



Nepal Tibetan Protest by Binod Joshi, AP, June 5, 2008

Pushed to the Edge

“House Church” leaders abused, arrested, and imprisoned because their idea of Christianity does not match that of the government; the pregnant wife of one house church pastor forced against her religious beliefs to get an abortion; Buddhist monks, beacons of peace and tranquility, beaten and tortured for speaking up; Christians jailed—in the name of “illegal business practices”— for publishing religious literature; Catholic bishops, ordained by the Holy See, forced to renounce their ordination or face prison time—some never to be heard from again; Muslims jailed for religious activities deemed “separatist”; Members of a premiere religious “cult,” Falun Gong, subjected to excessive force, abuse, rape, detention, and torture: some members, including children, reportedly died in custody. These are just a few of the astounding stories of religious freedom abuses in China—stories that are seldom told since those who dare to report Chinese abuses of religious freedom face arrest and imprisonment for “providing national intelligence to overseas organizations.”

With the opening of the 2008 Beijing Olympics, the world’s most populous nation has finally had its day in the sun. People across the world marveled at countless feats of technology achieved by the Chinese in a breathtaking opening ceremony. But for all its modernity, China still struggles to offer what we, as Americans, take for granted as a basic human right, religious freedom. While China chugs forward in the

21st century, its government still neglects to adhere to one of the utmost international treaties, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, signed by international leaders over half a century ago, as it declares in Article 18: "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. This right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship, and observance."

Religious peoples in China—belonging to unapproved and even some approved religious groups—face vast persecution for their faith. These abuses of religion can be linked to the Communist atheistic ideology. The government perceives unregulated religious gatherings or groups as a potential challenge to its authority and religious leaders as political rivals. China does recognize five religions—Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Catholicism, and Protestantism—which are perceived by the Chinese to be "normal." However, even these well-established religious groups face strict rules and regulations. Places of worship, registered and un-registered, are closely monitored, as are all religious activities. For many religions, lurking underground is the only hope of survival.

With the eyes of the world turned toward China, people are slowly starting to pay attention to what is happening inside the Communist nation. After long remaining silent on the issue, despite China's status as a Country of Particular Concern according to the 2007 International Religious Freedom Report prepared by the State Department, President Bush recently spoke out about the lack of religious freedom in China, noting that, "no state, man or woman should fear the influence of loving religion." However, the United States and other leading nations have yet to take any major action against China for its violations of religious freedom.

As the Olympics draw to an end, we cannot forget those who still suffer in China. For sadly, the same drive for control that has made the Beijing Olympics such a marvel has left countless Chinese to suffer solely because of their religious beliefs.