



6.15.2020

## **CHINA | Authorities Raid Church**

Xiamen city authorities destroyed property and parts of a building belonging to Xingguang Church on June 11 in the second raid on the church in just over a month, according to an open statement by a Chinese pastor on social media. Authorities had previously shut down a Sunday service at the church on May 3, injuring several church members and damaging property during the process.

On June 11, city authorities and construction workers demolished parts of the interior of five rooms, removing paneling and partition walls. During the raid, authorities also removed church property including furniture and educational materials from the church's school section. According to witnesses, the authorities verbally declared parts of the building to be "illegal" but did not provide any legal documentation. The authorities were accompanied by construction workers and unidentified persons dressed in black, armed with shields and what witnesses described as riot gear. Church members called the police several times. When the police arrived, they told the church members they could not intervene.

According to the pastor, the authorities responsible for the incident did not cite the COVID-19 pandemic or violation of lockdown rules as reason for their actions. In fact, the church had not been using the building for meetings for several weeks. This incident is the latest in long series of actions targeting the church.

The raid took place in the same week that the US Department of State released its annual report on international religious freedom, including a lengthy section on freedom of religion or belief violations by the Chinese government. According to the report, "There continued to be reports of deaths in custody and that the government tortured, physically abused, arrested, detained, sentenced to prison, subjected to forced indoctrination in CCP (Chinese Communist Party) ideology, or harassed adherents of both registered and unregistered religious groups for activities related to their religious beliefs and practices."

The patterns of violations described in the report are consistent with CSW's research. CSW's March 2020 report details a range of violations against churches, including demolition of church buildings, forced closure of unregistered churches, arrest and detention of church leaders, removal of banners, posters and tiles with religious messages from private homes and church buildings, threats to withhold state support from low-income Christian families if they do not give

up their religious beliefs, and pressure on landlords not to rent meeting space to unregistered churches.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "CSW condemns the raid on Xingguang Church in Xiamen, which is yet another example of China's relentless crackdown on religious groups. A church exercising its right to freedom of religion or belief by engaging in peaceful religious activities has endured property damage, harassment and intimidation without justification. This is by no means an isolated incident and we call on the Chinese authorities to cease all harassment of Xingguang and other churches, allowing them to meet for religious activities and upholding the right to freedom of religion or belief for people of all faiths and none. We continue to urge the international community to pay close attention to developments in China, holding the Chinese Communist Party to account for abuses of power and violations of religious freedom."