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One Hundred Eighteenth Congress
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Foreign Affairs
2170 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

February 16, 2023

Rashad Hussain
Ambassador at Large
Office of International Religious Freedom
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Julieta Valls Noyes
Assistant Secretary
Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Ambassador Hussain and Assistant Secretary Noyes:

I would like to draw your attention to a group of dissidents in Thailand who fled the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 2019 under religious persecution. Beginning in November 2019, 28 adults and 32 children from Shenzhen Holy Reformed Church fled the PRC after enduring significant religious persecution by the Chinese government for seven years.¹ In this group affectionately known as the Mayflower Church, there are now 16 families, with 64 total members, in Thailand awaiting response on refugee applications first submitted to the UNCHR on September 5, 2022.² Although all families have been issued a refugee seeker ID, so far only two of the families have been granted a refugee determination interview.

At every step of the journey for the Mayflower Church, there has been substantial opposition from the PRC. When the group first sought asylum in the Republic of Korea, the PRC Consulate refused to issue a passport to a member's newborn child, rendering the baby stateless and unable to travel. In interrogations with family members who remained in China, Ministry of Public Security agents have accused the church

¹Chun Han Wong and Josh Chin, [A Christian Congregation Fled Xi Jinping's China, but Escaping Control Had a Price](https://www.wsj.com/articles/a-christian-congregation-fled-xi-jinpings-china-but-escaping-control-had-a-price-11622628143?mod=article_inline), Wall St. J., June 2, 2021 at https://www.wsj.com/articles/a-christian-congregation-fled-xi-jinpings-china-but-escaping-control-had-a-price-11622628143?mod=article_inline.

²Chun Han Wong, [Christian Church That Fled China Seeks Refugee Status from United Nations](https://www.wsj.com/articles/christian-church-that-fled-china-seeks-refugee-status-from-united-nations-11662359039), Wall St. J., Sept. 5, 2022 at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/christian-church-that-fled-china-seeks-refugee-status-from-united-nations-11662359039>.

members of treason, collusion with foreign forces, and subversion of state powers for their desire to practice religion independent of the State.³ Church members have also received dozens of phone calls from Chinese government officials accusing the church of committing national security offenses by leaving China. Furthermore, in October 2022, the Chinese Embassy in Thailand demanded the Thai police send over all 58 passports to be “examined,” implying that they may be illegal.

I am highly concerned about the PRC’s growing influence in Southeast Asia and its ability to compel the repatriation of Chinese citizens who have sought refugee status. Religious freedom, and its protection abroad, are essential interests of our nation. Having just participated in the International Religious Freedom Summit on January 31, 2023, I am reminded of how integral freedom from religious persecution is to the growth of a healthy society, the protection of human rights, and the promulgation of democracy.

It is my understanding that the U.S. Department of State was made aware of this situation several months ago, but the group members are unaware of any action taken thus far. The Department has previously declared a commitment to “deter, and hold governments accountable for, transnational repression.”⁴ This begins with providing protection for the most vulnerable. The United States must intervene to help ensure the safety of the group, protect them against refoulement and continued harassment by the PRC, and support their prompt assessment for protection as refugees, including consideration by the United States Refugee Admission Program.

Therefore, I am requesting that you:

- Provide a briefing with an update on the refugee status of the dissidents in Thailand by Tuesday, February 28, 2023;
- Raise this issue at the next UNHCR meeting, and condemn the Chinese government’s transnational repression;
- Work to ensure prompt assessment and status determination for those connected to the Mayflower church seeking protection as refugees; and
- Work with congressional offices to help facilitate resettlement of any Mayflower Church members approved for admission to the United States as refugees, as there is a church in Tyler, Texas that is prepared to take in and sponsor members of the church for that purpose.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter. I look forward to your timely response and continuing to work with you to advance U.S. policy of religious freedom.

Sincerely,



MICHAEL T. McCAUL
Chairman
House Foreign Affairs Committee

³ Tassanee Vejpongsa and Dake Kang, [Beijing Hounds Chinese Church Seeking Safety Overseas](https://apnews.com/article/religion-china-beijing-immigration-south-korea-f0710d68d8985a7ed1f7fb8cb05a4545), Assoc. Press, Sept. 7, 2022 at <https://apnews.com/article/religion-china-beijing-immigration-south-korea-f0710d68d8985a7ed1f7fb8cb05a4545>.

⁴ Michèle Taylor, U.S. Permanent Representative to the U.N. Hum. Rts. Council, [Transnational Repression and Human Rights: Protecting Human Rights](https://geneva.usmission.gov/2022/10/04/transnational-repression-and-human-rights-protecting-human-rights-hrc51/) (Oct. 4, 2022) at <https://geneva.usmission.gov/2022/10/04/transnational-repression-and-human-rights-protecting-human-rights-hrc51/>.