

# ***Cross-Demolition Resumes in Zhejiang***

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*Holy Spirit Study Centre Staff*

**T**he wave of forced removal of crosses and the tearing down of churches in Zhejiang Province seemed to have ceased since the autumn of 2014. Unfortunately, the storm picked up again in 2015, and Wenzhou once more bore the brunt of the destruction. More than 1,200 crosses have now been removed. Protestant and Catholic communities in the province protested against the removal to the provincial authority. But the rigid response of the authorities aroused even greater discontent and worries among the Christian believers. Christian communities in other dioceses as well as overseas raised their voice in support of the suffering Church in China.

## **Appeal and Actions of the Catholic Diocese of Wenzhou**

On July 24, 2015 the elderly Bishop Zhu Weifang (朱維芳, aged 89) of Wenzhou led some 20 priests on a march to the Wenzhou City Government to protest against the forced removal of crosses. They carried a banner with the words—

Protect the dignity of faith  
Oppose the forced removal of crosses

The banner was signed by “The Wenzhou Diocese”. The protest lasted for two hours before the bishop and clergy returned to the cathedral. Police were watching but did not take any action. A source said that four dioceses in Zhejiang Province had appealed to the national Catholic organization in Beijing, but they have not received any response yet.

In July 2014, the government-sanctioned priests and the bishop of Wenzhou had published an open letter (See *Tripod* no. 174, Autumn, 2014 issue). The Provincial Patriotic Association and

Church Affairs Commission also released the report “Urgent request to stop the forced removal of crosses at once” (《關於強烈要求立即停止拆除十字架的報告》) in July, 2015.

The report was said to have been sent to the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and the Chinese Conference of Bishops. But so far there has been no response from either entity.

The non-government-sanctioned Coadjutor Bishop of Wenzhou, Bishop Shao Zhumin (邵祝敏), joined by some 20 priests, released the following statement.

### A Strong Statement Requesting the Cessation of the Forced Removal of Crosses

In this time of persecution, all members of the Diocese of Wenzhou are united together. We are making the following statement:

(1) The Cross is a holy symbol of our Christian faith. It deserves respect. So we strongly ask for the immediate cessation of the forced removal of crosses.

(2) We are determined to protect the Holy Cross. Christians, regardless of denomination, should unite together, to “keep watch together, and support one another”.

(3) We urge all Catholics of the parishes in the diocese to fast in atonement. Recite the verse “Our Lady Help of Christians of Sheshan, Pray for us” and “Jesus, I rely on you” three times a day. Catholics should go to confession, ardently take part in the Eucharist and Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Do penance for the family and the parish. And parishes can also arrange their own prayer activities.

Bishop Shao Zhumin, Prelate in-charge of Wenzhou  
July 29, 2015  
(co-signed by 22 priests)

## **Christian Communities in Hong Kong Voiced their Concern and Support**

Cardinal Tong, Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong released an urgent appeal about the forced removal of crosses on August 13. He urged China's Central Government to investigate thoroughly the real situation, and stop the demolition. He also asked Catholics to do penance for religious freedom. His statement is as follows:

### **The Sufferings of the Cross—an Urgent Appeal**

The Cross is the sign most representative of the Christian faith. As Christians, we must follow Christ. That requires us to carry the cross together with Jesus Christ.

Over the past two years, the crosses erected at over a thousand churches, Christian or Catholic, in Zhejiang province have been dismantled by force. Those dismantled include many that have been lawfully constructed with permits. In some of these incidents, members of the clergy and congregation, during their lawful act of defending their faith, have been detained, causing a lot of tension in local parishes. These incidents have caused much anxiety among Christians, local and overseas, about the policies of the government in regard to freedom of religion.

With utmost sincerity and urgency, I wish to make the following appeal:

(1) That the Central Government and authorities concerned liaise with the provincial authorities in Zhejiang province to investigate into what has happened; that all unlawful acts of dismantling crosses be stopped; and that all parties concerned stick to the principle of “the supremacy of the constitution, the rule of law and ruling the country according to the law”.

(2) That all Catholics in Hong Kong choose some forms of penance, such as fast and abstinence, and that they

especially pray for religious freedom, the dignity of the faith, and share the sufferings of their fellow Christians in Zhejiang.

+ John Card. Tong  
August 13, 2015

A number of Catholic communities submitted their petitions to the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in Hong Kong during July and August, 2015. Different parishes held Eucharistic services to show their support for the suffering sisters and brothers in Mainland China. Cardinal Zen, Bishop Emeritus of Hong Kong, actively participated in a number of activities and his actions were echoed by a great number of Catholics.

Dr. Paul Kwong, Primate of the Hong Kong Anglican Church appealed in the Anglican weekly, *Echo* (《教聲》) to the Central Government to stop the forced removal of crosses. Bp. Kwong is also a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.

### **Zhejiang Christian Association spoke out openly and was punished**

The Zhejiang Provincial Christian Council published an open letter on July 10, 2015 demanding an end to the campaign to remove crosses. It criticized the action as destructive of the relations between the party and the people.

The statement added that the removal of over 1,200 crosses in the past 18 months had hurt the feelings of more than 2 million Protestants.

Shortly after the statement was released, the Zhejiang Provincial Commission of Ethnic and Religious Affairs asked the Christian Council to withdraw it. When the Council refused, the provincial authorities in Zhejiang revoked the official seal of the local Christian Council.

One analyst interpreted this confiscation of the official seal as the "removing" of some of the Council's authority.

“It cannot issue another statement of protest as the seal validates an official document,” he explained.

In an interview with the *UCANews* on July 14, 2015, Dr. Anthony Lam Sui-ki, a staff member of the Holy Spirit Study Centre, warned that the Protestant group should “make the incident public to prevent the authorities from issuing a statement on behalf of the Council and misleading the faithful.”

As the events in Wenzhou as well as in the rest of Zhejiang Province are still in progress, we ask all our readers, and sisters and brothers in the Church to continue to support, and pray for the suffering communities.