

WRITTEN QUESTION E-2358/03

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to the Commission

Subject: Violation of religious freedom in China - further arrests of priests of the 'clandestine' Catholic Church

International press sources report that five priests belonging to the 'clandestine' Chinese Catholic Church were arrested on Thursday 3 July at Baoding, in the northern republic of Hebei, about 100 kilometres south of Beijing. According to reports by the Cardinal Kung Foundation, a Catholic human rights organisation based in Connecticut, the priests Kang Fuliang, Chen Ghuzen, Pang Guangzhao, Joseph Yin and Wang Lijun, all of them between 25 and 31 years old, were arrested whilst on their way to visit another member of the clandestine church, Lu Genjun, who had recently been released after three years' forced labour. Furthermore, Father Lu Xiaozhou, another member of the Roman Catholic church was also arrested last June.

Can the Commission say whether it has any further information about these serious incidents? What kind of diplomatic pressure will it bring to bear to put a stop to this violent campaign against Catholic clerics, who are 'guilty' only of recognising the authority of the Pope?

Does it intend to convey to the government in Beijing its firm condemnation of these acts of intimidation and, more generally, the systematic restrictions of religious freedom imposed on Chinese citizens, together with a forceful request to respect Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which recognises every individual's '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'?