



Current Events :: Chinese Officials Offer Citizens Monetary Reward for Pictures of Illegal Underground

Chinese Officials Offer Citizens Monetary Reward for Pictures of Illegal Underground Churches - posted by followthelam

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"Government officials in one of China's most populous provinces are offering monetary rewards to citizens who report on illegal religious activity venues, including underground churches, according to a new report.

In August, the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Bureau of Gushi county in Henan province began offering citizens 500 RMB (about \$70 USD) for collecting photos, videos, audio recordings and other materials of any illegal religious activities, according to the report by Bitter Winter, which monitors religious liberty violations in China. Henan is the third-most populous province in China.

Christians in China are only allowed to worship in a church that's part of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (for Protestants) or the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association. But because both bodies face severe restrictions including a limit on what is preached millions of Christians worship at illegal underground churches.

Underground churches often meet in homes or rented buildings. The county's stance on illegal churches caused one landlord to stop renting to an underground church, Bitter Winter reported.

"Encouraged by the government propaganda, the landlord drove us away, refusing to rent us her property," a church member of the underground church said. "She explained that she didn't want to suffer consequences if our venue was discovered. The CCP will not stop until it eliminates all religious beliefs."

Monetary rewards are being offered in other parts of the province, including in the cities of Mengzhou, Jiyuan and Shangqiu.

"The government exerts strict control not only to curb the development of Three-Self churches but also ban house churches, for fear that they will help topple the regime," a local government employee told Bitter Winter.

Government officials even have asked Three-Self church members to snitch on illegal underground churches. Such a request was made in the province of Hubei, where the government convened a meeting in June with 20 clergy from Three-Self churches.

"The government asks us to donate to it, disregarding that our church has been closed for months," one of the clergy told Bitter Winter. "Officials told us that since we don't have money to give to the government, we should encourage believers to spy on unregistered venues and collect rewards for this. We would get enough money after several such reports, they said. We do know who attends house churches, but we won't do things against our conscience. Everyone must have the right to practice their faith."