

Monthly News Summary: People's Republic of China July 2007

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Christians attending Olympics welcomed to worship, but not to evangelize. The China Christian Council has asked all Christian individuals and groups who attend the 2008 Olympic Games in China to respect the three-self nature of the churches in China, self-support, self-government, and self-evangelization. All are welcome to attend regular church services, but the Reverend Dr. Cao Shengjie, President of the China Christian Council, expressed concern that foreign religious groups not follow through with covert evangelization efforts which disregard the autonomy of churches in China. Her comments came in response to hearing reports that Christian organizations were mobilizing thousands of volunteer 'missionaries' to attend the Games, as visas to China will be easier to get, said Asia News. The Beijing Organizing Committee for the Games of the XXIX Olympiad (BOCOG) will follow Olympic tradition and build a religious service center in the Olympic Village, and give details of worship services in other Olympic cities, said the Associated Press. It is against Chinese law to proselytize in China, a direct response to the days when foreign denominations controlled the purse strings and power within church structures. The Olympics have long been seen as an evangelistic opportunity by many Christian groups worldwide. (Source: "Beijing warns the world's missionaries: 'abide by our rules,'" Asia News, May 30, 2007; The United Methodist China Program; "Despite China's ban on missionaries, Christians to evangelize at 2008 Olympics," Associated Press, June 3, 2007)

Horrid abuse at brick kilns exposed. A sweeping crackdown in Henan and Shaanxi province have led to the freeing of 568 people, including 22 who were under the age of 18, who worked in appalling and brutal conditions in brick kilns throughout the two provinces said Xinhua, China's state media. The story of these workers who were forced to work 20 hours a day, fed bread and water, and who endured massively blistered hands and feet as a result of being forced to carry hot bricks not properly cooled, has outraged the nation. Some workers had only one set of clothing which they wore for over a year, said a BBC report. Wages were withheld, and some workers released were so disoriented and malnourished they did not know from which village they had originally come. Xinhua reported that some were isolated from the outside world for years, others were beaten and maimed. When the plight of these workers came to light—the result of parents seeking to free their children through an Internet plea—public security moved in quickly and have arrested 168 so far and are looking for 22 others, said Xinhua. President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao have both issued statements asking for intensive investigations. Shaanxi province officials have now banned solid clay bricks made in the kinds of kilns in question. Employment agencies operating around the Xi'an train station which allegedly recruited for the kilns have been closed. (Sources: "China strikes at the root of brick kiln slavery," Xinhua, June 21, 2007; "China will catch slave owners," BBC News, June 16, 2007; "China catches slave-labor boss amid national uproar," Reuters, June 17, 2008)

Floods and earthquakes devastate China: Amity provides relief and rehabilitation. An overwhelming rainstorm hit most parts of the southern Yangtze River in southwest China leaving 155 dead and affecting the lives and livelihood of another 31 million people in Hunan, Guizhou, Sichuan and Guangdong provinces, said the Amity Foundation. The Amity Foundation is a Chinese social service organization inspired by Christians and was quick to mobilize relief efforts in the area through its network of local church and government contacts. It was weeks before that a serious earthquake left thousands homeless in the Ning'er county in Yunnan, to which Amity responded with hundreds of tents for temporary shelter, and help in rebuilding schools and irrigation systems. The United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) contributed \$10,000 to Amity's relief efforts which has brought quilts, rice, blankets and mosquito nets to 4,000 families. Amity continues to seek additional funding to establish temporary relief-villages for families in greatest need, as well as to rebuild houses, schools, medical clinics and to repair drinking water systems. UMCOR is the aid arm of the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries. To contribute to Amity's flood relief visit www.amityfoundation.org or www.gb-gm-umc/umcor (Source: The United Methodist China Program; the Amity Foundation)

Death penalty drops in China. Fewer death sentences have been handed out since laws governing who can issue them have come into place, said the BBC in a report that cited the death penalty had dropped

10 percent. Laws were changed last year to allow for China's top court only to review and ratify death penalties handed down by lower courts. The law was a result of investigations which saw several miscarriages of justice. In one instance a man was executed for the murder of woman who turned up alive in the next province, an unconfirmed source said. In speaking to the China Daily, criminal law expert, Chen Weidong, was quoted as saying that he expected to see executions drop by as much as 20 percent, said the BBC. (Source: "China death penalty verdicts drop," BBC News, June 8, 2007)

Ten years since July 1, 1997. Hongkong celebrated 10 years since it returned to China's sovereignty with lion dances, fireworks, and fly overs. China's President Hu Jintao personally swore in Donald Tsang, Hongkong's Chief Executive, who enters a second term in office. President Hu also opened a new bridge into neighboring Shenzhen city, emphasizing Hongkong solidarity within China's southern tip. Tens of thousands of people also marched through the street with 'one person, one vote' signs in reference to the fact that ordinary Hongkong citizens do not yet have universal suffrage which was also denied them under 156-year British rule. One of the marchers was Hongkong's Cardinal Joseph Zen-Ze-kiun, the Roman Catholic leader in Hongkong who has been an outspoken critic of both the Chinese government and the Catholic Patriotic Association in China, reported the New York Times. Hongkong is guided by a 'one country, two systems' policy, whereby Hongkong is governed by a mini-constitution called Basic Law which, among many articles, allows Hongkong its capitalistic economy and to keep its British legal system. Beijing retains say over issues like national security and defense. Quoting the index for Economic Freedom, Hongkong remains the freest economy in the world, said the BBC. ("Hongkong marks a decade since handover," New York Times, July 1, 2007; "Hongkong's decade under China's flag," BBC News, June 21, 2007.)

CCC at the Kirchentag (Church Day). Thousands of people visited the Bible Exhibition of the China Christian Council, *A light to my path, a lamp to my feet*, at the German Church Day, the Protestant *Kirchentag*, in Cologne. Visitors enjoyed displays which told of the history of the Bible in China and to learn more about Christianity in the People's Republic. The organizers, the EKD (*Evangelische Kirche Deutschland*) said the exhibition did much to dispel ignorance and misinterpretations and that it was an excellent way for churches in China to share the good news of God's faithfulness to the Chinese. The Exhibition went on to the Mission One World of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria, where it remained on display for a month. (Source: "Visitors impressed by China Bible ministry exhibition," Xinhua, June 10, 2007; "China at the Kirchentag," Amity News Service)

Costa Rica breaks ties with Taiwan. Costa Rican President Oscar Arias announced that his country has broken its 60 year relationship with Taiwan and established diplomatic relations with China mainland. The reasons cited were economic, as Costa Rica hopes to attract major mainland investments. Taiwan officials are stepping up their visits to the remaining Latin American countries for fear of a domino effect with other Central and South American nations following Costa Rica's move, said the BBC. Taiwan has diplomatic relations with 24 countries, compared to the mainland's 170. Those countries tend to be smaller; in Central and South American they include Panama, Nicaragua, Honduras, Haiti, El Salvador, Paraguay, Guatemala, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. (Sources: "Taiwan loses Costa Rica's support," BBC News, June 7, 2007; "Taiwan alarm at Costa Rica move," BBC News, June 7, 2007)

Manufacturing firm used child labor to produce Olympic products. Reports surfaced that some official 2008 Olympic merchandise has been produced by child labor, reported the BBC. Organizers of the Olympic Games to be held in Beijing next year, are investigating and, to date, Lekt Stationery, in Dongguan, Guangdong province, admitted to using children 12 and 13 years old to produce official Olympic stickers, notebooks and paper cups. PlayFair, a campaign groups organized by the International Textile Garment and Leather World's Federation and the Clean Clothes Campaign, originally issued a report that said it found several factories making official products that systematically violated workers rights which included what it said was "adult wages at half the legal minimum [and] employment of workers as young as 12 years old," said the BBC. Mr. Jiang Xiaoyu, vice-president of the Beijing Olympic Games organizing committee (BOCOG), affirmed that using child labor in China is clearly against the law. The investigations continue. (Source: "China Olympic abuse claims probed," BBC News, June 11, 2007; "Lekt Stationery admits employment of child labor," China CSR, July 5, 2007)

Huge bird-like dinosaur discovered in China's northwest. The fossilized remains of a giant bird-like dinosaur were unearthed in Neimongol (Inner Mongolia). The bird would have weighed 3,000 pounds and was so big that paleontologists thought at first they had discovered the bones of a Tyrannosaurus Rex.

The flightless bird comes as a complete surprise as it was thought that dinosaurs evolved down, from giant reptiles into light feathered creatures. Named Gigantoraptor, it is 300 times bigger than other dinosaurs of its kind, although it was determined that the creature being examined was only 11 years old. Gigantoraptor was a flightless bird, covered in feathers. (Source: "Giant ruffles size debate," Herald Sun, June 15, 2007)

Roadwork begins for Olympic torch. In preparation for the Olympic torch to travel to the world's highest mountain peak, China will begin to pave a road that leads to a base camp of Mt. Qomolanga, the Tibetan name for Mt. Everest. ("Everest Olympic road work begins," BBC News, June 19, 2007)

Links and sources

Amity Foundation	www.amityfoundation.org
BBC News	www.bbc.co.uk
Beijing Review	www.bjreview.com.cn
China Christian Council	www.chinesechristiancouncil.org
China Daily	www.chinadaily.com.cn
China Development Brief	www.chinadevelopmentbrief.com
Embassy of the PRC in the USA	www.china-embassy.org
General Board of Global Ministries, UMC	www.gbgm-umc.org
German Protestant Kirchentag	www.ekd.de/english/2169.html
New York Times	www.nytimes.com
People's Daily Online	http://english.people.com.cn/
UCAN News	www.ucanews.com
United Methodist Committee on Relief	www.gbgm-umc.org/umcor
Xinhua News Agency	www.xinhuanet.com

The United Methodist China Program seeks to facilitate deeper understandings between China, the United States and other nations throughout God's world. It respects the autonomy of Protestant churches in China and recognizes that, with God's guidance, Christians in China are shaping a bold new witness. The United Methodist China Program relies on partner organizations, including the China Christian Council, to help it define new relationships within China's post-denominational context. Through education, communication, and exchange, China Program is a sensitive lens through which we and people within China can see and understand each other more accurately.

The Monthly News Summary: People's Republic of China is prepared by Diane Allen, a GBGM missionary serving as China Program Associate to the United Methodist China Program. Her Advance Special number is # 10163Z.