

PRISONER PROFILE

Prisoner Name: **Zhao Weiliang**

Location: **China**

Arrested: **June 2014**



Arrest and background

Chinese Christian Zhao Weiliang was sentenced to four years in prison after Chinese officials raided a choir practice in June 2014. As the believers practised singing hymns more than 50 police and plain-clothes officers burst into the rural woodmill factory owned by a church member without identifying themselves and took the 22 Christians present into custody. Among those taken to the local police station were a pregnant woman and several small children, including two babies less than a year old. Musical instruments and equipment were also confiscated.

The group was deprived of food and water as the police tried to extract confessions that the Christians were part of a cult. Guards eventually brought some snack foods when the prisoners warned them that the babies could die. Ten of the Christians, along with the children, were then released, but 12 were kept in detention for further interrogation.

Zhao Weiliang was taken to a room where an officer told him, 'There is no surveillance camera in this room. If I beat you to death, no one will know.'

He was then handcuffed and taken to a hotel, where officers could abuse him without surveillance. He had not eaten or slept for two days. A high-ranking officer arrived and further abused the pastor, jumping on his back, striking him in the face, and repeatedly punching him in the chest. The officer demanded that the pastor confessed to leading a cult organisation.

The pastor responded to the accusations by explaining his beliefs in God, in Jesus Christ, and by saying that he did not believe in heresy.

Ten of the remaining Christians were granted bail and released the following month, but Zhao Weiliang together with his friend and fellow church leader, Cheng Hongpeng, was convicted under Article 300 of China's Criminal Code as someone who 'organises and utilises superstitious sects, secret societies, and evil religious organisations or undermines the implementation of the state's laws.'

Authorities accused Zhao of being the key leader of the 'cult' and Cheng of playing an active role.

In a legal appeal, Pastor Zhao's lawyer stated that the believers were not part of any specific organisation that would undermine the state laws. The group had conducted choir practice at the factory which had no close neighbours. They did not bother anyone nor break any laws. He added, 'If singing hymns were a crime, then perhaps the Cao County [authorities] would have to kill all the skylarks.'

The lawyer argued that though China had freedom of religion, the arrests were, 'a case of persecution of Christians.'

According to Release partner, China Aid, Zhao's Total Scope Church is a Bible- based Chinese house church centred on the teachings of Christ and not a cult.

Zhao Weiliang has a wife, Li Cuiping, and two small children. He also supported his elderly parents. His wife and family currently depend on church members to maintain a few acres of farmland and need our continued prayer and support.

PRAY:

1. For justice, that both Zhao and Cheng will be exonerated and released.
2. That God will strengthen, protect and encourage both men and enable them to remain faithful in their witness to their faith in Christ.
3. For God's blessing and provision for the families of both men.

SEND A CARD OF ENCOURAGEMENT TO ZHAO or CHENG:

Address card to:

Zhao Weiliang (or to Cheng Hongpeng)

Heze City Detention Center, No. 168 Changjiang Xilou, Cao county, Heze city

Shandong province

274031

China

Or alternatively mark cards for Zhang Weiliang (or to Cheng Hongpeng) and send to: Release International, PO Box 54, Orpington, BR5 4RT.

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Post this Prisoner Profile on the bulletin board in your church, Sunday school class or youth group. Share a copy with your pastor, members of your prayer group and other Christian friends.

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