

**STATEMENT SUBMITTED
TO THE
TOM LANTOS HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION**

Religious Freedom in China: The Case of Bishop James Su Zhimin

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BY

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Bishop James Su Zhimin and all China's Persecuted Believers

In the roll of saints and heroes of the Church Universal, you will find the name of Chinese Roman Catholic Bishop James Su Zhimin. Bishop Su, born in 1932, is Diocesan Bishop of Baoding, in China's northern Hebei Province. He has spent more years in incarnation than in freedom. The Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission's (TLHRC) "Defending Freedoms Project" notes that "in all, he has spent 40 years in prison, without charge, without trial."

The 88 year old bishop was last arrested in 1997 for refusing to join the State-sanctioned "Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association." He was only seen once since then, at a hospital in 2003, and has not been seen or heard from for 17 years. It may well be that this frail elderly man who is at the same time a great giant of faith is dead.

We commend TLHRC co-chairs, U.S. Representatives Christopher H. Smith and James P. McGovern, for holding this hearing on how the treatment of Bishop Su and the Chinese Communist government's move to control the Diocese of Baoding demonstrate the lack of overall religious freedom in China today.

The CCP regime has always stood its State-sanctioned Protestant and Catholic "Three-Self Patriotic churches" against unregistered underground churches. But in recent years, not only has the regime manifested more control over State churches, it is trying to eliminate completely the underground ones.

Key for the TLHRC hearing is news that Chinese authorities are asking the Vatican to recognize as new bishop for Baoding Diocese the current auxiliary bishop, An Shuxin, a member of the State-sanctioned Church. The TLHRC notes that religious freedom advocates fear this "is a test case for bringing to heel members of the "underground" Catholic Church, who do not recognize the legitimacy of the official church." It demonstrates the folly of 2018's supposedly "temporary protocol" between the Holy See and CCP government. And it fuels the concern that the bishop is dead.

The test case would also have serious ramifications for underground Protestant churches. The CCP regime knows Christianity is dangerous to Communism. Attempting to have total control over the churches could surely fit into China's overall plan for global hegemony, detailed in the People's Liberation Army's official documents now published as the book *Unrestricted Warfare*.

The Institute on Religion and Democracy (IRD) believes it the God-given right of all people to have religious freedom. Our International Religious Liberty Program is an advocate for Bishop Su and all Chinese prisoners of faith and conscience. Defending these believers is our God-mandated responsibility, and nowhere, it would seem, is this more necessary than in the 2020 People's Republic of China. The crackdown on Christians, Falun Gong practitioners, Uyghur, freedom lovers in Hong Kong, and others recently has intensified.

China's human rights and religious freedom violations run from the neurotic – needing to control churches and every word that comes from the pulpit – to the unspeakable – harvesting organs from live Falun Gong prisoners, and imprisoning millions of East Turkestan's Uyghur in prison camps.

We are deeply grateful to Congressman Smith for holding dozens of hearings on China for over two decades. Going back to the early '90's, these have often raised Bishop James Su Zhimin's name. A June 1996 hearing on the human rights consequences of extending Most Favored Nation (MFN) trade status to Communist China noted “new detentions or house arrests of clergy, including some of the aged bishops of the underground church.” That was how the Communist regime expressed its thanks for MFN! Testimony continued, “The Diocese of Baoding. . .a main base of the underground church, has borne the brunt of the persecution in the past and continues to suffer most from the present crackdown.”

In a hearing a year later the Cardinal Kung Foundation wrote of Su's suffering:

During one prison stint lasting 15 years, he was subjected to outrageous physical abuse. In one incident, the board, which was used to beat him, was reduced to splinters. The police then ripped apart a wooden door and continued to beat Bishop Su until it also disintegrated into splinters.

That was not the extent of his torture. And we know that it was not unique. The Chinese government has also tortured Christian pastors and evangelists and other religious believers with diabolical skill and creativity. And yet, the response of those believers was, in the words of Chris Smith, “dumbfounding.”

In hearing after hearing Rep. Smith has marveled at Bishop Su, who he met in 1996. “He had already spent several decades in the Laogai. He was tortured and yet this man had nothing but a sense of love and reconciliation toward his tormentors...he prayed for his tormentors.”

We do not have any confirmation of Bishop Su's death, but we have had confirmation after confirmation of his overcoming faith. The Christians in China are a shining example to the global Church. But their condition, and the overall conditions of repression under Communism are a reproach to the free world.

The great Russian human rights hero Natan Sharansky told us “when the policy of appeasement stopped,” the days of the Soviet Union were numbered. We commend the Administration for recent strong actions towards China such as stopping the Thrift Savings Plan's transfer of billions of dollars in US pensions to invest in Chinese industries and putting China on notice in speeches by the Attorney General, the US National Security Advisor, and others. We urge the US government to full the reject any policy of appeasement that enables the CCP regime to arrest, imprison, torture, and kill the peaceful, honorable religious believers of China.