

# Chinese officials arrest bishop in Hebei

HONG KONG – Chinese officials have arrested a bishop who is not registered with the government and have been pressuring other unregistered bishops and priests, sources told the Asian church news agency UCA News.

Bishop Julius Jia Zhiguo of Zhengding in China's Hebei province was arrested by the Chinese Public Security and Religious Bureau the morning of Aug. 23. His arrest was reported by the U.S.-based Cardinal Kung Foundation and confirmed by UCA News.

A statement from the Kung foundation said it did not know the reason for the bishop's arrest, but added that "in the last five days there was a marked increase in the number of security police for putting Bishop Jia under strict surveillance 24 hours a day, and there were police vehicles parking outside the bishop's residence." A priest and a layperson also were arrested and interrogated for eight hours before being released, the foundation reported.

It also reported that government religious affairs officials had placed a sign reading "Catholic Patriotic Association" at the side of the cathedral gate. Sources told UCA News that Bishop Jia had opposed their action and removed the sign.

The Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association acts as a liaison between registered Catholics and the Chinese government.

China requires that church leaders and prominent church buildings be registered with the government, although registration requirements vary from place to place. Registration usually includes requirements for unregistered priests to concelebrate Mass with a registered bishop and sometimes compels them to profess support for the "independent, autonomous and self-management" principle that the government insists on for the church. Because of this, some bishops and priests have refused to register.

The Kung foundation, a human rights organization that advocates for the Catholic communities in China not registered with the government, added that since the release of Pope Benedict XVI's June 30 letter to Chinese Catholics calling for unity between the registered and unregistered communities "Bishop Jia was told several times by the religious bureau that he was not allowed to publicly support and

promulgate" the letter. He had refused the officials' demand.

Since July, a priest told UCA News, Catholics from various dioceses had sought Bishop Jia's advice on how to respond to the papal letter and were interrogated by security officers at the cathedral.

This is not the first time Bishop Jia has been arrested. Since 2004, he has been arrested 11 times. In June, he was held by authorities for 17 days.

The foundation also reported that Father Wen Daoxiu of a village in Hebei was arrested Aug. 15 after a Mass. The details of the arrest remain unknown, said the foundation.

Meanwhile, sources told UCA News that other Hebei church leaders from the dioceses of Tianjin and Xiwanzi have faced pressure recently.

A church source told UCA News that around Aug. 22 security officers visited Bishop Stephen Li Side and Coadjutor Bishop Melchior Shi Hongzhen of Tianjin and ordered them to join the patriotic association. The officers took away a priest at Bishop Shi's residence.

Sources in Xiwanzi Diocese told UCA News Aug. 24 that Bishop Leo Yao Liang of Xiwanzi, who has been missing since July 2006, and three of his priests, who were taken away July 24 this year, have not returned and their whereabouts are unknown.