

## CECC Hearing Grace Jin Drexel

On October 10th, my father, Pastor Ezra Jin, was arrested by Chinese authorities along with 28 other pastors and church leaders from Zion Church. Seventeen church leaders now remain in prison with him. This crackdown has been reported as the largest takedown of an independent, or “underground,” or house church in China since the Cultural Revolution. Because of the prominence of the church and the brazenness of China’s repression, their case has become an international [incident](#) that has been profiled extensively in the international press, attracting a number of statements of public support across the United States government and beyond, including from Secretary of State Marco Rubio. Many of these church leaders were taken in front of their young families, who they now leave behind. My father, and several other older leaders, struggle with various health issues and we are deeply concerned about their treatment in prison. I urge the Chinese government to release all these Zion Church members immediately and unconditionally.

My father’s church, Zion Church, was founded in 2007 with the mission to be faithful to God’s Word and to serve families and communities around us. When Zion was founded in 2007, there were only 2 families—less than 20 church members. But by God’s grace and power, within just one decade, Zion grew rapidly into one of the largest emerging urban house churches in China, with more than 1,500 members and more than 20 ministers.

Since Chairman Xi Jinping came into power, he has refocused the Chinese Communist Party and the state to strengthen ideological purity and to consolidate control of society. In 2016, Xi rewrote the Regulation on Religion in China and emphasized the need to “Sinicize religion.” However, at its core, this was not about making religions “more Chinese”—Christians in China already had Chinese Bibles, indigenous hymns, their own Church history, and unique theology grown from years of persecution. Our churches are led not by foreign missionaries but by Chinese Christians themselves. Instead, the campaign was truly about forcing “socialist core values” into all religions. It is less Sinicization, more “Party-fication of religion.”

[Beginning in 2018, a wave of persecution and crackdown on all religions began under the auspices of Sinicization. We saw crosses being torn down, churches leveled, portraits of Xi and Mao installed in place of crucifixes. Instead of singing hymns, revolutionary Party songs were sung in churches. Independent churches, also known as house churches or underground churches, were shut down forcibly—the pastors or leaders dragged from the podium and often detained or harassed. Not only aimed at Protestant Christians and Catholics, this crackdown also targeted Muslims, especially

the Uyghur community in Western China, Buddhists, Taoists and other religious groups.]

In 2018, Zion Church was also targeted. Because the church leadership refused to install facial recognition cameras inside the sanctuary, the government harassed hundreds of church members, threatening them with their jobs, rented houses, children's education, and even their parents' retirement accounts. Many of the congregants did in fact pay these consequences for keeping their faith. On September 9, hundreds of police brutally seized and shuttered the church building, took hold of church assets, and briefly detained and closely surveilled the pastors and leaders. Since 2018, my father has been put under an exit ban and consequently has been forcibly separated from my family in the US for more than seven years.

That year, another influential independent house church in Sichuan, Early Rain Covenant Church, was also taken down. Its pastor, Pastor Wang Yi, has since then been in prison for a nine years sentence.

However, as many here can attest, as powerful as the Chinese Communist Party and many other authoritarian governments are, they will never be able to take our faith and beliefs from us. Even in the case of Zion Church's own history, we've already seen how government attempts to coerce and control the faithful have backfired, laying bare the hollowness of authoritarian ideology, the strength of faith, and ultimately growing the church. Because the church lost its place of worship, it pushed my father's church to develop a hybrid online-offline model that went nationwide, launching 100 new church plants in 40 cities across China, growing the church to the largest it's ever been, often reaching 10,000 individuals daily.

In 2025, a new wave of religious persecution is emerging across China. In the year leading up to Zion's arrests last month. Earlier this year, multiple Zion Church sites in dozens of cities were frequently disrupted during our Sunday services, and over 150 pastors, elders, and church members were taken to police stations. They were harassed, threatened, interrogated, and some briefly detained. In May of this year, Pastor Gao Quanfu, a dear friend of my father's, based in Xi'An, was detained on criminal charges of "using superstitious activities to undermine the implementation of the law." His son is also here in the audience today seeking to speak out for his parents and their church. In June, multiple co-workers of the Golden Lampstand Church in Linfen were imprisoned for "fraud," including Pastor Yang Rongli, who received a heavy 15-year sentence. Many more churches in China are suffering ongoing persecution this year.

Christians in China are not opposed to the Chinese authorities, and the Church has always sought to enrich Chinese society. They merely ask to be free from the control of the Chinese Communist Party, a self-identified atheist organization, in the sacred decisions of the church, including things like who can attend and be baptised, what sermons are preached, and what songs of worship they sing. The CCP seeks to control everything and everyone in China, including the most intimate part of us, which is our beliefs. My father started Zion Church in order to worship freely in a church that put God as the sole head of our church. Like faithful Christians everywhere, my father's church seeks to give unto Caesar what is Caesar's but holds firm the position that "thou shall have no other gods before me."

Chinese independent house churches are seen as a threat not because they are evil or dangerous as the authorities so often try to paint them. They are a threat because they often care deeply for the society and serve the community out of love, and not control. In 2008, the house churches came together and were the first to provide humanitarian aid for those suffering in Sichuan after the devastating earthquake. [My father's church ministers to broken marriages and depressed children. When they heard that the Beijing blood bank was almost out of blood, Zion Church hosted blood drives and continued to do so each year until the government seized its meeting space in 2018.] The Church also serves as a uniquely connected civil society organization in China, bringing together people from different economic, education, and social strata. Churches often model transparency in leadership, including democratically selecting church elders, rotation of church board members, and clear and independent financial structures.

Since I began advocating for my father and the release of the other church leaders detained around a month ago, my family has also experienced "transnational repression," that is, we have been targeted by the Chinese government abroad. A week after we began speaking out on my dad's detention, my mother received a threatening phone call from someone impersonating a US federal agent warning her that she was a suspect of a money laundering scheme. They threatened her to voluntarily return to China or face harsh consequences, and manipulated her into sharing her phone screen and contacts. There is also evidence that I have also been watched and followed in Washington D.C. as I meet with friends and mentors who have been helping me. I am sometimes indeed fearful—afterall, I know that I am seeking to expose and hold to account the second most powerful country in the world. Yet as a Christian, I believe only light exposes and ultimately overcomes darkness, and that the God who created Heaven and Earth will stand by my side.

Similarly, I urge leaders here today to take similar courage—too use the authority entrusted in your hands and to not forget us. Speak our names: Pastor Ezra Jin, Pastor

Gao Yinjia, Pastor Wang Lin, Pastor Yin Huibin and all the leaders of Zion Church in China. And others as well: Pastor Gao Quanfu of Light of Zion Church in Xi'an, Pastor Wang Yi of Early Rain Covenant Church, Elder Zhang Chunlei of Guiyang Ren'ai Reformed Church, and others. Please do not signal defeat and acceptance of this trampling of universal human rights with your silence.

As a Christian, I also believe in miracles, and we are praying for the full release of all of Zion's imprisoned church leaders today. And despite not knowing why this is happening and experiencing the despair of seeing my father and others wrongfully imprisoned, I can draw strength in knowing that my God is a good God and that even these bleakest moments might be used for bigger things, and our work is not in vain. As my dad wrote in a letter from prison just a couple weeks ago, "God has indeed used His power to uphold us...I believe that God is also testing us during this time, like refining gold—painful but full of love. God will not abandon us."

Thank you so much.