

Religious Freedom in the Motherland?....

6 November 2019

Greetings,

I hope all is well with you. I appreciate the good working relations we have had with your office during my ten years of Christian service in Beijing. It is my sincere desire to continue our friendly relations and harmony in working together for the good of all those in this nation.

We very much appreciate that China is a peaceful and orderly place. I know that your nation is guided by clear and open laws. As such, please receive this letter as a formal request for your WRITTEN answer within 15 days, as China Law dictates. I am asking for 2 specific answers below.

I am writing as one of the leaders of Beijing International Christian Fellowship which has made a positive contribution to Beijing society for 40 years. We are a community of almost five thousand followers of Jesus Christ from more than one hundred nations. We are grateful to be guests in China and endeavor to make a beneficial influence in diplomacy, education, technology, business, research, and academics.

My primary responsibility is to pastor the BICF in Zhongguancun. Our BICF ZGC community of Christians are primarily students and educators enrolled and working in dozens of Universities in Haidian. BICF ZGC has existed for fifteen years. Thousands of scholars from over one hundred nations have been part of our community of Christian faith.

Our ministry focus in BICF is on our fellow international guests. Foreign believers are coming to Beijing from many lands and languages, including speakers of Mandarin and Cantonese. Our ushers and greeters make it clear, as we do on our printed literature, that “Due to Local Regulations, BICF services are for Foreign ID holders only.”

China has been very generous to invite young scholars into their excellent academic programs. We are seeing these impressive graduates return to their homelands all over the world into key positions of leadership. These emerging leaders are now in strategic positions to advance the global belt-and-road initiative.

We all want these leaders who will help guide their nations for decades to love China!

But this love is being tested by mixed signals about their basic human rights to freely worship which are protected by China’s laws. As you well know, most foreign students and workers who come to China are people of faith – Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, and Christian. As guests of China, and people of faith, they have come anticipating that there would be open facilities for them to freely worship.

We in BICF have found that getting ‘permission’ to worship through the various of levels of authority here has been a constant challenge. Someone at the top may give a ‘green light’ but at the bottom it is a ‘red light’ – or vice versa.

So, I am now filing this official letter to your office asking for your written response to these two questions;

1. Do foreign passport holders who live and work in China have freedom to worship their God while respecting the privacy, safety, and religious rights of those around them? Will the authorities of China do their part to clarify and protect this freedom to all levels of authority enforcement?

2. Will you help BICF ZGC find a worship/meeting space located near the major universities of Haidian (where the great number of foreign students are gathered)? We have recently been sent away from the Xijiao hotel where we gathered for over six years. We paid our bills on time and maintained excellent relations with their staff. I was recently told by one of their managers that their leadership team liked us and wanted us to stay but they could not resist the pressure 'from above' to force us out. As we again search for a place to peacefully assemble, we are getting many mixed signals from business people and local authorities. We are appealing to you who know this country and how it functions to secure a place for us to worship our God every Sunday.

I am very much looking forward to your response. Thank you.

With Respect,

Mark Blair

Pastor, BICF ZGC