

Release China Appeal Transcript of interview with Bob Fu, October 2019

Andrew: Uyghur Christian **Alimujiang Yimiti** was sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment for allegedly leaking state secrets to a foreign individual. The charge and conviction were based on two private conversations between Alimujiang and an American friend. There is no evidence to suggest those conversations included any sensitive information, which points to his innocence.

Bob Fu of China Aid, let's just widen the picture slightly before we talk about his case. When you think about the Uyghurs in China you think of Muslims. Alimujiang is from a Muslim background and chose to be a Christian. How many Uyghur Christians are there and what kind of persecution are they facing?

Bob: Thank you Andrew. Yes, the majority number of the Uyghurs are Muslim believers, but the number of Christians who are Uyghurs is estimated from 700 - 800 to 1,000 or so. It is increasing, because so many missionaries and Christian workers had been working in the Uyghur region, namely Xinjiang, and have demonstrated love and the gospel has spread.

Andrew: So there is a minority of Christians among Uyghurs. What kind of persecution do they face?

Bob: So the Uyghur Christians actually received much more severe persecution than other minorities in Xinjiang. The Communist Party almost took what I called the Communist Party's version of sharia law, by forbidding any Uyghurs to convert to Christianity. So if you stayed as a Uyghur and as a Muslim, usually you would receive less threats and punishment, of course, until two or three years ago when [there was] this massive, across the border crackdown. But if you're found to be a Uyghur and a convert to the Christian faith, you will receive a much more severe sentence.

This is exactly happened to Alimujiang Yimiti. He is a Uyghur and he converted to the Christian faith. Not only did he become a follower of Christ as, but as a Christian he actually became a leader, a pastor among the Uyghur Christians. That's why he received such a ridiculously long, harsh sentence of 15 years.

The charge is so-called leaking state secrets to overseas organisations, or to foreigners. This is the only piece of evidence the court indicted him on; it was based on a secretly recorded conversation from his home that he had with an American business friend who was a Christian.

And Alimujiang was telling him basically, so you are monitored by the Chinese State security. That's the only piece of evidence he was accused of leaking or exposing – the state secret – and he received 15 years' of imprisonment.

Andrew: They tapped his phone to get evidence?

Bob: That's right. The so-called piece of evidence was secretly clandestinely recorded at his home and that was used against him for 15 years.

Andrew: So he's been imprisoned for nine years already. Where is he being held?

Bob: He's being held in a prison in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. His wife and two sons, for a few years were allowed to visit him once a month. But recently that was forbidden and banned.

Andrew: What do they hope to achieve by clamping down on him in this way? Why no family visits?

Bob: I think the Chinese Communist government want to send a signal to all the Uyghurs: if you become a Uyghur Christian, this will happen, not only to you, with a harsh sentence, but now your family would not even be allowed to visit you. So it's a kind of punishment to the Uyghur Christians.

Andrew: Do we know what his daily routine is in prison?

Bob: We're not exactly sure about his daily routine, but, of course, as we know from the information that leaked out about what is happening to other, up to one million of his fellow Uyghurs in the re-education camp in the past few years, they are subject to 24-hour, non-stop brainwashing, and all of the Uyghurs are mandated to wear a specially designed earphone with 24/7 propaganda broadcast. So some Uyghurs even went crazy.

Can you imagine? You wear the earphone with non-stop propaganda and you have to recite this propaganda, memorise that – love the party, love the state and love President Xi Jinping – these brainwash things non-stop.

Andrew: George Orwell would have been proud of him.

Bob: Yes, this is exactly the Chinese version of the Orwellian state.

Andrew: How is Alimujiang coping with all this? That's a terrible situation to be under. How is his faith standing up to this?

Bob: Alimujiang's faith is very strong, thankfully, and according to very reliable sources China Aid learned that as soon as he went into prison being sentenced for 15 years, initially, he was a little disappointed, even after so many rounds of legal defence.

And by the way, those lawyers, who went to the court, according to the Chinese own law, who defended him for several years, including the first and second trial and then the appeal to a higher court, were all harassed, intimidated and were even chased and warned and not allowed to go back to Xinjiang.

But his faith remains very strong. And recently, we learned that he told his family who visited him that he thanks God for sending him to that prison, so that he can continue to share the gospel and live out the gospel in these dark prisons in Xinjiang.

Andrew: So he is able to get some visitors? And sometimes this family can see him?

Bob: His family has been deemed as non-cooperative with the China securities. By definition, non-cooperation means she either talked to other Uyghurs or had fellowship with other Uyghur Christians or talked to a reporter or communicated on the phone or the Internet with other friends. That is deemed as non-cooperative by the authorities. So, she would be punished by being cut off from family visits with Alimujiang

Andrew: Now you have some news about his wife and the conditions she's facing. What's her name?

Bob: **Gulinuer** is a very dedicated, strong Christian lady, raising the two children in the past nearly two years without her husband and father's presence. She remains strong. And recently, she was not allowed to visit her husband anymore, and instead, we learn from our reliable sources, that she was being followed, monitored, every day for 24 hours a day, and even the state security agents would follow her into the bathroom.

Andrew: So they in her house? That's a terrible situation to be in. How is she coping?

Bob: Because of the extraordinary surveillance and intimidation and threat, we are still trying to find out what is her way of coping with this. But we know that her faith is very strong in Jesus Christ and she has not given up her faith. She actually continues to nurture her two children with solid Christian education at home.

Andrew: China Aid is a partner of Release International. Together we are supporting the persecuted church in China. How is China Aid able to help Alimujiang's family?

Bob: Alimujiang lives in Xinjiang as an ethnic Uyghur. As soon as we learned he was arrested we started speaking up for him. We also help the legal defence firm, during the first and second trial to the continuing appeal. So we provide support for that.

Of course, with two little children and the constant threat to his wife, initially they lived in another smaller city and we have been really very concerned about Guli's safety and the two children's education. They are not allowed to go to school. That's why we, from the very beginning, have started the financial support and helping cover the two children's education and the family and other expenses.

Andrew: And there are others like them, other families of people who are imprisoned in China. What typically is their need for support – what do they need the most?

Bob: Those who are persecuted, especially family members, they are always feeling isolated, especially in such a remote area in west China, in Xinjiang. They feel very, very lonely, so they really need our prayer support and they need encouragement. If there is any chance they need visitation, to let them know they are not alone.

Of course, they need financial support, because the Chinese regime cut off all financial resources as a way of holding the family as hostages, to punish prisoners like Alimujiang, to surrender his will and basically to break his will. And so we always

need to stand with them in solidarity and to speak up for them and to continue to pray for them.

Andrew: Let's move on to the case of Pastor **Zhang Shaojie**, the pastor of a state-approved church. In 2014 he was sentenced to 12 years' in prison on charges of public disorder and fraud.

Now China Aid and Release International believe those charges were trumped up, because the Nunle County Christian Church had been in dispute with the local government authorities over a plot of land. The authorities wanted the land, but Pastor Zhang and the church leaders had already posted plans for a new church building, Bible school and ministry centre.

Local government officials wanted to seize the plot and sell it to developers at a huge profit, so Pastor Zhang and church members decided to go to Beijing to petition for the land, but they were prevented from doing so by the local government.

Since then, he's been starved and tortured in prison, leaving his health in a critical condition. Officials have refused to let him appeal his sentence. Is there any update on the situation?

Bob: Yes. Pastor Zhang's case shows how hypocritical the Chinese regime has shown itself.

They always declared to the international community as long as you joined the government-sanctioned Three Self Patriotic Movement Church, you will be protected, you will be okay. And Pastor Zhang received a 12-year sentence for simply speaking up for the believers in his congregation, who received enormous social injustice. And with the government in collaboration with those commercial builders they wanted to grab the church's land for commercial use.

Andrew: So this is persecution linked to corruption?

Bob: Absolutely this is persecution linked to corruption. Because of Pastor Zhang's insistence, without compromise, he was hated and he was caught and then he was arrested and sentenced to this long sentence.

Not only Pastor Zhang was sentenced to all these years. All of his co-workers, the main leaders in that Three Self Church in Nanle County were arrested and sentenced.

Of course, most of them have been released except Pastor Zhang. He was being treated very terribly in prison, but we do learn that he has a very uplifting spirit. The prison authority sees him as a moral asset even, because as a pastor he was not only taking care of himself, he actually used the funding his family gave to him to support other vulnerable prisoners, by feeding them.

Andrew: So he has been pastoring others?

Bob: Yes, he was even leading a Bible study.

Andrew: So the authorities actually appreciate the good work is doing – is that what you're saying?

Bob: Yes, the prison authorities knew that he was a good Christian, and yet the Chinese security officers treated him very badly.

Andrew: So how is he now? What's his condition?

Bob: We heard that in his current prison he was still treated pretty roughly. He was not allowed to take showers. Sometimes he would receive threats by saying that if he does not give up – they've tried to force him to give up his leadership in the Nanle Church. Remember, he was forcibly removed from his pastoral leadership. He was the chairman of the Three Self Patriotic Movement of the whole of Nanle County. He was also the Nanle County's People's representative, like a city councilman.

The Chinese authorities tried to defame him, tried to break his will in the prison. They tried to ask him to volunteer to give up, but he refused to do that. Because of that, he received some harsh treatment

Andrew: Is he okay? Is he in good health?

Bob: Right now, I have heard that he is fine.

Andrew: Which prison is he in?

Bob: He is in Number Two Henan prison, I think.

Andrew: Let's revisit something you said earlier, that he was a leader of the official state-sanctioned, state-approved, legitimate, lawful church, but all this has happened to him. We know that there's been a clampdown of the law, the law tightened in 2018. It's been long said that if you are lawful and the church you go to is state-approved, you would be left alone. But what is the situation now facing Christians who have stayed in the state-approved church movement?

Bob: That is exactly the situation facing Christians in China after President Xijiping passed this new regulation of religious affairs on Feb 1, 2018. On that first day after this new regulation took effect, in Henan province alone, we learned that at least 10,000 churches were totally banned and closed, in one province. That's Pastor Zhang Shaojie's province. So the majority of them, ironically, are actually Three Self Patriotic Movement official churches.

Andrew: So there's no protection if you stay within the law?

Bob: That's right; the government actually has a quota to shut down two-thirds of the government-sanctioned church, no matter what. So those who are allowed to exist have to execute the so-called official sinicization campaign, which means then every morning on Sunday, all the church congregations have to rise up singing the Communist Party's national anthem as the first act of worship.

Andrew: Sinicization means actually to make it more Chinese?

Bob: Yes, but actually to be more clear, it is to make it more like the Communist version.

Andrew: Which, of course, is an atheist party, so you have an atheist party in control of the church, which is a contradiction in terms.

Bob: It is. To make your religion of Christianity compatible with the Communist Party.

Andrew: Which is atheism – it doesn't work, does it?

Bob: So there's been a loss of the church. Crosses were also forcibly demolished and destroyed in Henan province. If those leaders, like Pastor Zhang show any defiance it means they are immediately dismissed and possibly sent to prison, too.

Andrew: China is a partner of Release International. How is China Aid supporting Pastor Zhang?

Bob: As we learned about the situation, although he belongs to the government-sanctioned church, because what he did was out of Christian conviction and from the heart of the gospel, so we immediately started praying for him and his family. We arranged for a number of human rights lawyers to represent him and his fellow workers, including his family members.

And with Release International we had a campaign, financially supporting many of those families of prisoners including Pastor Zhang. And we, of course, have spoken very publicly in the international arena.

When one of his daughters, Esther and her family, were facing a very imminent life threat, we rescued her and her husband and her whole family to the United States. They are now living in Texas.

Andrew: Do you have any message for **Release International supporters** supporting you in your work?

Bob: We are very thankful. Release International is really one of the first Christian organisations that came to partner with China Aid, taking action in support of the church and those who are persecuted, including Pastor Zhang and his family. And several members from Released International travelled from Northern Ireland to Henan, to Nanle County, to visit the wife and children of Pastor Zhang and some of his fellow co-workers and families.

You guys sent the first group up to personally visit and so far it is the only group actually who were able to get there, at huge personal risk. I think family members of Pastor Zhang and his fellow co-workers have been greatly encouraged by that.

Andrew: We've had news recently that an American pastor has just been released from China. Can you tell us a little more about that?

Bob: Yes, **Pastor Michael Yu** had been an immigrant to the US from Taiwan for over 30 years. He used to pastor a very large Chinese Baptist Church in Orange County, California. He, in recent years he had been ministering to Chinese Christian business leaders.

In March of this year, after he finished meeting with some Chinese Christian business leaders, he was detained by the state security agents and suffered a number of interrogations. He was then banned from travelling back home to the United States. He is an American citizen. We had launched an appeal for him, both publicly and also briefing the White House and State Department senior officials, so the US government had very actively engaged in promoting for his freedom in advocating for his release.

Andrew: You must be very pleased is now free?

Bob: We are very, very thankful and glad that he has finally got home.

Andrew: Are there any other cases you like to highlight?

Bob: Yes. I'd like to highlight the case of **Pastor John Cao**, another Chinese-American pastor. He came to the US as a student studying theology and got married to a caucasian American wife and had two children.

He could have lived a very comfortable life, by continuing his American dream; he chose to be a senior pastor in a very large Chinese church in North Carolina, and yet he felt called by the Lord to go back to China.

He spent at least half a year in China, ministering to the house church. And a few years ago he travelled to the Burma side of China, to the Burma border, and met a group of Kachin minority people. This group of people were being persecuted by the Burmese military government. They were bombed and cornered into the mountainous area.

And when Pastor John Cao went there and saw these thousands of children who were barefooted with no clothes and no education at all, running around, he had a Macedonian call. He felt the Lord calling him to help them.

So he mobilised house churches in China and America and established 16 schools for 2,000 children, and yet the Chinese security officers arrested him three years ago and then sentenced him to seven years in prison. So he has been suffering enormously.

He has already lost 30lbs because of malnourishment in prison, and he is 60 years old already.

His American wife travelled to China to the prison wall where John, her husband, was imprisoned. But she was forbidden from even having a meeting with her husband.

Her mother and all her family members were prevented from meeting with him. So we need to really pray for this bold evangelist , this never ashamed of the gospel worker for the kingdom of God, a real champion for the mission China. We need to pray for him and support his family and support family visitation after his been transferred to prison from the detention centre recently. That's my prayer request.

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Bob Fu: Jesus is the Son of God. Here the Truth and the Life and my daily bread. He is both Saviour and Lord.

Andrew: How did you come to know him?

Bob: I'm very thankful that after the Tiananmen massacre, during the hardest time in my life, that Jesus rescued me through an American missionary's intervention. And I came to know the Lord.

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