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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Christian Solidarity Worldwide, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[30 May 2023]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



Deaths in Custody in China

1. CSW (Christian Solidarity Worldwide) is a human rights organisation specialising in the right to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) for all through research and advocacy.
2. This written submission, ahead of the interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary, or arbitrary executions, on deaths in custody at the 53rd session of the Human Rights Council, seeks to draw the Council's attention to deaths in custody affecting Falun Gong practitioners in China.
3. Falun Gong, a spiritual practice that stems from Buddhist tradition, is banned as 'heterodox teachings' or 'evil cults' by the Chinese government. Its adherents have been targeted by the authorities in China since 1999. State media depict the group as evil and openly call for its 'complete eradication', and China established an extra-legal security agency called '610 Office' for that purpose. Extensive evidence shows the authorities continue to repress and abuse Falun Gong followers across China on a large scale, subjecting them to arbitrary detention, imprisonment, forced labour and discriminatory treatment while in custody on account of their faith.
4. 'Even today, Falun Gong adherents make up a significant proportion of prisoners of conscience in China... Notably, all of [jailed Falun Gong practitioners] were punished for exercising their right to free expression—for example, by disseminating leaflets or DVDs about Falun Gong, human rights abuses, or the CCP's broader history of persecution against Chinese people,' stated Freedom House in a 2016 report.⁴
5. Falun Gong practitioners outside of China regularly report long lists of cases of Falun Gong practitioners subjected to torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment under police custody, causing serious bodily and mental harm. Although this group are not generally sentenced under the death penalty in China, thousands have reportedly died because of torture and abuse in custody, typically after they refused to recant their beliefs.
6. Minghui, a Falun Gong-affiliated publication, regularly reports cases where Falun Gong detainees are tortured as means for forced confession, coercive re-education or punishment for seeking redress. Methods include but not limited to beatings, electric shocks on genitals, being shackled in painful positions and hung from the wrists, rape and sexual abuse, sleep deprivation, forced drug administration, force-feeding, solitary confinement, and denial of food or medical treatment.
7. As of 5 January 2023, Minghui documented a total of 4,894 cases where Falun Gong practitioners died in custody or shortly after being released from prison, among which 172 deaths were reported in 2022.² Due to strict information censorship in China and the opaque legal system, only a small percentage of actual deaths in custody ever come to light, and even fewer cases can be verified.

Recent Cases

8. The following are three deaths that have been reported recently:
9. Pang Xun, a 30-year-old former host of the Sichuan People's Radio Station, was arrested on 27 July 2020 for distributing Falun Gong materials and later sentenced to five years in prison. In February 2023, news emerged that he died on 2 December 2022 in Jiazhou Prison, Sichuan Province. His body was covered with bruises from beatings and marks from electric shocks, and he had also become incontinent. The prison claimed that he died of hyperthyroidism and pressured his family to give consent for the cremation of his body by 13 December 2022.³
10. Teng Shuli, 53, died at Heilongjiang Province Women's Prison on 10 January 2023 while serving a seven-year term for practicing Falun Gong. She was detained on 12 October 2020 and sentenced to seven years with an 80,000-yuan fine on 2 June 2021. In prison, she was deprived of sleep and forced to sit on a small stool for extended hours without moving. She was forced to watch propaganda videos demonizing Falun Gong daily.

She became ill and emaciated. She developed a tumour in her abdomen, which caused severe bleeding while defecating. She was bedridden and was later found to have late-stage liver and rectal cancer. Her husband was denied visits with her despite his repeated requests. The prison also denied his request to have her released on medical parole.

11. Ji Yunzhi, 66, was detained by police in Balin Zuoqi, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region (IMAR), on 1 February 2022, after Falun Gong publications were found in her home. She had previously been sent to labour camp twice, in 2001 and 2008. Her son Simon Zhang said during the International Religious Freedom (IRF) Summit 2023:
12. 'In forced labour camps, she was tortured by police using electric batons for two hours until she had an involuntary urination, and her face was burned. That torture destroyed her health, but the abuse did not stop there. Both times we were only allowed to bring her home when she was about to die due to the severe torture and abuses. Last year in 2022, she was arrested again on the Chinese New Year... In [the] detention centre she went on a hunger strike to protest the arbitrary detention. The guards responded with torture, forced feeding and humiliation. As a result, she lost consciousness and was sent to hospital, where she was handcuffed to [the] bed for the last month of her life. They also placed iron fetters on her ankles. On March 21, 40 days after she was arrested, my mom died. My father demanded an explanation but was only met with indifference. Instead, nearly 50 policemen guarded my mom's body and monitored my parents' apartment. On April 7th, my mom was cremated. My father was forced to give permission...'4

Conclusion

13. There are multiple challenges in regard to accurately reporting how many Falun Gong practitioners have died in government custody in China. It is particularly difficult to establish how each victim died, due to extremely limited access to information, misinformation and underreporting. Nonetheless, cases like those above shed some light on the extent of suffering inflicted on Falun Gong detainees. Torture can never be justified. These individuals should never have been imprisoned for exercising their fundamental rights through the peaceful practice of their religion. The inhumane and degrading treatment inflicted upon the detainees at the hands of the police and prison officers violates their right to life and their fundamental freedoms of expression, association and thought, conscience and religion or belief.

Recommendations to the Human Rights Council:

14. Call on China to unconditionally release all those arbitrarily detained for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB), including Falun Gong practitioners, and to end discriminatory treatment against Falun Gong detainees.
15. Urge China to fulfil its obligations under the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and implement measures to protect people from torture, including independent checks on detention centres and prisons, monitoring of interrogations, prompt access to lawyers and courts, visits and communication with family members, and thorough and effective investigations into torture allegations.
16. Call on China to take prompt measures to ensure that all instances of death in custody are thoroughly and independently investigated and that those responsible for such deaths resulting from torture, ill-treatment or wilful negligence are held to account.

1. Freedom House, 'China's Latest Crackdown Is Not Its Worst', 12 September 2016, <https://freedomhouse.org/article/chinas-latest-crackdown-not-its-worst>

2. Minghui, 'Reported in 2022: 172 Falun Gong Practitioners Die in the Persecution of Their Faith', 7 January 2023 <https://en.minghui.org/html/articles/2023/1/7/206074.html>

3. RFA, “Suppression of religious freedom? Falun Gong practitioner Pang Xun dies in prison after suspected persecution”, 14 February 2023
<https://www.rfa.org/mandarin/yataibaodao/renquanfazhi/kw-02142023115208.html>
4. Falun Dafa Infocenter, accessed 25 May 2023, <https://faluninfo.net/ji-yunzhi/>