



ORLIR

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Intolerance and Discrimination Against Religion-Based Refugees from China in the OSCE Area: The Case of The Church of Almighty God

These days there are few issues that are particularly toxic in our societies: refugees and China. And my very young and still very small organization – ORLIR – is dealing with both of them.

We see how the issue of migration is turning apart countries, changing alliances, and helping populists of all kind to rise to power. It took us and media a long time to finally acknowledge that most of those people who massively arriving to Europe are not refugees but migrants. Still in the media confusion persists and very often information is inaccurate and blurred.

We all know that there is a big difference between migrants, searching for a better economic life, and refugees, who for reasons of war and persecution are fleeing their countries of origin. Some of these people have only two choices: to be persecuted, tortured and even killed, or flee their country and try to seek protection.

I perfectly understand challenge for the authorities of recipient countries to distinguish who is persecuted and in imminent danger, and who is pretending for the sake of getting the right to stay. My humble experience of talking to many refugees shows that those who are pretending being persecuted and are better actors and are getting refugee status. And those

who are in real danger very often fail to prove their case and thus are sent back to their oppressors.

I could tell many moving and tragic stories of people who flee severe persecution in China on religious grounds. I will focus today on members of a new Christian group called The Church of Almighty God. The Church of Almighty God is one of the largest and fastest growing religious groups in China. And this is exactly why it is severely persecuted. Any member identified by Chinese authorities would be sent to jail, most of them will be tortured in order to extract information about other members of the Church. They will be sent to reeducation camps and, once released, will be kept under watch, and eventually put in jail again if they would not agree to cooperate with Chinese authorities and renounce their faith. Cases of suspect organ harvesting from prisoners of conscience of this Church have also been reported.

Most members of The Church of Almighty God would flee their country only and when they have confirmed information that their arrest is imminent. They do not flee to seek our jobs or get financial or economic benefits, but to survive and protect other brothers and sisters of their group. By fleeing China, they lose everything: their families, friends, homes, and jobs. They arrive to our countries with nothing but their faith and their hope that fellow brothers and sisters would support them. They arrive carrying a lot of pain and deep trauma. Very often, out of fear, they are not able to present their cases well enough and end up being denied asylum or even being deported.

On August 31, despite protests by the Red Cross, the German Evangelical Lutheran Church, and several NGOs, including mine, a member of this Church, sister Zhao Xueliang, was deported back to China from Germany. She has “disappeared” in China and her whereabouts are unknown ever since. My pleading today to the representatives of the participating States is, please hear and remember the name of The Church of Almighty God. Please carry out serious research about this group, do not believe what Chinese media, and Western media that copy them, are saying but read reliable information from independent NGOs and academic sources. We have no right to play with people’s lives and we cannot send them to their death.

Another toxic issue is to talk about China. Yes, China spares no efforts and financial means to persuade us that there are no human rights problems there. They bribe and buy everybody they can: politicians, journalists, even academics who would be paid to say that what we are presenting to you today it's not true. Some of the meetings we organize during international political or academic conferences are half empty, because people know: once you will be spotted by Chinese authorities participating in this kind of meetings, you will never go to China again. China plays an important role at the United Nations to kill every mention of human rights, and human rights are rarely part of the agendas of bilateral meetings either, because everybody wants to have good economics contracts with China. But, if we cannot change Chinese politics, perhaps we can at least protect those who flee Chinese persecution. It is not only our moral duty to protect those who are in imminent danger. States have a legal obligation under international law.