

HFAC Hearing Testimony: “Defending Religious Freedom Around the World”

Grace Jin Drexel

February 4, 2026

On October 10th, 2025, my father, Pastor Ezra Jin, was arrested by Chinese authorities along with 27 other pastors and church leaders from Zion Church. Eighteen church leaders remain imprisoned still today. This crackdown represents the largest takedown of an independent Christian congregation in China since the Cultural Revolution—a sweep so brazen it has drawn international condemnation, including from Secretary of State Marco Rubio. Many of these leaders were seized in front of their young families. My father and several older leaders suffer from health issues, and we fear for their wellbeing in detention. I urge the Chinese government to release all these Zion Church members immediately and unconditionally.

My father founded Zion Church in 2007 with a simple mission: to remain faithful to Scripture and to serve families and communities. Starting with just two families—fewer than 20 members—the church grew by God’s grace into one of China’s largest urban house churches, with more than 1,500 members and over 20 ministers within a decade.

Beginning in 2018, a comprehensive crackdown on religious communities began. Crosses were torn down from church buildings. Churches were demolished. Portraits of Xi Jinping and Mao Zedong replaced crucifixes on sanctuary walls. Revolutionary Party songs replaced hymns. Independent Protestant churches—often called “house churches” or “underground churches”—were forcibly shut down, with pastors dragged from their pulpits and detained. This persecution has targeted not only Protestant and Catholic Christians but also Muslims, particularly Uyghurs in Western China, as well as Buddhists, Taoists, and other religious communities.

In 2018, Zion Church became a target specifically because the church leadership refused to install facial recognition cameras inside the sanctuary. This demand reveals the totalitarian nature of China’s approach to religious control. These are not merely security cameras—they are part of a comprehensive surveillance apparatus designed to track, monitor, and ultimately intimidate anyone who dares to worship independently. The Chinese government wanted to know the face of every person who entered Zion Church, creating dossiers that could be used for future harassment, employment discrimination, and social control.

When Zion Church refused these surveillance cameras, the response was swift and brutal. Authorities harassed hundreds of church members, threatening them with job loss, eviction from rented housing, denial of their children’s educational opportunities, and even seizure of their parents’ retirement accounts. Many congregants did in fact suffer these

consequences for maintaining their faith. On September 9, 2018, hundreds of police brutally seized the church building, confiscated church assets, and briefly detained the pastoral leadership. Since then, my father has been under an exit ban, forcibly separated from our family in the United States for more than seven years.

That same year, another prominent independent church—Early Rain Covenant Church in Sichuan—was similarly destroyed. Its pastor, Wang Yi, remains in prison serving a nine-year sentence.

Yet even authoritarian repression cannot extinguish faith. When Zion Church lost its physical building, my father and the congregation developed a hybrid online-offline model that expanded nationwide, launching 100 new church plants in 40 cities across China. The church grew to its largest size ever, often reaching 10,000 individuals daily through its services and ministry.

Starting in 2025, a new and more severe wave of persecution is underway—clearly coordinated at the national level by Chinese authorities. This is not a coincidence or the independent actions of local officials. Earlier in 2025, several Zion Church gatherings in dozens of cities across China were disrupted during Sunday services. Over 150 pastors, elders, and church members had been taken to police stations for harassment, threats, interrogation, and brief detention. On the weekend of October 10, nearly 30 pastors and church leaders were simultaneously arrested across eleven cities across China. This was a level of coordination that could only come from centralized government planning. The pattern is unmistakable: this is a deliberate, government-led campaign to destroy independent Christian worship in China.

Zion Church is also not an isolated case. In May 2025, Pastor Gao Quanfu of Light of Zion Church in Xi'an was detained on fabricated criminal charges of “using superstitious activities to undermine the implementation of the law” and “fraud.” His son is also here in the U.S. seeking to speak for his imprisoned parents. In June, leaders of Golden Lampstand Church in Linfen were imprisoned for “fraud,” including Pastor Yang Rongli, who received a harsh 15-year sentence. Many other churches across China are suffering similar persecution in recent years.

And this campaign is intensifying. Last month, nine people were detained when police raided homes and the church office of Early Rain Covenant Church in Chengdu—the same church whose pastor, Wang Yi, has been imprisoned since 2018. Five were released after one day, but the message was clear: even churches already decimated by previous crackdowns remain under constant threat. In December 2025, over 1,000 miles away in Wenzhou, authorities began demolishing the Yayang Church building—destroying not just a congregation's gathering place but a physical symbol of Christian presence in the community.

To understand why my father and these church leaders are in prison today, you must understand that China under President Xi Jinping has embarked on a deliberate, systematic campaign to achieve total state control over religious life—a campaign with global implications that extend far beyond China's borders. In 2016, Xi rewrote China's religious regulations to

formalize this control, requiring all religious organizations to embrace “socialist core values” and submit to Party oversight in matters of doctrine, leadership, and practice. The goal is nothing less than to eliminate any sphere of life—including the most sacred spaces of faith—that exists independent of Party authority. This framing is fundamentally dishonest propaganda designed to obscure the true nature of what is happening.

Let me be clear: “Sinicization” as the Chinese government uses the term is not about making religions more Chinese. It is repression, plain and simple, masquerading as cultural adaptation.

Chinese Christians have been Chinese for generations. We already use Chinese Bibles—translated by Chinese scholars. We sing indigenous hymns composed by Chinese believers. We have developed our own rich theological traditions through generations of faithful witness and persecution. Our churches are led not by foreign missionaries but by Chinese pastors who were born, raised, and educated in China. My father is Chinese. His congregation is Chinese. Their faith is expressed in Chinese language, Chinese cultural forms, and Chinese community life. When the government demands “Sinicization,” they are not asking us to become more Chinese—we already are Chinese. Consider what “Sinicization” actually means in practice:

It means removing crosses from churches and replacing them with portraits of Xi Jinping and Mao Zedong. This has nothing to do with Chinese culture—it is the replacement of Christian symbols with symbols of Communist Party authority.

It means replacing hymns of worship with revolutionary Party songs. Chinese Christians have sung Chinese-language hymns for over a century. “Sinicization” doesn't mean singing in Chinese—it means singing propaganda.

It means rewriting Scripture to align with “socialist core values.” The government has literally begun editing Bible passages to make them conform to Party ideology. This is not translation or cultural adaptation—this is censorship and theological corruption.

It means installing facial recognition cameras in sanctuaries to monitor who worships and harassing the congregation for attending church. This is not Chinese culture—this is high-tech totalitarian surveillance.

It means the government selecting church leaders, approving sermons, and dictating theology. No legitimate culture requires this. This is political control over sacred matters.

What the Chinese government actually means by “Sinicization” is the complete subordination of all religious life to Communist Party control—what might more accurately be called the “Party-fication of religion.” The goal is to transform every religion into an instrument of state power, where God is subordinate to the Party, where Scripture is edited by censors, and where faith serves political ends rather than divine truth.

This is not the work of rogue local officials or bureaucratic overreach. This is a centralized, government-led totalitarian project directed from the highest levels of the Chinese state.

Why are independent Christian churches seen as such a threat by Chinese authorities? The answer reveals the fundamental nature of totalitarianism: any institution that operates independently of Party control—no matter how peaceful or beneficial to society—is viewed as an existential threat to the regime. Churches are dangerous to the Chinese government not because they are subversive, but precisely because they serve their communities out of love rather than control, and because they model forms of civil society that exist independent of Party authority.

This is what the Chinese government cannot tolerate: spaces where the Party is not supreme, where another authority—God—takes precedence. In 2008, house churches were among the first to provide humanitarian aid after the devastating Sichuan earthquake, demonstrating that Chinese citizens could organize effective, compassionate responses to crisis without Party leadership. My father's church serves the poor and marginalized, ministers to struggling marriages and hurting children. When Beijing's blood bank ran critically low, Zion Church organized blood drives year after year until the government seized its meeting space. Churches like Zion also bring together people from different economic, educational, and social backgrounds—creating rare spaces of genuine community connection in Chinese society. Many practice transparency in leadership, including democratic selection of elders, rotation of leadership positions, and clear, independent financial accountability.

All of these activities—serving the vulnerable, building community, practicing democratic governance—are exactly what authoritarian regimes fear most. They demonstrate that Chinese society does not need the Party to function, to care for its members, or to organize for the common good. This is the real “crime” of China's independent churches.

Christians in China do not oppose legitimate government authority. The church seeks to enrich Chinese society and has always lived by the principle of rendering unto Caesar what is Caesar's. But they cannot render unto Caesar what belongs to God alone. My father founded Zion Church to worship freely in a community that recognizes God—not the Communist Party—as the sole head of the church. Like faithful Christians everywhere, they hold firm to the first commandment: “Thou shalt have no other gods before me.” They ask only to be free from Party control over the sacred matters of church life: who may attend and be baptized, what sermons are preached, and what songs are sung in worship.

Since I began publicly advocating for my father's release three months ago, my family has experienced what experts call “transnational repression”—the Chinese government's systematic practice of threatening and intimidating its critics even beyond its borders. This is not isolated harassment but part of China's deliberate strategy to silence dissent globally and export its authoritarian control beyond its territory. A week after we began speaking out, my mother received a threatening phone call from someone impersonating a US federal agent, falsely claiming she was under investigation for money laundering. They pressured her to “voluntarily”

return to China or face harsh consequences, and manipulated her into sharing her phone screen and contacts. A few months later, my mother's tires were slashed in the middle of the night, while parked inside her garage. I have been watched and followed in Washington, D.C. as I meet with friends and mentors helping me advocate for my father.

China's transnational repression demonstrates that its totalitarian ambitions extend beyond its borders. Just as China exports surveillance technology to help other authoritarian regimes control their populations, it seeks to control Chinese diaspora communities worldwide and silence critics on foreign soil. The Chinese government wants the world to know that speaking out against its repression—even from the safety of America—carries consequences. This should concern not only the Chinese diaspora but every free society that values free speech and the rule of law.

I am sometimes fearful—after all, I am exposing the mistake of the world's second-most powerful country, one that has demonstrated its willingness to reach across borders to threaten and intimidate. Yet as a Christian, I believe we are called to courage and truth-telling, trusting that the God who created heaven and earth stands with us.

I urge the distinguished members of this Committee to take similar courage. Speak our names at every possible opportunity: Pastor Ezra Jin, Pastor Gao Yinjia, Pastor Wang Lin, Pastor Yin Huibin, and all the imprisoned leaders of Zion Church. And others: Pastor Gao Quanfu of Light of Zion Church in Xi'an, Pastor Wang Yi of Early Rain Covenant Church, Elder Zhang Chunlei of Guiyang Ren'ai Reformed Church, and many more whose names the world does not yet know. Please do not signal acceptance of this trampling of universal human rights through silence.

I urge this Commission and other leaders to recognize that what is happening in China is not merely a domestic matter but a global threat to religious freedom and human dignity. China's model of totalitarian control over religious life—backed by cutting-edge surveillance technology and ruthless enforcement—is being studied and replicated by authoritarian regimes worldwide. When we remain silent about China's persecution of Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, and other believers, we effectively give permission to every dictator watching to implement similar systems of control.

Despite not knowing why this is happening and experiencing the despair of seeing my father wrongfully imprisoned, I draw strength from knowing that my God is good and that even these darkest moments may serve larger purposes. Our work is not in vain. As my father wrote in a letter from prison just weeks ago: "God has indeed used His power to uphold us...I believe that God is also testing us during this time, like refining silver—painful but full of love. God will not abandon us."

Thank you.

