

Peter Zoehrer: Persecuted Church Of Almighty God Seeks Asylum in S. Korea

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The Church Of Almighty God [Eastern Lightning] - Religious Refugees from China Seek Asylum in South Korea

On Saturday afternoon, September 1st, Peter Zoehrer, co-founder of Forum for Religious Freedom Europe, and I spent almost three hours with representatives of a small Christian sect based in China known as The Church of Almighty God. The meeting took place at the Ambassador Hotel in downtown Seoul. All four representatives are currently living in South Korea, having fled severe persecution for their religious faith by the Chinese Communist Party. The three women and one man all arrived in South Korea between 2007-2014 and have applied for asylum as political refugees. All are still waiting for their cases to be decided.

Now is a critical time for them because China is pressuring the South Korean government to reject their application for refugee status and return them to China where they would surely face imprisonment. There are several hundred Church of Almighty God believers now living in South Korea and many of them have already received deportation orders from the immigration authorities. In response they recently sent an open letter to the Korean Ministry of Justice detailing their circumstances if they were to be returned to China and asking that they not be deported. They are seeking help from the international human rights community in their plight. This week, anti-cult activists and family members under the direction of the Chinese Communist Party are staging demonstrations and press conferences around Korea demanding that the South Korean government force these believers to return to China.

In order to learn more, Mr. Peter Zoehrer asked a series of questions.

Peter: When did you join the Church of Almighty God?

David said he joined in 2002 and the ladies replied that they joined in 2006 and 2007.

Peter: What did your parents think about you joining an unpopular church movement?

My parents are believers in Jesus Christ as part of the House Church movement in China so they didn't oppose me. Almighty God's words are the same as Jesus's words. Most Church of Almighty God members come from the House Church movement.

Peter: How many Christians are there in China?

There are many many Christians in China today but it is not possible to count them. In China there are

two kinds of churches. There are the official churches, both Catholic and protestant, that are controlled by the CCP. Then there are the underground churches known as House Churches, again both Catholic and Protestant, that the Party can't control or count.

Peter: When did the persecution of the Church Almighty God begin in China?

The work of Almighty God began in 1991 and the persecution began immediately. Almighty God members came from the underground House Churches and already had experienced persecution for their belief in Jesus.



December 2014 - Church Almighty God members in Chinese court

Peter: How did you experience persecution?

David told his story first. He was going door to door giving out the gospel. They were reported to the police by someone. The police asked what they were doing and they said they were preaching the gospel. They were taken to the police station and were asked why are you preaching? The government doesn't allow this they were told. The police took their phone numbers and addresses in order to place them under surveillance. They went to the station restroom where they escaped out the window.

Angelia was a middle school teacher. Her family had experienced persecution for their faith in Jesus. When she joined Almighty God she got more of the same. Middle school teachers are not permitted to have religious beliefs. She was required to sign a document denying any religious belief in order to keep her job. When she refused to sign the police asked her why. They told her that she either had to give up her faith or quit her job. She really loved being a teacher but she quit the job. All of her colleagues were told that she quit because of her faith in Almighty God and that they should shun her. She had to leave her home and move to another city and live together with other believers. Many believers were arrested and she had to move again and again to avoid arrest. They were under police surveillance. There were cameras everywhere and they were always watched. The police required neighbors to watch and inform on them. She moved many times. Once she couldn't go out or turn on the lights for weeks out of fear the neighbors would inform on them. Block and community leaders were required to check houses and inform the police.

Peter: How were you able to escape?

In 2014 there was a murder at a McDonalds and the government falsely blamed Almighty God and used it to increase the persecution and arrests. We were on the run in China for a long time and so we decided to get out. In order for Chinese to travel to another country they have to get a passport which is not easy to do. Through contacts and money she was able to get a passport and travel to South Korea as a tourist and requested political asylum. With money you can obtain anything in China.

One member was arrested at the airport as he tried to flee. Another family fled and their home was ransacked by the police and all of their possessions were taken by the neighbors. Anyone caught fleeing is sentenced to prison. Those who return are also sentenced. In these cases no amount of bribe can buy their freedom.

Peter: How many Almighty God members are there in China?

They seemed to be unable or reluctant to answer this question directly. Every Almighty God family is persecuted. Refugees are now in South Korea and other countries.

The Chinese Communist Party and the Anti-Cult Movement

The communist party has labeled the Almighty God Church as a dangerous cult. They keep a black list of such dangerous cults and use this as the rationale for their actions. At one time the Falun Gong movement was #1 on the list. Now Almighty God Church has that distinction. Once labeled as a cult, any and all actions are justified to eradicate the group.

The anti-cult movement in China was once run by the 610 anti-cult office of the CCP. Now it is run by the state security apparatus. The recent demonstrations in South Korea by anti-cult activists and family members demanding that the Korean government return the Almighty God asylum seekers to China are coordinated by the CCP state security organs. This is a common tactic of anti-cultists and deprogrammers around the world. They use family members to say the cult is breaking up our family and the believers should be forcibly returned. If these people are returned to China they face imprisonment.

In only one province in China, Laioling, between June 26th and the 28th, more than 600 believers were arrested. Between 2011 and 2013 as many as 38,000 were arrested. As many as 70 people died while in custody. It has been reported that 13 were beaten to death. In 2018 the CCP issued a document calling for additional crackdowns on the Church of Almighty God.

The demonstrations, directed by the CCP and coordinated by anti-cult groups, in Jeju island yesterday, at the Almighty God church near Seoul today, and in front of the Blue House tomorrow are demanding that the Korean government deny refugee status to these innocent believers and return them to their family and into the arms of the state security organs of the CCP.

Peter: How can international human rights organizations help you?

Most important is to urge the South Korean government to grant refugee status to these believers and not return them to China. Next would be to gain the support of even more human rights organizations. Also it is critical for the Korean media to know and tell this story. Now the government and media is under a lot of political and economic pressure to see things China's way.

Peter: Why don't South Korean Christians help you?

The rumor, instigated by the CCP, that we are a cult puts off Christians.

Peter agreed to go to their church on Sunday to interview members and take photos of any anti-cult activities.

Michael Downey's comments;

When you label any group a cult then they become untouchable. Who wants to be painted with that same brush? No one wants to support a dangerous cult. It is similar to the tactics of the communists in the USSR and China. Once you declare someone or some group is an enemy of the people, a rightist, capitalist roader, or other, then any and all actions including imprisonment, exile, torture, or elimination become acceptable and even virtuous.

My suggestion is to broaden their appeal by making common cause with others who have been painted with the same brush.