

What Happens with the Church in China?

We have spoken about this before; but we reflect again on the situation of the Church in China as we welcome the Chinese New Year



The eighth National Congress of the Catholic Representatives was held in Beijing from 7-9 December 2010. The Congress was held against the wishes requests by the Holy See. The Holy See had stated that "forcing people to attend recent Catholic congress reflected 'a repressive attitude with regard to the exercise of religious liberty.'

The Chinese government branded a Vatican statement on China's policy of religious freedom as "very imprudent and ungrounded." The Dec. 22 statement was Beijing's first official response to a strongly worded Vatican statement that criticized the Chinese government-controlled National Congress of Catholic Representatives early in December, reported the Asian Church news agency UCA News.

On Dec. 17, the Vatican condemned the methods of convoking the assembly, saying it reflected "a repressive attitude with regard to the exercise of religious liberty, which it was hoped had been consigned to the past in present-day China." Forcing people to attend the congress represented a "grave violation" of people's human rights, particularly their freedom of conscience and religion, said the Vatican.



China's official Xinhua

News Agency quoted a spokesperson of the State Administration for Religious Affairs as saying the Vatican misunderstood the current situation of the Chinese Church and was trying to use religion to implement its political values. The official said the attempt would bring serious harm to the healthy development of the Chinese Church. The new heads of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and the Bishops' Conference of the Catholic Church in China — the two groups responsible for the public life of the Church in China — were elected by overwhelming majority, reflecting the wishes and expectations of the congress participants, the spokesperson said.

The Vatican voiced particular concern over the election of new presidents of both organizations during the congress. Bishop Joseph Ma Yinglin of Kunming, who was ordained without papal approval in 2006, became president of the bishops' conference. The new president of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association is Bishop Yohan Fang Xinyao of Linyi, who was ordained in 1997 and is in communion with the Pope.

The Vatican's condemnation of them was a "contempt" to the democratic wish of numerous Catholics and "extremely rude and disrespectful behavior," the government spokesperson said.

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