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China's Churches Face Renewed Government Persecution

The Chinese government has increased its efforts to eradicate the country's growing underground church movement, a Chinese watchdog group said in a recent report. [China Aid](#), which monitors instances of government persecution of the church in China, reported a 42-percent increase in government harassment of Christians and unauthorized places of worship from 2011 to 2012. In its study the Texas-based group, headed by former Chinese house church pastor Bob Fu, documented 132 cases of government persecution involving 4,919 persons in 2012, and noted a 125-percent jump in the number of people arrested and sentenced for involvement in unauthorized Christian worship over the previous year.



China Aid noted that last year the Chinese communist government launched a focused program to wipe out the underground church movement, which competes with the official [Three-Self Patriotic Movement](#), a closely monitored and government approved Protestant church in the country. Among the strategies the government is using, Fu explained, is forcibly banning and closing down worship places that have been operating for years, pressuring churches to join the official "Three-Self" church system, detaining church leaders and sending them to labor camps, and cracking down on Christian outreach to students.

Experts say the government fears the rise of any movement that could gain political clout among large numbers of people in the country. Fu told [Fox News](#) that over the past year the government has secretly investigated house churches, creating files on leaders and members, and has followed up by closing down churches using a variety of methods.

"Instead of using law enforcement officials directly to attack churches," Fu told Fox, "last year we found they used a softer approach. They used utility companies, service committees, and neighborhood committees to terminate contracts with rental facilities and cut off electricity and water [to the churches]."

[The New American](#) has reported on one particularly overt example of the crackdown, when the Chinese government attacked Beijing's Shouwang Church during Easter season in 2011, detaining several hundred of its members and making it impossible for the congregation to continue meeting in its customary worship location.

In the case of the Shouwang Church, the China Aid report noted, "landlords were pressured to terminate lease agreements with church members, church members who had purchased real estate were unable to take possession of them, church leaders were placed under house arrest, and church members were evicted — all of which was done to make it impossible for the house church to operate normally so that it would eventually disband."

Shouwang Church leaders said that last year members of the congregation were detained 1,600 times, at least 60 members were evicted from their homes, and nearly a dozen lost their jobs because they



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attended the church's outdoor worship services, where the church was forced to meet after it lost its building. Others were sent back to their hometowns, and some were confined to their homes during weekend services.

The report documented a total of 62 cases of government persecution of Christians in Beijing, the highest throughout the country, impacting nearly 1,000 believers, followed by 11 cases in Xinjiang in northwest China that affected almost 400 Christians. Fu estimated that China has some 80 million Christians, who have grown accustomed to the government's ongoing harassment. "It has almost become routine and that's the danger," Fu told Fox. "And when the Chinese government purposefully uses this kind of soft approach, the foreign media in Beijing won't be able to report it and the government is essentially taking advantage of the passive obedience by the church folks. If it happened to other social groups, there would be large demonstrations."

The China Aid report detailed the three-pronged government attack against the church, designed to force congregations either to register with the government or to disband. In the first phase, which began in January 2012, the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) began secretly investigating house churches across the country, creating files on their members and leaders. This has been followed by an ongoing crackdown on churches, continuing into 2013, which includes pressuring unauthorized churches to join the Three-Self Patriotic Movement and re-label themselves patriotic "house gatherings" — with the term "house church" being outlawed. While a few house churches have caved in to the pressure and registered with the Three-Self movement, most have resisted, which has resulted in more oppressive persecution.

The third phase of the crackdown is expected to commence in full around 2015 and run for the next 10 years, with the government shutting down churches that have not come under the Three-Self umbrella. [Morning Star News](#), which reports on Christian persecution around the world, noted several examples of the Chinese government's ongoing crackdown on churches and pastors. "In February 2012, two Christians in Yulin, Shaanxi Province, were sent to a labor camp on charges of being a cult," the news site recalled. "In April, seven leaders of a house church in Pingdingshan, Henan province, were arrested and tried on this charge. In August, nine Christians from Ulanhot, Inner Mongolia, were placed under administrative detention for engaging in evangelism while providing free medical services, and two of them were sentenced to two years of re-education-through-labor."

China Aid's Bob Fu noted that while the government campaign to eradicate churches has targeted some of the larger congregations, China's small house churches continue to proliferate "like dandelions in springtime." He said that those pursuing the effort are ignorant of Scripture and the divine power that undergirds China's Christians. "House churches will not be eradicated," he said. "What will be eradicated are any ideology and forces that try to resist the truth of Christ."

He emphasized that "house churches in China put their trust neither in potentates nor power, much less in man's wisdom and intellect. Rather, they trust in the omnipotence of the Holy Spirit and the truth of Jesus Christ. Nothing can separate us from the love of God, neither persecution or freedom, nor poverty or wealth." He added that in the years to come, "China's churches will face new challenges, and they will continue to renew people's hearts, influence society, and glorify the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ."



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