

Submission to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

The urgency of this religious freedom submission cannot be overstated. This petition seeks the immediate release and return of two underground Catholic bishops from Hebei Province in the People's Republic of China. The force of the UN global community is needed to protest and seek their release from illegal detention and confinement. The detention of these religious leaders violates the tenets of UN Sustainable Development 16¹ which seeks to attain “*hope for sustainable development without peace, stability, human rights and effective governance, based on the rule of law.*”²

Introduction

The illegal arrest and detention of two underground Catholic bishops from Hebei Province is the subject of this petition. Bishop James Su Zhimin³ of Baoding, now 88 years old, has been detained for nearly 25 years and his whereabouts and condition are unknown. Additionally, this petition also seeks the release of another Hebei Province underground Catholic prelate, Bishop Cui Tai of Xuanhua,⁴ age 69. Bishop Augustine Cui Tai has not been seen since April of 2018. Before his disappearance, Bishop Cui Tai had been repeatedly arrested, detained, and sent to labor camps over the years by the government authorities.⁵

Bishop James Su Zhimin

Bishop Su Zhimin has been detained since 1996. He served as an unregistered Bishop in the city of Baoding in the Chinese province of Hebei. In 1996, the bishop was arrested during a religious procession for conducted unregistered religious activities. In November of 2003, his family discovered him by chance at a Baoding hospital, surrounded by police and public security. He has not been seen since then. Despite numerous international inquiries, Bishop Su Zhimin has not been heard from.⁶

¹<https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals/goal-16-peace-justice-and-strong-institutions.html>

² *Ibid.*

³<https://humanrightscommission.house.gov/defending-freedom-project/prisoners-by-country/China/Bishop%20James%20Su%20Zhimin>

⁴<https://www.ucanews.com/news/chinese-bishop-back-in-detention-vicar-general-in-custody/84852>

⁵<https://www.ucanews.com/news/chinese-bishop-back-in-detention-vicar-general-in-custody/84852>

⁶<https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/after-vatican-china-deal-chinese-bishop-imprisoned-for-23-years-is-not-yet-released-87066>

Before being arrested in 1996, Bishop Su Zhimin was detained off and on for 26 years in various prisons or in forced labor camps. He has repeatedly refused to join the communist run Patriotic Catholic Association, the national Chinese Catholic Church which has detached themselves from the authority of the Vatican. This is his alleged crime. At his advanced age and the length of his illegal incarceration, Bishop James Su Zhimin is in grave danger.⁷ He should be released on humanitarian grounds by Chinese communist government officials.

Bishop Cui Tai

In February of 2018, Bishop Augustin Cui Tai of Xuanhua in Hebei Province disappeared and is believed to be in government custody. At the time of his disappearance, the bishop was staying at his sister's house when government forces arrested him.⁸ Bishop Cui Tai⁹ is in bad health and should be released immediately. Since 1993, the bishop has been repeatedly subject to detention, house arrest or sent to labor camps by the authorities for preaching or holding "illegal religious assemblies." [subject to detention](#) and house arrest or sent to labor camps by authorities for illegally preaching or holding illegal religious assemblies. His crime, like that of Bishop Su Zhimin is that he refuses to join the Communist founded and run Patriotic Catholic Church.

The illegal pattern of harassment, abduction, indoctrination, and detention of Catholic underground bishops by the Chinese government authorities violates basic religious freedom principles.¹⁰ In Articles 2 and 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the right of conscience and religious freedom are enshrined and protected.¹¹

While the total number of Catholic priests and bishops who are subjected to ongoing CCP governmental harassment cannot be gauged, the chilling effect on overall religious freedom is palpable. Under the Catechism of the Catholic Church, baptized Catholics need the presence and participation of clergy to perform the obligatory religious practice of Holy Mass, the seven sacraments, and spiritual direction.¹² The sacred and ministerial function of the clergy and hierarchy serve as an integral part of the Catholic faith preordained and handed down by Jesus Christ, the founder of His Church on earth.¹³

⁷<https://humanrightscommission.house.gov/defending-freedom-project/prisoners-by-country/China/Bishop%20James%20Su%20Zhimin>

⁸<https://www.ucanews.com/news/vatican-approved-bishop-detained-for-a-fourth-time-in-china/79300>

⁹<https://www.ucanews.com/news/church-group-calls-for-release-of-sick-chinese-bishop/82446>

¹⁰<https://bitterwinter.org/bishop-shao-zhumin-once-again-taken-in-for-indoctrination/>

¹¹<https://bitterwinter.org/bishop-shao-zhumin-once-again-taken-in-for-indoctrination/>

¹²http://www.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p2s2c3a6.htm

¹³ Ibid., Article 6

One of the most insidious tactics to undermine and eradicate religion is to deny the faithful the ministry, service and blessings of its clergy. These innocent men are prisoners of conscience, moreover, prisoners of religious freedom. They humbly and unselfishly dedicated their life to Jesus Christ and the Catholic Church so that souls may be saved and enter into eternal life. The brutal and illegal actions of the communist government robs the Catholic faithful of their clergy, and denies these prelates of their right and livelihood to religious freedom. This insidious governmental action demands international condemnation.

If the right to religious freedom means anything, it demands that those who selflessly dedicate their lives to serve their congregation are entitled to pursue without hindrance by illegal governmental persecution. The priesthood is a lofty and sacred service to humanity. This ministry has existed since ancient times. In the words of the Catechism of the Catholic Church:

*“The ministerial priesthood has the task not only of representing Christ - Head of the Church - before the assembly of the faithful, but also of acting in the name of the whole Church when presenting to God the prayer of the Church, and above all when offering the Eucharistic sacrifice.”*¹⁴

The woeful history of modern China is fraught with the martyrdom of its bishops at the hands of the Chinese Communist Party. In 1952, Bishop Francis X. Ford of Kaying¹⁵ was arrested and murdered in prison by the Chinese communist government. Bishop Ford was the first American Bishop martyred in China. He famously expressed his life’s purpose as a Chinese missionary in 1937, *“we are here in China to present a Gospel.”*¹⁶ Ford’s simple, yet stirring words, which captured his missionary work threatened the atheistic communist party. Bishop Ford ultimately lost his life for bringing the word of God to the people of China.

The CCP remains determined to eliminate all freedom of religion in China. This submission seeks the Rapporteur’s intervention to stop this draconian dragnet against people of faith and their clergy.

¹⁴ Ibid.,

¹⁵https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis_Xavier_Ford

¹⁶ Francis X. Ford, *Come Holy Ghost, Thoughts on Renewing the Earth as the Kingdom of God* (McMullen Books, 1953)