

COUNTRY PROFILE

CHINA



Chinese authorities have been strengthening their control over all religious communities, increasingly cracking down on unregistered places of worship, faith leaders and religious activities. Members of clergy must pledge allegiance to the ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and “resist illegal religious activities”. Estimates of those imprisoned for their religious beliefs range from the low thousands to over 10,000.⁵²

The CCP actively promotes atheism and discourages under-age citizens from practising any religion. The 281 million members of the CCP and its youth organisations are banned from being involved in religious activities.⁵³

Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam, Buddhism and Taoism are the only recognised religions and followers of these faiths are supposed to practise under the auspices of one of the state-sanctioned ‘patriotic associations’. Only groups (e.g. local parishes) belonging to these five religions are permitted to register to be able to hold public worship services.⁵⁴

While owning a Bible is not illegal, the authorities restrict its printing and distribution. Unauthorised editions are forbidden.⁵⁵

All religious groups are mandated to support the CCP’s push towards “sinicisation” – making Chinese in character – of all religious activity, and religious groups are expected to deliver patriotic education to believers.⁵⁶ Church leaders and believers refusing to align with the government’s agenda are often harassed and may be arrested.⁵⁷

The CCP has also been tightening its grip on Hong Kong,⁵⁸ imposing national security laws which have raised concerns about the future of religious freedom in the region.⁵⁹

SELECTED INCIDENTS

SEPTEMBER 2023 Revisions to the 2005 “Measures for the Administration of Religious Activity Venues” came into effect, requiring “places of religious activity” to uphold the leadership of the CCP and promote the sinicisation of religion. The measures also specify that sermons must reflect “socialist core values” and be integrated with “traditional Chinese culture”.⁶⁰

JANUARY 2024 Chinese security forces took Bishop Peter Shao Zhumin of Wenzhou into custody several times between mid-December 2023 and early January 2024. The bishop had refused to join the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and objected to CCP-mandated changes in his diocese, such as the transfer of priests and the division of parishes.⁶¹ He has since been released, according to ACN’s sources.

MARCH 2024 Religious freedom experts expressed concerns that Hong Kong’s new national security law – which implements Article 23 of Hong Kong’s Basic Law – would have severe implications for the confidentiality of the Sacrament of Reconciliation⁶² after the Hong Kong Executive Council’s Rony Tong indicated priests could face charges for failing to report national security crimes mentioned during confession.⁶³ Under the legislation, a person could be punished with up to 14 years in prison for failing to inform authorities that someone has committed treason.⁶⁴ The Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong subsequently issued a statement saying that the legislation “will not alter the confidential nature of Confession”.⁶⁵

APRIL 2024 A court in Inner Mongolia Province sentenced Christian man Ban Yanhong to five years in prison for selling Bibles on behalf of a Protestant house Church not registered with the authorities.⁶⁶