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## CHINA | Protestant, Catholic Churches Under Pressure

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) is concerned by reports that authorities in China's Henan Province have demolished crosses and churches, destroyed religious materials, and forbidden children from attending services in Protestant and Catholic churches.

On April 17, a Catholic church in Luoyang was demolished along with the priest's residence. According to [ucanews.com](http://ucanews.com), the tombstone of Bishop Li Hongye, who was appointed by the Vatican but not recognized by the government, was also demolished. Two priests from the same diocese were also driven out of their parish. In other areas, authorities have confiscated church property including religious materials, and removed or destroyed crosses. Children under 18 have been prevented from attending churches, and residents have been threatened with expulsion from education and employment if they "believe in religions."

Protestant churches in the province have experienced similar incidents. On April 11, China Aid Association published a notice from the Pingyuan Neighbourhood Committee, dated April 4, which orders Christians, Buddhists, Taoists, and Muslims to register with the government. Church leaders in the Province have been ordered to study the revised Regulations on Religious Affairs, which came into effect Feb. 1. Churches have also been ordered to fly the Chinese flag.

In a letter from a Henan Protestant, published by China Aid, the author reports that churches have been told to sing the national anthem and the song "No Communist Party, No New China" in their services. Banners, posters and tiles with religious messages must be removed and destroyed. Authorities have threatened to stop state support to Christians on low-incomes if they do not give up their religious beliefs. There are also numerous reports that people under the age of 18 are forbidden from attending churches.

In 2018, a number of developments have resulted in a severe tightening of state control over religious affairs. The revised Regulations on Religious Affairs include further restrictions on religious practice, including online religious expression, and contain special provisions on national security and foreign connections.

Additionally, on March 21, Chinese state media announced that the United Front Work Department, an agency of the Communist Party of China, will absorb the State Administration of

Religious Affairs, effectively giving the Party direct oversight of religious affairs. The same month, the state-sanctioned China Christian Council and Three-Self Patriotic Movement launched a five-year plan to “Sinicize” Christianity, which reportedly includes plans to write a “secular” version of the Bible, revise other religious materials, and include teaching on socialism and patriotism alongside religious study.

CSW’s Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, “The crackdown on Christians in Henan Province demonstrates the increasing pressure on religious communities in China. While the authorities claim that religious freedom is protected, the reality is that independent religious communities are subject to harassment, intimidations and other violations. Unregistered churches are being forcibly shut down. At the same time, churches registered with the government are being managed more tightly and forced to show loyalty to the Communist Party. We call on the Chinese authorities to protect the right to freedom of religion or belief for people of all faiths in China, in all parts of the country, and to release those detained in connection with their peaceful religious practice.”