

URGENT ACTION

CHRISTIAN HOUSE CHURCH MEMBERS CRIMINALLY DETAINED

Li Yingqiang is among about 100 members of the Early Rain Covenant Church in Chengdu, Sichuan province, who have been detained after a raid by the police on 9 December 2018. Without access to his family or a lawyer of his choice, he is at risk of torture or other ill-treatment.

Li Yingqiang, an elder of the Early Rain Covenant Church, was placed under criminal detention on suspicion of “picking quarrels and provoking trouble” by the Chengdu City Public Security Bureau on 11 December 2018. Li Yingqiang had gone into hiding following a police raid of the church premises on the evening of 9 December. Founded in 2005, the Early Rain Covenant Church is one of China’s largest and most prominent “house churches”, in which members have gatherings in their own homes rather than government-approved places of worship.

On 10 December, the day before his detention, Li Yingqiang wrote an open letter to the followers of the church, encouraging them to stay strong in the time of challenges. He insisted that the Early Rain Covenant Church should remain a “house church”, rather than registering as an official church with the Religious Affairs Bureau and joining the Three-Self Patriotic Association (the state-sanctioned Protestant Church in China). He further went on to advise that if followers could not worship in their church premises anymore, they should consider renting another place. “If there will be no indoor space that we can use for worshipping, we should start worshipping outdoors,” he continued.

No contact has been made with Li Yingqiang since he was first detained and, according to a close source, he has had no access to a lawyer. Currently detained at Chengdu City Detention Centre in the southwestern Chinese province of Sichuan, there are serious concerns for Li Yingqiang’s wellbeing as he is at risk of torture or other ill-treatment.

Please write immediately in Chinese, English or your own language urging the authorities to:

- Release Li Yingqiang unconditionally and immediately unless there is sufficient credible and admissible evidence that he has committed an internationally recognized offence and is granted a fair trial in line with international standards;
- Ensure that he is protected from torture and other ill-treatment while in detention;
- Ensure that he is allowed, without delay, regular access to a lawyer of his choice and his family.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 29 JANUARY 2019 TO:

Director

Li Xin

Chengdu City Detention Centre

Zhengyilu, Anjing Zhen

Pi Xian, Chengdu Shi, Sichuan Sheng

People’s Republic of China

Tel: +86 28 8640 7114

Salutation: Dear Director

Director

Wang Pingjiang

Chengdu City Public Security Bureau

136 Wenwulu

Chengdu Shi, Sichuan Sheng

People’s Republic of China

Email: cdsqaj@chengdu.gov.cn

Salutation: Dear Director

And copies to:

Minister of Public Security

Zhao Kezhi Buzhang

Gonganbu

14 Dongchanganjie

Dongchengqu, Beijing Shi 100741

People’s Republic of China

Tel: +86 10 6626 2114 (Chinese only)

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. HIS EXCELLENCY MR LIU XIAOMING, Embassy of the People’s Republic of China, 49-51 Portland Place W1B 1JL, 020 7299 4049, press_uk@mfa.gov.cn

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On the evening of 9 December 2018, police in Chengdu raided the premises of the Early Rain Covenant Church. About 100 members of the church were taken away and questioned by the police in the following days, including Li Yingqiang, pastor Wang Yi, Jiang Rong, Qin Defu, Ge Yingfeng, Li Xiaofeng, Lü Jinfeng, Fu Lijun, Huang Yaling and Li Zihu. Others have been released but remain under tight surveillance. Some of them said they were asked to sign a document to guarantee that they will not take part in the meetings of the church again. Liu Yingxu, Ding Shuqi and Song Enguang were still missing at the time when this action was issued.

Three days after the raid, on 12 December, the church issued a written statement prepared several months in advance by pastor Wang Yi in which he expressed determination to defend religious freedom. Some members have been detained on suspicion of criminal charges, including “illegal business operation” and “picking quarrels and provoking trouble”. Pastor Wang Yi and his wife Jiang Rong have been detained incommunicado on suspicion of “inciting subversion of state power,” a catch-all charge often used against dissidents and activists who speak out against the government.

Founded in 2005, the Early Rain Covenant Church is one of the largest and most prominent “house churches” in China. The leaders and members of the church did not want to register with the Religious Affairs Bureau or the Three-Self Patriotic Association, with which Protestant churches are required to be affiliated in order to be recognized by the government. These churches are commonly referred to as “house churches” because they usually gather to worship in members’ homes.

Since the amended “Regulation on Religious Affairs” came into force on 1 February 2018, “house churches” reported further crackdowns across the country, particularly in Henan, Zhejiang, Guangdong and Heilongjiang provinces. Authorities have removed crosses and Christian slogans from church buildings, confiscated or vandalized church properties, ordered churches to close and questioned church leaders and members.