
CHINESE POLICE DYNAMITE CHRISTIAN MEGACHURCH

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HONG KONG □ Chinese police officers demolished one of the countrys largest evangelical churches this week, using heavy machinery and dynamite to raze the building where more than 50,000 Christians worshiped.

The Golden Lampstand Church in Shanxi Province was one of at least two Christian churches demolished by the authorities in recent weeks, part of what critics describe as a national effort to regulate spiritual life in China.

Under President Xi Jinping, the government has destroyed churches or removed their steeples and crosses as part of a campaign that reflects the Communist Partys longstanding fear that Christianity, viewed as a Western philosophy, is a threat to the partys authority.

Global Times, a state newspaper, described the buildings destruction as part of a citywide campaign to remove illegal buildings, and quoted an unidentified official as saying that the church had been secretly constructed without proper permits and was initially disguised as a warehouse.

Members of the megachurch, however, have previously clashed with the authorities, including in 2009 when the police confiscated Bibles and imprisoned several of the congregations leaders.

On Tuesday, officers of the Peoples Armed Police, a state paramilitary organization, detonated explosives in the churchs underground sanctuary and destroyed the rest of the building, according to ChinaAid, an American watchdog group that monitors religious freedom in China.

The repeated persecution of Golden Lampstand Church demonstrates that the Chinese government has no respect for religious freedom or human rights, said Bob Fu, the groups founder.

ChinaAid said that the building was built by the married evangelists Wang Xiaoguang and Yang Rongli with nearly \$3 million in contributions from local Christians, but that it had never been registered with the authorities, a legal requirement.

Officially, Chinese citizens are free to practice the religion of their choice, but the government tightly controls spiritual life, and in some cases bans certain groups, like Falun Gong.

On Dec. 27, the authorities also demolished a Catholic church in Shaanxi Province, southwest of Shanxi Province, destroying an altar and confiscating vestments, according to ChinaAid.

More than 60 million Christians live in China, at least half of whom worship in unregistered churches.

Kaynak/Source: