



PRAY FOR PERSECUTED BROTHERS & SISTERS

Pray for the Persecuted Christians in China

Remember the prisoners as if chained with them - those who are mistreated - since you yourselves are in the Body also.

(Hebrews 13:3)



China

Total Population: 1,439,323,776

Self-Proclaimed Christian Population: 9% – **Evangelical Witness: 8%**

Largest Religion: Non-Religious: 44%

Death Rate: 8.2/1000 per year: Just today: 32,335

Chinese Christian group anxiously awaits asylum decision on South Korean island

The group could be forcibly repatriated to China, where they are already being targeted by state security police.

By Hwang Chun-mei and Bo Tao (Translated and edited by Luisetta Mudie.)

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Dozens of Christians on South Korea's Jeju Island are facing forcible repatriation to China after their asylum applications were rejected by multiple courts.

The 60 members of the Shenzhen Mayflower Church fled to Jeju in 2019, braving language barriers and lack of access to medical care in a bid to ensure their children didn't have to undergo the ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s "patriotic education" and anti-religious propaganda in school.

Mayflower pastor Pan Yongguang said church members have also been targeted after he co-signed a letter protesting against the government's new guidelines on the "management" of religions, which ushered in a crackdown on religious activities across the countries.

"Our church would educate our children about our religious beliefs, and the police would come along and force them to enroll in school so they could be brainwashed," Pan told RFA. "They didn't want us to teach our children the Bible, and children are banned from attending church."

"This went against our faith and our consciences," he said in an interview on Jan. 24. Some 30 Mayflower Church members who stayed behind in Shenzhen have been continually targeted for harassment by the state security police, Pan said.

"One of our sisters wasn't able to remain in Shenzhen, but had to go back to her hometown ... in Guangdong province," Pan said. "Sometime in April or May 2021, the state security police tracked her down and charged her with 'subversion of state power', confiscated her Christian books and cell phone, and placed her under surveillance."

"She isn't allowed to leave [China]," he said.

Pan himself faces multiple charges if he returns to China, while his mother, sister and brother back home have repeatedly been threatened by the local state security police. "I have been charged with subversion of state power, colluding with anti-China foreign forces and human trafficking," Pan said. "[That's because] I took these believers out of China, so now I'm suspected of trafficking or smuggling them."

"Just one of those charges would be enough to send me to jail for a very long time," he said.

Difficulty adapting

Pan said the group has had difficulty adapting to life in Jeju, given that none of them speaks Korean and the children aren't currently in school.

"Fortunately, we have all been given free COVID-19 vaccines, and nobody in the church has gotten infected so far," he said. "But the only industries are agriculture and tourism, and a lot of people can't find jobs."

"All they can do are odd jobs, like picking tangerines," he said.

Meanwhile, Chinese diplomatic staff on the island have been harassing church members, according to Pan.

"We have received many calls from the consulate," he said. "If we become illegal immigrants here, then the South Korean government can't offer us ... protection, and we are in danger."

The Mayflower asylum claims are currently due to be heard by the High Court, after being rejected by lower courts.

"If we don't get asylum approved, we will have 14 days to remain in the country legally, and after that we will be here illegally," Pan said. "It is very likely that the South Korean government will want us to leave. We may not necessarily have to go back to China, but we will have to leave."

The asylum-seekers have also applied for asylum in the United States, and a decision has yet to be announced. The Office of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) told the group it is unable to assess their status at its Seoul office.

South Korea 'too wary of the CCP'

Bob Fu, president of the U.S.-based Christian rights group ChinaAid, said Seoul is likely seeking to avoid conflict with Beijing over the fate of the Mayflower group.

"The current government of South Korea is too wary of the CCP," Fu told RFA. "Only 0.4 percent of asylum applications from Chinese nationals have been successful in the past."

"South Korea is effectively being held hostage by the CCP."

An employee who answered the phone at the Jeju Island branch of South Korea's Immigration Bureau declined to comment on the reasons for the rejection of the Mayflower applications when asked about the case by RFA.

"We can't tell you the reasons; we can only tell the people concerned," the employee said. "It's not yet clear whether they will be repatriated."

A lawyer for the group surnamed Zheng said South Korea requires asylum applicants to show that their lives or health would be in danger if they returned to China.

"The refugee application process is complicated, the likelihood of being rejected again is quite high, and it is a huge headache right now," Zheng said.