuan Zongjiao Shiwuju
Guowuyuan
22 Xianmen Dajie
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People's Republic of China
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and to diplomatic representatives of the People's Republic of China accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 25 January 2005.