

# INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM ROUNDTABLE

January 25, 2019

The Honorable David H. Paruch  
Immigration Court  
P.V. McNamara Federal Building  
477 Michigan Avenue, Suite 440  
Detroit, MI 48226

Dear Judge Paruch,

As you approach final determination and a decision in the asylum case of Ms. Zou Demei, a leader of The Church of Almighty God, we write as an informal and diverse group of non-governmental organizations and individuals who are scholars, religious leaders, and human rights advocates to strongly urge you to grant Ms. Zou asylum and release her from custody as soon as possible.

We understand Ms. Zou has been detained since entering the United States and was initially denied asylum. The Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) subsequently granted Ms. Zou's motion to reopen her case and returned her application to the court for reconsideration of her asylum claim.

Please understand that if her asylum claim is denied and she is deported back to China, she will undoubtedly be at risk of execution.

Scholars have learned that The Church of Almighty God (CAG) is a religious group listed as xie jiao ("heterodox teaching," often wrongly translated as "evil cult") and is therefore banned in China. It is important to understand that being active in a group listed as xie jiao is a crime under Article 300 of the Chinese Criminal Code and is punishable with a sentence of three to seven years "or more" in prison. Further, being a leader of such a group results in much harsher punishment.

We have recently gotten to know the sisters of CAG at the International Religious Freedom (IRF) Roundtable in Washington, DC, and they have been welcomed in our new Coalition to Advance Religious Freedom in China. They are regular participants of our coalition meetings and we can tell you their stories of persecution are consistent with what we know about the tyranny and oppression all nontraditional, xie jiao and banned religious groups are suffering in China. In fact, after hearing the CAG stories alongside those of other persecuted communities that made presentations at the IRF Roundtable in October 2018, it was Sam Brownback, U.S. Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, who encouraged all persecuted communities of China to work together in coalition and speak as one united voice. All of the persecuted communities are suffering the same oppression from the Chinese Communist Party.

Based on our knowledge of the situation in China, we believe Ms. Zou's asylum claim is consistent with the experiences of other persecuted individuals in China. Further, we believe she will likely be executed if she is deported back to China.

First, as one of the top leaders of CAG in China, she was one of the most wanted by CCP authorities with a substantial bounty placed on her head. CAG obtained a copy of her "Registration as Fugitive" document that reputable scholars believe to be genuine. It accuses Ms. Zou of being the leader of CAG in the provinces of Yunnan, Guizhou, Chongqing, and Sichuan. And as all CAG members do, she destroyed all evidence of her true identity and went under the pseudonym of Yao Lu. Because of the severe persecution, it is understandable for somebody in Ms. Zou's position to destroy all identification documents and operate under aliases.

Second, the "Registration as Fugitive" document also accuses Ms. Zou of being involved in "stealing and transporting Chinese military secrets abroad," an accusation that usually involves the death penalty.

Ms. Zou managed to escape from China with the passport of another person with her picture pasted on it. She reached South Korea but that country has not granted asylum to any CAG refugee and it was therefore unsafe for her to live there with a false passport. She therefore flew to the U.S. and landed in Detroit on January 24, 2017, where her passport was detected as false and she was arrested.

We understand Ms. Zou's new attorney was supplied with evidence that was not available to the previous attorney, including the "Registration as Fugitive" document from the Chinese police database, an affidavit and video evidence showing how the document was obtained in China and why it is genuine, and affidavits by several CAG members who knew Ms. Zou under her alias of Yao Lu in China, worked with her there, and then escaped abroad. Since "video visitations" are allowed by the Detroit detention center, they were able to speak with the person detained in Detroit through video conference and to attest that, without any possible doubt, she is the same Sister Yao Lu well-known to them as a CAG leader in China.

We understand how difficult it is for the Court to verify Ms. Zou's identity and the validity of her claims. But we sincerely hope that with the new evidence and testimonies, you will understand the nature of the tyranny and oppression she escaped from.

Again, we respectfully urge you to grant her asylum claim and release her from custody as soon as possible.

She cannot be deported back to China. We have seen vast documentation about CAG and its stories of persecution based on scholarly studies written by well-known scholars who have studied the issue. There are well-documented cases of members of CAG who returned to China from foreign countries and were arrested and even tortured, or "disappeared" there. This is a matter of life and death for Ms. Zou.

Thank you for your consideration. We appreciate your attention to this matter.

Respectfully,

Greg Mitchell  
Co-Chair, International Religious Freedom Roundtable  
President, The Mitchell Firm

ORGANIZATIONS

BITTER WINTER - A daily magazine on religion and human rights in China

CESNUR - Center for Studies on New Religions

CHINA AID

THE CHURCH OF ALMIGHTY GOD

CHURCH OF SCIENTOLOGY NATIONAL AFFAIRS OFFICE

EUROPEAN INTERRELIGIOUS FORUM FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM – EIFRF

IMMANUEL BAPTIST CHURCH

JUBILEE CAMPAIGN - USA

ORLIR - International Observatory of Religious Liberty of Refugees

PATMOS INSTITUTE

UNION OF COUNCILS FOR JEWS IN THE FORMER SOVIET UNION

UYGHUR ENTREPRENEURS NETWORK

VIETNAMESE PEOPLE'S EVANGELICAL FELLOWSHIP (VPEF)

Individuals

*With title and organization for identification purposes*

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Imam  
Ahmadiyya Muslim Community

Jon Campbell  
Pastor  
Immanuel Baptist Church

Rev. Nguyễn Công Chính  
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Vietnamese People's Evangelical Fellowship (VPEF)

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Past Board Member, Amnesty International USA

Dr. Lianchao Han  
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Patmos Institute

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