



## October, 2008

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### INTERNATIONAL

A prominent Chinese **human rights activist, Hu Jia, has been awarded the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize for Freedom of thought.** Mr Hu has been most active over religious and political freedoms, HIV/AIDS issues and environmental degradation. Beijing's ambassador to the EU, Song Zhe, had earlier written to the President of the European Parliament arguing that such an award would 'only deepen the misunderstanding between the two sides and is not conducive to the promotion of the cause of world human rights.' A spokesman for China's Internal Affairs Ministry told a news conference in Beijing that Mr. Hu was a 'criminal' and that to 'issue an award to such a criminal is interference in China's judicial sovereignty and totally against the initial purpose of this prize.' Hu Jia was reportedly in the running for this year's Nobel Peace Prize which eventually went to the Finnish ex-President Martti Ahtisaari. The US government has since pressed for Hu Jia's early release. (Originally reported by BBC, AP, AFP, 23 Oct; Epoch Times, Sept 30)

Amid growing speculation and at the last hour, the Chinese foreign ministry confirmed that liberalization of **laws governing the conduct of foreign journalists in China** would be made permanent. Greater journalistic freedom was introduced at the beginning of 2007 for foreign journalists covering China in the lead up to the Olympics. Freedom of movement was increased to regions apart from Tibet, and journalists are allowed to interview anyone who agrees to be interviewed. Chinese nationals may still not be employed as correspondents by foreign media organizations, but those working for registered organizations may be hired as researchers. Chinese media remain more tightly controlled. (Originally reported by SCMP, 26 Oct; Xinhua, 18 Oct; BBC, 17 Oct)

The **Dalai Lama has spoken of his frustration** at the lack of progress toward Tibetan autonomy. At his first public appearance following hospitalization, as far as he was concerned 'I have given up' on progress on his 'Middle Way' proposal: autonomy without independence. He cited Chinese government intransigence as the principle obstacle. He has called a meeting of representatives of Tibetan exile communities to a meeting in Dharamsala to discuss the future of the exiled Tibetan movement. (Originally reported by VOA, 26 Oct)

Seventeen **Chinese Uighurs who have been held at Guantanamo** since being picked up in Afghanistan, have been released into the United States. The Uighurs are alleged to be members of the East Turkestan Islamic Movement, listed as a terrorist organization since 2002, but no charges have been brought against them and a district judge has ordered them released. Five Uighurs have already been released from Guantanamo and resettled in Albania (!). The Bush administration says it will appeal the latest decision. (Originally reported by WP, 8 October)



## NATIONAL NEWS

Anger over the **milk contamination scandal** continues. Many commentators have pointed out that this was not just corruption on a grand scale, but was deliberate adulteration of baby-food and other milk products. The milk was supplied by 22 companies across China, and has forced a comprehensive recall of all milk products by Sanlu Group. Complaints were received by Sanlu as early as March this year, and two of the four infant deaths occurred in May and June. According to the *People's Daily* local officials in Shijiazhuang kept news of the scandal quiet for one month from Aug 2 so as not to impact the Olympics. Pressure was also put on Fronterra, the New Zealand company which holds a 43% stake in Sanlu, from going public. The scandal was finally exposed when the New Zealand ambassador brought it up with the central government, and a full scale investigation began. Li Changjing, the head of the Chinese food standards agency was forced to resign. Premier Wen Jiabao has offered a personal apology and promised to overhaul the inspection system. Tainted milk is still said to be sold in some rural areas. (Originally reported by IPS, 10 Oct; UCAN 9 Oct)

The Chinese **economy has begun to slow**, reflecting the wider economic slowdown and a post-Olympic decline. Rising production costs, growing unemployment and high inflation in food costs are the most severe problems, in addition to the long-term challenges of ecological degradation and health infrastructure. According to the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, China's urban unemployment rate has remained constant this year at around 4% or 8.3m people. However rural migrants are not included in these figures, and are probably those most at risk from a rapid slowdown in the mainland economy. Factories in Guangdong are receiving government aid to pay laid-off workers, in a bid to soften the social impact. Compensation funds have been established in several southeast provinces. China's vice-premier, Li Keqiang, announced a **massive government investment in infrastructure projects** in earthquake-hit Sichuan and other Western provinces. The investment will total \$146bn. (Originally reported by AsiaNews, 28 Oct)

The Chief Executive of Hong Kong, Donald Tsang has announced that the territory will create an advisory Minimum Wage Commission with a view to bringing forward legislation in the current 2008-09 legislative session. The minimum wage would apply to all sectors of the work force. The move follows over 10 years of debate around the issue, and has been welcomed by Catholic labour-rights groups. The Civil Alliance for Minimum Wage has campaigned that the minimum be set at HK\$33 per hour, or a monthly salary of HK\$6,600. (Originally reported by UCAN, Oct. 22)

A special survey of the Chinese health system by the *Lancet* has found that infant mortality in China's poorest areas is six times higher than that in prosperous Shanghai. The differential in the number of children who died before the age of six was just as high, and life expectancy was 11 years longer in Shanghai than in poorest regions of Gansu. The survey included articles by prominent Chinese academics that also highlight that rural-urban migrants have grossly substandard care. The cost of a visit to hospitals is now equivalent to the annual salary for many rural inhabitants. While healthcare improvements throughout China were significant in the 1980s, Yasheng Huang, an economist at MIT argues that rural growth in recent decades was sacrificed for tax revenues to fund the development of cities like Beijing and Shanghai. (Originally reported by The Telegraph, 21 Oct)



Former **deputy mayor of Beijing, Liu Zhihua, who has been convicted of corruption**, but his death sentence will probably be commuted to time in prison. Liu used funds for building developments and traffic infrastructure to personally enrich himself by more than US\$1m between 1999 and 2006. He secured a luxury lifestyle from contractors who bought him cars, villas, jewels and mistresses in exchange for development contracts in the lead up to the Olympics. His death sentence, handed down on the 18 Oct. has been suspended for two years, and with good behaviour may be commuted to life imprisonment. (Originally reported by AsiaNews, 20 Oct)

Zhou Tianyong, a senior Communist official and advisor to the Standing Committee, told the *Daily Telegraph* that “by 2020, China will basically finish its political and institutional reforms” which will involve “public democratic involvement at all government levels.” Zhou is deputy head of the Central Party School, and a leading liberal figure in the Chinese Communist Party. He argues that democratization of Chinese government is essential to a peaceful resolution of the Taiwan issue. President Hu Jintao has also indicated that he desires greater “democratic rights” by 2020, without indicating exactly what these are. At present there are grass-roots elections in 660,000 local villages, though their fairness is often contested. (Originally reported by Telegraph, CBN, Oct. 15)

Two Tibetan monks from the Gyanbe township in the Chamdo autonomous prefecture have been found guilty of planting a bomb outside the town’s police station. Two were sentenced to life imprisonment, while six others were given sentences of between five and fifteen years. According to the Free Tibet Campaign Gyurmey Dhondup and Kalsang Tsering, both from the Tongxia monastery, were sentenced on 23 Sept but the verdict was not made public. No one was hurt in the alleged explosions. (Originally reported by AP, 14 Oct)

A bold **change in China’s rural land policy** was heralded by news reports after the annual, four-day plenary session of the Central Committee. According to academics, the new plan aims to bolster rural growth by allowing China’s 800m peasants to unrestrictedly sell or trade the 30-year land-use contracts which are given them by the central government. This would be the most significant move toward privatization of rural land since the Maoist era. The policy hopes to double rural per capita incomes by 2020. Unlawful land seizures are at the heart of many rural Chinese protests, of which 86,000 were recorded in 2005. By giving peasants greater legal rights to their land, the central government may be hoping to reduce rising social tensions. Restrictions on companies buying the land contracts and converting them to non-agricultural use are likely to remain to ensure that China’s relatively little arable land continues to be used for crops. Details of the policy have yet to be released. (Originally reported by NYT, 13 Oct; AsiaNews, 10 Oct)

Housing subsidies for those in Sichuan who lost their homes in the May earthquake have been fixed. Urban families will receive CNY25,000 (US\$3,700) and those in poor rural areas will receive a free house. Those who lost their family will be housed in welfare homes and will receive CNY35,000 (US\$5,100). (Originally reported by AP, 8 Oct)



Media controls and propaganda campaigns have helped maintain stability and the survival of the CCP according to Liu Yunshan. The Party's propaganda chief was speaking to party officials in July, and an edited version of his speech was published in the Party magazine *Qiushi*. Mr. Liu is well known as a hardliner, and suggested in his speech that propaganda was essential to creating "an atmosphere of stability", has "influenced foreign opinions" and "promoted harmony and stability in the Tibetan-inhabited areas." (Originally reported by SCMP, 6 Oct)

### CHURCH AND RELIGIOUS NEWS

The **president of the China House Church Alliance, Zhang Mingxuan** (also known as Bike Zhang), has been allowed to contact his son and reveal some details of his detention. Speaking on 22 October, he said he had been detained on a flight from Kunming, and would soon be moved to Nanyang, Henan Province. Pastor Zhang's church has since been sealed shut with two truckloads of garbage and its electricity supply cut off. The church had had permission to meet as recently as September 28, after being closed during the Olympics. Bike Zhang's wife and sister are also in 'soft detention' at a PSB-run hotel in Beijing, with restricted communication and travel.

Pastor Zhang's son, Zhang Jian, has been pressured to sign a 'mediation agreement' with Beijing PSB officers, which will cover reimbursement for medical treatment. The treatment was required after he was severely beaten with iron bars at his mother's home on October 16. She insists that the beating was delivered by PSB officers. The agreement will force Zhang Jian to accept the PSB medical officer's report rather than an independent medical which indicated he received serious head injuries which required complicated surgery. (Originally reported by China Aid, 17 Oct, 22 Oct)

On 23 October, US State Department spokesman Robert Wood said that the US was gravely concerned about the status of Beijing pastor Zhang Mingxuan's two sons, and urged officials to release pastor Zhang. He spoke also of a 'pattern of intimidation of religious freedom and rule of law advocates and their family members.' This was rejected by Jiang Yu, spokeswoman for the Chinese Foreign Ministry, who said that China was a country ruled by law, and encouraged the US to look at its own human rights problems rather than 'interfering in other country's internal affairs.'

(Originally reported by Chinaview, 25 Oct; Reuters, 23 Oct)

World Mission Sunday was celebrated by the Chinese Catholic church. Many have combined events with celebrations of the Year of Saint Paul, with the Beitang in Guiyang (Guizhou diocese) using the theme 'Sound the Trumpet of Evangelisation'. Missionary zeal was expressed through social action: visiting the elderly, the sick, troubled families and bringing words of comfort from the gospel.

Churches in the diocese of Shantou held a blood drive, to which priests and laity both contributed. A youth missionary vigil was held at Shijiazhuang on 18 Oct, and was attended by over 300 university students. Celebrations of the missionary congregations in Hong Kong were held, and Taiwan marked the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its evangelisation. (Originally reported by AF, 24 Oct)



In an interview with the People's Daily, vice-principal of Nanjing Union Seminary confirmed the **growth in the number of Protestant seminaries and seminarians in China during the past decade**. The number of seminaries has grown from 10 to 18, and there are additional Bible schools and training centres in a number of cities. All this is testimony to China's religious freedom, Gao suggested. She was interviewed while attending the 7<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the Asian Conference of Religions For Peace in Manila. The conference brought together 370 religious leaders from 25 different countries. The conference suggested that each national assembly create therapeutic centres to care for those impacted by war, torture and disaster. It also recommended a UN decade of inter-religious dialogue and cooperation. The conference was addressed by Chinese Buddhist master Xuecheng, secretary-general of the Chinese Buddhist Association, who suggested that harmony among China's religions set an example for the world to follow. .

(Originally reported by China.org.cn; UCAN, China Daily, 22 Oct)

A pontifical association, Aid to the Church in Need, has produced its report on the world's religious freedom in 2008. It claims that even in China or Vietnam, actions against religious believers are motivated less by ideological zeal (for e.g. Marxist or nationalist reasons) than by a struggle against the freedom of man, the possibility of expressing one's own thought and building arenas of dialogue and justice in society. The report suggests there is growing interest in global society regarding religious freedoms but less interest on the part of governments.

(Originally reported by AsiaNews, 23 Oct)

GOD TV is now available on the Chinese mainland through satellite television. The broadcasts are produced in Jerusalem by Rory and Wendy Alec, and have been available to Hong Kong viewers since 2004. Its 'Greater China' launch means that some international programmes like Joyce Meyer's Bible studies and those by the Alpha Course's Nicky Gumbel will be available in Mandarin Chinese. Two high-profile Christian events from Hong Kong will also feature in October's schedule.

(Originally reported by Christian Newswire, 18 Oct)

Religious tourism in Taiwan is seen as a possible boom industry. Whereas ecotourism was important in the early years of 2000, looking at the example of the United States, the growth in the number of people combining vacation travel with pilgrimage, short-term missions, monastic retreats, religious camps or festivals, or visiting sites of religious importance is twice as fast as that of the rest of the industry. Taiwan hopes that it will be able to attract more religious tourists to annual events like the Mazu pilgrimage. (Originally reported by Taiwan Journal, 16 Oct)



The **Catholic Bishop of Wanzhou (Wanxian), bishop Joseph Xu Zhixuan, is critically ill**, though in a stable condition. The 92-year old bishop has been suffering from heart and organ problems, and has been regularly in and out of hospital since September. Auxiliary bishop Paul He Zeqing, ordained in 2005, has long taken on the day-to-day responsibility for running the diocese. Nevertheless, the consecration of a new church in Kaixian county has been postponed, as many clergy are busy looking after the elderly bishop. Kaixian church represents the last of eight churches to be built in the areas of resettlement after the flooding of the Three Gorges. Funds for these churches were given by Hong Kong and overseas Catholics. (Originally reported by UCAN, 16 Oct)

A Hong Kong academic has **suggested that the famous Jewish community at Kaifeng is a “hoax”**. Zhou Xun, an historian and specialist in Judaic affairs who trained at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, argues that Protestant missionaries eager to find traces of the lost ten tribes and hopeful that the “Jews” would more readily convert to Christianity than recalcitrant Buddhists, went to Kaifeng after reading reports of Jews there in earlier Catholic accounts. A fact-finding mission in 1850, however, failed to find any evidence of a Jewish presence, and it was only the following year that two Chinese colporteurs for the London missionary society returned from the city with copies of the Torah. Zhou argues that these copies were made locally under instruction from the LMS colporteurs, who then sold the fakes to the missionaries. The “synagogue” site was sold to the Anglican mission in 1912 and converted into a church. Zhou argues that earlier Catholic stories of a Jewish community was mistaken identity for a Moslem one, and that stone tablets purported to hold stories from the Bible have not been properly dated. Her thesis has not gone down well with the Kaifeng Jews, several of whom have applied for legal status as a minority religion. (Originally reported by SCMP, 13 Oct)

The Synod on the Word of God was opened by Pope Benedict in Rome. The synod has welcomed 41 bishops from Asia, but none from the Chinese mainland, indicating the limits of Vatican-Beijing rapprochement. (Originally reported by UCAN, 6 Oct)

City Glory Gospel Church in Yantai, Shandong province, was raided by twenty plainclothes officers on 20 September. The officers forced congregants to register their names and leave the building. They then confiscated Bibles, hymnals, the collection box and a large cross. A visiting pastor from Taiwan was speaking to the congregation of about 60 on matters to do with prayer and parent-child relationships. The bibles were later returned, but the meeting site has been closed and the district Religious Affairs Bureau has issued penalty notices. (Originally reported by China Aid, 1 Oct)



# China Desk Bulletin



## ABBREVIATIONS AND ORIGINAL SOURCES

AF	Agenzia Fides	<a href="http://www.fides.org">www.fides.org</a>
AFP	Agence France Presse	<a href="http://www.afp.com">www.afp.com</a>
AP	Associated Press	<a href="http://www.ap.org">www.ap.org</a>
BBC	British Broadcasting Association	<a href="http://www.bbc.co.uk">www.bbc.co.uk</a>
CAA	China Aid Association	<a href="http://www.chinaaid.org">www.chinaaid.org</a>
CASS	Chinese Academy of Social Sciences	
CBNN	Christian Broadcast Network News	
CCC	China Christian Council [Protestant]	
CCP	Chinese Communist Party	
(C)CPA	(Chinese) Catholic Patriotic Association	
CD	China Daily	<a href="http://www.chinadaily.net/news/">www.chinadaily.net/news/</a>
CHCA	Chinese House Church Association [Protestant]	
CRI	China Radio International	
CWN	Catholic World News	
	Chinaview	<a href="http://www.chinaview.cn">www.chinaview.cn</a>
	China.org.cn	<a href="http://www.China.org.cn">www.China.org.cn</a>
DPA	Deutsche Presse-Agentur	
EDA	Églises D'Asie	<a href="http://eglisie.mepasie.org">http://eglisie.mepasie.org</a>
FT	Financial Times	<a href="http://www.ft.com">www.ft.com</a>
	Guardian	<a href="http://www.guardian.co.uk">www.guardian.co.uk</a>
HK	Hong Kong	
	Independent	<a href="http://www.independent.co.uk">www.independent.co.uk</a>
IHT	International Herald Tribune	<a href="http://www.iht.com">www.iht.com</a>
IPS	Inter Press Service	<a href="http://www.ipsnews.net">www.ipsnews.net</a>
PBOC	People's Bank of China [China's Central Bank]	
PBS	Public Broadcast Radio	<a href="http://www.pbs.org">www.pbs.org</a>
RAB	Religious Affairs Bureau	
	Religious Intelligence	<a href="http://www.religiousintelligence.co.uk">www.religiousintelligence.co.uk</a>
	Reuters	<a href="http://www.reuters.co.uk">www.reuters.co.uk</a>
SARA	State Administration for Religious Affairs	
SCMP	South China Morning Post	<a href="http://www.scmp.com">www.scmp.com</a>
SOE	State Owned Enterprise	
	Telegraph	<a href="http://www.telegraph.co.uk">www.telegraph.co.uk</a>
	The Times	<a href="http://www.timesonline.co.uk/">www.timesonline.co.uk/</a>
UCAN	Union of Catholic Asia News	<a href="http://www.ucanews.com">www.ucanews.com</a>
UNPO	Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization	
WP	Washington Post	
	Xinhua	<a href="http://www.xinhua.org/">http://www.xinhua.org/</a>

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