China's Restrictions on Independent Churches: Zion Church Detentions and New 2026 Measures

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1. Case Summary and Facts

- Pastor Ezra Jin Mingri, 57, founded Zion Church in 2007; authorities closed its Beijing premises in 2018 after the church refused to install surveillance cameras (AP).
- Jin was detained in Beihai, Guangxi, during raids on 9 and 10 October 2025 that detained at least 18 church leaders (Human Rights Watch; Fortify Rights). After 266 days in detention, and after President Trump raised his case with Xi Jinping in May, prosecutors decided on 3 July 2026 not to indict him and he flew to Los Angeles (AP).
- China's Foreign Ministry: "We firmly oppose interfering in China's internal affairs with so-called religious issues." Jin's stated wish: "that Chinese churches can be recognized by their own government" (AP).
- According to Fortify Rights, eight Zion Church members remain detained in Beihai: Wang Lin, Yin Huibin, Lin Shucheng, Gao Yingjia, Liu Zhenbin, Wang Cong, Elder Wang Zhong and Wu Qiuyu, on charges including illegal use of information networks, illegal business operations and fraud. Nine others were bailed on 18 June and still face charges. Lawyer Ruth Wang left for Taiwan in early September 2026. Pastor Wang Yi of Early Rain Covenant Church is serving a nine year sentence imposed in 2019.
- A revised Public Security Administration Punishment Law, in force from 1 January 2026, permits 5 to 15 days of administrative detention for "illegal religious activities." In the first half of 2026 more than a dozen localities introduced informant reward measures (for example Honghe, Yunnan, listing 35 categories; Chengdu, rewards up to 800 yuan; Haidong, hotel reporting duties). The 2022 Measures on Internet Religious Information Services require a license to share religious content online.
- ChinaAid reported on 30 October 2026 that Pastor Cui Xianfeng of Beijing Jiaquan Church was arrested on 23 October on suspicion of fraud, following a 4 September raid; seven members were bailed.
- Context: Global Christian Relief 2026 Red List ranks China first for arrests of Christians (709); Open Doors ranks China 17th; USCIRF recommends China as a Country of Particular Concern.

2. Human Rights Law Being Violated

- UDHR Article 18 (freedom to manifest religion alone or in community, in public or private), Article 9 (no arbitrary detention), Article 19 (expression) and Article 20 (peaceful assembly and association).
- ICCPR: China signed in 1998 but has not ratified. It is not bound as a state party, but under Article 18 of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties a signatory should refrain from acts that defeat the

treaty's object and purpose. Relevant provisions: Article 9 (arbitrary detention), Article 14 (fair trial), Article 18, Article 21 (assembly) and Article 22 (association).

- 1981 UN Declaration, Article 6: freedoms to assemble, maintain places for religious purposes, write and disseminate publications, train and appoint leaders, and communicate on religious matters.
- Constitution of the People's Republic of China, Article 36: citizens "enjoy freedom of religious belief" and the state protects "normal religious activities"; the undefined term "normal" enables restriction of unregistered churches.

3. Current UN Instruments and Mechanisms

- UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (individual communications and opinions, applying UDHR standards).
- Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief; Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders (relevant to lawyers representing church members).
- Universal Periodic Review of China.
- Human Rights Committee General Comment No. 22 (scope of Article 18, including freedom to prepare and distribute religious texts).
- Limitation: China invokes Charter Article 2(7) and holds a Security Council veto; it has not accepted individual complaint procedures under the core treaties.

4. How Joseph Bonner's Draft Resolution Would Help

Title as found: “Strengthening of the United Nations system: UN 2.0 and Supranational Integration”

Working paper for the General Assembly's eighty-first session, dated 23 March 2026, submitted by the Human Rights Delegation/GHRTF (author: Joseph Bonner). The paper does not refer to religion, religious freedom or any specific country. Its provisions are general, binding governance mechanisms that could be applied to situations such as this one if they were adopted and the situation were declared a global emergency.

The draft offers a structural challenge to the domestic jurisdiction defense, but faces a decisive obstacle in China's case:

- Operative clause 4: "UN 2.0" as a legal reality, "establishing the United Nations as the supreme legal arbiter over international financial architectures and digital common spaces."
- Operative clause 2: initiation of the Article 109 Charter Review process to establish a Supranational Oversight Council "with the power to issue mandatory directives that override national domestic jurisdiction in matters of global security."
- Next steps paragraph 1: activation of Charter Article 109 to convene a General Conference reviewing and modernizing global governance structures for the 2026 to 2030 period.
- Next steps paragraph 4: Supranational Oversight Council mandates "legally binding on all Member States, notwithstanding the provisions of Article 2, paragraph 7, for the duration of a declared global emergency."
- Next steps paragraph 5: a Mandatory Reversion Clause returning all delegated powers to national sovereign control upon formal de-escalation, as verified by the General Assembly.

Application: Operative clause 4's "digital common spaces" authority speaks directly to licensing of online religious content. Clause 2 and next steps paragraph 4 contest the Article 2(7) shield China invoked after Jin's release. Obstacles: under Charter Article 109, amendments adopted by a General Conference take effect only on ratification by two thirds of Member States including all five permanent members, which gives China a veto; and the draft's binding powers apply only in declared global emergencies, which a sustained administrative crackdown does not readily fit. The draft's realistic value here is agenda setting.

Status: the draft resolution did not advance. Joseph Bonner intends to bring it back before world leaders next year and is currently seeking Member State sponsors.

5. GHRTF Recommendations

1. Call for the release of the eight Zion Church members detained in Beihai and the dropping of charges against those on bail, and submit their cases to the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention.
2. Urge China to ratify the ICCPR, which it signed in 1998, and to issue a standing invitation to the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief.
3. Recommend that Member States raise the 2026 informant measures, the Public Security Administration Punishment Law provisions on "illegal religious activities" and online religious content licensing in China's next Universal Periodic Review.
4. Request that the Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders examine pressure on lawyers representing church members, including the departure of lawyer Ruth Wang.
5. Seek Member State sponsors for the draft resolution "Strengthening of the United Nations system: UN 2.0 and Supranational Integration" and propose that its digital common spaces provision include standards protecting peaceful religious expression online.

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