

'The Chinese Regime and its moral culpability for the global contagion – COVID Statement'



Statement on COVID19 & China
– by Myanmar's Cardinal Bo,
President of Asian Bishops

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Here is Cardinal Bo's full message, which he provided to Zenit English:

Last Friday Pope Francis stood facing an empty St. Peter's Square, speaking to millions around the world watching through broadcasts and online. The square was empty but everywhere hearts are full not only of fear and grief, but also of love. In his beautiful *Urbi et Orbi* homily, he reminded us that the coronavirus pandemic has united our common humanity. "We have realized that we are on the same boat, all of us fragile and disoriented, but at the same time important and needed, all of us called to row together," he said.

No corner of the world is untouched by this pandemic, no life unaffected. According to the World Health Organisation, nearly a million people have been infected so far, and over 40,000 have died. By the time this is over the global death toll is expected to be millions.

International voices are raising against the negligent attitude showed by China, especially its despotic Chinese Communist Party (CCP) led by its strong man Xi. The London Telegraph (29 March 2020) said the local Health Minister accused China of hiding true scale of coronavirus. With shock it reported the reopening of the 'wet' markets which were identified as the cause of the spread of virus. James Kraska, an esteemed Law professor, writing in the latest issue of War on Rocks says, China is legally responsible for COVID 19 and claims could be made in trillions. (War on the Rocks, 23 March 2020).

An epidemiological model at the University of Southampton found that had China acted responsibly just one, two or three weeks more quickly, the number affected by virus would have been cut by 66 percent, 86 percent and 95 percent respectively. Its failure has unleashed a global contagion killing thousands.

In my own country, Myanmar, we are extremely vulnerable. Bordering China, where COVID-19 first began, we are a poor nation, without the health and social care resources that more developed nations have. Hundreds of thousands of people in Myanmar are displaced by conflict, living in camps in the country or on our borders without adequate sanitation, medicines or care. In such over-crowded camps the "social distancing" measures implemented by many countries are impossible to apply. The healthcare systems in the most advanced countries in the world are overwhelmed, so imagine the dangers in a poor and conflict-ridden country like Myanmar.

As we survey the damage done to lives around the world, we must ask who is responsible? Of course criticisms can be made of authorities everywhere. Many governments are accused of failing to prepare when they first saw the coronavirus emerge in Wuhan.

But there is one government that has primary responsibility, as a result of what it has done and what it has failed to do, and that is the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) regime in Beijing. Let me be clear – it is the CCP that has been responsible, not the people of China, and no one should respond to this crisis with racial hatred towards the Chinese. Indeed, the Chinese people were the first victims of this virus and have long been the primary victims of their repressive regime. They deserve our sympathy, our solidarity and our support. But it is the repression, the lies and the corruption of the CCP that are responsible.

When the virus first emerged, the authorities in China suppressed the news. Instead of protecting the public and supporting doctors, the CCP silenced the whistleblowers. Worse than that, doctors who tried to raise the alarm – like Dr. Li Wenliang in Wuhan Central Hospital who issued a warning to fellow medics on 30 December – were ordered by the police to “stop making false comments”. Dr. Li, a 34 year-old ophthalmologist, was told he would be investigated for “spreading rumors” and was forced by the police to sign a confession. He later died after contracting coronavirus.

Young citizen journalists who tried to report on the virus then disappeared. Li Zehua, Chen Qiushi and Fang Bin are among those believed to have been arrested simply for telling the truth. Legal scholar Xu Zhiyong has also been detained after publishing an open letter criticizing the Chinese regime’s response.

Once the truth became known, the CCP rejected initial offers of help. The US Center for Disease Control and Prevention was ignored by Beijing for over a month, and even the World Health Organisation, although it collaborates closely with the Chinese regime, was initially sidelined.

On top of all this, there is deep concern that the Chinese regime’s official statistics significantly downplay the scale of infection within China. At the same time, the CCP has now accused the United States army of causing the pandemic. Lies and propaganda have put millions of lives around the world in danger.

The CCP’s conduct is symptomatic of its increasingly repressive nature. In recent years we have seen an intense crackdown on freedom of expression in China. Lawyers, bloggers, dissidents and civil society activists have been rounded up and have disappeared. In particular, the regime has launched a campaign against religion, resulting in the destruction of thousands of churches and crosses and the incarceration of at least one million Uyghur Muslims in concentration camps. An independent tribunal in London, chaired by Sir Geoffrey Nice QC, who prosecuted Slobodan Milosevic, accuses the CCP of forced organ harvesting from prisoners of conscience. And Hong Kong – once one of Asia’s most open cities – has seen its freedoms, human rights and the rule of law dramatically eroded.

Through its inhumane and irresponsible handling of the coronavirus the CCP has proven what many previously thought: that it is a threat to the world. China as a country is a great and ancient civilization that has contributed so much to the world throughout history, but this regime

is responsible, through its criminal negligence and repression, for the pandemic sweeping through our streets today.

□□□□□□□ The Chinese regime led by the all powerful Xi and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) – not its people – owes us all an apology, and compensation for the destruction it has caused. At a minimum it should write off the debts of other countries, to cover the cost of Covid-19. For the sake of our common humanity, we must not be afraid to hold this regime to account.

Christians believe, in the words of the Apostle, Paul, that “the truth will set you free.” Truth and freedom are the twin pillars on which all of our nations must build surer and stronger foundations.

Cardinal Charles Bo., SDB

Archbishop of Yangon and President of FABC

[Cardinal Bo was appointed Myanmar’s (formerly known as Burma) first cardinal by Pope Francis in 2015, and elected President of the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences in 2018. In 2017 Pope Francis made the first papal visit to Myanmar, hosted by Cardinal Bo.]