

CONGRESSIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMISSION ON CHINA

Round Table on Religious Freedom March 25, 2002

U. S. Catholic China Bureau Statement on Religious Freedoms in the Peoples Republic of China

Founded in 1989, with the encouragement of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, the U.S. Catholic China Bureau is sponsored by a cross-section of Roman Catholic organizations and individuals in the United States who share its purposes and goals. Its overriding purpose is to foster communication and friendship with the people of China through sharing the values of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Bureau's programs are focused on promoting understanding among the American people about the catholic and christian churches in China, and the situation of catholic communities in particular.

USCCB is essentially motivated by a desire to undergird the emergence of dynamic and pastorally effective christian communities and churches, capacitated with the human and material resources required to fulfill the mandate to witness to the Gospel in contemporary Chinese society, including serving that society and the Chinese people in the full development of their spiritual, moral/ethical and human potential.

In this context, among its stated goals, USCCB *seeks to promote the full exercise of human rights and religious freedom of all religious believers in China*. Toward this end, the Bureau takes as its special role and mandate the provision of services and programs, to empower Chinese Catholics to be able to assume and exercise their religious freedoms, at such time as those rights, already guaranteed in the Constitution of the Peoples Republic (Article 36), become fully operational and are implemented in every sector and at every level of Chinese society.

USCCB takes note of the fact that China today is undergoing significant socio-economic and political change, as it emerges as a major player in the world community of nations. The impact this radical transition and transformation is having on the Chinese people, religious believers, including Christians and Catholics, is both positive and negative. In carrying out its mandate, and in working to achieve its goals, USCCB recognizes the complex historical and prevailing ethos governing State-Religion relationships in China. It further acknowledges the particularly difficult history of Christianity in China, as observed by Pope John Paul II in his message for the Fourth Centenary of the arrival of Matteo Ricci in China (October 24, 2001):

"History ... reminds us of the unfortunate fact that the work of members of the Church in China was not always without error, the bitter fruit of their personal limitations and of the limits of their action. Moreover, their action was often conditioned by difficult situations connected with complex historical events and conflicting political interests. In certain periods of modern history, a kind of "protection" on the part of European political powers not infrequently resulted in limitations on the Church's very freedom of action and had negative repercussions for the Church in China. This combination of various situations and events placed obstacles in the Church's path and prevented her from fully carrying out, for the benefit of the Chinese people, the mission entrusted to her by her Founder, Jesus Christ."

This latter sentiment of the Pope seems sadly to be repeating itself in recent times.

USCCB shares the concern and dismay of friends of China around the world at the well-documented reports of increased repression of churches and communities of faith in some places in China; and, from time to time, the harassment of individual believers in the exercise of their religious beliefs and practices. Regrettably, this phenomenon is not restricted to China alone, but is characteristic of too many other nations where the political, and socio-economic stress induced by changes all too sadly leads to discrimination on the basis of ethnicity and religion.

While affirming the significant strides made in legal reform and the development of religious law and policy in the Peoples Republic of China in recent years, USCCB calls upon the leadership of the Chinese people at every level: national, provincial and local, to keep faith with the noble provisions of its own Constitution and with the International Covenants guaranteeing civil, political, economic, social, cultural and religious rights and freedoms to which China is signatory.

We urge the political authorities in China to recognize the positive and productive role that religion and religious believers play in any modern society, and to commit themselves to full implementation of religious rights and freedom for all the people of China.

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