

About China Voices

Welcome to China Voices, a CSW quarterly update on freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) in China. All cases cited have either been published publicly or reported through CSW sources. For feedback or for further information, please contact admin@csw.org.uk.

Overview

This quarter saw the publication of [General Briefing: China](#), which provides an overview of changes in China's legal framework, highlights key issues and recent trends relating to FoRB, and provides recommendations to the UK Government to advocate on key FoRB issues.

On 5 December 2024, Lord Alton was appointed as Chair of the Joint Committee on Human Rights, a committee comprising members of the House of Commons and the House of Lords in the UK. Upon his appointment, he secured a debate in the House of Lords on human rights and security in China on 19 December 2024.

In November 2024, the landmark national security trial in Hong Kong led to 45 pro-democracy leaders receiving prison sentences ranging from four years and two months to up to ten years. In addition, the 76 year-old pro-democracy media tycoon, Jimmy Lai, who faces two counts of conspiring to collude with foreign forces under Beijing's security law, stood trial for the first time on 20 November 2024 since his arrest in 2020.

The Chinese government continued to use charges of 'illegal gatherings' and 'fraud' to detain leaders of unregistered churches. Sinicisation of religions continues to intensify.

The initial agreement signed on 22 September 2018 between Vatican and China on the appointment of bishops has been renewed for the third time, this time for four years on 22 October 2024, despite the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) repeated violation

of the terms of the agreement by appointing bishops without the approval of the Pope.

Part 1 – Law & Policy

[Joint NGOs Statement - 2nd Anniversary of the OHCHR Assessment on Atrocities in the Uyghur Region](#)

A number of human rights organisations published a joint statement on the Safeguard Defenders website on 24 August 2024. The statement aims to draw attention to the Chinese government's continuous widespread and systematic abuses across the Uyghur region, and the documented public declarations of senior government officials' intent to eradicate Uyghur culture, faith, and language.

[Vatican and China extend deal over Catholic bishop appointments](#)

On 22 October 2024 China and the Vatican renewed their non-disclosed agreement on the appointment of Catholic Bishops, this time for four years, the third renewal since the agreement was concluded in 2018.

While the Chinese government portrayed that the agreement seeks to unify the leadership between the China's state-sanctioned Catholic Patriotic Association and the underground church loyal to the Vatican, key concerns surrounding this agreement include its secret and still undisclosed text, and that it gives an atheistic and repressive CCP regime control over church affairs.

[Hong Kong 47: Top pro-democracy leaders jailed for subversion](#)

On 19 November 2024, in a watershed moment, the Hong Kong court has sentenced 45 pro-democracy leaders to years in jail for subversion, under the controversial national security law. The sentences ranged from four years and two months to ten years in prison, with the longest handed to Benny Tai, who is accused of being the 'mastermind' behind the

democrats' alleged plans to veto government budgets and force the resignation of the chief executive in July 2020.

The crackdown continued when the Secretary for Security Chris Tang invoked his powers under the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance, known as Article 23, and imposed a series of [special orders against seven overseas activists](#) on 24 December 2024.

Part 2 – Sinicisation of religions

[Officials in China intensify 'Sinicisation' of religion](#)

At a 'historic' high-level gathering on 26 June 2024, religious leaders were instructed by the Chinese government to put the 'Two Establishes' and 'Two Safeguards' at the centre of their sermons and activities.

'Sinicisation' has been clarified many times, and by Xi Jinping himself, that it does not mean adapting religion to Chinese culture and traditions but making religions subservient to the Chinese Community Party's ideology.

Part 3 – Fraud & Illegal Gathering: 'crime' against house churches

[Gatherings banned in Fengqing County](#)

CSW sources reported that in August 2024, a woman named Fan, who invited around 20 church members to her home for bible reading and to pray for her sick husband, was accused of 'illegal gathering.' She was made to sign a guarantee letter and was fined 5,000 yuan. According to the source, in the past ten years, half of the churches in Fengqing County have been demolished, and villages were told that any gathering of more than four people would be deemed illegal.

[Raid of Zion Church services in Beijing for illegal gathering](#)

In October 2024, the police, together with multiple departments in Beijing's Chaoyang District, launched a surprise raid on a number of Sunday service gatherings in the district simultaneously, and forcibly took away 12 members of Zion Church, including Elder Qin Guoliang, who was charged with 'illegal gathering' and detained for 14 days.

On a separate occasion, on 7 July 2024, while a group of Christians from Zion Church were gathering in Beijing Haidian District, the meeting was interrupted by 20 officials from different departments, who checked on their identities, specifically targeting young people and university students. Elder Chai Qing, 60, and two 27-year-old workers were detained for 14 days while other students were subsequently called for questioning by the authorities.

[Raid on Early Rain Covenant Church for illegal gathering](#)

On the sixth anniversary of the infamous [129 Crackdown](#) on Chengdu Early Rain Covenant Church, while Early Rain Covenant held a day of fasting and prayer, Deputy Deacon Zeng Qingtao, Preacher Yan Hong, and Elder Li Yingqiang and his family of four, were seized from their homes at different times during the day by police officers and the Chengdu Wuhou District Political Security Bureau on charges of engaging in an 'illegal gathering'.

[Human rights lawyers and religious leaders decry systematic accusations of 'fraud' against unregistered churches](#)

Since the CCP updated the Regulations on Religious Affairs Department in 2018 to date, 13 unregistered churches, including Linfen Covenant Home Church, have been accused of 'fraud' on the basis that the churches are not registered, so their collection of offerings constitutes fraud. Church leaders convicted of these charges could face a sentence of more than ten years in prison.

CSW everyone
free to believe

On 1 December 2024 a group of lawyers, human rights activists and religious leaders released an open statement on X (formerly Twitter), decrying the Chinese government's systematic violation of freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) by accusing house churches that are not registered under the government of being illegal, and declaring that offerings made to these churches are therefore fraudulent.

Part 4 – Human Right Defenders

[Re-detention of activist Zhang Zhan highlights Beijing's intolerance of dissent](#)

Christian human rights defender Zhang Zhan, who was released from prison on 13 May 2024 after completing a four-year prison sentence for 'picking quarrels and provoking trouble,' was detained once again in August 2024. No official reason has been given for her recent detention, but there is speculation she was targeted because she continued to advocate for human rights following her release.

[Guiyang Renai Church: Verdict Against Elder Zhang Chunlei Confirmed on Appeal](#)

[Elder Zhang Chunlei](#) of Guiyang Renai Reformed Church was sentenced to a total of five years in prison by the Guiyang Intermediate People's Court in Guizhou Province, China, on 24 July 2024 on charges of 'inciting subversion of state power', and 'fraud.'

Elder Zhang submitted an appeal on the judgement. His family was only informed in December 2024 that on 25 October 2024, the Guizhou Provincial High Court had upheld the Guiyang Intermediate Court's judgment.