

# CESNUR Center for Studies on New Religions



Via Confienza 19

10121 Torino, Italy

[www.cesnur.org](http://www.cesnur.org)

[cesnur\\_to@virgilio.it](mailto:cesnur_to@virgilio.it)

Publisher of the daily magazine on human rights and religious liberty in China *Bitter Winter*:

<https://bitterwinter.org/>

Warsaw, Thursday 13 September 2018

## **OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting**

Working Session 6: Combating intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief, including against Christians, Muslims and members of other religions, and combating anti-Semitism

Statement by Prof Massimo Introvigne, Managing Director, CESNUR

### **The Repression of Religion in China: Consequences for OSCE Participating States**

On February 1, 2018, a new Religious Affairs Regulation came into force in China. The consensus of legal experts is that it imposed new restrictions on the “gray market” of religions and churches that are not part of the five official government-controlled religious institutions. It also provided new tools for persecuting the religious communities in the “black market,” included in the official list of *xie jiao*, “heterodox teachings” that are entirely prohibited and persecuted. Being active in a *xie jiao* is a crime punished by art. 300 of the Chinese Criminal Code with a term to three to seven years “or more” in jail.

Tibet and Xinjiang have special regulations, but the general climate hostile to religion has led to increased persecution of Uyghur and ethnically Kazakh Muslims in Xinjiang and dissident Buddhists in Tibet. Scholars estimate that “transformation through education” camps, which are in fact concentration camps, host 1,5 million inmates, two thirds of them Uyghurs.

OSCE participating States have multiple relations with China, and we would encourage them to raise human rights and religious liberty issues in a more decisive way in bilateral meetings.

The OSCE space is also affected by the situation in China, as participating States receive a growing number of religion-based asylum requests by Chinese citizens. The largest contingents of them are Uyghurs, particularly in Central Asia, and members of religions listed as *xie jiao*, particularly in Western Europe and North America. There

are still refugees from Falun Gong but in recent years the highest number comes from The Church of Almighty God, a Chinese Christian new religious movement listed as a *xie jiao* since 1995 and credited by governmental sources with some four million members in China. The Church of Almighty God has been persecuted since 1995 or before, and more than 300,000 members of the Church have been detained in China. Some NGOs have documented several instances of torture and extra-judicial killings. It has also been targeted by consistent campaigns of fake news, accusing it of crimes rigorous investigation by Western scholars proved it has not committed.

Because of the fake news, general hostility to refugees, and confusions about how refugee laws should be interpreted, out of more than 2,200 asylum requests of members of this Church in the OSCE area, excluding the United States, only 320 have been accepted.

We commend Canada and Sweden for its prevalence of favorable decisions, and note that the Italian authorities have started a cooperation with scholars for receiving more accurate information on this and other groups.

But in other countries, most of the asylum seekers of The Church of Almighty God and other persecuted Chinese religions are rejected and, in some cases, deported back to China where they quickly “disappear.”

We recommend that serious and fair consideration be given to religion-based asylum requests by Chinese refugees, including those from The Church of Almighty God, in all participating states, and that nobody should be deported without seriously evaluating the risks he or she would face in China, which may include incarceration, torture, and even death.