

Prisoners of faith

release
PRISONERS

EMAIL ALERT

NOVEMBER 2014

Zhang Cuijuan China

As part of the continuing persecution of Pastor Zhang Shaojie (Prisoners of Faith Alert December 2013), his family and members of the Nanle County Christian Church, another two church members were recently sentenced. On September 9, the Nanle County People's Court found church missionary, Zhao Junling, and Zhang Cuijuan, one of Pastor Zhang's sisters, guilty of 'gathering a crowd to disrupt public order,' the same charge used against Pastor Zhang.

Zhao Junling was sentenced to one year in prison with a reprieve of two years, and Zhang Cuijuan to one-and-a-half years in prison. Zhang Cuijuan intends to appeal against the sentence while Zhao told Release's partner, China Aid, he felt he couldn't appeal because he had been tricked into dismissing his lawyers.

As of now, except for Li Cairen, a church member who has been kidnapped and placed under house arrest by Nanle County police and whose whereabouts are unknown, all other detained church members have been released on 'bail pending trial.' Another of Pastor Zhang's sisters, Zhang Cuixia, said that the reason the Government persecuted the church, her family and her brother, was because he didn't co-operate with the Government.

Zhang Cuijuan was taken away on November 16, 2013, but it was not until September 2, 2014, that the case came to court. Her lawyer insisted that detention for such a charge should last only six months at most; however, Zhang and Zhao were detained for 10 months. He also reported that the court denied the lawyers' request for witnesses to appear on their behalf.

Lawyers learned at the trial that there were three incidents, over the course of several years, which the court used to prosecute Zhang Cuijuan. The first of these incidents involved Zhao. Authorities confiscated church property worth 10,000 yuan (£1,000) via a local bank to cover an 'extra-child' fine



Photo: China Aid

Zhao owed. Zhang Cuijuan knew the bank's governor and went to mediate. The court said that this was the first instance of disrupting the public order. The second involved a dispute between a local dentist and Zhang Cuijuan's sister, after the dentist made a mistake treating Zhang's niece, leaving the child badly disfigured and embarrassed by her appearance. Zhang Cuijuan tried unsuccessfully to negotiate with the dentist and reported the incident to the Bureau of Health.

The final incident involved Zhang negotiating with the life insurance company of a church member's husband, who died in his hotel room while on a business trip. The family consulted her because she worked as a manager at another insurance company. Believing that the family was owed the amount of life cover from the policy, Zhang went to inquire about the dispute, which police deemed disruption of the public order.

During the trial only two family members were allowed to enter the courtroom, out of more than 50 church members who arrived at the court to show their support. Pastor Zhang's daughter, Zhang 'Shanshan' Linxin told China Aid that the clothes her aunt was wearing at the hearing were lent to her by some of the other women in her cell. 'The yellow vest for detainees that she was wearing covered her clothes, and we could only see her sleeves,' she said. 'She seemed to be very positive and optimistic. When she left us, she kept saying, "Don't worry about me. I'm doing fine!" She refused to plead guilty and submit to darkness, even at the cost of serving a prison term. She told us that she had experienced God's presence in her detention.'

HELPING CHRISTIANS IMPRISONED FOR THEIR FAITH

'I am in chains for Christ'

Philippians 1:13

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PLEASE PRAY

- ▶ For wisdom for Zhang Cuijuan's lawyers with regards to her appeal.
- ▶ For God to protect and strengthen both Zhang Cuijuan and Zhao Junling in prison.
- ▶ For Pastor Zhang Shaojie, his wider family and all of the Nanle church members.

PLEASE WRITE

The persecution of the Nanle church, Pastor Zhang and his family started in relation to land that had been purchased by the church on which they planned to erect a new church building, orphanage and Bible college. They desperately needed to replace their current church building which is very old and in a state of disrepair. Local authorities, realising that the new site is now in a prime commercial area and could be sold to private developers for many more times the amount it was sold to the Nanle church, wanted the land back. Pastor Zhang and the church objected and so began a process of tarnishing the pastor's reputation and disrupting, intimidating and persecuting his family and church members, which resulted in church members being detained, beaten and imprisoned.



Currently church members are not allowed to meet in the main church hall and they are regularly kept under surveillance and harassed. Pastor Zhang's family, including his elderly parents, children and grandchildren, are all suffering as a result of the church's stand against corruption, injustice and persecution.

When writing please do not mention Release International, advance your political opinions or include anything which could be insulting to the authorities.

Please consider sending a card or letter of encouragement to Zhang Cuijuan, Zhao Junling and their families to let them know that they are being prayed for. Release will endeavour to forward these cards and letters to the Nanle church and to the families of those involved.

Send cards to: Release International, PO Box 54, Orpington, BR5 4RT.

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